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Toward a Theology of Faithful Witness

A 21st Century, African American, Pentecostal Engagement with the Apocalypse

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TOWARD A THEOLOGY OF FAITHFUL WITNESS
A Twenty–First Century, African American, Pentecostal Engagement with the Apocalypse

By

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A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
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College of Arts, Education, and Humanities
Bangor University

2024

Author Declaration

'I hereby declare that this thesis is the results of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. All other sources are acknowledged by bibliographic references. This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree unless, as agreed by the University, for approved dual awards.

I confirm that I am submitting this work with the agreement of my Supervisor(s).'

'Yr wyf drwy hyn yn datgan mai canlyniad fy ymchwil fy hun yw'r thesis hwn, ac eithrio lle nodir yn wahanol. Caiff ffynonellau eraill eu cydnabod gan droednodiadau yn rhoi cyfeiriadau eglur. Nid yw sylwedd y gwaith hwn wedi cael ei dderbyn o'r blaen ar gyfer unrhyw radd, ac nid yw'n cael ei gyflwyno ar yr un pryd mewn ymgeisiaeth am unrhyw radd oni bai ei fod, fel y cytunwyd gan y Brifysgol, am gymwysterau deuol cymeradwy.

Rwy'n cadarnhau fy mod yn cyflwyno'r gwaith hwn gyda chytundeb fy Ngoruchwyliwr (Goruchwylwyr)

ABSTRACT

In the Apocalypse, the term ‘witness’ is present five times, explicitly, three of which are qualified as ‘faithful witness’; but the motif reverberates implicitly throughout. Scholars have appreciated the ubiquitous nature of witness in the Apocalypse, whether explicit or implied, however that appreciation does not elevate the motif to a thorough engagement at the monograph level. Currently, what exists in scholarship is a pastiche of valuable insight and commentary, but still a great deal of ambiguity. The following thesis offers a narrative reading of the Apocalypse, in order to construct a theology of faithful witness. The reading employs a 21st Century, African American, Pentecostal reading strategy: a liberated and pneumatically imaginative triadic negotiation of Spirit, Word, and community.

The work begins by exploring contemporary literature in Apocalypse scholarship and examining the various ways in which witness is engaged. These sources are arranged by three major categories, in chronological (earliest to latest) order. The first is a comprehensive engagement – scholars who consider the motif in the whole of the Apocalypse. The second is a textual engagement – scholars who only engage specific texts in the Apocalypse. The third and final category contains the thematic engagements with the motif. The thematic engagements are listed in alphabetical order by theme: discernment; discipleship; Jesus; martyrdom; mission; non-violence; suffering; and worship.

After surveying contemporary literature, attention is given to methodology. A brief history of the emergence of the Pentecostal movement is provided, and the subsequent hermeneutic, a triadic negotiation of Spirit, Word, and community. After which, a historical examination of the African American engagement of Scripture is offered in order to set forth an integration of an African American hermeneutic (liberation and imagination) and a Pentecostal hermeneutic (Spirit, Word, community). Brief attention is also given to the significance of such a reading strategy employed in the 21st century.

In harmony with the reading strategy, the community of early Pentecostals is considered by way of *Wirkungsgeschichte* (reception history). First, brief attention is given to the growing interest and employment of reception history in NT scholarship in general, Pentecostal scholarship in the Apocalypse in particular. The periodicals of early Pentecostals are surveyed from the start of Pentecostalism in North America at Azusa (1906) through the Great War (1921). The periodicals are engaged across two streams: The Wesleyan Holiness stream and the Finished Work stream. These periodicals are examined in chronological order only. The survey considered how witness was understood by early Pentecostals in general, then focuses on how the Apocalypse informed their understanding.

By employing a 21st Century, African American, Pentecostal hermeneutic, a narrative analysis of the Apocalypse is offered, examining the explicit and implicit occurrences of witness. In providing such a reading, the qualifying term *faithful* witness is thus considered, in light of the whole apocalypse, making possible the construction of a theology of faithful witness.

Having examined the contemporary literature, hearing the voices of the early Pentecostal community, and tracing the motif throughout the Apocalypse, a theology of faithful witness is constructed by providing seven observations of faithful witness: its content and aim; its nature (4 parts); its forms; and its rewards. Overtures are made from these observations to implications for the African American Pentecostal church

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ABBREVIATIONS

EARLY PENTECOSTAL PERIODICALS

<i>AF:A</i>	<i>The Apostolic Faith (Azusa)</i>
<i>AF:P</i>	<i>The Apostolic Faith (Parham)</i>
<i>CE</i>	<i>The Christian Evangel</i>
<i>COGE</i>	<i>The Church of God Evangel</i>
<i>PE</i>	<i>The Pentecostal Evangel</i>
<i>PHA</i>	<i>The Pentecostal Holiness Advocate</i>
<i>PT</i>	<i>Pentecostal Testimony</i>
<i>TBM</i>	<i>The Bridegroom's Messenger</i>
<i>TP</i>	<i>The Pentecost</i>
<i>WE</i>	<i>Weekly Evangel</i>
<i>WW</i>	<i>Word and Witness</i>

OTHER

<i>ABY</i>	Anchor Yale Bible
<i>ACNT</i>	Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament
<i>AJBT</i>	<i>The American Journal of Biblical Theology</i>
<i>ATJ</i>	<i>ACTS 신학저널 제</i> (<i>Acts Theological Journal</i>)
<i>AUSS</i>	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
<i>BAnn</i>	<i>The Biblical Annals</i>
<i>BHB</i>	<i>Black History Bulletin</i>
<i>BNTC</i>	Black's New Testament Commentary Series
<i>BRT</i>	<i>Baptist Review of Theology</i>
<i>BR</i>	<i>Biblical Research</i>
<i>BSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>CCGNT</i>	Classic Commentaries on the Greek New Testament
<i>CNT</i>	Commentaire du Nouveau Testament
<i>CPT</i>	Centre for Pentecostal Theology
<i>CTJ</i>	<i>Cavin Theological Journal</i>
<i>DMS:CRR</i>	<i>Diabetes & Metabolic Syndrome: Clinical Research & Reviews</i>
<i>ExpTim</i>	<i>The Expository Times</i>
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>ITCHSIONT</i>	International Theological Commentary on the Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testaments
<i>IVP</i>	<i>InterVarsity Press</i>
<i>KJCS</i>	<i>Korea Journal of Christian Studies</i>
<i>JATS</i>	<i>Journal of the Adventist Theological Society</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JECH</i>	<i>Journal of Early Christian History</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JPT</i>	<i>Journal of Pentecostal Theology</i>
<i>JPTSup</i>	Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement
<i>JRSSup</i>	Journal of Religion & Society, Supplement

<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNTSup	<i>Journal of Study of New Testament, Supplement Series</i>
<i>JTI</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Interpretation</i>
MDCPTSS	McMaster Divinity College Press Theological Studies Series
NAC	The New American Commentary
<i>Neot</i>	<i>Neotestamentica</i>
NIVAC	NIV Application Commentary
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
NTT	New Testament Theology Commentary Series
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
<i>Pneuma</i>	<i>Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies</i>
PONTC	The Pentecostal Old and New Testament Commentaries
PPSJS	Pentecostals, Peacemaking, and Social Justice Series
<i>PRS</i>	<i>Perspectives in Religious Studies</i>
<i>RE</i>	<i>Review and Expositor</i>
<i>SBS</i>	<i>Studia Biblica Slovaca</i>
SPCK	Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge
SPCT	Systematic Pentecostal and Charismatic Theology
<i>SS</i>	<i>Seminary Studies</i>
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
<i>TRINJ</i>	<i>Trinity Journal</i>
<i>TS</i>	<i>Theological Studies</i>
<i>TMSJ</i>	<i>The Master's Seminary Journal</i>
<i>ZNW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary

INTRODUCTION

1 THE TASK

Witness is a term that I have been keenly familiar with, as a fourth generation Pentecostal, son of a preacher and worship leader. I can recall summers, as a youth, engaging in what we called ‘door-to-door witnessing’ or street corner evangelism. As an African American Pentecostal, I can recall many sermons where the preacher would inquire of the attentive congregation, in true ‘black preacher’ voice, ‘*Can I get a witness in here?!*’, to which all would respond with a resounding ‘Amen!’. In our worship services, it was not uncommon, rather it was standard form, to hear a brother or sister in the church stand up to ‘testify’, and in doing so, would exclaim that they were a witness to the mighty works of God – be it healing, deliverance, provision, or other. Another experience, being raised in the Pentecostal church, was the exposure to end-time teaching and eschatological matters at an early age. We sang songs, engaged in Bible studies, and heard many sermons preached on the matter. It is difficult to imagine any Pentecostal, growing up in the 1970’s and 80’s, who was not keenly familiar with the fear-inspiring series written by Russell Doughten.¹ Most often, eschatology and readiness for the Lord’s return informed the witness of our church. The Doughten films, Dispensational ‘Chick Tracks’ that were used in evangelism, and talks of the rapture made eschatology a frightful topic. Fear was only exacerbated when opening the Apocalypse. Dragons, beasts, harlots, and horsemen! That which was not fear-inspiring was certainly confusing, even for one from a charismatic community.

A formal academic study of Scripture helped to alleviate the fear and gave much needed clarity to reading the Apocalypse. But it was not until a conversation with John Christopher Thomas that I had considered it a book worth engaging in research. He informed me of two works that opened my eyes to the treasure that may be found in the Apocalypse, bringing to the fore this motif, ‘witness’ that I was so familiar with traditionally, but not deeply acquainted with theologically. The first work was a Pentecostal work – *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation*,² by Robby Waddell, offering a comprehensive exploration of the Spirit’s role in the Apocalypse; namely, in the faithful

¹ Russell Doughten, *A Thief in the night* (1972); *A Distant Thunder* (1978); *Image of the Beast* (1981); and *The Prodigal Planet* (1983).

² Robby Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation* (JPTSup 30; Dorset: Deo Publishing, 2006).

witness of the church. The second project was by an African American Apocalypse scholar, Brian K Blount. His work, *Can I Get a Witness: Reading Revelation through African American Culture*,³ explores the witness motif in select passages of the Apocalypse, against the backdrop of the Civil Rights movement of the twentieth century. Reading these two monographs inspired me to imagine – what might a project that merged the two readings (Pentecostal and African American), tracing the motif of witness throughout the entire book, not select passages. The Apocalypse has received widespread, scholarly attention for its prophetic and eschatological themes, and its relationship to the OT,⁴ but there is an emerging guild of Pentecostal scholars who are exploring other prominent themes that exist within the apocalypse. Melissa Archer, for example, has taken up the study of worship as a theme in the Apocalypse,⁵ and David Johnson looks critically at the texts dealing with pneumatic discernment.⁶ The aforementioned scholarship is not at the exclusion of the prophetic and eschatological themes therein, but amidst these themes. Joining with these and other Pentecostal scholars, the following thesis examines the motif of *faithful witness* in the Apocalypse, in an effort to develop an Apocalypse informed theology of faithful witness. As the title of this thesis suggests, the current work will employ a reading strategy that reflects my theological context, a 21st Century, African American, Pentecostal. It is an engagement with the Apocalypse from this context that a theology of faithful witness will be constructed.

2 STRUCTURE AND FLOW OF THE ARGUMENT

The study is divided into five chapters. In the first chapter, I offer a review of faithful witness in the Apocalypse in modern literature. This chapter is divided into three major sections: (1) a comprehensive engagement; (2) explicit (1.5; 2.13; 3.14; 11.3; 17.6) and exclusive (6.9–11; 12.10–12; 16.5–7; 20.4) textual engagements; and (3) thematic engagements. The thematic engagements include eight themes: (1) discernment; (2) discipleship; (3) Jesus; (4) martyrdom; (5) mission; (6) non–violence; (7) suffering; and (8) worship. In the second chapter, I present my reading strategy for this thesis; a 21st Century, African American, Pentecostal Hermeneutic (21CAAPH). I will

³ Brian K. Blount, *Can I Get a Witness? Reading Revelation through African American Culture* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005).

⁴ Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation: Verse by Verse* (ONTC; Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), p. 11, notes that the Apocalypse ‘has nearly as many allusions to the Old Testament as the rest of the New Testament put together’.

⁵ Melissa Archer, *‘I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day’: A Pentecostal Engagement of Worship in the Apocalypse* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2015).

⁶ David R. Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment in the Apocalypse: An Intertextual and Pentecostal Exploration* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2018).

offer a brief overview of the Pentecostal movement of North America and the subsequent methodology that emerged from the movement. Owing to the diversity found in Pentecostal hermeneutics, I focus on the Pentecostal methodology that I employ. Following an overview of Pentecostal methodology, I turn attention to the African American engagement with Scripture, which begins earlier than the North American Pentecostal movement which began in 1906. After a survey of the African American engagement, I propose an integration of Pentecostal and African American readings as a preferred methodology with which to engage the Apocalypse.

The third chapter employs *Wirkungsgeschichte* (reception history), in order to understand how early Pentecostals engaged the witness motif both in theology and practice. Rather than surveying commentaries and scholarly resources, this chapter is concerned with the sermons, songs, letters, and testimonies of early Pentecostals found by way of exploring the early Pentecostal periodicals. Before considering these periodicals, I offer a brief survey on *Wirkungsgeschichte*, its emerging popularity in Biblical studies in general, but in Pentecostal and Apocalypse studies in particular. The fourth chapter is a close narrative reading of the Apocalypse, with a focus on the faithful witness motif. The reading follows a reading structure of a prologue, four ‘ἐν πνεύματι’ vision sections, and an epilogue.⁷

The fifth chapter synthesizes the work of the whole thesis, culminating in two sections. First, I will offer observations that the Apocalypse offers in regard to faithful witness; these observations include the content, nature, form(s), and reward(s) of faithful witness. Next, I offer overtures of these observations, and their implication(s) for the African American Pentecostal Church. The study concludes with a brief statement of the contributions made by this study, as well as proposed ‘next steps’ of such a study.

⁷ A more thorough examination of this structure will be offered in the narrative reading chapter.

CHAPTER 1

FAITHFUL WITNESS IN THE APOCALYPSE: A REVIEW OF MODERN LITERATURE

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Faithful witness is not a subject that is altogether ignored in studies in the Apocalypse. Many scholars acknowledge witness as a major thematic feature of the Apocalypse, although most limit their engagement with the topic to a shortlist of passages (1.5; 2.13; 3.14; 6.9; 11.3–13).¹ While the theme is acknowledged, it remains under-developed, with the exception of a very small number of monographs on the Apocalypse. Even with monograph-length commitment to scholarly exploration of the theme, faithful witness is shared with other themes (the Lamb, Worship, Suffering) in the Apocalypse. There currently exists no monograph that has given exclusive attention to this motif in the Apocalypse. The purpose of this chapter is to consider the space that faithful witness occupies in modern scholarly works on the Apocalypse.² The first section (1.2) concerns itself with scholarly work that has engaged the faithful witness theme in the Apocalypse, comprehensively, when compared to works in the subsequent sections. The second section (1.3) considers textual engagements with the theme, where scholars have centered their engagements around particular passages in the Apocalypse. Next, (1.4), I survey scholars who have engaged faithful witness thematically. This chapter will conclude (1.5) with a brief reflection on how this survey of literature helps to inform the current thesis.

1.2 A COMPREHENSIVE ENGAGEMENT

1.2.1 RICHARD BAUCKHAM, 1993

In 1993, Richard Bauckham published two iconic monographs on the Apocalypse, each contributing significantly to the faithful witness theme therein, although witness is not their *central* focus.³ Bauckham communicates how central faithful witness, as a theme, is to the Apocalypse,

¹ Some scholars do engage passages beyond this list, but this list represents the most popular engagement in monographs and published works outside of commentaries.

² This review does not include commentaries, except for excurses and appendices that are given exclusively to the subject. Commentaries are engaged later, in the exegetical chapter of this work.

³ Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (NTT; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (London; New York: T&T Clark: A Continuum Imprint, 1993).

suggesting that ‘the purpose of John’s prophecy was to enable the Christians of the seven churches to bear the witness of Jesus, and this could only be done by directing their sight and their lives toward the coming of the Lord’.⁴ Bauckham notes that Christians must *be* witnesses, and *bear* witness; a prophetic activity of the church.⁵ Owing to its inevitable conflict with Rome’s ‘divine pretensions’ witnesses (and their witnessing) will inevitably lead to conflict and suffering.⁶ Conflict and suffering do not prevent the faithful witnesses from experiencing the presence of Jesus, who walks among them (Rev. 1.13; 2.1).⁷

Setting faithful witness as a major symbolic theme of the Apocalypse is, perhaps, one of the greatest distinctions of Bauckham’s work. He names faithful witness as one of three major symbolic themes that work together to convey ‘most, if not all, of Revelation’s distinctive theological interpretation of Christ’s work’.⁸ It is his contention that ‘what matters most about the humanity of Jesus in Revelation is the witness which he bore and which his followers continue’⁹ noting that the faithful witness ascription to Jesus in Rev. 1.5 and 3.14 concerns the living witness which he bore to God that ultimately led to his death.¹⁰

It is Bauckham’s opinion that witness ‘does not yet, in Revelation, carry the technical Christian meaning of “martyr” (one who bears witness by dying for the faith)’, but that it refers to the spoken and (obedient) lived witness which Jesus bore;¹¹ and qualifies this witness as ‘Spirit-inspired prophecy’.¹² He concludes, however, that the outcome of faithful witness ‘in the circumstances envisaged in Revelation, is expected to be martyrdom (2.13; 6.9; 17.6; 20.4)’.¹³ The nature of this witness, which leads to suffering, conflict, and ultimately martyrdom is ‘primarily Jesus’ and his

⁴ Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 166–67.

⁵ Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 38; Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 161–62.

⁶ Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 258, 265.

⁷ Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 64.

⁸ Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 67. Also, see pp. 91–92, how this theme intersects with other themes, namely, the theme of messianic war.

⁹ Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 66. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 171, further notes that ‘the story of the witnesses is rooted in the *specific historicity* of Jesus’ crucifixion and is intended to take root in the lives of those who bear the witness of Jesus in the streets of the cities of Asia’. Emphasis mine.

¹⁰ Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 72.

¹¹ Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 72. cf. p. 120. While he makes it clear that the term does not yet mean martyr, Bauckham makes the argument that the word implies a faithfulness that will ultimately result in death.

¹² Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 161.

¹³ Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 161.

followers' witness to the true God and his righteousness, which exposes the falsehood of idolatry and the evil of those who worship the beast'.¹⁴

Truth and falsehood, according to Bauckham, are the dominant concerns of the Apocalypse, and bears direct association with the faithful witness theme. He notes that it is the faithful witness of Jesus (3.14) that ultimately validates his role as judge (19.11).¹⁵ Where the title of faithful witness refers to Jesus (1.5; 3.14), Bauckham posits that the OT connection may be more than Ps. 89.37; that John may have been inspired by Deutero–Isaianic prophecies, which would bring the theme closer to the judicial and militaristic imagery of the Apocalypse.¹⁶

According to Bauckham, Rev. 12.11 is a critical verse in understanding how faithful witness, leads to Christ's victory. He eludes to three things converging in this verse: witness, discipleship and martyrdom.¹⁷ Although he has already established that witness does not semantically refer to martyrdom in the Apocalypse, the connections that he repeatedly makes between faithful witness and martyrdom might lead one to treat the terms synonymously.¹⁸ Rev. 12.11, he suggests, 'refers to the participation of Christians in the death of Christ through faithful witness to the point of martyrdom'.¹⁹ While witness may not *mean* martyr, Bauckham is not hesitant to make connections between the two. The connections are so apparent that they verge blurring the clear definition that he set out to make at the onset of the chapter.²⁰

Bauckham notes that Rev. 11.1–13 is central to John's prophecy; that it 'is placed here to indicate how the church's witness to the nations intervenes before the final judgment, the seventh

¹⁴ Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, pp. 72–73.

¹⁵ Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 73.

¹⁶ Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 73.

¹⁷ Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 76.

¹⁸ Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 79. For example, he says that following the Lamb (14.4) refers not only to following after his faithful witness, but also his sacrificial death. A point that seems central to his discussion here on 'The Army of Martyrs' is that 'the victory of the Lamb's army is the victory of truthful witness maintained as far as sacrificial death'.

¹⁹ Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 228. He continues, that 'here it is a question of an activity by Christians, as in 7:14. 12:11 helps to clarify the sense in which the martyrs share in the Lamb's victory by means of a sacrificial death like his'.

²⁰ For more on these blurred lines, see Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, pp. 91–94. As the chapter nears its end, witness and death/martyrdom statements and observations are more frequent, yet he still maintains his argument that witness does not mean martyr in the Apocalypse. Note, for example, when he says (p. 94) that 'in the situation John envisages, martyrdom belongs, as it were, to the essential nature of faithful witness. Not every faithful witness will actually be put to death, but all faithful witness requires the endurance and the faithfulness (13:10) that will accept martyrdom if it comes.'

trumpet, with which God's kingdom finally comes (11:15–19).²¹ He is convinced that the story here is not to predict the future, but a parable that depicts the aim and accomplishment of the prophetic witness of the church to the nations.²² While scenes in this pericope include witness, suffering and martyrdom, Bauckham explains that these are not the focus here; rather, the focus is how witness, accompanied with death, is a critical component in the conversion of the nations.²³ He notes that a global, versus merely a personal salvation is the ultimate victory gained by faithful witness; the elect had been *personally* redeemed (5.9), in order that they might bear *global* prophetic witness (11.3–13).²⁴

Rather than ancient Biblical figures (Moses and Elijah), Bauckham suggests that the two faithful witnesses of Rev. 11.3 are symbolic representations of the church's faithful witness.²⁵ He notes a number of contrasts and parallels between Moses and Elijah and the two prophetic witnesses here; noting that the OT prophets 'set the precedent for the church's prophetic witness to the world', but that neither suffered martyrdom as the figures do here in the Apocalypse.²⁶ He makes a connection between these witnesses, and Jesus, in that 'it is the witness of Jesus himself that the witnesses continue, and their death is a participation in the blood of the Lamb'.²⁷ Bauckham makes a distinct note of the aim and outcome of the witnesses here; these witnesses, powered by the victory of the Lamb, represent the eschatological people of God 'who bring the nations to faith in the one true God'.²⁸

While the two prophetic witnesses in Revelation 11 offer a view of what victory of faithful witness and martyrdom ultimately produces (conversion of the nations), the enemies of God in Revelation 12 and 13 introduce the satanic trinity who the victory is over; the dragon, (sea) beast, and (earthly) beast. Bauckham notes that the beast's apparent victory, through martyrdom, over

²¹ Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 83. Bauckham is not without company to suggest that Rev. 11.1–13 is central to John's entire prophecy. See Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation*. This passage is central to Waddell's theme.

²² Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 274.

²³ Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 84.

²⁴ Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 84. Emphasis mine. cf. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 265. He also suggests (*Climax*, pp. 336–37) that this is a prophetic work done through the seven Spirits; that 'the sacrificial death of the Lamb and the prophetic witness of his followers are God's strategy for winning all the nations of the world from the dominion of the beast to his own kingdom'. Note, also *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 333–34, the connection between death and witness. It is not only the death of the Lamb that garners the salvation of the nations, but he says that it is also the church's faithful witness unto death.

²⁵ Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 84.

²⁶ Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 85.

²⁷ Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 85.

²⁸ Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 87.

the Christians seems to give evidence to his invincible, godlike might,²⁹ but that the exact opposite is true; the willingness of the faithful witnesses to lay down their lives gives greater support of the veracity of their testimony, over the falsehood of the beast.³⁰ Repeatedly, he emphasizes the role that faithful witness plays in the conquering of the beast; it is not through passive resistance, but through active witness and martyrdom:

Christians conquer the beast by their faithful witness to the truth of God up to and including death for maintaining this witness. In this way their faithful witness to the point of death participates in the power of the victory Christ won by his faithful witness to the point of death: they conquer ‘by the blood of the Lamb’ (12:11; cf. 7:14).³¹

The prophetic attention which he gives to faithful witness is noteworthy. Whether the prophets, Jesus, or the church, Bauckham makes it clear that the seven Spirits are what powers faithful witness.³² This *suffering, prophetic* witness is no less than the Word of God,³³ which distinguishes the one true God from idols, and its aim is ultimately the conversion of the nations.³⁴ Rev. 11.3–13 provides a clear framework for both the aim and activity of faithful witness.

Bauckham’s work presents faithful witness as a significant theme in the Apocalypse, both from a theological and prophetic perspective. This active obedience is Spirit informed, Lamb inspired, and prophetic in nature. Faithful witness, according to Bauckham, is more than an activity but a term that identifies a particular group; the followers of the Lamb, or Christians – more specifically, the church. While he argues against martyrdom for a definition of the term, it is difficult to grasp Bauckham’s understanding of faithful witness separated from the idea of death and martyrdom. His focus falls more to the church, as a collective, than any particular individual(s), such as John, Antipas or the witnesses noted in 17.6, besides Jesus/the Lamb.³⁵ He views 11.3–13 as central to the whole vision, positing that ‘the rest of Revelation expands on this theme of the church’s witness, setting it in a broader context and elaborating on its results’.³⁶ Such a view makes it understandable why other figures do not receive as much attention with him.

²⁹ Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 90.

³⁰ Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 91.

³¹ Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 92. In Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 228–29 (234), he further attributes their victory not so much their death, but their faithful witness that leads to death.

³² Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 113.

³³ Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 119.

³⁴ Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 121.

³⁵ Others are mentioned, but without significant development.

³⁶ Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 283–84.

1.2.2 MARK BREDIN, 2003

Mark Bredin's monograph, *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace: A Nonviolent Christology in the Book of Revelation*, engages faithful witness extensively, offering intertextual connections to OT and NT books,³⁷ in addition to exploring what he understands to be faithful witness and martyr traditions in Israel's historic narrative.³⁸ Many of the thematic scholars, surveyed below, will find common ground with Bredin's Christological, martyrological, missiological, and non-violent interpretations of the Apocalypse. Convinced that 'social groups find meaning in their traditions',³⁹ Bredin employs a bit of cultural exegesis, using Gandhi as a framework of sorts, upon which he builds his understanding of non-violence.⁴⁰ His work seeks to assess 'whether Jesus is a figure of vengeance or a figure of compassion in Revelation',⁴¹ a task which he suggests requires serious biblical exegesis – thus, he engages the Greek text critically at some passages, offering unique translations, over what is normally encountered in popular Bible translations.

In order to inform fully his understanding of the faithful witness motif in the Apocalypse, Bredin first traces faithful witness in the OT, suggesting that it is important to explore 'what it meant to John to read the stories of faithful witnesses in his Scriptures'.⁴² He begins his exploration with Moses, going so far as to suggest that 'Moses appears to be ready to die for his people (Ex. 32:30–33)', and that, as a faithful witness, he is tasked with challenging Egypt, the great oppressor.⁴³ Even with Moses, he makes an argument for the non-violent nature of faithful witness, informing readers that 'Moses himself discovers that liberation does not come through

³⁷ Gail R. O'Day, 'Jeremiah 9:22–23 and 1 Corinthians 1:26–31: A Study in Intertextuality', *JBL* 109 (1990), pp. 259–68 (259). 'Intertextuality refers to the ways a new text is created from the metaphors, images, and symbolic world of an earlier text or tradition. The interaction between a received text and a fresh social context brings a new textual and symbolic world into being. Intertextuality provides the hermeneutical lens through which to read the newly created work'.

³⁸ Mark Bredin, *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace: A Nonviolent Christology in the Book of Revelation* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2003).

³⁹ Bredin, *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace*, p. 57.

⁴⁰ Bredin, *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace*, p. 5. As will be seen in Blount, below, Bredin does not understand non-violence as a passive act. Referencing the non-violence of Gandhi, he insists that 'Gandhi's nonviolence was active and pacifism was far from his mind. Nonviolence is the witness that an activist gives. It demands non-cooperation with a system that advocates violence. It means accepting suffering and death rather than using violence'. He also adds (p. 54) 'Demonstrating to the group member that he or she must be ready to be martyred means using traditional stories about heroes who showed readiness to suffer and die for their beliefs'. And further, he notes that (p. 63) 'insights from sociology and social anthropology can expedite a fuller understanding of the mindset of one who is prepared to die for a belief rather than kill for it'.

⁴¹ Bredin, *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace*, p. 1.

⁴² Bredin, *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace*, pp. 60–61.

⁴³ Bredin, *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace*, pp. 61–62. Bredin notes, further that Moses 'intercedes on behalf of Israel so that they would not be punished and seems to offer his life for them'.

him killing the Egyptian guard (Ex. 2:14). It resulted in the process of liberation being delayed'.⁴⁴ The major and minor prophets were faithful witnesses included in Israel's tradition, according to Bredin, as they, like Moses, 'were confronted by God and driven to declare the word of God'.⁴⁵ Bredin sees significance in the faithful witness tradition here, and how it ultimately comes to inform John's writing of the Apocalypse, noting that:

The highest expression is the figure of the servant songs found in Isaiah 40–55 (especially Isa. 52:13–53:12). The author of these songs was influenced by stories about Moses, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. These songs in turn stirred the imagination of the writer of Daniel 7 in his depiction of the son of man and the wise ones in Daniel 11. The pierced one of Zechariah 12:10 also comes from the same fountain of tradition. The three heroes of Daniel 3 must be considered because in this story we read the closest account in the Old Testament to a martyr narrative as defined by sociologists.⁴⁶

While Bredin makes many clear points toward martyrdom, he does note that there are OT faithful witnesses who did not experience death but did encounter suffering for their witness.⁴⁷ He concludes his exploration of the OT faithful witness by giving attention to the Psalms. While Psalm 89 would be an expected exploration, Bredin centers his attention on Psalm 73, suggesting that this psalm, illustrates how the psalmist 'seeks to persuade his community to remain faithful to its own traditions in spite of their apparently powerless and hopeless situation'.⁴⁸ This psalm fosters a sense of solidarity amongst the faithful followers, the identity forming nature of liturgy, and thus further encourages faithful witness.⁴⁹

Bredin offers seven distinctives of OT witnesses that inform John's understanding of faithful witness. According to his exploration of Israel's traditions, and the faithful witness narratives, faithful witnesses (ultimately God's witnesses):

1. Proclaim God's word to all opposed to God.
2. Suffer.

⁴⁴ Bredin, *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace*, p. 75.

⁴⁵ Bredin, *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace*, p. 63.

⁴⁶ Bredin, *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace*, p. 61.

⁴⁷ Bredin, *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace*, p. 63. 'As a consequence of being called to witness to God, Amos, Hosea, the author of Isaiah 1–39 and Micah are set apart from their contemporaries and know loneliness. Although there is no account of them being martyred or beaten, they suffered, like Moses, because of their radical application of the law to their generation, their message of justice and peace and their attacks on those who lived by violence (Isa. 1:11–17; Mic. 6:6–16; Amos 5:21–24)'. He also notes (p. 70) that the 'narrative relating to Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in Daniel 3 resembles a martyr narrative, except that the three heroes do not die'. This distinction is important. If it stands that the faithful witness of the Apocalypse is part of a tradition narrative, and these who are not martyred help to inform that tradition – witness and martyrdom must not be synonymous, even if intimately connected.

⁴⁸ Bredin, *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace*, p. 74.

⁴⁹ Bredin, *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace*, p. 74. 'If the witness denies God by praising and accepting the powerful, he betrays not only God, but also the children of God'.

3. Are willing to die for their beliefs.
4. Take upon themselves another's suffering or death.
5. Will be justified by God.
6. Benefit their own people.
7. Benefit the nations.⁵⁰

This OT exploration of faithful witness informs how Bredin understands the witness–martyr connection, as it is seen in the Apocalypse. Rather than embracing a first–century, Greco–Roman inspired view of martyrdom, he suggests that ‘[t]he development of martyrdom as a way of witness within Judaism is especially associated with the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes from 175 BCE’.⁵¹ In the Apocalypse, therefore, ‘John drew upon his tradition to present the new Israel, the church, in continuity with the situation of those who had suffered and died for their faith as related in the pages of the Old Testament’.⁵²

A significant shift takes place, as faithful witness moves beyond the OT; Bredin suggests that the focus is not transformation, but vindication of those who are martyred for their witness.⁵³ No major attention is given to NT books; outside of the Apocalypse, Bredin offers one paragraph on the book of Acts, and no other books.⁵⁴ He seems to allow John to serve as a spokesperson for all NT writers, offering that ‘John advocates that faithful witnesses should be active in proclaiming the gospel until death to the nations hoping that they, too, will come to accept Jesus’ testimony as truth. Therefore, a faithful witness is a middleman of God before the nations’.⁵⁵ Clearly, a distinction that Bredin makes is that the aim of faithful witnesses in the NT (and, beyond) is the proclamation of the gospel.

⁵⁰ Bredin, *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace*, p. 76.

⁵¹ Bredin, *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace*, p. 77. This conclusion is based on three things, in particular:

(1) The ruthless and inept handling of Judea by Roman procurators leading up to 66 CE which marks the beginning of the rebellion of the Jews leading up to the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. (2) The destruction of the temple in 70 CE. (3) The suppression of the Bar Kochba revolt in 132 CE. Without dispute, these events were significant for the rise of a Jewish martyrology. Martyrdom was a way of boosting morale and group identity against a powerful enemy who was determined to see Judaism fully accept the Hellenistic way.

⁵² Bredin, *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace*, p. 78. ‘Just as it was the destiny of the Old Testament prophets to experience persecution, so it was also the lot of the prophetic witness of Jesus’. While making martyr connections in the OT to witness, Bredin does not ignore the testimony connection, even in the OT, noting (p. 159) that the term ‘occurs some sixty–seven times in the Old Testament. It most commonly refers to the role of the witness in the courtroom of one who has firsthand knowledge of an event or testifies on the basis of a report of another (Lev. 5:1)’.

⁵³ Bredin, *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace*, p. 102.

⁵⁴ 1 Peter 5.1 is mentioned, but only parenthetically, and that is in conjunction with Acts 10.39.

⁵⁵ Bredin, *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace*, pp. 160–61. He further notes (p. 163) that ‘the testimony Jesus gives before the world is expressed in his life and death. Therefore, John testifies to the testimony Jesus gave in his life, death and resurrection. Thus, an understanding of the Christology of Revelation must take into account Jesus as a witness who dies as a result of the lived and spoken testimony that he gave.’

Bredin engages faithful witness in both explicit and implicit passages in the Apocalypse. He argues that John has a forensic idea of faithful witness in view in the prologue (Rev. 1.2, 5), and that he has Jesus' trial before Pilate and the Sanhedrin in mind.⁵⁶ He includes John (1.9) and Antipas (2.13) in the line of faithful witnesses patterned after Jesus. Bredin challenges the idea that the witnesses beneath the altar (6.9–10) are witnesses of Jesus, instead, suggesting that 'it is more likely that John has in mind a broader category of innocent people who have been murdered for their testimony, which accounts for John's omission of Jesus with 'testimony'. John deliberately omits 'Jesus' and has only 'witness' as the Old Testament prophets had not the witness of Jesus'.⁵⁷ The witnesses of 11.3–13 and 12.11 suggest, according to Bredin, that it is not only the testimony of Jesus that is important, but the testimony of the church as well.⁵⁸ Though his exposition is minimal, he notes connections between death, persecution, and witness in 12.17 and 17.6.⁵⁹ Finally, he offers his own translation for 20.4 in which judgement was not given *to* those who sat on thrones; rather, it was given *on behalf* of those witnesses who were beheaded.⁶⁰

After his engagement with faithful witness in the Apocalypse, he concludes his study by returning to his central theme, non-violence, exploring the topic through a Christological lens. The most prominent Christological theme being Lamb, Bredin suggests that an understanding of faithful witness is necessary for understanding the Lamb in the Apocalypse.⁶¹ In summary, he concludes:

[Jesus'] life was as a 'faithful witness' in the cosmic law court against the world of violence, greed and aggrandizement. Jesus' testimony was of word, action and death, all of which set him against the values of the world represented in the form of idolaters, murders, and liars (see Rev. 9:20; 21:8; 22:15) in order to persuade them to turn from their idolatry. Jesus is a faithful witness inasmuch as it is hoped that humankind, as a whole, can be released from its bondage to the values of the world.⁶²

Bredin's work on faithful witness is helpful, as he offers a robust Christological view of the term; not at the expense of the more popular 'Lamb Christology' found in Apocalypse Studies. Much

⁵⁶ Bredin, *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace*, p. 162.

⁵⁷ Bredin, *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace*, p. 165. It should be noted that Bredin seems to contradict this conclusion, when he later (p. 170) writes that 'In 6:9 those who have been martyred like Jesus, died because of the testimony that they gave. The testimony is the testimony of Jesus, which he gave before his accusers in his silence, and readiness to die'.

⁵⁸ Bredin, *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace*, p. 167.

⁵⁹ Bredin, *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace*, pp. 168–69.

⁶⁰ Bredin, *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace*, pp. 168–69.

⁶¹ Bredin, *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace*, p. 222.

⁶² Bredin, *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace*, p. 222.

like Brian K. Blount, seen below, Bredin contextualizes his theology by comparing the narrative(s) of the Apocalypse to modern historical narratives – in this case, that of Gandhi.

1.2.3 DAVID A. DESILVA 2004, 2009

David deSilva engages the witness theme in the Apocalypse, both in his 2004 New Testament Introduction,⁶³ and his 2009 monograph *Seeing Things John's Way*.⁶⁴ While deSilva makes clear his appreciation for the socio–historical context of the audience, narrative and rhetorical analysis are mostly employed in his engagement. He posits that the failure of a number of the churches in Asia Minor to maintain faithful witness was an issue that needed addressing. John's visions, therefore, employ a rhetorical strategy of juxtaposing the present suffering and eschatological victory of the faithful hearer/reader. In doing so, John seeks to establish what deSilva calls 'critical distance' between the Christian and the imperial/idolatrous worship and practices. This critical distance is accompanied by not only prophetic witness to the one true God, but also witness to that which God values. Simultaneously, it is witnessing *against* the maltreatment of the same God and his values.⁶⁵

deSilva posits that faithful witness provides a rhetorical argument as to why John's audience should take heed to his prophetic vision. By introducing himself as one who is experiencing exile on account of his witness (1.9), John immediately co–aligns himself with the other faithful witnesses of the Apocalypse (Jesus 1.5, 3.14; Antipas, 2.13; martyrs 6.9, 20.4; those who keep the commandments of God 12.17).⁶⁶ By aligning himself with such a lineup of individuals, most of whom have experienced death – and death may be forthcoming for those who have not, John's

⁶³ David Arthur deSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods and Ministry Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004).

⁶⁴ David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John's Way: The Rhetoric of the Book of Revelation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009). Faithful witness is key here, as deSilva suggests (p. 70) that the rhetorical aim that supersedes all others, for John, is overcoming, which is accomplished through prophetic [faithful] witness.

⁶⁵ deSilva, *Seeing Things John's Way*, pp. 69–71 also notes the dual nature of this critical distance; while the Christians are 'coming out' of Babylon, their faithful witness still has a view toward Babylon, or at least the people therein, for it is to these individuals that an invitation to 'discover the critical distance' is extended. He further suggests (p. 89.) that '[t]he commendation of witnesses throughout Revelation, and the depiction of the honor and good consequences that eventually befall God's witnesses, invite the hearers to ask themselves: "Should I come forward as a witness to the One God in light of the death threats and the absence of a witness–protection program, or should I not?"' (p. 224) 'Throughout Revelation, it is the power of Christlike witness that "conquers," achieving a share in that victory that brings access to eschatological, eternal honor and prestige (1:5; 5:5; 12:11; 20:4)'. Although deSilva includes 'values' as an object of witness, he does not expound on what these values might be, but it is implied that it may relate to matters such as (but not limited to) immorality (2.14), adultery (2.22) and pride (3.17).

⁶⁶ deSilva, *Seeing Things John's Way*, pp. 131–32.

sincerity and ethos are revealed.⁶⁷ Faithful witness also creates a stronger contrast to see the malevolent nature of those who would oppose God and his values, namely the Nicolaitans, Balaam, and Jezebel.⁶⁸

In matters of injustice, deSilva asserts that witness is both ‘speech and lifestyle against the system that ignored or created [victims of social injustice] and perpetrated far more evils besides’.⁶⁹ For first-century Christians, the Apocalypse liberates them ‘from the myth of the emperor and Rome’, and it ‘frees them to live out their lives in witness to the one God, to the demands of God’s justice and to God’s beneficent vision for human community and wholeness, and thus in critique of the pretensions and injustice of the dominant culture and its order’.⁷⁰ deSilva builds on Adela Yarbro Collins’ assumption of the purpose of anonymity of the two witnesses in Revelation 11; both suggest that it beckoned the hearers to emulation. The echoes of the prophetic witness of Elijah and Moses in these two witnesses was to offer John’s readers/hearers a familiar narrative, potentially exciting them to emulation, as these were honorable historic figures.⁷¹ The excitement is invoked as the readers/hearers recall the divine empowerment of these historic prophets, even in the midst of systemic opposition – thus, their own divinely empowered faithful witness is plausible, even if the result is death, their witness is not without effect. The prophetic visions of the Apocalypse function just as the words of the Hebrew prophets did; ‘providing the picture of reality and the interpretation of the believers’ world ... that will motivate and legitimate the response of faithful witness and protest’.⁷²

⁶⁷ deSilva, *Seeing Things John’s Way*, p. 132.

⁶⁸ deSilva, *Seeing Things John’s Way*, pp. 138–39. David Arthur deSilva, *An Introduction*, p. 906, deSilva notes that “‘Jezebel’ and the ‘Nicolaitans’ are trying to reduce the tension between the Christian group and the society around them by making room for Christians to have fellowship with their neighbors in settings where idolatrous rites are performed ... In the course of this movement, however, the Christian group’s distinctive ethos and witness would be lost.’

⁶⁹ deSilva, *Seeing Things John’s Way*, pp. 74–75, ‘John’s call to “come out” from Babylon, neither participating in nor profiting from the unjust system – and boldly bearing witness to the larger society about that system’s injustices ... sought to advance social justice’. deSilva, *An Introduction*, p. 920. ‘At the same time that it assures those who suffer injustice because they have united themselves to God’s truth, the character of God also provides a strong incentive to not participate in a tainted system but to live as a witness to God’s justice, and not to enable ongoing injustice or its legitimization’.

⁷⁰ deSilva, *An Introduction*, p. 885.

⁷¹ Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis & Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1984), pp. 150–51; deSilva, *Seeing Things John’s Way*, pp. 223–25.

⁷² deSilva, *Seeing Things John’s Way*, p. 11. deSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 887. Expanding on the idea of protest, he notes (*Introduction*, p. 928) that ‘We are called to protest, to bear witness to what society *could* be if God were allowed to break in and reign, but we are not to defile ourselves with blood as God’s enemies have done’.

Discernment is a necessary part of faithful witness, as deSilva notes; his readers/hearers will need to practice discernment in order to maintain necessary boundaries that faithful witness demands.⁷³ Finally, he makes a connection to worship and witness:

Worship is similarly effective in Revelation, declaring God's triumph over Satan (Rev 12:10–12) and over the kingdoms of the world that set themselves against God (Rev 11:16–18). Moreover, it is from the vision of the worship of the one God that believers are empowered to take the testimony of Jesus into the world and to faithfully keep the commandments of this God, thus keeping their prophetic witness—and the call of God—alive in Asia Minor.⁷⁴

A major contribution of deSilva's work, so far as faithful witness is concerned, is that of rhetoric. More than an attempt to differentiate between testimony or martyr, deSilva recognizes that at the very least, the witnesses of the Apocalypse do testify and indeed suffer, but both with a rhetorical aim. In the end, he proposes that the risks and rewards of witness are offered to the first-century Christians, in order to help them appreciate the 'critical distance' that John seeks to create between them and the Roman gods and value systems. The critical nature of this distance is owing to the fact that only the ones 'who have been motivated to accept this role are truly free to encounter the larger society in a prophetic, critical role and bear witness to an alternative way of ordering society'.⁷⁵ As deSilva concludes his chapter on the Apocalypse in his NT introduction, his contextualized application of faithful witness can be found:

In a world where a Lamb conquers by dying and the dragon is defeated by believers who lay down their lives rather than collude with an idolatrous system, the path for resistance is clear. We are called to protest, to bear witness to what society *could* be if God were allowed to break in and reign.⁷⁶

1.2.4 MICHAEL J. GORMAN, 2011

Michael Gorman engages faithful witness in his monograph, *Reading Revelation Responsibly*. He suggests that while it is not one of the most popular terms associated with the Apocalypse, witness is, in fact, one of the central themes,⁷⁷ positing that the Apocalypse is 'a summons to first-

⁷³ deSilva, *Seeing Things John's Way*, pp. 333–36. The boundaries that deSilva notes are those activities (social/civil) that compromise witness to God. By living within these boundaries, faithful witness then testifies to 'a better way of being human together than the ways inscribed by the domination systems, which continually seek to keep people thinking and running within the grooves most congenial to the interests of those in power within the system'. Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, p. 247, also makes this connection in his thesis, as well as pointing out the connection to injustice.

⁷⁴ deSilva, *An Introduction*, p. 923.

⁷⁵ deSilva, *An Introduction*, p. 922.

⁷⁶ deSilva, *An Introduction*, p. 928.

⁷⁷ Michael J. Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly: Uncivil Worship and Witness: Following the Lamb into the New Creation* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), p. 1.

commandment faithfulness, a call to faithful witness and worship *in word and deed*, (italics added) and secondarily early resistance–literature.⁷⁸ Gorman first introduces John, the author, as a faithful witness, and offers allusions to what he believes faithful witness looks like:

What John thought of as bearing faithful witness looked to others—at first, perhaps acquaintances and associates, but later possibly religious and government officials, too—like threatening the political and social fabric by dishonoring the gods. John wanted the believers in the churches of Western Asia to follow his own example, even if it would cost them as it cost him.⁷⁹

Further, he expounds on John’s association with the theme, stating that John was a public faithful witness to Jesus, and considered himself one of a greater cloud of faithful witness.⁸⁰ According to Gorman, John had not only embodied and expressed faithful witness, but he expected it from his audience. Gorman also gives attention to hymnic texts (4.8b, 11; 5.9–10, 12; 5.13b; 7.12; 11.17–18; 15.3b–4) and doxological texts (1.5b–6; 1.7; 7.10; 11.15; 12.10–12; 16.5b–7; 19.1b–8a; 22.20b) of the Apocalypse, and concludes that the hymns contained therein also operate as faithful witness.⁸¹ He insists that a close examination of the faithful witness motif gives evidence that the Apocalypse should not be taken literally, due to the fact that it is through faithful witness, not military warfare that the followers of Jesus share in his victory.⁸²

Gorman describes the Apocalypse as a theo–political text, and a five–fold ‘Dramatic Narrative with a Liturgical Purpose’.⁸³ One purpose, in particular, is witness; ‘the story of a faithful, missional people on earth who have been redeemed by the Lamb and empowered by the Spirit to worship and bear witness to God and the Lamb in spite of danger and persecution’.⁸⁴ He further describes the Apocalypse as ‘a manifesto against civil religion and a summons to uncivil worship

⁷⁸ Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly*, p. 25. Also see p. 79, strategy no. 5, where Gorman also defines faithful witness as something expressed in *word and deed* (emphasis mine).

⁷⁹ Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly*, p. 27. Interestingly, Gorman is not among great company to suggest that John sees himself as the model, over the Lamb as the prototypical witness. This is a rather unique perspective, although almost all scholars seem to agree with witness and ‘cost’ being in relationship.

⁸⁰ Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly*, pp. 32–33. In addition to witnessing *to* Jesus, Gorman insists that John’s witness was patterned after the witness modeled by Jesus. He also explicitly identifies John as a faithful witness in the opening of chapter 5, p. 81.

⁸¹ Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly*, p. 34. By suggesting that ‘as a prophetic summons to first–commandment faithfulness, Revelation is both a call to worship the one true God and a call to forsake all false deities’, I assume that Gorman is placing a *faithful witness* mantle on worship itself, in light of the fact he states earlier that John witnessed *to* Jesus. Such, he says, is the aim of the hymns of the Apocalypse.

⁸² Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly*, p. 135.

⁸³ Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly*, p. 37.

⁸⁴ Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly*, p. 38.

and witness’.⁸⁵ Instead of conceptualizing ‘witness’ in extreme hostility and persecution, Gorman expects readers to understand faithful witness as something realized in the everyday life of the Christian community, living in a non-Christian broader society; especially when the civil religion of that society may be inherently anti-Christian in its values and practices. Space is given to make a distinction between witness and martyr, noting that although some *may* face martyrdom as a result of being faithful witnesses, to read the two terms synonymously would be an error. Discipleship, not death, is the illocutionary aim of these messages.⁸⁶

Gorman highlights seven theological themes in the Apocalypse, two of which are pertinent to the current thesis: The Call to Covenant Faithfulness and Resistance; and Faithful Witness: The Pattern of Christ.⁸⁷ Offering these theological categories further strengthens Gorman’s claim that faithful witness is a central theme of the Apocalypse. Faithful witness as both a narrative and theological theme is key to his work. He notes that the Apocalypse contains a significant Christology, drawing attention to the plethora of titles given to Jesus; however, two key images are developed early: Lamb and Faithful Witness. These two images of Jesus work together; it is through faithful witness that Jesus, ultimately, becomes the slaughtered Lamb, but it is also the death of the Lamb (Faithful Witness) that the people of God are empowered to be faithful witnesses.⁸⁸

Gorman observes how the Spirit plays a role in the drama of the Apocalypse, especially as it relates to faithful witness, explaining that the Spirit equips the church for faithful witness.⁸⁹ It is through keeping worship central, as well as keeping before the people of God: a view of God (4.2), of evil (17.3), and promises yet to come – chief among these promises, perhaps, is the promise of a victorious rest, not of ultimate destruction (14.13).⁹⁰ Gorman makes the distinct note, that ‘the

⁸⁵ Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly*, p. 55. He explains that it is ‘a prophetic, pastoral, visionary guide to worshiping and following the Lamb, a template for faithful witness against civil religion and for true worship of the true God. It calls us to unlearn and abandon the false but often seductive gospel of empire and civil religion as it calls us to learn and practice, in worship and witness, the truth of the Lamb’s eternal gospel.’

⁸⁶ Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly*, p. 97.

⁸⁷ Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly*, pp. 75–76.

⁸⁸ Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly*, pp. 120–21.

⁸⁹ Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly*, p. 122. ‘The Spirit functions primarily as the prophetic voice of God and the Lamb, speaking to the churches, but also bringing them into the presence of God for worship and enlarging their vision, forming them into faithful witnesses to the Faithful Witness (Jesus), and comforting them in times of tribulation and grief. John may be *on* Patmos, but he is *in* the Spirit (1.10; 4.2; 17.3; 21.10)’. The role of the Spirit is developed further in Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation*.

⁹⁰ Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly*, p. 122. Gorman suggests that a vision of all these is necessary for faithful witness.

persecuted but faithful Christians of John’s day are part of a greater body of faithful witnesses that comprise the people of God *throughout time*’, (emphasis mine) including Israel’s twelve patriarchs, the faithful of Israel, the apostles, and others, suggesting that they constitute the worshipping elders (4.4, 10) and those whose names are on New Jerusalem’s gates (21.12–14).⁹¹

1.3 TEXTUAL ENGAGEMENTS

1.3.1 EXPLICIT FAITHFUL WITNESS TEXTS (1.5; 2.13; 3.14; 11.3; 17.6)

1.3.1.1 J. SCOTT DUVALL, 2016

Although J. Scott Duvall is known to favor a historical–grammatical approach to Scripture,⁹² the chapters in which he engages the theme of witness in *The Heart of Revelation: Understanding the 10 Essential Themes of the Bible’s Final Book* do not reflect such a methodology.⁹³ His engagement is more intertextual and theological. Witness is not listed among the 10 essential themes;⁹⁴ however, it is a subtopic that emerges within a select number of his essential ten. Although not equally explored, Duvall gives attention to the five explicit faithful witness passages. Jesus and the two witnesses take up the majority of exploration, while the others receive honorable mention to be named in conjunction to the testimony of Jesus.⁹⁵

‘The people of God’ chapter is subtitled ‘His Called, Chosen and Faithful Followers’, where he notes that John and Christians in the Apocalypse bear the label ‘faithful witness’.⁹⁶ Faithful witness is addressed in homiletic fashion, in this chapter. After identifying the faithful witnesses of the text (John, Christians, Antipas, Jesus, and the witnesses of Revelation 11), Duvall explains that in the Apocalypse, ‘the Greek words *martyria* and *martys* simply meant “witness” or

⁹¹ Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly*, p. 131.

⁹² For more on Duvall’s methodology, consider J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God’s Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible* (3rd edn; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), pp. 97–98, where Duvall and Hays, together lay out a proposed ‘Interpretive Journey’ that should be followed in order to interpret Scripture appropriately; the first step in the journey is a consideration of the context of the original audience. – ultimately concluding the authorial intent of Scripture.

⁹³ J. Scott Duvall, *The Heart of Revelation: Understanding the 10 Essential Themes of the Bible’s Final Book* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2016). There is, surprisingly very little historical–grammatical work done in these chapters, and not a lot of engagement with critical scholars on the Apocalypse. He also has a commentary on the Apocalypse, with which I engage later in the exegetical chapter of this thesis.

⁹⁴ Those themes are God, worship, the people of God, the Holy Spirit, our enemies, the mission, Jesus Christ, judgement, the new creation, and perseverance.

⁹⁵ I have given him ‘textual’ consideration over ‘thematic’, owing to the fact that his thematic (missional) observations are made within the confines of the explicit passages.

⁹⁶ Duvall, *The Heart of Revelation*, pp. 51–52.

“testimony”, and that ‘staying faithful to Jesus is directly related to being a faithful witness’,⁹⁷ thus, giving a cursory view on how he believes witness should be read in the Apocalypse.

His greatest engagement of the theme is found in the sixth chapter, ‘The Mission’, where Duvall comments that ‘[Christians] have the greatest of all callings – to be a faithful witness to Jesus and to the life he offers’.⁹⁸ Here, he engages the pericopes surrounding each of the explicitly mentioned faithful witnesses in the Apocalypse: Jesus (1.5, 3.14); Antipas (2.13); the two prophetic witnesses (11.3); and the witnesses on whose blood the great whore is drunk with (17.6). The focus of this chapter is mission, with witness being necessarily intertwined. According to Duvall, Revelation 11 is where mission is seen in high definition, in that it offers three factors of faithful witness: (1) living and speaking prophetically, (2) willingness to suffer and (3) spiritual protection and vindication by God.⁹⁹ Three unique contributions are offered in this chapter. First, Duvall makes a connection to faithful witness and God’s love for humanity.¹⁰⁰ Second, he comments on the correlation of faithful witness and ethics, noting that witness is more than verbal testimony, but lived actions as well.¹⁰¹ Finally, he makes a brief, but significant, mention that faithful witness is a communal experience/expression, not merely an individual one.¹⁰² While Jesus is noted in this chapter as the example from which the church is to model their witness, Faithful Witness is not treated as a significant Christological focus in the next chapter, ‘Jesus Christ’.¹⁰³

Duvall’s work here is beneficial in that he contextualizes his exegesis with twenty-first century realities. While not highly scholarly in its engagement with other resources, his intertextual approach to the text is scholarly by his own merits. Furthermore, having a reputation for his

⁹⁷ Duvall, *The Heart of Revelation*, p. 59.

⁹⁸ Duvall, *The Heart of Revelation*, p. 118.

⁹⁹ Duvall, *The Heart of Revelation*, pp. 107–108.

¹⁰⁰ Duvall, *The Heart of Revelation*, pp. 102–105. Stating that ‘our mission connects directly to God’s heart for the nations’ (p. 104) is in essence saying that faithful witness and the love of God are directly connected, since he later states that ‘our mission is tied directly to our witness’ (p. 112).

¹⁰¹ Duvall, *The Heart of Revelation*, pp. 112–15.

¹⁰² Duvall, *The Heart of Revelation*, p. 117. This observation is worth exploring, as it is mentioned in the context of Revelation 11 and the two witnesses. The legal connection of testimony is oft noted here, but the communal distinction which Duvall draws has far reaching implications. A community is indeed present; albeit small (two), the small community represents a much greater community (the church). With the exception of Jesus (who also represents a community, from a trinitarian standpoint), the only ‘individual’ witness named (Antipas) occupies no eschatological stage (never referred to as resurrected, or occupying space ... under the altar, in a robe, etc.). Not that he suffered eternal damnation for individualism, but it seems that more attention is given to faithful witnesses in community.

¹⁰³ Perhaps this was not necessary since the topic was taken up in the previous chapter, but positioning the discussion of Jesus as Faithful Witness, in the ‘mission’ chapter, over the ‘Jesus’ chapter seems to give implication to the term being a matter of ecclesiology or missiology over Christology. Bauckham, however, considers the Christological value of faithful witness, while still appreciating the missiological and ecclesiological implications.

historical–grammatical approach to interpretation, one might appreciate his intertextual approach, especially his engagement with NT passages not widely engaged when writing on the Apocalypse.

1.3.1.2 SARAH S.U. DIXON, 2018

Sarah Dixon engages the explicit passages in her monograph, *The Testimony of the Exalted Jesus in the Book of Revelation*.¹⁰⁴ She considers her research instrumental in ‘understanding the concept of ‘witness’ (and related terminology) within Revelation and thus the New Testament as a whole’.¹⁰⁵ Sharing similarities to discourse analysis, Dixon’s methodology would best be described as *intra-textual* (in the text), as she argues for ‘using the information given within the text itself’ and that ‘the book itself is the most appropriate means for the modern reader to gain the information needed’ for interpretation.¹⁰⁶

Dixon offers commentary on each of the five explicit μάρτυς (martyrs) passages in the Apocalypse, though not in order of appearance. The two witnesses of 11.3–13 are first examined.¹⁰⁷ Here is where the distinction she makes between witness and testimony is most clearly seen. In the same pericope, both μάρτυσίν (martyrsin | witnesses) 11.3 and μαρτυρίαν (martyrian | testimony) 11.7 are present. Dixon concludes that ‘their testimony would have included the message of the Apocalypse, but their characterization as “witnesses” is not dependent on this’.¹⁰⁸ She posits that here, μάρτυσίν (martyrsin) represents the prophetic NT people of God.

¹⁰⁴ Sarah S. U. Dixon, *The Testimony of the Exalted Jesus in the Book of Revelation* (New York: T&T Clark, 2017). Her work finds significant intersection with my thesis; what I aim to do with ‘witness’, she does with ‘testimony’. Owing to the distinction that she makes between witness and testimony, my survey here is limited to her ‘witness’ commentary in the seventh chapter, but much of her ‘testimony’ commentary will be engaged in the exegetical chapter. It is important to note that she suggests that ἡ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ (he martyria Iēsou | the witness of Jesus) refers to the Apocalypse itself (p. 32). The relationship between ἡ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ and ‘witness’ is then understood to be a relationship between ‘witness’ and the written text of the Apocalypse. Since both witness (μάρτυς | martyrs) and testimony (μαρτυρίαν | martyrian) share the same Greek root, (μαρτ– | mart–), scholars make their own interpretive choice as to whether they want to read them as witness or testimony. Blount, *Can I Get a Witness*, p. 68, Kindle, for example, translates ἡ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ (he martyria Iēsou) as ‘the witness of Jesus’, in quoting Allison A. Trites, ‘Martyrs and Martyrdom in the Apocalypse: A Semantic Study’, *NovT* 15 (1973), p. 76. Trites, however, does not offer the same translation, but prefers the traditional ‘testimony of Jesus’ for Rev. 1.2. For Dixon, *Testimony*, p. 125, what is important is the relationship between ἡ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ and the other μαρτ–root words in the Apocalypse.

¹⁰⁵ Dixon, *Testimony*, p. 20.

¹⁰⁶ Dixon, *Testimony*, p. 21. She clarifies (pp. 21–22; n. 79) that she does not reject inter-textuality (text outside of the Apocalypse) nor historical background; she only suggests that they not be the starting point, following Joel B. Green, ‘The Challenge of Hearing the New Testament’, in Joel B. Green (ed.), *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation*, (2nd edn; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), p. 12, who suggests that ‘an interest in the text *as text* is not only an important but, indeed, an indispensable and non-negotiable initial step’. A key argument for her methodology (Dixon, *Testimony*, p. 24) is that historical data does not offer decisive information for interpreting the μαρτ– root words contained in the Apocalypse.

¹⁰⁷ Dixon, *Testimony*, pp. 132–33.

¹⁰⁸ Dixon, *Testimony*, p. 133.

The witnesses of 17.6, on whose blood the harlot is drunk, is said to represent, broadly, those who follow after the lamb – not necessarily resultant of their heeding John’s prophetic message, as there is no internal evidence in the text to suggest as much.¹⁰⁹ A similar witness–testimony relationship is offered for Antipas (2.13).¹¹⁰ Faithful to her intra–textual methodology, Dixon does note the allusion of Jesus, the Faithful Witness (1.5; 3.14) to Isaiah 55 and Psalm 89; however, owing to the fact that the Apocalypse is the only place in Scripture where Jesus is referred to as a witness, particularly in these two verses, she argues that the Apocalypse, not these OT passages, should inform the reader’s understanding of this title.¹¹¹ Her conclusion is that the title refers to his life, death and exaltation – ultimately qualifying him ‘to be the giver and validator of the ἀποκάλυψις’.¹¹²

Dixon draws some very straight–forward conclusions as it relates to μάρτυς. First, she concludes that since John never offers specific grounds for qualifying ‘witness’, this is perhaps a general term for those who are ‘actively faithful in word and deed’.¹¹³ Second, she does not believe that this faithfulness is a ‘general’ Christian behavior, but rather a proactive and prophetic activity.¹¹⁴ Lastly, as her research engages ‘witness’ in light of the phrase, ‘the testimony of Jesus’, which she suggests is referring to the Apocalypse recorded by John, she concludes that witness has no implicit connection to the Apocalypse.¹¹⁵

1.3.2 EXCLUSIVE FAITHFUL WITNESS TEXTS (6.9–11; 12.10–12; 16.5–7; 20.4)

1.3.2.1 STEPHEN PATTEMORE, 2004

In his monograph, *The People of God in the Apocalypse: Discourse, Structure, and Exegesis*,¹¹⁶ Stephen Pattemore, takes a unique approach in his methodology, using *relevance theory* as a hermeneutical framework.¹¹⁷ His engagement is primarily found in the fourth chapter, where he

¹⁰⁹ Dixon, *Testimony*, p. 134.

¹¹⁰ Dixon, *Testimony*, pp. 134–35. Since his death preceded John’s vision, it is not plausible that Antipas’ *testimony* was reflective of the Apocalypse; rather, it was connected to his following Jesus.

¹¹¹ Dixon, *Testimony*, p. 136.

¹¹² Dixon, *Testimony*, pp. 137–38.

¹¹³ Dixon, *Testimony*, p. 140.

¹¹⁴ Dixon, *Testimony*, p. 140.

¹¹⁵ Dixon, *Testimony*, p. 140.

¹¹⁶ Stephen Pattemore, *The People of God in the Apocalypse: Discourse, Structure, and Exegesis* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

¹¹⁷ Gene L. Green, ‘Relevance Theory and Theological Interpretation: Thoughts on Metarepresentation’, Joel B. Green (ed.), *Journal of Theological Interpretation*, 4.1–2 (2010), pp. 75–76. ‘Relevance Theory’ is ‘a general theory of cognition and communication that provides a model for understanding how texts and contexts, authors and readers,

introduces the focal passage of his work (Revelation 6.9). Because his thesis is chiefly concerned with how the characters (people of God) in the Apocalypse informed the identity of and instruction(s) to John's original audience, he suggests that illocutionary force of 6.9–10, in particular, is that the martyr church (John's original audience) would be challenged 'to resist temptation to compromise their witness in order to gain comfort or earthly security'.¹¹⁸

It is his argument that although the Apocalypse reveals that 'suffering for the faith involves many things before death ... the witnessing church is first and foremost identified collectively as a martyr church, patterned after the martyr status of the Lamb'.¹¹⁹ Challenging a 'Western compartmentalized world-view' of witness, Pattemore suggests that witness is lived obedience, referencing the woman's offspring who keep God's commands (12.17); adding that John envisions a context where death is the result of such an obedient witness, when that witness is without compromise.¹²⁰ It is both the death of the Lamb, and the faithful witness of the people of God that bring about their victory over Satan.¹²¹ According to Pattemore, the various scenes of 6.9–11; 12.10–12; and 16.5–7; culminating in 20.4 bring definition to the people of God, in that they involve 'those who have died because of their [faithful] witness'.¹²² He asserts that the death of these souls, for their witness, fosters a greater intimacy with Jesus, the Lamb who was slain for his witness.¹²³

What is rather striking in Pattemore's treatment of faithful witness is delayed acknowledgement. As the title of his book suggests, *The People of God ...*, it seems rather aberrant to ignore the faithful witness theme until the sixth chapter of the Apocalypse. Three times, the term is encountered (1.5; 2.13; 3.14) before meeting the souls under the altar in 6.9. Witness is explicitly presented before this point in John's vision, yet the implicit nature of the term, in this pericope (6.9–11), is what Pattemore brings to light. It is this passage that provides the framework,

collaborate in the communication of meaning. Relevance theory offers a pragmatic model of communication that shows how recovering contextual information is necessary for comprehension. It also argues that communication is, at its core, an inferential process and not merely a matter of encoding and decoding by utilizing a sign system'.

¹¹⁸ Pattemore, *The People of God*, p. 97, suggests that 'what is clear here is that ethical obedience to God and witness to Jesus are both inescapably tied up with suffering'.

¹¹⁹ Pattemore, *The People of God*, p. 80.

¹²⁰ Pattemore, *The People of God*, p. 115.

¹²¹ Pattemore, *The People of God*, pp. 178–79.

¹²² Pattemore, *The People of God*, p. 114. These passages are also focal passages for Blount, but the two have different interpretations.

¹²³ Pattemore, *The People of God*, p. 114. He notes (pp. 95–96), however, that such an observation does not suggest that John believed every follower of Jesus was or will be martyred, and he makes it clear that sacrifice and witness are not semantically equated in the Apocalypse.

according to Pattemore,¹²⁴ whereby the rest of the visions can be interpreted, concluding that ‘the church as a whole is defined by a willingness to sacrifice one's own life’.¹²⁵

1.3.2.2 BRIAN K. BLOUNT, 2005; 2013

Brian K. Blount extensively explores the faithful witness theme in his 2009, *Revelation: A Commentary*.¹²⁶ His 2005 monograph, *Can I Get a Witness: Reading Revelation Through African American Culture*,¹²⁷ concerns itself with a select number of passages, which he feels are the most pertinent to the topic (6.9–11; 12.10–12; 20.4–6). The exclusivity of engagement does not minimize his view of the significance of them; he argues that John’s entire work centers on faithful witness:

John’s opening chapter establishes the seer’s primary theme: witness. His entire work is a witness to the revelation that God has disclosed: God, working through the historical expression of Jesus as the Christ, is Lord. John relays this testimony with a purpose. His hearers and readers must witness to others the truth that John reveals to them, no matter the cost.¹²⁸

Cultural exegesis comes center-stage in Blount’s engagement with the Apocalypse; not only the culture of the seven churches of Asia Minor, but also that of the African American culture. Insisting that ‘the cultural context of the interpreter plays a powerful role in shaping the meaning that [the] interpreter builds from his or her interaction with a text like John’s Apocalypse’,¹²⁹ Blount surveys the cultural situation(s) of the churches in the Apocalypse, in conjunction with the historical-cultural situation(s) of African Americans. Further, history of interpretation takes precedence over historical-critical or grammatical approaches, as he argues that words only ‘convey meaning potential’ and the context of the reader plays an active role in establishing that potential.¹³⁰

¹²⁴ Pattemore, *The People of God*, p. 113.

¹²⁵ Pattemore, *The People of God*, p. 114.

¹²⁶ Brian K. Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary* (C. Clifton Black, M. Eugene Boring, and John T. Carroll [eds.]; 1st edn; The New Testament Library; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009).

¹²⁷ Blount, *Can I Get a Witness?* Although his monograph is titled *Can I Get a Witness*, witness is not the singular focus of Blount’s work. The focus is shared between witness, the Lamb and worship. The second chapter, ‘Can I Get a Witness: An Apocalyptic Call for Active Resistance’ is where most of his engagement with the theme ‘witness’ is found. Faithful witness is not, however, lost when he shifts his attention to ‘The Lamb’, and the ‘Hymns of Revelation’ in the subsequent chapters. Blount, in fact, makes a noteworthy connection between the three; Jesus, the Lamb, serves as the chief model of faithful witness, and thus proves worthy of the worship ascribed to him in the hymns that the witnesses in the Apocalypse sing.

¹²⁸ Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 27.

¹²⁹ Blount, *Can I Get a Witness*, p. 2.

¹³⁰ Blount, *Can I Get a Witness*, pp. 2–3.

Blount defines faithful witness as ‘engaged, resistant, transformative activism that is willing to sacrifice everything in an effort to make the world over into a reality that responds to and operates from Jesus’ role as ruler and savior of all’.¹³¹ Though engaged and resistant, Blount does not see faithful witness as a violent activity; in fact, he sees it as quite the opposite, reminiscent of the non-violent protests and sit-ins in the U.S., during the civil rights era, under direction of leaders like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.¹³² The transliteration of the Greek term (μάρτυς | martyrs), according to Blount, has caused interpretive challenges for the modern reader, resulting in the over-usage of ‘martyr’, a meaning that is ‘something quite different from what it meant for John and his hearers and readers’.¹³³ For Blount, all witnesses are not necessarily martyrs, but their commitment to their testimony is one that willingly accepts whatever consequences befall their faithful witness, even death. While Jesus, Antipas and other figures of the Apocalypse lose their lives for their witness, Blount argues, with assurance, that John was not focused on a church who was willing to die, as much as he was trying to help a church be a faithful, *living* witness.¹³⁴

Active engagement is expressed, according to Blount, through a commitment to ethical living, not restricted to physical activity.¹³⁵ He, in fact, suggests that this engagement is to take place by whatever means necessary; that it is through such an engagement that believers work together with God to bring about what he calls a ‘liberating transformative history’.¹³⁶ He makes a noteworthy observation that the attention of John’s audience is first drawn to Jesus, the Faithful Witness (1.5; 3.14) before Jesus, the slaughtered Lamb (ch. 5).¹³⁷ Jesus is not only the faithful witness, but ‘God’s prime [prophetic] witness’, owing to the fact that he testified to the truth of his own

¹³¹ Blount, *Can I Get a Witness*, p. 38.

¹³² Brian K. Blount, ‘Reading Revelation Today: Witness as Active Resistance’, *Interpretation* 54.4 (October 2000), pp. 398–412 (398). Blount parallels John and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., suggesting that ‘both expected their followers to act. Both anticipated hostile reactions from the established powers. Both were certain that the perseverance of their followers would transform the world.’ Owing to the similarities between John and King, Blount employs the term ‘active, nonviolent resistance’ synonymously with faithful witness.

¹³³ Blount, *Can I Get a Witness*, p. 46.

¹³⁴ Blount, *Can I Get a Witness*, p. ix.

¹³⁵ Blount, *Can I Get a Witness*, p. 46, includes spoken activity, as well, siding with Hermann Strathmann, ‘Μάρτυς’ *TDNT*, p. 476, who says that the term ‘denotes one who can and does speak from personal experience about actions in which he took part and which happened to him, or about persons and relations known to him’.

¹³⁶ Blount, *Can I Get a Witness*, p. 59. Even John’s writing was such an engagement, according to Blount, as it testified to the lordship of Jesus (p. 48), which he suggests is the chief concern of faithful witness (p. 1).

¹³⁷ Blount, *Can I Get a Witness*, p. 47.

lordship, and lived under the conviction of that testimony, even though it ultimately cost him his life.¹³⁸

Although Blount believes that the faithful witness theme permeates the Apocalypse, still he narrows much of his monograph discussion to 6.9–11; 12.10–12; and 20.4–6. These passages are identified as ‘those texts where [John] packages “witness” with word of God and then causally connects them both to some form of reactionary persecution’.¹³⁹ The conditions of the figures in these passages do not lead Blount to favor a martyr definition for witness; rather, they support his argument that witness is both public and active, owing to the resultant penalizing that takes place. According to Blount, the slain condition of the souls was not necessarily to further a case of martyrdom as a definition of witness; instead, it was John’s effort to show how these souls patterned their ‘active engagement’ after Jesus, the Lamb, encountered in the previous chapter.¹⁴⁰

It is in Rev. 12.10–12 where Blount’s ‘active, resistant witness’ can be most clearly seen. As he explains, John repurposes Roman Imperial ideals and language of power and authority, and redirects them from Caesar toward Jesus, through the witness of the believers. Their witness ushers in a reality that Jesus, not Caesar, is Lord. Further, Blount observes that the hostility toward the witnesses in the Apocalypse, so far, has not necessarily been warranted in the first 11 chapters. It is not until chapter 12 that we get a glimpse into the past and see that before the scenes of chapters 4–11 even occur, Jesus (the Lamb) and his witnesses have already secured victory – both through his shed blood, and their witness, which results in the hostility encountered in chapters 4–11.¹⁴¹

Blount’s treatment of the Apocalypse alongside the African American experience in the United States offers a unique contribution to studies in the Apocalypse, reminiscent of Allan Boesak’s *Comfort and Protest*, which engaged the Apocalypse in a South African Context.¹⁴² The parallels that he offers provide a unique perspective and help paint a vivid picture of the faithful witness motif, as he sees it, in the Apocalypse. Closely connected to this parallel is a connection of witness and liberation. In his first chapter, he gives significant attention to liberation and the religious

¹³⁸ Blount, *Can I Get a Witness*, pp. 47–48. Blount implies that the life ethic modeled by Jesus is the active engagement for which faithful witness calls.

¹³⁹ Blount, *Can I Get a Witness*, pp. 49–50.

¹⁴⁰ Blount, *Can I Get a Witness*, p. 51. Blount does not negate the implications of sacrifice in this passage but argues for more to be investigated.

¹⁴¹ Blount, *Can I Get a Witness*, pp. 60–66.

¹⁴² Allan A. Boesak, *Comfort and Protest: The Apocalypse of John from a South African Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1987).

experience of African American slaves, which helps establish a framework for his reading of the Apocalypse through the lens of African American culture.

1.4 THEMATIC ENGAGEMENTS¹⁴³

1.4.1 DAVID R. JOHNSON, 2018: FAITHFUL WITNESS AND DISCERNMENT

In his monograph, *Pneumatic Discernment in the Apocalypse*, David Johnson engages the Apocalypse intertextually, and with literary analysis,¹⁴⁴ making a number of connections between faithful witness and discernment. In the prophetic messages to the churches, for example, he comments on the only other named faithful witness other than Jesus, suggesting that the inclusion of the name Satan surrounding Antipas (2.13) gives the church of Smyrna ‘an opportunity to share in Christ’s sight and discern that their persecution originates from Satan’.¹⁴⁵ As these messages come from the resurrected Jesus, the ‘True and Faithful Witness’ (3.14), *through* the Spirit (3.22), Jesus’ discerning the lukewarm activity in the church of Laodicea, gives evidence that ‘the truthfulness of a faithful witness springs forth from hearing the Spirit who, in the Johannine literature, is the Spirit of Truth and who speaks the words of Jesus, the Truth’.¹⁴⁶ The prophetic messages from Jesus, the Faithful Witness, calls the church to the communal act of discernment.¹⁴⁷

According to Johnson, the souls under the altar (6.9–11) were discerning witnesses, in that their lament for justice revealed God’s intolerance for injustice.¹⁴⁸ Another major convergence of discernment and witness, according to Johnson, is in chapter 11. Here, he states that ‘the pneumatic power of the two witnesses is closely associated with their capacity to see with the seven eyes of the Lamb’.¹⁴⁹ Moreover, Johnson suggests that it is through the convergence of true witness and true prophecy, which we see in the narrative of the two witnesses, that the theme of discernment is expanded.¹⁵⁰ While faithful witness is not the focus of his monograph, Johnson’s work is helpful in making a connection between witness, Spirit, and discernment.

¹⁴³ The thematic categories listed here are not in order of importance, nor volume; simply alphabetically listed. The scholars noted in these categories are listed from earliest to latest.

¹⁴⁴ Johnson employs a *Pentecostal* reading of the Apocalypse, as the subtitle suggests. This methodology is further explored in the methodology section below.

¹⁴⁵ Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, p. 214.

¹⁴⁶ Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, pp. 225–26.

¹⁴⁷ Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, p. 229.

¹⁴⁸ Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, p. 248, notes that their lament actually ‘[shapes] true witness into the protest of injustice’.

¹⁴⁹ Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, p. 261.

¹⁵⁰ Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, p. 263, adds that ‘discernment is, at least in part, the ability of the seven churches to recognize the words of the Spirit and Jesus and thereby speak conterminously with them’.

1.4.2 SCOT MCKNIGHT, 2023: FAITHFUL WITNESS AND DISCIPLESHIP

In his monograph, *Revelation for the Rest of Us*,¹⁵¹ Scot McKnight approaches his engagement from a perspective of discipleship dissidence. It is his argument that ‘the book of Revelation is for modern–day disciples who have eyes to see the power of the empire in our world and in our churches’.¹⁵² He dedicates a short chapter to the subject of faithful witness, noting that ‘the faithful witnesses declare their allegiance to the Lamb and walk in the way of the Lamb as dissidents of Babylon. Faithful to the Lamb, they witness to the Lamb, speaking up and speaking out and sometimes suffering’.¹⁵³ While it is his contention that faithful witness ‘occupies nearly every page of the book’,¹⁵⁴ his engagement with the theme is limited to the woman of Revelation 12 and the seven churches.

As for the woman, McKnight parallels her narrative with various OT passages, and suggests that her children (12.17) ‘are the faithful witnesses of the seven churches’ but also that ‘the woman is the faithful of the seven churches’.¹⁵⁵ He suggests that readers should not try and restrict her identity to any figure or group in particular; rather, read with imagination and ‘let her be who John described her to be’.¹⁵⁶ Regarding the seven churches, McKnight argues that readers have missed the faithful witness motif in the seven letters, owing to dispensational approaches to the text.¹⁵⁷ Much of his discussion is spent explicating this argument. He offers a very brief analysis of the addresses to six of the churches (2.2, 9, 19; 3.1, 4, 8) but not of the message to Laodicea. Admittedly, his aim is not to explore the messages in depth; rather, he only seeks to raise awareness that ‘what Jesus affirms in the churches can be summarized as a call to be an *allegiant or faithful witness*’.¹⁵⁸ His engagement, though minimal, does anchor the theme of faithful witness, explicitly, in context of the seven churches of Revelation 2–3.

¹⁵¹ Scot McKnight with Cody Matchett, *Revelation for the Rest of Us: A Prophetic Call to Follow Jesus as a Dissident Disciple* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Reflective, 2023).

¹⁵² McKnight, *Revelation for the Rest of Us*, p. 13.

¹⁵³ McKnight, *Revelation for the Rest of Us*, p. 84.

¹⁵⁴ McKnight, *Revelation for the Rest of Us*, p. 84.

¹⁵⁵ McKnight, *Revelation for the Rest of Us*, p. 86.

¹⁵⁶ McKnight, *Revelation for the Rest of Us*, p. 86.

¹⁵⁷ McKnight, *Revelation for the Rest of Us*, p. 87.

¹⁵⁸ McKnight, *Revelation for the Rest of Us*, p. 89, (emphasis McKnight).

1.4.3 FAITHFUL WITNESS AND JESUS

1.4.3.1 RICHARD B. HAYS, 2012

In his chapter, ‘Faithful Witness, Alpha and Omega: The Identity of Jesus in the Apocalypse of John’,¹⁵⁹ Hays employs a literary analysis and intertextual reading of the Apocalypse, advocating for it being engaged as a literary whole, with a high regard for the intertextual interplay which it contains.¹⁶⁰ He suggests that when scholars are seeking rightly to interpret the text of the Apocalypse, ‘it becomes evident that literary, theological, and political readings are inextricably interwoven’.¹⁶¹ Only through such an engagement does Hays feel that readers will understand Jesus’ identity as presented in the Apocalypse.¹⁶² He recognizes faithful witness to be one of the major narrative representations of Jesus.¹⁶³

Hays points out the prominence of faithful witness, as a title for Jesus, early in the first chapter of the Apocalypse; however, he notes that while this title is mentioned only twice (1.5; 3.14) explicitly, the role of faithful witness has implications far beyond these explicit passages.¹⁶⁴ These implications extend to, but are not limited to, those individuals and groups mentioned in the Apocalypse for their participation in ‘the testimony of Jesus’; including John (1.9), the martyred souls under the altar (6.9), those who keep the commandments of God (12.17), and the souls of the beheaded (20.4). According to Hays, μαρτυρία (martyria | testimony/witness) ‘is central to the message of Revelation, and to its hortatory purposes’.¹⁶⁵ Witness/testimony, he suggests, is a prophetic act of counter-cultural resistance.¹⁶⁶

It is Hays’ position that the subject to which the testimony of the witnesses refer must encompass ‘both the proclamation about [Jesus] and the revelation that he supplies’.¹⁶⁷ This witness is not merely a spoken testimony, but one that is patterned after Jesus, embodied and

¹⁵⁹ Richard B. Hays, ‘Faithful Witness, Alpha and Omega: The Identity of Jesus in the Apocalypse of John’ in Richard B. Hays and Stefan Alkier (eds.), *Revelation and the Politics of Apocalyptic Interpretation* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012), pp. 69–83.

¹⁶⁰ Being well known in scholarship for his work in the Gospels and the letters of Paul, it makes sense that he makes intertextual connections within the canon of Scripture, both OT and NT connections, putting the Apocalypse in conversations with the prophets, the gospels, and Pauline literature.

¹⁶¹ Hays, ‘Faithful Witness’, p. 82.

¹⁶² Hays, ‘Faithful Witness’, pp. 69–70.

¹⁶³ Hays, ‘Faithful Witness’, p. 70.

¹⁶⁴ Hays, ‘Faithful Witness’, p. 77.

¹⁶⁵ Hays, ‘Faithful Witness’, p. 77.

¹⁶⁶ Hays, ‘Faithful Witness’, p. 78.

¹⁶⁷ Hays, ‘Faithful Witness’, p. 78.

expressed in non-violent activity, with the result of triumph (12.11).¹⁶⁸ He points out the eschatological significance of Jesus as ‘Faithful Witness’ (1.5), in that while the title of ‘Alpha and Omega’ (21.6) shows his divine role in the ultimate triumph over evil, as the prototypical faithful witness, Jesus shows the participatory role of humanity in the ultimate victory over evil.¹⁶⁹

1.4.3.2 S. JOSEPH KIDDER, 2017

S. Joseph Kidder explores two specific Faithful Witness passages in the Apocalypse, both of which (1.5; 3.14) pertain to Jesus.¹⁷⁰ Noting that faithfulness and witnessing are conceptualized throughout all of Scripture, his exploration leads him on a semantic study of the Hebrew (עֵד | ed) and Greek (μάρτυς | martyrs) words for witness, an intertextual journey in OT and NT passages; including Psalm 89, Isaiah 40–45, and the Johannine literature, and conceptual explorations of witnessing in faithfulness and of the character of God. He offers a case for the gravity of faithful witness in the Apocalypse in his opening of the article, stating that the early mention of Jesus as Faithful Witness (1.5) ‘sets the stage for everything that comes later,’ and further suggesting that ‘a correct understanding of the meaning of the “faithful and true witness” will guide one’s understanding of the entire book of Revelation’.¹⁷¹

His semantic work draws the conclusion that witness, both in the OT and the NT carries a juridical meaning. Exploring a number of OT passages, he concludes that ‘the word brings to mind the concept of a courtroom in which the witness has the choice to be either true or false in their testimony’.¹⁷² The NT exploration, he suggests, is a bit more developed, as the concept of witness ‘lies in connection with the testimony of the apostles to the life, work, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as authentic proof of His Messiahship (John 15:27; 10:35; Acts 23:11; 1 Cor. 15:15; 1 John 1:2)’.¹⁷³

In his intertextual work, he begins with the connection of Rev. 1.5 and Psalm 89 and notes four major ‘witness’ themes that connect the two: (1) faithfulness – that is, God’s total dependability; (2) rulership – God’s ultimate power over all creation; (3) past evidence – God’s hand in creation,

¹⁶⁸ Hays, ‘Faithful Witness’, pp. 78–79.

¹⁶⁹ Hays, ‘Faithful Witness’, p. 82.

¹⁷⁰ S. Joseph Kidder, ‘The Faithful and True Witness of Revelation 1:5 and 3:14,’ *JATS* 28.1 (2017), pp. 114–31.

¹⁷¹ Kidder, ‘The Faithful and True Witness’, p. 114.

¹⁷² Kidder, ‘The Faithful and True Witness’, p. 115.

¹⁷³ Kidder, ‘The Faithful and True Witness’, p. 116. He notes that bearing witness ‘in the language of a court setting is of utmost importance to the book of Revelation. God’s people are on trial facing unjust courts that give unjust sentences based on false witnesses. Therefore, the assurance comes that the true witness will vindicate them’.

and as a keeper of his covenant; and finally, (4) a promise – God will vindicate his people in the future. Kidder then notes three themes in Isaiah 40–55 which find intersection in the Apocalypse.¹⁷⁴ The first theme is two lawsuits or controversies between God and the world, wherein God and his witness (Israel) is on one side, and the gods of the pagan nations are on the other (Isa. 41.1; 43.9; 45.20). Ultimately, the pagan gods are no match for the witness of the faithful and true God (and his followers) (41.24, 26–29); such is the message of the Apocalypse. The next theme is the lawsuit between God and his people. As Kidder notes, ‘the people complain of being forsaken (49:14), but God counters that He could never forget them and desires to bless them and save mankind (49:26)’.¹⁷⁵ Though there are certainly better verses in the Apocalypse that would support his claim, Kidder concludes that the theme of Revelation is the nearness of God to his people, in difficult times, citing Revelation 1.7.¹⁷⁶

The final theme that he explores in Isaiah, which resonates with the message of the Apocalypse is the suffering servant. The suffering (and overcoming) of Jesus serves as a model to his followers – reminding them of the faithful vindication of God. He concludes, ‘Because of the association between suffering and witnessing (see Rev. 2:13; 11:3; 17:6; Isaiah 49:19–23; 50:6–7; 53), the word witnessing came to mean martyr later on in the history of the Christian church’.¹⁷⁷ In the NT, he explores witness in the Johannine literature. In John’s gospel, Kidder states that the aforementioned ideas in Psalm 89 and Isaiah 40–55 can be found.¹⁷⁸ Further, he argues that the quality of the testimony of Jesus is attested to in the gospel. According to Kidder, the concept of witness in the gospel and the epistles ‘serves to remind God’s people that the victory over the devil, sin, and death has already been won by Christ. The devil has been defeated and no longer has any power over them’.¹⁷⁹

Finally, he turns his attention to the concept of witnessing in faithfulness and the character of God. He makes a noteworthy observation, that while Psalm 89 serves as a basis for the witness of Revelation 1.5, the faithfulness of God is a dominant theme throughout Scripture as a whole, not

¹⁷⁴ Kidder, ‘The Faithful and True Witness’, pp. 120–24.

¹⁷⁵ Kidder, ‘The Faithful and True Witness’, p. 122.

¹⁷⁶ Kidder, ‘The Faithful and True Witness’, p. 123. I would argue that 1.12–13, 20 are better verses that give proof to God’s (Jesus) nearness to his people – especially as we learn that some of these churches are suffering persecution.

¹⁷⁷ Kidder, ‘The Faithful and True Witness’, p. 124.

¹⁷⁸ Kidder, ‘The Faithful and True Witness’, p. 124.

¹⁷⁹ Kidder, ‘The Faithful and True Witness’, p. 127.

simply this one passage.¹⁸⁰ Kidder explains that the Apocalypse was written to explain to the followers of Jesus that they will:

face many trials, temptations, persecution, and even death. Some of them will be discouraged, others will be depressed, and still others will be left in terrible pain and agony. They will be in desperate need of a word of assurance and love. Thus, John at the beginning of his book, before he writes anything, reminds them of God's absolute sovereignty (Rev. 1:5–6).¹⁸¹

Taken as a whole, Scripture is a witness to the faithfulness of God; past, present, and future. This faithful witness finds its climax in the Apocalypse. Speaking of the character of God, Kidder suggests that it is 'really the heart of the cosmic controversy, which is the basic content of the book of Revelation. The whole issue is whether God is just, righteous, and loving or not'.¹⁸² His conclusion is that the faithful and true witness serves as a reminder of four things:

- (1) of God's great interest in and love for his people
- (2) that God has a lawsuit against the world – one that is won by his prophetic word
- (3) that Jesus is the ultimate witness to the character of God
- (4) that Jesus will make sure that the prophecies in Revelation will come true¹⁸³

1.4.4 FAITHFUL WITNESS AND MARTYRDOM

1.4.4.1 ALLISON A. TRITES, 1973

Allison Trites explored the use of μάρτυς in the Apocalypse, in his 1973 *Novum Testamentum* article, addressing the semantic relationship between witness and martyr.¹⁸⁴ In the Apocalypse, 'the witnesses are also the martyrs who lay down their lives for their faith,' which makes investigating the semantics especially important to Trites.¹⁸⁵ He approaches this semantic investigation diachronically, exploring the changing of meaning.¹⁸⁶ Trites notes five stages whereby the meaning of μάρτυς changed from witness to martyr: (1) it was first a witness in court of law; (2) it then became one who testified to their faith in court, suffering death as penalty for their witness; (3) next, death became part and parcel to witness; (4) μάρτυς then became

¹⁸⁰ Kidder, 'The Faithful and True Witness', p. 127.

¹⁸¹ Kidder, 'The Faithful and True Witness', p. 128.

¹⁸² Kidder, 'The Faithful and True Witness', p. 130.

¹⁸³ Kidder, 'The Faithful and True Witness', p. 130.

¹⁸⁴ Allison A. Trites, 'Μάρτυς and Martyrdom in the Apocalypse: A Semantic Study', *NovT* 15.1 (January 1973), pp. 72–80.

¹⁸⁵ Trites, 'Μάρτυς and Martyrdom', p. 72.

¹⁸⁶ Trites, 'Μάρτυς and Martyrdom', p. 72. Bredin, *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace*, p. 162, argues that these stages are unnecessary, given the OT exploration that he offers for faithful witness and martyrdom. He suggests that these stages all exist in earlier development of martyrdom in Israel's tradition than Trites allows.

synonymous to martyr, and witness was a posterior idea; and (5) finally, witness was receded fully from the definition, and μάρτ- words fully took on the meaning of martyrdom.¹⁸⁷

Based on a careful examination of these five stages, Trites suggests that ‘the idea of death in the second and third stages is present only in the context, whereas in the fourth and fifth stages it is involved in the dictionary meaning of μάρτυς and its cognates’.¹⁸⁸ The question that his work seeks to answer is whether or not μάρτυς and its cognates have moved beyond stage three in the Apocalypse. Trites first notes that there is no mention of martyrdom in relation to μαρτύριον in Revelation 15.5.¹⁸⁹ Next, he investigates a prominent phrase in the Apocalypse, ἡ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ (the testimony of Jesus | 1.2; 1.9; 12.17).¹⁹⁰ Rather than following some scholars who argue for a plenary interpretation of the genitive ‘testimony of,’ Trites prefers the subjective genitive interpretation – that it is the testimony that Jesus gives, not the testimony concerning him.¹⁹¹ Investigating these passages and others containing the noun μαρτυρίαν (6.9; 11.7; 19.10; and 20.4), Trites concludes that μαρτυρίαν has not reached the semantic definition of martyrdom; rather ‘where martyrological ideas are present, they must be deduced from the context and not from a semantic shift in the meaning of the word’.¹⁹² He does not dismiss suffering, and even death/martyrdom in these passages; but, he notes that the suffering, death and most importantly martyrdom are addressed explicitly and deliberately, not in effort to offer definition to the term μαρτυρίαν.¹⁹³

Finally, Trites turns his attention to μάρτυς, noting that the five noted explicit μάρτυς passages in the Apocalypse are often used in defense of a martyrdom definition, yet he still insists that context be considered. He notes that the original definition is, at least, marginally present in 11.3, as the witnesses offer verbal testimony. For both these witness, and Antipas (2.13), the reader must be informed of their death.¹⁹⁴ He concludes that μάρτυς has not reached the third stage here. Trites considers 17.6 to present a challenge in determining which stage μάρτυς has reached, given the

¹⁸⁷ Trites, ‘Μάρτυς and Martyrdom’, pp. 72–73.

¹⁸⁸ Trites, ‘Μάρτυς and Martyrdom’, p. 73.

¹⁸⁹ Trites, ‘Μάρτυς and Martyrdom’, p. 74. He draws the same conclusion (p. 76) for the verb, μαρτυρώ.

¹⁹⁰ The noun, μαρτυρίαν, is also included in 6.9; 11.7; 19.10; and 20.4.

¹⁹¹ Trites, ‘Μάρτυς and Martyrdom’, pp. 74–75.

¹⁹² Trites, ‘Μάρτυς and Martyrdom’, p. 77.

¹⁹³ For example, Trites, ‘Μάρτυς and Martyrdom’, p. 76, in referring to the witnesses of Revelation 11, notes that ‘death is the penalty for courageous witness, but not part of the meaning of μαρτυρία; it is when the two μάρτυρες ‘have finished their testimony’ that they are killed, and the context explicitly informs the reader of their death’.

¹⁹⁴ Trites, ‘Μάρτυς and Martyrdom’, p. 78. He adds that the mention of a throne (2.13) further supports the juridical meaning, while not negating a close connection to death as consequence necessarily.

conspicuous martyrological context; however, he ultimately situates the meaning here in the third stage.¹⁹⁵ He concludes his engagement by investigating the contexts in which μάρτυς refers to Jesus (1.5; 3.14). While 1.5 shows a close connection with death (firstborn among the dead), Trites suggests that the μάρτυς here does not refer to Jesus' death, but his mediation of the Apocalypse.¹⁹⁶ In regard to 3.14, in spite of the overtures that can be made to connect faithfulness and death, 'the juxtaposition of "witness" and "words" cannot be taken as accidental'¹⁹⁷ in 3.14, suggesting that μάρτυς might include death here, but plausibly still includes its original juridical meaning.

Trites concludes that the μάρτυς cognates, μαρτύριον, μαρτυρία and μαρτυρεῖν, have not reached the fourth and fifth semantic stages in the Apocalypse, and thus do not imply martyrdom in the lexical sense.¹⁹⁸ Μάρτυς is something a little more complex, taken into its literary context; however, he still concludes that while the term certainly seems to be moving in the direction of the fourth and fifth stages, 'it is still questionable whether the martyrological understanding has become part of the dictionary definition of the word'.¹⁹⁹ His explication of μάρτυς and its cognates in their given context is extremely helpful for exploring the meaning and significance of μάρτυς in the Apocalypse, especially beyond martyrological meanings.

1.4.4.2 MITCHELL G. REDDISH, 1988, 2013

In addition to a commentary on the Apocalypse, Mitchell G. Reddish published two articles in which he acknowledges the importance of the faithful witness theme.²⁰⁰ In his 1988 *JSNT* article, 'Martyr Christology in the Apocalypse',²⁰¹ he employs a theological–exegetical methodology to explore the theme. While the article focuses on martyrdom, Reddish notes that, in the Apocalypse,

¹⁹⁵ Trites, 'Μάρτυς and Martyrdom', p. 79.

¹⁹⁶ Trites, 'Μάρτυς and Martyrdom', p. 79.

¹⁹⁷ Trites, 'Μάρτυς and Martyrdom', p. 80.

¹⁹⁸ Trites, 'Μάρτυς and Martyrdom', p. 80.

¹⁹⁹ Trites, 'Μάρτυς and Martyrdom', p. 80. Also, worth mentioning is Jürgen Roloff, *A Continental Commentary: The Revelation of John* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), pp. 20–21, who offers a brief excursus on the theme. He notes (p. 20) that witness, in the NT always concerns Jesus, and 'signifies not only a formally reliable reproduction of words and facts but also an intercession of the one bearing testimony with his or her whole person on behalf of the truth about what has been heard and seen'. He contends (p. 21) that the martyr theology of the second century is not necessarily present in the Apocalypse; however, owing to the ones who are portrayed to lose their life for the sake of their testimony (6.9; 11.3; 20.4), witness was certainly heading in that direction, and that bearing witness or being prepared 'to suffer for the sake of obedience in relation to the testimony of Jesus, even to the point of death', is required of all Christians.

²⁰⁰ Mitchell G. Reddish, *Revelation*, (R. Alan Culpepper [ed.]; Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary; Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Incorporated, 2001), p. 60, notes in a sidebar, that 'from the Greek word *martyrs* was derived the English "martyr," denoting someone who is a faithful witness even to the point of death'. 'Even to the point ...' is a distinct qualifier of his engagement of the term, evidenced in his articles.

²⁰¹ Mitchell G. Reddish, 'Martyr Christology in the Apocalypse', *JSNT* 33 (1988), pp. 85–95.

only context ultimately determines whether μαρτυς (martyr) simply conveys the idea of witness, which was still its foremost designation in the Apocalypse, or witness that leads to death.²⁰² He suggests that the designation of faithful witness refers to the whole of Jesus' life on earth, bearing testimony to God, but that Revelation 1.5 specifically focuses on the witness that led to his death.²⁰³ Given the nearly identical title given to Antipas (2.13), who is noted for his martyrdom, Reddish posits that the title of faithful witness is given to 'one who endures, who "holds the testimony", even at the cost of his or her life'.²⁰⁴ Presenting Jesus as the faithful witness, or 'proto-martyr/Supreme Martyr', would have been the most compelling way to influence the behavior of John's readers, according to Reddish, which he notes to be the purpose of apocalyptic literature.²⁰⁵ In this article, the faithful witness motif is read against the suffering and death of Jesus, the Lamb. The article is not concerned with the overall theme in the Apocalypse, nor significant engagement with other witnesses.

In his 2013 *Perspectives in Religious Studies* article, 'Followers of the lamb: role models in the Book of Revelation',²⁰⁶ Reddish employs a historical-literary method to engage the theme.²⁰⁷ He highlights faithful witness as the most powerful among all titles that John ascribes to Jesus, as it holds emulative value.²⁰⁸ He notes the legal aspect of μάρτυς (martyr | witness), and suggests that the immediate context be considered before inferring a connection to death.²⁰⁹ He is consistent to his attribution of this title to Jesus, suggesting that it refers to his earthly life; adding that it was both his words and actions which testified to God.²¹⁰ As it relates to the witness of Antipas, Reddish implies that Jesus is the faithful witness, *par excellence*, and highlights the possessive witness of Antipas (ὁ μάρτυς μου ὁ πιστός μου | ho martyr mou ho pistos mou | *my faithful*

²⁰² Reddish, 'Martyr Christology', p. 86.

²⁰³ Reddish, 'Martyr Christology', p. 87.

²⁰⁴ Reddish, 'Martyr Christology', p. 87.

²⁰⁵ Reddish, 'Martyr Christology', p. 91.

²⁰⁶ Mitchell Glenn Reddish, 'Followers of the Lamb: Role Models in the Book of Revelation', *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 40.1 (2013), pp. 65–79.

²⁰⁷ The historical exegesis is minimal compared to the literary engagement. His engagement with the theme is preceded by a discussion on the genre of the Apocalypse. The brief overview of apocalyptic literature lends itself to a discussion of what Reddish understands to be the context of John's audience, and thus the purpose of his writing. He also engages, intertextually, with other NT books, but not at length.

²⁰⁸ Reddish, 'Followers of the Lamb', pp. 66–67. Of all the other titles that Jesus holds, throughout the Apocalypse, faithful witness is the only vocation which John's readers can imitate.

²⁰⁹ Reddish, 'Followers of the Lamb', p. 67.

²¹⁰ Reddish, 'Followers of the Lamb', pp. 67–68. His argument, here, is more thorough than in the previous article. Here, he makes a compelling argument for the 'living' Jesus over the 'exalted' Jesus (cf. Aune, *Revelation* 1–5, p. 255). He notes that if Antipas is offered as an example of one who follows after Jesus' witness, then it is the living Jesus that he is imitating, thus losing his life, not trying to imitate the exalted Jesus.

witness).²¹¹ He suggests that this possessive distinction served as a call to action for other believers – if Antipas could follow, so should they. Reddish suggests that the mystery concerning his death is unimportant, as it is not the events of his death, but his example that John is concerned about.²¹²

Reddish discusses other witnesses in the Apocalypse, but not at the length to which he does Jesus and Antipas. He notes that the ‘great multitude’ (7.9) are rewarded with white robes for their faithfulness (7.14), and notes this scenario in other places in the Apocalypse (3.2–5, 18; 4.4; 6.11).²¹³ In popular company with other scholars, he understands the two witnesses (11.3) to represent the church, and its witness to the world, but adds that it is not their witness *to*, alone, but also their witness *against* the world.²¹⁴ Finally, he connects those ‘who overcome’ in the seven prophetic messages to the overcomers in 12.11. Because Satan is defeated, in part, by their faithful witness, Reddish says that the suffering and death of the followers of the Lamb is given purpose.²¹⁵ Using different methodologies in these two articles, and being over two decades removed from one another, Reddish remains consistent in his interpreting the text. His high view of martyrdom does not go away in the second article, but he is very clear not to suggest that μάρτυς (martyrs) should be read as martyr throughout the Apocalypse; still holding to a legal idea, but letting context decide if more is in view.

1.4.4.3 FRANK MACCHIA, 2016

In his commentary co-authored with J.C. Thomas, Frank Macchia makes a significant contribution to the theme of witness in the Apocalypse. Though situated in a commentary, it is worth noting in the review, as it is a theological excerpt, outside of the commentary. In the section ‘The Witness of the Martyrs’,²¹⁶ Macchia makes a connection between witness and martyrdom, but takes it a step further than other scholars by noting that ‘The martyrs are arguably not making the ultimate sacrifice at their moment of death. That decision was implicitly made at their conversion and baptism’.²¹⁷ While the review of Macchia’s excerpt fits in the category of martyrdom, it is mostly owing to his heading. While on the one hand, he does indeed engage the concept of the martyr

²¹¹ Reddish, ‘Followers of the Lamb’, p. 72.

²¹² Reddish, ‘Followers of the Lamb’, p. 73.

²¹³ Reddish, ‘Followers of the Lamb’, p. 75.

²¹⁴ Reddish, ‘Followers of the Lamb’, p. 75.

²¹⁵ Reddish, ‘Followers of the Lamb’, p. 76.

²¹⁶ Frank D. Macchia, ‘The Witness of the Martyrs’, in John Christopher Thomas and Frank D. Macchia, *Revelation, The Two Horizons New Testament Commentary* (Joel B. Green and Max Turner, [eds.]; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), pp. 529-32.

²¹⁷ Macchia, ‘The Witness of the Martyrs’, p. 530.

here, on the other hand, he sets himself apart from other scholars by offering several implications of the witness–martyr relationship.

The first implication, as noted above is the implication of time that Macchia makes, suggesting that martyrdom is not a decision made at the end of one’s life, but at their conversion and baptism.²¹⁸ He writes that ‘The decision made at the end of their lives represented a courageous act of following through from that original decision, to remain true to it no matter what price had to be paid to do so.’²¹⁹ Another implication is the reality that he notes – all people, Christians included, will someday die, this for the martyr, ‘to cling to life and to claim it as one’s own is an illusion’.²²⁰

This illusion leads to the second implication, which is that to which witness points to, and that is the righteous rule and reign of God. Macchia contends that ‘The martyr thus leads the missionary church in bearing witness to the value of the kingdom of God over all else.’²²¹ It is his position that the willingness for the martyr to lay down their life is a witness to the fact that their life did not belong to them, but that ‘the willingness of the martyrs to give up life in this world is rooted in the deeper truth that this life has always belonged to God as the creator and redeemer.’²²²

Within this implication lies another – and that is solidarity and unity. Macchia makes a point that ‘The church led by the martyrs is loyal above all else to the justice and mercy of the kingdom of God. It avoids any hint of racism or oppression and works against these social evils.’²²³ The connection between martyrdom as an opposition to racism and oppression is a unique view, but one worth noting as John’s vision includes people ‘from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues’ (Rev. 7.9). He argues that as a martyr community, ‘The church challenges and subverts a materialistic culture that seeks wealth and power by any means necessary, including those that do violence to others.’²²⁴

Another implication is discipleship, where Macchia notes:

The church engages in its social witness as an aspect of its discipleship, in a way consistent with the path of the cross. It knows that the more it penetrates into the depths of its center in the crucified Lamb, the more profoundly social it becomes, for the Lamb was slain for the

²¹⁸ Macchia, ‘The Witness of the Martyrs’, p. 530.

²¹⁹ Macchia, ‘The Witness of the Martyrs’, p. 530.

²²⁰ Macchia, ‘The Witness of the Martyrs’, p. 531.

²²¹ Macchia, ‘The Witness of the Martyrs’, p. 531.

²²² Macchia, ‘The Witness of the Martyrs’, p. 530.

²²³ Macchia, ‘The Witness of the Martyrs’, p. 530.

²²⁴ Macchia, ‘The Witness of the Martyrs’, p. 531.

whole world. The more social it becomes, the more it can penetrate into the depths of its own center.²²⁵

Though not expounding on them, he also makes connections to discernment²²⁶ and the Kingdom of God.²²⁷ He concludes his section on another object to which witness points, and that is ‘the victory of the risen Christ over the forces of death and alienation’.²²⁸ This witness, he is sure to note, is not done without ‘the Spirit of life in the crucified and risen Christ.’²²⁹

The theological value of Macchia’s contribution to witness cannot be understated. While written under the banner of martyr, he brings to the fore ideas that can be easily missed – especially when reading with a martyr lens. Whether one agrees or disagrees with his suggestion that ‘The NT word for witness implies a connection with the contemporary word “martyr”,²³⁰ it would be difficult to argue against the implications he makes based on such a conclusion. It should be noted, however, that Macchia does not explicitly define witness as martyrdom, only makes a connection between the two concepts. Equally worth considering is that his idea of martyrdom does not necessarily correlate to suffering, as there is really no mention of suffering, explicitly in his article. For him, martyrdom is simply witness that has remained steadfast till the point of death.

1.4.4.4 PAUL MIDDLETON, 2018

Paul Middleton’s background in Christian history, and studies in martyrdom take center stage in his monograph, *The Violence of the Lamb*.²³¹ While his work has a theological aim (the intersection of martyrology and Christology), his methodology is more historical–grammatical than theological. Middleton engages the Greek text, extensively, noting where he believes other Apocalypse scholars have missed the interpretive mark. He makes considerable intertextual observations, connecting the Apocalypse not only to the OT, as would be expected, but he also makes connections to the gospels and the Pauline epistles. Beyond the canon, Middleton engages other non–canonical Apocalyptic writings, such as 1 Enoch, 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch, as well as primary historical resources.

²²⁵ Macchia, ‘The Witness of the Martyrs’, p. 531.

²²⁶ Macchia, ‘The Witness of the Martyrs’, p. 530.

²²⁷ Macchia, ‘The Witness of the Martyrs’, pp. 530-31.

²²⁸ Macchia, ‘The Witness of the Martyrs’, p. 531.

²²⁹ Macchia, ‘The Witness of the Martyrs’, p. 531-32.

²³⁰ Macchia, ‘The Witness of the Martyrs’, p. 530.

²³¹ Paul Middleton, *The Violence of the Lamb: Martyrs as Agents of Divine Judgement in the Book of Revelation* (The Library of New Testament Studies; New York: Bloomsbury, T&T Clark, 2018).

In his estimation, ‘for John, the category of faithful [witnesses] Christians and the category of martyrs do not merely overlap, they are identical’.²³² His work suggests that death through martyrdom is either semantically equated with faithful witness, or it is the direct result of faithful witness, positing that chapters 11–14 strengthen this argument.²³³ In the third chapter, his focus is on how Jesus, the slain Lamb, stands as the prototypical faithful witness, owing to the fact that the Apocalypse focuses more on the eschatological activity of Jesus, and not that of his earthly life.²³⁴ As a ‘witness,’ he then argues that the Lamb is indeed a martyr. While he does acknowledge the later technical use of the term μάρτυς (martyr | witness), Middleton suggests that the later usage does not warrant the rejection of the coterminous relationship of witness and death in the Apocalypse.²³⁵ Through the Lamb’s witness/martyrdom, Middleton suggests that he (the Lamb) urges hearers of John’s recorded vision to come and suffer (to death), thus conquering, as he did.

In the fourth chapter, Middleton focuses on the Lamb’s judgement in the Apocalypse, rewarding the faithful witnesses and punishing the faithless. He suggests that the seven prophetic messages to the churches create a framework for the whole of the Apocalypse, explaining that their messages are underlined throughout the whole of the book; ‘those who are suffering must maintain their faithful witness, while those who are not must repent’.²³⁶ The judgements of the Apocalypse further this sentiment.²³⁷ Ultimately, the faithful witnesses become God’s agents for divine judgement.²³⁸ In the fifth chapter, Middleton takes a look at the theology of the term μάρτυς (martyr | witness), bringing a degree of concreteness to his definition. He defines the term as a multi-faceted act; it is the act dying for one’s faith (martyrdom), and also conquering through death.²³⁹ These acts, Middleton insists, are non-negotiables for all Christians (faithful witnesses), a point that he believes most scholars fall short of arguing.²⁴⁰ His high view of martyrdom offers him a more synchronous reading of the martyr visions (6.9–11; 7.1–8; 7.9–17 and 14.1–5) as he believes they represent various perspectives of one martyred Church.²⁴¹

²³² Middleton, *Violence of the Lamb*, p. 210.

²³³ Middleton, *Violence of the Lamb*, p. 25.

²³⁴ Middleton, *Violence of the Lamb*, p. 109.

²³⁵ Middleton, *Violence of the Lamb*, p. 110.

²³⁶ Middleton, *Violence of the Lamb*, p. 187.

²³⁷ Middleton, *Violence of the Lamb*, p. 139.

²³⁸ Middleton, *Violence of the Lamb*, p. 187.

²³⁹ Middleton, *Violence of the Lamb*, p. 197.

²⁴⁰ Middleton, *Violence of the Lamb*, p. 197.

²⁴¹ Middleton, *Violence of the Lamb*, p. 224.

Middleton's engagement with witness/martyr bolsters the popular reading of the Apocalypse, which suggests that John envisions that all who are faithful will ultimately die for their witness. While he continually makes this strong case for absolute martyrdom, he weakens the argument by suggesting that the expectation is on a literary level.²⁴² One may wonder what the actual expectation is of those who read, hear, and obey the words of John's Apocalypse (1.3).

1.4.5 FAITHFUL WITNESS AND MISSION

1.4.5.1 ROBBY WADDELL, 2006

Although his work centers its attention on the pneumatology of the Apocalypse, Robby Waddell engages the faithful witness theme in the fourth chapter of his monograph, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation*. His work centers around the two witnesses of 11.1–13. Not without company among scholars, Waddell believes this passage to be both the theological center of the Apocalypse, as well as the 'intertextual center of the role of the Spirit in the Apocalypse'.²⁴³ He arrives at this conclusion through a primarily intertextual approach to the text. Waddell does give recognition to the other explicit faithful witnesses in the Apocalypse (Jesus in 1.5; 3.14, Antipas in 2.13 and those who have been slaughtered in 17.6) but limits his discussion of faithful witness to the passages which concern his work. He supports the view of many scholars, that the two witnesses are representative of the divinely commissioned Church, or Christians in general, and suggests that 'the burden of proof will continue to lie with those who wish to identify the two [witnesses] lampstands as anything other than the church'.²⁴⁴

While not making an explicit argument for the connection of faithful witness and mission, it is clear that Waddell views the Spirit to be the connection. Waddell not only views 11.1–13 as a 'prophetic call to the people of God to be faithful witnesses,'²⁴⁵ but his work endeavors to give evidence to this prophetic call being made possible only by the power of the Spirit.²⁴⁶ He notes, 'faithful members of the church are prophetic not because they deliver a charismatic word for the community, but rather because they bear a prophetic witness of Jesus to the World'.²⁴⁷ While the witnesses of 11.3–13 indeed experience suffering and martyrdom, Waddell does not subscribe to

²⁴² Middleton, *Violence of the Lamb*, pp. 210, 224.

²⁴³ Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation*, p. 133.

²⁴⁴ Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation*, pp. 171–73. He notes that this commission is prophecy.

²⁴⁵ Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation*, p. 174.

²⁴⁶ Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation*, p. 175.

²⁴⁷ Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation*, p. 175; n. 144.

a martyrdom definition for witness. In fact, he makes it a point to note that ‘despite the fact that every witness in the book suffers a martyr’s death, scholars universally agree that witness defines the proclamation, and should not be understood exclusively as martyrdom’.²⁴⁸ Further, he notes that the death of the witnesses here could be hyperbolic, and aptly notes that martyrdom is not necessarily the fate of every church member (faithful witness).²⁴⁹

Owing to the fact that the messages to the churches are given to John while ‘in the Spirit,’ Waddell’s work brings to light the Spirit’s role in the witness of the church. In his words, ‘the role of the Spirit in the Apocalypse is to inspire the prophetic witness of a pneumatic church’.²⁵⁰ While faithful witness is not the central focus of his thesis, his work on the role of the Spirit in the Apocalypse offers a perspective with which to view the theme of faithful witness, and its relationship to mission, that has yet to be explored at such length.²⁵¹

1.4.5.2 DEAN FLEMMING, 2012

Flemming uses mission as a theological framework with which to engage the Apocalypse in his 2012 article, ‘Revelation and the *Missio Dei*: Toward a Missional Reading of the Apocalypse’.²⁵² He proposes a ‘missional hermeneutic’ in reading the Apocalypse; one that reads it as a witness to God, and concerns itself with how the Apocalypse functions as an instrument in mission.²⁵³ Through such a reading, Fleming concludes that ‘John believes the church on earth is caught up in the story of God’s mission in Christ. By virtue of his sacrificial death and victory, Christ has made the church a kingdom and priests, engaged in faithful service to God (1.5–6; 5.9–10; cf.

²⁴⁸ Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation*, p. 172. Two points of implication are noteworthy here; first, every witness in the book does not take into account the *implied* witnesses that the current thesis seeks to address; some of which do not appear as martyrs, as will be seen below. Secondly, although scholars do reference Hermann Strathmann, ‘μάρτυς, μαρτυρέω, μαρτυρία, μαρτύριον’ *TDNT*, pp. 474–508, and state that witness and martyr are not semantically equated in the Apocalypse, many still imply a close, if not semantically equal relationship; Waddell is not among this number. Waddell recognizes the martyrdom in chapter 11 but does not seem to be overly concerned with the idea, of martyrdom throughout the apocalypse. He leaves room to interpret (μάρτυς | martyrs) in its own literary context.

²⁴⁹ Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation*, p. 185. Faithful witness being my term here, but a fair choice to make, being that he has designated the term, earlier, to the church.

²⁵⁰ Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation*, p. 189.

²⁵¹ Not suggesting that other scholars miss the connection of the Spirit and witness; we can see such a connection in Gorman’s monograph, *Reading Revelation*. However, Waddell’s intertextual study of the Spirit in Revelation is the only monograph in print, at the time of this survey, given exclusively to the discussion of the Spirit, thus offering a more informed role of the Spirit in the Apocalypse in its relation to other themes like faithful witness.

²⁵² Dean Fleming, ‘Revelation and the *Missio Dei*: Toward a Missional Reading of the Apocalypse’, *JTI* 6.2 (Fall 2012), pp. 161–77. Although mission is a framework for engaging the Apocalypse, Fleming does not seek to establish a ‘theology of mission’ via the Apocalypse, but rather presents a case for a missional reading of it.

²⁵³ Fleming, ‘*Missio Dei*’, p. 162.

20.6)'.²⁵⁴ The call to faithful witness is paramount in the Apocalypse, according to Flemming, which is how the church participates in the *mission dei*, an activity that he suggests is 'both separation and engagement'; it is their *coming out* of Babylon, as well as their *calling out* to the world, through (prophetic) faithful witness.²⁵⁵

Flemming is not without company to connect faithful witness and suffering; just as the Lamb suffered, so must his followers (14.4). He advances the topic, qualifying the witness, observing that 'it is powerful, it is noncoercive and cruciform, the testimony of suffering love'.²⁵⁶ He also sheds light on the public aspect of faithful witness, marking three occurrences of public spectatorship in relation to the two prophetic witnesses (11.9, 11, 12), as well as other spaces, where the people of God display, outwardly, an allegiance to God (14.1, 7.3–8; 9.4).²⁵⁷ Flemming makes a connection with witness, mission, and worship. In his summation, witness and mission converge in worship. Worship, he notes, 'empowers the people of God for missional faithfulness', and therein, the lordship of God is proclaimed, and the world is invited to join the church in worshipping God, instead of the beast.²⁵⁸

1.4.6 FAITHFUL WITNESS AND NON-VIOLENCE

1.4.6.1 STEFAN ALKIER, 2012

Stefan Alkier, engages the Apocalypse intertextually, in 'Witness or Warrior? How the Book of Revelation Can Help Christians Live Their Political Lives'.²⁵⁹ Holding a view of the Apocalypse that combines both story and letter, Alkier also engages the book in a literary method, dividing the book into five particular movements.²⁶⁰ His intertextual engagement, he suggests, is necessary in order to safeguard the exegete from dangerous allegorical readings. Such allegorical readings, according to Alker, are those which suggest that [faithful] witnesses are to take up arms and engage

²⁵⁴ Flemming, 'Missio Dei', p. 169.

²⁵⁵ Flemming, 'Missio Dei', p. 172.

²⁵⁶ Flemming, 'Missio Dei', p. 173.

²⁵⁷ Flemming, 'Missio Dei', p. 174. This observation may be significant, as some scholars (cf. Bauckham, Waddell) view the two witnesses to be the theological nucleus of the Apocalypse.

²⁵⁸ Flemming, 'Missio Dei', p. 174.

²⁵⁹ Stefan Alkier, 'Witness or Warrior? How the Book of Revelation Can Help Christians Live Their Political Lives', in Richard B. Hays and Stefan Alkier (eds.), *Revelation and the Politics of Apocalyptic Interpretation* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012), pp. 125–41.

²⁶⁰ Alkier, 'Witness or Warrior', pp. 128–30.

in physical violence.²⁶¹ Alkier does not ignore the depictions of violence, cosmic powers and evil in the Apocalypse, but insists that the Apocalypse still serves as a pragmatic political model of non-violent witness for today's Christian.²⁶²

Alkier finds his basis for non-violent witness in patterning after the testimony of Jesus, who is the Faithful Witness '*par excellence*', and though remaining faithful in his witness, still experienced suffering and death.²⁶³ Intertextually, he compares and contrasts Joel and Revelation, and concludes that, as it relates to violence, 'in the book of Revelation, God and his heavenly agents destroy the powers of the evil and no human witness on earth takes part in that horrible war'.²⁶⁴ In his estimation, faithful witness plays a critical role in both the self-understanding and worldview of those who claim to be followers of Jesus (cf. 1.3, 'those who read, hear and obey'), citing John's self-identification as a fellow sufferer in 1.9, and then tracing the experience of the 'community of oppressed witnesses' in the rest of the Apocalypse.²⁶⁵ The resurrection of Jesus, the Faithful Witness, offers hope to witnesses who are yet living, that even when suffering leads to death, their life is actually not over.²⁶⁶

Alkier approaches the Apocalypse in a way that would prove beneficial to those seeking to engage the text forgoing the historical-critical route that is so prevalent in Apocalypse studies. He insists that intertextuality is not merely helpful, but necessary, stating that 'the generation of meaning is always codetermined-intended or not, consciously or unconsciously-through the actualization of potential relationships of the text in question to other texts'.²⁶⁷

1.4.6.2 THOMAS B. SLATER, 2019

Thomas Slater begins his monograph, *Revelation as Civil Disobedience*,²⁶⁸ with an overview of apocalyptic literature, and a brief discussion of the dating of the Apocalypse. This approach is necessary, perhaps, because it allows space for him to setup what he understands the social context

²⁶¹ Alkier, 'Witness or Warrior', p. 126. He uses Joachim of Fiore (1202), as an example of an early scholar whose commentary connected the Apocalypse to the Crusades of the Middle Ages, as well as modern Christian fundamentalists who connect the book to wars against the Islamic community, pp. 125-26.

²⁶² Alkier, 'Witness or Warrior', p. 127.

²⁶³ Alkier, 'Witness or Warrior', pp. 132-33.

²⁶⁴ Alkier, 'Witness or Warrior', p. 140.

²⁶⁵ Alkier, 'Witness or Warrior', pp. 133-34.

²⁶⁶ Alkier, 'Witness or Warrior', p. 134.

²⁶⁷ Alkier, 'Witness or Warrior', p. 138.

²⁶⁸ Thomas B. Slater, *Revelation as Civil Disobedience: Witnesses Not Warriors in John's Apocalypse* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2019).

of John's audience to be. It is within his proposed context that Slater engages with the faithful witness motif. The context, as he describes in chapter 1, is one of bigotry and prejudice against Christians, and the pressure to conform to social norms.²⁶⁹ He argues that 'Christians are never encouraged to take arms but to witness faithfully instead'.²⁷⁰ His second chapter is devoted to a survey of the Christology of the Apocalypse; centering his focus on Jesus, the Lamb, and chief faithful witness.

It is Jesus who is both the model and the means by which believers can be faithful witnesses, in that he has modeled faithful witness through his suffering. For Slater, witness bears a close connection to suffering, as far as the Lamb is concerned. According to him, the 'victory through suffering' portrayed in the death of Jesus is the type of behavior for which John's audience was to strive.²⁷¹ Ultimately, 'the Lamb will bestow positions of honor upon those who have suffered the most for their [faithful witness] (e.g., 12.11; 14.1–5; 17.14; 20.4–6)'.²⁷² Affirming Blount's suggestion that John's expectancy for the recipients of his apocalypse was a public pledge of their allegiance to the Lamb, potentially resulting in the same fate,²⁷³ Slater argues further that those who would be saved could not escape such a witness.²⁷⁴ He suggests that the transformation of Jesus from messianic Lion to slain Lamb in chapters 4–5 creates a shift for the duration of the apocalypse, insisting that for the rest of the apocalypse, any scene of victory comes by faithful witness, not by way of taking up arms and fighting (cf. 12.11).²⁷⁵ According to Slater, the shift from Lion to Lamb in chapters 4–5 also introduces 'the transformation of martyria from witnessing in court to witnessing fervently even if it means dying for one's beliefs'.²⁷⁶

Slater's third chapter, 'Bearing Witness', deals as equally, if not more, with overcoming (νικάω | nikaō) and victory (νίκη | nikē) as it does witness (μάρτυς | martyrs). According to Slater, John has repurposed the overcoming/victory terms to mean victory that comes as a result of suffering; particularly, suffering which is a result of faithful witness.²⁷⁷ In his brief overview of the prophetic messages to the seven churches in Asia Minor, Slater argues, repeatedly, that being faithful

²⁶⁹ Slater, *Revelation as Civil Disobedience*, p. 15, Kindle.

²⁷⁰ Slater, *Revelation as Civil Disobedience*, p. 18, Kindle.

²⁷¹ Slater, *Revelation as Civil Disobedience*, p. 40, Kindle.

²⁷² Slater, *Revelation as Civil Disobedience*, p. 45, Kindle.

²⁷³ See Blount, *Revelation*, p. 13.

²⁷⁴ Slater, *Revelation as Civil Disobedience*, p. 45, Kindle.

²⁷⁵ Slater, *Revelation as Civil Disobedience*, p. 52, Kindle.

²⁷⁶ Slater, *Revelation as Civil Disobedience*, p. 66, Kindle.

²⁷⁷ Slater, *Revelation as Civil Disobedience*, p. 67, Kindle.

witnesses, instead of fighting warriors, is what brings about victory for those who follow the Lamb. He notes that the promises of victory and overcoming are promises reserved for those who are faithful witnesses, conforming to the admonishments and encouragements given in those messages. As the sixth chapter of the Apocalypse introduces the first of seven seals, and begins scenes of trials and tribulation, Slater makes an argument for the faithful witness of the Christian community, noting that faithfulness of Christians during the trials which take place in the end-times is something that many contemporary Christians have missed.²⁷⁸ In his commentary on the two witnesses in 11.3–12, engagement with the faithful witness theme is minimal. These witnesses simply stand as symbolic figures who represent the responsibility of the church, in the last days – that they are to remain faithful [witnesses].²⁷⁹ He does make a connection between the two witnesses (11.3), Jesus (1.5; 3.14), Antipas (2.13), and the martyrs (6.9).²⁸⁰ The rest of his attention is given over to (νικάω | nikaō) overcoming.

He makes a brief comment on the victors standing by the sea in 15.2; however, the *faithful witness* observation here is not his own, but that of Thomas and Macchia.²⁸¹ For Slater, the more important observation (so it seems) is overcoming. The sharp sword, coming from the mouth of Jesus (19.15) leads Slater to recall 3.14, adding that witness is a spoken activity.²⁸² This spoken word, by Jesus, further supports Slater’s argument that taking up arms was not required – the [spoken] witness of Jesus was enough to gain victory over the enemy. Slater’s summary of his third chapter further emphasizes his interest in victory over witness.²⁸³

²⁷⁸ Slater, *Revelation as Civil Disobedience*, p. 75, Kindle, argues that this oversight is due, in part, to North American and European Christians not being pressured to conformity, and partly due to a pre-tribulation eschatological view. While his second point is understandable, an argument might be made that his first point is an overstatement, or subjective to context, at best.

²⁷⁹ Slater, *Revelation as Civil Disobedience*, p. 76, Kindle.

²⁸⁰ Slater, *Revelation as Civil Disobedience*, p. 78, Kindle. Martyrs is Slater’s label here, not necessarily my own. While he has not made an explicit mention of it, there is an implicit connection that he makes with witness and martyrdom throughout.

²⁸¹ Slater, *Revelation as Civil Disobedience*, p. 79, Kindle. Quoting John Christopher Thomas and Frank D. Macchia, in Joel B. Green and Max Turner (eds.), *Revelation* (The Two Horizons New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), p. 269.

²⁸² Slater, *Revelation as Civil Disobedience*, p. 84, Kindle. See, also, his commentary on 19.19–20 which follows the same argument.

²⁸³ Slater, *Revelation as Civil Disobedience*, p. 84, Kindle. ‘This chapter has examined the transformation of nikao and nike in the Book of Revelation from athletic victory or vanquishing militarily or politically to maintaining a faithful witness regardless of the eventual outcome. Victory is sustained through suffering. Power is redefined as conquest through nonviolent witness, a witness that sustains itself against institutional and social pressures to conform.’

Although the term *martyr* is employed in his work, the usage is primarily used in reference to the souls in chapter 6.²⁸⁴ The subtitle of the book is a simple, but weighty distinction; to contrast witnessing and warring is a rather fresh perspective to consider when engaging with the term.²⁸⁵ Another weighty observation that Slater makes is that the same witness that incites suffering for the Christian community will ultimately lead to their victorious exoneration.²⁸⁶ In fact, he views 12.11 as a key passage, suggesting that it ‘provides the key passage for understanding how the Apocalypse uses *nikao* and *martyria*’.²⁸⁷ While Slater offers a fresh view of the Apocalypse, as it relates to the contrast of witness and warrior, a careful reading will reveal that witness is not the primary concern of his work, but secondary to victory.²⁸⁸

1.4.7 FAITHFUL WITNESS AND PROPHECY: FREDERICK MAZZAFERRI, 1989

Mazzaferrri, an influential scholar on the work of Richard Bauckham and many others, offers significant observations regarding witness in the Apocalypse, particularly that of witness and prophecy. In his monograph, *The Genre of the Book of Revelation from a Source-critical Perspective*²⁸⁹, he suggests that the prophetic nature of the Apocalypse is apparent, as it is noted in the prologue (Rev. 1.2) to be ‘ὁ λόγος του θεού’ (‘the Word of God’).²⁹⁰ Moreover, he notes that this phrase being frequently associated with the phrase ‘θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ’ (‘the witness of Jesus Christ’), suggests the two phrases should be considered synonymous throughout the entire book.²⁹¹ He then proceeds to unpack the expression even

²⁸⁴ Still, there is an implied connection between *martyr* and witness, as the Christians and followers are expected to lay down their lives for their witness, or be willing to, just as the Lamb had done.

²⁸⁵ Gorman, ‘Messianic Warriors’, in *Reading Revelation Responsibly*, pp. 135–36 acknowledges the contrast, but the point is cursory and undeveloped. Unpacking this contrast is the focus of Slater’s work.

²⁸⁶ Slater, *Revelation as Civil Disobedience*, p. 56, Kindle.

²⁸⁷ Slater, *Revelation as Civil Disobedience*, p. 93, Kindle.

²⁸⁸ Rob Dalrymple, *Follow the Lamb: A Guide to Reading, Understanding, and Applying the Book of Revelation* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018) is a monograph that engages the faithful witness theme in similar fashion, but with less exploration than Slater offers. Faithful witness is closely connected to what Dalrymple values as the most important word – overcome, positing that when we read the seven prophetic messages (Revelation 2–3) and beyond, we discover that faithful witness must inevitably result in circumstance(s) that necessitate overcoming (pp. 47–50). The nature of these circumstances helps him make other literary connections between faithful witness, suffering (pp. 47, 161) and the perseverance of the people of God (p. 128). He brings faithful witness to the forefront of the Apocalypse, without a discussion on martyrdom. For Dalrymple, death may be an inevitable reality of faithful witness; however, it is not death, but the overcoming life of the people of God that is paramount in this book.

²⁸⁹ Frederick David Mazzaferrri, *The Genre of the Book of Revelation From a Source-Critical Perspective* (Beiheft Zur Zeitschrift Für Die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft Und Die Kunde Der Älteren Kirche; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1989).

²⁹⁰ Mazzaferrri, *Genre of the Book of Revelation*, p. 304.

²⁹¹ Mazzaferrri, *Genre of the Book of Revelation*, p. 304.

further, positing that ‘The noun μάρτυς appears five times in all, but nothing more can be gleaned from 2:13 than the grim fact of slaughter. Far more instructive is 11:3, whose δύο μάρτυρες are manifestly prophets. This invites the nexus, μάρτυς equals προφήτης’.²⁹² In other words, Mazzaferri argues that the two prophetic witnesses of Rev. 11.3 give credence to the synonymous relationship between witness and prophecy. He adds that 17.6 supports his view when considered in context with the judgment of those who ‘poured out the blood of the saints and the prophets’ (16.6) and ‘the blood of prophets and of the saints’ (18.24).²⁹³

Later, he notes that ‘The expression ὁ λόγος του θεού is a clear reference to Revelation as prophecy in terms of God as the head of that chain. Likewise, ἡ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ denotes it as prophecy in terms of Christ as its chief intermediary. Accordingly, the two expressions occur together frequently.’²⁹⁴ Mazzaferri does not limit his engagement to the μάρτ- nouns, but also considers the verbal appearances (μαρτυρεῖν) as well. The verb, he suggests, ‘offers further compelling evidence that the primary focus of the complex is prophetic. It appears four times in all, once in the prologue and three times in the epilogue. These parallel pericopes both stress the book’s prophetic genre’.²⁹⁵

The connection to prophecy becomes even more pronounced in his section, ‘John’s Prophetic Proclamation’,²⁹⁶ where he explains how ‘John goes to remarkable lengths to use some of the classical techniques of prophetic proclamation’.²⁹⁷ The two major connections that Mazzaferri makes are the acts of John as a scribe of the prophetic book, and the actions of the two witnesses of Rev. 11.3. As for John, Mazzaferri suggests that his instruction for the book to be read publicly, and the style of Greek that John writes with gives indication to John’s consciousness of OT prophetic formulas and address.²⁹⁸ Moreover, when John is instructed to participate in the vision (cf. Rev. 10. 8-11; 11.1-2), is reminiscent of OT prophets, such as Ezekiel (cf. Ezek. 4.1-3), who were instructed to participate in symbolic acts as part of prophecy.²⁹⁹ The repetition of the words

²⁹² Mazzaferri, *Genre of the Book of Revelation*, p. 306.

²⁹³ Mazzaferri, *Genre of the Book of Revelation*, p. 306. He writes, ‘It is clear, therefore, that ἅγιοι retains its specific identity in each of these three parallel verses, while μάρτυρες Ἰησοῦ equates with προφήται, at least, in the other two’.

²⁹⁴ Mazzaferri, *Genre of the Book of Revelation*, p. 309.

²⁹⁵ Mazzaferri, *Genre of the Book of Revelation*, p. 308.

²⁹⁶ Mazzaferri, *Genre of the Book of Revelation*, pp. 318-25.

²⁹⁷ Mazzaferri, *Genre of the Book of Revelation*, p. 318.

²⁹⁸ Mazzaferri, *Genre of the Book of Revelation*, p. 318.

²⁹⁹ Mazzaferri, *Genre of the Book of Revelation*, p. 319.

witness and prophesy, in their various forms, in Rev. 11.3-13 leads Mazzaferri to conclude that the connection between witness and prophecy cannot be missed.³⁰⁰ If word association is not enough support, he adds that the adornment of the witnesses (sackcloth) adds to the connection.

Mazzaferri joins Trites and Reddish as one of the older contributors to the theme of witness in the Apocalypse, but like Bauckham, his work is significant, in that it makes a clear case for the relationship between witness and prophecy. Owing to his connection between witness and prophecy, one can conclude that Mazzaferri views the whole of the Apocalypse as a prophetic witness. He views the Apocalypse as a work of classical prophecy, noting that ‘The contents of classical prophecy are its call and vision reports, oracles both threatening and benevolent, and their theology. The call confronts the prophet with Yahweh and his word, specifies his task and prepares him for it. The oracles are invariably conditional, not deterministic.’³⁰¹ John plays a major role in this conclusion, as Mazzaferri suggests that the Apocalypse is ‘a proximate classical prophecy, and John is not only a prophet, but a neo-classical one. His favourite exemplar by far is Ezekiel. From his call to his eschatology, he models himself here as fully as possible’.³⁰²

1.4.8 FAITHFUL WITNESS AND SUFFERING: GREGORY STEVENSON, 2018

Gregory Stevenson engages the Apocalypse, employing a historical–grammatical methodology, in his monograph, *A Slaughtered Lamb*.³⁰³ Recognizing the diverse, complex situations of the churches in Asia Minor, Stevenson advocates for a reading that first considers the complex and diverse context(s) of the seven churches, in order to interpret John’s authorial intent.³⁰⁴ Due to its focus on faithful witness, in light of suffering, he suggests that ‘Revelation is one of the most relevant books in Scripture for the daily living out of the Christian faith in the twenty–first century’.³⁰⁵

Although Stevenson views faithful witness as an important theme in the Apocalypse, it is the sixth chapter, ‘The Pattern of the Christ (Revelation 1–3),’ where he gives the most focused attention to the theme in his commentary on the seven churches. As evil and suffering are the focus of his monograph, faithful witness is situated in the center of such a context. In his commentary

³⁰⁰ Mazzaferri, *Genre of the Book of Revelation*, p. 323.

³⁰¹ Mazzaferri, *Genre of the Book of Revelation*, p. 380.

³⁰² Mazzaferri, *Genre of the Book of Revelation*, p. 383.

³⁰³ Gregory Stevenson, *A Slaughtered Lamb: Revelation and the Apocalyptic Response to Evil and Suffering* (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2013).

³⁰⁴ Stevenson, ‘The Either/Or Mentality’, in *A Slaughtered Lamb*, location 946, Kindle.

³⁰⁵ Stevenson, ‘The Relevance of Revelation’, in *A Slaughtered Lamb*, location 137, Kindle.

on the churches, Stevenson identifies the multifaceted adversary of faithful witness. While the macro-conflict is between God and Satan, the micro-conflict is more distinguishable in communal contexts. He notes that the messages to the seven churches reveal that ‘Satan’s opposition to the kingdom of God may manifest in political empires, in economic structures, in social institutions, in the synagogue, and even within the [community of faithful witnesses] itself’.³⁰⁶ Just as Jesus maintained his witness faithfully unto death, his followers (the churches) were to do the same. Stevenson makes a tacit approach to witness and martyrdom, noting death to be a potential, extreme outcome, (cf. 2.10) but he does not go as far as to suggest that martyrdom is the expected end of every witness. Revelation 2.10, rather, shows as a point of assurance for faithful witnesses that their faithfulness will be rewarded in spite of death.³⁰⁷ What is made clear is that faithful witness does not exempt one from suffering, but as was the case for Jesus, rather welcomes it.³⁰⁸

Although faithful witness is not the central focus of his book, Stevenson offers valuable discussion to the topic by centering it in the midst of evil and suffering.³⁰⁹ Engaging the topic through a lens of theodicy brings to light specific convergences (political, economic, social, theological, etc.) of faithful witness and suffering. This proves beneficial as it concretizes the adversaries of faithful witness within and outside of the community. An intriguing point that Stevenson makes, which this current thesis may do well to explore, is that there is an unbalanced, inconsistent correlation of faithful witness and suffering in the seven prophetic messages; those most faithful seem to experience suffering over and above those least faithful and more accommodating.³¹⁰ A final note of observance is, although the Apocalypse reveals much of God’s activity in relation to the community of faithful witnesses, Stevenson insists that a faithful reading of the Apocalypse will recognize the importance of the community’s active witness unto God.³¹¹

³⁰⁶ Stevenson, ‘Faithful Witness in Context’, in *A Slaughtered Lamb*, location 1679, Kindle.

³⁰⁷ Stevenson, ‘Faithful Witness in Context’, in *A Slaughtered Lamb*, location 1679, Kindle.

³⁰⁸ Stevenson, ‘Souls in Asylum’, in *A Slaughtered Lamb*, location 2185, Kindle.

³⁰⁹ Stevenson, ‘Souls in Asylum’, in *A Slaughtered Lamb*, location 2199, Kindle, also takes up the issue of justice, noting that ‘the justice of God demands that he respond to the suffering of his faithful witnesses’. Perhaps a better way of understanding his work is placing evil and suffering in the center of faithful witness. (‘Conclusion’, location 3424).

³¹⁰ Stevenson, ‘Three Reflections’, in *A Slaughtered Lamb*, location 1718, Kindle.

³¹¹ Stevenson, ‘The Sixth Trumpet, Scene Two’, in *A Slaughtered Lamb*, location 2478, Kindle.

1.4.9 FAITHFUL WITNESS AND WORSHIP: MELISSA L. ARCHER, 2015

Melissa Archer employs a Pentecostal narrative reading of the Apocalypse, investigating the theme of worship. In ‘*I Was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day*’,³¹² she makes a significant number of faithful witness observations, within the context of worship. For starters, John is recognized as a witness in close connection to Jesus, the faithful witness (1.2).³¹³ A liturgical context is set, given that the prophetic messages are distributed to seven worshipping churches, to be read aloud in the congregation.³¹⁴

In her survey of the prophetic messages to the churches, she offers some very practical considerations. The perseverance of 2.3, for which Jesus commends the church, is an act of faithful witness, which Archer suggests is ‘their proclamation of his death and resurrection (1.18) and his soon return (1.7)’,³¹⁵ but more than verbal proclamation, faithful witness also includes ‘their life lived before the world’.³¹⁶ Having learned from John’s own experience (1.9) that faithful witness can result in tribulation, the church in Smyrna is affirmed for their witness by Jesus, the Faithful Witness – something that Archer points out is only addressed through discernment.³¹⁷ Reflecting on the message to Smyrna, Archer posits that faithful witness is potentially punishable, public, and ultimately prize-worthy.³¹⁸ By situating the prophetic messages within a liturgical/worshipping context, Archer makes direct connections between worship and faithful witness, proposing that faithful witness is an act of worship,³¹⁹ and even offers Antipas (2.13) as ‘an exemplar for the churches as one who embodied faithful witness as an act of worship’.³²⁰ She also offers a hinderance to faithful witness, noting that the church’s engagement in idolatry and immorality can render void their faithful witness.³²¹

A significant contribution that Archer offers is strengthening the voice and view of Jesus in the Apocalypse, especially in the messages to the churches. For example, the ‘written names’ of 2.17 lead her to suggest that Jesus (as opposed to John) has an expectation that the church will

³¹² Melissa Archer, ‘*I Was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day*’: *A Pentecostal Engagement of Worship in the Apocalypse* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2015).

³¹³ Archer, ‘*I Was in the Spirit*’, pp. 122, 129–30.

³¹⁴ Archer, ‘*I Was in the Spirit*’, p. 123.

³¹⁵ Archer, ‘*I Was in the Spirit*’, p. 137.

³¹⁶ Archer, ‘*I Was in the Spirit*’, p. 137.

³¹⁷ Archer, ‘*I Was in the Spirit*’, pp. 142–43.

³¹⁸ Archer, ‘*I Was in the Spirit*’, p. 145.

³¹⁹ Archer, ‘*I Was in the Spirit*’, p. 173.

³²⁰ Archer, ‘*I Was in the Spirit*’, p. 148.

³²¹ Archer, ‘*I Was in the Spirit*’, p. 149.

continue in their faithful witness.³²² She does not set out to define faithful witness, beyond suggesting that it is both proclamation (speaking out) and presentation (living out); nor does she make lengthy strides to connect faithful witness and martyrdom. She does, however, note that death is more than likely an end result.³²³ In the event that death *is* an end result of their faithful witness, Archer concludes that martyrdom is the ultimate act of worship.³²⁴ The hymn of 11.17b–18 gives Archer further cause to connect worship and faithful witness. To this effect, she shows how the faithful witness of the church also serves as an act of invitation – inviting the newly repented members of the community to join them in worship.³²⁵

1.5 CONCLUSION

This survey has resulted in numerous observations regarding the faithful witness theme in the Apocalypse. First, commentary on the theme in the Apocalypse is both ambiguous and ubiquitous. Second, nearly every scholar who engages the theme makes note of Jesus as the supreme reason and rubric for faithful witness, but there exists no universal definition for the term, which most scholars agree upon.³²⁶ Third, scholars (Bauckham, Bredin, deSilva, Gorman, and others)³²⁷ give reasonable evidence for the theological significance of the faithful witness theme in the Apocalypse. Fourth, at the monograph level, scholars have parsed that significance by limiting their engagement to restrictive passages or themes. The results of this theological parsing is a ubiquitous term that does not move far beyond exegetical investigation of explicit texts (Duvall, Dixon) and particular figures discussed in implicit texts (Pattemore, Blount); or there emerges a pastiche of significant faithful witness themes like Christology (Hays, Kidder), discernment

³²² Archer, *I Was in the Spirit*, p. 151. Her engagement, in this regard, is seen throughout her work. Compare this to Stevenson, who is rather indirect with his observations of the prophetic messages; not giving significant attention to John's nor Jesus' voice or view. In contrast, Middleton and deSilva give prominence to John.

³²³ Archer, *I Was in the Spirit*, p. 193 says that 'the faithful – those who hold fast to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus – will likely be *slain* like Jesus (5.6)'.

³²⁴ Archer, *I Was in the Spirit*, p. 237.

³²⁵ Archer, *I Was in the Spirit*, pp. 214–16.

³²⁶ The definitions, as seen above, range from one's testimony to the willingness to die for one's testimony; however, some scholars have explicated the term further, to conclude that worship is witness, non-violent protest is witness, or even that prophetic mission is witness.

³²⁷ Another scholar who gives significant attention to this theme is my doctoral supervisor, John Christopher Thomas, who does not have a monograph on the subject, but his commitment to, and interest in, faithful witness is evident in his Apocalypse commentary, which will be engaged in the exegetical section. It is also evident in the works of Apocalypse scholars who were supervised by Thomas, including Robby Waddell, Melissa Archer, and David Johnson.

(Johnson), martyrdom (Trites, Reddish, Middleton), mission (Waddell, Flemming), non-violence (Alkier, Slater), suffering (Stevenson) and worship (Archer).

All these above-mentioned investigations of faithful witness in the Apocalypse offer unique benefits to further study. It seems apparent that faithful witness is not an under-appreciated theme in the Apocalypse, but it seems that it is an under-developed theme. There is no monograph-length work that amalgamates these various passages and themes, exploring faithful witness both explicitly and implicitly throughout the Apocalypse, offering more than a *theological appreciation* of faithful witness, but a way forward in a *theology of faithful witness*. Before turning our attention to this aim, I will explore the hermeneutic, or reading strategy, which this thesis employs; a Twenty-First century, African American, Pentecostal hermeneutic.

CHAPTER 2

A TWENTY–FIRST CENTURY, AFRICAN AMERICAN, PENTECOSTAL HERMENEUTIC

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Defining a Twenty–First Century, African American, Pentecostal (21CAAP) hermeneutic presents a challenge, in that a hermeneutic that distinctly and explicitly reflects this context is not easily defined in scholarship, although the Pentecostal movement, itself, has a rich African American heritage.¹ While defining this methodology may present a challenge, Black Pentecostal hermeneutics is not a new phenomenon, but a methodology that has ‘historically existed in the shadows of theological discourse’.² This chapter seeks to bring definition to the method, from my own perspective as a Twenty–First Century, African American, Pentecostal scholar. I begin with a brief history of the emergence and expansion of the North American Pentecostal movement, followed by an overview of the subsequent emergence of Pentecostal hermeneutics as a discipline.

The pneumatic/prophetic nature of the Apocalypse welcomes a Pentecostal reading; an increasing number of Pentecostal scholars such as Thomas, Waddell, Archer, and Johnson, have come to appreciate as much. Equally, the presence of suffering, and the context(s) of oppression also welcome an African American reading, as African American scholars such as Blount and Slater have evidenced. What has yet to surface in scholarship is a distinct integration of the two readings: a Pentecostal, narrative reading of the Apocalypse that accounts for an African American engagement with Scripture. As we negotiate the faithful witness motif in the Apocalypse, it is important to appreciate the distinction of a 21CAAP methodology.³ The difference(s) may seem

¹ Wolfgang Vondey, *Pentecostalism, A Guide for the Perplexed* (London; New Delhi; New York; Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 127. Vondey notes that ‘Despite the influence of the black preacher William J. Seymour and other African American leaders on the origins and development of Pentecostalism in North America, few scholars have developed a comprehensive argument on the racial landscape of Pentecostals’. It is my argument, as I will expound below, that this landscape extends to the area of hermeneutics as well.

² Antipas L. Harris, ‘Black Pentecostal Hermeneutics? James H. Cone’s Theological Sources and Black Pentecostalism’, *Pneuma* 41 (2019), pp. 193–217 (193). Further, he states that ‘[t]heological blackness in Pentecostalism has historically distinguished black Pentecostalism from subsequent white Pentecostalism’. For Harris, one cannot explore the depths of Black Pentecostal hermeneutics without addressing black epistemology. This exploration, he insists, has been void in Pentecostal scholarship (p. 195). I agree with his position on the epistemological necessity, and I will explore this issue further in a later section. A distinction must necessarily be made, however, between ‘black’ and ‘African American’. For Harris, this may not be necessary, but for this thesis, my concern is specifically the methodology of blacks in North America (excluding Canada), which may differ from blacks in other countries like Africa or the UK, for example.

³ Pentecostal scholars, Thomas and Macchia, *Revelation*, p. 22, for example note that ‘the intended audience of Revelation are familiar with the necessity of bearing witness in the face of opposition and the distinct possibility that

subtle, at first glance, but certainly what is in view is how ‘witness’ is defined differently, depending on the interpreter. As I have already established that the theme is underdeveloped in Apocalypse scholarship, even less present is an engagement of the theme from the perspective of a Twenty–First Century, African American, Pentecostal.

Because the spectrum of interpretive approaches among Pentecostal scholars is quite expansive,⁴ I will focus my engagement on Pentecostal scholars whose hermeneutical approach I intend to follow closely.⁵ According to these scholars, the triadic formula of (1) the Holy Spirit, (2) the Word of God, and (3) the believing community, is vital to Pentecostal Biblical interpretation.⁶ After considering their proposed triadic Pentecostal hermeneutical method, attention will be given to the journey of African American interpretation of Scripture.⁷ I will then review and consider the triadic interpretive approach from an African American perspective. My interest here is to explore whether or not the proposed triadic Pentecostal hermeneutic formula fully and faithfully represents the perspective of an *African American*, Pentecostal engagement of Scripture. Finally, I offer what I propose to be a methodology representative of a Twenty–First Century, African American, Pentecostal.

such activity could lead to various forms of persecution, including death’. Blount, *Can I Get a Witness?* (introduction), makes the argument, from one African American perspective,

John was interested not so much in creating a church of martyrs as he was in encouraging a church filled with people committed to the ethical activity of witnessing to the lordship of Jesus Christ. On the surface, that sounds like an exclusively spiritual and pious act. In John’s context, it was also a highly social, economic, and political one.

It seems, when the two readings are compared, that Blount’s African American reading does not view persecution/death as vividly as Thomas and Macchia’s Pentecostal reading. Although Thomas and Macchia do give attention to the social, political, and economic issues which occur in the Apocalypse, a significant difference in their reading is Blount’s Civil Rights Era lens through which he reads the term, witness. Though I believe these scholars may agree on ultimate outcome, it seems that a Pentecostal reading might illuminate *faithful*, whereas the African American reading illuminates *freedom* (to witness).

⁴ John Christopher Thomas, ‘Women, Pentecostals and the Bible: An Experiment in Pentecostal Hermeneutics’, *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 5 (1994), pp. 41–56 (41), offers an initial survey of this topic.

⁵ Kenneth J. Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic: Spirit, Scripture, and Community* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2005); Melissa Archer, ‘*I was in the Spirit*’; Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, and Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation*; John Christopher Thomas, ‘Reading the Bible from within Our Traditions: A Pentecostal Hermeneutic as Test Case’, in Joel B. Green and Max Turner (eds.), *Between Two Horizons: Spanning New Testament Studies and Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), pp. 108–22.

⁶ See, especially, Thomas, ‘Reading the Bible’, p. 119.

⁷ Walter J. Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic: A Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2015), p. 18 suggests that the growth and expansion of the Pentecostal movement is owing to its black roots. African American engagement with Scripture predates the Pentecostal movement, which did not emerge until the early twentieth century; however, the triadic Pentecostal hermeneutic will be the starting point for establishing our reading strategy, owing to the African American influence on the early development of the movement.

2.2 THE MOVEMENT: EMERGENCE OF PENTECOSTALISM IN NORTH AMERICA⁸

Pentecostalism has its strongest numbers, to date, in countries outside of North America; still, the global breadth and reach of the movement has its roots in North America, in the early twentieth century.⁹ Pentecostalism's 'popular' history emerges,¹⁰ primarily from the life and ministry of two men; Charles Fox Parham (Topeka, Kansas), a Caucasian American, Holiness preacher and teacher, and one of his former students, William J. Seymour (Los Angeles, California), an African American, Holiness preacher. In the popular historical narratives, scholars and historians are not in full agreement about where the movement should begin; some favoring Parham as founder, and others in favor of Seymour. Debates aside, no scholar will argue against the indelible impression that both men left on early Pentecostalism.¹¹

⁸ Despite Pentecostalism's rather short history, compared to other Christian movements, the global Pentecostal community boasts in a population of over a quarter of a billion adherents; over a half billion, if accounting for its various forms. Steven M. Studebaker (ed.), *Defining Issues in Pentecostalism: Classical and Emergent 1* (McMaster Divinity College Press Theological Studies Series 1; Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2008), pp. 1–10, offers a brief overview of the expansion of Pentecostalism, including some of the subsequent forms of Pentecostalism, such as 'Charismatic', and 'Third Wave'. One should note, however, that there are distinctions within these subsequent movements that differ from 'Classical Pentecostalism', though counted under the greater, general 'Pentecostal/Charismatic' label.

⁹ Vinson Synan, *The Holiness–Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century* (2nd edn; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), p. 129. For more on the breadth and reach of Pentecostalism, beyond North America, see Steven J. Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom* (JPTSup 1; New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), pp. 21–23. For more on the pre-twentieth century beginnings, including the impact of John Wesley and Methodist movement, see Synan, *The Holiness–Pentecostal Tradition*, pp. 1–83. It is his contention (p. xi) that 'Pentecostalism was basically a modified "second blessing" Methodist spirituality that was pioneered by John Wesley and passed down to his followers in the holiness movement, out of which came the modern Pentecostal movement'.

¹⁰ I use the term 'popular' history because many scholars note that Pentecostalism did not necessarily originate in North America, nor with these men. Vondey, *Pentecostalism*, p. 12, for example, notes that:

[M]ore recent histories of Pentecostalism point to the presence of similar revivals in Wales in 1904–5, India in 1905–6, Korea in 1907–8, and a host of other revival movements in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The origins of many of these local manifestations of Pentecostalism cannot easily be traced back to Pentecostals of North America, but are instead the result of unexpected and unpredictable events in a variety of distinct locations.

¹¹ Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., 'Pentecostalism and Mission: From Azusa Street to the Ends of the Earth', *Missiology* 35.1 (2007), pp. 75–92 (76), explains the cause for these debates, that 'denominational, cultural, racial and ethnic agendas, as well as calls to conform to certain standards of political correctness, are only a few of the agendas that have been brought to bear on the discussion of Pentecostal origins', and suggests that 'the position that appeals to God's sovereignty or to a theory of spontaneous origins seeks to mitigate the substantial contribution that either man made to the Movement'. Donald W. Dalton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* (5th edn; Metuchen, NJ: Hendrickson Press, 1987), p. 29, n. 6 offers, a different view on these disputes, suggesting that the issue 'depends in part on whether the white or black origins of Pentecostalism are stressed and in part on whether the first statement of the full Pentecostal theology or the beginnings of its worldwide impact are sought'. Recognizing Parham's impact on early Pentecostalism, Robeck still gives priority to the Azusa Street Mission, thus Seymour, for the emergence of the movement. Goff, *Fields White unto Harvest*, pp. 32–63 gives evidence that the great lengths of travel, inquiry, and searching of Scripture that Parham undertook, in order to bring Biblical/theological concreteness to the Pentecostal experience should not be overlooked; however, we will see, below, that there is more than a clear theological argument that gave rise to what we know today to be Pentecostalism, even in its varying Charismatic degrees.

2.2.1 CHARLES FOX PARHAM

James Goff, a notable historian on the life of Charles Parham, argues that ‘more than anyone else, [Parham] forged the movement which has mushroomed in the second half of the twentieth century’, considering other preceding movements to be ‘pneumatic revivals’ versus Pentecostal movements.¹² Goff insists that it was Parham’s ‘ideological formula of tongues as initial evidence for Holy Spirit Baptism’¹³ that gave this pneumatic movement a theological/creedal identity, thus formally giving birth to a movement. Parham’s self-designated title of ‘projector of the Apostolic Faith Movement,’ as published in the December 1905 issue of *The Apostolic Faith*,¹⁴ suggests that Goff is not the first to attribute Pentecostal origins to Parham.

Walter Hollenweger contests that the attestation of founder made by Goff (and Parham) should be examined. He argues that the birth of Pentecostalism is not a historical discussion, but a theological one; insisting that Parham’s ‘pacifism, his doctrine on the “destruction of the wicked,” his animosity to medicine, his Anglo–Israel theories, [and] his sympathy with the Ku Klux Klan ...’¹⁵ are not theologically harmonious with the Pentecostal experience evidenced at Azusa, thus conferring the honor of founder to Seymour.¹⁶ A thorough examination of the history of Pentecostalism in North America will evidence that both Parham and Seymour indeed made contributions to the early development of Pentecostalism, but the same examination will evidence that Parham’s views, particularly, those of race and tongues, are incongruent with the Pentecostal and Charismatic movement that emerged from Azusa.¹⁷

¹² James Goff, *Fields White unto Harvest: Charles F. Parham and the Missionary Origins of Pentecostalism* (Fayetteville, AR: The University of Arkansas Press, 1988), pp. 163–64.

¹³ Goff, *Fields White unto Harvest*, p. 164.

¹⁴ *AF:P* 1.7 (December 1905).

¹⁵ Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism*, pp. 22–24.

¹⁶ A thorough historical treatment on William J. Seymour can be found in the works of Vinson Synan and Charles R. Fox, Jr., *William J. Seymour: Pioneer of the Azusa Street Revival* (Alachua, FL: Bridge–Logos, 2012) and Cecil M. Robeck Jr., *The Azusa Street Mission and Revival: The Birth of the Global Pentecostal Movement* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2006). Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., ‘Pentecostalism and Mission: From Azusa Street to the Ends of the Earth’, *Missiology* 35.1 (2007), pp. 75–92 (76), explains the cause for debates about the Parham/Seymour Pentecostal origins in North America, suggesting that ‘denominational, cultural, racial and ethnic agendas, as well as calls to conform to certain standards of political correctness, are only a few of the agendas that have been brought to bear on the discussion of Pentecostal origins’, and suggests that ‘the position that appeals to God’s sovereignty or to a theory of spontaneous origins seeks to mitigate the substantial contribution that either man made to the Movement’.

¹⁷ A number of examples of the racial incongruencies can be found in early literature – one being the same edition of *AF:P* 1.7 (December 1905). In this edition, a testimony of a negro’s prayer is recounted, but the testimony is titled. ‘A Ducky’s Prayer’. A disdain for the negro influence on Pentecostal worship can be found in his assessment in Charles F. Parham, *The Everlasting Gospel* (1st edn; Baxter Springs, KS: Apostolic Faith Bible College, 1911), p. 119: ‘Many of the missions are dead and abandoned. Those still running are as dead and formal as any old–line church, except when they are able to stir up a fleshly animalism, similar to the working up of the power in an old–fashioned negro

In her PhD dissertation on the life of Parham, Leslie Dawn Callahan commends Goff for his thorough research into the life and history of Parham, but critiques his insufficient attention to some important topics, including Parham's racial views.¹⁸ Callahan recognizes Parham's ministry with people of color, but concludes, 'Although it is of little use to argue over the label "racist" when describing Parham, it is important to acknowledge that Parham subscribed to and propagated an ideology in which people of color, particularly African Americans, were considered inferior'.¹⁹ Callahan does not excuse Parham's assessments nor controversial labels, as it relates to African Americans, but she offers a notable observation; that Parham was a man who was 'typical of the late nineteenth century in which he came of age'.²⁰ The influences of this time were not just societal, but issues within the church as well. Some of these issues caused divisions in the church, such as the divisions of the Methodist and the subsequent emergence of the Holiness movements both of which, Parham and Seymour had been a part.²¹ Notwithstanding the influence of times,

camp-meeting in the South'. Referring to the negro's influence as 'fleshly' and 'animalism' is in stark contrast to Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism*, p. 23, who insists that if you omit 'Seymour's understanding of Pentecost and all the statistical hallelujahs of Pentecostalism are silenced, because there is hardly a Pentecostal movement in the world that is not built on Seymour's oral black modes of communication'. The incongruity of tongues is mainly an issue of glossolalia/xenoglossia. Goff, *Fields White unto Harvest*, p. 75 notes that Parham was convinced 'that the Baptism of the Holy Spirit should have some tangible *evidence* – something unmistakably biblical and functional'. Glossolalia/xenoglossia was not a new phenomenon as Parham's Shiloh experience evidenced. However, it seems to be a unanimous conclusion among Pentecostal historians that it is Parham who initiated the discovery of *evidence* as a doctrinal position. The xenoglossic (tongue-speech as human, unlearned, foreign language) nature of this evidence was not supported in the teaching at Azusa, but glossolalia (tongue-speech as non-human language) as evidence was.

¹⁸ Leslie Dawn Callahan, 'Fleshly Manifestations: Charles Fox Parham's Quest for the Sanctified Body', (PhD Dissertation, Princeton University, Department of Religion: June, 2002), p. 14.

¹⁹ Callahan, 'Fleshly Manifestations', p. 102.

²⁰ Callahan, 'Fleshly Manifestations', p. 110.

²¹ Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, pp. 19–20 notes that 'the great division finally came within the Methodist Church itself, with the Southern division espousing and defending slavery and the Northern division becoming more openly against it ...' and 'Long before 1858, the southern churches had largely abandoned the quest for holiness, in theory and in practice. From about 1830 until the outbreak of war, theological energies in the South were directed toward supporting and defending the institution of slavery'. For an example of the *southern* Methodist view of slavery, consider the argument of the president of the Methodist, Randolph-Macon College, William A. Smith, *Lectures on the Philosophy and Practice of Slavery as Exhibited in the Institution of Domestic Slavery in the United States: With the Duties of Masters to Slaves* (Medford, MA: Perseus Digital Library, n.d.), pp. 11–12, who writes in 1856:

The position I propose to maintain in these lectures is, that slavery, *per se*, is right; or that the great abstract principle of slavery is right, because it is a fundamental principle of the social state; and that domestic slavery, as an *institution*, is fully justified by the condition and circumstances (essential and relative) of the African race in this country, and therefore equally right.

Smith's low regard for the Negro, and support of slavery is exhaustive in this treatise, as he further argues (p. 156) that 'with [the negro's] *present state* of mental imbecility, moral degradation, and physical inferiority, they should be placed under that more decided form of control called domestic slavery'. The issue of slavery is a significant detail to note in Pentecostalism's (Methodist) history, as we move toward a proposal for a twenty-first century, African American, Pentecostal hermeneutic.

Callahan concludes that Parham's racial views, and social entanglement 'undermines the racial reconciliation rhetoric of Pentecostal historians, who wish to vindicate the Holy Spirit's supernatural work at the turn of the century by contrasting it with the social indoctrination of white supremacy in the United States'.²² Recognizing the extant debates regarding Pentecostal origins in North America, I argue for a Seymour–Azusa origin, as early testimonies ultimately describe a movement, culture, and common practices that were cultivated, protected, and celebrated by Seymour, but condemned by Parham.²³ Donald W. Dayton adequately sums that Pentecostalism's emergence 'was part of an ongoing struggle to understand and make vital for our own time the meaning of the New Testament'.²⁴

2.2.2 WILLIAM J. SEYMOUR

Vinson Synan reports a Baptist raised Seymour; but, according to Robeck, owing to 'The Black Code', Seymour, the son of former slaves, was born in 1870 and reared a Roman Catholic.²⁵ While

²² Callahan, 'Fleshly Manifestations', p. 219.

²³ For the culture and common practices that Seymour cultivated, protected, and celebrated, Robeck, *Azusa Street Mission*, p. 124 writes:

People within the African American church tradition as well as the larger Wesleyan holiness movement were often expressive in their worship style. Noise was not a problem for them. Their worship could be very loud and exuberant, though typically it was conducted in a fashion deemed orderly. Orderliness, of course, was measured not only by guidelines found in Scripture (1 Cor. 14), but also by cultural criteria. [There were a number of] manifestations that were ruled 'in order' at the Azusa Street Mission but that might have been understood as 'out of order' in another Christian congregation. The Azusa Street Mission may have been the most expressive and vocal congregation in Los Angeles at its time. Occasionally extreme behavior and disorderly manifestations required Pastor Seymour to discipline those who crossed from order into disorder. When he did so, he typically continued to be both gracious and soft-spoken.

Further, I do not argue for a Seymour–Azusa origin simply out of obligation to my African American community. Rather, my position is reminiscent of the 1996 song recorded by American professional basketball player, Shaquille O'Neal, entitled 'Biological Didn't Bother'. The song was dedicated to Phillip Arthur Harrison, O'Neal's mother's husband, who raised him from a young age. The song begins (and the chorus, similar): 'he was the one who took me from a boy to a man, so as far as I'm concerned, he is my father cause my biological didn't bother'. The urban, African American community is far too familiar with such sentiment, and Parham, though the originator of the creedal formula, fits the bill of the 'theological who didn't bother'. It was Seymour and the Azusa Street Mission community that took Parham's under-developed creed and doctrine, and nurtured it into something that could cross racial, ethnic, socio-economic, and even international boundaries.

²⁴ Dayton, *Theological Roots*, p. 35. Dayton's monograph is significant, as it brings to the fore the historical and theological reality that Pentecostalism did not emerge *ex nihilo*. The Seymour – Parham debates tend to eclipse the rich theological history that pre-dates the twentieth century movement. Dayton, however, investigates theological movements pre-twentieth century, thus bringing the reader to appreciate better the rich theological heritage of the Pentecostal movement. Such an appreciation extends itself to the subsequent hermeneutical methods that emerge within the movement.

²⁵ Synan, *The Holiness–Pentecostal Tradition*, p. 93. Robeck, *The Azusa Street*, pp. 20–25. The 'Black Code' was 'an eighteenth-century law instructing Louisiana slave owners to "instruct and baptize their slaves in the Roman Catholic faith shortly after their arrival in the region, or forfeit their slaves"'. Robeck acknowledges Seymour's non-Roman Catholic background. Baptist and Methodist missionaries had built schools during Seymour's childhood, in

most slave owners abided by the black code, slaves were creative to show signs of embracing the religion of their master, while melding into Catholicism some of their own African religions; one of those key religions being a modern derivative of classic Voodoo, known as Hoodoo. As Robeck observes, the native religion of the slaves was not extremely contrastive to that of their masters:

They believed in a Divine spirit, in the supernatural including the empowerment of individuals, signs and wonders, miracles and healings, invisible spirits, trances and spirit possession, visions and dreams as a means of Divine communication, as well as other phenomena described in the Bible. They sang, clapped, trembled, shouted, danced, played drums, and developed a ‘call and response’ preaching style.²⁶

After the passing of his father, life became difficult for Seymour’s family. Economic hardship may have been a factor in Seymour’s relocating to Indianapolis, Indiana in 1895, as Robeck reports;²⁷ however, Charles Fox suggests that the racial and political oppression of the south were also major factors.²⁸ Seymour’s time in Indianapolis was a theological defining point for him, setting in motion a spiritual journey of one of Pentecostalism’s founding fathers. It is in Indianapolis where Seymour is reported to have had a conversion experience in a black Methodist Episcopal church.²⁹

Meanwhile, in nearby Cincinnati, Martin Wells Knapp was a Holiness preacher who ran a ‘Pentecostal’ Bible school.³⁰ According to Robeck, ‘Knapp’s school was racially inclusive; blacks and whites studied side by side ... Knapp was an avowed premillennialist ... and took “special revelation” seriously’.³¹ It is for these reasons that Seymour eventually moved to Ohio, and may

which he was enrolled at the age of 10, according to a census. This enrollment does not remove him from his Roman Catholic ecclesial context. This is further supported by the fact that, at the age of 13, Seymour’s family *possibly* frequented the nearby Baptist church, but their Roman Catholic membership was maintained.

²⁶ Robeck, *The Azusa Street Mission*, p. 23. Although our language might be different in our description of the Pentecostal experience, any participant of a Pentecostal community would recognize familiar elements in Pentecostal worship practices as described here.

²⁷ Robeck, *The Azusa Street Mission*, p. 25.

²⁸ Fox Jr. and Synan, ‘Reconstruction’, in *William J. Seymour: Pioneer*, location 207, Kindle.

²⁹ Robeck, *The Azusa Street Mission*, pp. 27–31. Though Seymour was drawn to the Methodists, he did not subscribe to their amillennial position, nor to their aversion to special revelation; both were an important part of Seymour’s theological understanding. He soon became acquainted with Daniel S. Warner’s Evening Light Saints, a Holiness group known for their strong position on salvation, sanctification, and holy living. Although Warner’s millennial view and opinion on special revelation mirrored the Methodists, his socio–ecclesiological views (non–segregated laity, and egalitarian clergy) were obviously attractive to Seymour, as his later ministry in Los Angeles evidenced. Ultimately, the amillennial and special revelation issues caused Seymour to part ways with Warner.

³⁰ Robeck, *The Azusa Street Mission*, p. 31 notes, ‘[t]he term “Pentecostal” was commonly used across the holiness movement at the time. It did not identify the school as having sympathies with those who spoke in tongues, but rather, with those who held to two works of grace—salvation and sanctification.’

³¹ Robeck, *The Azusa Street Mission*, p. 31.

have attended the school.³² From Cincinnati, Seymour moved to Houston, Texas, but is noted to have done some traveling, making some strong connections, that would impact his ministry in Los Angeles; namely John G. Lake (Chicago, Illinois), and possibly Charles Price or Charles H. Mason (Jackson, Mississippi) – co-founders of the largest African American Pentecostal denomination to date, the Church of God in Christ.³³

In 1905, after returning from his trip to Mississippi, Seymour made his home in a small African American holiness church in Houston, pastored by Lucy Farrow. It was Farrow who made the introduction between Parham and Seymour, as she had served as governess to Parham's children. Owing to the Jim Crow laws of the south, which prohibited integrated learning, Seymour was unable to attend Parham's new school alongside white students; rather, he was required to sit outside of the classroom to learn.³⁴ Seymour shared in much of Parham's theology,³⁵ but the few things that he did not subscribe to, he did not raise issue on; one of the issues being glossolalia – Seymour was not convinced that the tongues spoken were a human language.³⁶ Parham and his associate, Warren Carothers, saw Seymour as a promising student; while he was not allowed to minister to whites, they had hopes to commission him to share the Apostolic Faith with African

³² Robeck, *The Azusa Street Mission*, p. 34.

³³ Fox Jr. and Synan, 'Conclusion', in *William J. Seymour: Pioneer*, location 765, Kindle, note, 'These influences provided the theological underpinning that would remain a part of Seymour's life, and help him articulate his message of Pentecost in the Apostolic Faith newspaper, as well as his own Doctrines and Discipline publication'. See also, Robeck, *The Azusa Street Mission*, pp. 34–35.

³⁴ Robeck, *The Azusa Street Mission*, p. 47. Goff, *Fields White unto Harvest*, p. 104, writes that Seymour sat in an adjacent room, other scholars say that Seymour was forced to sit in the hall (Synan, *The Holiness–Pentecostal Tradition*, p. 93) or simply outside the door (Knight, *Anticipating Heaven*, pp. 111–12). Room or hall, the significance is that Seymour's learning took place at a distance due to his race. The varying details seem to give credence to Robeck's opinion that varying agendas, including racial, are often at play in revisiting Pentecostalism's history. An *adjacent room* may be an effort to pacify Parham's Jim Crowism, while *the hallway* may be an attempt to vilify Parham.

³⁵ Parham's theology had come from many different sources, as both Goff and Synan agree – most notably is the work of Frank Sanford in Shiloh, Maine. Goff, *Fields White unto Harvest*, pp. 49–60; Synan, *The Holiness–Pentecostal Tradition*, p. 90. It was in Shiloh where Parham had first encountered glossolalia. A student by the name of Jeannie Glassey claimed to speak in an African dialect, by the Spirit's influence (xenoglossia), which became a critical factor in Parham's theology of Spirit baptism. Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism*, pp. 21–22 notes, 'all authentic glossolalia was for Parham xenolalia (that is the ability to speak an identifiable human language without ever having learned it); and xenolalia was to become for him both the "seal" of a missionary's call to a particular mission field and the divine enabling gift to carry out this call'. Goff, *Fields White unto Harvest*, p. 72. 'The importance of xenoglossia over glossolalia was more than just concern over the phenomenon's authenticity. Both Parham and the students shared an intense interest in world evangelism. They were also convinced that Christ's Second Coming would occur within their lifetime, making theirs the last generation to bear such an awesome responsibility'.

³⁶ For more on Seymour's divergent views, see Robeck, *The Azusa Street Mission*, pp. 49–50. There were also issues of annihilationism and racial casting with which Seymour disagreed.

American Texans. Their hopes were unfulfilled, as Seymour soon accepted a pastoral position at a black Holiness church in Los Angeles, California.

Seymour came to Los Angeles in early 1906, to a small church pastored by Ms. Julia Hutchins, who was bound for missionary work in Liberia. However, when he came preaching messages that included regeneration, sanctification, healing, and most importantly baptism in the Spirit, he was banned from the church by Hutchins, who literally locked the doors, preventing his entry.³⁷ Being dismissed from his office of pastor for his teaching on the Baptism of the Spirit, Seymour had nothing left to do but pray. First, these prayer meetings took place at the home of Edward S. and Mattie Lee, with whom he had taken residence, but as others gathered, the group outgrew the home, and the meeting was moved to the home of Richard and Ruth Asbury.³⁸ Soon, the gathering outgrew this home, and the gathering would move to 312 Azusa Street in April 1906, beginning a revival that would last for three years, but a movement that would far exceed it.

2.2.3 AZUSA STREET AND BEYOND

The Azusa Street Mission was the North American nucleus of Pentecostalism. The history of Parham and Seymour certainly evidences a degree of tension of ethnicity and culture; however, ethnic, social, and even socio-economic strains found transformation at Azusa. Kenneth Archer notes that the movement is not a homogeneous one, but multi-racial.³⁹ However, owing to Seymour's leadership of the Azusa Street Mission, Fox points out the significant African American imprint on the early movement, noting:

The roots of Seymour's spirituality lay in his past. He affirmed his black heritage by introducing Negro spirituals and Negro music into his liturgy at a time when this music was considered inferior and unfit for Christian worship. At the same time he steadfastly lived out his understanding of Pentecost. For him Pentecost meant more than speaking in tongues. It meant loving in the face of hate – overcoming the hatred of a whole nation by demonstrating that Pentecost is something very different from the success-oriented American way of life.⁴⁰

Though often looked at as an 'event', Robeck makes it clear that the Azusa Street Mission was not an event, but a three-year revival that was being stewarded by a local, multi-racial congregation.⁴¹

³⁷ Robeck, *The Azusa Street Mission*, pp. 58–63. Hutchins, as some other holiness preachers, viewed the teaching of Parham, and subsequently Seymour on the Baptism of the Holy Spirit as a 'third-work heresy'. For them, there was no third work of grace beyond salvation and sanctification. As Seymour taught, baptism in the Holy Spirit was not about holy living, but about empowerment.

³⁸ Robeck, *The Azusa Street Mission*, pp. 63–64

³⁹ Archer, *Pentecostal Hermeneutics*, p. 12.

⁴⁰ Fox Jr. and Synan, 'Conclusion', in *William J. Seymour: Pioneer*, location 765, Kindle.

⁴¹ Robeck, *The Azusa Street Mission*, p. 87.

The mission portrayed a beautiful picture of equality, as it commissioned and ordained ministers and missionaries, with no regard to ethnicity, gender, or socio-economic class.⁴² The mission attracted and released Pentecostal converts from all over the world; attracting converts and commissioning missionaries and ministers. According to Pentecostal scholar, Cheryl Bridges Johns, ‘There exists no worldwide Pentecostal organization which serves to unify all its adherents ... [thus,] it is difficult to identify theologically or sociologically Pentecostalism’.⁴³ Thomas, however, seems to suggest that a theological definition may not be as elusive as Johns argues. Commenting on the works of Donald W. Dayton and Steven J. Land, he notes that ‘standing at the theological heart of Pentecostalism is the message of the fivefold gospel: Jesus is Savior, Sanctifier, Holy Spirit Baptizer, Healer, and Coming King’.⁴⁴

Adding to the theological and, at minimum, ecclesiological identity of Pentecostals, Tony Richie contends not for a definition, but perhaps a description, and suggests that ‘[a]t the heart of Pentecostal experience and testimony is affirmation of the ongoing applicability of Hebrews 13:8, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (cp. Malachi 3:6) ... there are rich and far-reaching Christological, ecclesiological, and missiological implications of the Pentecostal understanding of this text’.⁴⁵ It is clear that Pentecostals, theologically speaking, are not simply a *spiritual* people, but are a people of the Word, who value the role of the Holy Spirit in their engagement with and embodiment of the Word. Land articulates this point well:

[T]he point of Pentecostal spirituality was not to have an experience or several experiences, though they spoke of discrete experiences. The point was to experience life as part of a biblical drama of participation in God’s history. The church was a movement from the outer court to the inner court to the holy of holies, from Egypt through the desert across the Jordan into Canaan, from Jerusalem to Judaea, Samaria and the end of the age (and the uttermost parts of

⁴² Knight, *Anticipating Heaven*, p. 113.

⁴³ Cheryl Bridges Johns, *Pentecostal Formation: A Pedagogy among the Oppressed* (JPTSUP 2; Sheffield; Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), p. 63. ‘Pentecostals represent many denominations and a variety of theological beliefs. Among the movement’s adherents one can find trinitarians and non-trinitarians, those who practice adult baptism only and those who utilize infant and adult baptism. Not all Pentecostals speak in tongues, but none would forbid the practice. There are Catholic Pentecostals, Anglican Pentecostals and a host of separate Pentecostal denominations’. Tony Richie, *Essentials of Pentecostal Theology: An Eternal and Unchanging Lord Powerfully Present & Active by the Holy Spirit* (Eugene, OR: RESOURCE Publications, 2020), p. 3, agrees, noting that ‘within the same Pentecostal denomination a great deal of diversity frequently exists, if not in doctrine at least in applications thereof’.

⁴⁴ Thomas, ‘Reading the Bible’, pp. 108–109.

⁴⁵ Richie, *Essentials of Pentecostal Theology*, p. 69.

the earth), from justification to sanctification to Spirit baptism, and then in justification, sanctification, and Spirit baptism into the harvest.⁴⁶

Bridges Johns, in company with a host of other scholars, recognizes the early (and lasting) impact that African American spirituality had on Pentecostalism:

From black spirituality, Pentecostalism retained the emphasis upon an oral, ongoing liturgy, maximum participation of the body, and the freedom to include such things as visions and dreams. The active presence of the Holy Spirit called for a radical equalizing of blacks and whites, males and females, the rich and the poor. All people were in need of salvation and all could be participants together of the ‘latter rain’ of the Spirit. It was, therefore, one’s standing with God which was important. Thus, Pentecostalism stood as a contrast to the dominant order of its day. It was a subversive and revolutionary movement, not based upon philosophic ideology nor totally upon critical reflection. It was a movement that experienced through the Holy Spirit God’s divine liberation.⁴⁷

Though the impact of African American spirituality is readily recognized in the ecclesial Pentecostal experience, it is a Pentecostal methodology, and its inclusiveness and reflection of an African American engagement of Scripture with which this chapter is most concerned. To that end, we must consider the Pentecostal hermeneutic with which my methodology aligns.⁴⁸

2.3 THE METHOD: ENGAGING SCRIPTURE AS PENTECOSTALS

Although ‘early Pentecostals were content to draw on their understanding of the Scriptures in the context of their formative traditions, in light of their experience of the Holy Spirit, without professional, academic theological support or direction’,⁴⁹ the theological wells from which Pentecostalism draws its emergence are nevertheless pervaded with interpretive strategies and presuppositions.⁵⁰ With Pentecostalism being a fairly young movement, when compared to other Christian traditions, identifying a hermeneutical approach that is distinctively Pentecostal has only

⁴⁶ Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, p. 67. ‘Whether it was couched in terms of biblical dispensations, discrete personal experiences, or missionary travels, all of this language was meant to speak of the mighty acts of God’s story of redemption in Scripture, in their lives and in the world’.

⁴⁷ Johns, *Pentecostal Formation*, p. 69.

⁴⁸ The reader should note that there is no *singular* Pentecostal hermeneutic; the diversity of the movement can be reflected in the way Pentecostals engage Scripture as well.

⁴⁹ Richie, *Essentials of Pentecostal Theology*, pp. 19–20.

⁵⁰ Lee Roy Martin (ed.), *Pentecostal Hermeneutics: A Reader* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2013), p. 3 notes that each of the movements from which Pentecostalism emerged ‘carried ramifications for Biblical Interpretation’. Martin recognizes the holiness, healing, restorationist, and other movements, but the ramifications are indeed deeper. Tracing the history of influence on Pentecostalism from John Wesley to Azusa, one will encounter many theologically contrastive views and interpretations; these conflicts certainly find themselves growing in the soil of holiness, revival, and other movements, but they also pre-date these movements. Thus, establishing a Pentecostal methodology is no modest task.

recently become a focus in Pentecostal scholarship.⁵¹ The quest for clarity of methodology stems, in part, from Pentecostals possessing a ‘disappointment with the results of rationalism’,⁵² as well as a growing respect for Pentecostal scholars by the broader theological community. Kenneth Archer expounds on this recent appreciation, noting that the Pentecostal tradition ‘is now in a position to examine critically, its own identity, hermeneutical posture and its relationship to other Christian communities’, also highlighting the fact that Pentecostal scholars are giving voice to contemporary theological and hermeneutical issues.⁵³

Owing to the ethos of the Pentecostal community, Thomas, asserts that ‘it should come as little surprise that many in the movement would have a distinctive approach to the text of Scripture’.⁵⁴ Pentecostals hold a high respect for the Word of God, especially when compared to the broader Christian community. Andrew Davies sums up this respect well:

Perhaps more than any other Christian tradition, we [Pentecostals] have sought to identify our own experiences with those of the earliest church, described in detail in what we recognise as the historical narrative of the Acts of the Apostles, and we have believed, prayed and worked in the spirit’s power that we might see our own worlds turned upside down just as first century Palestine was.⁵⁵

Bridges Johns proposes that ‘there exists within Pentecostalism the dynamics of *conscientization*; however, these dynamics are initiated and maintained by a transforming encounter with God, which refigures the corresponding historical action’.⁵⁶ This encounter necessarily, if not primarily,

⁵¹ Thomas, ‘Women, Pentecostals, and the Bible’, pp. 41–56 (p. 43; n. 4). This is not to suggest that Pentecostals have not contributed to hermeneutical discussions; however, until the latter part of the twentieth century, establishing an interpretive strategy that is *distinctively* reflective of the Pentecostal identity of the interpreter has not garnered significant scholarly attention. However, Thomas (p. 41), raises awareness to the fact that while there is a range between scholars ‘who deny the need for a distinctive Pentecostal hermeneutic, preferring to follow current evangelical models, to those who are in dialogue with a number of methodologies that have come to the forefront within the last decade ...’ still, many Pentecostal scholars, as of late, are seeking to bring their own definition to interpretive strategy. Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation*, p. 108, posits that much of the discussion of Pentecostal hermeneutics ‘has been primarily theoretical, arguing on the one hand the validity of a Pentecostal distinctive in biblical interpretation, and on the other hand arguing to what extent post–modern literary theory should be employed by a Pentecostal interpreter’.

⁵² Thomas, ‘Women, Pentecostals, and the Bible’, pp. 41–56 (41).

⁵³ Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, p. 1. What Archer illuminates here is no insignificant matter, given that, as he also notes (p. 3), ‘Most Pentecostals were not trained academically in university religion departments or academic seminaries. In time, however, Pentecostals ventured into these areas of learning which were often hostile to their own identity.’

⁵⁴ Thomas, ‘Reading the Bible’, p. 109.

⁵⁵ Andrew Davies, ‘What Does it Mean to Read the Bible as a Pentecostal?’, in Martin, *Pentecostal Hermeneutics*, pp. 249–62 (250).

⁵⁶ Johns, *Pentecostal Formation*, p. 65. Johns defines conscientization (p. 13) as ‘the process whereby persons become aware of the socio–cultural reality which shapes their lives and their ability to transform that reality. The term implies that action will be joined with this awareness’.

includes the engagement of Scripture. As to distinction, Harlyn Purdy, insists on a methodology ‘that embraces Pentecostalism’s distinctiveness, escapes the restriction of authorial intent, static meaning and the autonomy of the historical–grammatical method while also establishing appropriate boundaries around creative interpretation’.⁵⁷

In order to engage the text of Scripture with a method that faithfully reflects the Pentecostal community, some Pentecostal scholars, following Thomas, have adopted a triadic methodology that emphasizes giving priority to the inspiration and illumination of (as well as submission to) the Holy Spirit, a high reverence for Scripture as a divine text (the Word of God), and accountability to the Christian community.⁵⁸ These three elements (Spirit, Word, and community) are intrinsic to the Pentecostal communal identity, as Melissa Archer well notes;⁵⁹ however, she and David Johnson both propound that each must be explored independently, in order to appreciate fully the combined triadic approach to Pentecostal Biblical interpretation.⁶⁰ I examine each of these elements, Spirit, Word, and community, below.

2.3.1 SPIRIT

Thomas notes that it is surprising how little space scholars outside of the Pentecostal tradition give to the Holy Spirit, as it relates to interpretation.⁶¹ Owing to the event of Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 2, the space which the Holy Spirit occupies in the Pentecostal community is inexhaustible; as Daniela C. Augustine aptly states, ‘the event of Pentecost serves as contextual origin, dialogical anchor, and continual source of inspiration and challenge within Pentecostal theological

⁵⁷ Harlyn Graydon Purdy, *A Distinct Twenty-first-Century Pentecostal Hermeneutic* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2015), pp. 3–4.

⁵⁸ These scholars include (but are not limited to) J.C. Thomas, ‘Reading the Bible’, pp. 108–22, who emerges as the first to concretize this formula in hermeneutical language, using Acts 15.1–29 for his textual precedent; K. Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*; M. Archer, ‘I was in the Spirit’; David R. Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment in the Apocalypse: An Intertextual and Pentecostal Exploration* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2018). Amos Yong, *Spirit–Word–Community: Theological Hermeneutics in Trinitarian Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2006). Purdy, *A Distinct Twenty-first-Century Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, p. 89, agrees with this triadic formula, but adds a fourth, but unconvincing element, thus presenting a quadratic method of Spirit, Word, community, and trained individual.

⁵⁹ Archer, ‘I was in the Spirit’, pp. 44–45.

⁶⁰ Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, p. 22, adds that ‘it is problematic to view any part of the triad in isolation of others because the dialogue among each aspect of the triad is where meaning can be discovered. In other words, one cannot speak of scripture without mentioning the inspiration of the Spirit or the scripture’s impact in a community’.

⁶¹ Thomas, ‘Reading the Bible’, p. 109, notes, ‘Unlike many of their Christian siblings, Pentecostals have had a keen interest in, and a place for the role of, the Holy Spirit in the interpretive process. For Pentecostals, it is indeed one of the oddities of modern theological scholarship that across the theological spectrum approaches to Scripture have little or no appreciation for the work of the Holy Spirit in interpretation’.

reflection'.⁶² This theological reflection certainly includes engagement with the Holy Text. For Pentecostals, theology originates with the Holy Spirit; according to Land, 'the Spirit is prior to the written Word of God, but the Spirit inspires, preserves and illumines that Word within the communion of those who are formed, corrected, nurtured and equipped by that Word'.⁶³

Notwithstanding the Spirit's preceding the written Word, and existing before (Gen. 1.2) the inspired writers (community), the voice of the Spirit, as it pertains to biblical interpretation, is not independent of Word nor community. K. Archer contends that the Spirit's contribution to this triadic method of interpretation is quite complex to explain, insisting that it should not be 'reduced to nor simply equated with the Biblical text or the community, but is connected to and dependent upon these as a necessary means for expressing the concern(s) of the Godhead (Trinity)'.⁶⁴ Stated otherwise, Pentecostal scholar, French Arrington explains:

The Spirit establishes a continuum between the written word of the past and the same word in the present, thereby illuminating what the ancient author's words mean to us living in the twentieth century and how they speak to us today. Through the Holy Spirit the Word of God becomes alive and speaks to our present situation with new possibilities for personal and social transformation.⁶⁵

To the Pentecostal hermeneut, it is not with merely bridging the contextual-temporal gulf that the Spirit concerns itself, but there is an expectancy that the Spirit will give discernment in the reading, interpreting, heeding and teaching of the Word.⁶⁶

A Pentecostal hermeneutic is a methodology which anticipates that the Spirit will guide, inspire, assist, and lead the saints to discern meaning. The role of the Spirit in Pentecostal interpretation of Scripture is well summarized by Waddell, who explores the Spirit's role in the Apocalypse, where John is 'in the Spirit', and the seven churches are addressed by the Spirit. Waddell states:

In a postmodern world, Pentecostals no longer need to acquiesce to the evangelical doctrine *sola scriptura*, because the revelation of God is not transmitted to new generations by scripture alone but by the work of the Holy Spirit ... Interpretation of the scriptures continues for

⁶² Daniela C. Augustine, 'The Empowered Church: Ecclesiological Dimensions of the Event of Pentecost', in John Christopher Thomas (ed.), *Toward a Pentecostal Ecclesiology: The Church and the Fivefold Gospel* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2010), p. 157.

⁶³ Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, p. 28.

⁶⁴ Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, pp. 247–48.

⁶⁵ French L. Arrington, 'The Use of the Bible by Pentecostals', *Pneuma* 16 (1994), pp. 101–107 (104).

⁶⁶ Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, p. 49.

Pentecostals as it always has ‘not by might nor by power’ nor by educational level, social status or economic success, but by the Spirit of the living God.⁶⁷

2.3.2 WORD

As stated previously, the relationship between Spirit, Word, and community is not one that can be separated, as Clark H. Pinnock conveys:

The Bible functions as an authority in a variety of ways because the truth itself is so richly various. The truth of the Bible into which the Spirit would lead us does not consist only of matters of fact and bits of information. It includes truth for thought, for life, for feeling. The Spirit is concerned as much with the truth of our walk as the truth of our talk. His interests encompass all these things and to this end he makes full use of the Scriptures’ ability to be opened up.⁶⁸

The Pentecostal community’s high esteem for Scripture is rooted namely in two factors, experience and expectancy, though both of these factors are multifaceted. As M. Archer points out, the experience of the Pentecostal community is what informs our understanding of the authority of Scripture, over a doctrine of inspiration.⁶⁹ Finding solidarity with the ancient, yet ordinary figures of Scripture gives anchor to the Pentecostal’s belief that the Holy Spirit could inspire humankind to produce the written Word.⁷⁰

The experience is a shared one that involves the experiences of the people of the Bible, the experiences recorded in the history of the Church, and the experiences of the individual Spirit baptized believer/reader. However, more than merely sharing commonalities with the people of the text, Harris explains that ‘Pentecostals believe that they *continue* the Spirit-filled community of faith that started in Scripture, and that, through both the experience of the baptism of the Spirit and everyday experience of life in the Spirit of God, Scripture comes alive and God’s truth is revealed’.⁷¹ As a spiritual community, Pentecostals interpret both their trials and triumphs ‘as part of the one story of redemption ... interpreting their daily life and worship in terms of the significant

⁶⁷ Waddell, *Spirit of the Book*, pp. 127–28.

⁶⁸ Clark H. Pinnock ‘The Work of the Holy Spirit in Hermeneutics’, *JPT* 1 (1993), pp. 3–23 (14).

⁶⁹ Archer, *I was in the Spirit*, p. 46. She further notes (p. 47) that Pentecostals read the Scriptures not as observers but as participants in the stories. In this way, Pentecostals have an *experiential* relationship with Scripture as they relate to and participate in the *world* of the text.’ The italics is Archer’s.

⁷⁰ Thomas, ‘Reading the Bible’, p. 110.

⁷¹ Harris, ‘Black Pentecostal Hermeneutics?’, p. 201. Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism*, p. 24, notes that ‘Pentecostalism affirms the integral place in Jesus’ ministry of literal miracles of healing and insists that these are to be experienced in our own time because they are part of the post-Pentecost experience of the early church as reported in the Book of Acts’.

events of biblical history’, thus the Word of God gives significance to their life and circumstances through these shared experiences.⁷²

Another key factor of shared experience is the diversity of the inspired authors of the ancient Holy Text, and that of the modern interpreter. Keith Warrington brings attention to the increasing awareness of this shared experience of diversity; that the Holy Spirit inspired a diverse group of people to write both in and to a diverse set of circumstances.⁷³ Just as sure as the Holy Spirit inspired in diversity, the Holy Spirit still inspires today, but also illuminates and ignites the Pentecostal reader in diversity. Pinnock explains how the diversity of circumstances and time also inform how Scripture is interpreted, using Jesus as the exemplar for this practice.⁷⁴

The expectation is multifaceted, as it is of an already and not yet nature. Already, there is an expectation to encounter the unchanging God in the scriptures.⁷⁵ There is an expectation, therefore, that through this encounter, the Spirit baptized community will be equipped for active witness, to whatever degree the Spirit chooses. Finally, there is a ‘not yet’ eschatological expectancy, namely but not limited to the super-natural return of Jesus as reigning king.⁷⁶ These experiences and expectations are expressed well in the five-fold Gospel, where Jesus, as known in Scripture, is experienced as savior, sanctifier, healer, spirit baptizer, and soon coming king.

⁷² Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, p. 65.

⁷³ Keith Warrington, *Pentecostal Theology: A Theology of Encounter* (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2008), p. 182, notes, ‘There is an increasing awareness that the authors wrote in their own words and style, reflecting their native cultures and eras as well as their personalities and educative backgrounds. There is also a growing readiness to read the text in the recognition that it is an ancient document that was written to people whose lives and situations were very different to present readers and to whom the writers of the Bible were offering specific and applied wisdom’.

⁷⁴ Clark H. Pinnock, ‘The Work of the Spirit in the Interpretation of Holy Scripture from the Perspective of a Charismatic Biblical Theologian’, *JPT* 18 (2009), pp. 157–71 (159–61). Pinnock does a fine job placing Jesus on display as a hermeneut; noting, for example, Jesus’ reading of Isaiah 61 in Luke 14:

Jesus read [Isaiah 61.1–2a] on this occasion as good news even though he was taking liberties with the scriptures [omitting 61.2b]. What right did he have to do that? He did it because he knew the will of God in this matter and at this time. Jesus blended the original word of Scripture with its current significance for his bearers. It was his familiar practice. (p. 159)

Further, Pinnock notes (p. 161), ‘Jesus did not see all texts as being on the same level or as having the same authority. He recognized a degree of historical relativity. He knew that texts can open up. His critique does not diminish Scripture – it sets texts free to function as the word of God in new ways.’

⁷⁵ Richie, *Essentials of Pentecostal Theology*, p. 69.

⁷⁶ Peter Althouse and Robby Waddell (eds.), *Perspectives in Pentecostal Eschatologies: World without End* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2010) offer a collection of essays that give attention to various eschatological expectations of Pentecostals, from ecological, economic, social, pastoral, and more.

2.3.3 COMMUNITY

Given the nature of humanity, and the propensity to error, it might seem that the community aspect of Pentecostal hermeneutics is problematic – prone to individualistic and subjective interpretation.

Contrarily, the Pentecostal community actually

functions as the place where the Spirit of God acts and where testimony regarding God's activity is offered, assessed, and accepted or rejected. It also provides the forum for serious and sensitive discussions about the acts of God and the Scripture. The community can offer balance, accountability, and support. It can guard against rampant individualism and uncontrolled subjectivism.⁷⁷

One way that individualism and subjectivism is guarded against, according to Kenneth Archer, is that the Pentecostal hermeneut situates him or herself, participatorily, within the Pentecostal community, which is a discerning community, consequently.⁷⁸ It is within this community that interpretation takes place; 'the community reads and hears the Scriptures in particular ways, in light of its self-identity' as a Spirit-empowered community.⁷⁹

The Pentecostal community is, therefore, a hermeneutical community, especially 'when they explain and appropriate the biblical text ... when they ritualize their action in appropriating a divinely-generated spirituality ... and when they claim that God continues his work in the community of faith'.⁸⁰ Being a community of the Spirit, Scripture is interpreted within the community by the guidance of the Spirit.⁸¹ This interpretive work is not restricted to Pentecostal leaders; as Waddell aptly notes, the [interpretive] work of the Spirit is made available to all believers within the community – moreover the Spirit is at work within the community in matters of revelation, interpretation, and testimony.⁸²

⁷⁷ Thomas, 'Reading the Bible', p. 119.

⁷⁸ Archer, *Pentecostal Hermeneutics*, pp. 224–25.

Kenneth J. Archer, *The Gospel Revisited: Towards a Pentecostal Theology of Worship and Witness* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011), p. 20, further suggests that 'the way in which Pentecostals or any community goes about doing "exegesis" and "theology" has as much to do with their social location and theological formation as it does with their employment of a so-called neutral, scientific, exegetical-theological methodology'. Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, p. 22, expounds on the discerning nature of the Pentecostal community, noting that '[e]ach voice of the community (in)forms the discerning process by offering assistance in discovering an interpretation that is faithful'.

⁷⁹ Archer, *I Was in the Spirit*, p. 48.

⁸⁰ Richard D. Israel, Daniel E Albrecht, and Randal G McNally, 'Pentecostals and Hermeneutics: Texts, Rituals and Community,' *Pneuma* 15.2 (Fall 1993), pp. 137–61 (154).

⁸¹ Archer, *I Was in the Spirit*, p. 49.

⁸² Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation*, p. 128. Keith Warrington, *Pentecostal Theology: A Theology of Encounter* (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2008), pp. 198–99, notes:

Without the involvement and consensus of the wider community, one's interpretation of the text can become stridently dogmatic, divisive and thus ultimately and fundamentally flawed. In particular, the Pentecostal

Historically, the Pentecostal community has been a worshipping community, comprised of laity, missionaries, pastors and evangelists, but in recent decades, academic scholars have become increasingly present. M. Archer notes that since the closing of the twentieth, and start of the twenty-first century, Pentecostal scholars have especially contributed to scholarly work on the Apocalypse.⁸³ As a worshipping Pentecostal, and one formally trained in the academy, my methodology is reflective of both the worshipping Pentecostal community and the academic Pentecostal community.

According to Rodolfo Galvan Estrada, III, if Pentecostal scholars ‘rightly recognize the community’s role in pentecostal hermeneutics, then we must establish the fact that its contextual identity is also a part of its theological pentecostal identity and will be an integral component in the future of pentecostal hermeneutics’.⁸⁴ The ‘contextual identity’ that Estrada argues for includes race, gender, and culture. These contexts, he notes, influence the way that we interpret Scripture, and further warns that it is dangerous to speak of a Pentecostal community, without considering the context(s) of the individual identities within the community.⁸⁵

To this end, I will examine, in brief, the African American engagement of Scripture, as the methodology employed in the current thesis is Pentecostal in scope, but particularly, it is African American Pentecostal. As Spirit, Word, and community are essential in my engagement with Scripture, the ‘community’ aspect must be investigated further. Harris aptly notes that while similarities do indeed exist, in some ways there are ‘stark’ differences in the way that white and black Pentecostals interpret Scripture.⁸⁶ These differences, whatever they may be, warrant an investigation into the African American engagement with Scripture. Waddell aptly notes that ‘the

community brings its own unique comment on the text, based on its social and religious contexts and belief in the dynamic nature of the Spirit and the experiential aspect of their faith, such a context being as important to the hermeneutical process as any exegetical or theological method.

⁸³ Archer, ‘*I Was in the Spirit*’, pp. 50–52, provides a substantial list of scholars who have contributed journal articles, essays, chapters, monographs and commentaries on the Apocalypse.

⁸⁴ Rodolfo Galvan Estrada III, ‘Is a Contextualized Hermeneutic the Future of Pentecostal Readings? The Implications of a Pentecostal Hermeneutic for a Chicano/Latino Community’, *Pneuma*, 37 (January, 2015), pp. 341–55 (343). Though Estrada understandably contextualizes his article on a *mestizo* hermeneutic, the proposals he makes are not limited to a Chicano/Latino context, but all racial/ethnic contexts.

⁸⁵ Estrada III, ‘Contextualized Hermeneutic’, p. 345. I concur with his argument that ‘we cannot have a pentecostal hermeneutic with its assumed cultural hegemony or universal understanding of what it means to be a “pentecostal community”; it must be a hermeneutic that takes into account the communities’ historical experiences as Latino, Black, Asian, or Indian Pentecostals’. He further advises (p. 347) that since humanity revolves around an understanding/interpretation of these systems, it would be erroneous to ignore their impact on interpreting Scripture.

⁸⁶ Harris, ‘Black Pentecostal Hermeneutics’, p. 196. Harris does not explicate his use of the term ‘stark’. He does note, however, that the work of the ‘Cleveland School’, which includes Kenneth Archer, ‘advances a parallel method between white and black Pentecostals’.

majority of Pentecostals are non–white, which places a Pentecostal interpretation in a sympathetic relationship to African American reading as well'.⁸⁷

2.4 THE MINORITY: ENCOUNTERING SCRIPTURE FROM THE MARGINS

[W]hen first I saw him read, I was never so surprised in my whole life as when I saw the book talk to my master; for I thought it did, as I observed him to look upon it, and move his lips. I wished it would do so to me. As soon as my master had done reading I follow'd him to the place where he put the book, being mightily delighted with it, and when nobody saw me, I open'd it and put my ear down close upon it, in great hope that it wou'd say something to me; but was very sorry and greatly disappointed when I found it would not speak, this thought immediately presented itself to me, that every body and every thing despis'd me because I was black.
(James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, Negro Slave)⁸⁸

These were the words of Ukawsaw Gronniosaw (also known as James Albert), an 18th Century Negro slave. Though I lament at his unfortunate first encounter with the Word of God, my heart rejoices in knowing that he would eventually learn to read and come to have experiences of his own where the book would talk to him. It is on the worn and labored shoulders of black men and women like Gronniosaw, that African American scholars stand today.

African American scholars do not all begin at the same place, when surveying African American engagement with the Bible. Emerson B. Powery and Rodney S. Sadler, Jr. begin their investigation of African American interpretation in the midst of slavery, suggesting that '[the African American's] introduction to the Bible frequently came by way of sermons from Colossians 3:22–25, Ephesians 6:5–8, and 1 Peter 2:128–20, directed at ensuring their obedience to their masters'.⁸⁹ Allen Dwight Callahan concurs, positing that 'African Americans first encountered the Bible as strangers in a strange land of slavery, through the strange language of English letters, and by the strange religion of Evangelical Protestantism'.⁹⁰ Esau McCaulley and Vincent L. Wimbush are amongst scholars who suggest that the African engagement begins pre–African slave trade and colonization,⁹¹ thus the African 'American' engagement with the Bible must not wholly be based

⁸⁷ Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation*, p. 115.

⁸⁸ James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, 'A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, an African Prince, as Related by Himself' (Electronic Edition), Documenting the American South, p. 10.

⁸⁹ Emerson B. Powery and Rodney S. Sadler Jr., *The Genesis of Liberation: Biblical Interpretation in the Antebellum Narratives of the Enslaved* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016), p. 17, Kindle.

⁹⁰ Allen Dwight Callahan, 'Chapter One: The Talking Book' in *The Talking Book: African Americans and the Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), location 184, Kindle.

⁹¹ See 'Black and Proud: The Bible and Black Identity', in Esau McCaulley, *Reading While Black: African American Biblical Interpretation as an Exercise in Hope* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020), pp. 96–117. Here, McCaulley traces the black presence in the Bible, but also makes an argument for the Bible's affirmation of the

on their exposure to the English written text, but finds origins in the orated narratives of Scripture as well. Origins aside, African American interpretation does find rapport (though not explicitly stated as such) with the Pentecostal triadic negotiation of Spirit, Word, and community. What follows is a brief survey of each aspect of this negotiation within African American interpretation.

2.4.1 THE SPIRIT OF GOD IN THE MARGINALIZED COMMUNITY⁹²

Void of any pneumatological training, enslaved Africans found their own ways of interpreting Scripture through songs, sermons, stories, and other means of communication, believing that ‘everyone could approach the Bible *under the guidance of the Spirit*, that is, in his or her own way’.⁹³ More than simply being guided by the Spirit in their interpretation, the new ‘African Americans’ also encountered the same Spirit in the narratives. Thomas Hoyt, Jr. explains that those narratives ‘provided hope for those who identified with the freed Israelites, the rescued Hebrew boys, the *life-giving spirit* in the dried bones of the valley, and the hope of the resurrection as experienced in the conquering of the grave by Jesus Christ’.⁹⁴ Beyond the narratives of the OT, James Cone, the twentieth-century pioneer of Black Liberation Theology, offers a significant Spirit–Word connection to African American interpretation, offering Lk. 4.18 as a hermeneutical key; that the resurrected Jesus once, by the Spirit, dwelt among and served the marginalized, and

black race. Although engagement *per se* is not in focus in his chapter, the overall scope of the monograph is engagement, and the theological context of black people is a necessary part of informing that engagement. For example, as McCaulley points out, if Christianity was forced upon blacks (which he argues it was not), that bears a critical weight on how blacks view the Bible. Vincent L. Wimbush, *The Bible and African Americans: A Brief History* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), p. 12, also argues for a pre-American soil engagement, but suggests that the Bible was taken to Africa in efforts to *missionize*, and there began the dominating misuse and misrepresentation of Scripture by white–Europeans. Although, this runs somewhat contrary to his claim that the engagement ‘begins with the Africans’ involuntary *arrival* in the New World that came to be known as the United States’, in Vincent L. Wimbush, ‘Reading Texts through Worlds, Worlds through Texts’, ed. Robert C. Culley and Robert Bruce Robinson, *Semeia* 62 (1993), pp. 129–40 (130).

⁹² The term, ‘marginalized community’, is used in consideration of the conditions through which African Americans have historically lived. This term is defined, briefly, in Jae M. Sevelius, Luis Gutierrez–Mock, *et al.* ‘Research with Marginalized Communities: Challenges to Continuity During the Covid–19 Pandemic’, *AIDS and Behavior* 24.7 (2020), pp. 2009–12 (2009). ‘Marginalized communities are those excluded from main–stream social, economic, educational, and/or cultural life’. The marginalized conditions which these communities suffer under is ‘due to unequal power relationships between social groups’.

⁹³ Vincent L. Wimbush, ‘The Bible and African Americans: An Outline of an Interpretative History’, in Cain Hope Felder (ed.), *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), pp. 81–97 (86). Emphasis mine.

⁹⁴ Thomas Hoyt Jr., ‘Interpreting Biblical Scholarship for the Black Church Tradition’, in Cain Hope Felder (ed.), *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), pp. 17–39 (29).

ultimately suffered a violent death – that Spirit invites them to a greater revelation of Jesus and much more, an eschatological hope that they will be vindicated for their suffering as well.⁹⁵

The Spirit was not an interpretive helper of the African American for the ‘written’ Text only. Illiteracy demanded an orality of the early African American religious experience. As Janice D. Hamlet notes, the oral tradition of Africans was present before slavery, and was therefore brought onboard the vessels by which slaves were transported to America.⁹⁶ Although enslavers tried to impede the communication between slaves by dismantling tribes and dividing families, the cultural similarities amongst tribes, along with the imaginative, physical, and nonverbal nuances of their oral tradition, were strong enough for African strangers to develop a new, *African American* oral tradition. This oral tradition carried over into their encounter with the Word of God. Subsequently, the Spirit was therefore at work in the reception and response of Scripture ‘understood’.

W.E.B. Du Bois tells of the Spirit inspired shouting and ‘frenzies’ that slaves would experience during the late-night slave revivals in the backwoods – at the preaching and music they would hear, away from the earshot of their slave masters.⁹⁷ Cone suggests that this ‘experience of the Spirit’, when ‘the Word becomes embodied in the rhythm and the emotions of language’, is common place in the African American religious experience.⁹⁸ Although ‘the presence and prominence of the Holy Spirit in African American Christianity has often been cited as the root of the more emotional and energetic aspects of some forms of African American Christian Worship’, James H. Evans Jr. rightly argues that the Spirit is more than emotional; it helps to ‘provide counsel and guidance’,⁹⁹ thus making it clear that while orality and expression may have been descriptive of early African American spirituality, there yet remains a particular hermeneutical space for the Spirit amongst African American Christians, as it pertains to exegesis. The Word and community aspects of Pentecostal hermeneutics can be seen more vividly in African American hermeneutics. Powery and Sadler note how Antebellum Freedom Writers employed a practice of ‘functional quotations’, which was clearly a methodology based on Word and Community.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), p. 35.

⁹⁶ Janice D. Hamlet, ‘Word! The African American Oral Tradition and Its Rhetorical Impact on American Popular Culture’, *Black History Bulletin* 74.1 (2011), pp. 27–31 (27–28).

⁹⁷ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (Chicago, IL: A.C McClurg & Co., 1903), p. 135. Emphasis mine.

⁹⁸ James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1975), p. 19.

⁹⁹ James H. Evans Jr., ‘The Holy Spirit in African American Theology’, in Katie G. Cannon and Anthony B. Pinn, (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of African American Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 164–73 (168).

¹⁰⁰ Powery and Sadler, *The Genesis of Liberation*, p. 30, Kindle, note:

2.4.2 THE WORD OF GOD IN THE MARGINALIZED COMMUNITY

The importance of the Bible in African American hermeneutics must not be overlooked nor underappreciated. No other written corpus in history has had a more profound and indelible impression on the lives of Africans/African Americans over the centuries. The interpretations and proclamations of the Bible have fostered both enslavement and empowerment – calamity and courage for African Americans. The Bible has played, and continues to play a key role in the development of African American theologies;¹⁰¹ for in the narratives of the Bible, African Americans ‘found reasons to believe not only in the liberating power of the God of Scripture, but in the liberating emphasis of Scripture itself’.¹⁰² In his short treatise on African American Bibliology, Evans reasons that interpretation is conditioned by the interpreter’s socio–location, and reminds readers that ‘[t]he status of African Americans as outsiders within American society has shaped their perspective on the Bible. In fact, their very marginality has made them sensitive to the misuses of Scripture and has made them more open to its critical dimension’.¹⁰³

McCaulley seems to attest to Evans’ assumption, noting that a major issue to be addressed in Biblical interpretation is whose interpretation ‘does justice to as much of the biblical witness as possible ... [t]his is what we see in Satan’s use of Scripture in the wilderness. The problem isn’t that the Scriptures that Satan quoted were untrue, but when made to do the work that he wanted them to do, they distorted the biblical witness.’¹⁰⁴ Evans insists that the African American experience, in relation to the biblical text and its interpretive influences on African American existence, has warranted critical engagement of African Americans.¹⁰⁵ Michael Joseph Brown proposes that, by employing Lk. 4.18–19 ‘as its normative hermeneutical lens, black theology

[African Americans] employed the King James Version as their base text and then playfully modified the text typologically, often replacing the biblical heroes with the African American community and the biblical villains with their enslavers or oppressors. They preserved the gist of the text as well as the poetic and archaic dimensions of its language, yet the exact words and word order were less important and often modified slightly to fit the authors’ own narrative contexts.

¹⁰¹ I refer to ‘theologies’ rather than ‘theology’, owing to the diversity of theological experiences, convictions, and thoughts that can be found amongst African Americans. This diversity is not found at the denominational level only, but also refers to local, non–denominational expressions and individual theological perspectives as well.

¹⁰² Rodney Steven Sadler, ‘Rereading Their Scriptures: An Analysis of the Authority of Scripture among Early African Americans’, *Ex Auditu*, 19 (2003), pp. 153–65 (154).

¹⁰³ James H. Evans Jr., *We Have Been Believers: An African American Systematic Theology* (2nd edn; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), p. 58.

¹⁰⁴ McCaulley, *Reading While Black*, p. 91.

¹⁰⁵ James H. Evans Jr., *We Have Been Believers: An African American Systematic Theology*, Second Edition. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), 37.

advances a reading of scripture that places it in conversation with the contemporary experience of blackness among persons of African descent'.¹⁰⁶ The contemporary experience of blackness did not cause African Americans to dismiss Scripture altogether; rather, before literacy or academics were an option for the enslaved, still they developed a hermeneutic of hearing that scrutinized Scripture differently than their white slave masters.¹⁰⁷

Consider Solomon Northup's recollection of hearing Scripture expounded by his slave master, William Ford, and Ford's brother-in-law, Peter Tanner. He recounts how Tanner, 'an impressive commentator on the New Testament', preached a sermon from Luke 12, and began to offer exposition, coming upon v. 47:

... he looked deliberately around him, and continued – 'And that servant which knew his lord's will', – here he paused, looking around more deliberately than before, and again proceeded – 'which knew his lord's will, and *prepared* not himself' – here was another pause – '*prepared* not himself, neither did *according* to his will, shall be beaten with many *stripes*'.¹⁰⁸

'D'ye hear that?' demanded Peter, emphatically. '*Stripes*', he repeated, slowly and distinctly, taking off his spectacles, preparatory to making a few remarks. 'That nigger that don't take care – that don't obey his lord – that's his master – d'ye see? – that 'ere nigger shall be beaten with many stripes. Now, "many" signifies a *great* many – forty, a hundred, a hundred and fifty lashes. *That's* Scripiter!'¹⁰⁸

Such was the normative experience for the enslaved. As Powery and Sadler note, enslaved African Americans encountered Scripture (Gen. 9.18–27; Genesis 10; Exodus 20, 21; Eph. 6.4–9) in abusive, subjugated ways, but still held high regard for the Bible. For example, they 'fully embraced the Paul they encountered in Acts 17:26, which they made the basis of the "one blood doctrine", which the freedom narrators cherished, because they viewed it as trumping Paul's doctrine of "obedience to earthly masters"'.¹⁰⁹ The more critical the African American was to the text, the more empowered they became to create life anew, realizing that the Bible had been mishandled; that it actually did not denigrate their blackness, but affirmed their identity.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ Michael Joseph Brown, 'Black Theology and the Bible', in Dwight N. Hopkins and Edward P. Antonio (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Black Theology* (Cambridge Companions to Religion; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 169–83 (169).

¹⁰⁷ Wimbush, *The Bible and Africans*, p. 32, explains that 'the Bible, understood as the "white folks" book, was accepted but not interpreted in the way that white Christians and the dominant culture in general interpreted it. So America's biblical culture was accepted by the Africans, but not in the way white Americans accepted it or in the way the whites preferred that others accept it.'

¹⁰⁸ Solomon Northup, '12 Years a Slave', in *Unchained – Powerful and Unflinching Narratives of Former Slaves: 28 True Stories in One Volume* (e-artnow, 2017), Kindle Location, 2771.

¹⁰⁹ Powery and Sadler, *The Genesis of Liberation*, p. 8, Kindle.

¹¹⁰ Sadler, 'Rereading *Their* Scriptures', p. 154.

Some of the enslaved could even discern the potential that was found in their ability to read the Word for themselves. Frederick Douglass tells of his slave master condemning his wife for teaching Douglas his alphabets, and how to read three– and four–letter words. Knowing the potential, he scolded the mistress. Douglass recalls the man arguing that ‘if you give a nigger an inch, he will take an ell. A nigger should know nothing but to obey his master – to do as he is told to do. Learning would *spoil* the best nigger in the world ... if you teach that nigger ... how to read, there would be no keeping him. It would forever unfit him to be a slave’.¹¹¹ For a people who already valued the word that they heard, the ability to read garnered an even greater appreciation for the Word as it helped them to re–appraise their own lives as a marginalized people.¹¹²

2.4.3 THE PEOPLE OF GOD AS A MARGINALIZED COMMUNITY

The spirituals and sermons of African Americans reveal the community impact on their interpretation of Scripture. As noted previously, African American slaves found solidarity with the figures of Scripture. Paramount among these figures was the person to whom all of Scripture pointed – Jesus. Cone notes that ‘[t]he spirituals, gospel songs, and hymns focused on how Jesus achieved salvation for the least through his *solidarity* with them even unto death’.¹¹³ This solidarity is only noticeable because of the weight that community plays on the interpretation of the Bible.

For African Americans, community, both near and far, has implications on interpretation. An example can be found in Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s address to eight local white clergymen who openly opposed his non–violent resistance. In his iconic responsive essay, ‘Letter from Birmingham City Jail’, King brings to bear his understanding of the social implications of the gospel, charging the clergymen that he could not watch the plight of colored people in Birmingham from an idle seat in Atlanta. He lamented that ‘[i]njustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of

¹¹¹ Frederick Douglass, ‘Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave’, in *Unchained*, Kindle Location, 600.

¹¹² Powery and Sadler, *The Genesis of Liberation*, p. 49, Kindle, note:

For the formerly enslaved who penned their own narratives, literacy meant the beginning of basic freedom. Biblical literacy allowed these black interpreters to ‘talk back’ to the ‘talking book’ and thereby to engage in a critical hermeneutical challenge to the widespread oppressive use of Scripture on the side of the peculiar institution. Their God and their Bible would not allow for the dehumanization of those on the underside of life. Their God and their Bible were more inclusive than that.

¹¹³ Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, p. 32.

destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly'.¹¹⁴ This sentiment is reflective in his engagement with Scripture, as he shares his reason for being in Birmingham:

I am in in Birmingham because injustice is here. Just as the eighth century prophets left their little villages and carried their 'thus saith the Lord' far beyond the boundaries of their hometowns, and just as the Apostle Paul left his little village of Tarsus and carried the gospel of Jesus Christ to practically every hamlet and city of the Graeco-Roman world, I too am compelled to carry the gospel of freedom beyond my particular hometown. Like Paul, I must constantly respond to the Macedonian call for aid.¹¹⁵

Similar words are later echoed in Allan A. Boesak's *Comfort and Protest*, where he offers commentary on Rev. 6.9,11 where souls are crying beneath the altar.¹¹⁶ His exposition of this passage is informed by the struggle with apartheid that South Africans faced. Cone explains the weightiness of the community in interpretation, stating:

The theologian brings to the scripture the perspective of a community. Ideally, the concern of that community is consistent with the concern of the community that gave us the scriptures. It is the task of theology to keep these two communities (biblical and contemporary) in constant tension in order that we may be able to speak meaningfully about God.¹¹⁷

He further suggests that if a theologian is to speak of 'the God of the Bible', he or she must not neglect social issues, such as politics and economy – for it is in the midst of these issues where that God is active.¹¹⁸ J. Deotis Roberts takes the idea of community-influenced interpretation to a deeper, more scholarly level. Rather than community being limited to ethnicity or experience, Roberts suggests that theologians embrace the 'new demand', where community expertise is also considered. Roberts suggests an interdisciplinary approach to doing theology – a notion that he argued was missing in the church and the seminary in his day.¹¹⁹

Roberts' notion about community expertise is significant for my employment of the proposed methodology – specifically a 'twenty-first century', African American, Pentecostal engagement.

¹¹⁴ Martin Luther King Jr., 'Letter from Birmingham City Jail', in James M. Washington (ed.), *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1991), p. 290.

¹¹⁵ King, 'Letter from Birmingham City Jail', p. 290.

¹¹⁶ Allan A. Boesak, *Comfort and Protest*, p. 66.

¹¹⁷ James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (40th edn; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), p. 38.

¹¹⁸ See 'Biblical Revelation and Social Existence', in Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, pp. 64–83, where Cone surveys the OT and NT through the lens of liberation, concluding (pp. 81–82): 'The hermeneutical principle for an exegesis of the Scriptures is the revelation of God in Christ as the Liberator of the oppressed from social oppression and to political struggle, wherein the poor recognize that their fight against poverty and injustice is not only consistent with the gospel, but is the gospel of Jesus Christ'.

¹¹⁹ J. Deotis Roberts, *Black Theology in Dialog* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1987), p. 16. What Roberts argues for helps to inform what is *fully* meant by argument for a '21st Century' African American Pentecostal hermeneutic, as it speaks to the academic options made available to African American scholars in recent history.

While the numbers have significantly increased since the turn of the twenty-first century, at the time of his editing of *Stony the Road We Trod* in 1991, Cain Hope Felder noted that ‘less than one-fifth of 1 percent’ of North Americans holding a Ph.D./Th.D. in biblical studies were African American.¹²⁰ Further, he reported that ‘African American graduate students in the biblical field have been few due to economic and political conditions that have kept their ranks small, since heavy language requirements and minimal financial support have proven obstacles too great to surmount’.¹²¹ The African American scholars and theologians of the twentieth century, such as Seymour, Cone, King, and Roberts, did not have a wealth of earlier African American biblical scholars to draw from in their engagement with Scripture. Their engagement was informed, at the academic level, primarily by Caucasian scholars. African American scholars of the twentieth century were still ‘sitting in Parham hallways’, as it were, having to learn to engage Scripture from the margins with little to no input from their own marginalized community.

McCaulley shares a lament to which I, and many other African American theological scholars, can certainly attest. He explains that the biblical commentaries and textbooks which he often consulted, as a student of theology, gave diminutive attention to the situation and perspective of the African American community at large. In an introduction to his approach to Scripture, he asks, ‘what about the exploitation of my people? What about our suffering, our struggle? Where does the Bible address the hopes of Black folks, and why is this question not pressing in a community that has historically been alienated from Black Christians?’¹²² To Robert’s call for an interdisciplinary approach to theology, twenty-first century African American biblical scholars are engaging other African American scholars across a wide range of academic disciplines in order to provide an interpretation that fully represents the African American community; their journey, their struggle, their strengths, and their hope.¹²³

¹²⁰ Cain Hope Felder, ‘Introduction’, in *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), p. 1. Felder does not offer his statistical source here but claims that only a little more than thirty African Americans had completed such a degree, at the time of his writing. The reader should note that he is referring to biblical studies particularly, not general theology, religion, or communication; neither is he speaking of a DMin, a degree which many African Americans hold. The difference is significant, as a doctoral degree in biblical studies demands critical engagement with original languages, and comprehension of various forms of engagement, such as historical, grammatical, narrative, and discourse analysis.

¹²¹ Felder, *Stony the Road*, pp. 1–2.

¹²² McCaulley, *Reading While Black*, p. 12.

¹²³ Twenty-first century African American biblical scholars, such as McCaulley and I, are at a greater advantage than our predecessors. Although we have experienced a deficiency of African American scholars in our seminary syllabi and bibliographies, our resource choices become our own as we exit the seminary and embark upon doctoral research. Today, roads have been paved for us to engage Scripture critically, drawing insights from African American

2.4.4 LIBERATION AND IMAGINATION IN THE MARGINALIZED COMMUNITY

These examples offer but a brief illustration of the triadic (Spirit, Word, community) Pentecostal methodology that finds commonality with an African American interpretation of Scripture. This overview does not suggest that all Pentecostals and African Americans engage Scripture the same way. I find congruity in parts of the African American engagement, being an African American; however, I hold divergent views at some points, as a Pentecostal. For example, McCaulley rightly notes that while Cone may be a seminal figure in African American theology, some of his views seem to conflict with the biblical narrative.¹²⁴ A close examination of African American hermeneutics reveals that three questions are essentially being asked when engaging Scripture.

First, what is God's plan for African Americans? Is it enslavement? Injustice? Economic and educational disparities?

Second, does God's providence extend to African Americans? For the African American community, it may mean Do #BlackLivesMatter to God? The trend, #BlackLivesMatter (#BLM) became popular in 2013, in response to the acquittal of (Caucasian) George Zimmerman, who took the life of a young (African American), Trayvon Martin. Seven years later, in 2020, during a global pandemic, when several African American deaths at the hands of Caucasian men, namely law enforcement officers, the trend re-emerged as a national mantra of millions of African Americans. The church was not silent in response to this trend. For many evangelicals, due to the LGBTQ affirmation, pro-choice position, and other views held by the founding members of the BlackLivesMatter Organization, anyone affirming the mantra that 'BlackLivesMatter', was viewed to be in opposition of Scripture.

For many non-Christian African Americans, this view by individual Christians represented the view of the church, which ultimately represented God's view; thus, the question – *Do black lives matter to God?* Such a question of the greater African American community can only be answered by faithful engagement with Scripture. Is his care for African Americans merely an eschatological concern?¹²⁵

scholars of the mid to late twentieth and the early twenty-first centuries. Even more, our scholarly efforts contribute to syllabi and bibliographies in the academy. As biblical studies continue to develop, and new theological textbooks emerge, African American scholars are finally in the room where it happens – contributing to future theological dialogue in the academy.

¹²⁴ McCaulley, *Reading While Black*, p. 178 (cf. Cone, *A Black Theology*, p. 10).

¹²⁵ Cone, *A Black Theology*, pp. 17–18 argues, 'To suggest that black suffering is consistent with the knowledge and will of God and that in the end everything will happen for the good of those who love God is unacceptable to

Third, how can African Americans participate in the work of God? That is, how can we be faithful witnesses for God, when forced to live life in the margins? These questions call biblical doctrines such as anthropology and providence (and their implications) to the fore.

History, here and now, and hope all converge at the intersection of these questions. While a methodology of Spirit, Word, and community comes very near to answering them, it is logical to conclude that Pentecostal hermeneuts outside the marginalized community might miss the particularities of Scripture that explicitly address these questions.¹²⁶ In order for interpreters to recognize these particularities, I suggest that at least two elements must be recognized as essentially present throughout the triadic negotiation; these elements are liberation (the plan and providence of God) and imagination (participation with God). The rich oral tradition of African Americans is the soil in which liberation and imagination find their genesis. As Hamlet notes, ‘the oral tradition has served as a fundamental vehicle for cultural expression and survival. This oral tradition also preserved the cultural heritage and reflected the collective spirit of the race. It has a powerful history, beginning with the Africans’ proslavery existence.’¹²⁷

As it pertains to biblical interpretation, Hoyt makes an observation worth noting, at length:

The African was brought to a land where literacy was highly valued and where the presence and use of Africanisms were frowned upon by whites. This resulted in a more crystallized and sophisticated oral tradition among blacks. The oral stage of communication was complicated because of certain actions by the dominant white group. White owners prohibited blacks from reading because they felt it dangerous to the status quo. Whites felt that blacks who could read would be led to read the Scriptures and would become ‘infected’ by their explicit and implicit teachings on human equality and liberation. Once those held as slaves could read, then who could keep them from writing? The ability to write would open up channels of communication that could result in insurrections.¹²⁸

2.5 AN INTEGRATION: EXAMINING A LIBERATED AND IMAGINATIVE TRIADIC METHODOLOGY

Thus far, I have examined the triadic Pentecostal methodology, and given examples in African American interpretive history of how the two (African American and Pentecostal) methodologies find common ground. In this final section, I will examine the triadic negotiation, as it relates to

blacks. The eschatological promise of a distant, future heaven is insufficient to account for the earthly pain of black suffering.’

¹²⁶ Cone, *A Black Theology*, p. 11, shares a similar view, that ‘Not understanding what it means to be oppressed, the oppressor is in no position to understand the methods which the oppressed use in liberation’. While I do not share with Cone that everyone outside of the marginalized community is the oppressor, I would agree with his opinion, as it relates to the outsider may not understand the interpretive decisions of the marginalized.

¹²⁷ Hamlet, ‘Word! The African American Oral Tradition’, p. 27.

¹²⁸ Hoyt, ‘Interpreting Biblical Scholarship’, p. 26.

liberation and pneumatic imagination. The examination of liberation and imagination adds a unique dimension of interpretation to the Pentecostal methodology.¹²⁹ While liberation may have taken on new meaning in the twenty-first century than it has in eras past, for African Americans, liberation is still a matter of anthropology at its core.¹³⁰ For African Americans, liberation is rooted in anthropology, owing to the fact that it is a subject that deals specifically with humanity; the origin (*imago dei* – Gen. 1.27), value (workmanship – Eph. 2.10a), and purpose (good works – Eph. 2.10b). Thabiti Anyabwile notes that ‘the doctrine of mankind is one of the most energized theological discussions among African Americans’.¹³¹ Black identity, as it relates to *imago dei*, has been historically challenged by slave trade, antebellum, Jim Crow and Civil Rights issues.

As the history of Pentecostalism shows – this challenge has not been a social issue alone, but a theological issue. If God created humankind in his image (Gen. 1.26–27), and has an eschatological plan that includes humans from every ‘nation, tribe, people, and tongue’ (Rev. 7.9), then certainly, the Text that introduces God as a creator (cf. Genesis 1) and re-creator (Revelation 21), also portrays God to be providential on the behalf of his image bearers, especially those who are redeemed by his Son (Rom. 8.28, Eph. 2.10). If this providence does not extend to marginalized image bearers, then it stands that they should be exempt from the ethics of the Text. However, if the plan and providence of God include the marginalized community, that community is within rights to approach the Text with questions of socio-contextual inquiry.¹³²

¹²⁹ I am not suggesting that the triadic negotiation of Spirit, Word and community is lacking; rather, I am suggesting that where liberation and imagination might be *implied* in the broader Pentecostal community, *African American* Pentecostals (especially scholars, like myself, who are privileged to engage the sacred Scriptures at higher critical levels) should bring these interpretive lenses to the fore, in order to illuminate better, for our respective marginalized community, what is (culture) and what should/could be (Kingdom).

¹³⁰ Amos Yong, *The Hermeneutical Spirit: Theological Interpretation and Scriptural Imagination for the 21st Century* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017), p. 167, notes that ‘liberation theology in the twenty-first century is pluriform not only in its regional, ethnic, and cultural diversity but also in its interdisciplinarity and in its multiple layeredness moving between and within the grassroots and the theoretical elite’. As a theological topic and interpretive framework, liberation has not been equally appraised throughout the history of African American biblical interpretation. Extensive work has already been done by African American scholars to document the history of liberation amongst African Americans. Although the term ‘liberation theology’ was made popular in the late-twentieth century by Latin American scholar, Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, (Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson [trans]; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1973), the concept of liberation theology amongst African Americans was certainly present long before. Powery and Sadler, *The Genesis of Liberation*, look specifically at the antebellum era and slave narratives and give examples of liberation interpretations as African Americans encountered Scripture. Thabiti M. Anyabwile, *The Decline of African American Theology: From Biblical Faith to Cultural Captivity* (Chicago, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), offers a more modern investigation, spanning the eighteenth century through the twenty-first century.

¹³¹ Anyabwile, *The Decline of African American Theology*, p. 100.

¹³² Cone, *A Black Theology*, p. 38, argues that African Americans want to know ‘what God has to say about the black condition. Or, more importantly, what is God doing about it? What is the relevance of God in the struggle against

Imagination is an aspect of African American interpretation that is arguably as familiar to the community, if not more, than the written Text itself. Imagination and liberation have always worked hand in hand for the African American interpreter. The logic follows: If this is what God has created me to be (equal/free/liberated), then this is what I (a liberated individual) can become – even more, this is what may become (within/for my community) ... because of a liberated me. Imagination anchors us in a rich past, even if that past includes suffering, while simultaneously propelling us into a greater future. Wimbush reflects well on the bond of liberation and imagination in early African American interpretation:

The spirituals and other songs and forms of representation reflect an approach to biblical interpretation informed by trauma—both physical and psychosocial. Interpretation was in almost all cases not controlled by the literal words of the texts because the texts were, for a number of reasons, *heard* (and touched and otherwise experienced) more than simply *read*. They were engaged as stories that seized and freed the imagination. Rather than an end in itself, interpretation seemed actually to have been understood and experienced as the collective freed consciousness and imagination of the African slaves (and the generations to follow) as they heard the biblical stories and retold them to reflect their own actual social situations, as well as their visions for a different world order.¹³³

2.5.1 THE LIBERATED TRIADIC NEGOTIATION

The apostle Paul enlightens the church of Corinth that wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, freedom is there found (2 Cor. 3.17). This freedom encapsulates liberation.¹³⁴ A liberating Spirit was

the forces of evil which seek to destroy black being”? Powery, and Sadler, *The Genesis of Liberation*, p. 248, Kindle, note:

For many African Americans slaveholding ideology could not be detached from Christianity. The only option was to reject and turn away from this oppressive religion. But those who chose to accept and develop a Christian faith cultivated a hermeneutical strategy that allowed them to manage the biblical stories, interpret them, and integrate them in meaningful ways that contributed value to their identity. They sought spaces in which they could engage conversations with like-minded people, who shared their experiences of blackness in a white-constructed world.

Evans, *We Have Been Believers*, p. 45, writes, ‘Virtually every intellectual activity of African Americans was related to their condition of oppression and their desire for freedom. Thus, the hermeneutical perspective that they brought to the Bible was inseparable from their determination to live as full human beings in the presence of God’, by ‘socio-contextual’, I suggest that recognition of the marginalized context of the African American community at large leads to questions of liberation in interpretation.

¹³³ Wimbush, *The Bible and African Americans*, p. 28. Allen Dwight Callahan, ‘Prologue’, in *The Talking Book*, Location 109, Kindle, notes: ‘The Bible’s impact on the African-American imagination also has been broad and varied in the arts. Negro spirituals, that great corpus of African-American sacred music, are shot through with biblical allusions, and the genre of African-American music called “gospel” takes its name from its obsession with biblical stories from the life of Jesus’.

¹³⁴ Moisés Silva (ed.), ‘ἐλευθερία’, *NIDNTTE 2* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), p. 176. ‘The NT idea of freedom goes far beyond that of the OT in that it sees freedom as liberation from the manifold powers that suppress true humanity’. The same idea of freedom/liberation is found in Jn 8.31–32, in reference to the Word.

certainly present at the birth of the Pentecostal movement, as history suggests,¹³⁵ and the same Spirit is present in Pentecostal interpretation as well. We have noted the fact that Pentecostals recognize that it is the Spirit of God who inspired the written Word, illuminates the interpreter, and empowers them for witness. We must not forget, nor minimize the significant truth that the same Spirit impedes the social practices that lead to social marginalization. That impedance is a natural result of adherence to the Word. In each of these spaces ‘where the Spirit of the Lord is’ (inspiration, illumination, empowerment, and impedance), liberation is evidently present.

At the genesis of North American Pentecostalism, liberation was not noted, explicitly, as a hermeneutical tool. However, owing to the socioeconomically diverse community that gathered at the Azusa Street Mission, liberation was at work in the negotiation of Scripture. Amos Yong explains what made liberation such an integral part of interpretation; noting that ‘the gospel was historically, politically, economically, and socially relevant, and this also impacted the nature and mission of the church as the people of God and the body of Christ. Methodologically, liberation theology emphasized the hermeneutical starting point of solidarity with the poor.’¹³⁶ Frank Bartleman records that, at Azusa:

Nothing contrary to His pure Spirit was allowed there. The false was sifted out from the real by the Spirit of God. The Word of God itself decided absolutely all issues. The hearts of the people, both in act and motive, were searched to the very bottom. It was no joke to become one of that company.¹³⁷

Bartleman’s record gives evidence that the liberation experienced at the Azusa Street Mission, though despised by Parham,¹³⁸ was a liberation that was guided by the Spirit, guarded by the Word of God, and was a clear identity marker of the community. In other words, at the Azusa Street

¹³⁵ Frank Bartleman, *Azusa Street* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1982), pp. 51–52, notes that the Spirit of God was at work, washing away the color line. Moreover, *contra* Parham (see below), Bartleman suggests that it was the ‘pure Spirit’ of God that enabled such a liberated space of worship – void of any marginalization.

¹³⁶ Amos Yong, *The Hermeneutical Spirit: Theological Interpretation and Scriptural Imagination for the 21st Century* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017), p. 163. Wolfgang Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology: Living the Full Gospel* (Wolfgang Vondey and Daniela C. Augustine [eds.]; SPCT; London; Oxford; New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), p. 160, also notes:

Pentecostals emphasize the importance of the spiritual reality of Christ’s salvation from the cosmic powers of darkness (see Col. 1:13; Gal. 1:4; Phil. 3:21; Eph. 1:22; Heb. 2:8–9). Christology is interpreted pneumatologically. The reality of salvation wrought by the Spirit must therefore include material deliverance, healing, liberation, and sanctification from other spiritual beings and powers.

¹³⁷ Bartleman, *Azusa Street*, p. 52.

¹³⁸ Parham, *Everlasting Gospel*, pp. 72–77, did not view this liberating Spirit as a good thing, lamenting that being in Pentecostal meetings ‘where all crowded together around the altar, and laying across one another like hogs, blacks and whites mingling; this should be enough to bring a blush of shame to devils, let alone angels, and yet all this was charged to the Holy Spirit’.

Mission, where North American Pentecostalism finds its genesis, the triadic negotiation of Spirit, Word, and community resulted in a shared experience of liberation. This experience did not come only because of interpretation and proclamation of Scripture; liberation was foundational to the interpretive process, as I will demonstrate below.

2.5.2 THE THEOLOGICAL IMAGINATION EMPOWERED BY THE SPIRIT, SHAPED BY THE WORD, AND EXERCISED IN COMMUNITY

Thomas, Waddell, Archer, and Johnson have evidenced that a triadic methodology offers a fresh lens through which to read the Apocalypse. Imagination magnifies that lens, inviting the community pneumatically to discern what the Spirit is saying through the Word. Imagination beckons the community to do more than ‘hear what the Spirit says to the church,’ but participate, by the Spirit, with the Word (Rev. 22.12).¹³⁹ John J. Collins suggests that this drawing on the imagination is precisely the point of the Apocalyptic genre.¹⁴⁰ The invitation to imagine becomes vivid when one considers the witness motif in the Apocalypse. Bauckham suggests as much when he investigates the climactic witnesses of Rev. 11.3–13, suggesting that the witnesses here have an imaginative purpose for the church.¹⁴¹

Paul Avis insists that ‘[t]he language of the Bible is the language of the sanctified imagination’.¹⁴² He notes that the teachings of Jesus invoked ‘an act of imaginative insight on the part of the hearer to understand their meaning’.¹⁴³ Kevin J. Vanhoozer argues that the theological imagination ought to be reclaimed in our interpretation of Scripture.¹⁴⁴ These claims find

¹³⁹ It is worth noting that although the imagination may be rooted in pneumatic discernment, it is also socially situated. Thomas, ‘Reading the Bible’, p. 121, shares a story of an example of this, as he interacts with a student who was from a different community: ‘Although there were aspects of the story that did not seem to fit for me as well as they did for him, I was enraptured by his words and began to think more deeply about how the book sounds and what it means in parts of the world where people do not have the luxury of spending large amounts of time speculating about end-time events’.

¹⁴⁰ John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (2nd edn; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), p. 224. ‘The genre, in short, does not entail a consistent doctrine. Rather, it provides an imaginative view of the world, usually expressed in traditional symbols, within which there is room for a variety of theological doctrines’.

¹⁴¹ Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 169. ‘The story of the witnesses is to be read neither as simple prediction (history written in advance) nor as allegory (history or future history written in code symbols). Rather it is a story through which the churches are to perceive imaginatively, through the perspective granted them by the Spirit, their vocation and their destiny. Like 22:17, the story functions as a summons towards the eschatological future. It is not so much a story which predicts the future as a story which creates the future.’

¹⁴² Paul Avis, *God and the Creative Imagination: Metaphor, Symbol and Myth in Religion and Theology* (London/New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 45.

¹⁴³ Avis, *God and the Creative Imagination*, p. 46.

¹⁴⁴ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Pictures at a Theological Exhibition: Scenes of the Church’s Worship, Witness and Wisdom* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), pp. 10–11.

resonance in the Pentecostal community. Waddell asserts that ‘for Pentecostals, a spiritual reading is not a head trip nor solely a heart trip but rather an exercise in imagination that is grounded by the contextual realism of the spirituality’.¹⁴⁵ Additionally, Rickie D. Moore comments that in matters of biblical interpretation, ‘there is a vital place for emotion as well as reason, for imagination as well as logic, for mystery as well as certainty, and for that which is narrative and dramatic as well as that which is propositional and systematic’.¹⁴⁶

The activity of imagination, to which the Pentecostal hermeneut is drawn, is not of our own accord, lest God rebuke the erroneous actions and interpretations that follow (cf. Gen. 6.5; Ps. 73.7–8; Ez. 13.17; Jer. 23.16). It is a ‘pneumatic imagination’. Vondey argues that only such an imagination ‘leads the faithful in the process of sanctification toward the goal of being transformed into the image of Jesus. This process is not a mere performance of the script but is also an axiological, affective, and spiritual encounter with the living Christ.’¹⁴⁷ As an apocalyptic community, Pentecostal mission was fueled by imagination, as they ‘envisioned the last days as the unfolding of a cosmic drama of hope and judgment that constituted an irreversible break with the world and became the heartbeat of the Pentecostal self-understanding’.¹⁴⁸ Seymour’s exposition of the prophetic message of the Spirit to the church of Ephesus in Revelation 2 offers an example of what the methodology might look like when the triadic negotiation of Spirit, Word, and community is grounded in liberation and elevated by pneumatic imagination.

2.5.3 A MODEL OF A LIBERATED, IMAGINATIVE TRIADIC NEGOTIATION

In his exposition of the prophetic message to the church of Ephesus, Seymour invoked a sense of solidarity between the Pentecostal community that was his subscribed readership and the community of Scripture. At the onset, the reader is likely to appreciate Seymour’s imagination. His earnest desire for liberation becomes more vivid as his commentary unfolds. The readers are reminded that John ‘our beloved Apostle’ was on Patmos, suffering. John ‘had passed through awful trials and tribulations’, and while banished to Patmos, ‘Jesus Christ, the Son of the living

¹⁴⁵ Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation*, p. 111.

¹⁴⁶ Rickie D. Moore, ‘A Pentecostal Approach to Scripture’, in Martin, *Pentecostal Hermeneutics*, p. 12.

¹⁴⁷ Wolfgang Vondey, *Beyond Pentecostalism: The Crisis of Global Christianity and the Renewal of the Theological Agenda* (James K. A. Smith and Amos Yong [eds.]; Pentecostal Manifestos; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), p. 39.

¹⁴⁸ Vondey, *Beyond Pentecostalism*, p. 28. He further notes: ‘New members added to this imagination, bringing with them the likes and dislikes of their former religious backgrounds and forming a multifaceted narrative that was as much a reflection of the biblical texts as of their own experiences’.

God, our great Redeemer, came and gave him this wonderful revelation'. It is at this juncture that Seymour stops to remind his readers that 'Jesus knows all about our trials and tribulations', and reminds them of the suffering of Jesus, as recalled in Heb. 5.7–8.¹⁴⁹

Liberation and imagination should not be missed here. Owing to the adverse *Sitz im Leben* of the marginalized community, there are certain words communicated here that elevate the implications of the text when read through the lens of liberation. Seymour suggests that John's experience of oppression, suffering, and current state of confinement did not preclude him from a pneumatic experience, nor divine revelation. The triadic negotiation of Spirit, Word, and Community joined together with the apocalyptic nature of the text also bids Seymour to invoke the imagination of his readers. They are reminded of John's plight, inasmuch as it is not too far removed from theirs. Their pneumatic imagination is invited to behold a suffering Savior who was liberated (Heb. 5.9), who in turn extended that liberation to John. Though not a physical liberation, John was liberated in such a way that the boundaries of Patmos could not contain; John was invited to participate in faithful witness.

In Seymour's words, 'John was permitted to see from the beginning of the church age on down to the white throne judgment ... he had witnessed the glory and power of the apostolic church'. This pneumatic exercise of imagination, to which Seymour's readers would be drawn, would not be complete until they could envision themselves participating in this theo-drama unfolding in the Text. This invitation to participate is evident in Seymour's assertion that 'Christ is in His church today to fill men and women, to heal their bodies, save and sanctify their souls, and to put His finger upon every wrong and mean thing in the church'. He later comments on the seven stars – Jesus' 'Holy Ghost ministers', and notes as an aside that 'it is so sweet when we know that we have authority from Jesus'. Whether or not this statement is drawn from Seymour's experience with Parham is an argument from silence, but as the whole of the commentary is considered, Seymour does address wrong doctrine and racism – two issues which he encountered while studying under Parham.

For Seymour, the Spirit made it possible for the young Pentecostal community to join with the community encountered in Scripture. His exposition encouraged his readers to imagine themselves

¹⁴⁹ All Seymour quotes in this section are from the three-column exposition, W.J. Seymour, 'Christ's Messages to the Church', *AF:A* 1.2 (January, 1908), p. 3. While Seymour does not explicitly use words of liberation in this article, it is implied by his indictment against prejudice and partiality.

not as a community torn by sin and social compromise, contending that ‘the [first century] church at that time was as terrible as an army with banners. She conquered every power of evil’. He insisted that anything found amongst the Pentecostal community that conflicted with the teaching of the Word must be eradicated from the community:

When a church or mission finds that the power of God begins to leave, they should come as a whole and confess, and let all get down before God and repent and pray to God until the old time fire and power and love come back again. Many times the Holy Spirit will leave an assembly, mission, or church because the pastor grieves Him, and sometimes not only the pastor but the whole body commences backbiting, whispering, tattling, or prejudice and partiality creep in, until the whole body becomes corrupted and Jesus is just ready to spew them out of His mouth.

Spirit, Word, and community, grounded in liberation, yet simultaneously elevated by imagination; such an engagement with Scripture by an African American pastor undergirded the community that gave birth to the Pentecostal movement in North America. As Robeck reports, the Azusa Street Mission:

became one of the most racially inclusive, culturally diverse groups to gather in the city of Los Angeles at that time. It included people from all classes. It held the attention of the highly educated alongside the illiterate. It had something for new converts as well as for seasoned professionals in ministry. Even so, worship at the mission was undoubtedly heavily flavored by the dominantly African American character of its founding core membership.¹⁵⁰

2.6 CONCLUSION

If ever a book of the Canon welcomed a Pentecostal engagement, the Apocalypse does. Moreover, it welcomes and all but demands an *African American* Pentecostal engagement; particularly one situated in the twenty-first century.¹⁵¹ According to Richard Bauckham, it ‘is a work of immense learning, astonishingly meticulous literary artistry, remarkable creative imagination, radical political critique, and profound theology. Yet, among the major works of early Christianity included in the New Testament, it remains the Cinderella.’¹⁵² The proposed re-evaluated triadic negation, grounded in liberation and pneumatic imagination should serve as the

¹⁵⁰ Robeck, *The Azusa Street Mission and Revival*, p. 88.

¹⁵¹ Space has not allowed for an in-depth engagement, but one of the challenges of this work was finding African American, Pentecostal, post-grad level NT scholars. However, as has been briefly noted, the fact that African Americans and Pentecostals alike are occupying high-level academic spaces, I am honored to be named as an African American, Pentecostal, Apocalypse scholar. I am forever grateful for Dr. John Christopher Thomas, and his *spiritual community* of supervision, encouraging me to approach the *Word*, from my own context – a *liberated* African American with a vivid *theological imagination*.

¹⁵² Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, p. ix.

hermeneutical ‘glass slipper’ that further unveils the rich beauty of the Apocalypse. Such a methodology offers the hermeneut a framework whereby the commands, rebukes, consequences, and rewards, presented in the Apocalypse, can be most appreciated. Liberation and imagination are not foreign concepts in Pentecostalism, as has been shown. Michael Wilkinson and Steven M. Stuebaker note that just as much as liberation theologies turned their attention to the marginalized, the marginalized found respite in Pentecostalism.¹⁵³ Vondey states well the value of imagination in Pentecostal hermeneutics, that (by the Spirit) it is an improvisation with God, an improvisation of Scripture, and an improvisation in the Church.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ Michael Wilkinson and Steven M. Stuebaker, ‘Pentecostal Social Action: An Introduction’, in Michael Wilkinson, *et al.* (eds.), *A Liberating Spirit: Pentecostals and Social Action in North America*, (PPSJS 2; Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2010), p. 4.

¹⁵⁴ Vondey, *Beyond Pentecostalism*, p. 44, writes, ‘The imagination is therefore as much a theological improvisation (with God) as it is a biblical improvisation (of Scripture) and an ecclesial improvisation (in the church). It is paradigmatic for Christian theology, in general, and determinative of the ecumenical vision of the church’.

CHAPTER 3

HISTORY OF WITNESS IN THE EARLY PENTECOSTAL COMMUNITY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Faithful to the methodology of this thesis being a liberated and imaginative triadic negotiation of Spirit, Word, and community, it is to the early Pentecostal community that the current chapter gives focus. Here, I investigate how early Pentecostals understood witness in general, as well as how the Apocalypse informed the idea of witness in the early Pentecostal communities in North America. Unlike the first chapter, which concerned itself with modern scholarship and its interpretive engagement of the Apocalypse, this chapter is concerned with reception history (*Wirkungsgeschichte*), or the history of effect. This approach was made popular by Ulrich Luz, who adopted and revised the work of Hans George Gadamer.

Although Luz took *Wirkungsgeschichte* beyond what Gadamer had originally intended, like Gadamer, Luz was ‘convinced that past history, especially biblical history, is for us modern people a supporting and forming horizon into which we enter and not simply another subject about which we are concerned’.¹ *Wirkungsgeschichte* can be viewed as a type of reversed intertextuality, in that it ‘does not seek to identify how a given text is anchored in the past and in older texts, but how it has influenced its future and our past—how our world is connected by its “intertextuality” with the text that we are interpreting’.² As we continue to extrapolate this hermeneutical approach, it will become evident that *Wirkungsgeschichte* is helpful to biblical interpretation in general, but an African American, Pentecostal study of the Apocalypse in particular. As for an African American reading of Scripture, the orality and imagination discussed above, runs along a similar path as *Wirkungsgeschichte*, in matters of history being an intertextual connection to the text itself. Just as the Spirit draws John’s pneumatic imagination to OT narratives and theophanic scenes in the Apocalypse, so too does the Spirit beckon the pneumatic imagination of the African American

¹ Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1–7: A Commentary on Matthew 1–7* (Helmut Koester [ed.]; rev. edn; Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), pp. 61–62.

² Petr Pokorný, *Hermeneutics as a Theory of Understanding* (Anna Bryson–Gustová [trans]; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), p. 104.

hermeneut to draw from histories bound in oral tradition and the African American experience.³

This drawing carries intertextual possibilities, as Abiola Irele notes:

The literary component of [oral] tradition in particular, in both its expressive modes and with respect to its social significance, provides the formal and normative background for imaginative expression. In this primary sense, orality functions as the matrix of an African mode of discourse, and where literature is concerned, the griot [speaker or guardian of the word] is its embodiment in every sense of the word. Oral literature thus represents the basic intertext of the African imagination.⁴

Consider how Brian Blount's reading of the Apocalypse is informed by a (historical) imaginative look to the African American past:

In John's work of visionary prophecy, the Revelation of Jesus Christ, the language of witness commends civil disobedience in the form of active, nonviolent resistance. Because it conjures up images of the African–American–led Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, I use the term nonviolent resistance intentionally. Having read Revelation from the perspective of a contemporary African–American, I believe that there is a correspondence between John's counsel to witness and Martin Luther King, Jr.'s call to march. Both expected their followers to act. Both anticipated hostile reactions from the established powers. Both were certain that the perseverance of their followers would transform the world.⁵

The following section offers an exploration of how various scholars have employed *Wirkungsgeschichte* in their studies, beginning with NT studies in general, and will end with Pentecostal scholarship on the Apocalypse.

3.2 WIRKUNGSGESCHICHTE

3.2.1 ULRICH LUZ AND RECEPTION HISTORY IN NT STUDIES⁶

Luz's interest in reception history grew out of his critique of the historical–critical method. He contends that while it may offer the hermeneut a lens through which they can view the text in its

³ Although *Wirkungsgeschichte* concerns itself with history of the effects of a given text, I only mean to note here that the intertextuality of the imagination of the African American reader, drawing on history makes room for history of effects to be an organic approach to African American interpretive methodologies.

⁴ Abiola Irele, 'The African Imagination', *Research in African Literatures* 21.1 (1990), pp. 49–67 (58). Irele notes the six prominent functions of the griot, which sounds very descriptive of the African American preacher, but more – it sounds descriptive of the role of a prophet. The griot must be phatic, ludic, aesthetic, didactic, ideological, and symbolic.

⁵ Blount, 'Reading Revelation Today', p. 398.

⁶ Owing to the limited space of the current thesis, I have narrowed this survey to NT scholarship, but I do not suggest that *Wirkungsgeschichte* is *only* employed in NT studies. Reception history is also used in OT interpretation, as J.C. Thomas notes in his canonical overview of reception studies in Pentecostal scholarship. John Christopher Thomas, 'The Spirit, the Text, and Early Pentecostal Reception: The Emergence of a Discipline', in Daniel D. Isgrigg, Martin W. Mittelstadt, and Rick Wadholm, Jr. (eds.), *Receiving Scripture in the Pentecostal Tradition: A Reception History* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2021), pp. 49–92 (58–72).

original context, it does not invite them to appreciate the text experientially.⁷ Moreover, unlike the historical–critical method which situates the reader of Scripture into first century and earlier contexts, Luz suggests that reception history shows an appreciation for Scripture as an effectual text ‘that transcends a limited historical situation,’ since Scripture proclaims a God ‘who reveals again and again that “I am who I will be” (Exod. 3:14)’.⁸ Luz’s argument certainly resonates well with a 21CAAPH, especially as it relates to interpreting the Apocalypse – a prophetic revelation with great temporal ambiguity given to John, from God who exists, has existed before now, and will continue to exist both in and outside of time (Rev. 1.4, 8). The implications of this will be discussed further below.

According to Luz, readers, especially of Scripture, ‘are never autonomous subjects but owe themselves to the text they read’.⁹ Reception history is not interpretation in and of itself; rather, it illuminates the power of the text and consequences of interpretation, which helps the hermeneut recognize that interpretation ‘is not simply playing with words but an act with historical consequences’.¹⁰ Those consequences take many shapes and forms, across a variety of media types. *Wirkungsgeschichte* takes a critical look at ‘how the text is received and actualized in media other than commentaries—in verbal media such as sermons, canonical documents, and “literature,” as well as in nonverbal media such as art and music, and in the church’s activity and suffering, that is, in church history’.¹¹ In other words, interpretation begets ideas (sermons, songs, art, creeds, etc.), and ideas often beget policies, cultures, societies, and movements. Ignoring the significance of these consequences, and even their subsequent consequences, seems to dismiss a valuable aspect of interpretation of Scripture.¹²

⁷ Luz, *Matthew in History*, pp. 7–8. Luz argues that the intention of historical–critical exegesis is ‘to separate the texts from their present–day reader, to transpose them back into their own time, and to reconstruct their original meaning as intended by their authors or received by their original readers, respectively—in short, to reconstruct the original communication between the author and his first recipients’. Further, he notes that historical–critical exegesis ‘is preoccupied only with the past and cuts the texts off from their power’. p. 20.

⁸ Luz, *Matthew in History*, p. 19.

⁹ Ulrich Luz, *Studies in Matthew* (Rosemary Selle [trans]; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), p. 326.

¹⁰ Luz, *Matthew in History*, p. 33. See also p. 30, ‘The investigation of the history of influence of the texts can make a decisive contribution to the understanding of texts, even though it is a limited contribution and must be supplemented by other approaches, for example, sociological and psychological reflections’.

¹¹ Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, p. 61.

¹² Paula Gooder, *Searching for Meaning: An Introduction to Interpreting the New Testament* (London; Louisville, KY: SPCK; Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), p. 118. Gooder explains that:

The concern of reception history is not so much with what a passage means, or meant to its first author and readers, but what it has meant throughout history. Reception critics seek to remind readers that New Testament interpretation is around 2,000 years old and that, as a result, some ‘new’ interpretations are not as new as some

Luz employs *Wirkungsgeschichte* in his work on the Gospel of Matthew. One of the examples he offers of how reception history plays a role in interpretation is a look at the exegesis of Mt. 6.25–34, and how the problem of labor in that pericope is often overlooked.¹³ He traces the history of interpretation of the text, as well as its effect, concluding that such an investigation ‘shows how working became an essential part of Christian life, so that our predecessors could not see in the texts what they did not want to see. Indirectly [reception history] tells us who we are’.¹⁴

Another perspective of *Wirkungsgeschichte* is the fruit of interpretation. Luz offers the following example of this fruit in his discussion of Matthean studies:

For Matthew a word reveals its truth when it brings fruit in the life of the listeners. Those who say ‘Lord, Lord’ but bring forth no corresponding fruits (Mt. 7:21–23) are rejected. The study of the history of effects looks for the fruit of the texts in the course of history, thus posing a very Matthean question. Those who consider these fruits as a possible criterion of truth for a text of a new interpretation are thinking along Matthean lines.¹⁵

Luz’s contribution to hermeneutics has proven valuable in NT scholarship, especially for Pentecostals, but his work is not without critique. Emerson Powery notes, ‘Luz offers us a component not only for appreciating Scripture but also the interpretive tradition of Scripture by the [Pentecostal] community’.¹⁶ However, he offers minor objections to Luz’s method, first noting that, notwithstanding his critique of the historical–critical method, Luz still employs it in a seminal manner.¹⁷ For the basis of his argument, Powery comments on Luz’s exposition of Mt. 16.18–19, and its relation to Mt. 18.18; particularly, he is concerned with the historical reconstruction that Luz offers.¹⁸

While Luz’s treatment of the text may be narratively jarring to Powery, it is not inconsistent with his view of the historical–critical method; that it is simply insufficient, on its own, to provide a true *meaning* of Scripture for today’s reader.¹⁹ Another objection is to Luz’s use of love as a

may think. *Wirkungsgeschichte* also reminds us of the ways in which Christian culture has itself been shaped by the New Testament. The New Testament is not just received; it is an active agent in changing and shaping the world in which we live.

¹³ Luz, *Matthew in History*, p. 29.

¹⁴ Luz, *Matthew in History*, p. 29.

¹⁵ Luz, *Matthew in History*, p. 32.

¹⁶ Emerson B. Powery, ‘Ulrich Luz’s *Matthew in History*: A Contribution to Pentecostal Hermeneutics?’ *JPT* 14 (1999), pp. 3–17 (16).

¹⁷ Powery, ‘Ulrich Luz’s *Matthew in History*’, p. 12.

¹⁸ Powery, ‘Ulrich Luz’s *Matthew in History*’, pp. 12–13. Powery agrees with Luz’s special treatment of Peter in the Gospel of Matthew, but objects to the historical reconstruction of Mt. 18.18 to precede 16.18–19 narratively.

¹⁹ Luz, *Matthew in History*, pp. 85–88. Luz’s critique of the historical–critical method does not suggest that it has no value in interpretation; rather, that it is insufficient in and of itself. Because ‘historical events are contingent,

functional criterion for evaluating truth.²⁰ Powery views such a criterion as limiting. Since love is a work of the cross, as Luz sees it, Powery suggests that the cross can be too abstract for an applicable criterion in every hermeneutical situation. Luz does not suggest that his view is objective; rather, he leaves this criterion open for revision.²¹ Powery's critiques are but minor objections – he ultimately shows a high esteem for Luz's work in NT interpretation.

Powery praises the use of reception history in Lisa Bowens' *African American Readings of Paul*.²² Bowens, an African American Pauline scholar, considers *Wirkungsgeschichte* part and parcel of an African American Hermeneutic.²³ In her monograph on Pauline texts, she surveys African American poems, essays, letters, legal petitions and more that were both for and against slavery from the early eighteenth century and later. Pertinent to the current work, her research helps to illuminate the presence of liberation and imagination in African American negotiation of Scripture, as far back as the early eighteenth century, where she explains that Jupiter Hammon believed (imagined) that slaves could influence their enslavers by their good behavior, thus ultimately gaining liberation.²⁴ In her conclusion, she alludes that reception history allows African

ambiguous, accidental, and hypothetical from our perspective', (p. 86), Luz suggests (p. 88) that 'All our historical results are hypothetical and need verifications and corrections'. In his opinion (p. 85), historical criticism and history of effects are beneficial when employed together. A good example of how historical criticism can be recognized, yet not employed as a part of the hermeneutical methodology can be seen in Thomas' literary, theological commentary on the Apocalypse. Thomas reveals his awareness of the popular historical-critical work on the Apocalypse with his 'what would the hearers think ...' observations, yet it is with a literary/theological analysis that he engages the text. Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 110. An example is his exposition on the prophetic messages to the seven churches. Thomas offers a paragraph on what the hearers might have in mind, at Jesus' greeting, noting some of the historical points often commented on in historical-critical works. However, what is more prudent to his exposition is not what the hearers think, based on a historical re-creation of the *Sitz im Leben* of the hearers; rather by reading the text, 'they soon discover what Jesus thinks'. This pattern is carried out across the seven messages to the church.

²⁰ Powery, 'Ulrich Luz's *Matthew in History*', p. 13.

²¹ Luz, *Matthew in History*, p. 94. Luz notes, explicitly, that 'my formulation of the functional criterion also is open to dialogue and for revision'.

²² Lisa Bowens, *African American Readings of Paul: Reception, Resistance & Transformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2020). Powery employs this approach as well, as can be seen in the previous chapter and my short engagement with his work, *Genesis of Liberation*, which Bowens also engages in her monograph.

²³ Bowens' focus is Pauline hermeneutics, in particular; however, I would argue that the point she makes is not restricted to Pauline studies. Bowens, *African American Readings of Paul*, p. 6 suggests that 'to extend *Wirkungsgeschichte* of Paul to African American interpreters is a necessary development in light of the historical presence of the apostle in black thought and reflection. Due to Paul's towering presence in black writings, these compilations deserve substantial consideration and investigation.'

²⁴ Bowens, *African American Readings of Paul*, pp. 44–46. One can appreciate the interdependence of liberation and imagination. Hammon reads Scripture and *imagines* that by the African slave showing humility and obedience to their wicked slave masters could lead to their *liberation*. However, demonstrating such humility and obedience would require a liberation of sorts. The slaves would have control over their own faculties, allowing them to live by an ethical system other than that reflective of or responsive to that of their slave owners. This liberation affords them the ability to imagine more than mere liberation of faculties – the ability to decide their own ethics; but it affords them the ability to imagine a potential physical liberation at best, and an eschatological liberation at the very least. This inter-

American readers to situate (imagine) themselves at the center of interpretation, and, in the case of Paul, would lead one to a liberated view of Scripture, noting:

What does the idea of Paul as a figure of liberation and equality mean for biblical interpretation? Such a trajectory raises awareness of Scripture, including Pauline Scripture, as a resource for justice, equality, and liberation. It also underscores the possibility of liberative readings of what may seem like difficult figures in the text or difficult texts themselves.²⁵

J.C. Thomas and Kimberly Alexander employ *Wirkungsgeschichte* in their examination of Mk. 16.9–20, surveying early Pentecostal periodicals and finding that “‘signs following’ language emerges from each of the periodicals as one of the dominant beliefs and practices’ (cf. Mk 16.20).²⁶ In their inductive study of these primary sources, they found that early Pentecostals held Mk 16.9–20 in high regard. Notwithstanding the textual issues surrounding the passage,²⁷ Thomas and Alexander found that the commission therein was favored by early Pentecostals, over Mt. 28.20 and Acts 1.8.²⁸ Significant to their research is the discovery that ‘early Pentecostals were neither unaware of the textual problems associated with Mk 16.9–20 nor unprepared to respond to these problems’.²⁹

It was Alexander’s PhD work on a Pentecostal theology of healing that helped to excite Thomas to a re-examination of the text in Mark. Her work, later published in 2008,³⁰ traced healing beliefs and practices of the nineteenth century Wesleyan–Holiness Movement, and of early twentieth century Pentecostals across two streams, the Wesleyan–Holiness stream³¹ and the Finished Work stream.³² By investigating these two streams, Alexander recognized that ‘there was

dependence or inter-play of imagination and liberation is seen in other early African American works as well, as can be seen throughout Bowens’ work.

²⁵ Bowens, *African American Readings of Paul*, pp. 533–34.

²⁶ John Christopher Thomas and Kimberly Ervin Alexander, “‘And the Signs Are Following’”: Mark 16.9–20 – A Journey into Pentecostal Hermeneutics’, *JPT* 11.2 (2003), pp. 147–70 (150).

²⁷ Thomas addressed the textual complications in an earlier published article, offering five reasons to suggest that Mk. 16.9–20 is a later addition to the Gospel author’s original. Cf. John Christopher Thomas, ‘A Reconsideration of the Ending of Mark’, *JETS* 26.4 (1983), pp. 405–19 (418).

²⁸ Thomas and Alexander, ‘And the Signs Are Following’, p. 150.

²⁹ Thomas and Alexander, ‘And the Signs Are Following’, p. 157.

³⁰ Kimberly Ervin Alexander, *Pentecostal Healing: Models in Theology and Practice* (JPTSup 29; Blandford Forum, Dorset DT11 1AQ, UK: Deo Publishing, 2008).

³¹ As J. Kenneth Grider explains, Bedrock to the Wesleyan–Holiness tradition is their ‘second work of grace’ view of sanctification. J. Kenneth Grider, *A Wesleyan–Holiness Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1994), chapter 15, Kindle. ‘This second work of grace is obtained by faith, is subsequent to regeneration, is occasioned by the baptism with the Holy Spirit, and constitutes a cleansing away of Adamic depravity and an empowerment for witnessing and for the holy life’.

³² The Finished Work doctrine emerged in 1910, from a sermon preached by William Durham at a Chicago Pentecostal Convention. Vinson Synan, *The Holiness–Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century* (2nd edn; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997),

not a monolithic healing theology which guided the Pentecostal movement, especially after 1910 and the introduction of Finished Work soteriology'.³³ Her discoveries led her to conclude that the soteriological differences between the two streams had an impact on the understanding of divine healing, and understanding that resulted in two different theologies of divine healing.³⁴

Martin W. Mittelstadt proposes that reception history invites the hermeneut to 'revisit the Scriptures interpreted and experienced by both the giants of the Christian story and less celebrated, often forgotten interpreters. Both the well-known and the lesser-known readings contribute collectively to our identities and development'.³⁵ He concludes that by investigating resources beyond scholarly theological materials such as commentaries, hermeneuts who employ reception history allow readers of their produced work(s) to hear what Scripture has been saying, and better reflect upon what it has meant.³⁶

3.2.2 HISTORY OF EFFECT AND THE APOCALYPSE

Apocalypse scholars have found reception history very beneficial. In his commentary on the Apocalypse, Craig Koester observes that '[m]ainline Christians might not read Revelation, but they sing it all the time. Revelation has inspired songs and hymns that range from traditional compositions to contemporary praise choruses; and words from Revelation are woven into many liturgies'.³⁷ In the introduction, he addresses the point that interpretations of the Apocalypse have had a variety of influences on history – influences that range from intriguing to disturbing.³⁸

p. 150. 'Durham called for a new view which assigned sanctification to the moment of conversion based on "the finished work of Christ on Calvary." Denying Wesley's concept of a "residue of sin" in the believer, he taught that one was perfectly sanctified at conversion and had no need of a later crisis, or "second change." After conversion, a Christian would progressively grow in grace.'

³³ Alexander, *Pentecostal Healing*, p. 6.

³⁴ Alexander, *Pentecostal Healing*, p. 150. Alexander concludes:

The most significant contribution of this thesis has been the discovery that the 1910 division over sanctification as a second definite work of grace and the introduction of Finished Work soteriology into Pentecostalism produced an understanding of the provision of healing quite different from the way healing had been and continued to be perceived in Wesleyan-Pentecostal soteriology. Differences in understanding of faith, the role of the Holy Spirit and even the meaning of signs may be attributed to this paradigm shift.

³⁵ Martin W. Mittelstadt, 'Receiving Luke-Acts', *Pneuma* 40.3 (2018), pp. 367-88 (368).

³⁶ Mittelstadt, 'Receiving Luke-Acts', p. 385.

³⁷ Craig R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), p. 33. Further, he notes that '[w]orshippers often become acquainted with images from Revelation more through music than through reading the text'.

³⁸ Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, p. 1.

Koester believes that readers can more faithfully interpret the text, having considered how their own interpretation(s) may influence history.³⁹

Judith Kovacs and Christopher Rowland co–author a commentary on the Apocalypse that is primarily concerned with its reception history.⁴⁰ In the introduction, they report how the terrorist attack on America’s World Trade Towers in New York on 11 September, 2001 was covered by media with the Apocalypse in view, as it is viewed by many as a book that ‘is about cataclysm, death and destruction’.⁴¹ To that point, they include in their preface that ‘[i]n a modern theological culture that both fears and eschews apocalyptic thinking, it may come as a surprise to find how influential, directly or indirectly, the Apocalypse has been on Western art, literature and theology’.⁴² They offer a helpful conclusion as to why history of effect is so beneficial to studies in the Apocalypse:

One thing that becomes clear from a survey of the history of the reception of the Apocalypse is that it is not so easy to pin down one original meaning of the text and then use that to evaluate the later interpretations, for the exegesis of such an allusive text is always going to resist the desire for an authoritative interpretation. Ultimately, the question of how to adjudicate among varying readings belongs to the interpretative community.⁴³

Natasha O’Hear gives attention to the reception history of the Apocalypse, focusing exclusively on the arts.⁴⁴ Owing to the visual nature of the Apocalypse, and its repeated ‘like’ phrases (i.e. Rev. 1.13–17; 2.18; 3.3, 4.3; and others) which invite a symbolic reading of the text, O’Hear suggests that ‘[n]eglecting the contribution made by visual interpretations of the Book of

³⁹ Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, pp. 1–2. See also Craig R. Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (ABY 38A; New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2014), p. 29:

Revelation has engaged the imaginations of biblical interpreters and musicians, theologians and artists. Its vision of New Jerusalem has been celebrated in songs of hope, while its portrayal of a seven–headed beast has fueled speculation about the Antichrist. Its promise of a millennial kingdom has inspired reform movements dedicated to a new age of peace on earth, and yet its depictions of fire falling from the sky has awakened fears about the imminent end of the world. An overview of ways Revelation has been interpreted provides an opportunity for us to think about the questions others have asked and the assumptions that informed their reading of the book.

⁴⁰ Judith Kovacs and Christopher Rowland, *Revelation: The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), p. 12.

⁴¹ Kovacs and Rowland, *Revelation*, p. 1.

⁴² Kovacs and Rowland, *Revelation*, p. 2.

⁴³ Kovacs and Rowland, *Revelation*, p. 248.

⁴⁴ Natasha O’Hear, *Contrasting Images of the Book of Revelation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). The aim of this work is not to address a textual concern as Thomas and Alexander have with Mk. 16.9–20, nor to elevate a theological topic as Alexander did with divine healing. Rather, O’Hear expresses (p. 200) her hopes that the work would ultimately ‘lead to an appreciation of an important strand of visual exegesis whereby images function as ways of expressing the subject-matter of the text and possibly, in the process, as offering a critique of elements of the text’.

Revelation to its reception history, a growing field within biblical studies, is to deny a key part of the data available to us'.⁴⁵ She begins her study with the late 13th century, tracing Apocalypse inspired art across five media types: 'illuminated manuscript, tapestry, altarpiece, painting, and woodcut'.⁴⁶ In this work, O'Hear avoids the investigation of 'popular' visualizations, such as the stained glass windows of cathedrals, and instead explores pieces that are more exegetical in nature.⁴⁷ Through an examination of visual interpretations of the Apocalypse, different hermeneutical strategies emerge for the same texts.⁴⁸

Ian Boxall credited Kovacs and Rowland's work in his monograph, *Patmos in the Reception History of the Apocalypse*.⁴⁹ He surveys the reception of Rev. 1.9, offering 'a chronological–genealogical catalogue of the actual treatment of Patmos in Revelation's wider reception history, including its visual reception, from the 2nd century through to the 21st'.⁵⁰ He argues for a consideration of reception history, as he finds the historical–critical method limiting, 'with the exegesis often getting side–tracked into background issues of geography and authorial identity rather than consideration of what Patmos might mean, and discouraging reader participation in favour of "detached" historical reconstruction'.⁵¹ In his concluding chapter, Boxall offers three benefits of reception history, noting that it:

[1] has opened up a wider variety of interpretative possibilities than a strictly historical–critical approach alone (or indeed, a purely narrative–critical approach) would yield; [2] has introduced real audiences, not just hypothetically reconstructed 'original' or 'implied' ones, providing some benchmark against which the latter reconstructions might be judged; [3] has served as a salutary reminder of the extent to which all readings of texts are historically conditioned, as all interpreters are affected by the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of which they are part.⁵²

⁴⁵ O'Hear, *Contrasting Images*, p. 1.

⁴⁶ O'Hear, *Contrasting Images*, p. 4.

⁴⁷ O'Hear, *Contrasting Images*, pp. 4–5. She does not leave the popular media unexplored altogether. Natasha O'Hear and Anthony O'Hear, *Picturing the Apocalypse: The Book of Revelation in the Arts Over Two Millennia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). In this later monograph co-authored by Anthony O'Hear, Natasha O'Hear engages more than visual arts, but rather offers 'a carefully compiled survey of some of the many literary, artistic, musical, and, more recently, popular responses, provoked over the last two millennia by this complex work, which is in itself inspired and maddening in almost equal measure' (p. 2). They note (p. 29) that 'large numbers of artists, composers, writers, and, more recently, film-makers and journalists have found the text of Revelation to be an endlessly rich and fascinating source of imagery on which to draw for artistic inspiration and for polemical force'.

⁴⁸ O'Hear, *Contrasting Images*, p. 3.

⁴⁹ Ian Boxall, *Patmos in the Reception History of the Apocalypse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁵⁰ Boxall, *Patmos*, p. 27.

⁵¹ Boxall, *Patmos*, p. 2.

⁵² Boxall, *Patmos*, pp. 210–11.

3.2.3 HISTORY OF EFFECT AND THE APOCALYPSE IN PENTECOSTAL SCHOLARSHIP

It was in his 1998 Presidential address at the Society of Pentecostal Studies where J.C. Thomas gave a public call to Pentecostal scholars to engage reception history in their studies.⁵³ Arguing for discernment as requisite to reception history, Thomas likened its use to that of the testimony in Pentecostal worship services.⁵⁴ In his literary commentary on the Apocalypse, Thomas goes beyond the expected prolegomena material one would expect, and gives considerable attention to the various streams of influence of the Apocalypse, including other apocalyptic literature, arts, music, poetry, film, and commentaries.⁵⁵ He notes that the effects ‘reveal something of the document’s power, but they also suggest that attention paid to specific responses will enrich one’s own grappling with this remarkable text’.⁵⁶

Other Pentecostal Apocalypse scholars followed Thomas, employing reception history in their work. According to M. Archer, by looking at the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the text, the interpreter is freed ‘from the almost impossible task of seeking to approach the text from a purely distant and neutral stance’.⁵⁷ She concludes that reception history is a good approach for NT studies in general, but certainly helpful for Pentecostals in particular, in that:

the early literature of Pentecostalism holds much promise for connecting the movement with its historical and theological roots and enabling contemporary Pentecostals to be in ‘experiential continuity’ with early Pentecostalism as they hear the testimonies of their spiritual ancestors.⁵⁸

By surveying the reception histories of various early Pentecostal communities, particularly groups within the Wesleyan–Holiness tradition and those within the Finished Work tradition, Archer was

⁵³ J.C. Thomas, ‘Pentecostal Theology in the Twenty–First Century’, *Pneuma* 20 (1998), pp. 3–19 (16).

⁵⁴ Thomas, ‘Pentecostal Theology’, p. 16. No study on the use of reception history by Pentecostal scholars is more comprehensive than Thomas’ 2019 Society of Pentecostal Studies plenary lecture. In this lecture, later published in 2021, Thomas, ‘The Spirit, the Text, and Early Pentecostal Reception: The Emergence of a Discipline’, pp. 49–92. As Thomas shares (p. 56), despite his call for a Pentecostal employment of *Wirkungsgeschichte* in 1998, ‘[i]t would not be until October 2002 that the first self–consciously intentional *Wirkungsgeschichte* treatment by a Pentecostal would appear’.

⁵⁵ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 51–86.

⁵⁶ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 51.

⁵⁷ Archer, ‘*I Was in the Spirit*’, p. 55. In stating such, Archer is not suggesting that interpretation is an act of unbridled subjectivity, rather that *Wirkungsgeschichte* can help to discover misinterpretations in church history.

⁵⁸ Archer, ‘*I Was in the Spirit*’, p. 60. Archer adopts this term, ‘experiential continuity’, from Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, p. 221.

able to observe doctrinal differences between the communities, while recognizing consistency in some areas as it pertains to spirituality and worship in the Apocalypse.⁵⁹

David Johnson uses *Wirkungsgeschichte* to survey the diversity of, and dispensational influence on, interpretations of early Pentecostals, as it related to bestial texts (Revelation 13).⁶⁰ In his *JPT* article, Johnson looks at contributions to periodicals across the two streams, as did Archer. In his investigation, he did not find early Pentecostals to be a monolithic group, but that:

the two major streams of the early Pentecostal movement comprised a scaling interpretative continuum of dispensationally conditioned reading of Revelation when dealing with the bestial texts. There was a tendency in the Wesleyan–Holiness stream to include non–dispensational and dispensational interpretations alike while the Finished–Work stream exhibited a stronger influence of Dispensationalism.⁶¹

Further, he noticed that the Wesleyan–Holiness stream was more apt to contextualize their interpretations than the Finished–Work stream. For Johnson, *Wirkungsgeschichte* not only helps in interpretation as a practice, but identity formation as a practitioner.⁶²

In his monograph, *Pneumatic Discernment*, Johnson also uses *Wirkungsgeschichte* as ‘a method to hear and be (in)formed by the voices of the early Pentecostal literature by surveying their testimonies concerning the pneumatology of the Apocalypse and pneumatic discernment’.⁶³ He concludes that ‘the Spirit works through tradition to form a community, while participating in the process to discern these testimonies’.⁶⁴ Like Archer, Johnson reviewed the early periodicals around the first decade of Pentecostalism, considering the devotionals, testimonies, songs, etc. He too discovered differences in effect, but also noted that Pentecostals in both the Wesleyan–Holiness and Finished Work traditions ‘on numerous occasions commented on the Spirit as being actively involved in discernment, interpretation, and decision making’.⁶⁵ Further, Johnson contends that the discerning aspect of interpretation all but demands employment of

⁵⁹ Archer, ‘*I Was in the Spirit*’, p. 117. Archer notes that ‘early Pentecostal literature (1906 – 1916) reveals that the liturgy of the Apocalypse played a significant role in Pentecostal worship for both Wesleyan–Holiness and Finished Work streams of the tradition’. One of the theological differences that Archer notices (pp. 117–18) is that while contributions to the Finished Work stream periodicals gave evidence of dispensationalism in general, when it came to worship, the dispensational influence was not as present in the worship descriptions.

⁶⁰ David R. Johnson, ‘The Mark of the Beast, Reception History, and Early Pentecostal Literature’, *JPT* 25.2 (2016), pp. 184–202.

⁶¹ Johnson, ‘The Mark of the Beast’, p. 202.

⁶² Johnson, ‘The Mark of the Beast’, p. 202.

⁶³ Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, pp. 26–27.

⁶⁴ Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, p. 31.

⁶⁵ Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, p. 191.

Wirkungsgeschichte, suggesting, ‘If Pentecostals are to have an ear to hear, they have a responsibility to hear the voice of the Spirit in other traditions’.⁶⁶

This short-list of scholars is certainly not exhaustive, but it should give sufficient evidence of how *Wirkungsgeschichte* has impacted studies in the Apocalypse, particularly twenty-first century scholarship. It also helps to show its emerging popularity in Pentecostal studies. It is important to note that in surveying the history of effects, none of these scholars argue that all the interpretations which resulted in such effects are without error. They follow Luz, who suggests that ‘the study of the history of influence is important in showing how our texts were interpreted, misinterpreted, or neglected by specific interpreters or communities. It thereby reveals our confessional or cultural bias in the process of interpretation’.⁶⁷ Their investigation of the history of effects, in conjunction with varying interpretive methodologies, shows that *Wirkungsgeschichte* does not replace interpretation; it looks beyond interpretation and sees the results.

3.2.4 HISTORY OF EFFECT AND THE CURRENT WORK

A 21CAAP methodology welcomes *Wirkungsgeschichte*, not only as a functional aspect of my methodology, but a necessary one. Before surveying early Pentecostalism, I will highlight a few key points that make *Wirkungsgeschichte* a necessary approach in exploration of a faithful witness motif from a 21CAAP perspective. As it pertains to the twenty-first century, I have noted, in the previous section, scholars who have contributed to studies in the Apocalypse in the twenty-first century, who have employed reception history in their work.⁶⁸

Luz posits that ‘the study of effective history requires us to accept our own particularity, not trying to interpret biblical texts neutrally but as who we are, be it Protestants or Catholics, South Americans or Europeans’.⁶⁹ To this end, as a Pentecostal interpreter of Scripture, the use of *Wirkungsgeschichte* serves as an aid to bring awareness to how my tradition may have impact on my own interpretation, as well as how my interpretation might affect the greater Pentecostal community. Witness, as an identity, a theological concept, and a Spirit empowered mission was

⁶⁶ Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, p. 32.

⁶⁷ Luz, *Matthew in History*, p. 28. See also Richard L. Schultz, ‘Intertextuality, Canon, and “Undecidability”’: Understanding Isaiah’s “New Heavens and New Earth” (Isaiah 65:17–25)’, *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 20.1–4 (2010), p. 37. ‘In giving more attention to the interpretation and *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the text, one should not focus simply on those interpreters who, in our opinion, “got it right”’.

⁶⁸ The fact that all the scholars are not Pentecostal strengthens the point that *Wirkungsgeschichte* is an approach that is finding resonance with twenty-first century NT scholars in general.

⁶⁹ Luz, *Studies in Matthew*, p. 326.

intrinsic to early Pentecostals, but as modern scholarship reports, it seems that their theological understanding and mandate for witness was based mainly on a Lukan narrative.⁷⁰ What *Wirkungsgeschichte* offers to the current work is an opportunity to give voice to the Apocalypse in early Pentecostal witness dialogue.

As *Wirkungsgeschichte* investigates the realized potential of interpretation of the text, the approach inherently includes both liberation and imagination. This point is alluded to by Powery and Bowens, as can be seen in the previous engagement of their works.⁷¹ According to Luz, ‘the given meaning of a text and its potential of freedom are essential for understanding its significance today’.⁷² Additionally, he notes that ‘the history of influence has an important ecumenical function: it opens the eyes for new potentials of the texts. It shows not only what we have become through the texts out also what we could have been and what we could become’.⁷³ This ‘potential of freedom’ and ‘what could be’ is inviting to the theological imagination; much more, it welcomes a liberated reading of the text – one not restrained by forced or foreign methodologies.

⁷⁰ Archer, *The Gospel Revisited*, p. 45, notes:

The early Pentecostal understanding of Spirit baptism as an experience subsequent to regeneration and evidenced in other tongues was based upon their exegetical reading of the Lukan narrative—in particular Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8; 2:4, 38; 10:46; and 19:6. Spirit baptism was understood to be a normal experience of salvation for those living in the last days of the latter rain. Spirit baptism was a prophetic fulfillment of an ancient promise made to God’s people that God would pour out the Spirit upon all flesh. The Spirit empowered the community for witness and enabled the community to enter into deeper expressions of worship.

Frank D. Macchia, ‘Baptized in the Spirit: Towards a Global Pentecostal Theology’, in Steven M. Studebaker (ed.), *Defining Issues in Pentecostalism: Classical and Emergent 1* (McMaster Divinity College Press Theological Studies Series; Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2008), p. 15:

Most early Pentecostals ended up turning to John the Baptist’s prediction that Jesus would “baptize in the Spirit” (Matt 3:17), and to the fulfillment of this experience among the earliest followers of Jesus in Acts 1:8 and 2:4–5, to argue that Spirit baptism was not formally sanctification but rather a “charismatic” experience that empowers Christians for witness (e.g., Acts 1:8), especially in greater openness to extraordinary gifts (*charismata*) of the Spirit, such as speaking in tongues, prophecy, and divine healing. Spirit baptism was power for witness given to the sanctified life.

Joseph E. Campbell, *The Pentecostal Holiness Church 1898–1948: Its Background and History* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016), p. 180:

In this same connection Jesus says to His disciples, “Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto me.” [Acts 1.8] The question might well be asked, Had not these disciples received power? Could they not preach, cast out devils, and heal the sick? But here was an additional power which meant ye shall be martyrs, ye shall witness unto death, ye shall have the power of boldness to witness in spite of impending danger. Peter had denied his Lord a few weeks before Pentecost, but after Pentecost he was empowered to witness to the same group which has crucified the Lord.

⁷¹ These scholars elevate the voices of slaves, preachers, and black historical figures to levels of theological equality with historical scholars such as Luther and Calvin, thereby offering great examples of a liberating view of Scripture, as well as the subsequent imagination one can employ when there is freedom in interpretation.

⁷² Luz, *Matthew in History*, p. 22.

⁷³ Luz, *Matthew in History*, p. 31.

As Luz suggests in his work in the Gospel of Matthew, ‘one must make choices in the history of a text’s influence’.⁷⁴ These choices include which pericopes inspire those effects and which parts of a nearly infinite selection of non-commentary media we feel most necessary to engage. The sections to follow will offer a general overview of witness in the early Pentecostal community, followed by a canonical survey of early Pentecostal materials, focusing on instances where the early Pentecostal community connects witness to the Apocalypse explicitly, or implicitly without direct reference to other passages outside of the Apocalypse.⁷⁵ Following Archer and Johnson, I have made the choice to narrow my exploration to the first decade of the emergence of Pentecostalism in North America (1906–1915),⁷⁶ with the addition of five years (1916–1920) to account for the Great War (World War I) and the Flu pandemic.⁷⁷ This engagement will be traced across the Wesleyan–Holiness and the Finished Works streams of Pentecostalism.

3.3 WITNESS AMONG WESLEYAN–HOLINESS PENTECOSTALS⁷⁸

3.3.1 WITNESS OUTSIDE OF THE APOCALYPSE

Numerous occasions of witness can be found in early Wesleyan–Holiness Pentecostal periodicals; the majority being outside of the Apocalypse. It is not surprising that many of the mentions have

⁷⁴ Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, p. 62.

⁷⁵ Exceptions may be taken when an Apocalypse allusion is clearly apparent regardless of the cited passage.

⁷⁶ Walter J. Hollenweger, ‘Pentecostals and the Charismatic Movement’, in C. Jones, G. Wainwright, and E. Yarnold (eds.), *The Study of Spirituality* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 550–51. Hollenweger writes that ‘[h]ow one characterizes Pentecostal spirituality depends on whether one considers the first five to ten years of its history as an expression of a not yet fully developed infant spirituality or as the heart of Pentecostal spirituality’. The five-part criteria which he presents follows:

1. an emphasis on the oral aspect of liturgy;
2. theology and witness cast in narrative form;
3. maximum participation at the levels of reflection, prayer and decision-making, and therefore a form of community which is reconciling;
4. inclusion of dream and vision into personal and public forms of spirituality, so that the dreams function as kinds of icons of the individual and collective;
5. an understanding of the body/mind relationship which is informed by experiences of correspondence between body and mind.

These five elements which were descriptive of Pentecostal spirituality in the first decade are still present in Pentecostalism today.

⁷⁷ Archer engages the first ten years in her reception history. Johnson extends his engagement to account for World War I. Considering my research began in 2019, several months before the Covid-19 global pandemic that began in 2020, the Flu pandemic presents a relevant era to consult. My aim is to see if any significant (if any at all) change occurs in the engagement of the Apocalypse as it relates to the theme of witness amid these events. I included one-year, post-flu (1920), to account for any significant post-pandemic impact.

⁷⁸ The periodicals surveyed here are *The Apostolic Faith* (Azusa); *The Apostolic Faith* (Parham); *The Bridegroom’s Messenger*; *Church of God Evangel*; *Pentecostal Holiness Advocate*; and *Apostolic Evangel*. Owing to the similarities in these various periodicals, as it pertains to witness outside of the Apocalypse, I have combined the

a Spirit focus, referencing the book of Acts,⁷⁹ as this is where the promise of becoming witnesses (Acts 1.8) and the event of Pentecost, which empowered witness (2.1–4) are found, as well as instances where the Apostles bear witness – even in threat of persecution (5.32). Other articles concern the inner witness of the Spirit, in matters of justification and sanctification (quoting or alluding to Rom. 8.16; 1 Jn. 5.10; Heb. 2.4; 10.15).⁸⁰ These occasions include reports from

periodicals in this section by witness topic, instead of listing the periodicals individually. Combining these periodicals helps to avoid repetition.

⁷⁹ *AF:A* 1.1 (September 1906), p. 2; *AF:A* 1.2 (October 1906), p. 4; *AF:A* 1.4 (December 1906), p. 2; *AF:A* 1.6 (February – March 1907), pp. 2, 3; *AF:A* 1.7 (April 1907), p. 3; *AF:A* 1.9 (June – September 1907), p. 3; *AF:A* 1.10 (September 1907), p. 3; *AF:A* 1.11 (January 1908), pp. 3, 4; *AF:A* 1.13 (May 1908), pp. 3, 4. *AF:P* 1.9 (May 1906), pp. 10, 14–15; *AF:P* 1.7 (September 1912), p. 6; *AF:P* 3.2 (February 1914), p. 8; *AF:P* 3.6 (September 1914), pp. 8–9. Many instances in *The Bridegroom's Messenger* focused on testifying in Acts: *TBM* 1.3 (December 1907), p. 3; *TBM* 1.7 (February 1908), p. 3; *TBM* 2.32 (February 1909), p. 3; *TBM* 2.37 (May 1909), p. 3; *TBM* 2.40 (June 1909), p. 3, 4; *TBM* 3.68 (August 1910), p. 4; *TBM* 3.69 (September 1910), p. 2; *TBM* 3.71 (October 1910), p. 2; *TBM* 4.92 (August 1911), p. 2; *TBM* 5.107 (April 1912), p. 3; *TBM* 5.114 (July 1912), p. 1; *TBM* 5.121 (November 1912), p. 3; *TBM* 6.126 (February 1913), p. 1; *TBM* 6.134 (June 1913), p. 3; *TBM* 6.136 (July 1913), p. 2; *TBM* 7.152 (March 1914), p. 3; *TBM* 8.164 (November 1914), p. 4; *TBM* 8.167 (February 1915), p. 4; *TBM* 10.191 (February 1917), p. 4; *TBM* 13.222 (April – May 1920), p. 4. It is also noteworthy that every issue of *TBM* from December 1907 through November 1908 had a section for testimonies, which used Acts 5.32 as its header, and December 1908 through April 1915 used Acts 1.8 as the header. It is not stated why these witness headers were ultimately removed, though testimonies continued. Other instances focused on glossolalia in Acts: *TBM* 1.2 (November 1907), p. 3; *TBM* 1.7 (February 1908), p. 2; *TBM* 1.8 (January 1908), p. 1; *TBM* 1.15 (June 1908), p. 3; *TBM* 1.16 (June 1908), p. 1; *TBM* 1.17 (July 1908), p. 3; *TBM* 1.18 (July 1908), p. 4; *TBM* 2.25 (November 1908), p. 3; *TBM* 2.35 (April 1909), p. 4; *TBM* 2.36 (April 1909), p. 1; *TBM* 2.37 (May 1909), p. 3; *TBM* 2.43 (August 1909), p. 3, 4; *TBM* 3.53 (January 1910), p. 2; *TBM* 3.56 (February 1910), p. 4; *TBM* 3.71 (October 1910), p. 4; *TBM* 4.72 (October 1910), p. 1; *TBM* 4.77 (January 1911), p. 4; *TBM* 4.92 (August 1911), p. 1, 2; *TBM* 7.143 (November 1913), p. 3, 4; *TBM* 7.160 (August 1914), p. 3; *TBM* 7.161 (September 1914), p. 3; *TBM* 7.162 (September 1914), p. 2; *TBM* 8.164 (November 1914), p. 4; *TBM* 8.167 (February 1915), p. 4; *TBM* 12.212 (April 1919), p. 1. *COGE* 1.5 (May 1910), p. 5; *COGE* 1.6 (May 1910), p. 3; *COGE* 5.3 (January 1914), p. 6; *COGE* 5.23 (June 1914), p. 5; *COGE* 6.9 (February 1915), p. 1; *COGE* 6.46 (November 1915), p. 1; *COGE* 7.48 (November 1916), p. 1; *COGE* 8.11 (March 1917), p. 4; *COGE* 9.32 (August 1918), p. 4; *COGE* 9.43 (October 1918), p. 2; *COGE* 9.44 (November 1918), p. 3; *COGE* 11.47 (November 1920), pp. 2, 4. *PHA* 1.7 (June 1917), p. 3; *PHA* 1.13 (July 1917), p. 5; *PHA* 1.28 (November 1917), p. 6; *PHA* 1.39 (January 1918), p. 4; *PHA* 1.40 (January 1918), p. 6; *PHA* 1.44 (February 1918), p. 6; *PHA* 2.7 (June 1918), p. 3; *PHA* 2.10 (July 1918), p. 7; *PHA* 2.15 (August 1918), p. 6; *PHA* 2.18 (August 1918), p. 16; *PHA* 2.43 (February 1919), p. 4; *PHA* 2.44, 45 (March 1919), p. 7; *PHA* 3.7, 8 (June 1919), p. 4; *PHA* 3.14 (July 1919), p. 2; *PHA* 3.15 (August 1919), p. 2; *PHA* 3.29 (November 1919), p. 16; *PHA* 3.40 (January 1920), p. 2; *PHA* 3.47 (March 1920), p. 3; *PHA* 4.9 (July 1920), p. 13; *PHA* 4.25 (October 1920), p. 4; *PHA* 4.32 (December 1920), p. 4. *AE* 1.7 (May 1909), p. 6; *AE* 1.8 (June 1909), p. 6; *AE* 1.13 (August 1909), p. 5; *AE* 3.24 (February 1912), pp. 6, 8; *AE* 8.29 (September 1916), p. 6; *AE* 9.17 (November 1917), p. 8.

⁸⁰ *AF:A* 1.1 (September 1906), p. 3; *AF:A* 1.3 (November 1906), p. 1; *AF:A* 1.4 (December 1906), pp. 3, 4; *AF:A* 1.6 (February – March 1907), pp. 2, 7; *AF:A* 1.7 (April 1907), p. 4; *AF:A* 1.8 (May 1907), p. 4; *AF:A* 1.9 (June – September 1907), p. 2; *AF:A* 1.10 (September 1907), p. 2; *AF:A* 1.11 (January 1908), p. 4; *AF:A* 1.13 (May 1908), p. 2. *AF:P* (December 1910), p. 3; *AF:P* 1.4 (June 1912), p. 2; *AF:P* 1.6 (August 1912), p. 8; *AF:P* 3.3 (April 1914), p. 5; *AF:P* 3.6 (September 1914), pp. 12–14; *AF:P* 3.7 (October 1914), pp. 5, 7, 15. *TBM* 1.5 (January 1908), p. 4; *TBM* 1.6 (January 1908), p. 2; *TBM* 1.8 (January 1908), p. 3; *TBM* 2.29 (January 1909), p. 2. *TBM* 1.6 (January 1908), p. 2; *TBM* 2.29 (January 1909), p. 2; *TBM* 3.53 (January 1910), p. 4; *TBM* 4.91 (August 1911), p. 1; *TBM* 5.97 (November 1911), p. 1; *TBM* 5.102 (January 1912), p. 1; *TBM* 12.216 (September 1919), p. 1. For salvation testimonies, see *TBM* 1.19 (August 1908), p. 1; *TBM* 3.63 (June 1910), p. 2; *TBM* 5.95 (October 1911), p. 3; *TBM* 5.102 (January 1912), p. 4; *TBM* 5.103 (February 1912), p. 4; *TBM* 7.148 (January 1914), p. 3; *TBM* 7.158 (July 1914), p. 4; *TBM* 8.169 (April 1915), p. 3. For sanctification testimonies, see *TBM* 1.4 (December 1907), p. 4; *TBM* 1.8 (January 1908), p. 3; *TBM* 1.12 (April 1908), p. 1; *TBM* 2.25 (November 1908), p. 3; *TBM* 3.55 (February 1910), p. 3; *TBM* 3.61 (May 1910), p.

missionaries or personal testimonies from individuals who testify to having their ‘witness’ that they are forgiven or made righteous before God. Outside of these Scriptural instances of Holy Spirit and witness relationships, other general testimonies are given of the Spirit bearing witness, with a general idea of the Spirit’s confirmation or endorsement of a move of God.⁸¹ Witness is also mentioned in conjunction with the Holy Spirit in regard to Spirit baptism (with the evidence of speaking in other tongues), empowerment for mission, or the leading of the Spirit,⁸² though not

4; *TBM* 4.89 (July 1911), p. 1; *TBM* 5.121 (November 1912), p. 1; *TBM* 7.162 (September 1914), p. 4; *TBM* 10.200 (June 1917), p. 3; *TBM* 13.218 (November–December 1919), p. 4. *COGE* 1.6 (May 1910), p. 5; *COGE* 5.4 (January 1914) p. 6; *COGE* 5.5 (January 1914) p. 2; *COGE* 5.12 (March 1914), p. 8; *COGE* 5.14 (March 1914), p. 4; *COGE* 5.26 (June 1914), p. 7; *COGE* 6.5 (January 1915), p. 2; *COGE* 6.13 (March 1915), p. 1; *COGE* 6.16 (April 1915), p. 1; *COGE* 7.1 (January 1916), p. 3; *COGE* 7.2 (January 1916), p. 4; *COGE* 7.6 (February 1916), p. 2; *COGE* 7.14 (April 1916), pp. 1, 2; *COGE* 7.29 (July 1916), p. 4; *COGE* 7.40 (September 1916), p. 4; *COGE* 7.41 (October 1916), p. 3; *COGE* 7.49 (December 1916), p. 4; *COGE* 8.49 (December 1917), p. 2; *COGE* 9.1 (January 1918), p. 4; *COGE* 9.16 (April 1918), p. 3; *COGE* 10.17 (April 1919), p. 2; *COGE* 9.19 (May 1918), p. 3; *COGE* 9.29 (July 1918), p. 3; *COGE* 9.34 (August 1918), p. 1; *COGE* 9.41 (October 1918), p. 1; *COGE* 9.42 (October 1918), p. 1; *COGE* 10.24 (June 1919), p. 4; *COGE* 10.35 (August 1919), p. 1. *PHA* 1.7 (June 1917), p. 3; *PHA* 1.10 (July 1917), p. 11; *PHA* 1.23 (October 1917), p. 15; *PHA* 1.30 (November 1917), p. 3; *PHA* 1.37 (January 1918), p. 4; *PHA* 1.44 (February 1918), p. 5; *PHA* 2.5 (May 1918), p. 5; *PHA* 2.7 (June 1918), p. 5; *PHA* 2.11 (July 1918), p. 1; *PHA* 2.18 (August 1918), p. 16; *PHA* 2.32 (December 1918), p. 15; *PHA* 2.39 (January 1919), p. 10; *PHA* 3.4, 5 (May 1919), pp. 2, 8; *PHA* 3.25, 26 (October 1919), p. 7; *PHA* 3.31, 32 (December 1919), p. 15; *PHA* 3.40 (January 1920), p. 14; *PHA* 3.42 (February 1920), p. 5; *PHA* 3.53 (April 1920), p. 6; *PHA* 4.19 (September 1920), p. 3; *PHA* 4.25 (October 1920), p. 15; *PHA* 4.34 (December 1920), p. 2. *AE* 1.9 (June 1909), p. 2; *AE* 4.1 (February 1912), p. 4; *AE* 4.20 (December 1912), p. 7; *AE* 8.29 (September 1916), p. 5; *AE* 10.2 (March 1918), pp. 5, 8; *AE* 11.9 (July 1919), p. 9.

⁸¹ *TBM* 1.5 (January 1908), p. 3; *TBM* 1.6 (January 1908), p. 1; *TBM* 1.8 (January 1908), p. 3; *TBM* 1.9 (March 1908), p. 3; *TBM* 1.13 (May 1908), pp. 2, 3; *TBM* 1.15 (June 1908), p. 3, 4; *TBM* 1.16 (June 1908), p. 3; *TBM* 1.17 (July 1908), p. 2; *TBM* 1.18 (July 1908), pp. 3, 4; *TBM* 1.19 (August 1908), p. 4; *TBM* 2.25 (November 1908), p. 3; *TBM* 2.29 (January 1909), p. 3; *TBM* 2.32 (February 1909), p. 4; *TBM* 2.36 (April 1909), pp. 3, 4; *TBM* 2.42 (July 1909), p. 4; *TBM* 3.47 (October 1909), p. 3; *TBM* 3.48 (October 1909), pp. 2, 4; *TBM* 3.66 (July 1910), p. 3; *TBM* 4.92 (August 1911), p. 2; *TBM* 5.95 (October 1911), p. 3; *TBM* 5.98 (November 1911), p. 1; *TBM* 5.119 (October 1912), p. 3; *TBM* 6.128 (March 1913), p. 2; *TBM* 7.147 (January 1914), p. 1; *TBM* 7.148 (January 1914), p. 1; *TBM* 7.152 (March 1914), p. 1; *TBM* 7.154 (May 1914), p. 3; *TBM* 7.162 (September 1914), p. 1; *TBM* 8.174 (September 1915), p. 1; *TBM* 10.189 (December 1916), p. 3; *TBM* 13.221 (March 1921), p. 2. *COGE* 1.4 (April 1910), p. 7; *COGE* 1.13 (September 1910), p. 3; *COGE* 5.2 (January 1914), p. 4; *COGE* 5.5 (January 1914), p. 2; *COGE* 5.14 (March 1914), p. 4; *COGE* 5.49 (December 1914), p. 2; *COGE* 6.9 (February 1915), p. 3; *COGE* 6.13 (March 1915), p. 1; *COGE* 6.28 (July 1915), p. 2; *COGE* 6.50 (December 1915), p. 2; *COGE* 7.1 (January 1916), p. 3; *COGE* 7.25 (June 1916), p. 4; *COGE* 8.18 (May 1917), p. 4; *COGE* 8.21 (June 1917), p. 2; *COGE* 10.7 (February 1919), p. 2; *COGE* 10.26 (June 1919), p. 3; *COGE* 10.40 (October 1919), p. 4. *PHA* 1.3 (May 1917), p. 2; *PHA* 1.23 (October 1917), pp. 6, 15; *PHA* 1.26 (October 1917), p. 7; *PHA* 1.28 (November 1917), p. 6; *PHA* 1.37 (January 1918), p. 4; *PHA* 1.39 (January 1918), p. 4; *PHA* 2.43 (February 1919), p. 5; *PHA* 3.25, 26 (October 1919), p. 7; *PHA* 3.29 (November 1919), pp. 9, 16; *PHA* 3.31, 32 (December 1919), p. 15; *PHA* 3.42 (February 1920), p. 5; *PHA* 3.44 (February 1920), p. 16; *PHA* 4.10 (July 1920), p. 6; *PHA* 4.21 (September 1920), p. 4; *PHA* 4.25 (October 1920), p. 16. *AE* 4.20 (December 1912), p. 3; *AE* 5.2 (March 1913), p. 4; *AE* 10.2 (March 1918), p. 5.

⁸² *AF:A* 1.1 (September 1906), p. 4; *AF:A* 1.3 (November 1906), p. 1; *AF:A* 1.4 (December 1906), p. 3; *AF:A* 1.5 (January 1907), p. 4; *AF:A* 1.6 (February – March 1907), pp. 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8; *AF:A* 1.7 (April 1907), pp. 1, 2; *AF:A* 1.9 (June – September 1907), pp. 1, 3; *AF:A* 1.10 (September 1907), pp. 2, 4; *AF:A* 1.12 (January 1908), p. 3; *AF:A* 1.13 (May 1908), p. 2. *COGE* 1.6 (May 1910), pp. 5, 8; *COGE* 1.9 (July 1910), pp. 3, 6; *COGE* 1.11 (August 1910), p. 6; *COGE* 1.12 (August 1910), p. 6; *COGE* 5.6 (February 1914), p. 5; *COGE* 5.46 (November 1914), pp. 6, 7; *COGE* 6.14 (April 1915), pp. 1, 3, 4; *COGE* 7.7 (February 1916), p. 4; *COGE* 7.8 (February 1916), p. 1; *COGE* 7.14 (April 1916), p. 2; *COGE* 7.51 (December 1916), p. 3; *COGE* 8.1 (January 1917), p. 4; *COGE* 8.30 (August 1917), p. 4; *COGE* 9.19 (May 1918), p. 4. *PHA* 1.8 (June 1917), p. 7; *PHA* 1.10 (July 1917), p. 14; *PHA* 1.43 (February 1918), p.

all of the accounts are praise reports and testimonies. One entry notes that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is for us to be witnesses – offering a hard critique against the tongues void of real language and negroid ‘shakes and jerks’ of the congregation at Azusa.⁸³ Matthew 24.14 is often quoted as it related to missionary work going on in various countries. These missionary efforts served as proof that ‘the gospel will be preached as a witness’.⁸⁴ Early Pentecostals considered individuals and groups who were believers to be witnesses, particularly those who were engaged in missionary or evangelistic work.⁸⁵ The proclamation of the gospel, whether it be in a sermon or the evangelistic

12; *PHA* 1.44 (February 1918), p. 5; *PHA* 1.51 (April 1918), p. 12; *PHA* 2.2 (May 1918), p. 5; *PHA* 2.7 (June 1918), p. 3; *PHA* 2.10 (July 1918), p. 7; *PHA* 2.13 (July 1918), p. 6; *PHA* 2.32 (December 1918), p. 15; *PHA* 2.49 (April 1919), p. 5; *PHA* 3.4, 5 (May 1919), p. 8; *PHA* 3.52 (April 1920), p. 12; *PHA* 3.53 (April 1920), p. 15; *PHA* 4.6 (June 1920), p. 13. *LC* 4.47 (November 1906), p. 1; *AE* 1.8 (June 1909), p. 6; *AE* 1.13 (August 1909), p. 5; *AE* 2.4 (April 1910), p. 3; *AE* 3.24 (February 1912), p. 8; *AE* 4.1 (February 1912), p. 4.

⁸³ *AF:P* 1.8 (October 1912), p. 9.

⁸⁴ *AF:P* 1.3 (May 1912), p. 6; *AF:P* Supplement (August 1912), p. 1. *TBM* 1.1 (October 1907), pp. 1, 3; *TBM* 1.6 (January 1908), p. 1; *TBM* 2.35 (April 1909), p. 4; *TBM* 3.69 (September 1910), p. 1; *TBM* 5.105 (March 1912), p. 3; *TBM* 5.112 (June 1912), p. 3; *TBM* 6.134 (June 1913), pp. 2, 3; *TBM* 6.137 (August 1913), p. 1; *TBM* 7.162 (September 1914), p. 1; *TBM* 8.166 (January 1915), p. 3; *TBM* 8.174 (September 1915), p. 4; *TBM* 9.181 (April 1916), p. 1; *TBM* 12.216 (September 1919), p. 4. *COGE* 1.16 (October 1910), p. 2; *COGE* 1.19 (December 1910), p. 4; *COGE* 1.20 (December 1910), p. 2; *COGE* 5.25 (June 1914), p. 6; *COGE* 6.11 (March 1915), p. 4; *COGE* 6.13 (March 1915), p. 2; *COGE* 6.28 (July 1915); *COGE* 6.49 (December 1915), p. 1; *COGE* 7.48 (November 1916), p. 4; *COGE* 8.5 (February 1917), p. 3; *COGE* 9.1 (January 1918), p. 1; *COGE* 9.8 (February 1918), p. 1; *COGE* 9.10 (March 1918), p. 1; *COGE* 9.28 (July 1918), p. 1; *COGE* 9.36 (September 1918), p. 2; *COGE* 11.7 (February 1920), p. 3; *COGE* 11.17 (April 1920), p. 4; *COGE* 11.22 (May 1920), p. 1; *COGE* 11.28 (July 1920), pp. 1, 4; *COGE* 11.40 (October 1920), p. 3; *COGE* 11.44 (October 1920), p. 4. *PHA* 4.25 (October 1920), p. 8. *AE* 1.1 (February 1909), p. 3, MK 16.9–20 witness to truth; *AE* 1.8 (June 1909), p. 6; *AE* 2.4 (April 1910), p. 6; *AE* 4.1 (February 1912), p. 1.

⁸⁵ *AF:A* 1.4 (December 1906), p. 3; *AF:A* 1.6 (February – March 1907), p. 8; *AF:A* 1.7 (April 1907), p. 2; *AF:A* 1.8 (May 1907), pp. 3–4; *AF:A* 1.9 (June – September 1907), pp. 1–3; *AF:A* 1.10 (September 1907), p. 4; *AF:A* 1.11 (January 1908), p. 3; *AF:A* 1.13 (May 1908), pp. 1, 4. *TBM* 1.15 (June 1908), p. 1; *TBM* 1.17 (July 1908), p. 2; *TBM* 2.26 (November 1908), p. 4; *TBM* 2.25 (November 1908), p. 2; *TBM* 2.32 (February 1909), p. 3; *TBM* 2.33 (March 1909), p. 1; *TBM* 2.39 (June 1909), p. 2; *TBM* 2.41 (July 1909), p. 3; *TBM* 2.46 (September 1909), p. 4; *TBM* 3.47 (October 1909), pp. 2, 4; *TBM* 3.48 (October 1909), pp. 3, 4; *TBM* 3.50 (November 1909), pp. 2, 3; *TBM* 3.51 (December 1909), p. 4; *TBM* 3.61 (May 1910), pp. 3, 4; *TBM* 3.62 (May 1910), p. 3; *TBM* 3.63 (June 1910), pp. 3, 4; *TBM* 3.64 (June 1910), pp. 1, 3; *TBM* 3.67 (August 1910), p. 1; *TBM* 3.71 (October 1910), p. 4; *TBM* 4.74 (November 1910), p. 3; *TBM* 4.77 (January 1911), p. 3; *TBM* 4.79 (February 1911), p. 2; *TBM* 4.80 (February 1911), p. 2, especially when witness leads to persecution; *TBM* 4.82 (March 1911), p. 3; *TBM* 4.83 (April 1911), p. 3; *TBM* 4.87 (June 1911), p. 4; *TBM* 4.91 (August 1911), p. 1; *TBM* 4.92 (August 1911), p. 1, 2; *TBM* 4.94 (September 1911), p. 1; *TBM* 5.96 (October 1911), p. 3; *TBM* 5.98 (November 1911), pp. 1, 2, 3, 4; *TBM* 5.100 (December 1911), pp. 3, 4; *TBM* 5.102 (January 1912), p. 1; *TBM* 5.103 (February 1912), p. 1; *TBM* 5.104 (February 1912), p. 4; *TBM* 5.106 (March 1912), p. 1; *TBM* 5.108 (April 1912), p. 1; *TBM* 5.110 (May 1912), pp. 2, 3; *TBM* 5.112 (June 1912), p. 1; *TBM* 5.114 (July 1912), p. 1; *TBM* 5.115 (August 1912), p. 3; *TBM* 5.116 (August 1912), pp. 1, 4; *TBM* 5.117 (September 1912), pp. 1, 3; *TBM* 5.119 (October 1912), p. 3; *TBM* 6.124 (January 1913), p. 3; *TBM* 6.137 (August 1913), p. 1; *TBM* 6.139 (September 1913), p. 1; *TBM* 7.142 (October 1913), p. 2; *TBM* 7.143 (November 1913), p. 2; *TBM* 7.148 (January 1914), p. 4; *TBM* 7.149 (February 1914), p. 3; *TBM* 7.151 (March 1914), p. 3; *TBM* 7.154 (May 1914), p. 2; *TBM* 7.162 (September 1914), p. 2; *TBM* 8.164 (November 1914), p. 1, 3; *TBM* 8.167 (February 1915), p. 1; *TBM* 9.177 (December 1915), p. 4; *TBM* 9.179 (February 1916), p. 3; *TBM* 9.180 (March 1916), pp. 1, 4; *TBM* 9.181 (April 1916), pp. 2, 4; *TBM* 10.188 (November 1916), p. 2; *TBM* 10.189 (December 1916), p. 1; *TBM* 10.191 (February 1917), p. 3; *TBM* 11.204 (June 1918), p. 4; *TBM* 11.206 (October 1918), p. 2; *TBM* 12.207 (November 1918), pp. 1, 2; *TBM* 13.218 (November–December 1919), p. 3; *TBM* 13.222 (April – May 1920), p. 2. *COGE* 1.4 (April 1910), p. 6; *COGE* 1.5 (May 1910), p. 6; *COGE* 1.14 (September 1910), p. 3; *COGE* 5.16 (April 1914), p. 6;

work of a missionary, was also considered to be an act of witnessing.⁸⁶ This proclamation included personal testimony, be it oral or written, of what God had done in or through the men and women who contributed to these periodicals.

Other passages from Hebrews are quoted in a few periodicals, not referring to salvation or justification; namely the ‘cloud of witnesses’ (Heb. 12.1) are mentioned.⁸⁷ The Fourth Gospel is

COGE 5.18 (May 1914), p. 4; *COGE* 5.33 (August 1914), p. 5; *COGE* 5.39 (September 1914), p. 7; *COGE* 5.40 (October 1914), p. 4; *COGE* 5.46 (November 1914), p. 8; *COGE* 6.8 (February 1915), p. 4; *COGE* 6.13 (March 1915), p. 1; *COGE* 6.15 (April 1915), p. 4; *COGE* 6.17 (April 1915), p. 3; *COGE* 6.20 (May 1915), p. 2; *COGE* 6.22 (May 1915), p. 2; *COGE* 6.26 (June 1915), p. 2; *COGE* 7.36 (September 1916), p. 3; *COGE* 7.48 (November 1916), p. 1; *COGE* 8.2 (January 1917), p. 4; *COGE* 8.10 (March 1917), p. 3; *COGE* 8.15 (April 1917), p. 4; *COGE* 9.7 (February 1918), p. 3; *COGE* 9.16 (April 1918), p. 3; *COGE* 9.34 (August 1918), p. 3; *COGE* 10.7 (February 1919), p. 2; *COGE* 10.27 (July 1919), p. 4; *COGE* 10.35 (August 1919), p. 3; *COGE* 11.26 (June 1920), p. 3; *COGE* 11.43 (October 1920), p. 4. *PHA* 1.7 (June 1917), p. 3; *PHA* 1.11 (July 1917), p. 13; *PHA* 1.13 (July 1917), p. 5; *PHA* 1.19 (September 1917), p. 6; *PHA* 1.33 (December 1917), p. 12; *PHA* 1.44 (February 1918), p. 2; *PHA* 1.46 (March 1918), p. 2; *PHA* 2.39.0 (January 1919), p. 16; *PHA* 2.47 (March 1919), p. 14; *PHA* 3.3 (May 1919), p. 15; *PHA* 3.39 (January 1920), pp. 6, 16; *PHA* 3.40 (January 1920), p. 14; *PHA* 3.46 (March 1920), p. 16; *PHA* 4.8 (June 1920), pp. 4,5; *PHA* 4.29 (November 1920), p. 13; *PHA* 4.33 (December 1920), p. 5, 13. *LC* 4.6 (February 1906), p. 2; *LC* 4.20 (May 1906), p. 2; *AE* (August 1907), p. 2.

⁸⁶ *AF:A* 1.1 (September 1906), p. 4; *AF:A* 1.5 (January 1907), pp. 2, 4; *AF:A* 1.6 (February – March 1907), p. 8; *AF:A* 1.8 (May 1907), p. 3; *AF:A* 1.9 (June – September 1907), p. 3; *AF:A* 1.11 (January 1908), p. 3. *PHA* 3.4, 5 (May 1919), p. 14; *PHA* 3.10 (July 1919), p. 10; *PHA* 3.45 (March 1920), p. 2; *PHA* 3.53 (April 1920), p. 4; *PHA* 4.15 (August 1920), p. 3. *AE* 1.8 (June 1909), p. 3; *AE* 2.4 (April 1910), p. 6; *AE* 5.2 (March 1913), p. 4; *AE* 11.8 (June 1919), p. 12; *AE* 9.17 (November 1917), p. 1. *TBM* 1.2 (November 1907), p. 3; *TBM* 1.9 (March 1908), p. 4; *TBM* 2.39 (June 1909), p. 3; *TBM* 2.45 (September 1909), p. 1; *TBM* 2.46 (September 1909), p. 4, one writer suggests that witness is an evangelistic calling distinct from the calling of teaching. *TBM* 3.59 (April 1910), p. 4; *TBM* 3.66 (July 1910), p. 1; *TBM* 3.69 (September 1910), p. 3; *TBM* 3.70 (September 1910), p. 2; *TBM* 3.71 (October 1910), p. 4; *TBM* 4.75 (December 1910), p. 3; *TBM* 4.85 (May 1911), p. 3; *TBM* 5.103 (February 1912), pp. 1, 4; *TBM* 5.104 (February 1912), p. 2; *TBM* 5.106 (March 1912), p. 1; *TBM* 5.116 (August 1912), p. 3; *TBM* 5.117 (September 1912), p. 4; *TBM* 5.119 (October 1912), pp. 1, 4; *TBM* 5.120 (November 1912), p. 3; *TBM* 6.125 (January 1913), p. 2; *TBM* 6.127 (February 1913), p. 3; *TBM* 6.129 (March 1913), p. 1; *TBM* 6.132 (May 1913), p. 3; *TBM* 6.133 (May 1913), p. 1; *TBM* 6.136 (July 1913), pp. 1, 3; *TBM* 6.137 (August 1913), p. 4; *TBM* 6.139 (September 1913), p. 1; *TBM* 7.142 (October 1913), p. 1; *TBM* 7.145 (December 1913), p. 3; *TBM* 7.146 (December 1913), p. 2; *TBM* 7.149 (February 1914), pp. 3, 4; *TBM* 7.151 (March 1914), p. 1; *TBM* 7.153 (April 1914), p. 2; *TBM* 8.163 (October 1914), p. 3; *TBM* 8.164 (November 1914), p. 3; *TBM* 8.165 (December 1914), p. 1; *TBM* 8.166 (January 1915), p. 3; *TBM* 9.180 (March 1916), p. 1; *TBM* 9.185 (August 1916), p. 4; *TBM* 10.189 (December 1916), p. 3; *TBM* 10.198 (April 1917), p. 4; *TBM* 10.199 (May 1917), p. 2; *TBM* 11.205 (July 1918), p. 3; *TBM* 12.214 (June 1919), p. 3; *TBM* 13.224 (July – August 1920), p. 3. *COGE* 1.5 (May 1910), p. 3; *COGE* 1.7 (June 1910), p. 4; *COGE* 1.11 (August 1910), p. 7; *COGE* 1.13 (September 1910), p. 3, hymns as witness, p. 5; *COGE* 1.14 (September 1910), p. 3; *COGE* 5.28 (July 1914), p. 3; *COGE* 5.51 (December 1914), p. 3; *COGE* 6.33 (August 1915), p. 3; *COGE* 6.42 (October 1915), p. 2; *COGE* 7.5 (January 1916), p. 1; *COGE* 7.29 (July 1916), p. 4; *COGE* 8.11 (March 1917), p. 3; *COGE* 8.29 (July 1917), p. 3; *COGE* 8.30 (August 1917), p. 2; *COGE* 8.32 (August 1917), p. 2; *COGE* 9.35 (August 1918), p. 2, water baptism as witness; *COGE* 9.42 (October 1918), p. 3; *COGE* 9.43 (October 1918), p. 4; *COGE* 10.15 (April 1919), p. 3; *COGE* 10.17 (April 1919), p. 1; *COGE* 10.25 (June 1919), p. 3. *PHA* 2.8 (June 1918), p. 8; *PHA* 2.42 (February 1919), p. 10; *PHA* 2.48 (March 1919), p. 13; *PHA* 3.11 (July 1919), p. 14; *PHA* 3.34 (December 1919), p. 2; *PHA* 3.43 (February 1920), p. 5; *PHA* 3.44 (February 1920), p. 10 (false witness); *PHA* 3.45 (March 1920), p. 4; *PHA* 3.150 (April 1920), pp. 7, 14; *PHA* 4.3 (May 1920), p. 14; *PHA* 4.12 (July 1920), p. 2; *PHA* 4.29 (November 1920), p. 13. *AE* 2.22 (January 1911), p. 3; *AE* 5.1 (February 1913), p. 8; *AE* 5.2 (March 1913), p. 8; *AE* 8.29 (September 1916), p. 6; *AE* 10.5 (May 1918), p. 5; *AE* 10.22 (February 1919), p. 11; *AE* 11.9 (July 1919), p. 11.

⁸⁷ *COGE* 1.19 (December 1910), p. 5 (2.4); *COGE* 6.22 (May 1915), p. 4; *COGE* 7.1 (January 1916), p. 3, Hebrews 10; *COGE* 7.2 (January 1916), p. 4; *COGE* 7.6 (February 1916), p. 2 (10); *COGE* 7.35 (August 1916), p. 1 (2.4). *PHA* 1.3 (May 1917), p. 2; *PHA* 1.7 (June 1917), p. 4; *PHA* 1.11 (July 1917), p. 5; *PHA* 1.30 (November 1917),

referenced on occasion in matters of witness, having in view the witness of the Father and the Spirit to the divinity of Jesus as the Christ, as well as Jesus' own witness before Pilate, and his charge to his disciples that they would be witnesses.⁸⁸ In certain instances, witness was synonymous with evidence of the power of God; this was especially in the case of (but not limited to) healing, miracles, signs, and wonders.⁸⁹ That witness was an important motif among Wesleyan–Holiness Pentecostals is clear. What follows is an examination of how the Apocalypse informed this motif in each periodical, individually.

3.3.2 APOCALYPSE–INFORMED WITNESS

3.3.2.1 APOSTOLIC FAITH (AZUSA)

When it comes to an Apocalypse–informed witness in Azusa's *Apostolic Faith*, some of the previous listed ideas re–emerge. Mrs. Mary Galmond, for example, shares a testimony of her Spirit baptism, but connects it to a prophetic vision from God, which seems to correspond with the vision given to John in the Apocalypse. She reports that the Holy Spirit told her she 'should see, hear and know the wonderful things that should come to pass, before they did come to pass' (cf. Rev. 1.1).⁹⁰ Her vision included political, economic, and natural disasters. In conjunction with this testimony, she shares that the Holy Spirit promised her that she would not see death if she was faithful (cf. Rev. 2.11).⁹¹ In an article on sanctification and power, one contributor references Jesus' knocking

p. 3, Heb. 10.14–15; *PHA* 1.50 (April 1918), p. 2; *PHA* 2.17 (August 1918), p. 4; *PHA* 3.4, 5 (May 1919), pp. 2, 14; *PHA* 3.10 (July 1919), p. 10, Heb. 2.3–4; *PHA* 3.21 (September 1919), p. 6. *AE* 1.9 (June 1909), p. 4.

⁸⁸ *TBM* 1.14 (May 1908), p. 3; *TBM* 4.93 (September 1911), p. 3; *TBM* 5.97 (November 1911), p. 1; *TBM* 5.107 (April 1912), pp. 3–4; *TBM* 8.164 (November 1914), p. 4; *TBM* 11.205 (July 1918), p. 2; *TBM* 13.222 (April – May 1920), p. 4. *COGE* 7.2 (January 1916), p. 4; *COGE* 7.9 (February 1916), p. 1; *COGE* 7.50 (December 1916), p. 2; *COGE* 10.38 (September 1919), p. 1; *COGE* 11.18 (May 1920), p. 3; *COGE* 11.36 (September 1920), p. 2. *PHA* 3.7 8 (June 1919), p. 4; *PHA* 3.21 (September 1919), p. 3; *PHA* 4.32 (December 1920), p. 4. *AE* 2.4 (April 1910), p. 6.

⁸⁹ *TBM* 3.71 (October 1910), p. 4; *TBM* 4.74 (November 1910), p. 1; *TBM* 6.133 (May 1913), p. 2; *TBM* 7.145 (December 1913), p. 4; *TBM* 7.157 (June 1914), p. 2; *TBM* 1.1 (October 1907), p. 2; *TBM* 1.17 (July 1908), p. 3; *TBM* 3.60 (April 1910), p. 4, here, God's Word is noted as witness to the veracity of divine healing; *TBM* 3.62 (May 1910), p. 3; *TBM* 4.78 (January 1911), p. 3; *TBM* 5.95 (October 1911), p. 3; *TBM* 5.112 (June 1912), p. 4; *TBM* 7.154 (May 1914), p. 3; *TBM* 7.161 (September 1914), p. 2; *TBM* 11.206 (October 1918), p. 2. *COGE* 5.13 (March 1914), p. 6; *COGE* 5.21 (May 1914), p. 3; *COGE* 5.28 (July 1914), p. 5; *COGE* 7.14 (April 1916), p. 1; *COGE* 8.4 (January 1917), p. 2; *COGE* 8.8 (February 1917), p. 2; *COGE* 9.47 (November 1918), p. 4; *COGE* 10.4 (January 1919), p. 1; *COGE* 11.15 (April 1920), p. 4; *COGE* 11.40 (October 1920), p. 2; *COGE* 11.43 (October 1920), p. 4. *PHA* 1.6 (June 1917), p. 12; *PHA* 1.33 (December 1917), p. 12; *PHA* 2.17 (August 1918), p. 10; *PHA* 2.50 (April 1919), p. 3, Other nations are witness to the virility and vitality of the Christianity of America; *PHA* 3.29 (November 1919), pp. 6, 9; *PHA* 3.44 (February 1920), p. 16; *PHA* 4.13 (July 1920), p. 12.

⁹⁰ *AF:A* 1.2 (October 1906), p. 2.

⁹¹ *AF:A* 1.2 (October 1906), p. 2. To what this faithfulness refers is not mentioned, but as the editor notes, Galmond was known for prophesying; that while unlearned, 'she has been foretelling great events, and her prophecies accord with the Scriptures'. Perhaps the faithfulness is being faithful to prophecy.

at the door (Rev. 3.20) and urges readers to invite Jesus into their heart. According to the writer, this inviting Jesus into their heart positions the readers to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which enables them to be faithful witnesses.⁹² The writer further urges the readers that ‘we must preach and teach and practice all that Jesus has commissioned us’.⁹³

In an exposition on the prophetic messages to the churches in Revelation 2–3, Seymour makes some implicit observations as to how the Apocalypse informs his understanding of witness; namely, when Jesus returns, he expects to find the church ‘just as full of fire and power and the signs following, as it was when He organized it on the day of Pentecost’.⁹⁴ He speaks of various factors contributing to the church’s lack of witness, including immorality and impure doctrine, but also social infractions such as prejudice and failing to honor financial obligations. In another article, an anonymous contributor writes of thirteen promises to the overcomer in Revelation 2–3.⁹⁵ After surveying these promises, the writer exhorts the readers, to be faithful unto death, and reminds them that by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony, they will be overcomers (cf. Rev. 12.11).

One writer, only identified as a humble sister, shares her testimony of being led by the Spirit to write her testimony – one which she directs toward women.⁹⁶ Her testimony includes receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit, as well as hearing the voice of Jesus speak to her the words that he spoke to the church of Laodicea (Rev. 3.14–22). In her testimony, she speaks of being covered in the blood, having ‘the white stone and the mark and a new name’.⁹⁷ She writes of needing grace, patience, and strength – but her prayer request is of a domestic nature, as she asks for patience, quietness, and strength with her children.

A. Beck contributes a poem entitled ‘The Warfare, The Rapture, and Afterwards’,⁹⁸ in which allusions to an Apocalypse informed faithful witness are made. He notes ‘[t]o prisons some will go; Satan will press us sore, inspiring those that we love most to wound us to the core’. In the next section, ‘The Rapture’, those who were faithful unto death are now ‘glory crowned’ (cf. Rev.

⁹² *AF:A* 1.3 (November 1906), p. 4.

⁹³ *AF:A* 1.3 (November 1906), p. 4.

⁹⁴ *AF:A* 1.11 (October – January 1908), p. 4. It is clear that Seymour has Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 1.8 – 2.4 in view. One cannot ignore the witness (Acts 1.8) connection here. It is evident that what Seymour reads in the prophetic messages in the Apocalypse are praises and reprimands to the church throughout history for her unfaithful witness compared to that of the church found in the book of Acts.

⁹⁵ *AF:A* 2.13 (May 1908), p. 3.

⁹⁶ *AF:A* 1.8 (May 1907), p. 4.

⁹⁷ *AF:A* 1.8 (May 1907), p. 4.

⁹⁸ *AF:A* 1.6 (February – March 1907), p. 4.

2.10).⁹⁹ Beck alludes to the Apocalypse, in another poem as he writes of ‘bloodwashed saints in robes of light’ and ‘prayers turned to praise’.¹⁰⁰ Such language may remind the reader of the white-robed witnesses in Rev. 6.9–11 who lament to God but are comforted that their distress will come to an end.

While much of the engagement is with the prophetic messages to the churches, there are other connections made as well. An unknown contributor offers exposition on Revelation 14, and in it alludes to faithful witness.¹⁰¹ They note that after the rapture, there will be people left on earth, both proclaiming, and receiving the message of the gospel. These latter hearers of the gospel will then have opportunities to be faithful witnesses – even to the point of martyrdom. It is later said that the tribulation will produce many martyrs, suggesting that to this early Pentecostal, faithful witness was not something that ended with the rapture.

In a brief exposition of the parable of the ten virgins (Matthew 25) and the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19.9), Seymour makes some connections to witness and the Apocalypse. He first suggests to the readers that the testimonies written in the publication to which they have subscribed is a witness.¹⁰² The object of that witness is the coming of the Lord. As he further expounds on the text, Seymour encourages the church to be ready for the rapture. Those who miss it ‘and still prove faithful to God and do not receive the mark of the beast, though they will have to suffer martyrdom, will be raised to reign with Christ’.¹⁰³

In the *Apostolic Faith*, witness has numerous designations – people, testimonies, missionary activity, tongues, inner-working of the Spirit. These designations come from multiple Scriptural references; however, it is only those designations related to mission (people and proclamation) that are influenced by the Apocalypse. Nothing of justification or sanctification is offered here.

3.3.2.2 APOSTOLIC FAITH (PARHAM)

In Parham’s *Apostolic Faith*, very few references or allusions are made to the Apocalypse regarding witness. Chilton preaches a message on the church, opening with ‘He that hath ears to hear, let him hear’.¹⁰⁴ He first defines the church as ‘a body of faithful men where the pure word

⁹⁹ *AF:A* 1.6 (February – March 1907), p. 4.

¹⁰⁰ *AF:A* 1.5 (January 1907), p. 2.

¹⁰¹ *AF:A* 1.12 (January 1908), p. 2.

¹⁰² *AF:A* 1.5 (January 1907), p. 2.

¹⁰³ *AF:A* 1.5 (January 1907), p. 2.

¹⁰⁴ *AF:P* 1.9 (May 1906), pp. 1–3.

of God is preached'. One cannot but hear the prophetic messages to the churches in the Apocalypse here. In an article on prophecy, readers are warned against people claiming to be biblical figures, including the two witnesses of Rev. 11.3.¹⁰⁵ Regarding the coming of the Lord, one writer comments on the sealing of the saints (Revelation 7). Readers are encouraged therein to get their Pentecost, which empowers them for witness and serves as their evidence that they have been sealed.¹⁰⁶

Parham's *Apostolic Faith* published more periodicals than Azusa, but had less to contribute, as it pertains to witness. The highest concentration of the topic involves the Holy Spirit, whether that be baptism, empowerment, or confirmation of salvation or sanctification. As far as the Apocalypse is concerned, witness has missional implications, and greater focus is placed on the church and her response to the Spirit than on the Spirit alone.

3.3.2.3 BRIDEGROOM'S MESSENGER

While most of the witness contributions in *The Bridegroom's Messenger* are Spirit focused, there are instances where clear allusions or quotations to the Apocalypse can be seen to inform the contributor's view of witness. A small excerpt is shared by Rev. A.A. Boddy, who exhorts his readers to be loyal to the Lamb. Boddy shares a testimony of hearing the Lord speak to him the words spoken to the church of Smyrna (Rev. 2.10) 'Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life'.¹⁰⁷ In this context, Boddy connects the Apocalypse and Acts, suggesting that Pentecost gives new 'power' for witness (Acts) and for laying hold of 'gifts' (crowns – Apocalypse).

Elizabeth A. Sexton was a frequent writer on the Apocalypse in the *Bridegroom Messenger*. In an article, reflecting on Rev. 3.21 and 'The Laodicean Age', she uses words like 'faith ... failure to exercise it ...' and 'evidence', which seem to imply an indictment against a lack of faithful witness of the church.¹⁰⁸ In her critique of 'the large and wealthy churches' of her day, she thanks God that the church is not without faithful witness(es). In another issue, she writes about the seven prophetic messages to the churches and ages of the church, offering a dispensational overview of the seven ages of the church. Regardless the dispensation, Sexton suggests that the church has

¹⁰⁵ *AF:P* 1.7 (September 1912), pp. 11–12.

¹⁰⁶ *AF:P* 3.3 (April 1914), pp. 2–5.

¹⁰⁷ *TBM* 7.156 (June 1914), p. 3.

¹⁰⁸ *TBM* 2.34 (March 1909), p. 1.

never been without a faithful witness who has suffered for the sake of the truth.¹⁰⁹ In saying as much, it appears as though she is not equating witness with martyrdom, but certainly sees a relationship between witness and suffering.

E.T. Slaybaugh offers an exposition on the Apocalypse that spans across several issues. Included is an examination of Rev. 6.9–11. The souls under the altar, identified as martyrs, and included in the current thesis under the banner of ‘faithful witnesses’, are said to come from ‘among the saints who were not ready and were “left” behind at the rapture (Luke 17:34–36)’.¹¹⁰ Slaybaugh insists that they are not disembodied spirits as some suppose, but are resurrected saints who have received their glorified bodies, evidenced by the white robes given them. Finally, regarding these figures, Slaybaugh suggests that they are not a company of Jews, because the testimony they hold is the testimony of Jesus in Rev. 12.17 and 14.12–13; a testimony which the Jews do not yet have (as of 6.9–11).¹¹¹ Hattie M. Barth is not in agreement with Slaybaugh. In her exposition on Rev. 6.9–11, she suggests that the souls are in fact disembodied martyrs who missed the rapture, but were ‘awakened’ during the tribulation, and became faithful witnesses to the point of martyrdom.¹¹² She believes their cry, ‘How long ...?’ is not for vengeance, but expectancy for their glorified bodies. Referencing Rev. 12.11, she argues that all Christians are to be witnesses to the truth.

Lillian Garr, missionary to India, shares of the good work that God is doing in India, despite much opposition and subsequent suffering. Considering the persecution and suffering, Garr concludes that ‘to keep the testimony of Jesus now means the martyr spirit’, and quotes Rev. 12.11.¹¹³ An unnamed writer reports of missionaries going about, preaching the gospel and experiencing hardship and opposition in many ways, yet they seemed ‘to “love not” their lives unto death. They give clear ringing testimony of what Jesus has done for themselves, and what He is willing to do for the people’¹¹⁴ (Rev. 12.11).

Slaybaugh identifies the second company of martyrs in the Apocalypse as the faithful witnesses mentioned in Rev. 12.17 (the ones who hold to the testimony of Jesus).¹¹⁵ These witnesses are

¹⁰⁹ *TBM* 5.107 (April 1912), p. 1.

¹¹⁰ *TBM* 6.126 (February 1913), p. 4.

¹¹¹ It is not exactly clear, but it seems that Slaybaugh’s reading of Revelation is linear.

¹¹² *TBM* 10.188 (November 1916), p. 4.

¹¹³ *TBM* 3.65 (July 1910), p. 1.

¹¹⁴ *TBM* 1.16 (June 1908), p. 1.

¹¹⁵ *TBM* 6.127 (February 1913), p. 4.

noted to be the same company who refuses to worship the beast (Rev. 13.15). Slaybaugh offers a timeline of their witness progression in the Apocalypse; they are persecuted in 12.17, martyred in 14.12–13, resurrected in 15.2–4, and finally reign with Christ in 20.4. Another observation is that these witnesses experience the reward promised to the faithful in Smyrna. In a later issue, Slaybaugh continues his exposition of the Apocalypse, committing an entire article to the two witnesses of Rev. 11.3–13.¹¹⁶ Much of the article focuses on the identity of the witnesses, the aim of their witness, and the Antichrist and his ‘dupes’.

Another unnamed contributor addressed the spirit of apathy and retreat in the Church, in an era of war, suggesting that the Church had become indifferent to spiritual things and departed from her faith.¹¹⁷ In response to Christians who ask ‘What is the use in defending the truth of God’s Word?’ the writer insists that every Christian has a mandate to be a witness against error, and for truth, particularly in light of the coming of the Lord.¹¹⁸ Similarly, Albert Norton references the Apocalypse explicitly (Rev. 12.17, 14.12, and 22.14), and implies that faithful witness is a matter of obedience.¹¹⁹ In one issue, Sexton reflects on Rev. 22.3, and suggests that Spirit baptism and the preparation of the Lord’s appearance are correlated, warning readers of settling down and napping on their Pentecostal experience. Instead of settling, readers are urged to be faithful, and allow God to ‘make us loving witnesses to his full redemption work for body, mind and spirit’.¹²⁰

Most witness engagement, in *The Bridegroom’s Messenger*, is Spirit related, and references Scripture outside of the Apocalypse. However, where the Apocalypse is referenced, witness is almost always a missional topic involving the proclamation of the gospel, and in some cases, to the degree of suffering – possibly even martyrdom. Although dispensational reading can be found in relation to the Apocalypse and witness, it does not seem to influence the engagement of the term. The only instance where a missional view of witness is not considered is in Slaybaugh’s commentary on the Apocalypse.

¹¹⁶ *TBM* 7.155 (May 1914), p. 4. More than a third of the article discusses who the witnesses might be, with the resolve that Enoch and Elijah are most probable. The rest of the article explores the mission, and message of the witnesses – that is, ministering to the children of Israel and witnessing to the immanent return of Christ.

¹¹⁷ *TBM* 9.185 (August 1916), p. 4.

¹¹⁸ *TBM* 9.185 (August 1916), p. 4. While not explicitly referencing the Apocalypse, the mentioning of the imminence of the Lord’s return, and that he blesses such witness seems to have the Apocalypse in mind (Rev. 22.12).

¹¹⁹ *TBM* 9.187 (October 1916), p. 4.

¹²⁰ *TBM* 1.16 (June 1908), p. 1.

3.3.2.4 APOSTOLIC EVANGEL

The *Apostolic Evangel* had little to contribute to the witness motif, when compared to other early Wesleyan–Holiness periodicals. In matters of the Apocalypse, only one direct quote is offered – the rest are but allusions. In a Sunday school lesson on Hebrews 11, one writer concludes a discussion of the cloud of witnesses therein with the idea that ‘we could stand with these who are already mentioned, and together with them, help to perfect the chain of heroic witnesses throughout all the dispensations’.¹²¹ Such a reading of Hebrews seems to be influenced by the Apocalypse, indicative of the dispensational reference. Perhaps the writer had in mind the souls crying beneath the altar in Rev. 6.9–11. G.F. Taylor writes an article on the second coming of Christ, and in it mentions the witnesses of Rev. 11.3.¹²² They are said to be persecuted by the anti–Christ, ‘to the fullest extent of his possibilities’.¹²³

In an issue of *Live Coals* (later *Apostolic Evangel*), an article on foreign missions spans across several pages under the banner, ‘Missions: The Business of the Church’.¹²⁴ The writer insists that it is God’s desire that everyone be given sufficient witness of his salvation through Christ, and that witness comes through the testimony of redeemed individuals.¹²⁵ The writer continues that witness is the duty of every Christian, and that it is the plan of God to conquer this world by way of testimony.¹²⁶ Such language is reminiscent of Rev. 12.11. In another Sunday school lesson, written by J.A. Culbreth, dispensational language is again used, though the underlying texts are Mk. 16.11 and 1 Cor. 15.20.¹²⁷ The lesson concludes that God ‘still wants witnesses and faithful ministers who, if need be, would give their lives for the truth ...’¹²⁸

In the *Apostolic Evangel*, how the Apocalypse informs witness is not vast, but it is strong, even if only by allusions. Readers encounter words like ‘stand’, ‘heroic’, and ‘live their lives’. Such words make it clear that witness was taken seriously and was something that came with an expectancy of sacrifice to some degree.

¹²¹ *AE* 1.8 (June 1909), p. 7.

¹²² *AE* 3.11 (July 1911), p. 1.

¹²³ *AE* 3.11 (July 1911), p. 1. The discussion carries over into a later issue *AE* 3.22 (January 1912), pp. 1–2.

¹²⁴ *LC* 4.20 (May 1906), pp. 1–2,4. Given that no passage in particular carries the article, the witness discourse is worth noting.

¹²⁵ *LC* 4.20 (May 1906), pp. 1–2.

¹²⁶ *LC* 4.20 (May 1906), p. 2. When the writer states that ‘Jesus Christ has confidently staked everything’ in order that we might all be witnesses, Rev. 1.5–6 appropriately come to mind.

¹²⁷ *AE* 5.3 (March 1913), p. 6.

¹²⁸ *AE* 5.3 (March 1913), p. 6. The inclusion of dispensational and martyr language makes it plausible that the Apocalypse has influenced the writer’s lesson, to some degree.

3.3.2.5 CHURCH OF GOD EVANGEL

The *Church of God Evangel* had one of the most significant contributions to witness outside of the Apocalypse, but the Apocalypse-informed instances were not as substantial. Missionary, Lucy M. Leatherman greets her readers with the same greeting found in Rev. 1.4–6, substituting ‘the seven churches which are in Asia’ with ‘the churches of God which are in North America’.¹²⁹ After sharing testimonies from her missionary work in South America, Leatherman writes of the soon coming of the Lord and increasing iniquity in the world, but reminds her readers that God will reward those who remain faithful (in their witness) till the end. Herschel N. Scoggins writes an article on Christian obedience, and in it comments on the prophetic messages of Revelation 2–3. His conclusion reflects special attention to the message to Pergamum (Rev. 2.12–18) and Antipas, in particular. He submits that faithful witness, even to the point of martyrdom, is an act of obedience to Christ; charity, faith, and good works void of obedience falls short.¹³⁰

In a headline article, ‘Martyrdom and Martyrs – Past and Future’, Jesus is noted to be the prototypical martyr after whom we are to pattern ourselves.¹³¹ The article continues with commentary on the martyrs (witnesses) beneath the altar (Rev. 6.9) who cry out to God. The writer suggests that the souls are martyrs of the first century, thus giving clear indication that ‘many others are yet to be slain in martyrdom [and] many of us who are now living had just as well get ready for it’.¹³²

O.W. Alexander writes an article about testimony, commenting on three needs in particular: (1) ‘for a witness to the truth’, (2) ‘for testimony concerning God’, and (3) ‘for testimony to the truth concerning the relations of man to God and God to man’.¹³³ In response to these needs, Alexander writes that the church exists to be the witness who shares this testimony.¹³⁴ The conclusion speaks to the social times of the publication, and reminds the readers of Rev. 14.4:

Wherever there is ignorance, vice, hatred, injustice, bitterness or strive, there in the very condition is the call of God to us to enter and bear witness to the mercy, love and forgiveness

¹²⁹ *COGE* 8.25 (June 1917), p. 3.

¹³⁰ *COGE* 10.6 (February 1919), p. 3.

¹³¹ *COGE* 9.11 (March 1918), p. 1.

¹³² *COGE* 9.11 (March 1918), p. 1.

¹³³ *COGE* 10.31 (August 1919), pp. 1, 4. While the Apocalypse is not specifically quoted here, the broad treatment of the subject, with very few Biblical citations listed opens the article up to the possibility that Revelation may have influenced some of the writer’s thinking. These three testimonial needs are addressed throughout the Apocalypse in various fashion (cf. truth 3.14; 19.11; 21.5; 22.6; God 1.4, 8; and relationships 1.5–6).

¹³⁴ *COGE* 10.31 (August 1919), p. 4. It is unclear what is meant when Alexander writes that ‘Our witness will be most effective if it is NATURAL and UNSTUDIED’. (capitalization Alexander’s).

of God. Jesus' call to HIS CHURCH is to follow Him; to incorporate the truth in living character; to teach the truth; to be faithful to the truth even unto death.¹³⁵

One writer makes note of the prophetic message to the church in Philadelphia (Rev. 3.7–13) and asks why we should limit the promise to the faithful (witnesses) in this message to the first century recipients.¹³⁶ It is proposed that the message could have been prophetically written for the twentieth century church, and the trial she faced.¹³⁷ After noting that many claim to have the testimony of Jesus (thus claiming to be witnesses) but not having the character to substantiate, John Q. Myers, in his article on the testimony of Jesus (Rev. 19.10), offers that faithful witness is a work of the Holy Spirit; that humanity is not 'able to bear witness of Jesus, because they have not seen or known him in the natural; therefore, He must be revealed to [humanity] by the Spirit'.¹³⁸

Beyond the Apocalypse, contributions to the *Church of God Evangel* come from leaders and laypeople, missionaries and ministers alike. They are testimonies, reports, and prayer requests. The Apocalypse-informed witness contributions do not appear as broad. Contributions here seem to come more from leaders than laypeople. Most of the contributions are instructional in nature – what the Church must do, or what the Apocalypse means for believers today.

3.3.2.6 INTERNATIONAL PENTECOSTAL HOLINESS ADVOCATE

Both inside and outside of the Apocalypse, the *International Pentecostal Holiness Advocate* had the least to say about witness; nevertheless, witness is present in the engagement with the Apocalypse. In a sermon about Jesus, D.B. Dean reminds readers that Jesus was the faithful and true witness to the Laodiceans, and while not expounding on the matter, adds that he is also the true and faithful warrior and judge.¹³⁹ An early 1919 editorial column offers a broad overview of the Apocalypse, based on J.A. Seiss' work in the Apocalypse. In it, the author concludes that John offered three witnesses to the veracity of the Apocalypse; the Word of God, Testimony of Jesus Christ, and the things he was shown.¹⁴⁰ Of the souls under the altar (Rev. 6.9–11), the writer

¹³⁵ *COGE* 10.31 (August 1919), p. 4.

¹³⁶ *COGE* 10.33 (August 1919), p. 1.

¹³⁷ *COGE* 10.33 (August 1919), p. 1. It is not stated to what trial is being referred, but it could refer to wartime era, the flu pandemic, or even the social and economic difficulties that emerged in the wake of both.

¹³⁸ *COGE* 10.34 (August 1919), pp. 1–2.

¹³⁹ *IPHA* 2.27 (October 1918), p. 2.

¹⁴⁰ *IPHA* 2.44 (February 1919), p. 9. The questions asked were particularly regarding the inquisition found in Rev. 6.10, 'How long, oh Lord ...?'

suggests in a later issue that these are not martyrs in general, but ‘martyrs of a particular class’.¹⁴¹ The cry of the witnesses, according to the writer, is that God would avenge them by ‘crowning them with celestial rewards’.¹⁴² An editor responds to a reader’s inquiry on the identity of the two witnesses of Rev. 11.3, suggesting that they are Enoch and Elijah, in support of Seiss’ work in the Apocalypse.¹⁴³

Witness in the *International Pentecostal Holiness Advocate* was not as popular a topic, compared to other publications – especially where the Apocalypse is concerned. When the Apocalypse is engaged, the Spirit is less prominently considered, and the contributions come from leaders, rather than laypeople or missionaries. Only one contribution is homiletic in nature, the rest are informational.

3.3.2.7 WESLEYAN–HOLINESS CONCLUSION

In surveying the above periodicals, what is most noticeable is the diversity of contribution. Editors, pastors, church leaders, missionaries, and laypeople all have a voice in these periodicals, and all these give mention, whether through citation or allusion, to faithful witness in the Apocalypse. Such a diversity results in a variety of engagement. There is exposition of texts, homiletic exhortations, testimony, and even prayer requests. Dispensational views are minimal, and those only at the editor or expository/homiletic level; lay and missionary contributions seem to show less concern for the Church’s age and more for her assignment. As to the correlation of witness, suffering, and martyrdom, no pattern emerges. What does emerge from the Wesleyan-Holiness community is concern for the practical-missiological implications of witness.

3.4 FINISHED WORK

3.4.1 WITNESS OUTSIDE OF THE APOCALYPSE

Outside of the Apocalypse, Finished Work (FW) Pentecostals engaged the same topics as the Wesleyan–Holiness (WH) community, but not to the same degree. The book of Acts was

¹⁴¹ To be clear, it is ‘martyr’ that is discussed, but as the current thesis is concerned with this pericope, witness is in view, thus the inclusion of this discourse. *IPHA* 3.23, 24 (October 1919), p. 8. These are martyrs who ‘have been martyred for the Word of God, and for a special testimony which they have held with the greatest difficulty’.

¹⁴² *IPHA* 3.23, 24 (October 1919), p. 8. Though the writer uses the word ‘avenge’ it is suggested that these martyrs are not looking for God to inflict vengeful harm on their enemies; rather, ‘it is the cry of a righteous soul that desires to vindicate the cause of Christ in the midst of a wicked generation. It is a cry that God would prove their righteousness and establish their testimony ... [which] they had sealed with their own blood’.

¹⁴³ *IPHA* 1.14 (August 1917), p. 15.

referenced often, especially as it related to the Holy Spirit, but it was not cited as much as the Wesleyan–Holiness periodicals.¹⁴⁴ Contributors shared testimonies of having their witness of the Spirit that their hearts were changed, or that they were children of God – having been given the gift of eternal life.¹⁴⁵ More than testimonies, some of the contributions offered instructions to the readers to submit to God, that they might receive their witness of their salvation. Where the WH periodicals contained a balanced number of contributions on salvation and sanctification, the FW articles focused mainly on salvation. The witness of the preached gospel, according to Mt. 24.14,

¹⁴⁴ *LRE* 1.2 (November 1908), pp. 4, 19; *LRE* 1.3 (December 1908), pp. 16, 17, 19; *LRE* 1.4 (January 1909), p. 2; *LRE* 1.6 (March 1909), p. 23; *LRE* 1.10 (July 1909), pp. 6, 12–13; *LRE* 1.11 (August 1909), pp. 8, 14–16; *LRE* 1.12 (September 1909), pp. 17, 18–19; *LRE* 2.11 (August 1910), p. 5; *LRE* 3.8 (May 1911), p. 8; *LRE* 4.11 (August 1912), p. 5; *LRE* 5.7 (April 1913), p. 19; *LRE* 8.5 (February 1916), p. 9; *LRE* 8.8 (May 1916), p. 23; *LRE* 8.11 (August 1916), p. 12; *LRE* 9.6 (March 1917), p. 4; *LRE* 9.7 (April 1917), p. 15; *LRE* 11.2 (November 1918), p. 3. *TBC* 2.6 (November 1918), p. 4; *TBC* 2.10 (March 1919), pp. 9, 11; *TBC* 4.11 (April 1920), p. 21. *TCE* 65 (October 1914), p. 3; *TWE* 84 (April 1915), p. 4; *TWE* 98 (July 1915), p. 1; *TWE* 122 (January 1916), p. 10; *TWE* 148 (July 1916), p. 3; *TWE* 159 (September 1916), p. 13; *TWE* 172 (January 1917), p. 10; *TWE* 191 (May 1917), p. 1; *TWE* 205 (September 1917), pp. 2, 4–5; *TWE* 211 (October 1917), p. 7; *TCE* 266–67 (December 1918), p. 5; *TCE* 286–87 (May 1919), p. 4, 6; *TCE* 296–97 (July 1919), p. 1; *TCE* 298–99 (July 1919), p. 7; *TCE* 304–05 (September 1919), p. 4; *TCE* 306–07 (September 1919), p. 9; *TPE* 320–21 (December 1919), p. 5; *TPE* 356–57 (September 1920), p. 1; *TPE* 372–73 (December 1920), p. 8.

¹⁴⁵ *LRE* 1.5 (February 1909), p. 10, 19; *LRE* 1.11 (August 1909), p. 8; *LRE* 2.2 (November 1909), p. 19; *LRE* 2.4 (January 1910), p. 6; *LRE* 2.6 (March 1910), p. 20–21; *LRE* 2.9 (June 1910), p. 3; *LRE* 3.7 (April 1911), p. 21; *LRE* 4.3 (December 1911), p. 18; *LRE* 4.4 (January 1912), p. 10; *LRE* 4.5 (February 1912), p. 3; *LRE* 5.6 (March 1913), p. 8, 20; *LRE* 5.8 (May 1913), p. 8; *LRE* 5.9 (June 1913), p. 4; *LRE* 6.5 (February 1914), p. 19; *LRE* 6.7 (April 1914), p. 24; *LRE* 6.8 (May 1914), p. 14; *LRE* 7.6 (March 1915), p. 13; *LRE* 8.7 (April 1916), p. 21; *LRE* 9.2 (November 1916), p. 4; *LRE* 9.3 (December 1916), p. 2; *LRE* 10.2 (November 1917), p. 19; *LRE* 12.7 (April 1920), p. 5. *TBC* 1.1 (June 1917), p. 2; *TBC* 1.3 (August 1917), p. 2; *TBC* 1.8 (January 1918), p. 9; *TBC* 2.3 (August 1918), p. 2; *TBC* 2.4 (September 1918), p. 7; *TBC* 2.5 (October 1918), p. 2; *TBC* 2.11 (April 1919), p. 9; *TBC* 3.7 (December 1919), p. 22; *TBC* 3.8 (January 1920), pp. 6, 9; *TBC* 5.5 (October 1920), p. 3. *TCE* 54 (August 1914), p. 3; *TCE* 59 (September 1914), p. 3; *TWE* 84 (April 1915), p. 3; *TWE* 120 (December 1915), p. 1; *TWE* 122 (January 1916), p. 4; *TWE* 129 (March 1916), p. 3; *TWE* 138 (May 1916), p. 13; *TWE* 139 (May 1916), p. 3; *TWE* 153 (August 1916), p. 3; *TWE* 156 (September 1916), p. 13; *TWE* 158 (September 1916), p. 8; *TWE* 169 (December 1916), p. 8; *TWE* 172 (January 1917), p. 3; *TWE* 173 (January 1917), p. 2; *TWE* 174 (January 1917), pp. 4, 10; *TWE* 178 (February 1917), p. 11; *TWE* 182 (March 1917), p. 9; *TWE* 194 (June 1917), p. 4; *TWE* 195 (June 1917), p. 9; *TWE* 198 (July 1917), p. 14; *TWE* 203 (August 1917), p. 6; *TWE* 205 (September 1917), pp. 4, 6; *TWE* 212 (October 1917), p. 3; *TWE* 227 (February 1918), p. 2; *TWE* 231 (March 1918), p. 10; *TWE* 234–35 (April 1918), p. 16; *TWE* 238–39 (May 1918), p. 10; *TCE* 248–49 (July 1918), p. 7; *TCE* 260–61 (November 1918), p. 5; *TCE* 276–77 (February 1919), p. 7; *TCE* 280–81 (March 1919), p. 12; *TCE* 282–83 (April 1919), p. 2; *TCE* 294–95 (June 1919), p. 2; *TPE* 316–17 (November 1919), p. 10; *TPE* 322–23 (January 1920), p. 1; *TPE* 326–27 (February 1920), p. 10; *TPE* 328–29 (February 1920), p. 6; *TPE* 370–71 (December 1920), p. 3.

was also seen throughout the FW periodicals,¹⁴⁶ as well as references to the cloud of witnesses in Hebrews.¹⁴⁷ Though both were present, their occurrences were not as frequent as the WH stream.

The greatest occurrence of witness in the FW stream was a matter of proclamation. As people preached sermons, wrote articles, or shared testimonies of God performing miracles, signs, and wonders in Pentecostal worship services, tent meetings, and on the mission field, these events were considered witnesses, testimonies to the power of God.¹⁴⁸ Even occurrences of songs, hymns, and

¹⁴⁶ *LRE* 5.11 (August 1913), p. 13, 14; *LRE* 9.4 (January 1917), p. 6; *LRE* 10.9 (June 1918), p. 18; *LRE* 12.1 (October 1919), p. 8; *LRE* 12.5 (February 1920), p. 7; *LRE* 12.7 (April 1920), p. 22; *LRE* 12.11 (August 1920), p. 14. *TCE* 62 (October 1914), p. 3; *TWE* 98 (July 1915), p. 3; *TWE* 128 (February 1916), p. 6; *TWE* 147 (July 1916), p. 7; *TWE* 170 (December 1916), p. 2; *TWE* 232 (March 1918), p. 14; *TWE* 238–39 (May 1918), p. 1; *TCE* 246–47 (June 1918), p. 12; *TCE* 266–67 (December 1918), p. 4; *TPE* 358–59 (September 1920), p. 5.

¹⁴⁷ *LRE* 1.3 (December 1908), p. 11; *LRE* 5.9 (June 1913), p. 9; *LRE* 5.12 (September 1913), p. 18; *LRE* 7.12 (September 1915), p. 15; *LRE* 8.3 (December 1915), p. 22; *LRE* 11.8 (May 1919), p. 8 (2.4). *TCE* 78 (February 1915), p. 3; *TWE* 103 (August 1915), p. 3; *TWE* 133 (April 1916), p. 8; *TWE* 134 (April 1916), p. 6; *TWE* 174 (January 1917), p. 4; *TWE* 175 (February 1917), p. 3; *TWE* 231 (March 1918), p. 5; *TCE* 288–89 (May 1919), p. 12; *TPE* 370–71 (December 1920), pp. 5, 6.

¹⁴⁸ *LRE* 1.2 (November 1908), pp. 3, 12; *LRE* 1.3 (December 1908), p. 16; *LRE* 1.6 (March 1909), pp. 2, 10; *LRE* 1.7 (April 1909), pp. 9, 10; *LRE* 1.8 (May 1909), p. 24; *LRE* 1.10 (July 1909), pp. 12–13, 22; *LRE* 1.12 (September 1909), pp. 8, 18–19, 22; *LRE* 2.1 (October 1909), p. 18; *LRE* 2.2 (November 1909), p. 15; *LRE* 2.3 (December 1909), p. 12; *LRE* 2.4 (January 1910), p. 7; *LRE* 2.9 (June 1910), pp. 4, 20; *LRE* 2.11 (August 1910), p. 5; *LRE* 2.12 (September 1910), p. 16; *LRE* 3.1 (October 1910), pp. 7, 16; *LRE* 3.2 (November 1910), pp. 4, 15–16; *LRE* 3.3 (December 1910), p. 9; *LRE* 3.6 (March 1911), p. 6; *LRE* 3.8 (May 1911), pp. 9, 11; *LRE* 3.10 (July 1911), p. 12; *LRE* 3.11 (August 1911), p. 15; *LRE* 4.1 (October 1911), p. 2; *LRE* 4.2 (November 1911), pp. 19, 21; *LRE* 4.4 (January 1912), pp. 6, 10, 23; *LRE* 4.5 (February 1912), pp. 13, 15; *LRE* 4.7 (April 1912), p. 8; *LRE* 4.8 (May 1912), p. 21; *LRE* 4.10 (July 1912), p. 23; *LRE* 4.11 (August 1912), p. 8; *LRE* 5.2 (November 1912), p. 18; *LRE* 5.3 (December 1912), pp. 6, 8, 17; *LRE* 5.5 (February 1913), p. 9; *LRE* 5.6 (March 1913), pp. 16, 17, 21; *LRE* 5.7 (April 1913), pp. 15, 16, 19; *LRE* 5.8 (May 1913), p. 5, 12; *LRE* 5.9 (June 1913), pp. 2, 3; *LRE* 5.10 (July 1913), pp. 8, 14; *LRE* 5.11 (August 1913), p. 20; *LRE* 6.1 (October 1913), p. 17; *LRE* 6.3 (December 1913), pp. 10, 18; *LRE* 6.6 (March 1914), p. 16; *LRE* 6.7 (April 1914), pp. 9, 24; *LRE* 6.8 (May 1914), p. 19; *LRE* 6.11 (August 1914), pp. 14, 18; *LRE* 6.12 (September 1914), p. 16; *LRE* 7.6 (March 1915), p. 14; *LRE* 7.7 (April 1915), p. 10; *LRE* 7.11 (August 1915), p. 13; *LRE* 8.4 (January 1916), p. 14; *LRE* 8.7 (April 1916), pp. 5, 14; *LRE* 8.10 (July 1916), p. 21; *LRE* 8.12 (September 1916), p. 23; *LRE* 9.2 (November 1916), p. 11; *LRE* 9.3 (December 1916), p. 15; *LRE* 9.4 (January 1917), p. 4; *LRE* 9.6 (March 1917), p. 16; *LRE* 9.7 (April 1917), p. 15; *LRE* 9.9 (June 1917), p. 5; *LRE* 9.10 (July 1917), p. 12; *LRE* 10.4 (January 1918), p. 21; *LRE* 10.8 (May 1918), pp. 13, 14; *LRE* 10.9 (June 1918), p. 13; *LRE* 11.2 (November 1918), p. 3; *LRE* 11.3 (December 1918), pp. 13, 16; *LRE* 11.5 (February 1919), p. 7; *LRE* 11.6 (March 1919), p. 11; *LRE* 11.7 (April 1919), p. 22; *LRE* 11.8 (May 1919), p. 12; *LRE* 11.9 (June 1919), pp. 4, 6, 9, 16; *LRE* 11.10 (July 1919), p. 6; *LRE* 11.11 (August 1919), pp. 7, 14; *LRE* 12.1 (October 1919), p. 9; *LRE* 12.2 (November 1919), pp. 11, 19; *LRE* 12.3 (December 1919), pp. 13, 18; *LRE* 12.4 (January 1920), p. 14; *LRE* 12.5 (February 1920), pp. 11–13, 15, 18–20; *LRE* 12.8 (May 1920) 4; *LRE* 12.9 (June 1920), p. 20; *LRE* 12.12 (September 1920), pp. 3, 8, 9, 16; *LRE* 13.3 (December 1920), p. 19. *TBC* 1.8 (January 1918), p. 14; *TBC* 2.6 (November 1918), p. 5; *TBC* 2.7 (December 1918), pp. 13–15; *TBC* 2.8 (January 1919), p. 14; *TBC* 2.10 (March 1919), p. 9; *TBC* 2.12 (May 1919), p. 4; *TBC* 3.3 (August 1919), p. 7; *TBC* 3.6 (November 1919), p. 17; *TBC* 3.9 (February 1920), pp. 6, 8, 12, 14; *TBC* 4.11 (April 1920), p. 21; *TBC* 4.12 (May 1920), pp. 8, 19; *TBC* 5.1 (June 1920), pp. 6, 16, 17; *TBC* 5.2 (July 1920), pp. 7, 12, 19; *TBC* 5.5 (October 1920), pp. 10, 16; *TBC* 5.7 (December 1920), pp. 11, 21. *TCE* 50 (July 1914), p. 3; *TCE* 51 (July 1914), p. 4; *TCE* 59 (September 1914), p. 1; *TCE* 60 (September 1914), p. 4; *TCE* 64 (October 1914), p. 2; *TCE* 68 (November 1914), p. 2; *TWE* 87 (April 1915), p. 2; *TWE* 88 (May 1915), p. 4; *TWE* 90 (May 1915), p. 2; *TWE* 115 (November 1915), p. 2; *TWE* 120 (December 1915), p. 2; *TWE* 123 (January 1916), p. 9; *TWE* 126 (February 1916), p. 10; *TWE* 128 (February 1916), pp. 2, 10; *TWE* 132 (March 1916), pp. 2, 12; *TWE* 134 (April 1916), p. 6; *TWE* 137 (April 1916), p. 4; *TWE* 139 (May 1916), p. 4; *TWE* 140 (May 1916), p. 10; *TWE* 143 (June 1916), p. 10; *TWE* 145 (June 1916), p. 9; *TWE* 146 (July 1916), p. 2; *TWE* 148 (July 1916), pp. 4, 6; *TWE* 153 (August 1916), pp. 4, 12; *TWE* 158 (September

ordinances within a worship service were considered acts of witnessing. Nearly all these instances make mention of the Holy Spirit's involvement in the act of proclamation. That proclamation was made possible by the empowering work of the Holy Spirit, through Spirit baptism, with the evidence of speaking in other tongues.¹⁴⁹ In many instances where the Word of God is proclaimed, a testimony is given, or the people of God is gathered in corporate worship, the Spirit is noted to give witness to God's presence or validation of the proclamation or gathering.¹⁵⁰ The second

1916), p. 10; *TWE* 160 (October 1916), p. 9; *TWE* 161 (October 1916), p. 8; *TWE* 162 (October 1916), p. 4; *TWE* 164 (November 1916), pp. 8, 10; *TWE* 170 (December 1916), p. 10; *TWE* 174 (January 1917), p. 12; *TWE* 182 (March 1917), p. 7; *TWE* 185 (April 1917), p. 16; *TWE* 186 (April 1917), pp. 2, 3, 12; *TWE* 188 (May 1917), p. 2; *TWE* 189 (May 1917), p. 5; *TWE* 191 (May 1917), p. 13; *TWE* 193 (June 1917), p. 3; *TWE* 195 (June 1917), p. 8; *TWE* 199 (July 1917), p. 1; *TWE* 201 (August 1917), pp. 12–13; *TWE* 202 (August 1917), p. 14; *TWE* 203 (August 1917), p. 4; *TWE* 206 (September 1917), pp. 11, 14; *TWE* 207 (September 1917), p. 12; *TWE* 209 (October 1917), p. 15; *TWE* 212 (October 1917), pp. 12–13; *TWE* 219 (December 1917), pp. 8, 11; *TWE* 222 (January 1918), p. 12; *TWE* 223 (January 1918), pp. 12, 14; *TWE* 228 (February 1918), p. 5; *TWE* 229 (March 1918), p. 7; *TWE* 230 (March 1918), p. 10; *TWE* 231 (March 1918), p. 10; *TWE* 232 (March 1918), p. 15; *TWE* 233 (March 1918), p. 9; *TWE* 234–35 (April 1918), p. 1; *TWE* 236–37 (April 1918), p. 11; *TWE* 238–39 (May 1918), pp. 10, 12; *TCE* 246–47 (June 1918), p. 11; *TCE* 248–49 (July 1918), p. 7, water baptism served as a witness; *TCE* 250–51 (August 1918), p. 7; *TCE* 252–53 (August 1918), p. 3; *TCE* 254 (September 1918), p. 3; *TCE* 255 (September 1918), p. 7; *TCE* 256–57 (October 1918), pp. 6, 13; *TCE* 258–59 (October 1918), p. 6; *TCE* 262–63 (November 1918), p. 15; *TCE* 268–69 (December 1918), p. 3, 8; *TCE* 272–73 (January 1919), p. 11; *TCE* 290–91 (May 1919), p. 5; *TCE* 292–93 (June 1919), p. 5; *TCE* 294–95 (June 1919), p. 14; *TCE* 296–97 (July 1919), p. 1; *TCE* 298–99 (July 1919), pp. 11–12; *TCE* 300–301 Extra (August 1919), p. 6; *TCE* 304–05 (September 1919), p. 4; *TCE* 306–07 (September 1919), p. 9; *TPE* 314–15 (November 1919), p. 7; *TPE* 318–19 (December 1919), p. 7; *TPE* 328–29 (February 1920), p. 8; *TPE* 354–55 (August 1920), p. 11; *TPE* 366–67 (November 1920), p. 8; *TPE* 370–71 (December 1920), p. 12; *TPE* 372–73 (December 1920), p. 8.

¹⁴⁹ *LRE* 1.5 (February 1909), p. 7; *LRE* 1.8 (May 1909), p. 9; *LRE* 2.1 (October 1909), p. 24; *LRE* 3.1 (October 1910), p. 7; *LRE* 6.3 (December 1913), p. 22; *LRE* 6.10 (July 1914), pp. 16, 20; *LRE* 9.6 (March 1917), p. 4; *LRE* 10.8 (May 1918), p. 21; *LRE* 11.5 (February 1919), p. 4. *TBC* 2.5 (October 1918), p. 13; *TBC* 2.10 (March 1919), p. 11; *TBC* 2.11 (April 1919), p. 15; *TBC* 5.4 (September 1920), pp. 5–6; *TBC* 5.7 (December 1920), p. 11. *TCE* 1.1 (July 1913), p. 2; *TWE* 122 (January 1916), p. 4; *TWE* 130 (March 1916), p. 8; *TWE* 152 (August 1916), p. 13; *TWE* 159 (September 1916), p. 14; *TWE* 188 (May 1917), p. 11; *TWE* 193 (June 1917), p. 14; *TWE* 198 (July 1917), p. 5; *TWE* 205 (September 1917), p. 5; *TWE* 210 (October 1917), pp. 7, 10; *TWE* 211 (October 1917), p. 5; *TWE* 227 (February 1918), p. 6; *TWE* 238–39 (May 1918), p. 2; *TCE* 280–81 (March 1919), p. 9; *TPE* 320–21 (December 1919), p. 11; *TPE* 336–37 (April 1920), p. 7; *TPE* 350–51 (July 1920), p. 16; *TPE* 366–67 (November 1920), p. 5.

¹⁵⁰ *LRE* 1.9 (June 1909), p. 22; *LRE* 2.9 (June 1910), pp. 2, 3; *LRE* 2.12 (September 1910), p. 16; *LRE* 3.3 (December 1910), p. 13; *LRE* 4.11 (August 1912), p. 17 Direct; *LRE* 5.6 (March 1913), p. 22; *LRE* 6.5 (February 1914), p. 9, p. 24; *LRE* 6.8 (May 1914), p. 13; *LRE* 7.8 (May 1915), p. 2; *LRE* 8.3 (December 1915), p. 8; *LRE* 8.10 (July 1916), pp. 3, 4 God; *LRE* 11.5 (February 1919), p. 10; *LRE* 12.7 (April 1920), p. 5; *LRE* 12.8 (May 1920), p. 20; *LRE* 12.9 (June 1920), p. 9; *LRE* 12.12 (September 1920), p. 18. *TBC* 2.2 (July 1918), p. 11; *TBC* 2.7 (December 1918), pp. 11, 13; *TBC* 2.8 (January 1919), pp. 13, 16; *TBC* 2.9 (February 1919), p. 11; *TBC* 3.8 (January 1920), p. 18; *TBC* 5.2 (July 1920), p. 4. *TCE* 49 (July 1914), p. 4; *TCE* 52 (August 1914), p. 1; *TCE* 56 (August 1914), p. 3; *TCE* 66 (November 1914), p. 3; *TWE* 81 (March 1915), p. 1; *TWE* 99 (July 1915), p. 1; *TWE* 116 (November 1915), p. 4; *TWE* 122 (January 1916), p. 11; *TWE* 123 (January 1916), p. 6; *TWE* 131 (March 1916), p. 6; *TWE* 132 (March 1916), p. 5; *TWE* 135 (April 1916), p. 13; *TWE* 136 (April 1916), p. 4; *TWE* 137 (April 1916), p. 4; *TWE* 146 (July 1916), p. 11; *TWE* 148 (July 1916), pp. 6–7; *TWE* 153 (August 1916), p. 7; *TWE* 155 (September 1916), p. 10; *TWE* 171 (January 1917), p. 14; *TWE* 177 (February 1917), p. 9; *TWE* 186 (April 1917), p. 4; *TWE* 204 (August 1917), p. 13; *TWE* 208 (September 1917), p. 12; *TWE* 230 (March 1918), pp. 9–11; *TWE* 231 (March 1918), p. 10; *TCE* 256–57 (October 1918), p. 3; *TCE* 262–63 (November 1918), p. 1; *TCE* 280–81 (March 1919), p. 7; *TCE* 286–87 (May 1919), p. 8; *TCE* 288–89 (May 1919), p. 7; *TCE* 294–95 (June 1919), p. 6; *TCE* 296–97 (July 1919), p. 2; *TCE* 298–99 (July 1919), p. 5; *TPE* 316–17 (November 1919), p. 5; *TPE* 320–21 (December 1919), pp. 3, 5; *TPE* 356–57 (September 1920), p. 1.

highest volume of witness engagement in the FW stream concerns individual believers or groups who preach, teach, or testify, but it does not limit those witnesses to that of the modern reader.¹⁵¹ Figures of Scripture, like Peter, Stephen, and the Apostles are included, and some even refer to the periodicals themselves as witnesses. Additionally, reports are shared of miracles, signs, and wonders as witnesses – this includes, but is not limited to the miracle of healing.¹⁵² Finally, the

¹⁵¹ *LRE* 1.1 (October 1908), p. 11; *LRE* 1.6 (March 1909), pp. 10, 16; *LRE* 1.9 (June 1909), p. 7; *LRE* 1.10 (July 1909), pp. 12–13; *LRE* 1.12 (September 1909), pp. 17, 18–19; *LRE* 2.4 (January 1910), pp. 18, 19; *LRE* 2.5 (February 1910), p. 12, 19; *LRE* 2.11 (August 1910), p. 5; *LRE* 3.8 (May 1911), p. 10; *LRE* 3.9 (June 1911), p. 24; *LRE* 3.12 (September 1911), p. 22; *LRE* 4.3 (December 1911), p. 3; *LRE* 4.10 (July 1912), p. 22; *LRE* 4.11 (August 1912), pp. 6, 21; *LRE* 5.1 (October 1912), p. 20; *LRE* 5.6 (March 1913), p. 21, 22; *LRE* 5.7 (April 1913), p. 20; *LRE* 5.9 (June 1913), p. 13; *LRE* 5.10 (July 1913), pp. 14, 20; *LRE* 5.12 (September 1913), pp. 2, 9; *LRE* 6.1 (October 1913), p. 3; *LRE* 6.4 (January 1914), pp. 18, 23; *LRE* 6.7 (April 1914), p. 12; *LRE* 6.8 (May 1914), p. 19; *LRE* 7.4 (January 1915), p. 9; *LRE* 7.7 (April 1915), p. 10; *LRE* 8.7 (April 1916), p. 12; *LRE* 8.8 (May 1916), p. 4; *LRE* 8.10 (July 1916), p. 20; *LRE* 8.11 (August 1916), p. 2; *LRE* 8.12 (September 1916), p. 22; *LRE* 9.1 (October 1916), p. 11; *LRE* 9.5 (February 1917), p. 2; *LRE* 9.8 (May 1917), p. 22; *LRE* 9.9 (June 1917), p. 5; *LRE* 9.11 (August 1917), p. 21; *LRE* 10.1 (October 1917), p. 6; *LRE* 10.2 (November 1917), p. 14; *LRE* 11.12 (September 1919), p. 20; *LRE* 12.1 (October 1919), p. 9; *LRE* 12.3 (December 1919), pp. 13, 22; *LRE* 12.4 (January 1920), pp. 15, 20, 23; *LRE* 12.9 (June 1920), p. 17; *LRE* 12.11 (August 1920), pp. 14, 22; *LRE* 12.12 (September 1920), pp. 2, 8, 15; *LRE* 13.3 (December 1920), p. 2. *TBC* 2.4 (September 1918), p. 12; *TBC* 2.6 (November 1918), pp. 4, 10; *TBC* 2.12 (May 1919), p. 5; *TBC* 3.3 (August 1919), p. 7; *TBC* 3.9 (February 1920), p. 12; *TBC* 5.2 (July 1920), pp. 7, 19; *TBC* 5.3 (August 1920), p. 13. *TCE* 51 (July 1914), p. 4; *TCE* 53 (August 1914), pp. 2, 4; *TWE* 87 (April 1915), p. 2; *TWE* 88 (May 1915), p. 1; *TWE* 94 (June 1915), p. 4; *TWE* 118 (December 1915), p. 2, the Apostles were witnesses; *TWE* 120 (December 1915), pp. 1–2; *TWE* 122 (January 1916), p. 10; *TWE* 124 (January 1916), p. 10; *TWE* 125 (February 1916), p. 10; *TWE* 130 (March 1916), pp. 10, 13; *TWE* 131 (March 1916), p. 10, Peter was a witness; *TWE* 132 (March 1916), p. 4; *TWE* 133 (April 1916), pp. 4, 5; *TWE* 135 (April 1916), p. 10; *TWE* 137 (April 1916), p. 4; *TWE* 138 (May 1916), p. 10; *TWE* 139 (May 1916), p. 4; *TWE* 140 (May 1916), p. 4; *TWE* 142 (June 1916), p. 13; *TWE* 144 (June 1916), p. 8; *TWE* 148 (July 1916), p. 6; *TWE* 149 (July 1916), pp. 7, 11, 14; *TWE* 153 (August 1916), pp. 4, 5; *TWE* 156 (September 1916), pp. 4, 6; *TWE* 157 (September 1916), pp. 6–7, the church is a witness; *TWE* 160 (October 1916), p. 10; *TWE* 162 (October 1916), p. 13; *TWE* 164 (November 1916), p. 6; *TWE* 166 (November 1916), p. 12; *TWE* 167 (December 1916), p. 10; *TWE* 171 (January 1917), p. 10; *TWE* 180 (March 1917), p. 2; *TWE* 182 (March 1917), p. 6; *TWE* 187 (April 1917), p. 12; *TWE* 188 (May 1917), p. 2, 9; *TWE* 191 (May 1917), p. 12; *TWE* 196 (June 1917), p. 13; *TWE* 198 (July 1917), p. 7; *TWE* 202 (August 1917), p. 4; *TWE* 203 (August 1917), p. 11; *TWE* 204 (August 1917), p. 16; *TWE* 205 (September 1917), pp. 2, 4, 8; *TWE* 207 (September 1917), p. 10; *TWE* 211 (October 1917), pp. 2–3, 7, 12; *TWE* 216 (November 1917), p. 14, *The Weekly Evangel* was a witness; *TWE* 217 (December 1917), p. 5 *The Weekly Evangel* was a witness; *TWE* 227 (February 1918), pp. 4, 12; *TWE* 228 (February 1918), p. 14; *TWE* 230 (March 1918), p. 11; *TWE* 231 (March 1918), p. 10; *TWE* 232 (March 1918), p. 9; *TWE* 236–37 (April 1918), p. 11; *TWE* 240–41 (May 1918), pp. 2, 9; *TCE* 248–49 (July 1918), p. 11; *TCE* 250–51 (August 1918), p. 13; *TCE* 258–59 (October 1918), p. 6; *TCE* 262–63 (November 1918), p. 12; *TCE* 266–67 (December 1918), p. 8; *TCE* 270–71 (January 1919), p. 8; *TCE* 278–79 (March 1919), p. 6; *TCE* 280–81 (March 1919), p. 11; *TCE* 282–83 (April 1919), pp. 8, 12; *TCE* 286–87 (May 1919), pp. 4, 6; *TCE* 288–89 (May 1919), p. 2; *TCE* 298–99 (July 1919), pp. 7, 13; *TCE* 300–301 (August 1919), p. 12; *TCE* 302–03 (August 1919), p. 15; *TCE* 304–05 (September 1919), p. 4; *TCE* 306–07 (September 1919), p. 12; *TPE* 318–19 (December 1919), p. 14; *TPE* 320–21 (December 1919), p. 9; *TPE* 334–35 (April 1920), p. 4; *TPE* 356–57 (September 1920), p. 1; *TPE* 366–67 (November 1920), p. 8; *TPE* 370–71 (December 1920), p. 1.

¹⁵² *LRE* 1.5 (February 1909), p. 10; *LRE* 1.6 (March 1909), p. 18; *LRE* 1.7 (April 1909), p. 16; *LRE* 2.2 (November 1909), p. 3; *LRE* 2.6 (March 1910), p. 8; *LRE* 2.9 (June 1910), p. 19; *LRE* 3.3 (December 1910), p. 12; *LRE* 4.3 (December 1911), p. 6; *LRE* 4.4 (January 1912), p. 7; *LRE* 5.2 (November 1912), p. 2; *LRE* 5.10 (July 1913), p. 20; *LRE* 5.11 (August 1913), pp. 10, 15, 19; *LRE* 6.3 (December 1913), p. 2; *LRE* 6.4 (January 1914), p. 8; *LRE* 6.5 (February 1914), pp. 9; *LRE* 6.7 (April 1914), p. 7; *LRE* 7.8 (May 1915), p. 2; *LRE* 8.3 (December 1915), p. 15; *LRE* 8.5 (February 1916), p. 19; *LRE* 8.6 (March 1916), pp. 10, 13; *LRE* 8.8 (May 1916), p. 17; *LRE* 8.10 (July 1916), p. 4; *LRE* 8.12 (September 1916), p. 18; *LRE* 9.4 (January 1917), pp. 10, 19; *LRE* 9.6 (March 1917), p. 4; *LRE* 9.11

Fourth Gospel contributes to some of the witness accounts outside of the Apocalypse, along with the Gospel according to Mark, and the NT as a whole.¹⁵³

3.4.2 APOCALYPSE–INFORMED WITNESS

3.4.2.1 LATTER RAIN EVANGEL

As it pertains to witness in the Apocalypse, the contributions in the *Latter Rain Evangel* are minimal, but similar themes emerge to those outside of the Apocalypse. In his exposition on the Apocalypse, D. Wesley Myland notes that God gave the vision, Christ showed the vision, an angel signified it, and John had to testify to it.¹⁵⁴ Accordingly, Myland concludes that God still sends his truth via a messenger, and that messenger is to preach the gospel.¹⁵⁵ In a later edition of the publication, Myland offers commentary on the prophetic messages to the churches. In his commentary on the message to Smyrna, he offers application, noting that ‘human sweetness and culture, and sentimentalism, and love of nice things’ must be overcome in order to be faithful (witnesses).¹⁵⁶ Further, he suggests that Pergamum represents ‘worldliness and the love of worldly things; the love of money, of fashion, and of pride’.¹⁵⁷ In spite of the allurements of the world, Myland notes that there will still exist faithful witnesses who will lose their lives for their belief in

(August 1917), p. 13; *LRE* 10.2 (November 1917), p. 13; *LRE* 10.6 (March 1918), p. 6. *TBC* 1.3 (August 1917), p. 3; *TBC* 3.4 (September 1919), p. 7; *TBC* 5.2 (July 1920), p. 11, 13; *TBC* 5.7 (December 1920), p. 16. *TWE* 95 (June 1915), p. 4; *TWE* 116 (November 1915), p. 3; *TWE* 144 (June 1916), p. 11; *TWE* 157 (September 1916), p. 14; *TWE* 173 (January 1917), p. 16; *TWE* 178 (February 1917), p. 16; *TWE* 187 (April 1917), pp. 4, 10; *TWE* 189 (May 1917), p. 1; *TWE* 190 (May 1917), p. 10; *TWE* 192 (June 1917), p. 10; *TWE* 201 (August 1917), p. 3; *TWE* 203 (August 1917), p. 3; *TWE* 210 (October 1917), p. 6; *TWE* 216 (November 1917), p. 9; *TWE* 220 (December 1917), p. 13; *TWE* 222 (January 1918), pp. 5, 12; *TWE* 230 (March 1918), p. 9; *TWE* 234–35 (April 1918), p. 13; *TCE* 306–07 (September 1919), p. 2; *TPE* 326–27 (February 1920), p. 8; *TPE* 342–43 (May 1920), p. 9.

¹⁵³ *LRE* 6.3 (December 1913), p. 22; *LRE* 7.7 (April 1915), p. 10; *LRE* 10.6 (March 1918), p. 7. *TBC* 1.3 (August 1917), p. 3. *TWE* 116 (November 1915), p. 3; *TWE* 118 (December 1915), pp. 1, 3; *TWE* 123 (January 1916) 6; *TWE* 125 (February 1916), p. 7, the NT as a whole bears witness that Jesus is the Son of Man; *TWE* 129 (March 1916), pp. 6–7; *TWE* 171 (January 1917), p. 10; *TWE* 172 (January 1917), p. 10; *TWE* 175 (February 1917), p. 10; *TWE* 182 (March 1917), p. 10, the contributor writes of the faithful witness of the blind man of John 9, although this is one of the few chapters where the term witness is not found in the Fourth Gospel; *TWE* 211 (October 1917), pp. 2–3, 8; *TWE* 222 (January 1918), p. 12; *TCE* 302–03 (August 1919), pp. 8–9, Mark’s Gospel is noted.

¹⁵⁴ *LRE* 3.4 (January 1911), p. 9.

¹⁵⁵ *LRE* 3.4 (January 1911), p. 9. According to Myland, ‘God has no new method; still it is the preaching of the Gospel that saves men. That is the only way I know. We have to go to work with the old Bible and lay it on men’s hearts, preach it and live it, for it is the only medium the Spirit has to use’. Such a statement doesn’t suggest Hettiaratchy to be wrong that witness is a matter of demonstration, but Myland seems to appreciate more the proclamation as well. It is worth noting that this discourse on witness is found in his exposition on the first few verses of the first chapter; however, when he engages 1.5, no comment is made on Jesus introduced as the Faithful Witness.

¹⁵⁶ *LRE* 3.6 (March 1911), p. 2. In the February 1911 edition of this publication, Myland gives exposition to the message to Ephesus, but in it makes no reference or allusion to faithful witness (neither faithful, witness, nor the combined term).

¹⁵⁷ *LRE* 3.6 (March 1911), p. 3.

Scripture. To be such a witness, he warns readers against unholy alliances in the business, domestic, and social world.¹⁵⁸

In an article on Ezekiel's vision, Charles F. Hettiaratchy makes references to witness in the Apocalypse, calling Jesus' feet, which 'were like the color of burnished brass' (Rev. 1.15), 'witnesses for God'.¹⁵⁹ He further speaks of his own experience as a pastor, preacher, and evangelist, reporting that after an encounter with the Holy Spirit, he sought less after being a preacher, and more after being a witness. He insists, 'everywhere you go you spread the glory of God. You do not try to exert yourself to be a witness for Christ; you are not trying to preach, it is just spontaneous'.¹⁶⁰

Wm. T. MacArthur writes an article on the witnesses in Rev. 12.11. There, he connects the faithfulness of those who held fast to their testimony unto death to Jesus' promise that the baptism of the Holy Spirit would empower his disciples to become witnesses (Acts 1.8).¹⁶¹ He observes that the word translated 'witness' is also translated 'martyr', but that beheading or burning at the stake is not the only way to be a martyr. Instead, he argues that the daily dying to self is another (and perhaps much harder) death to die. Elizabeth Sisson writes about the character of the souls who were beheaded for their earthly witness (Rev. 20.4).¹⁶² She observes that every Christian will not be so faithful in their witness as to experience martyrdom as these, but that each generation has a remnant that will.

The contributions here are not testimonial but instructive. The homiletic engagement with the Apocalypse suggests that the articles here are written by pastors or leaders. Each article is

¹⁵⁸ *LRE* 3.6 (March 1911), p. 3. Here, again, Myland offers his own commentary on faithful witness, yet ignores the explicit Biblical reference to faithful witness in the text. No commentary is offered for Antipas in his treatment of the message to Pergamum. No faithful witness connection is made in his exposition on the message to Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, or Laodicea in *LRE* 3.7 (April 1911). He only notes (p. 8) that the church must be witnesses against all failing conditions of the church age, as represented in the messages to the churches. One would expect to see faithful witness in the message to Laodicea, but Myland does not even include the message to Laodicea in full, as he does the others. One might also wonder if Myland views faithful witness as an act for the whole church, or clergy only, given his view that witness is an act of preaching.

¹⁵⁹ *LRE* 3.2 (November 1910), p. 4. Here, he quotes Isa. 52.7, 'How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of them that bringeth good tidings'. Thus, it is implied by this statement that one who is a witness is one who bears good news.

¹⁶⁰ *LRE* 3.2 (November 1910), p. 4. He also adds a story of a woman who heard someone confess a preacher to be a man of God, on account of hearing him preach. Her response was that she need not hear him preach, she could see it in his face. Hettiaratchy then expressed his desire that we might become such witnesses for God.

¹⁶¹ *LRE* 10.5 (February 1918), p. 3.

¹⁶² *LRE* 2.3 (December 1909), p. 20.

expositional in nature, accompanied by a practical call to action or implication of Scripture. The idea of martyrdom comes to the fore in this publication, but more figuratively than literally.

3.4.2.2 THE BRIDAL CALL

As the editor of *The Bridal Call*, Aimee Semple McPherson is a prominent voice, and when reading the witness motif in the Apocalypse, she is the only contributor. She writes a prophetic message given to her through the Spirit to the church. In the introduction, she records words spoken to her by the Spirit, ‘Write, Write. Write my words, that all may be edified.’¹⁶³ Such an instruction should remind the readers of Rev. 1.11 (‘write ...’) and 1.3 (‘blessed is he ...’). In this message, the Spirit says to the church, ‘I have called out churches from the churches ... the sanctified from the lukewarm’ (cf. Rev. 2–3, esp. 3.16).

She continues ... that there will emerge a people who will perform signs and wonders, and will speak the words of the Lord, causing people to marvel (cf. Rev. 11.3–6). The message goes on to include immanent suffering and promises of blessings made to those who overcome. Such is clear Apocalypse language. In a testimony of one of her Florida camp meetings, McPherson opens with a doxology found in Rev. 11.17.¹⁶⁴ In the conclusion of her testimony, she reports their tribulations and poverty in ministry – a testimony that sounds very near the prophetic message to Smyrna (Rev. 2.8–11) and ends with a prayer request that they might ‘remain faithful, even unto death’.¹⁶⁵ In a sermon titled ‘The White Stone’ (Rev. 2.17), she writes that the Holy Spirit ‘bears faithful witness with our spirits that we are the children of God’.¹⁶⁶ Though McPherson’s contributions are prophetic and testimonial in nature, they have a didactic ring to them. Here, we still see familiar themes – Holy Spirit, proclamation, signs and wonders, and justification, to begin. While martyrdom is not explicitly connected, it is subtly mentioned in the prayer request of faithfulness unto death. Suffering is also mentioned in connection with witness.

3.4.2.3 THE PENTECOSTAL (ALSO WEEKLY AND CHRISTIAN) EVANGEL¹⁶⁷

¹⁶³ *TBC* 1.2 (July 1917), P. 1.

¹⁶⁴ *TBC* 1.11 (April 1918), p. 15.

¹⁶⁵ *TBC* 1.11 (April 1918), p. 15. The testimony does not mention imprisonment, but there are enough similarities there to make the connection. For example, you can hear in the tone of the testimony that even though they are facing circumstances that present felt realities of poverty or trials, there is a ‘rich’ feeling of peace and reward for the witness taking place through these camp meetings.

¹⁶⁶ *TBC* 1.1 (June 1917), p. 3.

¹⁶⁷ Throughout the years of which this exploration covers, the periodical changed its name more than once, but the content and its contributors remained consistent.

No other FW periodical contained as much engagement with witness in the Apocalypse as *The Pentecostal Evangel*. This engagement is both broad in scope and diverse in contribution. A Sunday School lesson teaches on Christ, based on Rev. 1.1–8, 17–20. In the exposition of the text, 1.4b (‘grace to you ...’) is quoted with commentary. The writer continues to 1.5b – 6 (‘unto him who loves us ...’) giving no attention to ‘Jesus Christ, the faithful witness’ in 1.5a.¹⁶⁸ Andrew D. Urshan writes a sermon on serving the Lord, based on Rev. 3. In it, he comments on Jesus, the faithful and true witness (3.14), that it would be a blessing to have him as our witness, just as God was a witness to Job. He balances this blessing with a warning, that Jesus is God’s witness for and against us.¹⁶⁹

Another writer gives focus to Revelation 3, particularly the prophetic message to the Laodicean church. Here, the writer translates witness (3.14) literally to mean martyr without expounding on the matter at any length.¹⁷⁰ Though not explicitly mentioning the Apocalypse, Alice Flower does allude to it in a Sunday School lesson on foreign missions. She notes that in Luke’s Gospel (11.32), Jesus, ‘the faithful and true witness’ (Rev. 3.14), validates the veracity of the story of Jonah.¹⁷¹ Flower uses the story of Jonah as a framework to teach the Great Commission of Mt. 28.19–20, suggesting that it is Spirit empowerment that enables such witness today, as the message Jonah was charged to preach to Nineveh.

E.T. Slaybaugh, also known for contributions in the *Bridegroom’s Messenger*, compares the cosmic war of the Apocalypse with the emerging ‘great war’, which had not yet involved America at the time of his writing.¹⁷² As America becomes involved in the great war of the eastern hemisphere, Slaybaugh suggests that the effects of the war would be global – just as the great war of the Apocalypse. Moreover, as the war continues, Slaybaugh notes that ‘Rev. 6:4 will be verified to the letter’, and that ‘some saints will have to seal their testimony with their blood’.¹⁷³ In an article on the significance of the Jews, particularly as it relates to the return of Christ, E.S. Hubbell uses Isa. 43.12 as a base text for the Jews ‘as witnesses to the veracity of Bible history’, and engages the Apocalypse – citing that the sealed ones (Rev. 7.3–4) are the witnesses of Isa. 43.12.¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁸ *TWE* 166 (November 1916), p. 10. Witness is not discussed in this article, ignored from exposition.

¹⁶⁹ *TWE* 191 (May 1917), p. 6.

¹⁷⁰ *TWE* 222 (January 1918), p. 15.

¹⁷¹ *TWE* 115 (November 1915), p. 2.

¹⁷² *TWE* 90 (May 1915), p. 3.

¹⁷³ *TWE* 90 (May 1915), p. 3. Though he draws this conclusion, no concrete scenario is provided which explains the conditions in which these saints will lose their lives, nor how their testimony will be demanded of them.

¹⁷⁴ *TCE* 258, 259 (October 1918), p. 6.

She suggests that the seal is the baptism of the Spirit, and the foreheads represent ‘minds, purposes and wills [of the witnesses] all given over to [the Spirit]’.¹⁷⁵

Alice Flower contributes a lesson on the Lord’s coming, based on a reading of Acts 1.1–14, and in that lesson suggests that the two men robed in white were highly probable to be the witnesses of Rev. 11.3–11.¹⁷⁶ Ultimately admitting uncertainty, Bell does make note that he does not believe the witnesses to be the church nor resurrected saints or overcomers. An unnamed sister shares her testimony of a three–staged prophetic vision she received while ‘in the Spirit’, in which she saw the second coming, tribulation, and the ministry and martyrdom of the two witnesses (Rev. 11.3).¹⁷⁷ Later in the same issue, a subscriber asks the identity of the witnesses of Rev. 11.3, suggesting that God only had the Spirit and the Word as witnesses in the world.¹⁷⁸ E.N. Bell refutes this suggestion based on the limited number of days of the witnesses, their expiration, and their beheading; these all being inconsistent, and perhaps ontologically impossible to reconcile with the Spirit and the Word.¹⁷⁹ In a different article, when responding to the same question, Bell answers that he believes they are two real men, perhaps Enoch and Elijah.¹⁸⁰

In an article on the church, witness is engaged extensively, under the header ‘The Church is a Witness to the World’.¹⁸¹ Interestingly, under that header, no references nor allusions are made to the Apocalypse, while other NT passages are cited. It is not until a later banner, ‘The Church is the Salt of the Earth’, that the Apocalypse is engaged, and that is not in reference to witness, but to martyrdom, only to refute the argument that the Holy Spirit leaves the world with the rapture, based on a reading of Rev. 13.7–15 and 20.4.¹⁸²

D. E. Stover laments about the lack of a Pentecostal outpouring in Central Illinois. This lament reflects an awareness of the Apocalypse as Stover expresses hopes that the church of Mansfield, IL may not be like the Laodiceans, thinking themselves rich yet being poor.¹⁸³ Stover ends with a

¹⁷⁵ *TCE* 258, 259 (October 1918), p. 6.

¹⁷⁶ *TWE* 120 (December 1915), p. 2.

¹⁷⁷ *TPE* 338, 339 (May 1920), pp. 1–3. Reading her vision does not offer new insight into the Apocalypse. At best, it may add to the imagination of the reader, as her vision adds details not offered in the Apocalypse, such as the appearance, age, and wardrobe of the witnesses.

¹⁷⁸ *TPE* 338, 339 (May 1920), p. 5.

¹⁷⁹ *TPE* 338, 339 (May 1920), p. 5.

¹⁸⁰ *TWE* 121 (January 1916), p. 8.

¹⁸¹ *TWE* 157 (September 1916), p. 7.

¹⁸² *TWE* 157 (September 1916), p. 9. The article states that since there are those who belong to Christ suffering martyrdom in these passages, the Spirit must still be present.

¹⁸³ *TCE* 53 (August 1914), p. 4.

prayer request – that God would pour out his Spirit upon the church in Mansfield, qualifying them as his witnesses. In light of the ‘ripe harvest’ (Rev. 14.15), one writer states that ‘now is the time for the “witnesses” of the Lord to arise and gird up their loins and buckle on their swords and prepare themselves for the battle’.¹⁸⁴

Elizabeth Sisson uses Rev. 20.4 as a lens through which to understand Paul’s pressing toward the goal in Phil. 3.8–15.¹⁸⁵ Sisson compares Paul, who suffered martyrdom for the witness of Jesus, to the repentant thief on the cross (Lk. 23.43). Though both the thief and Paul died believing in Jesus Christ, it was only Paul who died *for* his testimony, thus reigning with Christ (Rev. 20.4) for 1,000 years. The thief, having no testimony, would be resurrected afterward (20.5).

Overall, *The Pentecostal (Weekly/Christian) Evangel* contains more information than instruction. Contributors seem to place more of a focus on explanation of biblical information and interpretation than they are instructing believers what the implications of their interpretation demanded. The contributions are, perhaps, more identity forming – in that they position the readers in the text, even in their engagement with the Apocalypse. Unlike other periodicals, *TP(W/C)E* does not shift to a missional focus when engaging witness in the Apocalypse.

3.4.2.4 FINISHED WORK CONCLUSION

Most of the contributions in the periodicals surveyed above are less focused on the testimony of faithful witness, in a practical sense, and more on teaching what the Apocalypse says on the matter. The contributions come from voices of leadership and scholarship, not as much from the laity. Such may inform why periodicals from this stream contain a greater number of intertextual references than the former. Dispensational language is more present in these periodicals, than the former, but it is not overt. Although no true pattern emerges correlating witness, suffering, and martyrdom, there are more attempts to define witness explicitly in the Finished Work periodicals, with definitions including martyr and preaching.

3.5 CONCLUSION: STREAMS IN DIALOGUE

Surveying the voices of the early Pentecostal community, across two dominant streams of Pentecostalism, two major differences were discovered. First, a recognizable difference of

¹⁸⁴ *TCE* 63 (October 1914), p. 1. According to this article, part of that witnessing is putting our talents into service, ‘and that speedily for the time is short and the earth must me reaped’.

¹⁸⁵ *TWE* 236, 237 (April 1918), p. 3.

engagement can be seen across both streams. Unlike the Wesleyan–Holiness Pentecostal periodicals which are very diverse in the areas of content and contribution, the Finished Works periodicals are rather monolithic in contribution, and the resulting content reflects as much. The Wesleyan–Holiness contributors range from new believers and lay people to missionaries and church leaders. Most Finished Work contributions come from pastors, scholars, and evangelists, apart from one layperson’s vision shared in the *Pentecostal Evangel*. Second, The Wesleyan–Holiness groups seemed more concerned with the experience of an Apocalypse informed understanding of witness, while the Finished Work groups seemed more concerned with the exposition of the Apocalypse.

There are far more similarities across both streams than differences; five are noteworthy. First, it is not apparent whether dispensational eschatology has any bearing on this matter, but it does seem that the more prevalent a dispensational eschatology, the more exegetical the treatment of the text, and less practical. Second, whether practical or exegetical/theological, there were contributors in both streams of Pentecostalism who understood suffering and/or martyrdom to be connected to witness. Third, both streams understood witness to be a work of the Spirit through the church. Fourth, the embodiment and expression of witness is multifaceted, and included preaching, obedient living unto God, sharing one’s testimony or even writing in a column. A fifth and final noteworthy remark is that in neither stream shows significant impact of World War I nor the Flu pandemic. Very little is said of the war in relation to this topic, and the pandemic is not mentioned at all, regarding witness and the Apocalypse.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁶ This is not to say that the war and the pandemic are ignored; they are not. They are simply not topics that are brought to bear on the subject of witness and the Apocalypse.

CHAPTER 4

NARRATIVE READING OF WITNESS PASSAGES IN THE APOCALYPSE

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will offer a narrative analysis of the Apocalypse, following the faithful witness motif. As a point of focus, witness is presented in the Apocalypse five times explicitly (1.5; 2.13; 3.14; 11.3; and 17.6); however, developing a theology of a *faithful* witness will require an engagement with a number of other *implicit* occurrences,¹ including interrelated terms, such as testimony and testify.² Similarities of confession, condition, correction, or commendation can be found between the individuals or groups in the implicit and explicit passages identified. Through analysis of these collective passages, the nature of witness becomes clearer, and a more thorough analysis of faithful witness can be presented. In my engagement with the text, I will treat the term ‘testimony’ as ‘witness’, owing to both words sharing the same Greek root (μαρτ– | mart–).³

Inasmuch as this narrative engagement employs the proposed triadic negotiation of Spirit, Word, and community, grounded in liberation and pneumatic imagination, my aim is to examine the *orality* of the Apocalypse, and consider the imaginative response that it inspires.⁴ Although it is without argument that the Apocalypse is replete with literary devices that can lead to great interpretive decisions and theological conclusions,⁵ the current analysis concerns itself with the literary devices that would be heard, namely by an implied initial hearing.⁶ By doing so, I intend

¹ Revelation 1.1–3; 1.11; chapters 2–3 (not counting explicit mentions: Antipas in 2.13 and Jesus in 3.14); 4.4; 6.9–11; 7.9–17; 10.11; 11.16–18 12.10–11, 12.17; 13.9–10; 14.1–5, 12–13; 15.2–4; 16.15; 17.14, 16; 18.4; 19.10, 14; 20.4–6, 12; 21.7; and 22.12.

² Brian J. Tabb, *All Things New: Revelation as Canonical Capstone* (London; Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), p. 54.

³ Scholars make their own interpretive choice as to whether to read ‘μαρτ–’ words as witness or testimony. Dixon, *The Testimony of the Exalted Jesus*, does this in her monograph, exchanging ‘witness’ for ‘testimony’. Blount, *Can I Get a Witness*, p. 68, Kindle, translates ἡ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ (he martyria Iēsou) as ‘the witness of Jesus’, in quoting Trites, ‘Martys and Martyrdom’, p. 76. Trites, however, does not offer the same translation, but prefers the traditional ‘testimony of Jesus’ for Revelation 1.2.

⁴ Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 18, contends that ‘the images of Revelation are symbols with evocative power inviting imaginative participation in the book’s symbolic world. But they do not work merely by painting verbal pictures. Their precise literary composition is always essential to their meaning.’

⁵ See Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 1–37. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, pp. xc–civ.

⁶ Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 1–2, notes, ‘It is important to realise that the essential structure of the book, without recognition of which it would be incomprehensible, must have been intended to be perceptible in oral performance’. Further, he notes (p. 3), ‘John, it is important to remember, was writing in the first place for hearers (1:3), even though he must also have expected some readers who would study his work at leisure. In a text intended for oral performance the structure must be indicated by clear linguistic markers’. See also Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 10, where he notes:

to answer the question, ‘How does one *hear* the faithful witness motif when the Apocalypse is read?’ It is by answering this question that an Apocalypse informed, contemporary *theology of faithful witness* might be constructed.

4.2 STRUCTURE

Numerous narrative structures have been proposed for the Apocalypse, with no consensus to date.⁷ Two features of the Apocalypse that are significant to the reading I offer here are the ‘ἐν πνεύματι’ (‘in the Spirit’) phrases which introduce significant scenes in the Apocalypse (1.10; 4.2; 17.3; 21.10) and a clear prologue and epilogue which envelop those scenes.⁸ From an initial hearing of

Most ‘readers’ were originally, of course, hearers. Revelation was designed for oral enactment in Christian worship services (cf. 1:3). Its effect would therefore be somewhat comparable to a dramatic performance, in which the audience enter the world of the drama for its duration and can have their perception of the world outside the drama powerfully shifted by their experience of the world of the drama.

Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 2, echoes Bauckham, and further notes:

it is important to remember that the document was apparently written to be heard while it was being read aloud (1.3). Part of the genius of the work is that the clues as to its structure seem to communicate at a couple of different levels. On the one hand, some of the literary devices are apparent on one’s first exposure to the document; on the other hand, many of these dimensions emerge slowly as the book is repeatedly read and heard over a prolonged period of time.

I recognize the plausibility of a repeated reading–hearing of the Apocalypse among the seven communities addressed (1.4, 11; chs. 2–3); however, the reading and exploration that I offer in this thesis is more concerned, perhaps, with the first level – that is, ‘one’s first exposure to the document’.

⁷ Examples of the various reading structures include Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 2–22, who follows a reading structure based on the four ἐν πνεύματι (in the Spirit) occurrences (1.10; 4.2; 17.3; 21.10) but adds a transition between the ἐν πνεύματι in 17.3 and 21.10. He notes (p. 5), ‘Between the two sections 17:1–19:10 and 21:9–22:9 comes a section which must be understood as a single section describing the transition from one to the other. It describes the events which intervene between the fall of Babylon and the descent of the New Jerusalem.’ Mitchell G. Reddish, in R. Alan Culpepper (ed.), *Revelation* (Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary; Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Incorporated, 2001), pp. 19–21, compares John’s writing to a musical composition, offering a recapitulative (spiraled and developing) iteration of his visions. He ultimately concludes (p. 22) that readers ‘should avoid the temptation to impose too rigid a structure or order on John’s writing’, and proposes a minimalist outline, dividing the Apocalypse into four major sections: Prologue (1.1–8), Vision of the Son of Man (1.9 – 3.22), Visions of the Future (4.1–22.5) and Epilogue (22.6–21). Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, pp. 20–21, offers a similar outline, dividing the Apocalypse into prologue (1.1–8), Prophetic messages (1.9 – 3.22), Series of visions (4.1–22.9) and Epilogue (22.10–21). After presenting arguments for ‘seven sets of seven’ and ‘six sets of six’, J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (ABY. 38; New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), p. 50, suggests that the Apocalypse ‘falls into three or four distinct parts: chs. 1–3, the letters or prophecies to the churches; chs. 4–11, the visions especially concerned with the Lamb; chs. 12–22, which may be broken down into chs. 12–19 containing the well-known picture of the harlot and chs. 20–22 which seem to show several marks of redaction and interpolation’. Craig R. Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (John J. Collins [ed.]; ABY. 38A; New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2014), p. 112, follows an enumerated reading structure containing six sets of seven, enveloped by an introduction and conclusion: Introduction (1:1–8); Christ and the Seven Assemblies (1:9–3:22); The Seven Seals (4:1–8:5); The Seven Trumpets (8:6–11:18); The Dragon, the Beasts, and the Faithful (11:19–15:4); The Seven Bowls and the Fall of Babylon (15:5–19:10); From the Beast’s Demise to New Jerusalem (19:11–22:5); and Conclusion (22:6–21).

⁸ For more proponents of this reading structure, see George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), pp. 14–17; Frederick David Mazzaferri, *The*

the Apocalypse, the prologue sets a literary stage for the hearers' imagination, introducing narrator (John),⁹ characters (Father, Son, Spirit, angel, bondservants, churches, souls, and more), and plot – though slightly veiled (that which must soon take place). An initial setting (Patmos) is given in the prologue, but it is the Spirit that sets the narrative in motion – changing the setting at every ‘ἐν πνεύματι’ occurrence. The characters and narrator are consistent throughout the Apocalypse, including the prologue. It is in the prologue where the plot reaches its climax. That which must soon take place (1.1) is not reduced to the series of events that occur in John's visions when he is ἐν πνεύματι; rather, the pinnacle of 1.1 is realized in 1.7 ‘behold, he is coming in the clouds’. The pronouncement of Jesus' immanent return is repeated three times more (‘I am coming soon!’ 22.7, 12, 20).

- I. Prologue (1.1–8)
- II. ἐν πνεύματι – on the Lord's Day (1.9–3.22)
- III. ἐν πνεύματι – in Heaven (4.1–16.21)
- IV. ἐν πνεύματι – in the Wilderness (17.1–21.8)
- V. ἐν πνεύματι – on a High Mountain (21.9–22.5)
- VI. Epilogue (22.6–21)

In the Apocalypse, the Spirit is a guide – not for John only, but for the readers and hearers as well. The prominent role of the Spirit is made clearer by an ἐν πνεύματι reading structure. With the Spirit as a conductor of the symphony of scenes, signs, symbols, and OT allusions throughout the Apocalypse, an ἐν πνεύματι reading structure helps hearers to appreciate the Apocalypse as a single cohesive narrative, with all its complexities.

4.3 REVELATION 1.1–8: PROLOGUE

In the opening of the Apocalypse (1.1–3), we are introduced to the witness motif and its theological significance. Streams of Christology begin to emerge early.¹⁰ Moreover, the source (God), substance (Jesus), summons (read, hear, obey), and surety (blessing) of witness are all found here. Though the hearers are not yet aware, this beginning will be matched by a similar section toward the Apocalypse's conclusion, where this faithful and true witness recorded by John is said to come

Genre of the Book of Revelation from a Source-critical Perspective (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1989), pp. 395–96; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 2–8; Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation*, p. 138; Archer, ‘*I Was in the Spirit*’, p. 119; Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, pp. 194–95.

⁹ U-Wen Low, ‘Wait, Witness, Worship: (Limited) Human Agency as Resistance in the Book of Revelation’, *ABR* 70 (2022), pp. 101–15 (104).

¹⁰ Peter J. Leithart, *Revelation* (Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain [ed.]; ITCHSINT 1; London; Oxford; New York; New Delhi; Sydney: Bloomsbury; Bloomsbury T&T Clark: An Imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2018), pp. 69–70.

from God (22.6); its content is Jesus (22.7, 12–16, 20); there is a clear summons – though now it is to ‘come’, (22.17); and the assurance is specific – washed robes (22.14) and a drink of the water of life (22.17).¹¹ That the Apocalypse ends with this grouping concretizes the veracity of the promises of blessings in the beginning; the chaos which the hearers will encounter in the chapters to come will not render the assurance of blessing null and void.

John begins with the title of the book, A Revelation of Jesus Christ (Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ).¹² In contrast to witness/testimony (μάρτυς/μαρτυρία/μαρτυρέω), the term revelation (Ἀποκάλυψις) is absent from Johannine literature, apart from its use in the Apocalypse, and that only here in the first verse. Notwithstanding the absence of the term from Johannine literature, the hearers might understand that what they will encounter in this writing will require imaginative and responsive hearing, as this revelation was given to show (δεῖξαι) what will soon take place. In the FG, as well as here in the Apocalypse, this infinitive verb carries with it the idea of disclosure;¹³ particularly, it was revealing something that was fully understood or known in heaven yet hidden or revealed partially on earth. It was through Jesus that this revealing would take place (Jn 2.18;

¹¹ Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, pp. 13–14, offers a partial example of this doublet; however, the lens of faithful witness brings more to the fore of the text than a broad-stroke exegetical engagement.

¹² This word has garnered much attention, as it relates to definition of a term and identification of a genre, but there is no reason to believe that a literary genre is meant here. In matters of genre, and the apocalyptic tradition, Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 13–14, notes that ‘for some interpreters the evidence for this is so strong that it is not uncommon to find commentaries that address the issue of apocalyptic as its first order of business’. Catherine Gunsalus González and Justo L. González, in Patrick D. Miller and David L. Bartlett (eds.), *Revelation* (Westminster Bible Companion; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), p. 7, offer an example of such evidence:

In general, apocalyptic literature seeks to deal with the suffering of the just at the hands of the unjust and does so in a highly symbolic language that combines liberal use of metaphor with numbers of often mysterious meaning. Since such literature generally is addressed to the faithful, it often speaks a language that is hard for the uninitiated to understand. Visions and their explanations play an important role in all apocalyptic literature and serve to explain why the just suffer, as well as to paint a picture of the final victory of God and God’s chosen people.

Gerhard A. Krodel, *Revelation*, (Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1989), p. 81. ‘With this designation he did not refer to a literary genre, as though he wished to indicate that he was writing another apocalypse, but he referred to a revelatory experience, as the narration in 1:9–20 will clarify’. Archer, ‘*I was in the Spirit*’, p. 121. For more on the vast scholarship and media that concerns itself with Apocalypse, see Leithart, *Revelation*, pp. 55–56. John J. Collins, ‘Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre’, in John Joseph Collins (ed.), *Semeia* 14 (1979), pp. 1–20 (9), offers a definition of the genre, though not intended to be complete. He states that it ‘is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world’. See also his later developed monograph, John C. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1984). For a collection of essays from various scholars on the subject, see Adela Yarbro Collins (ed.), ‘Early Christian Apocalypticism: Genre Social Setting’, *Semeia* 36 (1986).

¹³ G. Schneider, ‘Δείκνυμι, δεικνύω’, *EDNT* 1, p. 280.

5.20; 7.4; 10.32; 14.8,9; 20.20).¹⁴ Such an understanding of δεῖξαι, in conjunction with a preunderstanding that Jesus only disclosed that which God gave to him (Jn 1.18; 8.28; 12.49–50; 14.10; 15.15; 17.8, 14), should alert the hearers to the revelatory nature of what was to be read before them.¹⁵

John's mention of the name Jesus (Ἰησοῦ) together with Christ, *the Anointed One* (Χριστοῦ),¹⁶ may cause the hearers to imagine the earthly ministry of Jesus. Rather than a surname, the term Χριστοῦ is pregnant with identity and vocation, especially in matters of faithful witness. The first mention of Christ, in Johannine literature is found in the FG, where it is recorded that through Jesus 'Christ', grace and truth were apprehended (cf. Jn 1.17). The Johannine community would recognize, as John the Baptizer testified in the FG, that there was only one who would fulfill this role (cf. Jn 1.20). When Andrew found his brother, Simon Peter, his report (Jn 1.41) was that they had found the Messiah, 'which translated means Christ'. When Jesus engages the Samaritan woman in the FG, she responds that she knows of the coming Messiah, '(the one who is called Christ)' (Jn 4.25). The hearers would likely be familiar with the ending of the FG, which claims that all that had been written therein was so that the readers would believe that Jesus is the Christ

¹⁴ Pace Blount, *Revelation*, p. 27, who suggests that at hearing the word *apokalypsis* (revelation), the hearers may have in mind the disrobing of a virgin, it seems more likely that the Johannine community may recognize *apokalypsis* (revelation) as something of a divine nature. Leithart, *Revelation*, p. 69, suggests that an 'erotic connotation' may be at play here, based on its use in the LXX, but ultimately expounds on the divine focus that John seems to have in mind here. For more on the divine connection, see Henry Barclay Swete (ed.), *The Apocalypse of St. John* (2nd edn; Classic Commentaries on the Greek New Testament; New York: The Macmillan Company, 1906), p. 1. More specifically, Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 87, notes that the hearers may have made the connection between *apokalypsis* (revelation) and prophecy, per 1 Cor. 14.6.

¹⁵ Perhaps the hearers might simply accept this correspondence as a written form of what Jesus provided in his messianic work on earth – prophetic declaration and disclosure, as well as signs and wonders.

¹⁶ The Anointed One is italicized here for emphasis to the reader of the current thesis. Koester, *Revelation*, p. 211, suggests that Christ is part of Jesus' name in 1.1–2, and 5, but that John uses it as a title in 11.15 and 12.10. He gives no explanation as to why John would consider Χριστοῦ a surname for Jesus, nor why he would change his usage to a title later. Leon Morris, *Jesus Is the Christ: Studies in the Theology of John* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), p. 68, suggests that 'Jesus was called "Christ" because he fulfilled all that the title signifies and in due course his title was employed so often that it came to be used as a name with no particular emphasis on its meaning'. Even if Koester and Morris are correct, if John uses Christ as a part of Jesus' name, the FG gives substantial evidence of the messianic role of Jesus; implying that the name is more than identity, but vocation as well. See also Donald Guthrie, 'The Christology of Revelation', in Joel B. Green and Max Turner (eds.), *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ: Essays on the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology* (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; The Paternoster Press, 1994), pp. 398–99:

It is not accidental that the title 'Jesus Christ' occurs three times in the first chapter but nowhere else in the book. The first Christian readers would need to be led from Jesus Christ to the Lamb, the name which dominates the second part of the book. It is significant that the messianic title for Christ, in the sense of the Anointed One, is introduced at the beginning but occurs again only three times in the rest of the Apocalypse. It is as if the writer is leading his readers to concentrate on an even more significant title, that of the Lamb, who is not, however, introduced until ch. 5.

(Jn 20.31).¹⁷ Thus, the hearers understand that this Apocalypse comes from Jesus, the same anointed Messiah of the FG.

More than emerging early as a theme, witness is presented implicitly as the subject matter of the Apocalypse;¹⁸ John bears witness (ἐμαρτύρησεν) to the Word of God (τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ) and the witness of Jesus Christ (καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ).¹⁹ An understanding of this phrase is paramount for following the witness motif in the Apocalypse. Here, John's exegetical use of καὶ is often missed, owing to most translations rendering, 'the Word of God *and* the witness of Jesus Christ'.²⁰ Such a use of καὶ here would suggest that 'the witness of Jesus Christ' (τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ) is synonymous to, or a functional equivalent of 'the Word of God' (τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ).²¹

The Apocalypse itself is a written and orated 'witness' of the commissioned witness of Jesus, who is the Word of God, and the experienced witness of John, his bondservant (1.1–2).²² This

¹⁷ I recognize that throughout these examples, there exists both an articular (ὁ χριστός | the Christ) and anarthrous (χριστός | Christ) use of the term. The illocutionary force of the FG and the Apocalypse suggest that there may have been instances where the article ὁ was necessary for reasons of clarity in the FG, but in the Apocalypse was not something to prove or validate. As Slater, *Revelation*, p. 37, alludes, John does not intend to prove Jesus to be the Messiah here, rather it is to present the slain Lamb as the victorious Messiah.

¹⁸ The scholarly attention given to apokalypsis may be, in part, why faithful witness seems to go unnoticed or underappreciated in the Apocalypse, especially here in the introduction. A more careful examination will reveal not only its significance, but its prominence for the whole of the Apocalypse.

¹⁹ Since both witness (μάρτυς | martyr) and testimony (μαρτυρίαν | martyrion) share the same Greek root, (μαρτ- | mart-), scholars make their own interpretive choice as to whether they want to read them as witness or testimony. Ian Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John* (BNTC; London: Continuum, 2006), p. 25, notes that 'Revelation is John's written testimony to all the things he has seen'. Blount, *Revelation*, p. 27. Note Blount's agreement:

John's opening chapter establishes the seer's primary theme: witness. His entire work is a witness to the revelation that God has disclosed: God, working through the historical expression of Jesus as the Christ, is Lord. John relays this testimony with a purpose. His hearers and readers must witness to others the truth that John reveals to them, no matter the cost.

W.C. Van Unnik, 'Jesus the Christ', *NTS* 8.2 (1962), pp. 101–16 (106), makes an observation worth noting at length: In the course of nineteen centuries with Christian preaching, thinking, praising Jesus Christ, the Saviour in glory has so completely moulded the meaning of the word 'Christ' that we have forgotten that once in the very beginning it was different: not Jesus—once in humility, now in glory—gave meaning to the title 'Christ', but the common Jewish category 'Christ–Messiah' gave meaning to the person Jesus. Centuries of Christo– logical thinking have laid a crust over the meaning 'Christ–Messiah' had for the Jews in Jesus' days. This process was already on its way in the N.T. As soon as Christianity stepped outside the Jewish sphere, this typical designation lost its matrix because it had no place in pagan 'theology' and was meaningless to the Greeks and Romans; it dried out, was fossilized. But fossils are important witnesses to a previous stage of life. In the study of N.T. Christology we must distinguish better than has been done so far between images and titles; between names taken from 'outside' and those which were thought appropriate in connexion [sic] with the special 'case' of Jesus.

²⁰ KJV, NIV, NASB, NLT, ESV, and others.

²¹ Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, p. 19; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 89.

²² G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), p. 183. Jon K. Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2021), p. 85. This perspective of the Apocalypse helps to ease the ambiguous interpretive

recorded witness is to be shared with ‘his bondservants’ (τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ). That these hearers are part of the Christian community will be evident owing to their being addressed as members of the seven churches in Asia (1.4).²³ Moreover, the theological and literary semblance between the FG and the Apocalypse suggests that it is a Johannine Christian community.²⁴ Given John’s many allusions to the OT,²⁵ where the prophets are referred to as God’s ‘servants’ (עֲבָדֵי), it is fair to imagine that this is a prophetic community.²⁶ At a minimum, the readers and hearers of this Apocalypse are called upon to discern the prophetic signs that they will encounter in this narrative

tension of the genitive construction of the phrase Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (revelation of Jesus the Anointed One); that is, whether it is a revelation *about Jesus* (objective genitive) or *from Jesus* (subjective genitive). Valid arguments are made for the subjective: David L. Mathewson, *A Companion to the Book of Revelation* (Cascade Companions; Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2020), p. 39; Craig S. Keener, *Revelation* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999), pp. 53–54; Leithart, *Revelation*, p. 73, offers a similar view, noting, ‘Jesus *receives* this apocalypse from the Father in order to “show” (δειξαι) it to the slaves’. Ford, *Revelation*, p. 373, prefers an objective view. Keener, *Revelation*, p. 54, and James L. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John: A Narrative Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), p. 62, both suggest that choosing between the two is rather artificial. We will soon come to know, what the hearers of this narrative discover – Jesus is the subject who does this unveiling (1.1), as well as the object which is unveiled (19.13).

²³ Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, pp. 23–24. Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 29.

²⁴ Thomas, *The Apocalypse* p. 23, lists these two (theological and literary) arguments for a Johannine community, adding that ‘an obvious indicator that Revelation is part of the Johannine community is the fact that all of these documents are either directly or indirectly tied to the name John, though Revelation is the only document in which the name appears in the text itself’. Additionally, D. Moody Smith, ‘Johannine Christianity: Some Reflections on Its Character and Delineation’, *New Testament Studies* 21.2 (1975), pp. 222–48 (22–23), observes:

The communal images of the Gospel (e.g. the shepherd and the flock, the vine and the branches), the prayer for unity (John xvii), and the underlying assumption of the farewell discourses that the disciples of Jesus are to constitute a continuing community after his death (an assumption that receives confirmation in I John) allow us to speak of a Johannine conception of the church, despite the disuse of the term *ecclesia* in the Gospel and Epistles. Yet there are problems in attempting to construct the Johannine conception of the church directly from the relevant texts.

Additionally, he writes (pp. 236–37):

While certainty in such matters is scarcely attainable, the cumulative effect of a variety of evidence makes it appear highly probable that the Johannine writings emerged from a tradition, from a particular strain of early Christianity. Moreover, we shall not badly mislead ourselves if we think of a community (or communities) with some stability, with which it had been endowed in part by its continuity with the past. It is likely, if not certain, that the Johannine community was coterminous with specific Christian congregations who lived both in it and from it. The rather small extent of clear literary relation and other evocations of contact between the Johannine literature and the rest of the New Testament suggests that the Johannine *Eigenart* reflects the existence of distinctly Johannine communities, rather than communities in which the Johannine option was one of several.

²⁵ G.K. Beale and Sean M McDonough, ‘Revelation’, in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos, 2007), p. 1082. This is not an argument that they are all prophets, but that they are a community receptive of prophetic activity, with at least some (as John) occupying the vocation of a prophet. Craig R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, p. 45. See also, Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation*, pp. 66–68.

²⁶ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 88. ‘The intended recipients of this Apocalypse are “his servants”, which could be a reference to believers in general. However, given the OT usage of this term to designate prophets it is likely that its occurrence here anticipates the numerous mentions of prophets in this book and may even be evidence that the community of the Apocalypse is a prophetic community’.

witness that which was ‘sent and communicated by his angel’ (καὶ ἐσήμανεν ἀποστείλας διὰ τοῦ ἀγγέλου αὐτοῦ) to John, for them.²⁷ Owing to the fact that ἐσήμανεν (communicated/signified) is a word of demonstration, the community would likely expect to have to exercise their imagination to visualize what was given to John.²⁸

‘His servant, John’ is presented early as a trustworthy witness (1.1).²⁹ The John to which the name refers is unclear,³⁰ though few can ignore overtures to the FG and 1–3 John, especially in matters of theological themes such as ‘the Word’³¹ and ‘witness’.³² Obscurity notwithstanding, one does not need to resolve the issue of authorship to perceive John as a witness. We might safely imagine the hearers recognizing John as a prophetic member of their community (1.3; 22.19).³³ Additionally, we can imagine their trust in John the prophet as a reliable witness, owing to his commissioning from God, through Jesus, through the angel.³⁴ The first sentence of the Apocalypse concludes with the centrality of its focus – witness.³⁵ Therein, the hearers observe heaven and earth, God and humanity, converging at this significant theme.

What would the hearers imagine when they hear that John ‘bore witness’ to the ‘witness’ of Jesus Christ? The hearers would likely recall the witness of Jesus in the FG (cf. Jn 5.33–47), especially when standing trial before Pilate (Jn 18.28–40), or the eyewitness testimony recorded

²⁷ John Peter Lange, *et al. A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Revelation* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), p. 89. Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 29, does not view the servants as the whole community; rather they ‘are prophetic colleagues to whom John reports his revelatory visions. They in turn are expected to broadcast, that is, witness the report to the churches’. Such a distinction does not seem necessary if the transmission ultimately ends up presented before the church as a whole.

²⁸ Karl Heinrich Rengstorff, ‘Σημεῖον, Σημαίνω, Σημειώω, Ἄσημος, Ἐπίσημος, Εὔσημος, Σύσσημον’, *TDNT* 4, p. 243, notes that in Johannine literature, it denotes ‘something one can and basically should see’.

²⁹ Javier Lopez, ‘Tres Veces Juan: Rol de una Singular Presentación (Ap 1,1.4.9)’, *Gregorianum* 93.1 (2012), pp. 47–73; 51, notes that other than John, the only biblical writer mentioned in the Apocalypse is Moses (15.3), and he is mentioned with the same designation, ‘τοῦ δούλου τοῦ θεοῦ’ (the servant of God). It would not be out of place to imagine that the hearers might appreciate that John is a bondservant being given a message from God, just as Moses and other OT prophets.

³⁰ Slater, *Revelation as Civil Disobedience*, p. 4, suggests that since the author does not appeal to apostolic authority, nor claims any relation to the twelve, he cannot be John the apostle. Leithart, *Revelation*, pp. 73, 76–79, for example argues for John the apostle and beloved disciple of Jesus as the author of Revelation, the FG, and 1–3 John – providing intertextual evidence to support his claim. Ford, *Revelation*, p. 28, prefers John the Baptist as the author. Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 41–50, offers considerable attention to the debate, ultimately suggesting (with which I agree), that such a debate misses the call to hear from John the prophet, as such is his vocation in writing this narrative witness.

³¹ John 1.1, 14; 2.22; 4.39, 50; 10.35; 12.38, 48; 14.24; 15.3, 20, 25; 18.9, 32; 1 Jn 1.1, 2.7, 14.

³² John 1.7, 8, 19; 2.25; 3.11, 32–33; 5.31–32, 34, 36, 39; 7.7; 8.13–14, 17; 10.25; 12.17; 15.26–27; 18.23, 37; 19.35; 21.24; 1 Jn 1.2; 4.14; 5.7, 9–11; 3 Jn 12.

³³ Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 3; Archer, ‘*I Was in the Spirit*’, p. 122.

³⁴ Douglas F. Kelly, *Revelation* (A Mentor Expository Commentary; Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor, 2012), p. 23. Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 89.

³⁵ Blount, *Revelation*, p. 27.

in 1 John (1 Jn 1.1–4). Certainly, this community of prophetic believers would understand witness to be something of the communicative nature,³⁶ but this early in the narrative, it might be safe to imagine courtroom imagery as a primary conception in the minds of the hearers as there is no indication that martyrdom is in view this early in the text.³⁷ Whatever they might imagine at its hearing, they will soon discover what *faithful* witness requires and what is its reward, so far as the Apocalypse will inform the vocation.

The didactic nature of this narrative witness is understood in 1.3. The readers and hearers are encouraged not to receive the Apocalypse passively; rather, they are exhorted to ‘keep’ (τηροῦντες) – that is, to be active, obedient participants of that which they read and hear.³⁸ John

³⁶ Blount, *Revelation*, p. 29, argues, ‘It is a word of provocative testimony and therefore active engagement, not sacrificial passivity. *Martyr* language, as John introduces (*martyreō*, testify, 1:2; *martyria*, testimony, 1:2, 9; *martys*, witness, 1:5) and develops it, is language preoccupied not with dying, but declaration’.

³⁷ Trites, ‘Μάρτυς and Martyrdom’, p. 76:

In i 2 the testimony of Jesus is defined in terms of the contents of the prophecy; the seer of Patmos ‘bore witness (ἐμαρτύρησεν is an epistolary aorist), ‘even to all that he saw’. Taken by itself, then, there is no martyrological suggestion in the use of μαρτυρία in i 2. The same is true of i 9, though there the idea of suffering as a penalty for bearing witness is mentioned in vi 9 the martyrs are ‘slain’ (note the repeated use of σφάζειν in v 6, 9; vi 4, 9; xiii 3, 8; xviii 24) for a testimony *previously* given – a point made crystal clear by the context.

Roloff, *A Continental Commentary*, p. 20, makes the connection, that:

Its origin is in the realm of law: testimony is the binding deposition that someone renders before a court about that which one has seen and heard. Whenever the New Testament speaks of testimony and of bearing testimony or witness to that which has occurred in Jesus Christ, it signifies not only a formally reliable reproduction of words and facts but also an intercession of the one bearing testimony with his or her whole person on behalf of the truth about what has been heard and seen.

Kendell H. Easley, *Revelation 12* (Holman New Testament Commentary; Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), p. 12. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 63. Alan S. Bandy, ‘Patterns of Prophetic Lawsuits in the Oracles to the Seven Churches’, *Neot* 45.2 (2011), pp. 178–205 (186), suggests that the prophetic messages to the churches which follow ‘are comparable to the proceedings of a judicial investigation whereby a judge examines the evidence and either encourages particular actions or warns of impending judgement’. Such a literary observation would support the courtroom imagery of the witness motif. For a Johannine engagement with witness in the FG, see J.H. Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John 1* (Alan Hugh McNeile [ed.]; International Critical Commentary; New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1929), pp. xci-xcii, who offers a sevenfold list of witnesses in the FG: (1) John the Baptist; (2) other human witnesses; (3) The OT; (4) the works of Jesus; (5) the Father; (6) Jesus himself; and (7) the Spirit. While not defining witness, it is clear that Bernard suggests a ‘testimonial’ view of witness in the FG. Andrew T. Lincoln, *Truth on Trial: The Lawsuit Motif in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000), p. 185, helps to make this testimonial view clear, noting:

One of the distinctives of [the Fourth Gospel] is that its testimony about God is so intricately linked to its testimony about Christ and vice versa. The talk about a cosmic lawsuit provides a reminder that, for all the focus on Christ in this narrative, it is by no means christomonist (i.e., employing Christ as a regulative principle to the exclusion of other aspects of theology). An investigation from this angle has to start, at least formally. With God because. Cosmic lawsuit is all about the relationship between God and the world.

Concerning the witness of Jesus, he further notes (p. 194), ‘The [Fourth] Gospel emphasizes in a further way the relationship between Jesus and God entailed in Jesus’ witness. Like all human witnesses, Jesus speaks of what he has seen and heard, but with a striking difference: what Jesus has seen and heard and what becomes the content of his witness are heavenly things (3:12).’

³⁸ ‘τηρέω’, *BDAG*, p. 1002.

pronounces a blessing upon the observant hearers, amplifying his voice as a credible witness. The blessings which accompany adherence to the words of the Apocalypse speak to the trustworthiness of the narrative itself, and equally of the vessel through whom it was transmitted. The beatitude is linked directly to adherence to all that they will soon hear, and by virtue suggests that witness bears with it a degree of ethical compliance.³⁹

The hearers of the Apocalypse would not discern the call to witness with individualistic ears, for it is to be read aloud before the congregation.⁴⁰ This liturgical communique is made evident by the singular and plural pronouns; *one* is expected to read (ὁ ἀναγινώσκων | ‘he who reads’) before multiple hearers (οἱ ἀκούοντες | ‘those who hear’).⁴¹ The beatitude inspires one to imagine diversity in this Johannine community; though they may be assumed a prophetic company, blessing is not reserved for an elite group within the commonwealth.⁴² Every member of the community is entitled to the same promise of blessing; regardless of nation, kindred, people, or tongue.⁴³ This beatitude has a binding effect, in that it brings the hearers together in solidarity – much like that of the songs sung during the Civil Rights era helped to unify African Americans, as well as those who stood with them from outside of the African American community. Additionally, the beatitude gives reader and hearer equal relevance, for what John writes should invoke the performative imagination toward active participation in witness.⁴⁴

The prophetic identity of the hearers becomes clearer as John categorizes this narrative. If prophecy were to be implied by his use of the words Ἀποκάλυψις (Apocalypse) or δεῖξαι (‘to show’) in the opening, John will now leave no room for ambiguity. What they are about to read, hear, and observe are ‘the words of the prophecy’ (τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας).⁴⁵ Thus far, the

³⁹ Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation: Verse by Verse* (Osborne New Testament Commentaries; Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), p. 22. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 184.

⁴⁰ ‘ἀναγι(γ)νώσκω’, *BDAG*, p. 60. R.H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St John* (vol. 1, International Critical Commentary; Edinburgh: T&T Clark International, 1920), p. 7; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 90. I do not suggest that there will not be individual responsibility to ‘hear what the Spirit says to the churches’. What is meant by not discerning with individualistic ears is that the Spirit is not speaking in private, thus all who hear, though individually responsible for observing, are accountable to the community at large.

⁴¹ Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, p. 11.

⁴² Roloff, *The Revelation of John*, p. 213.

⁴³ David L. Barr, ‘How Were the Hearers Blessed? Literary Reflections on the Social Impact of John’s Apocalypse’, *Proceedings* 8 (1988), pp. 49–59 (50). Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 26. Anne-Marit Enroth, ‘The Hearing Formula in the Book of Revelation’, *NTS* 36 (1990), pp. 598–608 (607–608).

⁴⁴ Barr, ‘How Were the Hearers Blessed?’, pp. 54–55; Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 31; Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 26.

⁴⁵ According to Mazzaferri, *The Genre of the Book of Revelation*, p. 56, ‘as his words were read aloud they would certainly sound prophetic to his people. Already John points forcefully to his self-identity as a prophet in classical Old Testament style’.

hearers must imagine that the call to witness involves communal engagement and active participation.⁴⁶

At the close of 1.3, a temporal significance is emphasized, setting witness *in tempore* (against time), owing to John's record that what he witnesses (1.1) must soon take place.⁴⁷ Rather than suggesting that this will take place in latter days (cf. Dan. 2.28), it seems that John expects the readers and hearers of this prophetic witness to hold in tension an ambiguous sense of urgency.⁴⁸ Accordingly, it would seem that those who read and hear should do so with a sense of immanence, as John reinforces the urgency in 1.3, for 'the time is near' (ὁ γὰρ καιρὸς ἐγγύς). While the hearers of this narrative witness have been informed of its apocalyptic and prophetic nature, John shifts to a conventional opening of an early Greco–Roman letter (cf. 2 John and 3 John),⁴⁹ but this greeting contains so much more than a salutation.⁵⁰

Whereas 1.1–3 was an introduction to the nature of the Apocalypse – what it is and how it ought to be transmitted, 1.4a identifies the author and recipients.⁵¹ John is introduced, once again, to the hearers, yet here in this greeting, he uses no title. Having already established himself as a bondservant of God (1.1), the untitled mention of his name here further amplifies his voice as a credible witness in the community.⁵² Further, it helps us to imagine a degree of intimacy between John and his hearers.⁵³ He continues by identifying the recipients of the correspondence as the

⁴⁶ As the Apocalypse unfolds, the relationship between prophecy and faithful witness becomes clearer. Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary*, p. 87.

⁴⁷ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 184.

⁴⁸ Mathewson, *A Companion to the Book of Revelation*, p. 40.

⁴⁹ John Wick Bowman, *The Drama of the Book of Revelation* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1955), p. 11; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 91.

⁵⁰ Thomas B. Slater, *Christ and Community: A Socio–Historical Study of the Christology of Revelation* (JSNT Sup 178; Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press Ltd. 1999), p. 93:

The cosmology in these verses has presented Christ as a participant in divine honors with God. Christ takes a place of pre–eminence as God's first–born and ruler of the earth. Christ has faithfully re–presented the word of God to humanity and now represents that very word of God in his person (cf. Rev. 19.13). He also has faithfully discharged his responsibility, even to the point of giving his own life, and has been elevated by God to the position of Sovereign Lord of the universe. Christians may feel safe, for their lord and master rules the universe. Eventually, Christ's sovereignty will be acknowledged by all humanity (v. 7). Thus, these verses also convey to the reader the certainty of God's eternal blessings to his 'faithful witnesses'.

⁵¹ Keener, *Revelation*, p. 66.

⁵² Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, p. 18.

⁵³ Isbon T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John: Studies in Introduction with a Critical and Exegetical Commentary*. (New York: Macmillan Company, 1919), p. 423. Merrill C. Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1957), p. 45. Smalley, *Revelation*, p. 31.

seven churches in Asia,⁵⁴ addressing them not as ‘synagogues’ (συναγωγῆ, cf. 2.9; 3.9); instead, as the ‘seven churches’ (ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαις).⁵⁵

John continues in the greeting by wishing a special blessing of grace and peace upon the prophetic churches (1.4b). As they hear the words ‘grace to you, and peace’ (χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη), they may recall that it was through the fullness of Jesus Christ that grace was received (Jn 1.16).⁵⁶ They may also recall Jesus’ proclamation of peace to his disciples, three times, after his resurrection (Jn 20.19–29). Whatever they might imagine at the hearing of the words grace and peace, they will soon come to find (chs. 2–3) the significance of this greeting. Though the greeting has been penned by John, the prophetic leader, the origin of grace and peace is threefold.⁵⁷ In his introduction, John has already informed the hearers of this prophetic witness – that it comes from God the Father, through Jesus Christ. Its prophetic nature, noted in the beatitude (1.3), may imply Spirit origin as well (cf. 1 Sam. 10.6; Ezek. 37.1–7). Here in the formal greeting, God, Spirit, and Jesus are introduced with expanded description.

First mentioned is God (1.4c).⁵⁸ Here, John draws attention to the constancy of God. Those hearing this message may recognize John describing God in temporal language; he was, he is, and he is coming.⁵⁹ Certainly, history and hope must begin to flood the imagination of the listeners at such a greeting. The hearers would be keenly aware of God’s faithfulness to his people, even when they were unfaithful. This same God is present with them in their circumstances; but, to claim that he is coming (ὁ ἐρχόμενος), implies an immanent nearness – perhaps unlike that which they have experienced.⁶⁰

⁵⁴ Blount, *Revelation*, p. 33; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 91.

⁵⁵ It appears that John has reserved this term for the communities who follow Jesus. Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation*, p. 215. Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 29.

⁵⁶ Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 65.

⁵⁷ Blount, *Revelation*, pp. 34–35; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 91.

⁵⁸ Some scholars draw out the grammatical challenges of the greeting from God: Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 32, offers two: ‘(a) The description of God is the nominative, whereas the preposition ἀπό (apo, ‘from’) is normally followed by the genitive’, and ‘(b) The finite verb ἦν (ēn, ‘was’) is used in two parallel clauses which are participial: ὁ ὢν (ho ōn, ‘who is’) and ὁ ἐρχόμενος (ho erchomenos, ‘[the one] who is coming’)’. Also, see Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, p. 10, who contends that ‘the Seer has deliberately violated the rules of grammar in order to preserve the divine name inviolate from the change which it would necessarily have undergone if declined’. However, it seems unlikely that the hearers of the Apocalypse would be concerned with parsing the words. Even if the reader were to recognize the grammatical nuances (Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 31, suggests that John may be ‘presenting Israel’s God as the ultimate subject, who can be confined by no-one’s grammatical rules’), it is unlikely that they would stop to explain such nuances in a worship service.

⁵⁹ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 91. Beale, *Revelation*, pp. 187–88. For the temporal description, see Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, p.10. Lange, et al. *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, p. 91.

⁶⁰ *Contra* Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 31, who comments that ‘the God who now exists is also the one who was in the beginning, and will continue to be into eternity’. John does not use a third εἰμί (I am) verb here,

No longer implied in the prophetic nature of the Apocalypse, John brings the Spirit to the fore, introducing the seven spirits around the throne of God (1.4d). It is unlikely that the hearers would imagine seven angels with this mention,⁶¹ for the seven spirits before the throne of God share in the offering of grace and peace. One might safely conclude that the hearers understand the seven spirits here to represent the Spirit of God, as nowhere in the Johannine writings do we find grace and peace to come from angels or humans.⁶² Having heard the number seven for the second time so early in the narrative, the hearers might begin to recognize a pattern emerging. Regardless of what they might imagine at the hearing of the seven spirits, they will soon come to know how the Spirit works in their call to witness (chs. 2–3).

From the onset of the Apocalypse, witness has been established as an operative theme, and Jesus has been presented as a prominent witness figure in the narrative; however, a point of distinction is made here in the greeting. In 1.5, for the first time, the Johannine community will encounter ‘*faithful*’ witness, explicitly identified. This designation, so early in the narrative, elevates the witness motif, and sets a platform for everything that follows.⁶³ Grace and peace come from God, who is faithful (implicitly) throughout time; the Spirit, who is faithfully present (implicitly) before his throne; and finally, Jesus Christ who is faithful (explicitly) in his witness. Although witness is a recognized theme in the Johannine community, it is only in the Apocalypse that the term receives the qualification of faithful – *faithful* witness is not seen in the FG nor 1–3 John. The hearing of witness qualified as faithful is found first here in the greeting, spoken of

but chooses a verb of movement (ἔρχομαι – to come), which denotes a change of position from one to another. ‘ἔρχομαι’, *BDAG*, pp. 393–95. Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 32, suggests that John ‘uses (one) ‘who is coming’, rather than ‘who is to be’, as being more suited to the eschatology of his apocalypse’.

⁶¹ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 48, admits to it being conjecture, but concludes that ‘it would seem that “the seven spirits before [God’s] throne” are best understood as part of a heavenly entourage that has a special ministry in connection with the Lamb’.

⁶² Thomas R. Schreiner, ‘Revelation’, in Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Jay Sklar (eds.), *Hebrews–Revelation* (vol. XII, *ESV Expository Commentary*; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), p. 553, notes, ‘Grace and peace always come from God himself, and thus it makes most sense to see the “seven spirits” here in 1:4 as referring to the Holy Spirit’.

⁶³ S. Joseph Kidder, ‘The Faithful and True Witness of Revelation 1:5 and 3:14’, *JATS* 28.1 (2017), pp. 114–31 (114). Kidder’s note that “‘The faithful and true witness’ is a phrase that occurs twice in the book of Revelation (1:5; 3:14)’ is in need of correction, as ‘true’ is not present in 1.5, but 3.14 only. The phrase that occurs twice is ‘faithful witness’ (1.5; 2.13). However, owing to the fact that it appears first in the greeting from Jesus, I do agree with Kidder’s assessment that ‘Because this phrase is mentioned at the beginning of the book, it sets the stage for everything that comes later’.

Jesus. The adjectival elevation of such a familiar theme invokes the imagination of the hearers to listen more intently. Additionally, this designation offers the hearers eschatological promise.⁶⁴

Already, if the hearers have discerned witness to bear a degree of social and ethical implications (cf. 1.3, ‘the one who hears ... and obeys’), now they come to know that the ethos which *faithful* witness demands is found only in Jesus himself. For the third time, the Johannine community reads and hears the name Jesus Christ (Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ). Such repetition further alerts the hearers to the prominence of Jesus in this Apocalypse.⁶⁵ The recipients of this prophetic witness are aware of Jesus’ earthly ministry as the anointed messiah, as stated above; but, as the greeting unfolds, John expounds on the identity (1.5a, who he is) and vocation (1.5b–6a, what he has done) of Jesus.⁶⁶

John pauses with a call of response in (6b), concluding in v. 7 with an eschatological effect of Jesus’ faithful witness. In each of these three distinct movements, identity, vocation, and effect, John offers a tri-part description. His attention to Jesus, over God the Father and the Spirit, begs the attention of his hearers; he is ‘the Faithful Witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth’ (1.5a).⁶⁷

More than one who witnesses, Jesus is the arbiter of witness, the prototypical witness, *par excellence* – he is the *Faithful Witness*.⁶⁸ Perhaps the hearers imagine the faithfulness of Jesus in his public testimony.⁶⁹ His faithfulness in his earthly messianic ministry led to his death, but in this greeting, the hearers are reminded that death was not the end.⁷⁰ They might also begin to

⁶⁴ Slater, *Christ and Community*, p. 89. ‘Set within the superscription of the document, Jesus’ role as the heavenly authority behind Revelation, coupled with a reference to his earthly role as faithful witness to God, assures the reader that faithfulness to Jesus ensures a heavenly reward’.

⁶⁵ Schreiner, ‘Revelation’, p. 553: ‘The focus is certainly on Jesus, as more is said about him (cf. vv. 5–6) than about the Father or Spirit’.

⁶⁶ Francis J. Moloney, SDB, *The Apocalypse of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2020), pp. 46–47. Moloney emphasizes the role, person, and results of the work of Jesus. His reading illuminates three sets of threes: identity, result, response.

⁶⁷ As Moloney, SDB, *The Apocalypse of John*, pp. 46–47, points out – ‘the steady use of three indicates the perfection of God, and the perfection and the role of Jesus Christ from the first page of the document’.

⁶⁸ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 92. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 64. Schreiner, ‘Revelation’, p. 554. ‘Jesus here functions as an example for the readers, called to be faithful witnesses like their Lord. The course the readers are called to run was traversed first by Christ’.

⁶⁹ Blount, *Revelation*, p. 36; Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 67; Leithart, *Revelation*, pp. 60–61, notes: ‘“Faithful witness” describes Jesus’s earthly ministry. He presented the Father’s case, at the cost of his life. Because of his faithful witness, it was just that the Father justify him in the resurrection. Having raised him from the dead, making him firstborn from the dead, the Father has also made him King of kings’.

⁷⁰ Kidder, ‘The Faithful and True Witness’, p. 170, avers that ‘the motive of the faithful witness serves to remind the whole universe that God is all that He claims to be. The character and life of Jesus testify to the whole universe and throughout all history that the character of God is beyond reproach’.

consider the cost of *faithful* witness, for immediately following this title, Jesus is also presented as the firstborn among the dead. At this designation, the hearers may be reminded of his victory over death, but much more. If the hearers are familiar with Jesus' raising of Lazarus from the dead (Jn 11.43–44), the hearers would not likely understand this victory over death to mean that Jesus was the first to be raised from the dead.⁷¹ Instead, they might begin to imagine the resurrection to have ushered in Jesus' preeminent reign.⁷² The Faithful Witness who conquered death is also the ruler of the kings of the earth. As the hearers are introduced to this expanded domain of Jesus from the Jews (Jn 1.49; 12.13; 18.37), to the world,⁷³ they may begin to appreciate more the unrivaled supremacy of Jesus. As Faithful Witness, he has all authority in the cosmos; among the living and the dead.⁷⁴

The greeting continues in doxological form, shifting the focus from Jesus' identity to his vocation. Many scholars separate this section as a doxology, giving it exclusive attention.⁷⁵ However, as Thomas notably observes,⁷⁶ the break that scholars make between introduction and doxology is unnecessary and artificial. What Thomas observes is especially noticeable when read from an African American homiletical/liturgical perspective. The two are seldom mutually exclusive in the African American worship experience. In the African American church, particularly, the Pentecostal church, it is not uncommon to hear the preacher integrate song in the introduction of a sermon. Separated (introduction and doxology), one might emphasize the

⁷¹ *Contra* Leithart, *Revelation*, p. 90, who suggests that Jesus is 'the first to return from the grave'. Jesus is not called the 'first to be born' (πρῶτος ἐγεννήθη), but the firstborn (ὁ πρωτότοκος). The difference in the two are crucial for interpretation. The former suggests sequence, the latter can suggest significance. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, p. 14, argues for a Messianic significance.

⁷² Koester, *Revelation*, p. 217. 'In Jewish tradition, the firstborn son was entitled to a double share of inheritance (Deut 21:17; Philo, *Spec. Laws* 2.133), and in a royal household, he inherited the throne (Ps 89:27; 2 Chr 21:3; Jos. As. 4:11). Royal connotations are evident in Colossians, where Christ is "the firstborn of the dead" and has the "first place in everything" (Col 1:18; cf. Heb 1:6)'. Also, Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 34.

⁷³ Thomas and Macchia, *Revelation*, p. 76. 'Jesus is also called "the ruler of the kings of the earth," which indicates that this revelation of Jesus Christ makes known things about him not yet fully appreciated. In John's gospel, Jesus is known to be the King of Israel (John 1:49), for a true Israelite declares him so (1:47). In Revelation, this reign now extends over all kings of the earth'.

⁷⁴ Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, p. 14 notes:

the sense of being first in point of time appears in certain passages to be displaced wholly by the secondary idea of Sovereignty. Thus in Heb. 12:23 the phrase ἐκκλησία πρωτότοκων emphasizes wholly this latter idea. Even God Himself was called בְּכוֹרֵי שֵׁל עוֹלָם (= πρωτότοκος τοῦ κόσμου). Our present context appears to require the secondary meaning of πρωτότοκος, and accordingly Christ is here said to be "the true witness of God, the sovereign of the dead, the ruler of the living" (*i.e.* the kings of the earth and their subjects).

⁷⁵ See Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 67, for example.

⁷⁶ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 93.

Trinitarian formula of the greeting, or the early presence of worship here in the Apocalypse but miss the significant role of witness as a collected introduction.

John writes, ‘To him who, loves us and released us from our sins by his blood — and has made us to be a kingdom, priests (possibly understood as prophetic leaders if Caiaphas’ prophesying as high priest informs the hearers’ understanding of the vocation, cf. Jn 11.49–52) to his God and Father’ (1.5b–6a). The hearers might certainly hear a tone of worship here, but not independent of the description John offers of Jesus – rather, the doxology expands that description.⁷⁷ The first activity of Jesus is spoken of in the present tense; although his love was made evident through his faithful witness which led to his death (Jn 15.12–13), John suggests that Jesus’ love for the community is ongoing.⁷⁸ It was through his victory over death that the hearers of this prophetic witness would experience the liberation from the enslaving power of sin that his blood offers.⁷⁹ John offers a socio–political implication of Jesus’ kingship; having conquered death and laying claim to all the kingdoms of the world, he has now made a kingdom of this prophetic community.⁸⁰

This kingdom establishment is a consequence of his faithful witness.⁸¹ Being established on earth by the faithful witness of Jesus, this kingdom is one that bears with it the ethos of *faithful* witness. The hearers would hardly miss the theological significance here; more than bondservants (1.1), the Faithful Witness has made them to be priests in the kingdom. It is difficult to imagine hearers counting John’s words, but perhaps in a careful reading, they may discern a pattern of seven here as well. All activities of Jesus, including Χριστοῦ, represents his earthly ministry activity: (1) Messiah; (2) faithful witness; (3) Firstborn; (4) Ruler; (5) loves us; (6) releases us; (7) made us to be a kingdom, priests.⁸²

⁷⁷ Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, p. 45. Lange, *et al. Revelation*, p. 92, suggests ‘The doxology at the close of ver. 6, however, is independent; it is founded upon all that has been previously affirmed of Christ’. Lange explains in a footnote that the ‘position can be maintained only in defiance of all grammatical propriety’; Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation*, p. 62. ‘John now moves from the titles of Christ to a doxology that emphasizes Jesus’ saving acts for his people (“us”)’.

⁷⁸ A more literal reading here may be ‘to the one *who is loving* us, and *having freed* us ...’ Ford, *Revelation*, p. 378. ‘Some variants have the present participle, probably indicating the timelessness of his love’.

⁷⁹ Peter S. Williamson, *Revelation* (Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), pp. 46–47.

⁸⁰ Andrew J. Bandstra, “‘A Kingship and Priests’: Inaugurated Eschatology in the Apocalypse’, *CTJ* 27 (1992), pp. 10–25 (16–17), makes the argument that the βασιλείαν should be viewed in the dynamic/active sense, thus translated ‘made us to be a kingship’ vs. kingdom. He believes that such a view holds the already/not yet dimensions of the kingdom. The argument that he makes for interpretation seems strong, but the argument for implications – that is, the current reigning of believers in Jesus, is weak and in need of development.

⁸¹ Williamson, *Revelation*, p. 47.

⁸² Kelly, *Revelation*, p. 24, does not make a break for the doxology; instead, he reads six distinctions in Jesus’ role here, starting at 1.5 and ending at 1.8, including (1) faithful witness; (2) firstborn among the dead; (3) prince of

The doxological introduction reaches its climax with a call for response from the hearers – worship; ‘to him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen’ (1.6b).⁸³ An eschatological effect is offered after the liturgical break, with two prophetic utterances – once again, the hearers are called to an affirmative response at this proclamation. The first utterance is his coming: ‘He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over him’. This proclamation calls for yet another response – ‘Yes, amen’ (1.7).

Second, the attention of the hearers is directed once again to the God the Father (1.8). A prophetic utterance begins with language reminiscent of the FG where, Jesus declares, ‘I am’ (Ἐγώ εἰμι), a claim heard previously only from Yahweh (Exod. 3.14).⁸⁴ Here, the declaration does not come from Jesus, but from God.⁸⁵ Already introduced as the one who was, is, and is to come, the co-grantor of grace and peace presents himself with an additional term – one found nowhere else in Johannine literature, but will become intimately known to the hearers throughout the Apocalypse. He is ‘the all-powerful one’ (ὁ παντοκράτωρ)⁸⁶. At the hearing of this new attribution, the churches can be assured that whatever they may witness in this prophetic narrative, God is in control – the one who bids grace and peace has the power and authority to assure it.

4.3.1 FAITHFUL WITNESS IN THE PROLOGUE

The prologue reveals important factors about faithful witness in the Apocalypse. At a surface level, witness necessitates human agency; two observations reveal that necessity. First, there is the

the kings of the earth; (4) giver of infinite love; (5) soon coming king; and (6) same as God. Leithart, *Revelation*, p. 89, also gives significant attention to the description of Jesus found here:

The most elaborate part of this blessing is the identification of Jesus. John gives Jesus a triple title, followed by a triadic description of Jesus’s work. John is playing with sevens. Apart from articles, the triple title of Jesus contains seven words: witness, faithful, firstborn, dead, ruler, kings, earth. After the titles are three descriptions of Jesus’s actions on our behalf, and then a doxology. Three titles, plus three actions, plus doxology is another 7. The Spirit is a sevenfold Spirit, and Jesus is also a seven.

As engaging as Kelly and Leithart’s observations are, neither account for Χριστοῦ. This account should perhaps be considered if such a lengthy engagement is given to Jesus here. Leithart weakens his argument of John playing with sevens, splitting faithful and witness. To recognize the Apocalypse as a prophetic book, suggests that John and the Johannine community would be familiar with messianic prophecy. To recognize messianic prophecy and overlook the messianic role of Jesus but prefer to view Χριστοῦ as simply a name proper seems to miss a great interpretive point and opportunity to understand faithful witness to the Kingdom of God.

⁸³ Archer, *I Was in the Spirit*, p. 127. The ‘amen’ here seems to elicit a liturgical response.

⁸⁴ Blount, *Revelation*, p. 39.

⁸⁵ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 95–96.

⁸⁶ ‘παντοκράτωρ’, *BDAG*, p. 755.

human agent of delivery and reception.⁸⁷ The Apocalypse is given from God, to Jesus, to an angel, but ultimately to John (1.1, 4). John is then instructed to deliver what he has received to other human recipients (his servants, 1.1) The very first beatitude (1.3) testifies to this agency as well. The Apocalypse demands a human reader and human hearers.⁸⁸ The second observation to be examined is the prototype for witness. It is likely that the *faithful* witness of Jesus, *par excellence* (1.5), refers to the testimony offered by the incarnate son of God.⁸⁹ Pertinent to the current study, the prologue qualifies the witness of Jesus as ‘faithful’ in concert with the acts of Jesus. If Rev. 1.5 makes a clear connection to the witness and the life and death of Jesus,⁹⁰ then such a connection underscores the humanity that witness necessitates.⁹¹

As it relates to human agency, three observations are made in the prologue. First, is the shared community of witness, absent of hierarchy. John writes that the Apocalypse was given by God ‘to show to his servants’ (‘δειξαι τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ’), and subsequently that it was given ‘to his servant, John’ (‘τῷ δούλῳ αὐτοῦ Ἰωάννη’) (1.1). In matters of witness, Jesus is the prototype, but John places himself in equal company of the hearers – as witnesses, they are all servants of God. The second observation is suffering. That the witness of Jesus led to the shedding of blood and ultimately death (1.5) makes this apparent. Third is time. In matters of humanity, witness works against time, as John must record ‘the things which must soon happen’ (1.1) and reminds the hearers that ‘the time is near’ (1.3). The prologue also reveals a divine aspect of witness, establishing it as a prophetic work, at its foremost (1.2–3).

Further, the activity of witness can be seen in the prologue. The activity of witness is presented in both communicative (spoken, read aloud, heard cf. 1.3) and demonstrative (shown, sent 1.1; seen 1.2; keep 1.3; loved, released, made 1.5–6). The transmission of the Apocalypse, (God – Jesus

⁸⁷ Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 27.

⁸⁸ Gerhard A. Krodel, *Revelation* (ACNT; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1989), p. 80. Admittedly, the beatitude does not specify humanity, but because it is given ‘to show his bondservants’ (1.1), it is implied.

⁸⁹ Paul Barnett, *Revelation: Apocalypse Now and Then* (3rd edn; Sydney, South NSW: Aquila Press, 2019), p. 25, notes that the future which with the Apocalypse is concerned, ‘is controlled by the great events of the past centered on Christ’s faithfulness in life (“the faithful witness” 1:5), his sacrificial death (he “loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood” 1:5), and his resurrection (“I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive forever and ever” 1:18)’.

⁹⁰ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 92.

⁹¹ Others in the Apocalypse will share such a connection, including Antipas (2.13), the innumerable multitude before the throne who came out of the great tribulation (7.9–14), the prophetic witnesses (11.3–11), the ones who overcame by the blood of the Lamb and their witness (12.11), and the witnesses on whose blood the great harlot was drunk (17.6).

– Angel – John – Churches) is a communicative act of witness (1.1–2). The beatitude (1.3) is a communicative call (reading and hearing) for demonstrative actions (keeping/obeying). In his greeting, (1.4–5) John situates God as the enthroned supreme ruler, the Spirit as the ultimate viceroy, and Jesus as the arbiter. The motif of witness is brought full bear at the mention of Jesus (1.5–7), the one who was faithful in witness, even to the point of death. His faithful witness led to his victory over death, affirming his preeminence and bringing ‘divine power and glory to its climax’⁹² as ruler of all earthly kings. As the introduction bursts forth in communicative, doxological witness, it sings of the demonstrative acts of the incarnate Son. Humanity was liberated from the slavery of sin by the shedding of his blood, now free to be active prophetic members of the kingdom. These demonstrative acts, in turn, deserve a demonstrative response – ascribe to him glory and might, forever. As witness anticipates, the prologue concludes with a two-fold prophetic utterance; a declaration of this constructed reality soon becoming a physical reality that will be witnessed by all.

Finally, the prologue makes it clear that faithful witness has its reward. The first beatitude is found in the opening of the Apocalypse: ‘Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy and keep the things which are written in it, for the time is near’ (1.3). Placed at the beginning, it sets the expectation of witness upfront; read, hear, obey. The reward seems ambiguous when the promise alone is considered, but when the context is examined, it becomes clear. The beatitude recalls the previously stated fact that in the Apocalypse, the hearers are encountering ‘the things which must soon happen’ (1.1). The reward is a promised security; the ruler of the Kingdom to which they witness offers a guarantee of their well-being, even when their witness is costly and fatal such as it was for Jesus.⁹³

4.4 REVELATION 1.9–3.22: IN THE SPIRIT ‘ON THE LORD’S DAY’

4.4.1 REVELATION 1.9–20

John continues to establish his credibility as a witness. Beginning with a note of solidarity, he identifies himself with the hearers as their brother and participant (‘ὁ ἀδελφὸς ὑμῶν καὶ συγκοινωνὸς’),⁹⁴ Although the hearers might recognize John as a leader in the community, being

⁹² Moisés Silva, ed., ‘πρωτότοκος’, *NIDNTTE* 4, p. 180; ‘πρωτότοκος’, Louw and Nida, p. 116.

⁹³ Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation*, pp. 130–31.

⁹⁴ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 49, recognizes the article with ‘brother’ vs. ‘participant’, suggesting that the emphasis is the brotherhood bond that John shares with this community of believers. Additionally, the term

the bondservant to whom the Lord revealed ‘what must soon take place’ (1.1),⁹⁵ his self-designation as brother to these communities of believers removes any idea of hierarchy, so far as witness is concerned.⁹⁶ As a brother, John is a participant in the persecution, kingdom, and perseverance in Jesus (τῆ θλίψει καὶ βασιλείᾳ καὶ ὑπομονῇ ἐν Ἰησοῦ) (1.9a).⁹⁷ If the community has not yet discerned that witness bears a connection to suffering and prophecy, John suggests as much here.

As the hearers encounter the word ‘persecution’ mentioned explicitly,⁹⁸ they may begin to understand better that the experience of suffering because of their witness is a shared suffering, although the immediate context(s) of suffering may differ (chs. 2–3).⁹⁹ John’s participation suggests that he is no stranger to their experience of hardship. Moreover, he implies that the suffering or tribulation that witness involves is anchored in Jesus, the Faithful Witness. John’s tribulation may even include his being on Patmos (1.9b).¹⁰⁰ For the second time, the hearers

συγκοινωνός suggests that witness bears with it a degree of fellowship. Also see Boxall, *The Revelation*, p. 38; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 97–98, notes that the designation ‘brother’ evolves from the FG through 1 and 3 John, beginning as biological, but by Jn 21.23, and subsequently 1 and 3 John, it becomes more of a spiritual designation.

⁹⁵ Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgement* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1985), p. 196, suggests that John’s self-identification as a fellow bondservant (or brother) is strategic (over the term prophet) in that it amplifies his counter-cultural prophetic position.

⁹⁶ Boxall, *The Revelation*, 38, notes that ‘Whatever office he may have held within the Church, it suits his literary strategy at this point to stress only what they share, or what he would like them to’. Blount, *Revelation*, p. 41.

⁹⁷ François Bovon, ‘John’s Self-Presentation in Revelation 1:9–10’, *CBQ* 62.4 (October 2000), pp. 693–700 (695), connects this opening from John with witness, stating that ‘the function of the “I” is to bring the narrative closer to the reader, or to give witness to the truth, or to manifest the nature of the narrative. This is exactly what happens in the Book of Revelation’. In matters of solidarity, he writes, ‘While John in 1:1 is connected with God and Christ, in 1:9 his relationship to his fellow Christians is underlined. He refuses a hierarchical clerical order and states his communion with them. He is not their father but their brother’. As it pertains to identification, he adds (p. 697), ‘John does not care to avoid confusion by distinguishing himself from all the other Johns [of Scripture], particularly the ones with decisive early Christian roles like John the Baptist, John the son of Zebedee, and John Mark. John’s identity is structured by several portrayals of himself, not by distinctions from others’.

⁹⁸ By ‘definitively’, I am referring to the article that governs ‘persecution, kingdom, and perseverance’.

⁹⁹ Slater, *Christ and Community*, p. 67, suggests that the prophetic messages to the seven churches were mainly ‘to address internal issues within each congregation by stating what constitutes a faithful Christian witness in each context. In this way, the instructions within the letters are aimed at preparing the churches spiritually so that they might endure and overcome the perceived crises envisioned in Rev. 4.1–19.21’.

¹⁰⁰ Slater, *Christ and Community*, p. 94, writes, ‘This confirmation statement communicates to the reader that John has consistently held fast to his Christian beliefs even through tribulation and that John’s witness is trustworthy’. Though it is a popular view in scholarship, imprisonment is not the only view of John’s being on Patmos. Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 4, posits:

It has most often been assumed that 1:9 indicates he was exiled there, whether in flight from persecution or legally banished to the island. This is possible, but it is also possible that he went to Patmos in order to receive the revelation (‘on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus’ could refer back to i :2, where these terms describe what he ‘saw’; but on the other hand, cf. 6:9; 20:4).

For varying views in reception history, see Ian Boxall, *Patmos in the Reception History of the Apocalypse* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013).

encounter the phrase ‘the Word of God and the witness of Jesus’. Accordingly, they may begin to discern that the prophetic witness that they hear was not without a price.¹⁰¹ Inasmuch as suffering has an association with witness, kingdom and perseverance are also essential elements; how the two are anchored in witness will become apparent as the narrative unfolds. The narrative progresses with John’s first described pneumatic experience.

Owing to the prophetic nature of the community (1.3), the hearers would not marvel that John was ‘in the Spirit’ (ἐν πνεύματι).¹⁰² His first experience takes place in a temporal location – he was in the Spirit ‘on the Lord’s day’ (1.10). What assurance the hearers must feel, knowing that the Spirit is not impeded by John’s suffering.¹⁰³ Moreover, they might find comfort in this commission, as they are direct beneficiaries (1.3) of John’s call to witness.¹⁰⁴ Hearing a loud, trumpet-like voice, John is instructed to write (*create a record of witness*). By writing this prophecy, for liturgical reading, John authors more than a letter of exhortation; rather, he provides the hearers with a pastoral letter that demands pneumatic discernment and obedient response.¹⁰⁵ Additionally, John is to share (*do the act of witnessing*) with the seven churches, all that he sees (*be a credible eyewitness*) (1.11). The designated churches are called by name, alerting the hearers to the personal nature of this narrative witness.

John paints a vivid picture of his pneumatic experience, inviting the hearers to lean in – to imagine what he experienced ‘ἐν πνεύματι’ (1.12–16). He provides a fascinating description of his first encounter with the voice behind him – an encounter that evoked a sense of fear. However, what John experiences will be a repeated occurrence throughout this prophetic narrative – where he hears one thing, when he turns, he beholds something altogether different.¹⁰⁶ What John sees is seven lampstands, and ‘one like the son of man’ (ὅμοιον υἱὸν ἀνθρώπου) standing in their midst.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰¹ Blount, *Revelation*, p. 42.

¹⁰² Blount, *Revelation*, p. 42.

¹⁰³ W.J. Seymour, ‘Christ’s Messages to the Church’, *AF:A* 1.2 (January, 1908), p. 3.

¹⁰⁴ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 102.

¹⁰⁵ Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 188. While Fiorenza’s commentary seems to put too much emphasis on John’s motivation, and not that of Jesus who has commissioned him to write, her conclusion resonates with the reading that the current methodology employs (the liberation and imagination elements in particular). Ultimately, the Apocalypse, as a prophetic document, presents future possibilities which the hearers may experience, owing to their faithful witness.

¹⁰⁶ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 102.

¹⁰⁷ This messianic term may have already alerted John’s hearers that it was Jesus whom he encountered; nevertheless, his description still invokes imaginative hearing, given the sights and sounds provided. Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 103, notes the numerous OT texts that converge here. Additionally, Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 2012), p. 114, notes this title, ‘Son of Man’ is the second favorite self-title that Jesus uses in the FG. The significance here may be in the combination of both the

While the hearers are not yet made aware of the connections of sevens – seven churches, seven spirits, seven lampstands, and seven stars, they would likely draw the inference that there is a significance in the relationship between the one speaking and the seven lampstands – both of which are soon to be identified by the speaker.

Nearly falling faint as though dead (1.17) at the sight of the ‘one like a son of man’ (1.13), John is assured by this figure, amid the seven lampstands, with seven stars in his hand (1.17b–18a), exactly who he is – it is Jesus, the Faithful Witness. The description that John offers might remind the hearers of Daniel’s vision (Dan. 10.5–6), a connection that will occur often in the Apocalypse.¹⁰⁸ Significant to the introduction is Jesus’ self-designation as the one who ‘has the keys of death and hades’ (ἔχω τὰς κλεῖς τοῦ θανάτου καὶ τοῦ ᾗδου). As a community of witnesses, the hearers may find assurance that even if suffering for their witness leads to death, they are not out of the reach of the one of whom they witness.¹⁰⁹ The Faithful witness gives no pause for John to respond, he immediately gives instruction.¹¹⁰

John is instructed to scribe this prophetic narrative witness (1.19), recording all that he has just witnessed, as well as what is taking place currently ἐν πνεύματι. The hearers might imagine at this point that more ‘ἐν πνεύματι’ experiences are yet to come, as Jesus also instructs John to record the ‘things which will take place after these things’ (ἃ μέλλει γενέσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα). Before the Faithful Witness discloses to John what is to come, he gives clarity to what John sees, in order that the imagination of the hearers may be more accurately guided (1.20). Receiving this point of clarity, the hearers may realize that Jesus is very near to witness their suffering and perseverance – as well as any complacency and compromise. Moreover, they have greater assurance of the veracity of this prophetic witness recorded by John. Again, Jesus does not leave room for a

OT and the FG use of the term, as Joseph Dongell, *John: A Bible Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 1997), pp. 52–53, notes, suggesting that Jesus draws from Dan. 7.13–14 for this title, and, ‘This figure envisioned by Daniel seems to have had heavenly position, divine status (note that he only seems like a human being) and royal function. Could it be that Jesus adopted this obscure expression as a self-reference in order to point toward suprahuman dimensions of His person and ministry? If so, it is fitting that Jesus speaks of himself as the Son of Man to Nathaniel when promising to him a vision of heavenly things.’

¹⁰⁸ Steve Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation* (Stanley E. Porter [ed.]; JTC 115; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), pp. 36–37.

¹⁰⁹ Blount, *Revelation*, p. 46.

¹¹⁰ Graeme Goldsworthy, *The Lamb and the Lion: The Gospel in Revelation* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1984), pp. 76–77.

response from John¹¹¹ – nor does John give any impression of a reservation from sharing this prophetic narrative; and thus, the prophetic messages to the churches begin.

4.4.2 FAITHFUL WITNESS IN THE INAUGURAL VISION: REV. 1.9–20

Several observations from the prologue emerge again here in John's inaugural vision, 'in the Spirit'. First, the solidarity that is experienced in the community of witnesses is reiterated in John's greeting (1.9), when he addresses himself as 'your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance' ('ὁ ἀδελφὸς ὑμῶν καὶ συγκοινωνὸς ἐν τῇ θλίψει καὶ βασιλείᾳ καὶ ὑπομονῇ'). Second, as a partaker in their tribulation, John also revisits suffering as an aspect of witness, here in his greeting. Third, the aspect of time emerges (1.19) as John is instructed to record that which he had seen, which are, and which are to come. The divine aspects also emerge, as John is 'in the Spirit' (1.9) receiving this vision, wherein he encounters 'one like a son of man' (1.13).

The communicative acts of witness are present in the inaugural vision, as John is instructed to 'write' in his first pneumatic experience (1.19). Equally, this communicative act is demonstrative, as it suggests to the hearers that there is a shared experience in witness – while the reading, hearing, and keeping (1.3) convey a sense of learning, writing what has been witnessed conveys sharing in one's experience. The Kingdom of God is not lost in this inaugural vision – John is on Patmos, owing to 'the Word of God and the witness of Jesus' (1.9). John's situation suggests that he is active in faithful witness; in his location (Patmos), his commission (write), and his obedience to that commission.

¹¹¹ Goldsworthy, *The Lamb and the Lion*, p. 77. Goldsworthy makes the noteworthy observation that, beginning with 'Do not fear' in 1.17, there is no break in the words of Jesus, all the way through 'To the angel of the church of Ephesus write ...' Unlike the exodus narrative, where Moses has an encounter with God (see Exodus 3–4), and wrestles with the command, out of fear and inadequacy, such is not the case here for John. Because John does not offer commentary on his response to the explanation, comfort, and command, the prophetic message is not weakened – it places John behind the message, and Jesus at its center. Although John is a key figure in this narrative, he knows his place as a witness.

4.4.3 REVELATION 2.1–7: EPHESUS

The first of the seven churches addressed is Ephesus.¹¹² The hearers might further perceive the prophetic nature of these messages by the phrase ‘Τάδε λέγει’ (‘this is what ... is saying’).¹¹³ The hearers might discern a change in Jesus’ relation to the congregation from John’s inaugural vision. Instead of one who is ‘in the midst’ (ἐν μέσῳ) of the lampstands (1.13) and ‘has’ (ἔχων) seven stars in his hands (1.16), Jesus is now (2.1) the one who ‘holds the seven stars’ (ὁ κρατῶν τοὺς ἑπτὰ ἀστέρας ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ αὐτοῦ) and ‘walks about among the seven lampstands’ (ὁ περιπατῶν ἐν μέσῳ τῶν ἑπτὰ λυχνιῶν τῶν χρυσοῶν).¹¹⁴ Such a shift, though subtle, intensifies the active intimacy that Jesus has, with the work and witness of the church.

The hearers learn that the first thing Jesus addresses is their works (τὰ ἔργα σου | ‘your works’) – a significant theme in the Apocalypse.¹¹⁵ Much like the scene of a courtroom, Jesus takes the stand as both an eyewitness (knowing their works) and a character witness (knowing their heart/motive). This elevated intimacy makes Jesus more than an observant witness – he is the one who knows (οἶδα | ‘I know’) their works.¹¹⁶ While such words of commendation could give room for a sense of pride and accomplishment, the hearers might begin to wonder which works have caught the attention of the Faithful Witness. The work which Jesus notices has proven burdensome.¹¹⁷ Consequently, this laborious work has demanded perseverance. They have been witnesses to the truth, implied in the commendation for not standing with evildoers and for having

¹¹² It is understood that each of these prophetic messages are addressed to the churches *through* an *angel of the church*. The discussion of the angel/messenger is beyond the purview of the current thesis. What is clear is that the entire community is being addressed in each message. See Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 109: ‘While it is likely that the appearance of “angel” or “messenger” refers to an angelic messenger, owing to the fact that an individual “human” messenger would no doubt deliver the book to the individual congregations, perhaps the hearers would not be overly preoccupied with the meaning of the term’.

¹¹³ Bandy, ‘Patterns of Prophetic Lawsuits’, pp. 188–89, notes that the LXX employs the phrase more than three hundred times – most of which are attributed to a word from God. See also Mark D. Mathews, *Riches, Poverty, and the Faithful: Perspectives on Wealth in the Second Temple Period and the Apocalypse of John* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013) pp. 145–46.

¹¹⁴ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 111.

¹¹⁵ Blount, *Revelation*, p. 49, Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 111–12, and Paul DeCock, ‘The Works of God, of Christ, and of the Faithful in the Apocalypse of John’, *Neot* 41.1 (2007), pp. 37–66 (40), recognize the significance of the theme of work in the Apocalypse. Being that scholars also appreciate the importance of witness in the Apocalypse, one might appreciate the relationship between works and witness. This is a slight twist from the other churches, where Jesus says ‘οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα’.

¹¹⁶ ‘οἶδα’, *BDAG*, p. 693.

¹¹⁷ ‘καί’, *BDAG*, p. 496. Such a reading would suggest an explicative use of καί, where the toil and perseverance are not in addition to the work, but an elaboration or qualification of the work.

discernment to recognize false apostles.¹¹⁸ All this, they have done for the name of Jesus, the Faithful Witness. In this work, they have been found faithful – not growing weary.¹¹⁹

Their commendation is interrupted with one indictment (2.4). More than an area in need of improvement, they are told that the Faithful Witness holds this ‘against’ (κατά) them, which may intimate hostility between Jesus and the church of Ephesus.¹²⁰ Their witness is impeded by the abandonment of devotion – that is, their first love.¹²¹ Given the context of the indictment, and their commendation for persevering for the name of Jesus, their issue may perhaps be as much a social matter as it is a spiritual one. While the concept of love in the Johannine literature is predominantly concerned with the love of God (1 Jn 4.7; 16b), especially in relation to the giving of Christ (Jn 3.16; 1 Jn 4.9–10), and the subsequent love of the Son to his own (Jn 13.1; 1 Jn 3.16),¹²² the social implications of that love was missing in Ephesus, thus hindering their work of witness.¹²³

The solution to their impeded witness begins with an act of imagination; they are first to ‘remember’ (μνημόνευε) from where they have fallen (2.5).¹²⁴ They are to ‘repent’ (μετανόησον) from leaving such a state of devotion and resume the activities (τὰ πρῶτα ἔργα ποιήσον | ‘do the work you first did’) that were once practiced amongst them. The integral nature of devotion to works (of witness) is evident in the emphatic call to repent.¹²⁵ What was an earlier pronouncement

¹¹⁸ Blount, *Revelation*, p. 49.

¹¹⁹ Another view is Leithart, *Revelation*, p. 145, who says that the commendations are correlative to the church’s actions: works – not enduring evil ones; toil – putting apostles to the test; and perseverance – endurance for the name of Jesus.

¹²⁰ κατά, *BDAG*, p. 511; b. The ‘against’ in this case is regarding an action that is contrary to the desire(s) of Jesus, therefore the hostile use of κατά seems appropriate.

¹²¹ Blount, *Revelation*, pp. 50–51.

¹²² Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 116–17.

¹²³ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 230–31, suggests that perhaps the abandoning of the first love is directly related to witness – that ‘they no longer expressed their former zealous love for Jesus by witnessing to him in the world’. Moreover, he links this correction with Mt. 24.12–14, a passage that was often cited by early Pentecostals, as it related to witness. Additionally, he offers the suggestion (pp. 231–32) that the abandoning of the first love could be a suppression of Spiritual gifts which were necessary for effective witness. Boxall, *The Revelation*, pp. 49–50; Blount, *Revelation*, p. 51, argues that though Ephesus was ‘known as a loving community, they had suddenly become a policing one. Ephesian faith had become a matter of Ephesian quality control. Assessment became more important than love’. James L. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John: A Narrative Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), p. 87, notes that it is a false dichotomy to try and separate the two aspects of love here. Cf. Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation*, p. 85.

¹²⁴ The command to repent and do what they did at first suggests not just memory recall, but an imaginative overlaying of what they once did over who they are now. For example, Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 232, posits that the readers could be second generation believers – thus the act of ‘remembering’ would require even more imagination, were this the reality of the hearers. However, second generation or first, the imagination is still necessary to inform the future by recalling the past.

¹²⁵ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 120 says:

To underscore the seriousness of the situation facing the church at Ephesus, a call for repentance concludes v. 5, balancing the call that appears at the beginning and middle of the verse. This explicit emphasis not only alerts the

of victory and triumph ('he is coming' – 1.7), now bears with it a sense of fear and judgement. Jesus says, 'I am coming to you' (ἔρχομαι σοι).¹²⁶ Though Jesus stands as a faithful *witness* both for ('I know') and against ('but this I have against you') the church in Ephesus, they may soon encounter him as a righteous *judge*. Their non-compliance will result in a severance of their identity as witnesses,¹²⁷ removal from their current place; that is, out of the community with the other churches, and the safety of the one who walks among them as their watchman and witness.¹²⁸

Jesus concludes with an oddly placed commendation – that he shares in their hatred of the works of the Nicolaitans.¹²⁹ These works, whatever they might be, stand in stark contrast to the work of witness.¹³⁰ The fact that Jesus commends them for hating the works of the Nicolaitans suggests that when done so in a spirit of love, discerning false doctrine is an important aspect of faithful witness.¹³¹ Once again, the inclusive nature of this prophetic message is apparent – 'the one who has an ear to hear' is instructed to 'hear what the Spirit says to the churches'. At this instruction, the hearers are reminded of three important matters. First, the hearers are to discern this prophetic message by the Spirit.¹³² Second, although this message was addressed to Ephesus, they are reminded that they are a part of a greater community that will also hear the commendations

hearers to the need for repentance on behalf of the church at Ephesus, but also puts the hearers on notice that the issue of repentance will turn out to be a major one in the Apocalypse.

See also, DeCock, 'The Works of God', p. 41, who notes that they are rebuked for abandoning their first love and instructed to return to their first works, which would highlight the close relationship.

¹²⁶ Scholars are not unanimous about the nature of this 'coming' to the church of Ephesus. Robert L. Thomas, 'The "Comings" of Christ in Revelation 2–3', *TMSJ* 7.2 (Fall 1996), pp. 153–81 (61–62), suggests that in keeping with the over-arching theme of the Apocalypse, the coming is best understood as the final eschatological coming of Jesus. Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation*, p. 87, disagrees with this position and suggests that it is conditional to the witnessing works of the church in Ephesus. While the nature (conditional or eschatological) of the 'coming' is interpreted differently, scholars seem to be in unanimous agreement that the coming is not desirable.

¹²⁷ Jon K. Newton, 'Not Who They Seem: Community and Identity in the Seven Churches of Revelation', *Colloquium* 50.2 (December 2018), pp. 72–89 (80).

¹²⁸ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 120, writes that 'If leaving the first love refers to Jesus, it is not surprising that such action would ultimately result in the destruction of the church by the one abandoned, Jesus'. More can be said of the consequences here. If the love that they have abandoned (see notes above) is both a love for Jesus and a love for one another, the social implications of witness should not be missed here. The removal of their lampstand takes them out of communion with Jesus (the one who walks among them) as well as the other congregations (representative of the other lampstands). Witness is both a social vocation and a social identity, thus, the removal of their lampstand strips them of both identity and vocation as witnesses. Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, p. 209, agrees, noting that 'the judgment of the community in Ephesus is not inconsequential. If they have indeed lost their love, despite their tremendous abilities to discern, they might already be losing their identity as a lampstand'.

¹²⁹ Lange, *et al. A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, p. 116, raises the point worth recognizing that it is the works that are hated and not the Nicolaitans themselves, whomever they might be.

¹³⁰ Blount, *Revelation*, p. 51.

¹³¹ Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, p. 209.

¹³² Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 122.

and indictments, thus being held accountable for their witness.¹³³ Finally, there is a reminder that all, in the occasion of hearing, are equally responsible for their returning to their first love.¹³⁴

Though the church of Ephesus has already been commended for their steadfast perseverance in spiritual discernment, it is made clear that the fight for their first devotion will not be easy. Their lack of devotion must be ‘overcome’ (νικῶντι), a term that will be employed often in this narrative and would be synonymous with faithful witness.¹³⁵ Those who do overcome are promised something never experienced throughout all humanity, apart from Adam and Eve. What was prohibited due to disobedience, in the first paradise (Eden) is now offered as a reward in the eschatological paradise – eating of the tree of life.¹³⁶

4.4.4 FAITHFUL WITNESS IN THE PROPHETIC MESSAGE TO EPHEBUS

The witnesses in Ephesus (2.1–7) are praised for their theological discernment, and testing of false teaching; thus, they have demonstrated that their witness is theologically dependent on the Word of God. What they fail in demonstrating is God’s love which accompanies discernment. Such is the love that Jesus demonstrated (Jn 3.16; Rev. 1.5). The indictment suggests that while witness acts in spiritual discernment, it also acts in love. The human aspects of suffering and time are of note here in the message. As for suffering, they are noted for perseverance and endurance (2.3). The aspect of time is noticed in their works; the lack of love differentiates their witness from what ‘what you did at first’ (2.5). The warning of Jesus’ return and removal of the lampstand implies time as well, as it anticipates the consequences of not being faithful in witness. The divine aspects continue as Jesus addresses the church through John by way of the Spirit (2.1,7).

4.4.5 REVELATION 2.8–11 SMYRNA

Without pause, John continues with a message from Jesus to the next congregation, Smyrna. The repeated ‘Τάδε λέγει’ (‘this is what ... is saying’), continues to strengthen the prophetic force of the message. The message to Smyrna is the shortest of the seven and contains the fewest OT

¹³³ Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, p. 53; Boxall, *The Revelation*, p. 51.

¹³⁴ Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, p. 210; Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary*, p. 88.

¹³⁵ Blount, *Revelation*, p. 52. Slater, *Revelation as Civil Disobedience*, pp. 67–68, argues that the use of *nikao* and *nike* (and their cognates) in the prophetic messages demonstrates ‘the christological consistency among the visions as well as maintaining a victory through suffering motif’. He further notes (p. 69) that ‘Christians must overcome by bearing witness, not by bearing arms. They must be militant by being firm in their faithfulness, not by being militaristic.’

¹³⁶ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 124–25.

allusions or echoes compared to the other messages,¹³⁷ but there is nothing lacking in the praise nor the promise that they will receive from the Faithful Witness. Once again, the hearers are reminded of the inaugural vision – Jesus introduces himself as ‘the First and the Last’ (cf. 1.17) who was dead and has come to life (1.18).¹³⁸ Both here and in the inaugural vision, Jesus introduces himself with words that echo the Divine title given in Isaiah (44.6; 48.12).¹³⁹ The hearers might discern the sovereignty of Jesus here – that he preceded their current suffering, and will yet remain when their suffering has come to an end, even if that end is death itself.¹⁴⁰

Their witness has resulted in three predicaments to which Jesus stands as a witness. First, they are undergoing ‘oppression’ (θλιψιν).¹⁴¹ Second, he is a witness to their reputation for ‘poverty’ (πτωχείαν);¹⁴² however, owing to their steadfast witness in the midst of their tribulations, Jesus says that they are ‘rich’ (πλούσιος).¹⁴³ When the hearers are made aware of Jesus’ perception of their spiritual–economical standing, they might be encouraged to discern that their earthly possessions (or lack thereof) have no effect on their vocation and identity as witnesses.¹⁴⁴ Jesus is also a witness to a group of people who blaspheme. While there is no mention of testing the blaspheming (βλασφημίαν) individuals, the Faithful Witness has discerned that they are false witnesses. Though they consider themselves Jews, Jesus says they are not – nor are they a part of the ecclesia; they are of the synagogue of Satan (συναγωγή τοῦ σατανᾶ).¹⁴⁵ Rhetorically, these

¹³⁷ Timothy L. Decker, ‘Faithfulness to Christ as Covenant Fidelity: The Pastoral Purpose Behind the Old Testament Allusions in the Seven Messages of Revelation 2–3’, *AUSS* 55.2, pp. 165–93 (171–73).

¹³⁸ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 125–26.

¹³⁹ Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, p. 30, observes that ‘it is remarkable that a statement concerning the eternity of God is juxtaposed with a statement about Christ’s death and resurrection’.

¹⁴⁰ Paige Patterson, *Revelation* (E. Ray Clendenen [ed.]; NAC 39; Nashville, TN: B&H, 2012), p. 94. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 88.

¹⁴¹ ‘θλιψις’, *BDAG*, p. 457. While most translations offer ‘tribulation’ here, it seems fitting that the context of poverty favors an experienced oppression. Such is often the experience of the poor and the marginalized. One might imagine the challenges the Smyrnaeans would have in their witness if they are undergoing social marginalization because of abject poverty. While tribulation does convey a sense of distress, oppression bears with it a sense of marginalization.

¹⁴² Although no details are offered for their poverty, Mathews, *Riches, Poverty, and the Faithful*, p. 156, suggests that ‘some form of literal poverty is in view’. He further offers (p. 157) that ‘this poverty refers to some form of social or economic marginalization’.

¹⁴³ Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, p. 30, gives three options for the poverty – that it may have been partly to ‘(1) the fact that the converts were drawn chiefly from the poorer classes; (2) the demands made upon them by their faith; and (3) the pillage of their property by a Jewish or pagan mob. The context suggests that the poverty of the Smyranean Church was at least aggravated by the last of these causes.’ As Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 127–28, notes, it is unclear if the poverty is because of their witness, but the possibility is certainly a real one.

¹⁴⁴ Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, p. 212.

¹⁴⁵ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 127. Additionally, such language suggests that this group still occupies an ecclesial space, and perhaps the slanderous work is done in the context of worship.

juxtapositions of opinion (what the church of Smyrna sees vs. what the Faithful Witness discerns, and the ones who say they are Jews but are discerned as the synagogue of Satan) reveal the identity forming power of prophecy in general, and this prophetic narrative, in particular.¹⁴⁶

The oppressed Smyrnaeans are not promised immediate vindication from suffering; instead, more is to come. It is unclear whether the blasphemers are implicit in the impending suffering, but the hearers are clear who is directly behind their own suffering – the devil. They are informed that their suffering will involve imprisonment, which is meant to test them. If they have not imagined thus far, the hearers may begin to make the connection between their oppression and their witness. They now discern that just as the Faithful Witness was led to trial for his testimony, and John is their participant in tribulation, they will suffer for their witness as well.¹⁴⁷ Though the trials that await them are almost certain to incite fear, evident in the command not to fear (μηδὲν φοβοῦ ἃ μέλλεις πάσχειν), the Smyrnaeans may find comfort in hearing that this tribulation has an expiration date.¹⁴⁸

They are encouraged to remain faithful in their witness, even if it costs them their lives. As the Faithful Witness has already proven, the first death that is a result of one's faithful witness is not final.¹⁴⁹ Even if the first death is the cost of their faithful witness, the one who conquered death has something to say to them about death. Only the one who has conquered death and reigns as king can offer what Jesus promises – 'the crown of life' (τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς). Once again, the hearers of this prophetic witness are collectively invited to share in the promise; yet simultaneously, they are individually responsible – 'the one who has an ear to hear, let that one hear what the Spirit says to the churches'. Those who overcome – that is heed the words that they encounter in this prophetic narrative, the second death will have no indefinite effect on them.

¹⁴⁶ Newton, 'Not Who They Seem', p. 79.

¹⁴⁷ Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, p. 44. Ladd makes the interesting observation that prison was merely a holding place in the first century. Ultimately, those in prison were awaiting vindication, or some form of punishment – even death.

¹⁴⁸ Blount, *Revelation*, p. 55, and Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 130–31, note the ten days of testing in Dan. 1.12–15, and use this as intertextual support that the ten days noted here would serve as comforting news to the congregation – that the suffering would be notably brief, though not all agree with this perspective (cf. Lange, Schaff, *et al. Revelation*, p. 118). Keener, *Revelation*, p. 243, suggests, 'Possibly the "ten days" is literal, but more likely it is figurative for a period of trial; the number is a literary allusion to Daniel used to indicate the oppressive yet temporary nature of the period the Christians were about to pass through'.

¹⁴⁹ Blount, *Revelation*, p. 55.

4.4.6 FAITHFUL WITNESS IN PROPHETIC MESSAGE TO SMYRNA

The witnesses in Smyrna (2.8–13) receive no indictment, for they have been found faithful in their witness. Their suffering (2.10) demonstrates that witness endures hardship; for they have not abandoned their witness amid tribulation and poverty. The message communicates that witness is not relegated to earthly wealth or status – there is no socio–economic disadvantage insofar as witness is concerned. It validates the community that is shared amongst witnesses, as ‘some’ will be cast into prison (2.10). This suggests that there is a shared experience of suffering. Moreover, they live as though death is not final and are encouraged to continue in such a state of living (2.10). Moreover, they are promised eternal crowns. Here again, the human aspects of time, suffering, and community emerge, as well as the divine aspects as Jesus continues to speak through John, by way of the Spirit (2.8, 11).

4.4.7 REVELATION 2.12–17: PERGAMUM

Jesus addresses the church in Pergamum as ‘the one who has the sharp two–edged sword’ (ὁ ἔχων τὴν ῥομφαίαν τὴν δίστομον).¹⁵⁰ John has already shared with the hearers that he witnessed the two–edged sword in the mouth of Jesus (1.16) in the inaugural vision. Perhaps the sword coming from his mouth causes the hearers to imagine the confrontational weight of the words which will come next.¹⁵¹ The first thing that the Faithful Witness addresses in Pergamum is not a matter of works, but one of location and authority.¹⁵² That the church’s place of habitation has been discerned to hold significant bearing on their witness is evidenced by the repeated use of the verb ‘dwell’ (κρατεῖς / κατοικεῖ) occurring at the beginning and end of 2.13.¹⁵³ Jesus is aware of their

¹⁵⁰ While the mouth is mentioned with the sword in 1.16 and 2.16, it is omitted in 2.12. The omission does not suggest that the sword is no longer in his mouth. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, p. 181. This omission might be intentional, as it may cause the hearers to contemplate a battle of some nature. This is considerable considering the opposition that they face ‘where the throne of Satan is’. This throne speaks to a possible systemic oppression at a higher civic level; thus, a proper response would be war.

¹⁵¹ Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 58; Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 90.

¹⁵² Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 58.

¹⁵³ Blount, *Revelation*, p. 57; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 133.

challenges here; they have taken up residence¹⁵⁴ in the same place where ‘the throne of Satan’ (ὁ θρόνος τοῦ σατανᾶ) is located.¹⁵⁵

Jesus, through his servant John, does not find it necessary to expound on what this throne might represent.¹⁵⁶ What is clear is that the challenges that the witnesses face are not ecclesial only (cf. Ephesus and Smyrna), but they are civic as well. Whether from within (the church) or from without (the community/culture), witnesses to Jesus are facing opposition.¹⁵⁷ Hearing the mention of this throne from the lips of Jesus might rattle the imagination of the hearers; on the one hand, they may be encouraged that the Faithful Witness recognizes the opposition that the church is up against in their witness.¹⁵⁸ On the other hand, encouragement might be tempered by a degree of anticipation, as a throne suggests royalty or sovereignty – will Jesus overthrow this throne?¹⁵⁹ It is hard to imagine that the hearers would not immediately discern that this throne of Satan stands in complete

¹⁵⁴ Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 58. Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 68, and Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, pg. 79, both suggest that the term ‘κατοικέω’ means permanent residence, but according to ‘κατοικέω’, *BDAG*, p. 534, it simply means ‘to live in a locality for any length of time, live, dwell, reside, settle (down)’. Perhaps by ‘permanent’, they simply mean that they are not sojourners,

¹⁵⁵ Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, p. 182 and Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 134, are right to note the articular throne here (ὁ θρόνος τοῦ σατανᾶ). Accordingly, we might safely imagine an intensity in spiritual opposition to the Pergamemes. Leithart, *Revelation*, p. 165, suggests that ‘The most important fact about the church at Pergamum is where it is, and that it shares the same civic space with Satan and his kingdom’. While I certainly agree that this is a central point, I would argue that it is not *the* central point of this message, as will be developed below.

¹⁵⁶ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 246–47, suggests that it ‘is a way of referring to that city as a center of Roman government and pagan religion in the Asia Minor region’. Koester, *Revelation*, pp. 286–87, who offers a list of arguable reasons, finds those reasons ultimately unpersuasive and suggests that it has only received such designation because it is the only one of the seven cities where a Christian (Antipas) has been put to death. Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation*, p. 92, challenges Koester, suggesting that:

Koester understands the reference to the location of Satan’s throne as referring to the fact that only here has a Christian been executed, rejecting explanations built on altars and temples. But this sounds like confusing symptoms with causes. The implication seems to me that Antipas was killed because Satan no longer felt safe on his throne of pagan worship due to the progress of the gospel (compare Acts 19:25–27).

For a comprehensive look at options for the designation of the throne of Satan, Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, pp. 182–84. Aune’s conclusion is that it ‘should be identified not with a specific architectural feature of Roman Pergamon (in part because so little is actually known about first-century Pergamon) but rather with the Roman opposition to early Christianity’.

¹⁵⁷ Leithart, *Revelation*, p. 166.

¹⁵⁸ Blount, *Revelation*, p. 57.

¹⁵⁹ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 246, suggests that ‘it would be more difficult for Christians to maintain a high profile about their faith without also running into conflict with those committed to the officially accepted pagan religions, behind all of which Satan stood as king’. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 90. Though we do not see it this early in the narrative, it is fair to imagine the Pergamemes wrestling with questions like, ‘*How long, oh Lord, will thou avenge?*’ (cf. the souls under the altar 6.9), given the commendation that they have held fast to the name of Jesus and did not deny his faith. Leithart, *Revelation*, pp. 165–66, observes that while Satan is said to have a throne, it is never said that he occupies the throne.

opposition to the one who sits on the throne and the Faithful Witness, who is also Ruler of the kings of the earth (1.5).¹⁶⁰

Immediately after acknowledging the throne of Satan, Jesus implies that Satan's influence has somehow created challenges for the witness in the church in Pergamum – 'you are holding fast my name' (κρατεῖς τὸ ὄνομά μου) and 'you did not deny my faith' (οὐκ ἠρνήσω τὴν πίστιν μου). The discerning hearers might begin to recognize a shift from geographical matters to temporal; while the church in Pergamum is yet holding fast to the name of Jesus, there was a particular time where its witness was challenged to the point of denial, yet it did not succumb to the pressure.¹⁶¹ The witnesses in Pergamum receive praise both for their witness and their discernment – recognizing *him* as the Faithful Witness.¹⁶² Leaving no room for ambiguity, Jesus beckons their imagination to recall a time in their recent history when the church's faith was not denied, 'that is, in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness' (καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις Ἀντιπᾶς ὁ μάρτυς μου ὁ πιστός μου).¹⁶³

For the first time, the hearers encounter *faithful* witness in the concrete context of someone other than Jesus. Moreover, it is an individual who is recognizable to their community, as Antipas was one 'who was killed among you' (ὃς ἀπεκτάνθη παρ' ὑμῶν).¹⁶⁴ The fact that he was killed 'among you' may suggest that his death was not too far removed from the hearers.¹⁶⁵ Though the narrative offers little information regarding Antipas, the discerning community might hear three important factors concerning him. First, Jesus is emphatic to single him out as his own witness,

¹⁶⁰ Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, pp. 58–59, adds that 'there is a rival throne to the true throne of God, which has been set up on the earth, not only in Pergamum but wherever opposition to God's kingdom manifests itself'. See also Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 134.

¹⁶¹ M. Archer, *I Was in the Spirit*, p. 147, recognizes the present active holding (κρατεῖς) in contrast to the aorist deny (ἠρνήσω). I agree with her assessment that the use of different verbal tenses seem to suggest that Jesus has a particular point of time in view.

¹⁶² Blount, *Revelation*, p. 57. Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 135, offers the likelihood that 'the phrase "my faith" suggests something of the church's solidarity with the faithfulness of Jesus'.

¹⁶³ Their witness seems to have had temporal limitations. Although most English translations read 'even in' the days of Antipas, the context could suggest an explicative 'καί' vs. an intensive 'καί', 'that is ... in the days of Antipas'. For more on the explicative use of καί, see 'καί', *BDAG*, p. 495 ©.

¹⁶⁴ Koester, *Revelation*, p. 292 raises the point that all that is needed here is to understand that Antipas stands in solidarity with Jesus, the Faithful Witness. Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 136, raises the view that an intimate relationship between Antipas is probable, owing to the location where he was killed, 'among you'. Both make valid points, but whether Antipas was a resident of Pergamum or not is neither verifiable nor necessary to conclude to discern the prophetic message here. What is significant, as Thomas notes, is the progression that arises in just one verse. The progression of Satan's influence moves from civic/systemic (throne) to civil/social (dwelling).

¹⁶⁵ I do not suggest that he was a *contemporary* of the hearers. Richard B. Vinson, 'The Social World of the Book of Revelation', *RE* 98.1 (Winter 2001), pp. 11–33 (16), may be right to suggest that the death of Antipas seems to have taken place outside of the time of the hearers. The comparison would be a twenty-first century African hearing of 'the days of Martin Luther King, Jr.'. One need not to have resided in Memphis, TN during the mid-twentieth century, nor hail from Atlanta, GA, to feel a sense of connectedness to the martyred Civil Rights leader.

indicated by the double pronoun, ‘μου’.¹⁶⁶ Second, the immanent death that awaits some in Smyrna has already been experienced in Pergamum.¹⁶⁷ Thirdly, and more pertinent to the prophetic message to Pergamum, Antipas was a disciple of Jesus,¹⁶⁸ as his testimony was patterned after Jesus (1.5) and he may have even stood trial for it.¹⁶⁹ As the gravity of this recollection begins to sink in, the hearers might begin to consider whether or not their witness is as strong as that of Antipas. They might also discern that faithful witness is a calling that extends from Jesus to them – it is not restricted to the Messiah.

Again, the hearers are met with location – where Antipas lost his life, Satan dwells. At the first mention, Satan has a throne, but at this second mention they are made aware that Satan has residence. The hearers are met with the reality that Satan’s influence is more than one of a civic nature – it is also civil.¹⁷⁰ Regardless of what happened when Antipas was alive, or what moves Satan has made, Jesus mentions them no longer – he turns his attention back to the church in Pergamum. Notwithstanding their holding fast to the name of Jesus, and refusal to deny his name, Jesus has a lament against the witnesses there. He says, ‘but, I have a little matter against you’ (ἀλλ’ ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὀλίγα). What Jesus calls little, the hearers will soon come to understand has grave consequences.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁶ Archer, *I Was in the Spirit*, p. 138.

¹⁶⁷ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 136.

¹⁶⁸ He was not a disciple in the sense of those who walked with Jesus as recorded in the gospels, but a disciple in the sense of his pattern of life. Leithart, *Revelation*, pp. 166–67 refers to Antipas as a disciple, and rightly so. Blount, *Revelation*, pp. 57–58, considers Antipas the ‘poster child’ for faithful witness. Mitchell G. Reddish, *Revelation*, p. 60 says that ‘The *imitatio Christi* motif is at work here’. Leithart takes the connection too far in his suggestion that:

It is a sacrificial slaying. Just as Jesus was killed as the ‘one man who should die for the people,’ the scapegoat for Israel, so Antipas’s death was a sacrificial death, an offering carried out before the place where Satan dwells. While his murderers think they are offering service to the Satanic imperial power, Antipas offers himself to God as a living and dying sacrifice. Might we go so far as to say that Antipas’s death, like Jesus’s, looses from sin and constitutes the priestly kingdom? Does Antipas’s death cancel old things and make way for new? The parallels are suggestive, but we will have to wait to see the hints developed.

To suggest that Antipas was an offering that even possibly looses from sin is rather peculiar. It is unclear what is meant by the parallels being suggestive, and I do not follow what the ‘hints’ are that give such an impression.

¹⁶⁹ Koester, *Revelation*, pp. 288, 292.

¹⁷⁰ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 136.

¹⁷¹ Blount, *Revelation*, p. 58, says ‘Though the Pergamum believers have stood fast before external inquisition, they have not been so successful at resisting internal forces that lure them away from a proper witness to Christ’s lordship’. Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation*, p. 94, notes that ‘While these Christians have withstood the pressure to worship Satanic forces, they have apparently compromised at the edges of the conflict’. The views surrounding what Jesus holds against the Pergameme congregation varies. Boxall, *The Revelation of St. John*, p. 59, and Blount, *Revelation*, p. 58, translate ‘I have a few things against you’. However, Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, p. 185, translates ‘I hold a minor matter against you’; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 136, translates, ‘I have a little against you’. Context seems to prefer a qualitative (relatively small) translation over a quantitative (few in number) translation. See ‘ὀλίγος’, *BDAG*, pp.702–703. The only other place this adjective is used is in 3.4. The fact that multiple teachers are

Instead of works, it is teaching that concerns Jesus. Having an understanding from the FG of how significant discipleship is to Jesus,¹⁷² this concern is likely to be appreciated by the hearers. The Spirit must, therefore, invoke the imagination of the hearers, for them to recognize fully the discipleship deficit taking place in the church in Pergamum. In their immediate history is an uncompromising faithful witness, Antipas, who was a disciple of Jesus, evident in his designation being patterned after Jesus Christ, the Faithful Witness.¹⁷³ However, Jesus is not the teacher of some of the witnesses in Pergamum – a deeper, corrosive history is presented that they might have in full view the theological scope of their pedagogical compromise. Three times, the listeners hear the word ‘teach’ (two nouns – διδαχὴν, one verb – ἐδίδασκειν).¹⁷⁴ Though Jesus calls the issue small, the hearers might note the irony in the words wielded like a two-edged sword coming from his mouth. The issue is not small at all! The Faithful Witness has discerned that almost as much as they hold fast to his name, they hold to problematic teaching.¹⁷⁵

addressed does not seem to be the issue that he has – the issue is bad teaching, or a lack of effective discipleship. Perhaps by calling it a little thing, Jesus may be using irony or sarcasm here – it is in no way little to him, but perhaps the teachers do not see the issue as major. Especially when one considers the Balaam narrative from start to finish, the Balaam story does not present an alarming issue (See Numbers 22–24). However, Numbers 25 shows Israel in violation of God’s commands after Balaam’s departure, and in Num. 31.15–16, we discover that this was because of Balaam’s instruction.

¹⁷² For consideration of the centrality of discipleship to the FG, see Craig R. Koester, *The Word of Life: A Theology of John’s Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), p. 187:

Jesus’ first words in John’s Gospel are a question, ‘What are you looking for?’ and an invitation, ‘Come and see’ (1:38–39). The two people who hear this go with him, and a relationship is formed. At the end of the Gospel, when Jesus speaks for the last time, he says, ‘Follow me,’ and the implication is the same (21:22). To relate to Jesus is to go with him. The call to faith is a call to a way of life. Throughout the Gospel this path is shaped by the encounter with Jesus. The life of a disciple is not discussed in abstract terms, because it is so thoroughly bound up with Jesus himself. People are not given a set of teachings that can easily be separated from the Teacher. For the Fourth Evangelist, the questions of discipleship are, ‘What impact has Jesus had on you?’ and ‘What is he calling you to do?’

¹⁷³ When one considers the basic definition of ‘disciple’, they would hardly argue that discipleship is not the issue at stake in Pergamum. ‘μαθητής’, *BDAG*, pp. 609–10, offers two definitions that fit here: ‘one who engages in learning through instruction from another’; ‘one who is rather constantly associated with someone who has a pedagogical reputation or a particular set of views’. Both definitions fit well with Antipas. Additionally, when one considers the epistle of Ignatius to the Romans, discipleship and faithful witness were synonymous to the early church fathers and martyrs. Joseph Barber Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer, *The Apostolic Fathers* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1891), p. 151:

Now am I beginning to be a disciple. May naught of things visible and things invisible envy me; that I may attain unto Jesus Christ. Come fire and cross and grapplings with wild beasts, [cuttings and manglings,] wrenching of bones, hacking of limbs, crushings of my whole body, come cruel tortures of the devil to assail me. Only be it mine to attain unto Jesus Christ.

¹⁷⁴ M. Archer, *I Was in the Spirit*, p. 148, addresses the double noun, but the verb is worth noting as well, as it amplifies the idea that teaching is certainly an issue here in Pergamum. Slater, *Christ and Community*, p. 125, alludes to a significance in the three, by noting the references of Balaam, Balak, and the Nicolaitans.

¹⁷⁵ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 136, suggests that the ‘little’ issue ‘suggests that the rebuke to follow will not be as severe as the one to the church in Ephesus’. As it relates to severity, I am inclined to agree with Patterson,

Jesus does not recount to the hearers the content of the teaching; rather, he discloses the outcome. First, the teaching was of a ‘scandalous’ nature (‘σκάνδαλον’), like that of the OT prophet, Balaam. The hearers would no doubt be keenly familiar with the narrative of Balaam and the trouble that his teaching was for Israel.¹⁷⁶ By referencing the Balaam narrative, Jesus presents a prototype of false teachers.¹⁷⁷ While the end results of Balaam’s teaching might resemble the current state of the church in Pergamum, as it relates to compromise, the greater point is that the outcome of the prophet’s improper instruction led Israel away from spiritual fidelity.¹⁷⁸ That the teaching is scandalous might cause the hearers to discern better that discipleship is at stake, as Jesus addressed potential stumbling blocks (σκάνδαλον) in the FG (cf. Jn 6.59–71; 11.6–17; 16.1–

Revelation, p. 103, who suggests that while ‘the teaching of Balaam and the Nicolaitans, are not numerous, they are nevertheless serious enough to command one of the more serious threats to any of the churches’. One can only imagine how severe it might be to have the one who conquered death threaten to wage war with you – even if it is with his words ... perhaps *especially* if with his words. Ford, *Revelation*, p. 399 notes that ‘Despite their faith in face of martyrdom the citizens of Pergamum have succumbed to heterodoxy’. Leithart, *Revelation*, p. 164, shows a chiasmic pattern that would support the idea that the teaching (thus discipleship) is the main issue here in Pergamum:

- A. To the angel of Pergamum, v. 12a
- B. Jesus with the two-edged sword, v. 12b
- C. Holding the name, v. 13
- D. Holding the teaching of Balaam and Nicolaitans, vv. 14–15
- C’. Repent, v. 16a
- B’. Jesus makes war with the two-edged sword, v. 16b
- A’. Closing promise, v. 17

Frederick J Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon: The Revelation to John* (Howard Clark Kee and J. Andrew Overman [eds.]; The New Testament in Context; Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, International, 1998), p. 130, suggests that there is actually one issue, the teaching of Balaam and the Nicolaitans are one and the same.

¹⁷⁶ Swete, *The Apocalypse*, p. 36; Blount, *Revelation*, p. 58. See Leithart, *Revelation*, p. 168, for a typological overlay of the Balaam narrative over the situation in Pergamum.

¹⁷⁷ Slater, *Christ and Community*, p. 125; Mathews, ‘Riches, Poverty, and the Faithful’, p. 154, notes that ‘the sobriquets Balaam and the Nicolaitans do not represent actual historical groups or persons with whom John is in conflict as much as they are negative labels that malign a certain kind of teaching that is identical to that of Jezebel’.

¹⁷⁸ Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, p. 194; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 249, notes:

their teaching would ultimately dilute the exclusive claims of the church’s Christian witness to the world, which was still the church’s strength. Perhaps part of the motivation for the teachers’ attitude was the threat of economic deprivation, which may have facilitated the comparison with Balaam, since the original narrative and subsequent reflections on it associate his deceptive motives with financial gain.

Blount, *Revelation*, pp. 58–59, argues:

While some commentators argue that the term John employs, *eidōlothyton*, refers to the meat that was sacrificed and then eaten later, after the sacrificial ceremonies had concluded, Beale contends that the term refers to the eating of the contraband meat as a part of the ceremony itself. He therefore argues that John is concerned not just about the leftover eating, but the actual participation in foreign cults. The narrative does not itself offer enough evidence to decide the matter.

To Blount’s point, the main point of this condemnation, per the text, does not appear to be an investigation into the motive of cultural compromise and pagan practices – the cause is what is important to the discerning Faithful Witness, and that cause is false teaching which leads to false witnesses. See also Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation*, p. 94.

4), each issue referring to following after Jesus.¹⁷⁹ Pushing forward the irony of the ‘little matter’, Jesus has discerned also that they are holding to the teaching of the Nicolaitans in the same fashion.¹⁸⁰ If the church at Ephesus hated the *works* of the Nicolaitans, yet were still at risk of their lampstand being removed, how would the one with the two-edge sword react to the church at Pergamum becoming *disciples*, of the Nicolaitans; those who are formally trained in the scandalous ways that Jesus hates?

Before hearing the consequences, the hearers learn what must be done to right the course of a scandalous witness. The church at Pergamum need not imagine nor remember, as the church at Ephesus was instructed, but they are to repent.¹⁸¹ As the hearers have discerned a discipleship problem, the call to repent would alert them to a pedagogical reformation in matters pertaining to faithful witness unto Christ.¹⁸² Refusal to comply would result in a more imminent return than anticipated in 1.7.¹⁸³ When he returns, it would not be to warn nor to witness, but make war with them, that is, those who refuse to repent.¹⁸⁴ That he would come to wage war would perhaps not

¹⁷⁹ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 137. To this might be added Jn 11.6–17. A close examination would perhaps allow one to see how it is worthy of mention alongside the other passages. In the Lazarus account, there are key passages that give evidence to the relationship between σκάνδαλον and discipleship. Jesus’ mission in Bethany was not emotional, but doxological – ‘for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified’ (11.4). This act of worship and witness was necessary – yet it was a costly assignment. At Jesus’ command to go (11.7), the disciples wrestle with fear (11.8) that this assignment would lead to suffering, and possibly death. Jesus’ response (11.9–10) suggests that they are on limited time to follow him (the light), and as long as they do so, they are not in danger of σκάνδαλον; however, not following him will certainly result in σκάνδαλον.

¹⁸⁰ It is plausible, though not absolute, that there is some type of relationship or correlation between Balaamic teachers and Nicolaitan teachers. See Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, p. 188; Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, p. 48; Blount, *Revelation*, p. 59; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 139; Slater, *Christ and Community*, p. 126.

¹⁸¹ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 140, notes that ‘unlike the prophetic message to the church in Ephesus (2:6), this call for repentance is not softened in any way. It stands without final words of commendation’.

¹⁸² A critical point might be missed here by scholars who suggest that *discipline* is the answer to the problem in Pergamum. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 251, for example, suggests that the Pergamemes ‘should not assume that it will escape the same fate if it does not attempt to discipline these people’. As the narrative reads, it seems that a better reading would be Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 140, who understands the call to repent as a rejection of the teaching of Balaam and the Nicolaitans.

¹⁸³ Here, I would agree with Koester, *Revelation*, p. 289, who advises that this return be viewed ‘as a limited disciplinary visitation before the end. Here his coming is conditional: He will come if (ei) people refuse to repent, which implies that if they do repent, he will not come. His coming is also limited to people at Pergamum, whereas his final coming will defeat God’s opponents everywhere’. See also Blount, *Revelation*, p. 59, and Francesco Piazzolla, ‘Balaam and Jezebel in Revelation: The Re-Reading of OT Figures’, *SBS 14* (1, 2022), pp. 92–114 (99), who writes, ‘This is not an allusion to the end of time, but to Christ’s coming in the historical events of the Church where the polemical dimension of his word will be manifested’. Kwang-Jin Lee ‘A Study on the Announcements of Judgment against the Churches in Rev 2–3’, *한국기독교신학논총 KJCS 48* (December 2006), pp. 107–26 (113), suggests, ‘Through this image the author stresses that Christ’s judgment is a warlike act, in which the exalted Christ destroys the opponent and his followers within the church’. Lee, however, views this ‘coming’ as eschatological. See also Thomas, ‘The Comings of Christ’, p. 165, who suggests that ‘The presence of the adverb ταχϋ (tachy, “soon”) — the soonness found also in 1:1 and 3:11 ... fuels the case for seeing a reference to Christ’s imminent return’.

¹⁸⁴ Blount, *Revelation*, p. 60; Archer, *I Was in the Spirit*, p. 150.

be surprising to the hearers, as he did not introduce himself as the one holding the stars (2.1) nor the resurrected one (2.8) – he came with a sword in his mouth.¹⁸⁵ The hearers would not likely miss the gravity of Jesus waging war with his mouth, for he only speaks that which is given him from the Father (Jn12.20; 14.10), and the very next phrase, they have heard twice already – ‘the one who has an ear ... hear what *the Spirit* says to the churches’. Further, this possible allusion to Isa. 11.4 might help the hearers to appreciate the power of the prophetic Word of God.¹⁸⁶ Taken together, the hearers might well discern, that this war would ultimately mean that all of heaven stands against them.

The refrain offers hope – manna and white stones with new names written upon them await those who overcome. For the fledgling disciples, their fear and dread might be replaced with hope and resolve that faithful witness is still a possibility for them.¹⁸⁷ Overcoming, for the church of Pergamum would mean more than holding fast to his name; it would also be a call to a clear discipleship reformation.¹⁸⁸ If cultural compromise regarding food are issues in Pergamum, the promise of hidden manna is quite profound.¹⁸⁹ The hearers would hardly be surprised to learn that Jesus is holding on to names of the ones who held fast to his. The new, unknown names written on white stones might cause the hearers to imagine their repentance and reformed discipleship (that is, faithfulness in their witness) ushering in a deeper sense of solidarity with Jesus.¹⁹⁰

4.4.8 FAITHFUL WITNESS IN THE PROPHETIC MESSAGE TO PERGAMUM

The witnesses in Pergamum (2.12–17) are commended for their high esteem for the witness of Jesus, ‘you hold fast my name and did not deny my faith’ (2.13) but are reprimanded for not emulating it. By following scandalous teaching (2.14–15), they do not demonstrate with their actions what they communicate with their claims. The ‘days of Antipas’ (2.13) reminds the hearers that witness, so far as humanity is concerned, is against time. The death of Antipas may further

¹⁸⁵ Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 58.

¹⁸⁶ Piazzolla, ‘Balaam and Jezebel in Revelation’, p. 99, notes:

The ‘sharp two-edged sword’ is present in the initial vision where, from the mouth of the Risen came ῥομφαία δίστομος ὀξεῖα (Rev 1:16b). In Isa 11:4 the shoot from the stump of Jesse (messianic character), ‘shall strike the ruthless with the rod of his mouth’. In this text, the image suggests that the power of word is comparable with the force of a sword although the term sword does not appear. Instead, the term ὀξεῖα appears in the description of the prophetic ministry of the servant (Isa 49:2 LXX), since his word will assume the characteristics of a sword.

¹⁸⁷ Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 60.

¹⁸⁸ Keener, *Revelation*, p. 125.

¹⁸⁹ Blount, *Revelation*, p. 60; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 141.

¹⁹⁰ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 142. How fitting it is that!

suggest as much, if it implied the end of an era, inferring that they have not been intentional in raising up more witnesses in Pergamum. From the indictment, we are reminded that witness is to act in a didactic, teachable manner. Time is also noted in the threat of a quick return (2.16).

Although no explicit mention of suffering is given in the message, it is easily implied by their dwelling ‘where Satan’s throne is’ and yet they ‘hold fast my name and did not deny my faith’ (2.13). Such words of praise seem to suggest that opportunity for letting go and denial were very real. The death of Antipas, however, is an explicit reference to suffering that witness involves (2.13). With Antipas being the second figure in the Apocalypse to be considered a ‘faithful witness’ thus far in the narrative, the hearers may understand that witness is qualified as ‘faithful’ when one continues in their witness until death. As the hearers might expect, the divine aspects of witness are present in this prophetic message as well (2.12, 17).

4.4.9 REVELATION 2.18–29: THYATIRA

Jesus continues to speak to the churches by John, through the Spirit, with the longest of the prophetic messages. Being positioned in the center of the seven messages, might speak to its centrality of all the messages, and its significance to the universal Church.¹⁹¹ The hearers have received the messages to the churches at Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamum – each time being reminded of John’s inaugural vision of Jesus (1.12–16). How Jesus will speak to the church at Thyatira is different – a point the hearers need not discern, for they will hear it plainly in his address. It is not the titular designation, ‘the Son of God’ (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ), that would alarm the hearers,¹⁹² although they encounter it here for the first time in the Apocalypse.¹⁹³ It is alarming that they are hearing it in his opening address. Whatever the hearers may have understood Jesus to be from John’s inaugural vision, Jesus makes it clear in this address, that he is that and more.¹⁹⁴ It is only after this authoritative designation that Jesus proceeds with his familiar pattern.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹¹ Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 62; Thomas, *Apocalypse*, p. 143; Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation*, p. 97.

¹⁹² Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 143, notes that ‘this title is familiar from other places in the Johannine tradition (John 1.18, 34, 49; 3.16–18, 35; 5.25; 10.36; 11.4, 27; 19.7; 20.31; 1 John 1.3, 7; 2.22–24; 3.8, 23; 4.9–10, 14–15; 5.5, 9–13, 20; 2 Jn 3, 9)’.

¹⁹³ Scholars rightly note that the ‘title’ does not appear anywhere else in the Apocalypse. Blount, *Revelation*, p. 62; Archer, *I Was in the Spirit*, p. 151; Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, pp. 217–18. Readers should note that they do encounter the title here, explicitly, for the first time; however, the title is implied in 1.6 where the Faithful Witness ‘made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father’. Slater, *Christ and Community*, p. 132.

¹⁹⁴ Blount, *Revelation*, p. 62.

¹⁹⁵ Koester, *Revelation*, p. 304, suggests that “‘Son of God’ identifies Jesus as the one who establishes the reign of God’. Blount, *Revelation*, p. 62. That Jesus begins with his divine authority is significant – it is only because he is

As with the previous messages, the elements of the inaugural vision are fitting for what the Faithful Witness will address in his message to the church at Thyatira. He comes as ‘the one who has eyes like a flame of fire’ (ὁ ἔχων τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτοῦ ὡς φλόγα πυρὸς), and his feet are like polished bronze (οἱ πόδες αὐτοῦ ὅμοιοι χαλκολιβάνῳ). We can imagine the hearers listening with anticipation at the realization that the one with both a fiery gaze and gait has words concerning the witness of the church at Thyatira.¹⁹⁶ Having eyes like flames of fire, the hearers might begin to imagine Jesus having a gaze that has the ability to refine – that is, to burn away the dross and imperfections of what his eyes see.¹⁹⁷ Moreover, his feet are as polished bronze. Hearing this term for the second time, the hearers might recall that the feet appeared as though they were refined by a furnace fire (1.15). Through this imagery, the hearers might imagine both purity and power – sanitization and strength found in Jesus.¹⁹⁸ He who looks upon the seven churches has a refining discernment. He who walks among the lampstands walks with strong feet that have been tried in the fire and found to be true – for he has conquered death, hell, and the grave (Rev. 1.18; 20.18).

For the second time, the hearers are made aware that the Faithful Witness is intimately familiar with the works (τὰ ἔργα) of his churches (cf. 2.2); however, what is witnessed in Thyatira differs from that of Ephesus. No other church will have their works examined to such a degree.¹⁹⁹ Knowing their works, Jesus expounds that what he bears witness to in their church is ‘namely, the love and faithfulness and service and perseverance of yours’ (καὶ τὴν ἀγάπην καὶ τὴν πίστιν καὶ τὴν διακονίαν καὶ τὴν ὑπομονὴν σου).²⁰⁰ More than a general knowledge that they are active in religious deeds, Jesus appraises critical aspects of their work; their motive (love)²⁰¹ which fuels

the Son of God that he can discern, having flames in his eyes, and feet refined by fire. The significance will be seen as this prophetic message unfolds.

¹⁹⁶ Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, p. 41; Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 72; Leithart, *Revelation*, p. 173; Slater, *Christ and Community*, p. 132.

¹⁹⁷ Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 92.

¹⁹⁸ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 259–60; Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 63; Slater, *Christ and Community*, p. 137. Scholars have noted that χαλκολιβάνος (polished bronze) is unknown outside of Revelation and offer historical–critical arguments and OT intertextuality for exegesis and commentary. While these do lead to plausible conclusions, one only needs to be aware of the concept of fire in Johannine literature. Consider the FG, where ἀνθρακιά (charcoal fire) is used for warmth (Jn 18.18) and cooking (Jn 21.9). See ‘ἀνθρακιά’, *BDAG*, p. 80. Such fire is clearly not in view here; in fact, ἀνθρακιά is never used in the Apocalypse. Each of the twenty–seven times that fire is used in the Apocalypse (approximately one third of its 70 uses in the NT), the word is πῦρ, which has more to do with melting, forging, testing, and purifying, among other things. See ‘πῦρ’, *BDAG*, p. 898; Moisés Silva, ed ‘πῦρ’, *NIDNTTE* 4, pp. 193–95. Thus, a narrative reading offers all that is needed to discern what the Spirit is saying here. See Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 143–44.

¹⁹⁹ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 144.

²⁰⁰ Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, p. 202.

²⁰¹ Blount, *Revelation*, p. 62.

their commitment (faithfulness)²⁰² in ministry (service),²⁰³ but met with challenges which they continue to overcome (perseverance).²⁰⁴ Each of these aspects are representative of faithfulness in witness.²⁰⁵ It is fitting that Jesus would be so thorough in his audit of their works, for as the hearers will soon discover, it is such a critical perspective that they lack, thus hindering their faithful witnesses.²⁰⁶

How could the Faithful Witness have any objection to a loving, faithful, serving church who is persevering under trials and maturing? A holy hush may indeed overtake all within earshot of this prophetic message, as the listeners hear that dreaded refrain; ‘but, this I have against you’ (ἀλλ’ ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ). While excelling at loving, serving, and persevering, the church at Thyatira is charged with allowing a prophetic leader among them to teach and deceive. Owing to the designation of Jezebel, another name that would be sure to trigger the imagination of the hearers to Israel’s history,²⁰⁷ they may have in mind a particular female leader in their community.²⁰⁸ That a woman occupied the space of a prophetic leader was not the issue; rather it was that her teaching

²⁰² Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 144.

²⁰³ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 144.

²⁰⁴ Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 63.

²⁰⁵ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 73.

²⁰⁶ *Contra* Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 63, I am not sure that this is a literary strategy meant to ‘win over’ any of the hearers in Thyatira. It seems that the issue in this community is discernment. What Jesus offers here is not an attractive ploy, nor an attempt to build rapport (*contra* Koester, *Revelation*, p. 298). Certainly, there are rhetorical strategies at play, but these strategies speak to a lesson in discernment:

1. Son of God – Jesus states the obvious because they are obviously struggling to identify the source of prophetic teaching.
2. The title might also be one of establishing ultimate authority. If Jezebel calls herself a prophet, how would John’s prophetic Apocalypse out-rank hers? Whose prophetic word would hold more weight? Certainly, the one which contains words that come from the lips of the Son of God himself.
3. Love, faith, service, perseverance – all the previous observations in other churches (whether present or lacking) were addressed. Thyatira is noted for their maturing (Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 144–45), suggesting that they have been faithful in critical areas of witness – what *negative* could possibly proceed this commendation?
4. Though Jezebel calls herself a prophetess, Jesus never outright says she’s not. Though assigning her the name Jezebel, he never says ‘but she’s not’, as it relates to her title, he only addresses the fruit of her ‘prophetic teaching’.

²⁰⁷ As scholars note, the imagination recalls Jezebel, the OT wife of Ahab, king of the Israelites (1 Kgs 16.31; 18.4, 13; 19.1–3). Blount, *Revelation*, p. 62; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 146–47.

²⁰⁸ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 148, notes, ‘Jesus’ naming this woman Jezebel would alert the church to her true identity, suggesting that its discernment with regard to this figure was lacking.’

was bearing false witness and impeding faithful witness.²⁰⁹ Although they may not be active participants in her false teaching, they cannot escape culpability.²¹⁰

While the church at Thyatira possessed the love that was lacking in the church at Ephesus, their love did not make up for their lack of discernment, for which Ephesus was praised.²¹¹ While this prophetic leader ‘calls herself a prophetess’ (ἡ λέγουσα ἑαυτὴν προφητιν), a title that would garner respect and honor in this prophetic community, Jesus calls her Jezebel, a name that would be abhorrent and offensive.²¹² To hear such an exchange would be a shocking reality for the hearers, as she has clearly gained status and influence in the church, under the church’s watch.²¹³ As alarmed as the hearers might be that Jesus calls her Jezebel, more concerning is that she has assigned to herself a title that not even John has ascribed to himself; rather, he is simply a bondservant (1.1) and a brother (1.9).²¹⁴ It would be troublesome enough if the instruction and practice of this individual were simply erroneous, but the one who has fire in his eyes has discerned that they are in fact egregiously wicked, for she deceives the servants of Jesus (‘deceives my servants’ | πλανᾷ τοὺς ἐμοὺς δούλους).²¹⁵

The irony would hardly be missed here by the hearers. The FG records Jesus being accused of deceiving or leading people astray (Jn 7.12, 47), but as the Faithful Witness, he proved that his teaching and practices were not deceptive but liberative. Warnings against deception occur in 1 John (1.8; 2.26; 3.7). The teaching and practice of this charismatic individual in Thyatira are in direct opposition to Jesus, and by tolerating it in their community, the church at Thyatira is in

²⁰⁹ I agree with Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, p. 214. Additionally, Thomas, *Apocalypse*, pp. 147–48, suggests that ‘The problem here is not that the claims come from a woman, for it is likely that women were numbered among the prophets in this prophetic community. Rather, the problem is with her activity and lifestyle.’ Also, Archer, *I Was in the Spirit*, p. 153; Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation*, p. 100.

²¹⁰ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 148.

²¹¹ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 148.

²¹² Piazzolla, ‘Balaam and Jezebel in Revelation’, pp. 103–104, suggests that her self-designation ‘reveals a polemical contest with John’ who presents himself and his community as prophetic people. While this is certainly possible, nothing in the text suggests such a contest.

²¹³ Blount, *Revelation*, p. 63.

²¹⁴ The current work does not allow space for such an examination, but it is noteworthy that Jesus does not follow-up with a rebuttal to this title – ‘but she’s not’ (cf. 2.9). He does not even offer an explicit indictment that she is false (cf. 2.2). Is this a prophetic leader who has fallen away from following Christ, or one who was never a part of the prophetic community to begin with? These are the types of questions a lens of imagination and liberation brings to the text. While it is commendable that some scholars fight against the marginalization of women operating in prophetic leadership (cf. Koester, *Revelation*, p. 299), the defense stops there. Even the discerning Faithful Witness, at one point in time, had grace on this prophetic figure, owing to her opportunity to repent. Though some go as far as to say that this woman was not sent by the Spirit (Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation*, p. 99), that might be said of her teaching at the present time, but we need not assume that it was always the case.

²¹⁵ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 148.

direct violation of the instructions found in 1 John.²¹⁶ Their tolerance for this deceptive activity is a clear sign of their lack of discernment, for as Jesus seems to suggest, the problem has been ongoing.²¹⁷

Jesus informs the hearers, ‘I gave her time to repent’ (ἔδωκα αὐτῇ χρόνον ἵνα μετανοήσῃ).²¹⁸ Would the hearers be surprised to discover that she rejected this opportunity?²¹⁹ It is very likely that anyone hearing these words of Jesus, ‘I gave her time to repent’, and are found to be complicit in her sexual immorality, might begin to feel the heat of the discerning eyes of Jesus. If her ways were found out by the Faithful Witness, surely theirs would be as well. Regardless how the hearers feel about this Jezebel and her refusal to repent, all those with ears to hear will soon come to discover how Jesus feels about her, those entangled in her web of deceit, and those born of her wayward practices. Additionally, the hearers may be struck by the lengths to which the Faithful Witness would go to offer her an opportunity for repentance, thus redeeming her faithful witness.

Jesus leaves no room for the residue of false witness to be left in his church. The discipline that will come upon the church at Thyatira is far reaching, and it will come from Jesus himself.²²⁰ He begins with the source. Jezebel’s window of repentance having been closed, Jesus now condemns her, promising that ‘I am casting her upon a bed’ (ἰδοὺ βάλλω αὐτὴν εἰς κλίνην).²²¹

²¹⁶ Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, p. 214; Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 73; Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 64.

²¹⁷ It is without argument that Jesus is addressing tolerance here (cf. Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon*, p. 135; Archer, *I Was in the Spirit*, p. 155), but the tolerance is evidently a problem that is owing to the inability to recognize either the deceptiveness of this Jezebel, or they did not discern how far reaching her scandalous teaching was (cf. Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, pp. 217–18).

²¹⁸ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 148–49. It is unclear whether this ‘Jezebel’ refused altogether, or if she offered a partial repentance. Jesus is forthright concerning the object of her repentance – it was her actions (sexual immorality) not false teaching of which she refused to repent. This implies at least one of two options: (1) she repented of false teaching but refused to change in behavior; or (2) when she was offered an opportunity to repent, her teaching had not yet become corrosive – it was only her actions that were found compromising.

²¹⁹ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 149; Archer, *I Was in the Spirit*, p. 154. She is the first figure in the Apocalypse to be noted for open rebellion.

²²⁰ Slater, *Christ and Community*, p. 135; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 150 (cf. Archer, *I Was in the Spirit*, p. 154), observes:

To this point in the Apocalypse, those who share in tribulation have been those who have sought to be faithful witnesses to Jesus like John (1.9) and the church at Smyrna (2.9,10). On those occasions it appears certain that the suffering experienced comes at the hands of Satan and those who stand with him. However, the suffering that awaits those who commit adultery with ‘Jezebel’ comes from the hand of Jesus.

One might appreciate the husbandry parallels here to John 15. In Jesus, the hearers will bear much fruit – fruit that remains. However, following this Jezebel, they will experience quite the opposite. Jesus will cast her down (the vine), oppress her coconspirators (branches), and destroy her offspring (fruit).

²²¹ The translation that I offer is a conservative one. Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 149, observes that this idiom can be translated (as is in some English translations) ‘I will cast her on a sick bed’. The varying interpretations are far reaching. S.E. Shier, ‘Jezebel’s Voice: A Feminist Reconstruction of the Message to Thyatira in the Book of

Whatever the hearers might understand this statement from Jesus to mean, they would not confuse this bed for anything other than a punitive²²² response for her actions.²²³ That faithful witness is no longer an option for this Jezebel is evident in her lost opportunity for repentance. Her coconspirators still have a chance to revive their witness if they repent of her works. Such a repentance would demand a deeper discernment than that which they have exercised thus far.²²⁴ Finally, ‘her children’ (τὰ τέκνα αὐτῆς), that is, those spiritually born of her immorality, will be brought to an end by way of death or a plague.²²⁵ By castigating the works of this Jezebel to such an extent (her, those associating with her, and those *spiritually* born of her ways), Jesus shows just how deeply his discerning eyes of fire will reach in order to protect the witness of his church. This central message bears with it a central significance. All those hearing this warning should lean in to hear this message, for what the Faithful Witness has to say to the church at Thyatira is clearly meant to be heard beyond Thyatira – it is for the Church universal.²²⁶ This judgement comes in order that ‘all the churches will know’ (γνώσονται πᾶσαι αἱ ἐκκλησίαι).²²⁷ The hearers would not miss the familiar OT expression spoken often by God through the prophets; all the churches will know ‘that I am ...’ (ὅτι ἐγώ εἰμι), now spoken by Jesus through John.²²⁸ Jesus does not cease in discerning thoughts and emotions, rewarding each according to their faithfulness in their witness.²²⁹

All is not lost in Thyatira, for the discerning one is aware that there are some in the community ‘who do not have this teaching’ (ὅσοι οὐκ ἔχουσιν τὴν διδασχὴν ταύτην). Those who have not

Revelation’ (Ph.D. thesis, Trinity College, 2016), p. 306, suggests that ‘Jezebel’ here, could already be on a sickbed, and Jesus is laying claim to the cause for her current state. Chantel R. Heister, ‘Jezebel’s Punishment in Revelation 2: Research and Trends’, *Currents in Biblical Research* 20.2 (February 2022), pp. 186–99 (96), is an example of how far reaching the interpretation of Rev. 2.22 can be, and the conclusions drawn from various readings. Heister suggests a plausibility that ‘Jezebel’ represents a male in the text. Such a conclusion is extremely problematic, as Jesus could have very well referenced Balaam here as he did in Pergamum – just as he references the Nicolaitans in both Ephesus and Pergamum.

²²² Piazzolla, ‘Balaam and Jezebel in Revelation’, p. 107.

²²³ Major English translations (*NIV, ESV, NASB, NLT, LSB*) insert suffering or tribulation to render act of discipline clearer, but other options exist for interpretation here. cf. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, p. 43; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 150.

²²⁴ Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, p. 219.

²²⁵ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 75; Blount, *Revelation*, p. 63; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 151.

²²⁶ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 152.

²²⁷ Blount, *Revelation*, p. 64; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 152; Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, p. 219, writes, ‘a significant aspect of discernment is that the churches themselves will know (γνώσονται) that Jesus Christ’s discerning fiery eyes are able to see the inner most being and the heart, nothing can be hidden from him against the inability of the churches to know’.

²²⁸ Decker, ‘Faithfulness to Christ as Covenant Fidelity’, p. 178.

²²⁹ Patterson, *Revelation*, p. 116.

conspired with this Jezebel are said not even to know ‘the deep things of Satan’ (τὰ βαθέα τοῦ σατανᾶ). Those associated with Jezebel might claim to know deep things of Satan, that is claiming a deeper spiritual insight, or they might claim to know deeper thing about God, but they are assessed by the witnesses to be Satanic in nature. Either way, the persevering witnesses in Thyatira have rejected these teachings, preferring only that which is from the Lord.²³⁰ To those who have been found faithful, Jesus would impose no further burden.²³¹ After affirming what they do not have, the Faithful Witness encourages them to hold fast to that which they do have – that which was discerned in the opening address (2.19).²³² For those who have discerned Jezebel’s deception and held fast to the works of Jesus, as well as those who have repented of her immoral behavior, Jesus offers a promise, ‘to him I will give authority over the nations’ (δώσω αὐτῷ ἐξουσίαν ἐπὶ τῶν ἐθνῶν).

This promise contains words that might first cause confusion to the hearers, if not for its allusion to Ps. 2.8–9.²³³ To the overcomers who are given authority, Jesus promises ‘he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken into pieces’ (καὶ ποιμανεῖ αὐτοὺς ἐν ῥάβδῳ σιδηρᾷ ὡς τὰ σκεύη τὰ κεραμικὰ συντριβεται).²³⁴ As they listen with ears of discernment, they may ultimately understand that Jesus is promising a discerning position of authority.²³⁵ How great a reward! This promise might evoke the imagination of the hearers to contemplate the liberating hope that accompanies faithful witness.²³⁶ Jesus offers this reward for

²³⁰ Numerous views are presented in scholarship as to what the ‘deep things of Satan’ may refer. See Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 76; Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 66; Koester, *Revelation*, p. 300; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 153; Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, p. 220.

²³¹ Slater, *Christ and Community*, p. 136. By this statement, Jesus may have in mind here the burdensome work of persevering, not tolerating the teaching and practices of Jezebel. Since such a perseverance is leading to maturity (it is plausible that the applauded works in the beginning were not true of all in earshot of this prophetic message), Jesus would be content to let them continue in what they have been doing.

²³² Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 66; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 150.

²³³ Decker, ‘Faithfulness to Christ as Covenant Fidelity’, p. 179.

²³⁴ Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 66, who says that although ‘the image of earthenware vessels being broken in pieces (cf. Jer. 18:1–11) may not be the obvious image related to the work of a shepherd, the reality is that the Lamb’s role may be received as benevolent shepherding (e.g. 7:17) or as a harsh judgement (e.g. 6:16), depending on one’s stance’; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 157, notes, ‘the appearance of the word ποιμαίνω (*poimainō*, “rule” or “shepherd”) in the same context as the breaking of vessels to bits might strike the hearers as a bit unexpected if not inappropriate. For the activity of smashing pottery into pieces does not seem to fit the meaning often attributed to “shepherd”. However, amongst the shepherd’s duty was the protection of the sheep, which might involve the use of the rod as a weapon’.

²³⁵ The rod, which represents authority, discipline, and protection is made of iron, which must be forged in fire. The shattering of vessels by a potter speaks to usefulness and discernment.

²³⁶ If some of the hearers were slaves; the liberating hope of this promise to one day rule (Rev. 2.25-26) would be a great encouragement.

faithful witness because it was the same reward he received from his Father for his own faithful witness.²³⁷ Moreover, Jesus promises them the morning star, that is, himself. Though placed differently in the message than in times before, Jesus concludes this message, with a clarion call to all the hearers to be attentive to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

4.4.10 FAITHFUL WITNESS IN THE PROPHETIC MESSAGE TO THYATIRA

In Thyatira, witness is demonstrated in their love, and implied suffering; in these areas, they have excelled (3.19). Their tolerance of the one referred to as ‘Jezebel’ suggests that in their witness, they have not acted in discernment (3.20). Moreover, their failure to discern by way of the Spirit has resulted in pervasive immorality (3.20, 23). Jesus’ indictment suggests that witness discerns and witness disciplines. The love that witness demonstrates is seen in the opportunity that the one referred to as ‘Jezebel’ was given to repent (3.21).

Here again, the human elements of witness are present. It is apparent that time involves more than activity and anticipation; it seems that patience for unfaithfulness in witness is also against time, owing to the expiration of the one referred to as ‘Jezebel’s opportunity to repent. The community aspect is implied throughout; perhaps, in this message, the hearers understand more that witness, whether faithful or unfaithful is always a community matter. Just as some follow the teaching and practices of ‘Jezebel’, there are others ‘who have not known the deep things of Satan’ (3.24). Moreover, those who have not known the deep things are encountering some degree of suffering, as they are promised that ‘no other burden’ would be placed upon them (3.24). As it is with the other prophetic messages, the divine elements are present, as Jesus continues speaking by way of the Spirit, to the churches (3.18, 29).

4.4.11 REVELATION 3.1–6: SARDIS

The attention of the Faithful Witness turns to yet another congregation. While the church at Ephesus *endured* for the name of the Living One (2.3) and the church at Pergamum *held fast* to that name (2.13), seemingly, the congregation in Sardis has taken enduring and holding to a greater level; they have *embodied* a name of one who is alive – yet they receive no praise, and they will soon understand why.²³⁸ Jesus addresses the church at Sardis as ‘the one who possesses the seven

²³⁷ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 158.

²³⁸ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 161.

spirits of God and the seven stars’ (ὁ ἔχων τὰ ἑπτὰ πνεύματα τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοὺς ἑπτὰ ἀστέρας).²³⁹ This designation brings together John’s prologue and his inaugural vision, thereby illuminating the relationship between Jesus and the Spirit,²⁴⁰ as well as the Spirit’s role in witness, as this same Spirit has ushered John into his current prophetic space.²⁴¹ Moreover, the designation is significant to the assessment of their works – what the church at Sardis lacks (the life-giving Spirit of God), the Faithful Witness possesses.²⁴²

The message begins with a familiar expression, ‘I know your works’ (οἶδα τὰ ἔργα σου), but here, no commendation accompanies – only condemnation.²⁴³ Jesus offers no inspection of the work, but a revelation of the workers. While the church at Sardis possesses a name (ὄνομα ἔχεις) that they are ‘living’ (ζῆς), they are ‘dead’ (νεκρός) in reality.²⁴⁴ The hearers might discern both the spiritual and pneumatological implications of Jesus’ words.²⁴⁵ Hearing the juxtaposition of life

²³⁹ Patterson, *Revelation*, p. 121, suggests:

‘Holds’ is the NIV translators rendering of *echō* and is certainly one of the accepted meanings. Here, however, the Authorized Version translates *echō* as ‘has,’ which is preferable since it is difficult to speak of the risen Christ as ‘holding’ the Holy Spirit. The purpose of the identification seems to be relational. The risen Christ maintains relationship with both the seven spirits (i.e., the Holy Spirit; see 1:4) and with the seven stars identified as the angels of the seven churches.

However, the translation ‘holds’ may not be as problematic as Patterson supposes. Jesus promised in the FG that he would send the Holy Spirit (Jn 14.16–17; 15.26; particularly, the resurrected Christ is the one who gives the Holy Spirit 20.22). Thus, it is made clear in his promise that he is the arbiter of the Spirit at work in his church. Holding would convey that it is his to give, just as having might.

²⁴⁰ John Christopher Thomas, ‘The Spirit in the Book of Revelation’, in Craig R. Koester (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Book of Revelation* (Oxford: Oxford Academic, 2020), pp. 241–55 (253).

²⁴¹ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 159–60; Archer, ‘*I Was in the Spirit*’, p. 157; Slater, *Christ and Community*, p. 138.

²⁴² Gordon D. Fee, *Revelation* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), p. 47.

²⁴³ Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, p. 219, suggests that the message here and to Ephesus are likely to be similar in purpose, but the verses to follow do not seem to present a case for such a conclusion. The fact that no words of praise are offered to the church in Sardis seems to suggest that something far more severe is of concern to Jesus. Thus, Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, p. 79, and Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 80, correctly assess this message as strongest in its condemnation, compared to the messages to the other churches. Blount, *Revelation*, p. 66.

²⁴⁴ Moisés Silva, ‘νεκρός’, *NIDNTTE* 3, p. 376 observes that in ‘most occurrences of the word the thrust of the context is that death need not be regarded as a final state—it has to be viewed in the light of the resurrection of Jesus’. Accordingly, the hearers would not mistake this probation to mean that they are physically dead. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, p. 473; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 161. Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary*, p. 104, notes that this is common in the Apocalypse – that things are not always what they seem. ‘We read of “those who say they are apostles and are not” (2:2), those who are poor but really rich (2:9), “those who say they are Jews and are not” (2:9; 3:9), Jezebel “who calls herself a prophet” (2:20) and the self-proclaimed rich church, which is really “wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked” (3:17)’.

²⁴⁵ In the Johannine literature, life is a prominent motif, much like witness. It should be noted, however, that life is conveyed in different ways. For example, in the FG, it is (1) ζωή (Jn 1.4; 3.15, 16, 36; 4.14, 36; 5.21, 24, 26, 29, 39, 40; 6.27, 33, 35, 40, 47, 48, 51, 53, 54, 63, 68; 8.12; 10.10, 28; 11.25; 12.25, 50; 14.6; 17.2, 3; 20.31), and (2) ψυχή (Jn 10.11, 15, 17; 12.25; 13.37, 38; 15.13). ζωή, the life type of which Sardis has a name, is wholly understood as a spiritual matter, having both eschatological and pneumatological implications, as Jesus declares in Jn 6.63 that it is the Spirit who gives ζωή.

and death in the church at Sardis, perhaps the hearers might recall the vine discourse of Jesus, as recorded in the FG (cf. Jn 6.48–51).²⁴⁶ Pneumatologically, they would recall that ‘the Spirit is the one who gives life; the flesh profits nothing’ (Jn 6.63). Who else but the resurrected Faithful Witness could discern such a contrast of perception and reality?²⁴⁷ This striking contrast would suggest that the Sardians have only the appearance of witness. Detached from the giver of life, the Sardians are witnesses only to themselves.²⁴⁸

Unlike the churches in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, and Thyatira, no exposition is given to context or conflict(s) in Sardis, as far as their work is concerned; there is no mention of false teachers nor opposition that threatens their witness.²⁴⁹ The hyperbolic (living/dead) chastisement in 3.1 becomes clearer in 3.2 with two commands, ‘make yourself attentive,²⁵⁰ and strengthen those remaining things which are on the verge of dying’ (γίνου γρηγορῶν καὶ στήρισον τὰ λοιπὰ ἃ ἔμελλον ἀποθανεῖν).²⁵¹ That they are to become attentive might be good news to the hearers, for it further suggests that their dead state is one that holds a possibility of life.²⁵² It becomes clearer that the church at Sardis is not wanting for activity, but their witness does not reach beyond mere performance.²⁵³ The command to strengthen ‘the remaining things’ (τὰ λοιπὰ) would perhaps suggest to the hearers that Jesus does recognize that the church at Sardis was once, and perhaps is even now, active in their witness.²⁵⁴ The absence of the Spirit, who is the giver of life, has resulted

²⁴⁶ It is doubtful that the hearers would miss the weightiness of Jesus’ comparison to the Israelites in the wilderness in Jn 6.49. Jesus’ discourse on the vine was to clarify a religious misconception, as it pertained to work. As the crowd was asking what works should be done (6.28), Jesus was explaining that there was no work that they could do apart from him. Miracles and provision are indeed gifts from the Father but they are not life-giving. The only source of life is the one who is the Bread of Life. Only by feasting on this Bread and abiding in this Vine will they have life, and bear fruit. Thus, the pronouncement of death upon the community suggests that there is a famine and a disconnect.

²⁴⁷ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 161.

²⁴⁸ Blount, *Revelation*, p. 67; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 161.

²⁴⁹ Archer, *I Was in the Spirit*, p. 158. Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary*, p. 104.

²⁵⁰ Though many translations (*NASB, ESV, NIV, NLT*) render γρηγορῶν as ‘Wake up!’, ‘Be watchful’ (KJV, NKJV, ERV ‘Be *thou* watchful’) offers a better translation of what is being conveyed here. The present middle/passive verb ‘to be’ (γίνομαι) suggests that the subject (in this case the hearers) is both performing and receiving the action of the verb. See William D. Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek: Grammar* (Verlyn D. Verbrugge [ed.]; 3rd edn; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), p. 149. Together, the command would sound more like ‘Put yourself in a position of alertness’. Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, p. 222, says, ‘The fact that Jesus’ address is cryptic seems designed to inspire self-critical discernment on behalf of the churches because they are charged to discern for themselves the reason for their necromantic state. In order to repent, come alive, keep, and obey, the churches must discern their state from Jesus’ perspective’.

²⁵¹ Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, p. 219; Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 81; Blount, *Revelation*, p. 67; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 162.

²⁵² Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, pp. 68–69; Leithart, *Revelation*, p. 184.

²⁵³ Blount, *Revelation*, pp. 67–68.

²⁵⁴ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 273.

in a spiritual carelessness – weakening both their witness and their watchful discernment to hear the failing spiritual heartbeat of their community.²⁵⁵

There is a short pause in a series of five imperatives, and the hearers are once again reminded of the intimacy between Jesus and the Father when he reprimands that ‘I have not found your work to be complete in the sight of my God’ (οὐ γὰρ εὗρηκά σου τὰ ἔργα πεπληρωμένα ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ μου).²⁵⁶ Here marks another occasion where Jesus has proven credibility to pronounce such strong judgment on the church – as he has brought glory to the Father by ‘having completed the work which you have given me to do’ (Jn 17.4). It is because Jesus was found to be a faithful witness that he could stand as an auditor of the witness of the churches.²⁵⁷ The works, that is – active witness of the church at Sardis, would not be made complete by innovation or increased activity, but only by reliance upon the Spirit – the one who gives life, and bears witness to the Son and the Father (cf. 1 Jn 5.4–12).²⁵⁸ The works of the church at Sardis, as discerned *by* Jesus, do not demonstrate a Spirit-empowered witness *to* Jesus.

Since their witness is not complete before God, the imperatives continue, the church at Sardis is instructed first to remember that which they had received. It is doubtful that the hearers would not imagine those things which Jesus gave in the FG; namely, the command to love one another (Jn 13.34), a supernatural peace (Jn 14.27), and the Holy Spirit (Jn 20.22).²⁵⁹ Additionally, they are instructed to remember that which they heard. As it is Jesus, the Faithful Witness who speaks to the church at Sardis, it is likely that they would recall words that came from the mouth of Jesus himself. Having been considered ‘dead’ in their witness by the one who possesses the seven Spirits, the hearers might recall Jesus’ teaching that those who love him would keep his words (Jn 14.24); moreover, that the Spirit will instruct and remind them of all that Jesus had spoken (Jn 14.26). There is a significant distinction in the things which are to occupy their thoughts, for that which they have received (εἴληφας) suggests something that yet remains, even if dormant, while that which they heard (ἤκουσας) refers to a moment in time.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁵ Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, p. 49.

²⁵⁶ Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 69; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 162–63.

²⁵⁷ Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, p. 220; Leithart, *Revelation*, p. 184.

²⁵⁸ Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, p. 49, writes that “‘works’ are πεπληρωμένα only when they are animated by the Spirit of life”; Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary*, p. 104.

²⁵⁹ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 163. That what they are to remember is ‘the Christian gospel’, as Slater, *Christ and Community*, p. 139, supposes seems rather limiting.

²⁶⁰ Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, p. 80 notes that ‘the change of tenses is here significant. ἤκουσας points to the time when they heard the Gospel: cf. 1 Thess. 1:5, 6, 2:13. εἴληφας concedes that they still possess this gift of God’.

These things (which they have received and heard) they are to be active in keeping (τήρει).²⁶¹ Even without the promised reward that is soon to be announced for those who overcome (3.5), the hearers would know that the command to keep bears with it a promised blessing (1.3).²⁶² The final imperative is that they are to ‘repent’ (μετανόησον), which suggests that inattentiveness, spiritual negligence, forgetfulness, and forfeiture of spiritual things are abhorrent to Jesus, and antithetical to faithful witness.²⁶³ The imperatives come full circle to a warning. Inattentiveness was the beginning of their witness problem, and thus it is the one thing that Jesus warns against. Like the messages to the churches at Ephesus and Pergamum, the church at Sardis is warned of a distinct coming²⁶⁴ – not the expected coming in the clouds (1.7), but a particular judgmental return. Because of all that Jesus has discerned and instructed, if they refuse to be vigilant in their attentiveness, his coming will be ‘as a thief’ (ὡς κλέπτης).²⁶⁵ That which they hold dormant, he who possess both the seven spirits and the seven stars will take from them.²⁶⁶

While the whole church at Sardis has not lived up to its name, Jesus is a witness to a faithful few in the community who have.²⁶⁷ Jesus transitions from rebuke to commendation with the reversal of a familiar refrain, ‘but’.²⁶⁸ It is not what Jesus has *against* the church at Sardis, but what they have going *for* them that he notes. There are a few names among them ‘who have not soiled their garments’ (ἃ οὐκ ἐμόλυναν τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτῶν). Context suggests that the hearers might have in mind a group that has not ruined their testimony by being inattentive, spiritually negligent, forgetful, and forfeiting spiritual things.²⁶⁹ Owing to their demonstration of spiritual attentiveness,

²⁶¹ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 82.

²⁶² Blount, *Revelation*, p. 69.

²⁶³ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 82, notes that ‘the present imperative τήρει (*tērei*, ‘pay attention’) implies continuous action; while the aorist μετανόησον (*metanoēson*, ‘repent’) presupposes a single act’.

²⁶⁴ R. Thomas, ‘The ‘Comings of Christ’, p. 167, argues that this is not a distinct coming, but the Parousia. Lee, ‘A Study on the Announcements’, p. 118, agrees. I, however, agree with Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 70, who suggests that this is a special, punitive coming. See also Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, p. 22 and Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation*, p. 105.

²⁶⁵ Decker, ‘Faithful to Christ’, pp. 182–83, makes an interesting OT connection here, suggesting that the issue of attentiveness and repentance bears a stronger connection to the ‘thief law’ in Exod. 22.2–3 than it does to the synoptic parables found in Matthew 24 and Luke 12.

²⁶⁶ Blount, *Revelation*, p. 69.

²⁶⁷ Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, p. 81.

²⁶⁸ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 165.

²⁶⁹ While OT imagery (Zech. 3.3–5) found here is suggested among scholars (cf. Ford, *Revelation*, p. 412; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 166), it does present its challenges. Whereas Joshua is first presented with soiled garments that are replaced with clean ones, the few here have not had their garments soiled. Admittedly, Thomas notes that it is not clear how the hearers might receive this imagery of the garments. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 96, suggests that the garments are ‘often emblematic of inner character, and those dressed with spotless garments represent the ones who are spiritually pure at Sardis’. Though unclear, it seems a far stretch to side with Leithart, *Revelation*, p.

Jesus says that these witnesses in Sardis will receive a reward of high honor;²⁷⁰ ‘they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy’ (περιπατήσουσιν μετ’ ἐμοῦ ἐν λευκοῖς, ὅτι ἄξιοί εἰσιν). Though they will hear the term ‘worthy’ again in the Apocalypse, only here is it attributed to anyone other than Jesus.

Those who overcome – that is, demonstrate spiritual attentiveness, are also promised white garments.²⁷¹ For living up to their name, their names will forever be found in the book of life.²⁷² Moreover, Jesus promises to acknowledge them publicly before his Father and his angels, a promise found nowhere else in the Apocalypse.²⁷³ The hearers might find this promise especially comforting, given that their name(s) will be both protected and proclaimed by the Faithful Witness. Once a church known as being alive, the Sardians have become void of the life-giving Spirit demonstrated in their witness (Jn 6.63). Perhaps the hearers would now be more attentive to heed the admonishment and hear the words that have just been given to the church by way of the Spirit.

4.4.12 FAITHFUL WITNESS IN THE PROPHETIC MESSAGE TO SARDIS

The reputation of the witnesses in Sardis was not credible. Though an unnamed few among them had remained faithful in their witness (3.4), the church, as a whole, seemed to be content with a recognized name over and above the evidence of life (3.1). They had been unaware that the presence of the life-giving Spirit was missing from among them. Void of the Spirit, their work was rendered incomplete and their assignment near expiration (3.2). The soon coming expiration of their witnessing works makes the aspect of time clear in this message. The anticipation of time is elevated at the threat of coming ‘like a thief’ in an unknown hour (3.3). The message to Sardis also makes clear the point that witness acts demonstratively; it should give evidence of the life of the Spirit (Jn 6.63) at work in the Church. This demonstration of life also brings to light the divine

185, who holds that ‘Jesus’s reference to soiled garments during sleep suggests a nocturnal emission, connecting to his warnings about πορνεία in the earlier edicts’. Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 84; See also, Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 166.

²⁵⁹ Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, p. 222.

²⁷¹ J. William Fuller, “‘I Will Not Erase His Name from the Book of Life’ (Revelation 3:5)”, *JETS* 26.3 (September 1983), pp. 297–306 (299), observes, ‘The singular – “one who overcomes” – implies that the victory is made on an individual basis, that not all Christians attain it’. Further, he notes that ‘exclusivism of the title “overcomer” implies, however, that some believers – namely, those who do not remain faithful, who deny him under persecution — will not inherit those promises’.

²⁷² See Fuller, “‘I Will Not Erase His Name’”, pp. 299–300. Some scholars note here that while one does not add their name to the book by their works, their works (or neglect thereof) certainly can remove them from it. See Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 70; Blount, *Revelation*, pp. 71–72.

²⁷³ Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, p. 51; Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 86.

aspect of witness, in addition to Jesus speaking through the Spirit. The few names ‘who have not defiled their garments’ reminds the hearers of the communal nature of witness (3.4).

4.4.13 REVELATION 3.7–13: PHILADELPHIA

For the sixth time, the Faithful Witness turns his attention to a community of witnesses. For the second time, he uses a title not found in the inaugural vision. He presents himself as ‘the one who is holy, who is true, who possesses the key of David; the one who opens (doors) and no one will shut, and shuts (doors) and no one opens’. At this designation, the hearers are reminded of key characteristics of messianic identity (holy, true) and vocation (possessing, opening, and shutting) found in the Faithful Witness.²⁷⁴ The words holy and true (ἅγιος | ἀληθινός) are not present in the inaugural vision, but they certainly would be familiar epithets for Jesus, as the FG records Peter affirming him as ‘the holy one of God’ (Jn 6.69), and Jesus is recorded to be both ‘full of truth’ (Jn 1.14) and the embodiment of truth itself (14.6).²⁷⁵

It is no insignificant matter that Jesus begins with holy and true; for it is from such a place of purity and separateness that Jesus bears the keys of David.²⁷⁶ The one through whom access is given is incorruptible. Moreover, this designation fits well with the OT context from which elements of the message seem to draw.²⁷⁷ The hearers might recognize an allusion to the story of Eliakim in Isaiah 22 at the mention of the key of David,²⁷⁸ especially when they hear this in concert with the later promise to be made a pillar in the sanctuary of the Lord (3.12), but an echo of 1.18, where Jesus holds the keys of death and Hades would also not be missed.²⁷⁹ Thus far in this prophetic narrative, keys represent access to fatalistic spaces (death and Hades), but here, where the church is limited in their power and the only community of witnesses discerned to have issues with limited access (3.8), Jesus reveals that the ‘key’ (κλεῖν) which he possesses is also the key to

²⁷⁴ Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, pp. 478–79.

²⁷⁵ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 171.

²⁷⁶ Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 71.

²⁷⁷ Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, p. 34, notes:

if John had this text in mind, it not only explains the title to the letter, it may also explain the promise, which says, ‘I will make you a pillar in the temple of my God’ (Rev. 3:12), for Isaiah continues, ‘I will fasten him like a peg in a secure place, and he will become a throne of honour to his ancestral house’ (Isa. 22:23). Hemer suggests that John has been meditating on a number of ‘temple texts’ (Isa. 60; Ezek. 48; Isa. 22) and is creatively applying them to the church. The case that the ‘open door’ of evangelism suggested Isa. 22:22, which was then used to construct the title (‘key of David’) and transferred to the vision (‘I have the keys’) seems most unlikely.

²⁷⁸ See the story of Eliakim in Isaiah 22. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, p. 235; Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 88; Blount, *Revelation*, p. 74.

²⁷⁹ Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 71.

life and liberty.²⁸⁰ With this key, the one who is holy and true is actively ‘opening ... and closing’ (ὁ ἀνοίγων ... καὶ κλείων) doors. The hearers may likely discern the fact that Jesus’ possession of this key would equally represent access and security.²⁸¹ Having given the longest introduction of all the prophetic messages, Jesus commences with his address to the church at Philadelphia.

Jesus says, ‘I know your works’ (οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα) – words which are familiar as they have been heard in five other prophetic messages, in which Jesus had discerned the works of other communities (2.2; 2.19; and 3.1). It is only here, however, where the discerned works are *interrupted* with a call to pneumatic imagination.²⁸² Instead of an enumeration of *their* works,²⁸³ Jesus interjects, calling their attention to *his* work on their behalf.²⁸⁴ He reveals to them that ‘I have placed before you an open door’ (ἰδοὺ δέδωκα ἐνώπιόν σου θύραν ἠνεωγμένην).²⁸⁵ The perfect tense of the verb δέδωκα (‘I have placed’) suggests that the open door given them has already taken place, but could also imply that it remains open.²⁸⁶ It is doubtful that the Philadelphians would wrestle with the interpretation of what this door might represent, be it evangelism,²⁸⁷ a particular space,²⁸⁸ the messianic kingdom,²⁸⁹ access to the presence of God where they might gain a heavenly perspective of his activity in the world,²⁹⁰ or a combination of all these.²⁹¹ What the hearers are more likely to focus on is Jesus’ authority over the door.

²⁸⁰ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 284; Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 71; Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 97.

²⁸¹ Archer, ‘*I Was in the Spirit*’, p. 161, observes a significant detail – that keys represent opening and closing as well as locking and unlocking. It is fitting here to imagine the hearers understanding this key to mean both.

²⁸² Jolyon G.R. Pruszinski, ‘The Cognitive Phenomenology of Doors in the Book of Revelation: A Spatial Analysis’, *Religions* 10.3 (March 2019), pp. 1–14 (6), notes that ‘one cannot imagine a space without imagining oneself in that space’. Thus, the command to ‘behold’ the opened door is essentially a command to imagine themselves in a spatial locale of spiritual significance. What is meant here by ‘pneumatic imagination’ is that Jesus instructs them to ἰδοὺ (behold). The idea of pneumatic imagination can be appreciated when one considers the fact that it is not a literal door that they are to look at and see. Rather, they are to ‘see in the Spirit’ what the Faithful Witness has done – by his faithfulness, even unto death, he has granted them access denied otherwise. The call is not to remember (cf. the command to Ephesus, ‘remember from where you have fallen’, Rev. 2.5), but to think and perceive (‘Behold, I have set before you ...’, Rev. 3.8).

²⁸³ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 173.

²⁸⁴ Archer, ‘*I Was in the Spirit*’, p. 162.

²⁸⁵ Pruszinski, ‘The Cognitive Phenomenology of Doors’, p. 6, contends, ‘The implication in the passage is that the open door is one to heaven for the hearers and is not open to those who are disobedient. The hearer is encouraged to be one of those who enter through the door, that is, to imagine themselves entering through.’

²⁸⁶ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 174. Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek*, p. 223, explains that ‘the Greek perfect describes an action that was brought to completion and whose effects are felt in the present’.

²⁸⁷ Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, p. 480; Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, p. 87.

²⁸⁸ Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, p. 480.

²⁸⁹ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 89; Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary*, p. 108.

²⁹⁰ Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 72.

²⁹¹ This view is not prominent, but among the varying arguments of scholars for what this door represents, it is difficult to deny the plausibility in them, which leads me to consider a plenary view of the open door. One might even

To whatever the door might refer, the church at Philadelphia is promised that no one would be able to shut it. After this parenthetical revelation of an open door having been placed before them, Jesus turns attention back to *their own* work, for it is ‘because of’ (ὅτι) the work of the church that he has opened this door.²⁹² The reason given is three-fold; their capability (‘little power’), conviction (‘kept my word’), and confession (‘have not denied my name’).²⁹³ First, he has discerned their weak state. Unlike the church at Smyrna, where Jesus offered a rebuttal (‘but you are ...’) to their apparent state, here no rebuttal is offered – only the reality that ‘you have little power’ (μικρὰν ἔχεις δύναμιν). It is likely that this power refers to something that the church at Philadelphia is struggling to accomplish.²⁹⁴ Outwardly, their lack of power may have impeded their influence,²⁹⁵ but from Jesus’ perspective, it has not rendered their witness ineffective.²⁹⁶ They have maintained their witness in Philadelphia, being found faithful to have ‘kept my word’ (ἐτήρησάς μου τὸν λόγον) and ‘have not denied my name’ (ἠρνήσω τὸ ὄνομά μου) despite their deficit.²⁹⁷

Once again, they are invited to imagine. The repeated ‘behold’ (ἰδοὺ) would not be missed by the hearers.²⁹⁸ At each command to behold, the imaginative gaze of the hearers is directed toward the activity of the one who is holy and true, suggesting that what they envision is trustworthy and accurate. The first ‘behold’ was directed toward a past activity; here, he directs their attention to present (‘I *am* giving up’ | διδῶ) and future (‘I *will* cause’ | ποιήσω). At these commands to ‘behold’ works past, present, and future, the hearers might be reminded of the unity of Jesus and God, the One ‘who is, who was, and who is to come’ (1.4; 1.8). The hearers are made aware that Jesus is actively at work in the vindication of his church, even if the results are not yet seen.

argue that Jesus holds the ‘master key’, and which of these doors that the Philadelphians have had opened was not opened by the one who holds the key? As their witness has not come to completion (implied in the fact that they could possibly lose their crown, cf. 3.11), there are doors of evangelism that may not yet be opened. Some of these doors may require access to spaces social, civic, or otherwise, and none could argue against the kingdom door.

²⁹² Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, p. 236.

²⁹³ Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, p. 237, suggests that ‘keeping the word’ and ‘not denying the name of Jesus’ are one and the same with an antithetical expression. While this may be the case, nothing in the text suggests that it is absolutely the case.

²⁹⁴ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 174.

²⁹⁵ Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, p. 481; Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, p. 54; Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, p. 87.

²⁹⁶ Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 72; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 287; Blount, *Revelation*, p. 74; Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 98.

²⁹⁷ Koester, *Revelation*, p. 324; Blount, *Revelation*, p. 75.

²⁹⁸ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 175.

An antagonistic group identified amongst the church at Smyrna is also mentioned here; a group self-identifying as Jews but who are discerned to be ‘the synagogue of Satan’ (τῆς συναγωγῆς τοῦ σατανᾶ).²⁹⁹ Rather than recall the works of the antagonists, Jesus reveals his plan for them.³⁰⁰ By this word, ‘διδῶ’ (I *am* giving up), we might imagine that they are a group whom Jesus once identified as members of the community.³⁰¹ Though they may still present themselves as Jews in the community, the one who is holy and true, and wields the power of access has rendered their eviction notice. Expulsion would not be the end of the matter; rather, Jesus adds, ‘I will make them come and fall before your feet’ (ποιήσω αὐτοὺς ἵνα ἤξουσιν καὶ προσκυνήσουσιν ἐνώπιον τῶν ποδῶν σου). It is difficult to imagine the hearers understanding this as them becoming objects of worship; rather, they might expect that vindication of some sort would come because of their witness.³⁰² Moreover the love Jesus has for this community of witnesses will be made known to those who are of the synagogue of Satan.³⁰³

Owing to (‘because of’ | ὅτι) their active witness, that they ‘have kept the word of my steadfastness’ (ἐτήρησας τὸν λόγον τῆς ὑπομονῆς μου),³⁰⁴ Jesus promises the church at Philadelphia that in turn ‘I will keep you from the hour of testing’ (κάγώ σε τηρήσω ἐκ τῆς ὥρας τοῦ πειρασμοῦ).³⁰⁵ No elaboration is given as to when this testing hour might begin, but it seems apparent that the hearers are already anticipating its arrival.³⁰⁶ The keeping that he promises is not a removal from the hour, but divine intervention in the midst of that hour.³⁰⁷ Such keeping would not be foreign to the hearers, as keeping of this sort was the priestly prayer of Jesus in the FG (Jn 17.15) where Jesus asks not for the removal of the disciples from the world – only that they be

²⁹⁹ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 286–87.

³⁰⁰ Blount, *Revelation*, p. 75–76.

³⁰¹ ‘διδῶμι’, *BDAG*, p. 243; 15, notes that a possible translation is to ‘give up, something that has been under one’s control for a relatively long time, give up, give back’. Therefore, it is plausible that what Jesus is saying here is that he will no longer acknowledge them as a part of his community, though they once were.

³⁰² Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 91; Blount, *Revelation*, p. 76; Koester, *Revelation*, p. 325. One might consider the Joseph narrative. Despised by his brothers and sold into slavery, they would later come and fall down before him (Gen. 42.6).

³⁰³ Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 72.

³⁰⁴ Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, p. 483, suggests that ‘the meaning is clearly the loyal steadfastness of the Philadelphians, shown in certain persecutions which they had suffered; but the precise construction is not certain. The two nouns may form a compound expression, the pron. μου depending on the whole: *my steadfastness–command*, i.e. *my command to be steadfast*.’ Blount, *Revelation*, p. 76, is right to imply that this *keeping* is an act of witness.

³⁰⁵ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 178.

³⁰⁶ Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, p. 239, notes, ‘The fact that τῆς ὥρας τοῦ πειρασμοῦ is articular indicates that it refers to an event with which the author assumed his audience was familiar, i.e., a period of great distress and suffering that early Judaism and early Christianity expected would immediately precede the eschatological victory of God’.

³⁰⁷ Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 73; Blount, *Revelation*, p. 77; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 179; Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 99.

kept from the evil one.³⁰⁸ This time of testing, Jesus says will encompass all of humanity,³⁰⁹ but its purpose is ‘to test those who dwell on the earth’ (πειράσαι τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς); that is, those who do not bear witness to Jesus.³¹⁰

Words that were meant to invoke fear and repentance to the churches at Ephesus, Pergamum, and implied in the message to the church at Sardis are words of comfort and encouragement to the witnesses in Philadelphia – ‘I am coming quickly’ (ἔρχομαι ταχύ).³¹¹ This encouraging word is not without warning, a warning that suggests that the return of which Jesus speaks here is his eschatological return.³¹² Their witness has earned a reward, for they are told to ‘hold fast to what you have’ (κράτει ὃ ἔχεις), that is – remain faithful in their witness, ‘in order that no one takes your crown’ (ἵνα μηδεὶς λάβῃ τὸν στέφανόν σου).³¹³ The reward which the witnesses in Smyrna had yet to receive (2.10), the witnesses in Philadelphia have yet to lose. Although a door remains open for them that no one can shut (3.7), the reward for their faithful witness does not promise the same security.³¹⁴

Maintaining their witness will not come easy, for Jesus promises to make a pillar (ποιήσω αὐτὸν στῦλον) of ‘the one who overcomes’ (Ὁ νικῶν). The pillars are said to be positioned ‘in the temple of my God’ (ἐν τῷ ναῷ τοῦ θεοῦ μου). The hearers are given an eschatological promise for faithful witness.³¹⁵ Here again, a promise is made that speaks to the commonality or solidarity found in faithful witness – the hearers would be well aware of the social divisions and boundaries

³⁰⁸ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 91; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 179.

³⁰⁹ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 92.

³¹⁰ Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 73; Blount, *Revelation*, p. 77, notes:

Here, as in the Gospel, persecution is something that believers will endure (2:10). Their witness matters as much as it does because they give it in the circumstances of such duress, just as Christ himself did on the cross. That is no doubt why in the end the hour is described in terms of a testing rather than a judgment; believers, too, will have an opportunity to make the grade. They will have the opportunity to witness.

This testing will reveal whether or not those who are not witnesses respond to the faithful witness of those who have been ‘kept’ during this hour of tribulation. Koester, *Revelation*, p. 326, notes:

Revelation develops the negative connotations, portraying those who live upon the earth as opponents of God (Rev 6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8, 12, 14; 14:6; 17:2, 8; Bauckham, *Climax*, 239–41). The testing mentioned here is sometimes taken as God’s punishment on an unbelieving world (Beale), but this is unlikely. In Revelation, testing (peirazein) reveals the character of both the faithful and the unfaithful (2:2, 10).

³¹¹ Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, p. 484.

³¹² Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 92; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 181.

³¹³ As Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, p. 241, notes, the στέφανόν (wreath/crown) is given as a reward for an accomplishment; therefore, to have it taken away speaks of disqualification, rather than simply not attaining to something. Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 73; Blount, *Revelation*, pp. 77–78.

³¹⁴ Blount, *Revelation*, p. 78.

³¹⁵ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 93; Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, p. 241.

of Jerusalem – especially in the temple (nation, tribe, people, tongue); but, faithful witnesses are equally promised a place of central permanence in the temple.³¹⁶ Whatever the social challenges may be for the church at Philadelphia, their faithful witness there will grant them eternal fellowship with God as pillars in his heavenly temple.³¹⁷ To a body of witnesses that have been identified as having little power, the strength and permanence of a pillar in the temple of God, accompanied by the assurance that they ‘will never again go out from it’ (ἔξω οὐ μὴ ἐξέλθῃ ἔτι) would be a promising motivator to maintain their witness.³¹⁸

The witnesses in the church at Pergamum are promised a written name on a stone (2.17) and those in the church at Sardis are promised a heavenly confession of their name (3.5). The hearers would certainly discern the particularity of the promises made here, as witnesses in the church at Philadelphia are offered: (1) ‘the *name* of my God’ (‘τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ θεοῦ μου’); (2) ‘the *name* of the city of my God’ (‘τὸ ὄνομα τῆς πόλεως τοῦ θεοῦ μου’); and (3) ‘my new *name*’ (‘τὸ ὄνομά μου τὸ καινόν’). Such an emphasis on the bestowment of names would legitimize their witness,³¹⁹ guarantee citizenship in the new creation,³²⁰ and welcome a new sense of identity.³²¹ Four times in this promise, the hearers encounter the words ‘of/from my God’ (‘τοῦ θεοῦ μου’), reminding the hearers that faithful witness leads to a close connection with Jesus and to God.³²²

Jesus concludes with familiar instruction: ‘the one who has an ear, let that one hear what the Spirit says to the churches’ (Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις). The command reminds the hearers that though their prophetic message was full of promise, the blessings that accompany the promises (1.3) are only realized when adherence to the instruction(s)

³¹⁶ R Larry Overstreet, ‘The Temple of God in the Book of Revelation’, *BSac* 166.664 (October 2009), pp. 446–62 (454).

³¹⁷ While ‘στῦλος’, *BDAG*, p. 949, offers a definition of ‘a person or community recognized for spiritual leadership’, for pillar, Wilhelm Michaelis, ‘Στῦλος’ *TDNT* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), p. 736, suggests a lesser metaphorical view, suggesting, ‘The apocalyptic idea that eschatological deliverance is an irreversible integration into the kingdom of God’s salvation is here conjoined with the thought of fitting a pillar into the heavenly building, and this combination expresses the central theologoumenon of Revelation, namely, that of the heavenly citizenship of tested Christians’. I see no reason not to view both definitions working together. Slater, *Christ and Community*, p. 145; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 293; Blount, *Revelation*, p. 78; Koester, *Revelation*, p. 326.

³¹⁸ Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, p. 242; Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 93; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 182–83; Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 99.

³¹⁹ Slater, *Christ and Community*, p. 146.

³²⁰ Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, p. 243; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 183. Note that the city of my God ‘ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἀπὸ’ (comes down out of heaven), which seems to suggest the new earth.

³²¹ Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 99.

³²² Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 182.

are heeded. For the church at Philadelphia in particular, that instruction is to hold fast to their witness (3.11).

4.4.14 FAITHFUL WITNESS IN THE PROPHETIC MESSAGE TO PHILADELPHIA

As it is with the church at Sardis, the reputation of the witnesses in Philadelphia (3.7–13) is equally deceiving, but in their favor. The message implies the supremacy of Jesus over earthly authority (3.7). While their reputation suggests powerlessness and restraint, their faithfulness to the Word of God and witness of Jesus guarantees them access (3.8). The human aspects of witness are present in this prophetic message. The temporal and anticipatory nature of witness is encountered as the Philadelphian witnesses expect an imminent ‘hour of testing’ (3.10). The promise to be kept from this hour is owing to their current perseverance, which implies that they have been experiencing suffering to some degree. The access provided by Jesus, on account of their witness (3.7–8), and the subsequent vindication (3.9) also speaks to the community that faithful witness shares; together, they have access, together they are vindicated, and together they are kept from the hour of testing (3.10). The address (3.7) and the familiar refrain, ‘let the one who has ears to hear, hear what the Spirit says to the churches’ (3.13) reminds the hearers of the divine aspect of witness.

4.4.15 REVELATION 3.14–22: LAODICEA

The final prophetic message given to the churches is directed toward the church at Laodicea, who boasts in their own self-perception of affluence (3.17). But the hearers have been made aware by way of the previous messages that Jesus is not moved by what the churches have declared, but what he has discerned (apostles are false, 2.2; poor are rich, 2.9; Jews are synagogue of Satan, 2.9; prophetess is Jezebel, 2.20; alive are dead, 3.1). Jesus begins with a signature unique not only to the Apocalypse, but to the NT in general, he identifies himself as ‘the Amen’ (ὁ ἀμήν).³²³ The theological implications of a titular use of this term would not go easily missed by the hearers. The FG is replete with the phrase which employs the same Greek word, ‘truly, truly I say to you’ (Ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω σοι).³²⁴

³²³ Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, p. 255; Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 96.

³²⁴ Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, p. 58; Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, p. 255; Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, p. 488; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 186.

By assuming the title of ‘the Amen’, Jesus personifies affirmation of the prophetic words uttered to the previous six churches as well as what is to come; he is more than a response to the message, but the reality of the message.³²⁵ This reality is further developed by the additional title of ‘the Faithful and True Witness’ (ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινός).³²⁶ It is fitting that the title would be used here in this the final message to the churches. Though it is not a description or title from the inaugural vision, faithful witness is present explicitly in the prologue (1.5) and in the message to the church at Pergamum (2.13). Given their perceived comfort and lack of want, the mention of faithful witness here might cause the hearers to discern that their witness is lacking, as the previous mentioned witnesses endured suffering, even death.³²⁷

However, the final signature is not final at all; ironically, the last epithet given to Jesus in the last of the seven prophetic messages situates the imagination of the hearers in the beginning of all things. Jesus is ‘the ruler of the creation of God’ (ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς κτίσεως τοῦ θεοῦ).³²⁸ While several interpretations exist for the term, ἀρχή,³²⁹ the hearers would no doubt be reminded that ‘in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and was God’ (Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος, Jn 1.1).³³⁰ Further, they would know that everything came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being (Jn 1.3).³³¹ Divinity, preeminence, authority, and source all converge in this last title.³³²

These titles – ‘Amen, Faithful and True Witness, and Ruler of the creation of God’ all will bear significant weight on the words that will fall on the ears of the hearers; he existed in the beginning (Jn 1.1–3), he will be the final affirmation of all things (Rev. 22.21), and he is faithful to be a

³²⁵ Blount, *Revelation*, p. 81; Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation*, p. 336.

³²⁶ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 96.

³²⁷ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 187.

³²⁸ ‘ἀρχή’, *BDAG*, p.138; 6–7, offers supporting definitions for such a view: (6) ‘an authority figure who initiates activity or process, ruler, authority’; (7) ‘the sphere of one’s official activity, rule, office’.

³²⁹ Michael J. Szigel, ‘Christ as Αρχή in Revelation 3:14’, *BSac* 161.642 (April 2004), pp. 215–31, offers commentary on these interpretations, including origin; ruler; beginning; mediate agent; philosophical principle; and double entendres, or plenary meanings. The more popular of the list being source, ruler, and beginning.

³³⁰ This is not an argument for the semantic equivalence of ἀρχή in Jn 1.1 and Rev. 3.14, but an oral reception of the message might remind the hearers that the ὁ λόγος, who is Jesus, was one with God in the beginning – thus reminding them that ἀρχή could not refer to origin.

³³¹ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 187.

³³² Although Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, p. 488, insists that Jesus cannot be the source of creation, restricting that role to God, such would seem to separate Jesus’ role in creation unnecessarily, particularly when considering Jn 1.3. See Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, p. 94 and Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, p. 256; Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation*, p. 336.

truthful witness of all in between (Rev. 1.5; 3.16).³³³ The designation in its entirety (‘the Amen, the True and Faithful Witness, the beginning of the creation of God’) may be an elaboration of Isa. 65.16.³³⁴ While he has existed in all of history – past, present, and future, the hearers will encounter the only message to the churches where Jesus is seemingly unwelcomed, and that is among them.³³⁵

The hearers would not be surprised to know that Jesus is aware of the witnessing efforts of the church at Laodicea (‘I know your works’ | οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα). This familiar declaration suggests that in the eyes of Jesus, work is indeed taking place in the church. What is alarming is that there is no mention of an antagonist or rebel leader, no scandalous teaching being accepted, and no waning love in the congregation,³³⁶ only a sudden shift to hospitality language, and that in the most unfavorable way. Jesus discerns, that regardless of how much work is going on, their witness is ineffective.³³⁷ The indictment against the witnesses at Laodicea is that they ‘are neither hot nor cold’ (οὔτε ψυχρὸς εἶ οὔτε ζεστός), but he wishes that they were. In matters of hospitality, hearers would understand the usefulness of both hot and cold beverages.³³⁸ The Faithful Witness has

³³³ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 296, suggests that the three titles are not distinct, but overlap in meaning to underline the faithfulness of Jesus in his earthly ministry, and continuing forward. Where the idea of overlapping seems to be a fair assessment, Jesus’ earthly ministry would seem rather limiting, as it would not account for the beginning of creation. A more favorable approach would be that it speaks to the trustworthiness of his witness throughout eternity – even preceding the incarnation.

³³⁴ G.K. Beale, *John’s Use of the Old Testament in Revelation* (Stanley E. Porter ed.); JSNTSup 166; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), pp. 292–93. G.K. Beale, ‘The Old Testament Background of Rev 3.14’, *NTS* 42.1 (January 1996), pp. 133–52 (151), also suggests that this view ‘comes from further scrutiny of the LXX in general and of the Greek OT versions of Isa 65.16 in particular, as well as observing the unique predicative use of “Amen” together with analysis of the immediate and broad contexts of Rev 3.14’.

³³⁵ Although Leithart, *Revelation*, p. 198, calls this a fallen message, this would be an inappropriate label for this message. The sin here, if such a label fits, is one of arrogance and independence. Nothing is said of sexual immorality, false prophets, false teaching, or any other such offense. If anything, this message could be esteemed ‘the provider’s lament’. Such attention is given by scholars to the lukewarmness of Laodicea that neglected space from which Jesus, the source and head, has to speak is underexplored.

³³⁶ Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, p. 59; Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, p. 95; Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 76.

³³⁷ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 188.

³³⁸ Against Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 76 and Patterson, *Revelation*, p. 139, who argue that cold is synonymous with being against God or refusal to follow Jesus, and hot being faithful in witness (though Patterson admits that these arguments do not find their support in the text itself). Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 98, suggests that cold is hostility toward Jesus while hot is friendliness toward him. These views miss the one literary clue that makes room for a positive cold – ‘στόματός μου’ (my mouth). The drinking factor here offers hearers a great clue as to the usefulness of figuratively cold and hot works. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, pp. 100–101, offers a defense for the positive hot and cold, stating that ‘Hot water is useful for cooking, washing clothes, and bathing; cool water is needed to slake thirst. Tepid water, however, is of little value and, therefore, Christ threatens to vomit the angel out of his mouth’. What he misses in this argument is that same literary clue that makes room for the positive restricts the context to consumable colds; usage such as washing, cooking, and bathing is inapplicable here. For arguments in favor for both hot and cold as positives, see Craig R. Koester, ‘The Message to Laodicea and the Problem of Its Local

discerned no usefulness in the works of the church at Laodicea – he finds them ‘lukewarm’ (χλιαρὸς).

This term (χλιαρὸς), found only here in Biblical Greek,³³⁹ brings the picture of hospitality closer to the foreground of imagination; the witness presented before Jesus is as repulsive as an undrinkable beverage offered to a guest. Johannine hearers would not miss the irony of such an egregious offense if they claimed to be faithful followers of Jesus – for he is the one who turned water into ‘the good wine’ (Jn 2.9–10) and promised to possess a water after which those who drink ‘would thirst no more’ (Jn 4.13–14). The witness of the church at Laodicea is found neither good nor satisfying; it is, in fact, indistinguishable in its effect from their surroundings.³⁴⁰ Owing to their uselessness, Jesus is on the verge (μέλλω) of vomiting them from his mouth (σε ἐμέσαι ἐκ τοῦ στόματός μου). As severe as the charge might be, it bears with it a glimmer of hope, as it is not a final judgement.³⁴¹

What would cause Jesus to be so disgusted by the church at Laodicea?³⁴² The hearers will soon find that it is arrogance and independence that has grieved the heart of the Faithful Witness.³⁴³ While the wealth and self-sufficiency is commendable in the eyes of the church,³⁴⁴ it has resulted in a spiritual apathy of which they are unaware (‘you do not know’ | οὐκ οἶδας – 3.17).³⁴⁵ The reason (‘because of’ | ὅτι) for his rejection is that they say ‘I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’ (λέγεις ὅτι πλούσιός εἰμι καὶ πεπλούτηκα καὶ οὐδὲν χρεῖαν ἔχω). Unfortunately, for the witnesses at Laodicea, this ‘nothing’ seems to have included Jesus.³⁴⁶ The arrogance and independence of non-productive witnesses in the church at Laodicea is evident in the repeated use of the pronoun, ‘I’ (‘I am rich’, ‘I have become wealthy’, ‘I have need of

Context: A Study of the Imagery in Rev 3.14–22’, *NTS* 49.3 (July 2003), pp. 407–24 (413), and Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, pp. 226–27.

³³⁹ Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, p. 96.

³⁴⁰ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 189, makes an insightful observation that “‘lukewarm’ imagery would likely convey the idea of reflecting the temperature of the environment rather than a very distinctive imagery of something being hot or cold. While some degree of work is involved in keeping a substance, ‘hot’ or ‘cold’, nothing is required for a substance to be ‘lukewarm’.” He further observes that the church at Laodicea’s ‘works reflect accommodation to its environment and the loss of its distinctive “Christian” temperature. Its own faithful witness is now indistinguishable from its surroundings.’

³⁴¹ Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, p. 96; Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation*, p. 344.

³⁴² Leithart, *Revelation*, p. 203, has too extreme a view in mind when he writes, ‘It is clear that lukewarmness is not a minor failure. It is an abomination, like idolatry, like the shedding of innocent blood, like sexual perversions that pollute the land. A lukewarm pastor might as well be killing the innocent, might as well be a sodomite.’

³⁴³ Archer, *I Was in the Spirit*, pp. 166–67.

³⁴⁴ Blount, *Revelation*, p. 82.

³⁴⁵ Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation*, p. 342.

³⁴⁶ Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary*, p. 114.

nothing’).³⁴⁷ In their eyes they have no need for dependence,³⁴⁸ but faithful witness is never independent of the One who is ‘the ruler of the creation of God’ (ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς κτίσεως τοῦ θεοῦ); the one through whom nothing has come into being that has come into being (Jn 1.3).

Jesus responds with an emphatic negation,³⁴⁹ ‘you have not discerned that *you* ... you are miserable, pathetic, poor, blind, and naked’ (οὐκ οἶδας ὅτι σὺ εἶ ὁ ταλαίπωρος καὶ ἐλεεινὸς καὶ πτωχὸς καὶ τυφλὸς καὶ γυμνός). Though these qualities might have a rhetorical ring to them when heard aloud,³⁵⁰ it is hard to imagine the hearers understanding these indictments to reflect only one condition.³⁵¹ Given Jesus’ instruction to acquire from him gold, salve, and garments (3.18), the hearers might discern that without spiritual value, discerning vision, and garments representative of faithful witness, they are left in a state of pathetic misery.³⁵² Unlike the church at Smyrna who thrived in their witness despite their poverty, the church at Laodicea has mistaken their material wealth for spiritual wealth and effective witness.³⁵³ Just as their poverty is a spiritual matter, so is their blindness,³⁵⁴ suggesting spiritual darkness and a lack of discernment.³⁵⁵ The nakedness would be especially shameful, even humiliating.³⁵⁶ While some witnesses in Sardis had soiled their clothes (indicative in there being some who had not 3.4), the church at Laodicea had even less.

Jesus offers a solution, if the church at Laodicea is going to remedy their pathetic state and render their witness useful – he advises them to purchase from him.³⁵⁷ The irony would not be lost on the hearers; though discerned to be poor, the church is to make a purchase of gold of the purest kind³⁵⁸ – that is, ‘gold refined in the fire so that you might be rich’ (χρυσίον πεπυρωμένον ἐκ πυρὸς ἵνα πλουτήσῃς). Perhaps the hearers understand this as a command for the church at Laodicea to sacrifice some of the material wealth that they currently possess, in order that they might be found

³⁴⁷ Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, p. 60; Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 99; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 190; Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, p. 227.

³⁴⁸ Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, p. 96.

³⁴⁹ Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, p. 60, notes: ‘Σὺ is emphatic, “thou that boastest”, and the article that precedes the predicates strengthens the picture: “it is thou that art the (conspicuously, pre-eminently) wretched” etc.’.

³⁵⁰ Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation*, p. 338.

³⁵¹ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 99, views them as all representative of the same issue, given the single article, but it seems as if more could be at play here.

³⁵² Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 190.

³⁵³ Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation*, p. 338, notes that ‘for the rhetoric to be effective, the congregation would need to be wealthy enough for the indictment to be plausible’; Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 101.

³⁵⁴ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 191.

³⁵⁵ Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, p. 259.

³⁵⁶ Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 101; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 191.

³⁵⁷ Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary*, p. 115

³⁵⁸ Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, p. 61; Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, p. 259.

faithful in their witness.³⁵⁹ The hearers would not mistake the call to purchase white garments to be an eschatological matter, as they are aware of witnesses in Sardis who are robed in white.³⁶⁰ They would likely understand it as a redemptive opportunity to walk in purity and solidarity with the Faithful Witness.³⁶¹ An added benefit to purchasing white garments is that they would ‘not reveal the shame of your nakedness’ (μὴ φανερωθῆ ἡ αἰσχὺνὴ τῆς γυμνότητός σου). This might even suggest that the effects of their pathetic state had not yet made a total spectacle of them. Lastly, the advisement to purchase eye salve is so that they might see – that is, obtain pneumatic discernment – seeing what Jesus sees.³⁶²

In their striving to be independent, the Laodicean Church fails to see that they will never be faithful in their witness without dependency upon Jesus, for spiritual independence is the counteragent of faith (Jn 15.1–5). They are to acquire all that they lack from him and only him, the source of all things pertaining to faithful witness.³⁶³ To bring this message into balance, Jesus interjects a word of intimacy,³⁶⁴ intentionality,³⁶⁵ and intensity,³⁶⁶ those whom he loves, he carefully examines³⁶⁷ and disciplines.³⁶⁸ In light of this reality (‘therefore’ | οὖν), the hearers would not be surprised at the command to repent, but the command preceding it would be a new command heard in these messages – they are to be zealous. Of all the commands to repent throughout the prophetic messages (2.5, 16, 22), only here is repentance preceded by a call to discern the earnestness of their repentance.³⁶⁹

³⁵⁹ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 193.

³⁶⁰ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 193.

³⁶¹ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 193.

³⁶² Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 306.

³⁶³ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 306–307; Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 99; Blount, *Revelation*, p. 83; Archer, *I Was in the Spirit*, p. 167.

³⁶⁴ Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, p. 100.

³⁶⁵ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 195.

³⁶⁶ Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation*, p. 339.

³⁶⁷ ‘ἐλέγγω’, *BDAG*, p. 315. Given the context of the messages thus far, especially here, it would seem that the text favors the interpretation ‘to scrutinize or examine carefully, bring to light, expose, set forth’. This reading seems to provide a fuller idea of what is taking place here, and carries with it an idea of discernment, rather than simply reprimand, which would seem redundant to discipline.

³⁶⁸ Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, p. 491; Moisés Silva, ‘παιδεύω’, *NIDNTTE*, p. 587, notes that the concept of discipline develops in the NT ‘with the idea that God’s teaching and therefore loving hand was to be experienced in suffering’. This insight makes one wonder if the Laodiceans thought that they were really experiencing the love of God, or his favor because they were wealthy and without need. The weightiness of Jesus’ words here would make complete sense; where they may have seen suffering as an absence of God’s love, quite the reverse could be the case, that there was a didactic value in suffering. Informing them of such would have the potential to reorient their minds to embrace suffering in their journey to being faithful witnesses.

³⁶⁹ ‘ζηλόω’, Louw and Nida, p. 297, to be zealous is ‘to be deeply committed to something, with the implication of accompanying desire’.

Instead of a threat of an impending arrival, the witnesses at Laodicea are instructed to discern ('behold' | Ἴδου), that Jesus has already arrived.³⁷⁰ As further indictment of their independence, the witnesses are made aware that while Jesus is present, their confidence in their riches has boxed him out of the so-called rich company that they enjoy inside. He has come and stood at the door of the Laodiceans, and is currently knocking, hoping to gain entrance. The irony of such a non-intrusive position that Jesus has taken would not likely have fallen on deaf ears. The one who is the door (Jn 10.7), who has keys to doors of death (Rev. 1.18), the key of David (Rev. 3.7), and who has the ultimate authority of opening and shutting doors (Rev. 3.7), does not force himself upon the church at Laodicea who has denied him access owing to their independence and wealth.³⁷¹

Even before hearing the familiar call of the Spirit to hear the prophetic message to the church, a promise is offered to those who do more than listen, but respond by opening the door; Jesus would come in to them and they will dine together.³⁷² It is doubtful that the hearers would miss the implications of this beckoning; so long as the door is closed to the Faithful Witness, they have no witness. Opening the door to Jesus, they transition from independent hostility to dependent hospitality.³⁷³ Fellowship with Jesus would be an immediate, earthly reward – but Jesus continues with an eschatological promise.

The eschatological reward is granted to the one who overcomes (νικῶν),³⁷⁴ a word that is used in the Apocalypse for those who have been faithful in their witness, even unto death.³⁷⁵ Here, overcoming would involve exchanging their independence for dependency upon the Faithful Witness.³⁷⁶ Jesus promises both intimacy; I will grant him to sit with me (ὡσω αὐτῷ καθίσει μετ'

³⁷⁰ Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, p. 491; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 308–309. Archer, 'I Was in the Spirit', p. 169.

³⁷¹ Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 102, comments, 'Surprisingly, Laodicea appears to have barred Christ from its fellowship. Jesus does not knock on the door of those outside the church; rather, he knocks on the door of the church'. See also, Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary*, p. 116.

³⁷² Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 78. Scholars have commented on the homiletic confusion around this passage. It has been preached in evangelistic contexts, suggesting that Jesus is knocking at the door of the hearts of unbelievers. However, it is not the outsider that Jesus is speaking to here, but his own community of witnesses, even if that witness is waning at the present – by opening the door, they can renew their witness.

³⁷³ Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, p. 261. Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 101. 'The tenses of the verbs in this sentence are significant. Jesus is "standing" (ἔστηκα, *hestēka*, perfect, lit. "I have stood") at the door; and this suggests that he has been there for some time. Meanwhile he "knocks" (κρούω, *krouō*, present, "I am knocking"); and this implies a repeated and gentle request for entry'. Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation*, p. 340; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 197.

³⁷⁴ Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, p. 101.

³⁷⁵ Slater, *Revelation as Civil Disobedience*, p. 75.

³⁷⁶ Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation*, p. 342, offers a chiasmic structure that highlights this call for dependency:

Sovereignty: Christ is the faithful witness and ruler of God's creation.

ἐμοῦ), and authority; on my throne (ἐν τῷ θρόνῳ μου). They will share in the same reward that was given him for his faithful witness by his father.³⁷⁷ For the final time, the churches hear the clarion call to heed the voice of the Spirit; ‘Let the one who has ears to hear, hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches’ (Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις’).

4.4.16 FAITHFUL WITNESS IN THE PROPHETIC MESSAGE TO LAODICEA

The witnesses in Laodicea (3.14–22) are not praised for their longsuffering in their witness. They are not commended for their demonstration of God’s love. Pneumatic discernment is not celebrated in their community. Quite the opposite is true. In matters of witness, their earthly affluence has had no influence. The hearers discover that their accumulation of earthly goods has done no spiritual good (3.17). It has, in fact, led to a sense of spiritual independence. The message to Laodicea suggests that witness does not act independent of intimacy with Jesus (3.20). Just as the message to Smyrna communicates that there is no socio–economic disadvantage in matters of witness, the message to Laodicea conveys that there is no advantage either.

Striking about the message to the Laodiceans is that the human aspects of witness are altogether missing from this message, which serves to underscore their lack of faithful witness. There is no mention of time, whether anticipation or action – time is not even a factor in their rebuke (compared to the message to Sardis who is warned of his coming at an unknown hour – 3.3). There is no mention of suffering, endurance, or perseverance. The only thing that can be said of the community at Laodicea is that they seem to be equally independent of intimacy with Jesus. Human elements notwithstanding, the divine elements are still present, as Jesus speaks through the pen of John, by way of the Spirit, for the final time to the church.

4.4.17 FAITHFUL WITNESS IN THE SEVEN CHURCHES

The first order of business for this prophetic, narrative witness was to address seven distinct churches all experiencing distinct circumstances: Ephesus, lacking in love; Smyrna, increased

Dining: Christ will vomit the lukewarm out of his mouth.

Prosperity: They think they are wealthy, but they are poor, blind, and naked.

Prosperity: Obtain gold, eye salve, and clothing from Christ.

Dining: Christ will eat with those who open the door to him.

Sovereignty: Christ’s faithful followers will share a place on Christ’s throne.

While lukewarmness and the door closed to Jesus seem to most often be the central focus in the exegesis of this prophetic message, a closer examination would show that they both stand at the edge of the true matter – independence and wealth that need to be traded for humility and dependence on Jesus.

³⁷⁷ Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation*, p. 341; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 199.

suffering unto death; Pergamum, a lack of discipleship; Thyatira, a lack of pneumatic discernment; Sardis, no demonstration of the life giving Spirit; Philadelphia, a need for divine intervention; and Laodicea, no dependency on the very one of whom they are to emulate in their witness.³⁷⁸

While each church is distinct in its circumstance, they share in one common element which demands that each hear the commendation and correction that comes from the Faithful Witness. The messages bear emotive weight upon the hearers, possessing a sense of imminence ('I am coming'; 'I will come') that likely elicits both fear and confidence from the hearers.³⁷⁹ With a greater understanding of what faithful witness demands, and what it promises, the hearers may now better discern what John will experience 'ἐν πνεύματι', as it is the Spirit, who is directing this *theodrama* that the Apocalypse represents.³⁸⁰ Each prophetic message begins with an address from Jesus the Faithful Witness, and concludes with a common hearing formula, 'The one who has ears to hear, let them hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches'. This pattern is likely to help the hearers appreciate the close relationship between Jesus and the Spirit, especially in relation to the church and its witness.³⁸¹ It is only by the direction of the Spirit that John moves from one vision to the next – and having addressed the seven churches, the Spirit transitions John to another scene.

Throughout these messages, it is noticeable that the faithfulness of humanity is not guaranteed when it comes to witness. It is equally evident that opposition to witness can come from within or without. Just as Jesus is identified as the Faithful Witness in the prologue (1.5), Antipas is identified as a faithful witness to Jesus (2.13). Those who desire to be considered *faithful witnesses* must heed the teaching of Jesus, as heard by way of the Spirit. Although the churches are being commended or corrected for their witness, what becomes evident so far in the narrative is that witness can only be qualified as faithful when one has witnessed unto death. The message to the

³⁷⁸ Within each of these messages, themes are found that will echo throughout the rest of the apocalypse. See David L. Barr, 'The Apocalypse of John as Oral Enactment', *Int* 40.3 (1986), pp. 243–56 (247). See also, Goldsworthy, *The Lamb and the Lion*, p. 85.

³⁷⁹ DeSilva, 'The Strategic Arousal of Emotions in the Apocalypse', p. 100.

³⁸⁰ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Faith Speaking Understanding: Performing the Drama of Doctrine* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), p. 24. 'There is theodrama wherever there is divine address awaiting human response. What the church ultimately has to perform is not a holy script but rather the theodrama that Scripture describes, transcribes, and prescribes. This is the sense in which the believing community is to be biblical, the sense in which the church best constitutes a living Bible.'

³⁸¹ Enroth, 'The Hearing Formula in the Book of Revelation', p. 601. Further, Enroth suggests (p. 603) that in the messages:

the function of the HF [Hearing Formula] is not esoteric, because it is openly directed towards all the hearers or readers. It is not a signal underlining some deeper intention. The HF combined with the exhortation to be victorious is clearly a promise and an invitation. There is no indication of division and hardening, as there should be if the formula were to be interpreted in an esoteric way.

churches is clear – witness is not without difficulty; to be a faithful witness is to overcome (2.7, 11,17, 26; 3.5, 12, 21). When witness is waning, the only proper responses are to repent for unfaithfulness, recall season(s) of fidelity in witness, and return to a state of faithfulness in witness.

The motif of witness is illustrated on the canvas of suffering in most of these messages.³⁸² The ‘toil and perseverance’ of the church at Ephesus is addressed (2.2). The church at Smyrna is experiencing tribulation and poverty (2.9). Those in the church at Pergamum dwell ‘where Satan’s throne is’, and Antipas was killed (2.13). His death is also a reminder that witness is set against time, so far as humanity is concerned. The church in Thyatira is ever increasing in perseverance (2.19). At Philadelphia, the church is in need of power, and presumably facing internal opposition (3.9). Only the churches in Sardis and Laodicea seem to be free of opposition or suffering.

Although the prophetic messages to the seven churches in Asia Minor each begin, ‘To the angel of the church in ...’ (2.1, 8, 12, 18; 3.1, 7, 14), the recipients of those messages are the members who make up those churches. Owing to their role as agents of prophetic delivery/reception, the ‘angel of the church’, whoever they be interpreted by the reader to be,³⁸³ implicitly occupies the vocation of a witness, as does every member in the church ‘who has ears to hear’. Whether the ‘τῷ ἀγγέλῳ’ is interpreted as ‘the angel’ or ‘the messenger’,³⁸⁴ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ of the church is a witness because, like John, they are an agent of delivery in the prophetic transmission to human recipients. The members of the church are witnesses, as they are being called to model the faithful witness of Jesus, revealing a present truth that demands appropriate response and behavior, via the power of the Spirit.³⁸⁵

³⁸² Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 25.

³⁸³ Barnett, *Revelation: Apocalypse Now and Then*, p. 42, believes that ‘it was a human messenger from the churches of Asia, who had come to Patmos to tell the revered Christian leader about the grave difficulties Christians were then facing in the mainland cities’. While I do not share his opinion, the point here is that whether an angelic being, or the pastor of that particular church (cf. Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), p. 61, either of these agents of delivery occupy the space of a witness.

³⁸⁴ ‘ἀγγέλῳ’, *BDAΓ*, p. 8. Both ‘angel’ and ‘messenger’ are appropriate translations, thus the options.

³⁸⁵ This is an adaptation of Blount and Waddell. Blount, *Can I Get a Witness*, pp. 14–15, writes, ‘as the Lord’s representatives, [the churches] are to initiate his victory by living out a witness of active and aggressive resistance against any power, human or supernatural, that would contest his lordship by establishing and promoting its own’. Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation*, p. 175, says that in his writing of the Apocalypse, ‘John is calling the church to engage in its prophetic role by bearing witness to Jesus via the power of the Spirit’.

4.5 REVELATION 4.1–16.21: WITNESS ‘IN HEAVEN’

4.5.1 REVELATION 4–5: WORSHIP BEFORE THE THRONE

Throughout the seven prophetic messages, the hearers encountered words of Jesus, conveyed by the Spirit, through the writing of John. As the situational prophetic messages conclude,³⁸⁶ signified by John’s transitional statement (4.1), ‘after these things’ (Μετὰ ταῦτα), the hearers now receive words from John.³⁸⁷ He looks and sees ‘a door having been opened in heaven’ (θύρα ἠνεωγμένη ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ). The hearers would likely recall the open door that Jesus had opened for the witnesses in the church at Philadelphia (3.8).³⁸⁸ This opened door may provide further evidence that the doors which Jesus opens cannot be closed; for while John is on Patmos due to his steadfast witness, a door beyond Patmos has been opened for him.³⁸⁹ The ‘first voice’ (ἡ φωνὴ ἡ πρώτη) that greeted him in the inaugural vision (1.10), once again speaks to him, this time, beckoning him to a new scene ἐν πνεύματι. Without delay (Εὐθὺς | ‘immediately’), John is ushered by the Spirit into heaven (4.2), where he encounters symbols, sounds, and phrases that were present in the messages to the witnesses that are the seven churches (thrones, white robes, crowns, lamps, fire, gold, holy). This encounter might cause the hearers to discern that what they are about to hear is heaven’s perspective of the implications of their earthly witness.³⁹⁰

The first thing John encounters is a vision of God seated on a throne, reminiscent of OT prophetic depictions of God,³⁹¹ the same throne from which the seven churches were greeted (1.4).³⁹² The centrality of God’s supremacy and authority here would not be easily missed by the hearers, as everything John describes will reference back to the throne.³⁹³ In lieu of an

³⁸⁶ Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 15, notes that ‘John explicitly and carefully contextualizes his prophetic message in seven specific contexts’.

³⁸⁷ N.T. Wright, ‘Freedom and Framework, Spirit and Truth: Recovering Biblical Worship’, *SL* 32 (2002) pp. 176–95 (177), suggests that Μετὰ ταῦτα does not refer to an eschatological future (cf. chs. 21–22). David J. MacLeod, ‘The Adoration of God the Creator: An Exposition of Revelation 4’, *BSac* 164 (April–June 2007), pp. 198–218 (202), disagrees. For more on the subject, see also Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 86; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 201–202.

³⁸⁸ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 202.

³⁸⁹ Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 87. Here, again, I direct the reader’s attention to the conclusion of the reception chapter where Seymour makes this observation about John on Patmos.

³⁹⁰ Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 106.

³⁹¹ Tabb, *All Things New: Revelation as Canonical Capstone*, pp. 37–38.

³⁹² Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 31, says this vision of a divine throne is a significant feature in OT prophetic tradition (cf. 1 Kgs 22.19–23; Isaiah 6; Ezekiel 1); Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, pp. 323–33.

³⁹³ Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, p. 115; Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, p. 73. Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly*, p. 103. See also, MacLeod, ‘The Adoration of God the Creator’, p. 203; Josh Butler, ‘The Politics of Worship: Revelation 4 as Theopolitical Encounter’, *Cultural Encounters* 5.2 (Summer 2009), pp. 7–23 (8), who notes, ‘Every event in chapter 4 is located in relation to [the throne]. God is seated on the

anthropomorphic description of God, John illustrates the magnificence of beholding God enthroned.³⁹⁴ His ‘appearance was similar to’ (ὅμοιος ὁράσει) precious stones ‘like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance’.³⁹⁵ While the jewel imagery may cause the hearers to imagine the beauty and radiance of the glory of God, the rainbow imagery might serve as a witness, leading them to recall the narrative of Noah (Gen. 9.8–17) and imagine the faithfulness of God to his promises.³⁹⁶

As John’s description continues, the focus shifts from foreground to background. Furthest removed from the immediate space of the throne of God are twenty–four thrones with twenty–four elders seated there (4.4). The hearers do not have, in their history or Johannine tradition, twenty–four elders to which this reference would explicitly refer³⁹⁷ – a point that is made clear by John’s anarthrous description here (*twenty–four elders* vs. ‘*the*’ *twenty–four elders*).³⁹⁸ While the numbering of the elders indeed is pregnant with theological significance,³⁹⁹ John does not seem too concerned to identify them.⁴⁰⁰ As it pertains to faithful witness, the hearers do not need to

throne; the worshippers are located around the throne; theophanic occurrences are emanating from the throne. It is mentioned explicitly ten times, making it the most prominent image in the chapter.’

³⁹⁴ Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 32; Wright, ‘Freedom and Framework’, p. 178.

³⁹⁵ Slater, *Revelation as Civil Disobedience*, p. 48, notes, ‘The theophanic elements ... coupled with the reference to the seven spirits of God, confirm that the One sitting on the throne is God Almighty (v. 5)’.

³⁹⁶ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 115; MacLeod, ‘The Adoration of God the Creator’, p. 205.

³⁹⁷ Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, p. 288.

³⁹⁸ Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, p. 287; Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, p. 74; Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 116.

³⁹⁹ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 207, notes:

It is very difficult to imagine that the hearers would not see in this number some kind of combination of the theological significance of the number 12 in both the OT and the Johannine tradition. Specifically, the hearers will learn that both the 12 tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles have a significant place in heaven (Rev. 7.4–8) and the New Jerusalem (21.12–14). At this point, one of the things the number twenty–four would suggest to the hearers is that there is a profound relationship between these twenty–four elders and those represented by the twelve tribes and the twelve apostles.

⁴⁰⁰ There is not a unanimous consensus in scholarship as it pertains to the identity of these elders. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, p. 68, suggests:

The symbol appears to be based on the number of the tribes of Israel; the δωδεκάφυλον is represented by 24 Elders, two for each tribe, the double representation suggesting the two elements which coexisted in the new Israel, the Jewish and Gentile believers who were one in Christ. Thus the 24 Elders are the Church in its totality, but the Church idealized and therefore seen as already clad in white, crowned, and enthroned in the Divine Presence.

Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, p. 498, argues that the fact ‘That they are kings is shown in the fact that they sit on thrones and wear crowns’. Keener, *Revelation*, pp. 171–72, notes that ‘most likely they represent all believers. The doubling of the twelve could represent the Old and New Testament peoples of God together (see 21:12–14). But given their function in worship they probably represent the twenty–four courses of priests in the Old Testament (1 Chron. 24:4)’. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 322, offers some of the varying views, that ‘the elders have been variously identified as (1) stars (from an astrological background), (2) angels, (3) OT saints, (4) angelic, heavenly representatives of all saints, (5) patriarchs and apostles representing the OT and NT saints together, and (6) representatives of the

imagine far beyond the prophetic messages that they have just heard from Jesus as to whom these elders might represent.⁴⁰¹ As John continues in his description of the elders on the throne, it becomes evident that it is not their identity that is of main concern, but their function – witnessing by worshipping God (4.10–11).⁴⁰²

The adornment of the elders would not be missed by the hearers – in fact, it is probable that the garments worn and the thrones upon which the elders are seated would be of most significance to the listeners. That they were seated on thrones should remind the hearers of the promise made to the church at Laodicea (3.21) and perhaps Thyatira (2.26–27) implied in the promise to rule.⁴⁰³ The white garments would certainly remind them of the messages to the churches at Sardis (3.4) and Laodicea (3.18). The crowns would draw their attention to the message to the churches at Smyrna (2.10) and Philadelphia (3.11). The gold, though here forged into crowns, gives subtle allusions back to the gold which the Laodiceans are encouraged to purchase from Jesus, the Faithful Witness (3.18). Taken together, it becomes clear why John does not expound on the identity of these elders – the hearers must surely discern that these are faithful witnesses –

prophetic revelation of the twenty–four books of the Old Testament’. Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 116, notes the most serious contenders for the identity of the elders:

(1) They have been identified as the heavenly counterparts of the leaders of the twenty–four priestly courses of the second–temple period (cf. 1 Chron. 23:6[7–24]; 24:7–18); although, except for bearing incense representing the prayers of God’s people (Rev. 5:8; cf. 4:10), the elders do not exercise priestly functions.

(2) They represent saints of the Old Testament.

(3) A popular interpretation is to regard the two sets of twelve elders (although John does not introduce this division) as patriarchs and apostles, representing together the saints of the Church as a whole: Israel old and new. However, the scene in Rev. 4–5 is less ecclesial, than courtly.

(4) A more likely explanation, and a variant of the last, is to regard the elders as angelic members of the heavenly court: divine representatives of the body of the faithful, all of whom are priests (Rev. 1:6). This is in line with the biblical tradition which suggests that every human being has a ‘guardian angel’ (cf. Tobit 5:1–22; Acts 12:15; also Matt. 18:10). Angels and human beings are in any case related in biblical and Johannine thought (see on Rev. 1:20); and John typically conjoins, in a context such as this, the spiritual and the material.

(5) The elders have also been identified as individual Christians who have sealed their faith through martyrdom; or (6) as figures from astral mythology, such as the twenty–four star–gods of the zodiac.

⁴⁰¹ Low, ‘Wait, Witness, Worship’, p. 108, ‘These twenty–four elders have a symbolic role within the text, likely as a promised future for the audience, and seem to be intended as paragons of the faithful, beings worthy of being emulated’.

⁴⁰² Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, p. 288; Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 90, agrees, suggesting that ‘in the end, John is more interested in narrating the significance of the elders than he is in identifying them’. Archer, ‘*I Was in the Spirit*’, p. 178.

⁴⁰³ Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 85.

overcomers, that is, those who have been faithful to Jesus unto death, receiving all the rewards promised to the churches in the prophetic messages.⁴⁰⁴

John turns his attention, once again, to the throne, where more OT theophanic imagery emerges.⁴⁰⁵ He witnesses thunder and lightning emitting from it. Before the throne are ‘seven torches of fire burning’. These torches, he explains, are the seven Spirits of God. The hearers would no doubt be reminded of the opening of this prophetic narrative, where they are greeted from the seven Spirits who are before the throne of God (1.4); but here, the Spirit is described, visually, as torches of fire. As fire has been referenced in various ways in the messages to the churches, the vital role of the Spirit in the witness of the church would not be easily missed. As Jesus addressed the witnesses in Thyatira (2.18) as the one who had eyes ‘like flames of fire’ (ὡς φλόγα πυρὸς), the hearers might make a clearer connection between the Spirit and discernment. As the witnesses in Laodicea (3.18) were encouraged to purchase gold from Jesus ‘refined by fire’ (πεπυρωμένον ἐκ πυρὸς), the hearers might discern that the refining of gold was perhaps a surrendering of their riches to the authority of the Spirit.

Still in view of the throne, John beheld that there was ‘before the throne, a sea of glass, like crystal’, and in the midst are ‘four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind’ (4.6). Both the location of the creatures ‘in the center of the throne and around the throne’ and the elaborate descriptions that John gives (‘like a lion ... like a calf ... the face of a man ... a like a flying eagle ... each having six wings’) of them would certainly suggest that there is a theological significance to them.⁴⁰⁶ The many eyes of the creatures suggest great discernment, witnessing firsthand the glory of God, as well as any activity of the elders behind them.⁴⁰⁷ Their significance will be

⁴⁰⁴ Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, p. 74; Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 90; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 208; Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, pp. 233–34; Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation*, p. 123.

⁴⁰⁵ Tabb, *All Things New*, p. 71, notes that this scene:

recalls the presence of ‘flaming torches’ in Old Testament theophany scenes (Gen. 15:17; 20:18) and in Ezekiel’s heavenly vision (Ezek. 1:13). The reference to ‘lightning’ and ‘thunder’ in John’s throne-room vision (Rev. 4:5) further links this scene with Old Testament depictions of God’s awesome presence (cf. Exod. 19:16; 20:18). In Revelation 4:5 this same imagery recurs at the conclusion of seal, trumpet and bowl judgments (8:5; 11:19; 16:18), which signals that the sovereign on the heavenly throne will definitively judge his enemies.

⁴⁰⁶ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 212.

⁴⁰⁷ Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, p. 234, notes, ‘The appearance of the four living creatures and the 24 elders around the throne discloses that the activity of the one on the throne is not far removed from creation. The abundance of eyes upon the four creatures signifies that they have knowledge and discernment because they are able to see everything, even the divine throne’.

revealed incrementally to John and the hearers, as the Spirit leads him through various scenes throughout this pneumatic encounter.

What is clear here is that these creatures acknowledge the holiness and majesty of God in their ‘never ceasing’ (ἀνάπαυσιν οὐκ) worship (4.8). The hearers are made aware that heaven already stands as witness to the holiness, authority, and faithfulness (‘was’, ‘is’, ‘is to come’) of God – regardless of their own faithfulness or lack thereof; though Jesus will indeed reward their faithful witness, his glory is not dependent upon it. As the four creatures worship, the twenty–four elders follow suit, but their proclamation is amplified. The creatures proclaim the holiness, authority, and constancy of God,⁴⁰⁸ while the elders prostrate themselves before him who sits on the throne, presenting back to God the crowns which they have been rewarded for their faithful witness, and they proclaim words that can only be uttered by faithful witnesses who overcome, having endured suffering and tribulation, holding fast the name of Jesus, even unto death.⁴⁰⁹

Worship is ushered in by the four creatures but validated by the twenty–four elders (4.10–11).⁴¹⁰ More than declaring the holiness of God, the elders proclaim his worth (‘worthy are you, our Lord and our God to receive glory and honor and power’ | ἄξιός εἰ, ὁ κύριος καὶ ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν, λαβεῖν τὴν δόξαν καὶ τὴν τιμὴν καὶ τὴν δύναμιν), his work (‘for you created all things’ | ὅτι σὺ ἔκτισας τὰ πάντα), and the manifestation of his will (‘because of your will they existed and were created’ | διὰ τὸ θέλημα σου ἦσαν καὶ ἐκτίσθησαν).⁴¹¹ The significance of the prostration and proclamation of the elders, would not easily be missed by the hearers.⁴¹² After hearing a message of rebuke for the independent witness of the Laodiceans, here, the faithful witnesses that are crowned, robed, and enthroned, still display a posture and attitude of humility and subordination to God.⁴¹³ The worship taking place around the throne has a didactic value.⁴¹⁴ While the seven churches witness to *their* character by their works, the faithful witnesses in heaven – that is, those who were faithful unto death – witness to the *character of God* in their worship.⁴¹⁵

Amid this heavenly worship scene, John draws the hearers’ attention again (5.1) to the throne, witnessing (‘and I saw’ | Καὶ εἶδον) a scroll in the right hand of the one seated upon it. Though the

⁴⁰⁸ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 124.

⁴⁰⁹ Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 95.

⁴¹⁰ Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 89; MacLeod, ‘The Adoration of God the Creator’, p. 216.

⁴¹¹ Wright, ‘Freedom and Framework’, pp. 178–79.

⁴¹² Tabb, *All Things New*, pp. 41–42.

⁴¹³ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 117. Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, pp. 32–33.

⁴¹⁴ Archer, ‘*I Was in the Spirit*’, p. 181, agrees, suggesting that ‘the hymn has a pedagogic function’.

⁴¹⁵ Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, pp. 108–109.

scroll is sealed up with seven seals, John discerns that it has writing on both sides. Beholding this scroll, John then sees (καὶ εἶδον) a powerful angel who asks, ‘Who is worthy?’ (τίς ἄξιος) to open the scroll and break its seals (5.2), only to reveal that there was none worthy ‘in the heavens’ (ἐν τοῖς οὐρανῶ), ‘on the earth’ (ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς), or ‘under the earth’ (ὑποκάτω τῆς γῆς) – neither to open it nor look into it. For John, this news caused great distress, moving him to overwhelming tears (5.4). Though there are some witnesses in Sardis who were found worthy (3.4), still even they were not so worthy as to be able to open the scroll.⁴¹⁶ Such a limited worthiness, in contrast to the unlimited worthiness of God demonstrated in the worship of chapter four (4.11), should alert the hearers even further to the surpassing greatness of God over his creation – even when they are found faithful and worthy.

One of the elders instructs John to cease from weeping (5.5), and to ‘behold, he has overcome’ (ἰδοὺ ἐνίκησεν). The Greek construction of the sentence supposes that John has purposefully elevated the triumphant work of Jesus, the Faithful Witness.⁴¹⁷ This elevation is, perhaps, owing to the repeated promises made to the witnesses who overcome in the prophetic messages to the churches (2.7, 11, 17, 26; 3.5, 12, 21), as well as the fact that the very one instructing John at this point has himself overcome.⁴¹⁸ As a Johannine community, the hearers would be well-acquainted with Jesus as *the Overcomer* (Jn 16.33).⁴¹⁹ Upon hearing that one has overcome, in juxtaposition to the reality that there is none (even among the faithful witnesses of Jesus) found worthy to open the scroll or look upon it, the elder offers description of the overcomer in particular, of whom he speaks. Drawing from OT imagery pregnant with messianic expectation, the elder describes him as ‘the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah’ (ὁ λέων ὁ ἐκ τῆς φυλῆς Ἰούδα), recalling the blessing of Jacob/Israel over Judah (Gen. 49.8–12), and ‘the Root of David’ (ἡ ῥίζα Δαυίδ), recalling Isa. 11.1–10.⁴²⁰ It is, in fact, on account of his victorious messianic work that the Faithful Witness is worthy to open the scroll and its seals. At this news, we might imagine John having a sense of hope and expectancy. The scene, thus far has been nothing short of majestic, with flashing lights, rolling thunder, magnificent creatures, and adorned overcoming witnesses – now with news of the messianic Lion figure, this Root of David, what might John encounter next?

⁴¹⁶ Archer, *I Was in the Spirit*, p. 184.

⁴¹⁷ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 222; Archer, *I Was in the Spirit*, p. 184.

⁴¹⁸ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 222.

⁴¹⁹ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 223.

⁴²⁰ Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 180–81; Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 105; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 223; Slater, *Revelation as Civil Disobedience*, p. 49.

His attention shifts ('and I saw' | Καὶ εἶδον) from the scroll to the one worthy of revealing its contents (5.6), yet in an unexpected twist, John does not see a lion nor a conquering figure, but instead 'a lamb standing as if slain' (πρεσβυτέρων ἀρνίον ἑστηκὸς ὡς ἐσφαγμένον). It is not likely that the hearers would confuse this Lamb for the infant ἀμνὸς (amnos) sacrificial lamb (cf. Jn 1.29, 36), but a mature ἀρνίον (arnion) lamb, as the one here is horned.⁴²¹ The Lamb is situated in the midst of the four living creatures, suggesting a very close proximity to the throne, if not seated on it.⁴²² The transition from Lion and Root to slaughtered Lamb might be perplexing to the hearers at first, causing them to reimagine their messianic expectations.⁴²³ But they may perhaps be a bit more discerning – the Lamb, though slaughtered, is standing before the throne. Such detail would suggest to the hearers that the Lamb has overcome death.⁴²⁴ Moreover, because the Lamb has overcome, despite suffering – even unto death, the hearers might find comfort in their current tribulations.⁴²⁵ We can safely imagine that the hearers have discerned this worthy one to be Jesus, the Faithful Witness. Equally, they might begin to understand more the connectedness of the Faithful Witness and the Spirit, as the Lamb has seven horns. John witnesses yet another pneumatic shift – instead of the seven Spirits of God appearing as torches before the throne, they now adorn the horns as eyes, and from here they are sent out into all the earth.⁴²⁶

What happens next is sure to empower the church in their witness, for John discovers that the Lion/Root/Lamb is not only *worthy* ... he is *willing* to open the scroll! When the Lamb removes the scroll from the right hand of the one sitting on the throne, all of heaven responds. The four living creatures and the twenty-four elders, possessing harps and golden bowls full of incense representing the prayers of the saints, prostrate themselves before the Lamb. Heaven and earth converge at such a sight. For the hearers, the assurance that their prayers have not fallen on deaf ears would find its evidence in this scene.⁴²⁷ Moreover, how comforted they must be to know that their prayers are not only heard in heaven, but so closely to the throne of God.

⁴²¹ Boesack, *Comfort and Protest*, pp. 57–58, notes that 'this is not the image of the gentle lamb but rather that of the militant little ram, the bellwether. He leads the flock, the first one up on the hill and the first one down in the valley'. See also 'ἀρνίον', Louw and Nida, p. 41.

⁴²² Boxall, *The Revelation to Saint John*, p. 98.

⁴²³ Tabb, *All Things New*, pp. 59–60.

⁴²⁴ Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, p. 239.

⁴²⁵ Slater, *Revelation as Civil Disobedience*, p. 44.

⁴²⁶ Slater, *Revelation as Civil Disobedience*, p. 50, observes that the horns represent omnipotence, and the eyes omniscience, thus making a strong association with God Almighty as well as the Spirit.

⁴²⁷ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 222.

Now accompanied by music (the elders having harps), a ‘new song’ (ὄδῃν καινὴν) rings out in heaven (5.9–10), echoing the words of Daniel 7 and Genesis 10⁴²⁸ – this time, it is the Lamb who is the object of worship. All of heaven sings of his worth because he was slain. They sing to the efficacy of his sacrifice – ‘you purchased for God with your blood, people from every tribe and tongue and people and nation’. The hearers then encounter a familiar refrain – ‘you made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God’. These words, they have heard in John’s opening address (1.8), but the four creatures and twenty–four elders add ‘and they will reign upon the earth’.

As all of heaven joins in worship of the Lamb, John’s attention shifts (Καὶ εἶδον), beholding an innumerable choir of angels surrounding the throne, the creatures, and the elders. The worth ascribed to the Lamb is seven–fold (5.11).⁴²⁹ Thousands upon thousands all sing to the Lamb, ‘Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing’. The hearers might imagine that while the creatures and elders are singing antiphonally in vv. 9–10,⁴³⁰ the angels are singing their syncopated lyrics of v. 12. This worship is repeated over and over, until all of creation reaches the crescendo in v. 13, worshipping God the Father and the Lamb together. After this doxology to the Lamb, it is as if a camera were to dolly back swiftly, opening up to an anamorphic, wide–angle view. Still in heaven, John witnesses ‘every creature’ (πᾶν κτίσμα) now joining in worship. They sing, not only unto the Lamb, rather ‘to him who sits on the throne, and unto the Lamb’. Both are equally worshipped, and together ascribed *the blessing, the honor, the glory, and the power* for ages and ages (forever and ever).⁴³¹ The articular pronouncement of the worship here, as in 4.11, may suggest that the blessing, honor, glory, and power that is due the one on the throne and to the Lamb are *par excellence*. Not as to conclude this cosmic worship service, as John has already noted that the worship is unending (4.8), the four creatures attest to this universal worship with a resounding ‘Amen’, and the elders prostrate themselves in worship.

This heavenly vision begins with a scene around the throne of God Almighty, though he is not anthropomorphically described. Through a series of zooming in and out, John offers a description of the created beings which occupy the space, and even those far removed from the immediacy of

⁴²⁸ J. Daniel Hays, *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race* (Downers Grove, IL; England: InterVarsity Press; Apollos, 2003), p. 196.

⁴²⁹ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 234.

⁴³⁰ For more on this view, see Moses Stuart, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse* (Edinburgh: Maclachlan, Stewart, 1848), pp. 132–33, and MacLeod, ‘The Adoration of God the Creator’, pp. 210–11.

⁴³¹ Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 120.

the throne. Regardless of their space, all are joined in worship, offering various hymns to God, and as the vision unfolds, John sees that they worship the Lamb as well. Through this worship experience, the hearers would likely appreciate the ultimate authority of God over all of creation, even against a backdrop of suffering and tribulation on earth.⁴³² The act of faithful witness, wrapped in the term ‘overcome’ that was so encouraged in the prophetic messages is realized through the overcoming Faithful Witness of the Lamb. For this, he is worthy of worship – a significant detail in the vision, as the Lamb will become a central figure as the Apocalypse continues to unfold, especially as it relates to witness.⁴³³

4.5.2 FAITHFUL WITNESS IN REVELATION 4–5

In John’s heavenly vision, witness is demonstrated in singing, prostration, adornment, and prayers. Before these encounters arise, John first sees a throne (4.2). The central focus of this throne in this pneumatic encounter makes clear that all the worship that takes place around it is a declaration of the supremacy of God and the Lamb. The worship which takes place around the throne is characteristic of witness, as we have observed above. The worship declares the eternal rulership of God (4.8–11) and ascribes the same worth to the Lamb (5.9–10, 12–14). The elders’ adornment of white robes and golden crowns (4.4) demonstrate that the promises said to await faithful witnesses (2.10, 26–27; 3.5, 21) are true.

As John is transitioned, *in the Spirit*, to a great worship scene before the throne in heaven (4.2), another group of implied witnesses emerges. It is in Revelation 5 where the designation of angels, the twenty–four elders, and the four creatures as witnesses can be more easily recognized. Eventually, all of creation joins in as witnesses in this cosmic worship scene. The four living creatures and the twenty–four elders fall before the Lamb, singing a new song (5.9–10), the angels join in (5.12), finally, ‘every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them’ (5.13) joins in the worship. Several details of this worship scene help to discern these heavenly figures as witnesses. Having explored the nature of witness, we can infer certain distinguishable qualities about these figures that garner the designation of witness; first is their location. As John has been ushered before the throne, (4.2) the reader should be reminded that this ushering was ‘ἐν πνεύματι’ (‘in the Spirit). Moreover, while John was

⁴³² MacLeod, ‘The Adoration of God the Creator’, p. 201.

⁴³³ Slater, *Revelation as Civil Disobedience*, p. 51.

brought before the throne by way of a pneumatic experience, the Spirit was already present before the throne (1.4; 5.6). It can therefore be deduced that those who were worshiping were doing so ‘in the Spirit’.⁴³⁴

If prophetic witness is ‘the revelation of a present truth that demands appropriate present and future behavior’,⁴³⁵ then the words that they sing are not only pneumatic (in the Spirit), but prophetic.⁴³⁶ The antiphonal liturgy that John experiences here is replete with ‘present truth’ and behavioral demands. The slain Lamb (5.12) and his seat on the throne (5.13) are present truths (realities) that call for behavioral demands (cf. 1.3, 5-6). These realities demand a response from all of creation – heaven and earth. ‘Worthy is the Lamb’ – that is, ascribe worth to him. ‘Be the blessing and honor and glory’ – that is, bless, honor, and glorify him. The four creatures do not cease in affirming this attribution of worth, blessing, glory, honor, and power – ‘*Amen!*’. Thus, the prophetic and pneumatic nature of their witness can be discerned, but the human nature should not readily be dismissed.

Although the angels, elders, and creatures ‘have not experienced redemption ... they have nonetheless witnessed it’.⁴³⁷ More can be said, however, of the human nature in their worship. The reader should also be reminded of the three aspects of the human nature of witness – solidarity of community, suffering, and time. John observes the community of earth joining the community of heaven (5.13) in their singing with one voice.⁴³⁸ The songs sang to the Lamb in 5.12–13 recall the song sung by the elders and creatures in 5.9, a song which champions the Lamb’s work in all three aspects:

Worship Proclamation	Human Aspect
You were slain, and purchased, with your blood... (5.9)	Suffering
People from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation... (5.9) A kingdom and priests to our God (5.10)	Solidarity of Community
You <i>were</i> slain... they [<i>are</i>] a kingdom/priests... (5.9,10) They <i>will</i> reign... (5.10)	Time (past, present, future)

⁴³⁴ Archer, ‘*I Was in the Spirit*’, pp. 190–91.

⁴³⁵ Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 348.

⁴³⁶ See also, Boesack, *Comfort and Protest*, p. 60.

⁴³⁷ J. Daryl Charles, ‘An Apocalyptic Tribute to the Lamb (REV 5:1–14)’, *JETS* 34.4 (December 1991), pp. 461–73 (472).

⁴³⁸ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 234–35.

4.5.3 REVELATION 6–7: THE SEALS, THE SOULS, AND THE SONGS

As the worship commences, the hearers are alerted to another significant scene in heaven, as John's attention is drawn to the opening of the seals – Καὶ εἶδον (6.1)!⁴³⁹ The imagination of the hearers is constantly under development throughout this vision, for often, when John sees (εἶδον), it is more than a visual experience. As the Lamb opens one of the seals, John simultaneously *hears* one of the creatures beckoning with a thunderous voice for one to 'come' (ἔρχου). The command draws John's attention (καὶ εἶδον) to a crowned archer on a white horse (6.2), who 'went out overcoming in order that he might overcome' (ἐξῆλθεν νικῶν καὶ ἵνα νικήσῃ). The white horse, crown, and fact that the rider is actively overcoming and will overcome even more might cause the hearers first to conclude that this rider is a faithful witness to the Lamb – yet John offers no commentary on the matter. However, as the hearers have been admonished to be discerning, they may recall that often in the Apocalypse, things are not as they appear on the surface.

While there are different views as to whom this rider may be,⁴⁴⁰ it is perhaps the African American lens that brings the idea to the fore that the rider might just be the Church. Having already overcome, as noted in the doxology of Rev. 1.5–7, it is difficult to imagine Jesus involved in any act that *would result* (ἵνα) in overcoming. And while the idea of a demonic parody is plausible, it is found wanting, as this would be the only time in Johannine literature that a satanic figure is associated with white – a color that has otherwise been reserved in the Apocalypse for

⁴³⁹ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 252–53.

⁴⁴⁰ Daniel K. Wong, 'The First Horseman of Revelation 6'. *BSac* 153.610 (April 1996), pp. 212–26 (219), argues against Jesus as the rider:

(a) It is difficult to conceive of Christ coming in response to the call of one of the four living creatures, since He has just received their worship (5:8). (b) The parallelism with the other three horses, which are nondivine instruments of destruction, makes the first rider's identification with Christ improbable, (c) Christ opens the seal in heaven so that this horseman is allowed to ride forth on earth. This negates the possibility of His also being the rider revealed by breaking that seal.

See also, Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, pp. 124–25, who presents a plausible case for this rider not being the Faithful and True judge of Rev. 19.11, and writes (p. 124):

Because the rider in 6:2 is the first, his appearance indicates that the initial opposition to God will be one of confusing mimicry. By setting himself on a dazzling horse and laying claim to the Lord's language of conquest, this satanic emissary tries to wreak havoc in God's own image. In this way, the first horseman would be the prelude to the many false christs who would eventually appear in Christ's name and image.

For divergent views, see Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 107, and Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 127, who suggest that this rider is a demonic parody. Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation*, p. 394, suggests, 'The most plausible view is that the horseman signifies the threat of human wars of conquest. This approach considers all four riders as a set, like the four groups of horses and riders in Zech 1:8–15 and 6:1–8, and it recognizes that all the horsemen are ominous'. While Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 240–41, seems to be in favor of Jesus as the rider, his engagement does leave room for the plausibility of the church, noting, 'At the very least, this imagery of v. 2 would convey to the hearers the idea that wherever this horse and rider go Jesus himself goes.'

faithful witness (cf. 1.14; 2.14; 3.4, 5, 18; 4.4; 6.11; 7.9, 13, 14; 14.14; 19.11, 14; and the great white throne of 20.11). It is quite natural to see the Church involved in such an act – the present overcoming of the Church makes way for the future overcoming. The ominous nature of the other three riders is easily explained – the nations are offered an opportunity to worship the Lamb in response to the faithful witness of the Church (cf. Rev. 11.3-13). The other three riders may represent the consequences that the nations face, owing to their ignoring the witness of the Church.

For the rider on the white horse as the Church, ‘overcoming and to overcome’, consider the popular Negro anthem of the twentieth century, ‘We Shall Overcome’. This song was sung by African Americans (and those standing in solidarity with them) during marches, protests, sit-ins, and even worship gatherings. While much of the non-violent protests resulted in advancement for colored people – Jim Crow laws abolished, voting rights changed, discriminatory practices in the workplace sanctioned, there is yet more overcoming that is needed. So still, in the twenty-first century, the anthem is sung in marches, protests, sit-ins, and African American worship services today... *We shall overcome!*

Perhaps John offers no commentary because there is no time, for as the rider on the white horse is riding out, the Lamb opens a second seal and another creature beckons, ‘come’ (ἔρχου). The second rider does not bear the features of a witness, but of a warrior. Riding a red horse and armed with a ‘great sword’ (μάχαιρα μεγάλη), he is sent out to remove shalom from the earth ‘in order that humankind would slay one another’. Immediately, the Lamb opens a third seal. The hearers would expect, at this point, to hear an accompanying ‘come’ (ἔρχου) with the opening of this seal. Unexpectedly, John interjects a familiar phrase before announcing the next rider – καὶ εἶδον! This familiar phrase would no doubt alert the hearers to a noticeable change in the scene. A different color horse would be expected – the rider is mounted on a black horse. In his hand is a pair of scales. Once again, what John sees is not merely visual, but audible as well – John ‘heard something like a voice’ come from the midst of the four creatures. The voice does not give instruction but conveys a standard for commerce: ‘one measure of wheat for one denarius, and three measures of barley for one denarius, and do not harm the oil and the wine’. The Lamb opens a fourth seal, and John hears the fourth creature beckon, ‘ἔρχου’! John alerts the hearers again to a significance in this new scene, ‘καὶ εἶδον’! The fourth rider emerges on a pale horse. What has drawn John’s attention is that this rider is identified; his name is Death, and Hades follows him.⁴⁴¹

⁴⁴¹ Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 130, reads the text this way:

Famine and sword, pestilence and wild beasts are his tools, death and destruction are his assignment, to a quarter of the earth.

At the opening of the fifth seal, John encounters another significant change of scenery. Instead of a rider on a horse, he sees (εἶδον) beneath the altar (6.9) ‘the souls of those who had been slain on account of the Word of God and the witness they had’ (τὰς ψυχὰς τῶν ἐσφαγμένων διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ διὰ τὴν μαρτυρίαν ἣν εἶχον). It would not be missed by the hearers that these souls are people whose witness has been patterned after the slaughtered Lamb.⁴⁴² Additionally, these souls bear close association with John, as his situation at Patmos is owing to the same witness,⁴⁴³ Antipas, as he was killed for his witness, and subsequently, the witnesses of the seven churches who received the prophetic messages, as these souls are given white robes (cf. 3.4–5, 18).⁴⁴⁴ John does not speculate as to whom these martyred souls might refer, for such speculation is unnecessary in order for the hearers to imagine the eschatological reality of giving their lives for their witness.⁴⁴⁵ Having been slaughtered for their witness, the hearers would certainly recognize these souls as *faithful* witnesses, patterned after Jesus (1.5; 3.14) and Antipas (2.13). Without minimizing the significance of the martyrdom for their witness, the cry of the souls beneath the altar would likely turn the attention of the hearers, even if momentarily, from them and their slaughtered condition to Jesus, and his vindication for their martyrdom.⁴⁴⁶ Though John has just bore witness to the prayers of the saints heard in heaven (5.8), here beneath the altar, the content of the prayers of faithful witnesses are heard.

Amidst a cacophony of sounds already described, an emotional lament is heard in heaven – ‘with a great voice’, (6.10), the souls inquire about the delayed vengeance of Jesus for their

It is not surprising, then, that this rider’s name is ‘Death.’ There is a logistical problem of having Hades follow along with Death even though only one horse is mentioned. John, though, is not concerned with such details. He means to connect the personification of death with the equally fearful personification of Hades so that his readers may be assured that the peril now confronting them in the narrative is total. Death is the force that snatches up the essence of human life. Hades is the underworld place where that essence is eternally enslaved. The two form a partnership of grim reaping, which is why John often pictures them working together (1:18; 6:8; 20:13–14).

⁴⁴² Pattemore, *The People of God*, p. 78; Tabb, *All Things New*, p. 141.

⁴⁴³ Craig R. Koester, ‘Introduction to Revelation’s Social Setting, Theological Perspective, and Literary Design’, in *The Oxford Handbook of the Book of Revelation* (Craig R. Koester, [ed.]; New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 1-17 (3).

⁴⁴⁴ John Paul Heil, ‘The Fifth Seal (Rev 6,9–11) as a Key to the Book of Revelation’, *Biblica* 74.2 (1993), pp. 220–43 (226), suggests that the ‘word of God’ also includes here the prophetic message proclaimed to the seven churches. See also, Pattemore, *The People of God*, p. 78.

⁴⁴⁵ Pattemore, *The People of God*, p. 79.

⁴⁴⁶ Blount, *Can I get a Witness*, pp. 72–74.

blood.⁴⁴⁷ Such a request, ‘How long, O Lord ...?’ finds community among OT voices – the imprecatory Psalms especially (Pss. 13.1, 2; 74.10; 79.5; 82.2; 89.46; 90.13; 94.3).⁴⁴⁸ Additionally, this outcry is congruent with the character of God, who promises vindication, perhaps an allusion to the song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32 (cf. especially vv. 40–43).⁴⁴⁹ Though martyred for their earthly witness, these faithful witnesses continue to witness to Jesus in their lament⁴⁵⁰ – testifying to his holiness, trustworthiness (‘O Lord, holy and true’ | cf. 3.7, 14), and righteous power (‘will you not judge and avenge our blood’).⁴⁵¹ The hearers may discern that such a petition is sure to be heard by Jesus, given their close proximity to God (beneath the altar).⁴⁵²

The response offers no immediate comfort,⁴⁵³ but more than a consolatory answer, the witnesses are granted white robes, instructed to ‘rest for a little while longer’, and they are made aware of the reality that suffering is not over – for they are to wait (‘until their fellow slaves and brothers who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also’).⁴⁵⁴ The ambiguity

⁴⁴⁷ Pattemore, *The People of God*, p. 82, notes that ‘Theirs is the fourth loud voice, following that of Christ (1:10), the mighty angel (5:2), and the host of angels (5:12)’. See also Boesack, *Comfort and Protest*, p. 68. David Seal, ‘Emotions, Empathy, and Engagement with God in Revelation 6:9–11’, *ExpTim* 129.3 (2017), pp. 112–20 (118–20), notes the emotional elements present that would stimulate imitation of the martyrs on the part of the hearers: lament, reverence, hope, and confidence.

⁴⁴⁸ Boesack, *Comfort and Protest*, p. 68; Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 135.

⁴⁴⁹ Edwin E. Reynolds, ‘Resolving the Confusion in Revelation 6:11’, *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 59.1 (Spring 2021), pp. 35–48 (45–46).

⁴⁵⁰ Boesack, *Comfort and Protest*, p. 68.

⁴⁵¹ Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation*, pp. 399–400. I suggest that power is witnessed to here, owing to the question of delay. Such a question suggests capability.

⁴⁵² Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 130; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 248.

⁴⁵³ Boesack, *Comfort and Protest*, p. 70, notes (despite the robes, and rest) that the souls ‘are told the simple truth: the battle is on, it is not over yet; the price is high, but the end is near’.

⁴⁵⁴ Following Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation*, pp. 399–400, Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation*, p. 151, notes, ‘the word “number” is not in the Greek text, so the sense may rather be that they wait until the work of the martyrs is fulfilled’. See also, Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 51–53. Reynolds, ‘Resolving the Confusion’, p. 39, gives significant attention to this passage, and writes:

Plēroō is most often used to indicate filling full (plērēs) or fulfilling, but it is sometimes used to signify bringing something to completion or perfection. Local context, of course, must be the determining factor for the meaning in any text. Here the subject of the sentence is people who are about to be killed, just as the slain martyrs had been. God is asking the martyrs to wait a little longer until these others should reach a certain state that God intends for them.

While Reynolds bases his argument off the semantic range of πληρώω according to *BDAG*, he seems to favor one definition (b) in particular (see p. 39, n. 18) ‘When used in reference to a person, the verb speaks of filling someone with powers, qualities, etc. But when used of persons absolutely, without an object, it suggests a state of completeness. In this context, this would mean perfection of character’. Though uncited in his work, his conclusion might find a closely implied connection with Moisés Silva, ed., ‘πληρώω’, *NIDNTTE* 3, pp. 792–93, which states:

In John and the Johannine letters there is a freq. connection between πληρώω (pass.) and joy (χαρά G5915; see χαίρω G5897). What is meant, in the first instance, is the joy of Jesus himself (ἡ χαρὰ ἡ ἐμὴ, John 3:29 et al.), but through his words of comfort and the promise of his return (cf. 16:20–22), the disciples “may have the full measure of [his] joy within them” (ἵνα ἔχωσιν τὴν χαρὰν τὴν ἐμὴν πεπληρωμένην ἐν ἑαυτοῖς, 17:13; sim. 15:11;

of this statement does not seem to be a concern for John, as no commentary or explanation is offered. Perhaps clarity may not be the focus – rather, it is that the hearers might simply be encouraged that the Lord responds to imprecatory prayers.⁴⁵⁵ While the content of the response offers no immediate comfort, the hearers may be content with the fact that the lament was not met with rebuke, relieving them of any anxiety regarding any lament for their own suffering. Given the promise of white robes to those who overcome (3.4, 5, 18), it is apparent that these martyred souls have overcome – that is, held fast to their witness, even unto death. That they are instructed to wait ‘a little while longer’ indicates that the souls are now at rest – free from suffering and tribulation. The hearers are made to realize that there is an appointed time for vindication – and that time has not yet come for these souls beneath the altar.⁴⁵⁶

With a familiar marker of transition, καὶ εἶδον, John proceeds to direct the attention of the hearers to the opening of the sixth seal (6.12), where he witnesses ecological destruction (6.12–14). As this destruction take place, people of the earth both great and small began to seek refuge in caves and mountains, in order that they might hide themselves ‘from the presence of him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb’ (6.15–16). The reason they hide, John explains, is that ‘the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?’. What John sees next is not the opening of the seventh seal, as the hearers might expect, but what seems to be a doxological

16:24). Joy characterizes the life of the disciples in their walk with Jesus; it becomes complete. This language is echoed in the Johannine letters, though the context is different (1 John 1:4; 2 John 12).

Aune, *Revelation*, p. 412, considers this verb extremely problematic, but against Reynolds, insists that the verse implies that a ‘*numerus praedestinatorum*’ – that is, ‘a predetermined number’ of martyrs must die, drawing his definition from ‘πληρῶω’, Louw and Nida, p. 597, ‘to make something total or complete – ‘to make complete, to complete the number of’.

⁴⁵⁵ Unlike the imprecatory psalms, with which the hearers would be well acquainted, the cry for divine intervention here is not unanswered, nor is it left to the ones who lament to come to their own conclusion that God is concerned with his people. I would suggest here that the need for the interpolation of ‘number’ is not necessary, even if plausible arguments are presented. A greater lesson here may not be a divine quota of martyrs, but understanding the solidarity that exists among the community of witnesses, both in heaven and earth. If this is the greater lesson, then the argument that Reynolds makes may have merit, especially considering Heb. 11.37–12.3. The writer states (11.40) that ‘God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect’. Thus, the vision of the souls beneath the altar gives life to this text. Thus, Reynolds, ‘Resolving the Confusion’, p. 40, states well, ‘The point is not that God is waiting for a particular number of martyrs to be reached. Rather, he is waiting for others to achieve a state of perfect faith and trust in God, or faithfulness, to the point that they too will be prepared to lay down their lives for their convictions and their love for God’. Theologically speaking, Reynolds makes a reasonable argument that waiting for a number of souls to be killed seems less significant than the testing of their witness to the point of perfection. In the context of the faithful witness the interpolation of ‘number’ is less favorable than the idea of completion of the witnesses.

⁴⁵⁶ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 253. Reynolds, ‘Resolving the Confusion’, p. 44, suggests that ‘The main point of the passage is God’s faithfulness to his covenant promises, an issue of theodicy. It is central to the plot of the book of Revelation’.

pause. This pause is not an intermission, but a dramatization of the delayed vindication of 6.11.⁴⁵⁷ Though four angels stand in wait to execute the fullness of their wrath (7.1–4), they are instructed to delay this order ‘until we have sealed the slaves of our God on their foreheads’, a possible allusion to Ezek. 9.4–6.⁴⁵⁸

Those sealed are ‘144,000 sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel’, twelve thousand from each tribe (7.4–8). Hearing this number, and the naming of the tribes,⁴⁵⁹ the hearers might first have in mind ethnic Israel,⁴⁶⁰ but as the scene expands, they are likely to discern much more. John then sees (Μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον | ‘after these things I saw’) ‘a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb’ (7.9). Though the order is modified, this four-part description (‘nation, tribe, people, tongue’) recalls 5.9 (‘tribe, tongue, people, nation’), perhaps drawing the imagination of the hearers toward a global representation (‘every nation’ | 7.9) over an ethnic one (‘every tribe’ | 5.9).⁴⁶¹ This great multitude, ‘clothed in white robes’ and brandishing palm branches, bears a close connection with the churches addressed in chapters 2–3.⁴⁶² They also share a connection with the souls beneath the altar as they ‘cry out with a loud voice’ of worship⁴⁶³ – ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb’ (7.10). In their worship, they celebrate God as one who liberates, thus giving witness to what the souls cry out for in 6.11.⁴⁶⁴ The scene recalls

⁴⁵⁷ Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, p. 55. ‘John holds his hearers in suspense, inserting a long parenthesis (chapter 7) before the opening of the seventh seal. This parenthesis dramatizes precisely the delay which has been explained to the martyrs (6:11)’.

⁴⁵⁸ Craig L. Blomberg, Darlene M. Seal, and Alicia M. Duprée, *From Pentecost to Patmos: Acts to Revelation* (2nd edn; vol. 2; New Testament Introduction and Survey; London: Apollos, 2021), p. 775.

⁴⁵⁹ Blomberg, Seal, and Duprée, *From Pentecost to Patmos*, p. 775.

⁴⁶⁰ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, pp. 186–87; Koester, ‘The 144,000 from the Twelve Tribes (7:1–8)’, in *Revelation*, pp. 424–27, presents three views for the identification of the 144,000, including (1) ethnic Jews; (2) martyrs; and his preferred view, (3) ‘the heirs of the promises to Israel (7:4–8) and a group of people from many nations (7:9–17)’.

⁴⁶¹ J. Daniel Hays, *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race* (Downers Grove, IL; England: InterVarsity Press; Apollos, 2003), p. 197, suggests that this modification elevates every nation over every tribe.

⁴⁶² Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 267. Robby Waddell, ‘The Apocalypse of John according to Craig R. Koester: A Critical Appreciation of Revelation (The Anchor Yale Bible) with Special Attention to Rev. 7.1–15.4’, *JPT* 24.1 (2015), pp. 13–23 (19), presents a plausible suggestion:

The Jewish descriptors of the 144,000 need not be explained away if they are understood as an integral part of the great multitude. In other words, the 144,000 may be a symbol for ethnically Jewish followers of Jesus, though not in an exclusive manner à la the Dispensationalists but rather chronologically. Not unlike Paul who can speak of the gospel coming first to the Jew and then to the Greek, which I understand to be a chronological descriptor rather than a qualitative category, John also can refer to the army of the Lion of Judah numbering 144,000 that expands to become the multitude of lamb.

⁴⁶³ Archer, *I Was in the Spirit*, p. 197.

⁴⁶⁴ Archer, *I Was in the Spirit*, p. 198, makes a noteworthy observation that ‘In this context, ἡ σωτηρία (‘salvation’) encompasses victory, deliverance or justice/vindication. The cry of the martyrs for justice is enfolded in

chapters 4–5, but in reverse; instead of the worship scene being described as looking out (from creatures and elders to all creation), here (7.11–12), the scene looks inward (from all nations to the creatures and elders).

The hearers may be reminded of John’s inaugural vision (1.20), where Jesus explained to John the mystery of what he saw, for as the worship commences, one of the elders cease from singing to ensure that John understands what he is witnessing. The elder asks John to identify those clothed in white robes – ‘who are they, and from where do they come?’ (7.13). Reminiscent of the prophet Ezekiel in the valley (Ezek. 37.3), John places the burden on the one who asks.⁴⁶⁵ As the elder gives clarity to the scene to which John is a witness, the hearers might be reminded that prophetic witness is not an independent activity.⁴⁶⁶ As the elder (implicitly) identifies them as faithful witnesses (7.14–17), the hearers would likely notice motifs present in the seven prophetic messages.⁴⁶⁷

First, they are identified as ‘the ones coming out of the great tribulation’. Though the hearers are likely to have in mind here a particular expected event (Rev. 3.10; cf. Dan. 12.1–2),⁴⁶⁸ it would not be missed that John is a fellow partaker in tribulation (1.9), Smyrna is expected to face tribulation, and those complicit with Jezebel in Thyatira are threatened to be thrown into great tribulation. Second, ‘they washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb’. The hearers have encountered white robes/garments in this prophetic narrative. Though not described as white, Jesus is robed (1.13), some witnesses in Sardis are clothed in white (3.4), whoever overcomes will be as well (3.5), and Laodicea is encouraged to purchase white garments (3.18). The robes being made white by the blood of the Lamb would remind the hearers that the blood was both a cleansing blood, and liberating blood (1.5).

Third, ‘they are before the throne of God; and they serve him day and night in his sanctuary; and he who sits on the throne will dwell over them’. It would be difficult for the hearers not to imagine the message to the church at Philadelphia where they are promised a permanent place of

the prophetic declaration of the hymn’. To Archers’ observation, I would point out that liberation is included in this context – implied in ‘justice’.

⁴⁶⁵ Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 153. Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 271–72, notes that this question from the elder might suggest to the hearers that more is to be discovered about this great multitude.

⁴⁶⁶ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 272, comments, ‘The question is also helpful in establishing the scope and limit of John’s prophetic ability and/or knowledge, implying that his prophetic ability and function is absolutely dependent upon that which is made known to him’.

⁴⁶⁷ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 272–74.

⁴⁶⁸ Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 127; Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation*, p. 429.

leadership in the sanctuary of God, if they overcome (3.12). His dwelling over them might remind the hearers of the witnesses at Pergamum, who dwelled where Satan dwelled, and had a throne (2.13). But, just as the creatures and elders in Revelation 4, these overcoming witnesses are situated where God dwells and is enthroned.

As the elder offers a fourth description, he shifts to a future tense, ‘they will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore, nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat’. At this description, the hearers may recall the prophetic message to the church at Ephesus where the overcomers are promised to eat from the tree of life (2.7), ‘which is in Paradise’. This return to paradise and eating of the tree of life recalls the creation–fall narrative of Genesis 1–3. In the Garden of Eden, eating of the tree of life meant that they would live forever (cf. Gen. 3.22), but the effects of Adam’s disobedience meant not only prohibition from the tree, but an implied heat from a beating sun (cf. Gen. 3.19, ‘by the sweat of your face, you will eat bread’). The final description of this multitude is reminiscent of the final message to the seven churches, but in ironic fashion, attention is taken off the multitude, and placed on the Lamb. Though the church at Laodicea was independent, and inhospitable, this multitude is led by the lamb and enjoying fellowship with him. The elder informs John that the Lamb ‘will shepherd them and guide them to the springs of the water of life’. The irony would hardly go unnoticed here – the one denied hot or cold sustenance by an independent church leads this crowd of overcoming witnesses to refreshing springs. To further the irony, Laodicea was encouraged to purchase eye salve for their failed vision (3.18), and here tears are taken away from the eyes of the overcomers.

4.5.4 FAITHFUL WITNESS IN REVELATION 6–7

The cry of the witnesses beneath the altar (6.9–11) recalls several observations made, thus far in the narrative, about faithful witness. First, it reiterates the observation that witness is against time. The cry anticipates (‘how long, O Lord?’), but the answer (‘rest for a little while longer, until ...’) recalls the temporal restraints of witness upon humanity. Second, as the souls are crying out for vengeance for their martyrdom, it recalls the point that witness bears with it a degree of suffering. Third, the solidarity of community would not be missed by the hearers; what the souls observe, even beneath the altar (the unmatched glory of God), the witnesses on earth must still await. Fourth, their cry also gives witness to the sovereign rule and reign of God, as it is to him alone that they cry out for vengeance. This cry for vengeance is echoed in the worship of the great multitude (7.9–11), where again the Lamb is celebrated for his demonstrative witness.

The innumerable multitude which John encounters in Revelation 7, ‘from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues’, who were dressed in white robes and waving palm branches (7.9), are implied witnesses. Observing the fuller description of these witnesses, given by the angel, helps to make a case for such a designation:

These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation, and they washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His sanctuary; and He who sits on the throne will dwell over them. They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; for the Lamb at the center of the throne will shepherd them and will guide them to springs of the water of life. And God will wipe every tear from their eyes. (7.14–17)

Solidarity of community is inferred in the (‘nations, tribes, people, tongues’) who share the same, wardrobe (‘white robes’), worship, (‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb’ 7.10), and situation (‘tribulation, hunger, thirst, and tears’).

The waving of palm branches is a prophetic act (declaring what is), recalling the triumphal entry of Jesus in the FG (Jn 12.13).⁴⁶⁹ The song is equally prophetic, recalling the proclamation of the Samaritans in the FG, ‘we have heard for ourselves and know that this One is truly the Savior of the world’ (Jn 4.42). They are clothed in white robes, which is the symbolic adornment for witnesses in the Apocalypse (1.9; 3.4–5, 18; 4.4; 6.11; 19.14). Their circumstances, past, present, and future, bring to view the suffering and temporal aspects of their witness. It is evident that they have suffered, for they are ‘coming out of the great tribulation’, but more is disclosed. Their current or past condition assumes want, distress, and sorrow, owing to the promise that they will encounter neither in the eschatological new heaven and earth (21.4; 22.3–5), thus suffering is presented here. Robed in white and before the throne, having been witnesses unto death, they now stand as faithful witnesses.

4.5.5 REVELATION 8–10: THE FINAL SEAL, FATAL SOUNDS, AND A LITTLE SCROLL

John turns the attention of the hearers, once again to the opening of the seals. Though the vision has presented numerous instances of sounds, here, the opening of the seventh seal anticipates a significant act of God by introducing a prophetic call to silence (cf. Hab 2.20; Zech 2.13; Zeph 1.7; Isa. 41.1), for a duration of ‘approximately half an hour’.⁴⁷⁰ The imagination of the hearers is reengaged at yet another transitional ‘Καὶ εἶδον’ (8.2). John sees angels – seven with trumpets,

⁴⁶⁹ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 269.

⁴⁷⁰ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 279; Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation*, p. 172.

and one with a golden censer and incense to be included with the prayers of the saints on the altar before the throne.

For the third time in the Apocalypse, the hearers encounter prayers being offered. The first prayer (5.8) receives no divine response, the second prayer (6.10) is responded to with the command to wait. As the hearers encounter prayers of the saints offered here, perhaps they might anticipate a divine response, owing to the response to the second prayer.⁴⁷¹ Whatever the hearers may anticipate, they would hardly miss the widening of the spectrum – the prayers in 6.10 are heard by the souls of martyred faithful witnesses (6.9), but the prayers here in 8.3 are the ‘prayers of all the saints’ (‘προσευχαῖς τῶν ἁγίων πάντων’). Such an expansion would be encouraging to the hearers; that it would include their prayers as well.⁴⁷² As the prayers of the saints go up before God, the angel’s instrument of prayer becomes an instrument of peril, as he fills the censer with fire from the altar – throwing it to the earth, resulting in thunderous noises, bright lights, and an earthquake (8.4–5) The seven angels with the trumpets each give way to destruction on the earth.

The first four trumpet sounds bring about catastrophic events upon the earth (8.6–12), before being interrupted by a loud voice (8.13). When John looks (Καὶ εἶδον), he reports not what he saw, but what he heard – ‘woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpets of the three angels who are about to sound’. At the sound of the fifth angel’s trumpet, the events increase in severity, but amid the wrath poured out on the earth, an angel is instructed that the destruction is only to come upon ‘the men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads’ (9.4). At this point of instruction, the reason for the sealing of the 144,000 in chapter 7 becomes clearer to the hearers.⁴⁷³

John continues in describing the devastation and torment (9.5–11), but reminds the hearers, ‘one woe is past; behold two woes are still coming up after these things’ (9.12). The trumpet of the sixth angel releases four angels who are tasked to killing one third of humanity (9.13–19), yet even amidst this devastation, those who were left alive ‘did not repent of the works of their hands’ (9.20–21). These works, described as demon worship, idolatry, murder, sexual immorality, and theft, would likely cause the hearers to consider again the prophetic messages where works were repeatedly mentioned (2.2, 5, 6, 19, 22, 23, 26; 3.1, 2, 8, 15). Perhaps they would consider the

⁴⁷¹ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 281.

⁴⁷² Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 281–82.

⁴⁷³ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 295.

repeated call for repentance in those messages (2.5, 16, 21, 22; 3.3, 19).⁴⁷⁴ It is doubtful that they would miss the significance of this list of works – that these works stand in total opposition to faithful witness.

As John and the hearers anticipate the second woe and the sound of the seventh trumpet, he sees (‘Καὶ εἶδον’) another ‘strong angel’ holding ‘a little scroll which was opened’ (10.1–2). It may be understood by John and the hearers that this scroll is the same as the one sealed in chapter 5.⁴⁷⁵ As the angel takes his stand on the earth, the hearers encounter another series of sevens, as ‘seven peals of thunder uttered their voices’. Owing to his commission to provide a written witness of all that he encounters (1.11, 19), John commences to write what he hears spoken by the peals of thunder, but he encounters a voice from heaven instructing that the words spoken by the peals remain sealed and not written down (10.3–4). For the hearers, this concealment may call to mind Daniel’s vision, where he was instructed to conceal the vision (Dan. 8.26).⁴⁷⁶ Though John is a witness to everything that he sees, the prohibition from writing would remind the hearers that faithfulness in witness is subject to divine instruction – even in pneumatic experiences.

Immediately, the angel holding the scroll is brought back into focus, lifting his right hand and making an oath to God that there would be no further delay (10.5–6). John’s ability to record this oath makes clear to the hearers that this prophetic vision is restricted only in part; though John cannot share with the hearers what he heard from the peals of thunder, he is not restricted from recording the oath of the angel.⁴⁷⁷ Though time is said to delay no longer, the hearers must still wait for the sound that will come from the seventh angel who ‘is about to sound’, only after this will ‘the mystery of God’ be finished, which included the preaching of the gospel (‘as he proclaimed good news’ | ὡς εὐηγγέλισεν) (10.7).

⁴⁷⁴ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 305.

⁴⁷⁵ Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, p. 243, notes, ‘A major key to the correct interpretation of Revelation has been missed by almost all scholars. It is that the scroll which John sees, sealed with seven seals, in the hand of God in 5:1 is the same as the scroll which he sees open in the hands of an angel in 10:2’. He offers several reasons (pp. 245–57) that the two scrolls should be identical. First is the literary connection, where a ‘mighty angel’ is first mentioned in 5.1, and second here in 10.2. Second is the OT source (Ezek. 2.8–3.3) for the scroll in both chapters 5 and 10. The third reason is a matter of the nature of the scroll. The content of the scroll in 5.1 is evidently something of a divine nature that would not be revealed until after the opening of the final seal (8.1), appearing opened in 10.2 and revealed only by ingestion by John in 10.10. Fourth, Revelation 5 and 10 have strong connections to Daniel, especially Rev. 10.5–7 and Dan. 12.7–9. This relationship offers evidence that ‘John thought of the scroll of Revelation 10 as a scroll which had been sealed, but has now been opened. It follows that the scroll of Revelation 5:1 is sealed because it is this same scroll’ (p. 252). The fifth and final reason is the uniqueness of the angel of Revelation 10, that seems to present a chain of events in this revelation.

⁴⁷⁶ Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 193.

⁴⁷⁷ Archer, *I Was in the Spirit*, p. 207.

Meanwhile, John is invited to witness not by seeing and hearing, but by consumption – reminiscent of Ezekiel’s experience (Ezek. 2.1–3.3).⁴⁷⁸ John is instructed to take the opened scroll from the great angel and eat it – signifying John’s internalization of its contents.⁴⁷⁹ John complies without question, and though sweet to his lips, the consumed scroll makes his stomach bitter (10.8–10). After consuming the scroll, John is instructed, ‘You must prophesy again about many peoples and nations and tongues and kings’ (10.11). For this prophetic commission to come from more than one source (‘and they said to me’ | καὶ λέγουσίν μοι), the hearers would be forced to contemplate who is giving the instruction, but it is quite imaginable that the hearers would understand this as an idiomatic phrase, translated ‘I was told’, and discern this to be a divine commissioning – one that further situates John in the company of OT prophets.⁴⁸⁰

4.5.6 FAITHFUL WITNESS IN REVELATION 8–10

While the witness motif seems silenced in chapters 8 – 10, there are several points of observation that are worth noting. First, as the seventh seal is opened in chapter 8, what follows a half an hour of silence is the mention of the prayers of the saints (8.3), which, for point of the current thesis, should be regarded as the prayers of witnesses; that is, living witnesses and *faithful* witnesses – those who have died in/for their witness. This broader scope of prayer, from the martyrs (6.10) to the whole community of witnesses, both living and dead, is a reminder of the solidarity of community that is found in witness.

Second, it appears no further witness implication is given until 9.4; however, the contrary is true – the sounds of the first four trumpets imply a passing of time. It is safe to imagine the hearers pondering what might be the situation and condition of the witnesses during the sounds of these trumpets. What is difficult to imagine is that the witnesses would not experience some degree of suffering during these trumpet sounds.⁴⁸¹ It is in 9.4 where the hearers discover that the witnesses

⁴⁷⁸ Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 157; Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 155; Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation*, p. 198.

⁴⁷⁹ Austin Farrer, *A Rebirth of Images: The Making of St. John’s Apocalypse* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1949), p. 44, suggests that the digesting of the scroll is metaphorical. See also Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 155.

⁴⁸⁰ Mazzaferri, *The Genre of the Book of Revelation*, p. 102, notes three crucial features to the prophetic call: divine confrontation, introductory word, and commission. See also Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 321.

⁴⁸¹ Such a conclusion is reading with imagination, and outside of the text, but it is a plausible proposal when one considers the impact of the 2020 Covid–19 global pandemic. As a whole, witnesses (the Church), found no exemption from the suffering that the world had to endure – job losses, business closures, remote learning, etc., were all natural byproducts of a global challenge. A noteworthy point, so far as witness is concerned, is that there were some cases where churches and faith–based organizations were berated for gathering for worship and outreach efforts, even with

whose foreheads have the seal of God are protected from the effects of the fifth trumpet sound, which will be upon ‘those who dwell on the earth’ (8.13).

The final significant observation is the instruction(s) John receives in chapter 10; ‘seal up ... do not write’ (10.4), ‘go, take the scroll’ (10.8), ‘take it and eat it’ (10.9), ‘prophesy again’ (10.11). Concealing, taking, consuming, prophesying – these are new instructions for John, and certainly the hearers would be intrigued at hearing these new directives. What would not be missed by the hearers is what witnessing looks like ‘ἐν πνεύματι’. John’s pneumatic experience does not elevate him beyond that of a bondservant of God (1.1). In the Spirit, John must still be submitted to divine direction, lest his witness be found wanting.

4.5.7 REVELATION 11 – THE TWO PROPHETIC WITNESSES

As John receives further instruction, he is also given an unexpected narrative;⁴⁸² the story of the two witnesses is not conveyed as a vision which John sees ‘καὶ εἶδον’, but what he is told.⁴⁸³ Clear literary evidence connects this instruction and narrative to the prophetic commissioning of Revelation 10 by the conjunctive phrase ‘And it was given to me ...’ (‘Καὶ ἐδόθη μοι’).⁴⁸⁴ Without delay, his commission changes from consumption (10.9–10) to calibration (11.1–2) as he is given a rod with which he is to measure the sanctuary.⁴⁸⁵ It is unlikely that the hearers would understand ‘τὸν ναὸν’ (sanctuary/temple) to be the earthly temple, nor the ‘holy city’ which is to be trampled (11.2) to be the city of Jerusalem. Instead, they may discern that here, John speaks symbolically

social distancing in place. On other occasions, such groups were precluded from certain economic relief opportunities, owing to their faith-based policies and practices. One could then imagine similar circumstances during the sounding of these trumpets, thus an implied suffering.

⁴⁸² Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation*, p. 170.

⁴⁸³ Farrer, *A Rebirth of Images*, p. 123, raises this point – that John never actually sees the witnesses, but is told what will happen with them. He suggests that the narrative serves as ‘A special device ... to impress upon us that the whole vision of the martyrdom and vindication of the witnesses is anticipatory merely of what the seventh trumpet will unleash’.

⁴⁸⁴ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 271; Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation*, p. 494; Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, p. 258.

⁴⁸⁵ Just as Farrer, *A Rebirth of Images*, p. 44, suggests that ‘the digesting of the scroll is a metaphorical reading’ (10.10), here also he notes that ‘the measuring of the temple will be a metaphorical writing’. He notes the dual meaning of κάλαμος (reed | pen). cf. ‘κάλαμος’, *BDAG*, p. 502. See also, Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 323.

of the people of God.⁴⁸⁶ He is to measure two distinct groups that comprise the sanctuary⁴⁸⁷ – that is, the altar (martyrs, cf. Rev. 6.9) and those who worship (faithful, cf. Rev. 7.9–10),⁴⁸⁸ but not the court outside the sanctuary (11.1–2), which the hearers might understand to represent those found compromising in their witness.⁴⁸⁹

This commission to measure the sanctuary marks a significant point in this prophetic narrative for several notable reasons. First, the narrative of the two prophetic witnesses is situated here in the center of the Apocalypse, where the Spirit’s role in the Apocalypse is centered also.⁴⁹⁰ Second, the central message contained in the scroll is performed here through the drama of the two witnesses.⁴⁹¹ Third, it is through the narrative of the two witnesses that prophecy and witness are equated.⁴⁹² Fourth, and most pertinent to the motif of faithful witness, an exegetical use of *καὶ* would suggest that the distinction between martyred believers and worshipping (non-martyred) believers comprising one group (temple/sanctuary) of righteous followers (faithful witnesses) is

⁴⁸⁶ Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 272–73, writes:

[John] is distinguishing the inner, hidden reality of the church as a kingdom of priests (cf. 5:10) who worship God in his presence from the outward experience of the church as it is exposed to persecution by the kingdom of the nations. The church will be kept safe in its hidden spiritual reality, while suffering persecution and martyrdom. This is partially a parallel, using different imagery, to the vision of chapter 7, where the servants of God are kept safe by the seal on their foreheads, but suffer martyrdom.

⁴⁸⁷ Blomberg, Seal, and Duprée, *From Pentecost to Patmos*, pp. 781–82, infer as much in stating that ‘If God could depict the entire fellowship of believers as 144,000 Jews, it is not hard to imagine him describing his church as the temple; indeed that is the consistent referent of the word temple throughout the Epistles of Paul and Peter’.

⁴⁸⁸ Such a translation demands an exegetical use of *καὶ* (meaning ‘that is’) and is not without company. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 571 hints at the possibility, and Marko Jauhiainen, ‘The Measuring of the Sanctuary Reconsidered (Rev 11,1–2)’, *Biblica* 83.4 (2002), pp. 507–26, explores it a bit further. The idea is explored at length in Rob Dalrymple, ‘The Use of *καὶ* in Revelation 11,1 and the Implications for the Identification of the Temple, the Altar, and the Worshippers’, *Biblica* 87.3 (2006), pp. 387–94 (388–89), raises a plausible argument that the *καὶ* introduces two groups of witnesses – the altar and the worshippers. The altar, he contends, are the martyred witnesses, and the worshippers are simply the witnesses who remained faithful to the end. He adds (p. 91) that if the temple is to be taken metaphorically, it seems logical that the constituent parts of the temple might also be used metaphorically. He raises the logical question (p. 92) that if the altar is not to be representative of martyred souls, then what might be the purpose of its divine protection? Taking Dalrymple’s argument further, it could then be plausible that what John is measuring is the righteous, both living and dead – those who are the worshippers could be the ones currently active in earthly faithful witness.

⁴⁸⁹ Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, pp. 105–106, notes:

A very different and more plausible understanding of the places mentioned in this passage takes the ‘temple’ and the ‘holy city’ as metaphors for the Christian community. The vision of God’s ‘temple’ being oppressed does not have to do with a location hundreds of miles removed from the Christians in Asia Minor, who were first addressed by Revelation. The vision calls readers to faithfulness in their own conflicted contexts.

⁴⁹⁰ Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation*, p. 165.

⁴⁹¹ Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, p. 266.

⁴⁹² Mazzaferri, *The Genre of the Book of Revelation*, p. 306; Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation*, p. 171.

noted here.⁴⁹³ The measuring recalls OT narrative and is symbolic of prophetic activity that may include preservation or judgement.⁴⁹⁴

As the vision shifts from instruction to narrative, divine authority is given to two witnesses to prophesy and perform miraculous deeds.⁴⁹⁵ It is possible that their number (two) is provided so that the hearers would understand their witness to be true, as Torah requires a minimum of two witnesses to validate a truth claim (cf. Num. 35.30; Deut. 17.6; 19.15).⁴⁹⁶ No formal identification is offered, but John introduces the witnesses in a way that seems to suggest that the hearers are familiar with whomever they may be (‘τοῖς δυσὶν μάρτυσίν μου’ | ‘the two witnesses of mine’).⁴⁹⁷ The allusions to OT prophetic narratives would not be missed by the hearers.⁴⁹⁸ John describes these witnesses as ‘the two olive trees and two lampstands that stand before the Lord’, recalling

⁴⁹³ Dalrymple, ‘The Use of Καί in Revelation’, p. 393, concludes:

John reassures the entire covenant community that their eternal destiny is firmly within the sovereign judge’s control. The exegetical use of καί in 11,1b explains why it is ‘the altar’ and not some other piece of furniture that is measured. Finally, the distinction between the righteous who are martyred and those who are not confirms that John did not perceive all of the righteous as suffering martyrdom.

João Paulo Thomaz de Aquino, ‘A Proposed Reading of Revelation 11:1–13’, *Fides Reformata* 23.1 (2018), pp. 35–51 (43), disagrees with Dalrymple, suggesting that this reading is not the most natural, and that it weakens the link to Ezekiel 40–42 and Revelation 21 – however, not enough evidence is offered for this weakening.

⁴⁹⁴ For preservation, see Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 160, and Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation*, p. 165, who suggests that preservation may recall Ezekiel 40–42 and Zech. 2.1–5 and is consistent with the previous interlude (Rev. 7.3–4, cf. also 3.10). For judgement, see Aquino, ‘A Proposed Reading’, p. 43, who suggests that ‘the act of measuring does not mean protection for the church. Rather, its meaning is God’s analysis or judgement in order to decide those who were to be spared or not, according with the results of the measurement, as it happened to the Moabites in 2 Sam 8:2.’ Additionally, Aquino, ‘A Proposed Reading of Revelation’, p. 45, though not arguing for the exegetical reading, notes that the Apocalypse ‘makes clear that there are celestial counterparts for many earthly realities’ and suggests that such could be the case for the sanctuary here. It is not Aquino’s view, but I would suggest that this heaven and earth reality is seen in the altar (heaven) and worshippers (earth).

⁴⁹⁵ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 327.

⁴⁹⁶ David E. Holwerda, ‘The Church and the Little Scroll (Revelation 10, 11)’, *CTJ* 34 (1999), pp. 148–61 (157), notes that ‘The fact that there are two and not seven witnesses most likely does not mean that only two of the seven churches will be faithful. Instead, two is the number required for legally valid testimony (Deut. 19:15; John 8:13–18)’. See also, Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 208; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 328.

⁴⁹⁷ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 275, notes the articular mention of the witnesses ‘τοῖς δυσὶν μάρτυσίν’ (the two witnesses). Kenneth A. Strand, ‘The Two Witnesses of Rev. 11.3–12’, *AUSS* 19.2 (Summer, 1981), pp. 127–35, argues that the two witnesses are primarily ‘the Word of God’ and ‘the testimony of Jesus’ or (p. 134) ‘what we today would call the OT prophetic message and the NT apostolic witness’. See also, Judith Kovacs and Christopher Rowland, *Revelation: The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), pp. 126–30, explore various views in reception history for the identity of these witnesses. Aquino, ‘A Proposed Reading’, p. 50, offers a startling and unique conclusion for the identity, stating, ‘It is possible to assert that John is reaffirming the master–disciple structure for the testimony of the church and that he predicts the coming of a duplet as Moses–Joshua, Elijah–Elisha and John–Jesus during the time of the great tribulation’. While the conclusion is intriguing, nothing in the narrative suggests one of the witnesses is subordinate to the other or succeeding the other. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 575 notes that they have equally attributed power.

⁴⁹⁸ Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation*, pp. 505–506.

Zechariah 4 (cf. vv. 6, 11–14).⁴⁹⁹ The ministry of these two witnesses is reminiscent of Moses (cf. Exod. 7.14–24) and Elijah (cf. 1Kgs. 17.1; 2 Kgs. 1.10).⁵⁰⁰ Allusions notwithstanding, literary cues infer a plausible conclusion that these witnesses may not be individuals, but instead represent the church and its witness,⁵⁰¹ as so far in the narrative, lampstands have represented the church (1.12, 20; 2.1).⁵⁰²

Several important factors surface at the onset of their introduction. First, being identified as witnesses places them in the company of Jesus (1.4; 3.14) and Antipas (2.13) explicitly.⁵⁰³ Implicitly, this company would include John, the seven churches, the worshipping hosts in heaven, and the souls beneath the altar.⁵⁰⁴ Second, they are witnesses belonging to God, which would include their prophetic activity.⁵⁰⁵ Third, their sackcloth adornment makes it apparent that they have yet to overcome, as the sackcloth would contrast the white robes of the overcoming witnesses.⁵⁰⁶ The adornment also indicates that their prophetic proclamation includes mourning and a call to repentance.⁵⁰⁷ Fourth, the allusion to Zech. 4.6, 14, suggests that these witnesses are empowered by the Spirit.⁵⁰⁸ Fifth, the lampstand imagery in concert with the witness motif and prophetic assignment implies that the witnessing work of the church and Spirit empowered prophecy are intimately connected.⁵⁰⁹ Until now, prophecy has only been associated with the

⁴⁹⁹ Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, p. 261.

⁵⁰⁰ Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation*, pp. 179–80.

⁵⁰¹ David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16* (WBC 52B; Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), p. 586; Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 208; Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation*, p. 497; Flemming, ‘Revelation and the *Missio Dei*’, p.172.

⁵⁰² Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 273–74.

⁵⁰³ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 328.

⁵⁰⁴ Slater, *Revelation as Civil Disobedience*, p. 78.

⁵⁰⁵ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 328.

⁵⁰⁶ Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 163.

⁵⁰⁷ Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, pp. 590–91. Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 163; Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation* p. 172. Tony Siew, *The War Between the Two Beasts and the Two Witnesses: A Chiasmic Reading of Revelation 11:1–14:5* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), pp. 216–19, argues that the witnesses do not call the people to repentance, only mourn. However, it seems apparent that a closer reading of the context of the witnesses would favor both. Their activity holds a degree of proclamation and devotion; unlike Jonah who sought to escape his assignment to prophesy to Nineveh, for lack of devotion (love for the Ninevites). They prophesy in hopes of repentance, but dress in mourning, understanding that not all who hear will listen.

⁵⁰⁸ Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, pp. 113–14. Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation*, p. 163, proposes that these witnesses are not only empowered or commissioned by the Spirit, but that they belong to the Spirit as well.

⁵⁰⁹ Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 113, notes:

[John] must mean that they are lampstands bearing the lamps which are the seven Spirits, though since he has chosen to have only two witnesses, according to the requirement for valid witness, and therefore only two lampstands, he cannot refer to the seven Spirits without confusing the imagery intolerably. Nevertheless, the

words of the Apocalypse (1.3) and commission of John (10.11), but here marks an expanded association to the church.⁵¹⁰

John is informed that Gentiles ‘will trample the holy city under foot’ for a period of forty–two months, and while the prophetic activity of the two witnesses equals in duration, it is enumerated in days (1,260) rather than months.⁵¹¹ Perhaps the descriptive switch from broad (months) to specific (days) might suggest to the hearers that they are to pay closer attention to their witness than their persecution.⁵¹² While they witness, the two witnesses are given divine protection that recalls Jer. 5.14;⁵¹³ from their mouths come words of fire that consume and devour their enemies. The protection is necessary owing to the certainty of malevolence (11.5).⁵¹⁴ If the hearers understood the sanctuary and the lampstands metaphorically, they would likely discern the fire in the mouths of the witnesses as such, perhaps recalling that Jesus, the prototypical witness possessed power in his speech (cf. 1.16; 2.16).⁵¹⁵ The hearers would likely understand the authority given to the witnesses as evidence of Spirit empowered witness.

While the desires of the enemies of the witnesses are met with their own destruction by the mouths of the witnesses (11.5), the desires of the witnesses evince Spirit empowerment and divine authority.⁵¹⁶ The divine protection given them does not outlast their assignment;⁵¹⁷ the imminent completion of their witness (‘when they have completed their witness’ | ὅταν τελέσωσιν τὴν μαρτυρίαν αὐτῶν) may alert the hearers that trouble is soon to follow.⁵¹⁸ Such was the case of Jesus, after ‘having finished the work’ (τὸ ἔργον τελειώσας) that he was assigned (Jn. 17.4), a trial

implication is clear that the seven Spirits are the power of the church’s prophetic witness to the world, symbolized by the ministry of the two witnesses.

⁵¹⁰ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 328.

⁵¹¹ The hearers would not discern as much at this point in the narrative, but Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, p. 402, notes that ‘when John uses the figure 42 months he designates the apocalyptic period as the beast’s time—for trampling and rule (11:2; 13:5), whereas when he uses the figure 1260 days he designates it as the church’s time—for prophesying and protection (11:3; 12:6)’. See also, Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 328.

⁵¹² This idea is admittedly conjecture, but no clear reason is offered for the variation. Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, p. 264, while not making the same argument, does note the perspectival difference in months vs. days.

⁵¹³ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 331.

⁵¹⁴ *BDF* § 271. The conditional phrase which opens this verse, ‘εἴ τις αὐτοὺς θέλει ἀδικῆσαι’ (‘if anyone wishes to harm them’), suggests a reality of the matter. Accordingly, a truer meaning of the sentence, per its Greek structure, is not that it *may* happen, but *when* it happens.

⁵¹⁵ Ian Paul, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary* (Eckhard J. Schnabel [ed.]; TNTC 20; London: Inter–Varsity Press, 2018), p. 200; Flemming, ‘Divine Judgment’, p. 172.

⁵¹⁶ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 333.

⁵¹⁷ Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation*, p. 207.

⁵¹⁸ Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 211.

and crucifixion followed. Moreover, after his work on the cross had been completed (Jn. 19.28–30) and Jesus uttered the words, ‘it is completed (τετέλεσται), he bowed and gave his spirit.’⁵¹⁹

The completion of their witness raises two significant points in the Apocalypse. First is the introduction into the narrative of an antagonist – ‘the beast who comes up out of the abyss’ (τὸ θηρίον τὸ ἀναβαῖνον ἐκ τῆς ἀβύσσου ποιήσει μετ’ αὐτῶν πόλεμον). The articular construction (‘the beast’ vs ‘a beast’) suggests familiarity to the hearers; perhaps the mention of his origin (‘the abyss’) is evidence enough for the hearers to discern his identity.⁵²⁰ Second, while they would not likely be surprised at the beast making war with the witnesses, hearing that he will ‘overcome them’ (νικήσει αὐτούς) may be alarming, owing to the fact that overcoming has been used in favor of witnesses of Jesus in Johannine literature up till this point.⁵²¹ So far in the narrative, overcoming has been restricted to those who remain faithful to Jesus, but here the one in direct opposition is noted to overcome.⁵²²

As their bodies lie ignominiously in the street as a spectacle, the very ones whom John was to prophecy concerning (Rev. 10.11; people, tribes, tongues, and nations) look upon them for three and a half days, prohibiting their corpses to be buried. The prohibition evinces that while the witnesses had enemies, their prophetic work would have fallen on listening ears as well, as some were sympathetic to honoring their remains.⁵²³ Perhaps this humiliating span of time may bear an ironic association to the burial of Jesus, while the body of Jesus lay in a tomb, the bodies of his witnesses lay public for all to see.⁵²⁴ Unlike Jesus, their bodies are not anointed and preserved, nor their resurrection unseen. Their prophetic activity has caused their death to be celebrated by ‘those who dwell on the earth’ (οἱ κατοικοῦντες ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς), a term that the hearers have already encountered (3.10) representing those against the witness of Jesus. This celebration is owing to the fact that they ‘tormented’ (ἐβασάνισαν) them through their prophetic activity.

⁵¹⁹ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 333; Paul, *Revelation*, pp. 200–201.

⁵²⁰ Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 163; Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation*, p. 180.

⁵²¹ Cf. Jn. 16.33; 1 Jn. 2.13–14; 4.4; 5.4; Rev. 3.21; 5.5; 6.2. The only time that overcoming is not in favor of witnesses of Jesus is here in Rev. 11.7 and 13.7.

⁵²² Slater, *Revelation as Civil Disobedience*, p. 78.

⁵²³ Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 215, contends that they are believers in the city, but such does not have to be the case – they may simply be sympathetic to suffering and injustice. This would be no different than your modern philanthropist.

⁵²⁴ Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, pp. 617–18, notes the urgency in which Pilate wanted to have bodies buried. Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 165, suggests that the focus could be the time between death and resurrection. Though both have essentially the same time in mind, the focus taken off the person in ‘perceived’ power (Pilate/world) and placing it on the corpses seems to elevate the experience of the witnesses.

The shifting moniker from witnesses (11.3) to prophets (11.10) would be of no surprise to the hearers; for while designated ‘witnesses’ at the start of the narrative, their assignment is prophecy – the witnesses prophesy, and the witness is completed by prophets.⁵²⁵ The interchanging of terms may have a rhetorical aim of helping the hearers understand that the witness of the church is indeed a Spirit empowered act of prophecy.⁵²⁶ Their resurrections are as public as their death and humiliation, which suddenly turns festivity to fear. The fear may reveal that the enemies are cognizant of the fact that it is the witnesses who emerge victorious.⁵²⁷ Simultaneously, it may also be a reverent fear, resulting in the conversion of souls. If true conversion is the case, it would evince the missional effect of witness.⁵²⁸ The onlookers who ignored their prophetic call to repent will not turn a deaf ear to the loud voice beckoning them to ‘come up here’ (ἀνάβατε ὧδε). The ascension of the witnesses results in a great earthquake where a tenth of the great city is killed and causes those left alive to glorify God.

This interlude marks the second of three ‘woes’ (11.14). Its pronouncement is not followed by a third woe,⁵²⁹ but instead another worship scene where the hearers are reminded of the effects of faithful witness, as loud voices declare, ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign forever and ever’ (11.15). Spoken as a past reality, the declaration made in worship is a proleptic witness of what is to come (ἐγένετο | it has become).⁵³⁰ It would not be missed by the hearers that this hymn witnesses again to the Lordship of Christ, although the antecedent of the pronoun ‘he’ in the phrase and ‘he will reign’ (καὶ βασιλεύσει) is somewhat ambiguous,⁵³¹ but before the hearers have time to grapple with the theological implications, they encounter more worship from the elders. The elders fall prostrate in

⁵²⁵ Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 85.

⁵²⁶ Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation*, p. 175. See his n. 144 for debating views on distinguishing prophets from saints. Ultimately, Waddell is on target when he concludes that insofar as the Apocalypse is concerned, ‘Faithful members of the church are prophetic not because they deliver a charismatic word for the community but rather because they bear a prophetic witness of Jesus in the world’.

⁵²⁷ Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation*, p. 185.

⁵²⁸ Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 85; Flemming, ‘Divine Judgment’, p. 174.

⁵²⁹ Boesack, *Comfort and Protest*, p. 77.

⁵³⁰ Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, p. 161; Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), p. 563, notes that ‘The aorist indicative can be used to describe an event that is not yet past as though it were already completed. This usage is not at all common, though several exegetically significant texts involve possible proleptic aorists.’ See also, Archer, *I Was in the Spirit*, p. 212.

⁵³¹ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 345, notes that while ambiguous, the hymn sang here is rich with theological implications that might be appreciated by the hearers.

worship, per usual (4.10; 5.8, 14; 7.11), witnessing to the attributes, authority, and accomplishments of God (11.17–19):

We give You thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who is and who was, because You have taken Your great power and have begun to reign. And the nations were enraged, and Your rage came, and the time came for the dead to be judged, and to give reward to Your slaves—the prophets and the saints and those who fear Your name, the small and the great—and to destroy those who destroy the earth.

Forming an *inclusio* with the beginning of the chapter (11.1–2), Revelation 11 ends (11.19) with reference back to the sanctuary, with the witness narrative between.⁵³² At the opening of the chapter, the sanctuary was a place of demarcation, but the narrative of the two witnesses transforms the sanctuary to a place of demonstration, as the presence of God is there, and the theophanic sights and sounds that John encountered in chapters 4–5 emerge again.⁵³³

4.5.8 FAITHFUL WITNESS IN REVELATION 11

The two prophetic witnesses (11.3–13) communicate and demonstrate faithful witness. They communicate by way of their prophetic proclamations. While the content of their message is not provided in the narrative, the hearers are told that it is prophetic (11.3). The duration of one thousand, two hundred sixty–six days, as well as the garments they wear as they prophesy, both serve as a reminder that humanity has a limited timeline in which we play an active role in witness on earth. Unlike the white robes of faithful witnesses in heaven, their sackcloth communicates that their witness has not yet reached its point of completion. Their sackcloth may also communicate the gravity of their prophetic message.⁵³⁴

The divine dependency of witness is demonstrated in the description that these witnesses ‘are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth’ (11.4). Owing to the Lord having been only mentioned on the throne, their position before the Lord places them in the presence of the throne, where the Spirit is noted to be. It is conclusive, though already discerned, that their prophetic work is Spirit empowered. Their death (11.7) speaks to the suffering that may result in witness, and the extent to which suffering may go. The disregard for their dead bodies, and celebration of their torment (11.8–10) demonstrate the counter–cultural reception and

⁵³² Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 350.

⁵³³ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 350–51.

⁵³⁴ ‘σάκκος’, *TDNT*, 7, p. 63, ‘the σάκκοι of the witnesses probably signify their task of preaching and threatening punishment, just as the raiment of the Baptist (Mk. 1:6) may be regarded as a parabolic action which accompanied his preaching of repentance’.

effect of witness. Their resurrection (11.12) and punishment of their enemies (11.13) demonstrate the veracity of the promises made by the Faithful and True Witness of salvation and reward (cf. 2.10–11). Immediately following their vindication, the ultimate aim of faithful witness is revealed as loud voices in heaven celebrated the establishment of ‘the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ’, explicitly (11.15–18).⁵³⁵

4.5.9 REVELATION 12

Such a climactic ending to the narrative of the witnesses, with the song of the elders, might lead the hearers to expect a conclusion to John’s vision – a resounding ‘Amen!’, but instead, the vision shifts with the appearance of two signs (12.1–3).⁵³⁶ The hearers would likely notice the shift from ‘and I saw’ (καὶ εἶδον) to ‘there appeared’ (ᾤφθη).⁵³⁷ More than recounting what he was seeing and hearing, John introduced this scene in terms of signs (σημεῖον), welcoming the imagination of the hearers to situate themselves as active participants in the vision, drawing more attention to the objects of the vision. At such a term, the hearers might imagine two significant factors; first is the prophetic significance of what is to come.⁵³⁸ Second, they might discern a Christological significance, owing to the occurrences of σημεῖον (sign) in the FG having reference to divine and authoritative claims of Jesus (cf. Jn. 2.11, 18, 23; 3.2; 4.48, 54; 6.2, 14, 26, 30; 7.31; 9.16; 10.41; 11.47; 12.18, 37; 20.30). To discern these significances would require them to consider the implications of the signs over and above their descriptions alone.

The ‘great sign’ (σημεῖον μέγα) is that of an effulgent pregnant woman ‘clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet and on her head a crown of twelve stars’, crying out in labor. The other, ‘a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads were seven diadems’. The textual allusions to the sign of the pregnant woman might bring various maternal narratives to

⁵³⁵ Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon*, p. 255.

⁵³⁶ Reddish, *Revelation*, p. 229; Pierre Prigent, *L’Apocalypse de Saint Jean* (CNT 14; Geneve: Labor et Fides, 2000), p. 283, suggests that the vision in Revelation 11 continues through chapter 12. Although Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 352, does not make the same argument as Prigent for continuity, he agrees that there are literary markers that connect the vision of chapter 12 to that of chapter 11.

⁵³⁷ Piotr Blajer, ‘A Great Sign Appeared in the Sky. Audience–Oriented Criticism of Revelation 12:1–6’, *BAnn* 12.1 (2022), pp. 45–63 (50), understands the aorist passive ‘ᾤφθη’ (there appeared) to mean that the sign was visible to everyone. However, Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 225, may have a better view of John’s aim here, that the shift from ‘I saw’ to ‘there appeared’ moves John further into the background of the vision and the objects closer to the foreground.

⁵³⁸ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 353, notes the prophetic significance.

the mind of the hearers, Eve (Gen. 3.15) and the mother of Jesus (Isa. 9.6) in particular.⁵³⁹ As the vision unfolds, the hearers may discern that this woman represents a community of witnesses – the Church.⁵⁴⁰ What is made clear from the very beginning of this vision is that the woman and the dragon are at war.⁵⁴¹ The picture of the battle between the woman and the dragon reveals to the hearers the cosmic battle between witnesses of Jesus and powers of darkness.⁵⁴²

The dragon fails in its attempt to slay the child born to the woman. Instead, the woman ‘gave birth to a son, a male child’ (ἔτεκεν υἱὸν ἄρσεν) ‘who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron’ and is ‘caught up to God and to his throne’. Three things should come to mind immediately for the hearers. First, that John uses the term υἱὸν (son) to describe the child would inform their imagination that this child is Jesus, as this term is popular in Johannine literature, used almost exclusively in reference to Jesus.⁵⁴³ Second, the rapture of the son brings imagery of the Lamb clearer to the foreground (cf. 5.6). Third, the hearers would likely be reminded of the prophetic message to Thyatira (2.26–28) where overcomers (faithful witnesses) are promised authority over the nations, and to rule with a rod of iron ... ‘as I also have received from My Father’. At this point, the hearers can see that access to the throne comes only through faithful witness patterned after the Lamb.⁵⁴⁴

The fact that the woman ‘fled’ (ἔφυγεν) does not make her a weak bystander in the vision,⁵⁴⁵ rather it evidences her protection of the child. After the son is raptured to God and his throne, she

⁵³⁹ Not all agree with this interpretation. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, p. 316, for example, follows early scholars who argue for a mythical goddess. Edgar J. Bruns, ‘Contrasted Women of Apocalypse 12 and 17’, *CBQ* 26.4 (October 1964), pp. 459–63 (459), writes, ‘As the travailing mother of the Messiah she is the daughter of Zion (cf. Mi 4,10; 5,2), and as the mother of “the rest of her offspring who keep the commandments of God, and hold fast the testimony of Jesus” (Ap 12,17), she is the Church’. Farrar, *A Rebirth of Images*, p. 140, suggests that she is Eve, Rachel, and the church. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 625, notes allusions to Sara. For an engagement on these various views, see Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 225, who concludes that ‘It is unlikely that John has in mind an individual woman, historical or otherwise’.

⁵⁴⁰ Farrar, *A Rebirth of Images*, p. 140; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 625; Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 171.

⁵⁴¹ Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, p. 314; Roger D. Aus, ‘The Relevance of Isaiah 66 7 to Revelation 12 and 2 Thessalonians 1’ *ZNW* 67.3–4 (1976), pp. 252–68 (254), n. 10, suggests that the battle between the woman and the dragon constitutes the third ‘woe’ that the hearers have anticipated.

⁵⁴² Reddish, *Revelation*, p. 229.

⁵⁴³ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 358. The term is used 89 times in Johannine literature. In the FG, only a handful refer to someone other than Jesus (1.42; 4.5; 46–53; 6.71; 9.19–20; 13.2, 26; 17.12; 19.26; 21.15–17). However, in 1 John and 2 John, the term is used exclusively for Jesus.

⁵⁴⁴ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 361.

⁵⁴⁵ While some see her as a victim, (cf. Tina Pippin, ‘Eros and the End: Reading for Gender in the Apocalypse of John’, *Semeia* 59 (1992), pp. 193–210 (201), who presents her as a ‘double victim’), the narrative does not seem to present as much. Rather, she is a protector of the child, fleeing from the dragon.

flees to the wilderness to ‘a place prepared by God’, ‘in order that’ (ἵνα) she would be nourished for 1,260 days. It would not be missed by the hearers that this is the same duration of time when the two witnesses will prophecy.⁵⁴⁶ John draws the attention of the hearers to a battle in heaven between the dragon and his angels versus Michael and his angels – a war in which the dragon and his angels do not emerge victorious. Subsequent to their defeat, the dragon and his angels are cast down to earth, no longer having a place in heaven. The hearers are informed of what they may have already discerned – the dragon and Satan are one and the same.

A doxological pronouncement of the defeat of Satan is given by a loud, anonymous voice in heaven – ‘Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God, day and night’ (12.10). While the brothers (and sisters) stood accused in v. 10, they emerge victorious in v. 11. The redundancy in the Greek construction ‘καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐνίκησαν αὐτὸν’ (*lit.* ‘and they, they overcame him’), referring to the witnesses, suggests that John may be emphasizing the role that faithful witness plays in the ultimate battle against Satan and his army.⁵⁴⁷ The hearers have encountered the word ‘overcome’ on many occasions in the Apocalypse, but here in 12.11 is the first time that the overcoming of the witnesses is given an object – Satan.⁵⁴⁸

The pronouncement includes instrumental details about the overcoming that recalls earlier scenes from John’s vision. First, they overcame Satan ‘by the blood the Lamb’ (‘διὰ τὸ αἷμα τοῦ ἀρνίου’). The hearers would likely recall that the blood has ‘released us from our sins’ (1.5), ‘purchased people for God’ (5.9), and that the great multitude of witnesses in Revelation 7 had their robes washed in the blood of the Lamb (7.14). Second, another cause (‘διὰ’ | ‘on account of’) for their overcoming was ‘the word of their witness’ (‘τὸν λόγον τῆς μαρτυρίας αὐτῶν’) to the Lamb. It would hardly be missed that Satan is referred to as ‘the accuser’ ‘ὁ κατήγορ’. Such a term draws from courtroom imagery.⁵⁴⁹ It is thus fitting that witness would be a formidable defense against his accusations. It is through their faithful witness unto death that the victory of the Lamb is affirmed.⁵⁵⁰ The hearers may recall the prophetic activity of the two witnesses of Revelation 11. Moreover, the cost of their witness is reminiscent of John who is on Patmos for his witness (1.9);

⁵⁴⁶ Leithart, *Revelation*, p. 39.

⁵⁴⁷ Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 238; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 371.

⁵⁴⁸ Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 88.

⁵⁴⁹ See Boring, ‘Interpreting Revelation Satan Language’, in *Revelation*, p. 164–67.

⁵⁵⁰ Boesack, *Comfort and Protest*, p. 91; Blount, *Can I Get a Witness?* p. 137.

moreover, Jesus (1.5) and Antipas (3.14) who were both faithful witnesses who lost their life for their witness. Third, as ‘they did not love their life, even to death’ (‘οὐκ ἠγάπησαν τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτῶν ἄχρι θανάτου’), Johannine hearers would likely make strong connections to Jesus, faithful witness, and even death (cf. Jn 10.11–17; 1 Jn 3.16).⁵⁵¹

The voice continues, instructing the heavens and its occupants to rejoice, but pities (‘woe’ | οὐαί) the earth and sea since the devil ‘has come down to you’, although his time is short (12.12). Immediately after this declaration, John redirects the attention of the hearers back to the dragon, the woman, and the child. After being cast down to the earth, the dragon persecuted (ἐδίωξεν) the woman, making it apparent that the woe is directed to the community of believers.⁵⁵² This potent ‘woe’ would perhaps encourage the hearers to faithful witness, realizing that the persecution that Satan inflicts is merely an outlash in response to his ultimate demise.⁵⁵³ Whatever encouragement the hearers might find in knowing that Satan’s time is limited, would be magnified when they hear that wings are given to the woman, ‘in order that she could fly’ (ἵνα πέτηται εἰς) to the wilderness and be nourished ‘for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent’.

The ‘two wings of the great eagle’ (δύο πτέρυγες τοῦ ἀετοῦ τοῦ μεγάλου) which carry the woman, coupled with the passive verb πέτηται (‘she might fly’) echoes OT narratives (Exod. 19.4; Deut. 32.11–12),⁵⁵⁴ and may help the hearers to discern that the woman does not act on her own strength; rather, with these wings, it is God who carries her.⁵⁵⁵ While it is not explicitly stated as such, the hearers would likely discern that when the woman is flown ‘to her place’ (εἰς τὸν τόπον αὐτῆς) in the wilderness, this is the same place ‘prepared by God’ in 12.6. Though defeated, the serpent is unrelenting in his pursuit of the woman, having water like rivers come from his mouth ‘in order that she might be swept away by the flood’.

The waters coming ‘from his mouth’ (ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτῶν) would not be insignificant. So far in the narrative, the mouth has been mentioned only in relation to Jesus, John, and the two witnesses, in matters of judgement (1.16), war (2.16), rejection (3.16), and prophecy (10.9–10; 11.5). For the first time in the Apocalypse, the mouth of the antagonist is mentioned. If the mouth

⁵⁵¹ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 373.

⁵⁵² Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 374.

⁵⁵³ Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation*, p. 555.

⁵⁵⁴ Fee, *Revelation*, p. 176; Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation*, p. 232.

⁵⁵⁵ Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 240. Additionally, Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 376 notes, ‘The divine passive ἐδόθησαν (‘were given’) stands first in the Greek sentence followed by “to the woman”, underscoring the fact that her means of flight is divinely provided’.

of Jesus and his witnesses is representative of truthful testimony, the mouth of the serpent may represent deceit and falsehood.⁵⁵⁶ The hearers would hardly miss the OT narrative overtures.⁵⁵⁷ They may recall the Exodus narrative, where a decree was made from the mouth of Pharaoh, instructing that every Hebrew male child was to be thrown into the river (Exod. 1.22).

The limitation of Satan's power in his pursuit of the woman is magnified by John's second reference to his mouth – for the earth is presented as a strong ally of the woman, when 'the earth opened its mouth and drank up the river which the dragon poured out of his mouth' (12.16). It is hard to imagine what might be implied by the earth coming to the aid of the woman, but it could suggest that witnesses can be delivered by natural intervention, as much as supernatural/divine intervention. While pronouncements have been made of his demise (12.10–12), the dragon's fury is not satisfied. Enraged with the woman, he leaves her to war against the rest of her seed⁵⁵⁸ 'who keep the commandments of God and have the witness of Jesus' ('τῶν τηρούντων τὰς ἐντολὰς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἔχόντων τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ' (12.17). The καὶ here is likely exegetical – those who keep the commands are namely those who have the witness of Jesus.⁵⁵⁹ The dragon positions himself for war, taking his stand at the seashore (12.18).

4.5.10 FAITHFUL WITNESS IN REVELATION 12

The faithful witnesses of 12.11 demonstrate, verbally ('the *word* of their witness') and physically ('did not love their life, even unto death'), two realities. First, having *overcome* the accuser, they demonstrate that witness is not without opposition. Second, they demonstrate that death in witness is a victorious death. The witnesses with whom the dragon goes to make war (12.17) demonstrate how witness and works go together; they 'are keeping the commandments of God' ('τῶν τηρούντων τὰς ἐντολὰς τοῦ θεοῦ'), and in doing so, they 'possess the witness of Jesus' ('ἔχόντων τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ').

As for the human element of time, the hearers would certainly consider time as a factor when they encounter a woman 'about to give birth' (12.4) and then having given 'birth to a son' (12.5). Suffering is implied in her encounter with the dragon, as well as the faithful witnesses who 'did not love their life, even to death' (12.11). Unlike Pergamum who had one faithful witness whom

⁵⁵⁶ Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 241.

⁵⁵⁷ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 378.

⁵⁵⁸ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 380, observes that the mention of 'the rest of her seed' completes the evolution of the maternal picture of the woman – from Eve, to Israel, to Mary, now here, the Church.

⁵⁵⁹ Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 242.

Jesus claims as his own (Antipas, 2.13), the faithful witnesses of chapter 12 are not singular, but a community – ‘they overcame’ ... ‘their witness’ ... ‘they did not love their life’ (12.11).⁵⁶⁰

4.5.11 REVELATION 13

John redirects the attention of the hearers with the familiar ‘Καὶ εἶδον’ (and I saw), drawing their attention to a beast resembling a leopard, a bear, and a lion, coming forth from the sea with ten horns with crowns, and seven heads with blasphemous names upon them. This beast recalls three of the four beasts of Daniel 7, but instead of multiple beasts, John sees only one.⁵⁶¹ The beast receives ‘great authority’ (‘ἐξουσίαν μεγάλην’). Although this is the first time in the Apocalypse that authority has received qualification (great), the hearers would understand that the authority of Jesus and his overcoming witnesses is a greater authority, as it comes from God.⁵⁶² They may be reminded of Pilate’s boasting in his own authority in the FG (Jn 19.10), and Jesus’ response that his authority is subject to whatever God allows (Jn 19.11).

In the Apocalypse, witnesses who overcome are promised ‘authority over the nations’ (2.26), as Jesus had received from the Father (2.27). Prophetic, demonstrative authority was given to the two witnesses in Revelation 11 (cf. 11.3, 6), and the authority of Jesus was sung about in 12.10. John draws the hearers to lean in more – ‘Καὶ εἶδον’ (13.3). He notices that one of the beast’s heads appeared slain but healed. Owing to the authority the dragon gave to the beast, ‘the whole earth’ worshipped both the dragon and the beast, saying ‘Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?’. For the first time in the Apocalypse, someone other than God and the Lamb are worshipped. Perhaps, at this juncture, the hearers discern that they should take seriously their opponent; though the dragon and the beast have been overcome (12.11), they are still formidable opponents of the witnesses of Jesus.⁵⁶³ The mouth given to the beast opened ‘in blasphemies against God, to blaspheme His name and His tabernacle, that is, those who dwell in heaven’ (13.6). This statement may be difficult for the hearers to understand – who are those who dwell in heaven? Are the hearers to understand these heaven-dwellers to be angelic hosts?⁵⁶⁴ Are they faithful

⁵⁶⁰ No indication in the text is given to how great or small the community, but it is clearly more than one person.

⁵⁶¹ Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, p. 193; Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, p. 276.

⁵⁶² M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation* (Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching; Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1989), p. 160, alludes to this point, positing that ‘The beast is “allowed” (God the hidden sovereign!) to make war on the saints’.

⁵⁶³ Archer, *I Was in the Spirit*, p. 228, agrees, suggesting that this part of John’s vision might serve as a warning to the hearers to take their opponents seriously.

⁵⁶⁴ Such is the argument of Fee, *Revelation*, p. 182.

witnesses who have died, such as the martyred souls beneath the altar (6.9)?⁵⁶⁵ Might they understand them, metaphorically, to represent the people of God?⁵⁶⁶ Whoever these heaven-dwellers may represent, it appears that their opposition is in the form of word only (blasphemy).

The hearers might expect a response to this slander, instead they are met with a striking turn. The opposition is more than blasphemy. John records that ‘it was also given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them, and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him’ (13.7). As a result, ‘all who dwell upon the earth’ worship the beast (13.8), that is those whose names are not written in the book of life. This would likely bring confusion and grave concern to the hearers – how have the conquerors (12.11) become the conquered? Perhaps they might find comfort knowing that the power that the beast has ‘was given to him’ (‘ἔδόθη αὐτῷ’). They may discern that even when it seems like the beast is emerging victorious, his power and authority are still subject to the sovereignty of God (cf. 11.3–13).⁵⁶⁷

In the midst of this vision, John abruptly interjects a familiar phrase, ‘If anyone has an ear, let him hear’ (13.9). The hearers would certainly recall the prophetic messages to the seven churches where the Jesus speaks, by way of the Spirit. This recalled command seems to suggest that what is to be stated next is not of John, but of the Spirit, and as such would require pneumatic discernment.⁵⁶⁸ What comes next seems to offer clarity to the events of Rev. 11.3–13.8; ‘If anyone is destined for captivity, to captivity he goes; if anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed’. Although the promises to the witnesses stand (cf. Revelation 2–3), faithfulness does not mean assurance that the faithful witnesses will be kept from suffering and persecution.⁵⁶⁹ It is this understanding of God’s sovereignty over all that makes up the ‘perseverance and the faith of the saints’.⁵⁷⁰ Such an understanding is present in the death of the faithful witnesses who

⁵⁶⁵ Paul Henry Yeates, ‘Blaspheming Heaven: Revelation 13:4–8 and the Competition for Heaven in Roman Imperial Ideology and the Visions of John’, *NovT* 59.1 (2017), pp. 31–51 (35), posits that they are the same martyred souls in 6.9–11, and ‘martyred saints, like God himself, may still be blasphemed by the Beast but they are no longer subject to his war of persecution like the saints on earth’.

⁵⁶⁶ Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, p. 746, and Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 341, suggest as much. See also, Pattemore, *The People of God*, p. 168.

⁵⁶⁷ Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation*, p. 245.

⁵⁶⁸ Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 92; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 395; Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, p. 280.

⁵⁶⁹ Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 192.

⁵⁷⁰ David Seal, ‘The Reception and Delivery of the Oracle in Revelation 13:9–10’, *Scriptura* 119.1 (2020), pp. 1–13 (7), suggests that the concluding phrase ‘articulates a call for Christians to endure persecution, and is likely the seer’s own words rather than part of the divine message’. He adds (p. 9), ‘Given that the style of language of the oracle is different from that which precedes or follows it, the poetic form tends to indicate a change in speaker – God is now addressing the church’.

overcome in Rev. 12.11, who ‘did not love their life, even unto death’. Victory, for the faithful witness, comes not by retribution, but through suffering, even unto death.⁵⁷¹

John turns their attention, ‘Καὶ εἶδον’, to yet another beast – this one, with two horns and a voice like a dragon, was coming up from the earth (13.11). While the first beast from the sea blasphemed and warred, the land beast exacts control by way of deception and sorcery.⁵⁷² With the authority of the first beast, he forces those who dwell on the earth to worship the sea beast, deceiving them with great signs, even those reminiscent of the two witnesses (cf. 11.5)⁵⁷³ – inciting the people to make an image to the beast (13.13–14). Although he gives breath to the image, it would not be missed by the hearers that it was only because ‘it was given to him’ (‘ἐδόθη αὐτῷ’) the ability to do so. Although the beast changes, the same limited authority applies. The land beast demands that the image be worshipped – those who refuse are to be put to death. The seriousness of faithful witness and worship would not be missed by the hearers.⁵⁷⁴ More than a call to worship, the beast marks the right hand and forehead of his worshippers and prohibits any commerce void of this mark. Thus, the potential socio–economic consequences of faithful witness to the Lamb, reflected in worship, becomes more apparent to the hearers.

4.5.12 FAITHFUL WITNESS IN REVELATION 13

In chapter 13, it becomes more apparent to the hearers that their witness is in opposition to a formidable adversary. It is unlikely that they could hear John’s testimony of this vision, and not immediately be reminded of the Kingdom vision which awakened Daniel (cf. Daniel 7). The visions of Daniel 7 and Revelation 13 run almost parallel. If worship is an act of witness to the Lamb (cf. chs. 4–5), the hearers learn that there are witnesses *against* the Lamb, as demonstrated in their worship of the dragon (13.4). Time (forty–two months – 13.6), suffering (13.7), and community (13.7) all emerge in this chapter. For the first time since the prophetic messages, the hearers are explicitly instructed to listen (13.9), thus emphasizing the importance of pneumatically discerning what they have just witnessed in this vision.

The significance here is astounding in matters of the Spirit’s role in the activity of faithful witness. In Daniel’s vision, his distress moved him to inquire of one of the bystanders: ‘As for me,

⁵⁷¹ Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, p. 129.

⁵⁷² Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 91.

⁵⁷³ Archer, *I Was in the Spirit*, p. 231.

⁵⁷⁴ Archer, *I Was in the Spirit*, p. 232, suggests that the hearers might recall all who have been put to death thus far in the Apocalypse – realizing that ‘worship is about allegiance’.

Daniel, my spirit was distressed within me, and the visions of my head kept alarming me. I came near to one of those who were standing by and began seeking out from him the exact meaning of all this. So, he said it to me and made known to me the interpretation of these things' (Dan. 7.15–16). However, the Spirit leaves no room for anxiety on account of interpretation here, for without pause, the hearers encounter the familiar words, 'whoever has ears to hear, let them hear' (13.9). It is by way of the Spirit that both the revelation and interpretation of this vision is received.

Daniel's vision serving as an interpretive filter through which to hear John's pneumatic encounter, the hearers may still hold a degree of alarm in their heart, such as Daniel did (cf. Dan. 7.28). Alarm notwithstanding, they would likely possess a degree of anticipation, as Daniel was informed of the outcome of all that he saw: 'Then the reign, the dominion, and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him' (Dan. 7.27). Here in the Apocalypse, an expectancy would exist in the hearts and minds of the hearers to see 'the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ' (Rev. 11.15) fully established, even in spite of the overcoming of the dragon and the beast that they have just encountered here.

4.5.13 REVELATION 14

As the hearers contemplate the grave implications of faithful witness, John once again interrupts their pondering with his familiar 'and I saw'. This time, he adds 'and behold' ('Καὶ εἶδον, καὶ ἰδοὺ') as if to emphasize his beckoning them to look away from the triumph of the dragon and his beasts, to behold the Lamb once again (14.1). In contrast to the worshippers of the beast who had his mark on their hands and foreheads, the hearers are reminded of the 144,000 (7.4–9) having the name of the Lamb and of the Father written on their foreheads. The name of both the Lamb and the Father is significant for two reasons. First, the worshippers of the beast bear only his mark, not that of the dragon from which he received his authority. On the contrary, the worshippers of the Lamb, (his witnesses) receive the seal of both Jesus *and* the Father. Second, this fourth mention of the Father in the Apocalypse emphasizes to the hearers the intimacy between Jesus and the Father, which ultimately extends to faithful witnesses;⁵⁷⁵ the beasts, worshippers of the beast, and the dragon do not share such intimacy.⁵⁷⁶

⁵⁷⁵ Archer, *I Was in the Spirit*, p. 233.

⁵⁷⁶ A close reading would show that the dragon stands on the seashore (13.1) and gives authority to the beast (13.2), but he is not mentioned in the marking of the heads or hands.

The 144,000 are led into worship before the throne, the creatures, and the elders, by a loud, thunderous voice, singing a song that even John could not articulate. While he cannot utter the words which they sing, their identity is no mystery. John notes:

These are the ones who are not defiled with women, for they are virgins.

These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes.

These have been purchased from among men as first fruits to God and to the Lamb.

And no lie was found in their mouth; they are blameless. (14.4–5)

The chiasmatically structured description ('These are ...') of the witnesses reveals more for the hearers than the initial vision (7.4–8).⁵⁷⁷ Central to the description is the vocation of these witnesses, 'these are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever he goes, (‘οὔτοι οἱ ἀκολουθοῦντες τῷ ἀρνίῳ ὅπου ἂν ὑπάγῃ’). The hearers would not miss the significance of such a vocation, as it was an important theme in the FG.⁵⁷⁸ Jesus calls the disciples to follow (Jn 1.43), his sheep follow because they know his voice (10.4–5, 27), those who serve him are exhorted to follow him (12.26), Simon Peter is promised that he can follow in a future time (13.36), and after the resurrection Peter is invited to 'Follow me' (21.19, 22). Based on an understanding of ἀκολουθέω (follow) in the FG,⁵⁷⁹ the hearers would understand these worshipping witnesses to be disciples, just as Antipas, the faithful witness (2.13), had followed the Lamb unto death. Additionally, the identification of these witnesses, and their incommunicable song suggests two significant things regarding worship. First, while John is 'in the Spirit' on Patmos, even his pneumatic state does not make him privy to

⁵⁷⁷ David E. Aune, 'Following the Lamb: Discipleship in the Apocalypse', in Richard N. Longenecker (ed.), *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), p. 271, suggests that the description is meant to provide an understanding of John's view of discipleship, offering a metaphorical view of 144,000. See also Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 424–25, who makes a case for the identity of this company not being a literal group of virgin males. His suggestion that they may be representative of a body of witnesses, male and female, who are who are readying themselves for battle is convincing. He suggests that the virgin reference may symbolize OT war regulations (cf. Deut. 23.9–10; 1 Sam. 21.5; 2 Sam. 11.11). Although he ultimately warns at attempts to definitively interpret John's metaphorical symbols in the Apocalypse, Mitchell G. Reddish, 'Followers of the Lamb: Role Models in the Book of Revelation', *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 40.1 (2013), pp. 67–79 (74), views this group not simply as witness, but as martyred witnesses in particular.

⁵⁷⁸ Aune, 'Following the Lamb', pp. 275–76, notes the frequency of the verb 'follow', ἀκολουθέω in the NT, particularly the Gospels. Moreover, he observes that the term speaks figuratively about discipleship.

⁵⁷⁹ Moisés Silva, ἀκολουθέω, *NIDNTTE*, I, p. 206, notes the significance of this term in the FG, especially as it relates to Jesus. Moreover, Kittel, ἀκολουθέω, *TDNT*, I, pp. 213–15, explores the use of the term in the NT, and writes that the term was exclusively connected to following after Jesus as a disciple, in the Gospels. Further, Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 426, comments that 'the language of "following" is, in the Johannine community, discipleship language *par excellence*'; moreover, he suggests that the discipleship journey is enveloped in this command.

this special song. Second, it is only before the throne that they sing this unknown song, suggesting that the fullest expression of worship by witnesses is not revealed here on earth.⁵⁸⁰

John directs their attention, with yet another ‘Καὶ εἶδον’ (14.6), to a series of three angelic visions. The first proclaims the gospel to the residents of the earth, exhorting them to worship God. When the hearers encounter the words ‘residents of the earth’ (‘τοὺς καθημένους ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς’) they may discern these recipients to be unbelievers.⁵⁸¹ Such an understanding may also be on account of the angel’s address ‘to every nation and tribe and tongue and people’ – the same group that they just encountered worshipping the beast (13.7–8).⁵⁸² The angel proclaims that it is God ‘who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters’. The hearers would hardly miss the irony – the places where the dragon and his beasts stood (land and sea), belong to God. At the evangelistic proclamation made to the unbelieving community, the hearers may ponder the far-reaching love of God. They may recall the same love shown to ‘Jezebel’ in Thyatira (2.21), who was given time to repent of her sexual immorality and false teaching.

The second pronounces judgement on ‘Babylon the Great, she who has made all the nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her sexual immorality’. The third angel offers a warning – those who worship the beast and take his mark will experience the full wrath of God and face eternal torment. The call for pneumatic discernment in 13.10 reappears and is expanded upon – ‘Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus’ (14.12). Suddenly (14.13), an unidentified voice from heaven commands John, ‘Write, “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on ... so that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them”’. The hearers may very well discern that this voice is Jesus, the Faithful Witness, as he has instructed in what to write (1.19; 2.1, 8, 12, 18; 3.1, 7, 14) and what not to write (10.4).⁵⁸³

John’s attention shifts, ‘Καὶ εἶδον’, to two harvest visions, beginning with ‘one like a son of man’ sitting on a cloud – crowned and holding a sickle in his hand (14.14). The one sitting on the cloud does not speak; instead, another angel cries out in a loud voice – ‘Put in Your sickle and reap, for the hour to reap has come, because the harvest of the earth is ripe’. With a swing of his

⁵⁸⁰ Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, pp. 267–68.

⁵⁸¹ Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, p. 193. Earlier in the narrative (3.10, 6.10, and 8.13), unbelievers are noted as those who ‘dwell’ (κατοικέω) in the earth. Though there is a change in the Greek (καθημένους | ‘reside’), the context suggests that the same people would be in view, as they would be the ones in need of the gospel. Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 272, suggests that John is ‘massaging the presentation’ of the verb here, in order ‘to bring them to mind while simultaneously softening his hearers’ and readers’ impression of them’.

⁵⁸² Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation*, p. 620.

⁵⁸³ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 439.

sickle, the one sitting on the cloud reaps the harvest of the earth. Another angel comes from the sanctuary in heaven wielding a sharp sickle and is commanded by another to use it to ‘gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, because her grapes are ripe’ (14.18). The clusters are gathered, and pressed unto the point where blood comes from the winepress. Given the bloody nature of this gathering, and their being thrown into ‘the great winepress of the wrath of God’ (14.19), the hearers would likely understand these clusters to represent the nations – those opposed to the Lamb, but worshippers of the dragon and the beast.

4.5.14 FAITHFUL WITNESS IN REVELATION 14

In Rev. 14.1–5, John encounters a group of witnesses, 144,000 of them. John offers a brief description of them in vv. 4–5: ‘These are the ones who are not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These have been purchased from among men as first fruits to God and to the Lamb. And no lie was found in their mouth; they are blameless’. Their virginity is likely representative of their fidelity, but not in the sexual sense; rather, it speaks metaphorically of their faithful witness.⁵⁸⁴ Going beyond metaphor, John further describes them as being followers of the Lamb ‘wherever he goes’. As the Lamb is Jesus, the Faithful Witness, *par excellence*, these witnesses are then identified as committed disciples, who have been faithful in their witness to the point of death, thus qualifying them as *faithful* witnesses.

The one hundred forty–four thousand faithful witnesses who follow the Lamb (14.3–5) demonstrate the trustworthiness of the witness of Jesus, in that they are branded with the name of the Father (cf. 3.12), as promised to overcomers. The unknown song which they sing speaks to the unique experience that humanity has in their participation in witness, compared to heavenly beings who witness by observation. That they ‘follow the Lamb wherever he goes’ demonstrates the didactic nature of witness, and its demand for discipleship. Having no lie in their mouth, they reveal the consistency between declaration and demonstration that faithful witness demands.

The hearers encounter the second pronounced reward for faithful witness in 14.13, ‘Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on ... so that they may rest from their labors, for their works follow with them’. Though it emerges late in the Apocalypse, its placement is no insignificant matter, situated after the account of the victorious beast. The witnesses who were promised that they would be blessed if they ‘overcome’ (that is, hear and heed the words of the

⁵⁸⁴ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 425.

prophecy), encounter the beast making war with the saints and overcoming them (13.7). The text seems to imply that the reward applies only to the witnesses who die from the point in time of the proclamation and beyond. However, ‘from now on’ (‘ἀπ’ ἄρτι’) may not suggest an immediate starting point, but it could refer to an immediate history – that is, those who recently died, as well as the death of any future witnesses.⁵⁸⁵ The reward is eschatological; an eternal end to their ‘labor’ (‘κόπος’), which may be better understood as an end to their distress and difficulty.⁵⁸⁶

4.5.15 REVELATION 15–16

The gathering and pressing of the clusters may lead the hearers to believe that they have come to the end of John’s vision, but with a repeated ‘Καὶ εἶδον’, he turns their attention to another scene. More than a scene, he encounters ‘another sign in heaven’, that is, seven angels which will complete the wrath of God (15.1). Before expounding on the angelic scene, John interjects yet another ‘Καὶ εἶδον’, turning the attention of the hearers to a crowd of faithful witnesses, ‘those who have overcome the beast and his image and the number of his name’, standing on what appeared as a sea of glass mixed with fire. Having harps in hand, the witnesses on the glassy sea sing a song (15.3):

Great and marvelous are your works, O Lord God, the Almighty;
Righteous and true are your ways, King of the Nations!
Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name?
For you are holy.
For all the nations will come and worship before you,
For your righteous acts have been revealed.

Owing to the interpretive options of ‘καὶ’ (‘and’),⁵⁸⁷ when the hearers encounter the words ‘the song of Moses, the slave of God, *and* the song of the Lamb’, they may first imagine two songs; one that recalls the OT hymn, attributed to Moses and sang by the children of Israel after their exodus from Egypt (Exod. 15.1–18), and another song attributed to the Lamb (cf. Rev. 12.11).⁵⁸⁸

⁵⁸⁵ ‘ἄρτι’, *BDAG*, p. 136.

⁵⁸⁶ ‘κόπος’, *BDAG*, p. 558.

⁵⁸⁷ ‘καί’, *LSJ*, pp. 857–58. The ‘and’ could refer to two objects separately, or two objects collectively. Rudolph Scharneck, ‘The Song of Moses Which Is Not (Also) the Song of the Lamb: An Investigation into the Number of Songs at Play in Rev. 15’, *JECH* 9.2, (2019), pp. 59–73 (61–62), examines the interpretive weight of καί, here in this passage, in contemporary scholarship.

⁵⁸⁸ Martin Pohlmann, ‘The Victory Song of Moses in Christological Perspective Within the Apocalypse of John’, *Conspetus* 14.9, (September 2012), pp. 133–52 (134), finds problems with this view as the song recorded in Revelation 15 is much shorter than that of Exodus 15. Scharneck, ‘The Song of Moses’ pp. 69–70, explains this theory, which does not find popular support, that there are two songs. Owing to its familiarity to the hearers, the first song is mentioned but not recorded. The second song ‘composed by the Lamb’ is the song recorded in Revelation 15. He also

However, owing to significant overtures,⁵⁸⁹ discerning hearers might understand John to mean one newly composed song that draws from both the OT victory hymn in Exodus, and the NT victory of the Lamb in the Apocalypse.⁵⁹⁰

The song is significant, for three reasons. First, this song draws explicitly on redemptive history, displaying the ‘*Heilsgeschichte* of God’.⁵⁹¹ While the worship thus far in the Apocalypse may imply the mighty works of God throughout history, it is not until the witnesses/overcomers sing around the glassy sea that redemptive history is drawn into the hymn, explicitly.⁵⁹² Perhaps standing around the glassy sea, in the presence of God, ‘the one who is and who was and who is to come’ (1.4), their imagination was beckoned to recall Israel before the Red Sea, thus inspiring a song unto the Lord. Now, through their worship, they witness to his unchanging holiness in concert with his redemptive work throughout history.⁵⁹³ Such a song invokes the imagination to

presents a third and even less supported theory (pp. 66–67) that suggests three different songs – two well-known songs (of Moses and about the Lamb) that are not recorded, and the recorded song of Revelation 15 to be the third. After exploring this third option, Scharneck notes some of the problems with this view.

⁵⁸⁹ Both songs are declarative in regard to the greatness of God and interrogative in regard to the enemies of God. Steve Moyise, ‘Singing the Song of Moses and the Lamb: John’s Dialogical Use of Scripture’, *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 42.2 (2004), pp. 347–60 (354), suggests that here, John is juxtaposing Moses and the Lamb just as he juxtaposes the Lion and the Lamb in Revelation 5. This juxtaposition is not one of replacement, but ‘a dialogical use of Scripture, which brings two or more texts together in order that they might mutually illuminate one another’. Pohlmann, ‘The Victory Song of Moses’, p. 137, suggests, ‘The Revelation 15 song takes the essence of the Exodus 15 song and re-interprets it in terms of the Christian Church being led in victory by the “Lamb” of God’.

⁵⁹⁰ Most scholars seem to take the position of one combined song, although some arrive at the same conclusion for different reasons. Proponents of one song include: Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 385, who raises an argument for the expegetical use of καί; Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, p. 297, and Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 99 says that this recorded song is ‘an interpretation of the song of Moses’; Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 135, suggests that there is no literary connection to either song attributed to Moses (Exodus 15 and 32), but that the song represents an amalgamation of OT motifs; Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 287, suggests that instead of appealing to a single text, John has, while calling upon the master image of Moses’ song and all that it implies about God’s majestic identity and judging behavior, based his new song upon a broad cross-section of OT texts that heralds a consensus about God’s almighty and salvific stature. Fee, *Revelation*, p. 212, calls it ‘a hymnic commentary on Exodus 15:1–10, which extols the great and wonderful nature of God’s works and the justice and truth of God’s ways’. See also Archer, ‘*I Was in the Spirit*’, p. 241.

⁵⁹¹ So, Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 386, ‘The saints declare the righteous and redemptive activity of the Lord, starting from the time of the covenant with Moses, and culminating in the death and exaltation of the Lamb’. According to Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), p. 16, ‘the distinctive feature of *Heilsgeschichte* lay [sic] in its traditio-historical trajectory which spanned both testaments’. Further, he adds, ‘The great strength of an appeal to *Heilsgeschichte* lies in its concern to deal seriously with the particularity and the dynamic movement of history as an essential feature of Biblical Theology’. Pohlmann, ‘The Victory Song of Moses’, p. 135, says that is a theological term which ‘refers to the combined past and present history of humanity as interpreted in the light of an anticipated salvation’.

⁵⁹² By explicitly, I mean to say that the composition and/or singing of the song makes explicit reference to God’s work of redemption (for Israel via Moses) in history.

⁵⁹³ Perhaps this is what leads Jan A du Rand, ‘The song of the Lamb because of the victory of the Lamb’, *Neot* 29.2 (1995), pp. 203–10 (209), to call these witnesses ‘the people of the new exodus’. See also Slater, *Revelation as Civil Disobedience*, p. 60.

consider the liberating works of God in the past while simultaneously, perhaps prophetically, anticipating what he may yet do on behalf of his people.⁵⁹⁴

Second, this song presents a question, ‘Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name?’ The question, though rhetorical, introduces profound implications of faithful witness in their worship, as it reveals their perspective of the beast worshippers (who will not fear?), and their expected outcome (... and not glorify your name?).⁵⁹⁵ The question would likely cause the hearers to recall the question that the beast worshippers raised – ‘Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?’ (13.4). Moreover, the question would certainly remind the hearers of the command, which was given by the angel after proclaiming the gospel message, ‘Fear God, and give Him glory’ (14.7). This question may be a response to the worshippers of the beast, in light of the proclamation of the gospel, and the response which it demands.⁵⁹⁶ The question also anticipates what the hymn declares – God’s great and marvelous works.

Third, in this hymn, God is referred to as ‘ὅσιος’ (‘holy’), compared to elsewhere in the Apocalypse where the term ἅγιος (‘holy’) is used (4.8; 6.10).⁵⁹⁷ More than ‘ὅσιος’, the worshippers here proclaim him to be ‘μόνος ὅσιος’ (‘only holy’). The qualifying term, μόνος (only), appearing only here in the Apocalypse may serve as an intentional witness to the incomparable worthiness of God – much more than that of the beast (13.4). They conclude their song with a triplicate refrain of ‘ὅτι’ (‘because/for’) phrases: ‘you are holy’, ‘all the nations will come and worship before you’, and ‘your righteous acts have been revealed’, in justification of their rhetorical claims.⁵⁹⁸

At the conclusion of this worship, another scene is interposed by John’s ‘εἶδον’. The hearers’ attention is directed toward ‘the sanctuary of the tabernacle of witness’ in heaven, where the seven angels with plagues exit, robed in clean, bright linen and golden sashes on their chest. Each are

⁵⁹⁴ Songs of this type are familiar in the African American community. Blount, *Can I Get a Witness?* p. 132, Kindle, describes the worship in the Apocalypse from an African American cultural perspective, that ‘Like rap, Revelation is a dangerous blend of memorable music and recalcitrant rhetoric. But, like the spirituals, Revelation never gives up hope. Its liturgical hymns witness to the promise that God is relieving Rome of its historical command right now’ (cf. 15.3-4).

⁵⁹⁵ Boesack, *Comfort and Protest*, p. 109, likens this rhetorical question to the joy of children citing a riddle to which they already know the answer. Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 455, suggests that the lyrics, with their OT overtures, ‘underscore the fact that God’s activities throughout the Apocalypse have been designed to bring unrepentant humankind to repentance and true worship’.

⁵⁹⁶ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 458.

⁵⁹⁷ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 459.

⁵⁹⁸ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 459.

given golden bowls full of God’s wrath. Before John tells of what the angels do with the bowls, he shares a remarkable scene of the glory of God filling the sanctuary (15.8).

Suddenly, John redirects the imagination of the hearers (16.1), not by what he sees (Καὶ εἶδον), but by what he hears (‘Καὶ ἤκουσα’ | ‘and I heard’). The call to attention is modified, but it is likely that the effect would be equal. He hears a voice instructing the angels to pour out the wrath from the bowls upon the earth. Just as the song of Rev. 15.3–4 is reminiscent of the exodus of Israel from Egypt, the bowls poured out recall the plagues, at least in part.⁵⁹⁹ One by one, the angels heed the command of the voice. The first bowl maligned those with the mark who worshipped the image of the beast (16.2). The second killed every living thing in the sea (16.3). The third turned springs and rivers to blood (16.4).

While the hearers might anticipate a scene of suffering and/or death to follow the outpouring of the third bowl, John alerts them to a change with another ‘Καὶ ἤκουσα’. Instead of a lament, or dirge, the angel of the water echoes the worship of the faithful witnesses around the sea (15.3–4):

Righteous are you, who is and who was, O Holy One,
for you judged these things;
for blood of saints and prophets, they poured out
and blood, to them, you have given to drink
(for) they are worthy (Rev. 16.5b–6)

The faithful witnesses around the sea witness to the character and the works of God, even the response that his ‘righteous acts’ demand. Here, the angel witnesses to the nature of God.⁶⁰⁰ The angel makes it clear (‘for these things’ | ‘ὅτι ταῦτα’), the wrath poured out is God’s judgment on the acts of the antagonists of his faithful witnesses.⁶⁰¹ The mention of the poured–out blood of the saints may cause the hearers to consider the potential cost of faithful witness.⁶⁰² This costly endeavor has already been evident in the Apocalypse through Jesus (1.5), Antipas (2.13), the souls under the altar (6.10), the two prophetic witnesses (11.7–12), the ones who overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their witness (12.11), those who would not worship the image of the

⁵⁹⁹ Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation*, p. 653; Ha Young Son, ‘The Exodus Theme in the Bowl Judgments in Revelation 16: A Study of Patterns in Old Testament Usages in Revelation’, *ATJ* 53 (October 2022), pp. 9–62 (10).

⁶⁰⁰ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 470.

⁶⁰¹ Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 297.

⁶⁰² Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 472, suggests that ‘reference to saints and prophets would perhaps be taken as a reference to the people of God as a whole and the prophetic witness to which they are called’. See also Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, pp. 227–28.

beast (13.10, 15), the 144,000 who follow the Lamb (14.4), and those who have overcome the beast, his image, and number of his name (15.2–4).⁶⁰³

The irony in the refrain of this hymnic declaration would be difficult to miss (16.6) – the angel declares ‘ἄξιοί εἰσιν’ (‘they are worthy’). While the faithful witnesses in Sardis who had not stained their robes were found to be worthy (3.4) to walk with Jesus, the one whose blood was poured out (1.5), the ones who pour out that blood are worthy to drink it.⁶⁰⁴ John then hears a reiteration of the angel’s declaration from the altar – ‘Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments’ (16.7). The hearers would not likely take this literally as if the altar were given a voice; rather, it is apparent from the declaration that the voice is from one singular, or collective voice of martyred souls, recalling the cry of the souls beneath the altar in 6.9–11.⁶⁰⁵ The hearers would also discern, pneumatically, that the pouring out of the bowls of wrath was, in part, what the souls were to wait for.

The outpouring of the bowls of wrath continues with the fourth angel who scorches men with fire as his bowl is poured out on the sun, prompting their blasphemies against the name of God (16.8–9). The bowl of the fifth angel was poured out on the throne of the beast, inciting darkness and pain over his kingdom, resulting in the same response of the people (16.10–11). When the hearers learn that those who blaspheme ‘did not repent so as to give Him glory’ three things may come to mind.

First, they may be reminded of the occasions that the issue of repentance is raised in the prophetic messages to the churches. The witnesses in the church at Ephesus are encouraged to repent, lest their lampstand be removed (2.5). Those in Pergamum are warned that a failure to repent would result in a swift return and war with the sword of the mouth of Jesus (2.16). In Thyatira, Jezebel had been given time to repent, but refused (2.21), and those who are complicit in her immorality are warned to repent or thrown on a bed of sickness along with her. Witnesses in Sardis are exhorted to repent and wake up, else Jesus will come as a thief (3.3). In the church at

⁶⁰³ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 472.

⁶⁰⁴ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 473.

⁶⁰⁵ Such a reading considered ‘τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου’ an ablative genitive, which Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics*, p. 107, calls a ‘Genitive of Separation [out of, away from, from]’. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 295, suggests personification. Pattemore, *The People of God*, p. 100 observes that the contents of the speech serve to identify that the martyred souls of 6.9–11 are doing the speaking. See also Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 473, who suggests that it should be read ‘one from the altar’. Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation*, pp. 279–80, reads it as the altar is speaking. Regardless of how the source is interpreted, scholars seem to agree that this declaration recalls Rev. 6.9–11.

Laodicea, witnesses are encouraged to repent in response to Jesus' discipline, but more – to do so zealously (3.19).

Second, they might recall the opportunity for repentance for two-thirds of humankind who had been spared from the plagues poured out on the earth when the four angels were released (9.19–20). The scene here would be strikingly familiar.

Third, and perhaps front of mind, they would recall the inquisition in the song of Moses and the Lamb, 'Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name?' (15.4). Though the question is raised rhetorically, the rebellion of the ones who blaspheme makes it evident to the hearers that while the opportunity to become witnesses is universal, repentance will not be forced upon anyone.

The bowl of the sixth angel dries up the great river, Euphrates, preparing the way for the kings from the east (16.12). John redirects the attention of the hearers ('Καὶ εἶδον') to the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet, where demonic spirits, like frogs, come forth (16.12–14). The spirits go about performing signs that draw the kings of the world together 'for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty' (16.14). Amid this scene, where it seems as if the kingdom of the dragon, his beast, and false prophet are gaining strength and power, a word from Jesus is uttered, as if to eclipse the scene. The prophetic declaration is not prompted by John, that is no 'Καὶ ἤκουσα' precedes it, but perhaps the absence of a prompting from John gives the hearers all the more reason to pay attention.

In the absence of a prompting from John, the command to 'behold' ('Ἴδου') is not missed – 'Behold, I am coming like a thief' (16.15a). These words would not fall on undiscerning ears. The hearers would likely discern the convergence of several of the prophetic messages.⁶⁰⁶ The notion of Jesus' coming has been raised in the prologue and on numerous occasions in the prophetic messages to the churches (1.7; 2.5, 16, 25; 3.3, 11, 20). Of all these mentions, first to mind would likely be the message to the witnesses in the church at Sardis (3.3), where Jesus warns, 'I will come as a thief'.

The suddenness of his appearance may sound threatening on first hearing, but the beatitude which follows suggests otherwise.⁶⁰⁷ Jesus continues, 'μακάριος ὁ' ('Blessed is the one ...'). This,

⁶⁰⁶ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 483–84.

⁶⁰⁷ It is fitting that Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 483, considers 'ἔρχομαι' ('I am coming') not necessarily as a threat here, but as a promise. Such a view does not rob the coming of the punitive results of those who blaspheme, but the context here does not seem to have such a group in mind, over witnesses.

the third beatitude of the Apocalypse, offers both a promise and a mandate to watchfulness.⁶⁰⁸ The first beatitude (1.3) is promised the one who hears and obeys the words of the prophecy, the second (14.13) is promised to those who die in the Lord. Here, the third beatitude is promised to the ones ‘who stay awake and keeps one’s garments, so that one will not walk about naked, and they will not see their shame’ (16.15b). This promised blessing recalls the prophetic message to the witnesses of the church at Sardis, regarding watchfulness and the keeping of their garments; and the nakedness and shame recalls the message to the witnesses of the church at Laodicea (3.17–18).⁶⁰⁹ The hearers would discern both the weightiness and the hope of faithful witness; thus far, these beatitudes suggest that the reward of faithful witness demands at least three things: first, the adherence to prophetic instruction (1.3); second, commitment to witness, even unto death (14.13); and third, diligent watchfulness (16.15).

The scene resumes with the kings gathered ‘to the place which in Hebrew is called Har–Magedon’ (16.16). As the seventh angel pours his bowl over the air, a loud voice from the throne in the sanctuary pronounces, ‘It is complete!’ The pronouncement ushers in theophanic sights and sounds reminiscent of John’s first encounter in heaven, but John notes a distinction; these sights and sounds are ‘such as there had not been since man came to be upon the earth, so great an earthquake was it, and so mighty’ (16.18). The wake of the pouring out of the seven bowls of wrath is nothing short of devastating, yet still, they blaspheme God (16.19–21).

4.5.16 FAITHFUL WITNESS IN REVELATION 15–16

The song sung by the faithful witnesses around the glassy sea (15.2–4) offers great example of faithful witness in worship. No great description is given of the witnesses, other than their overcoming. Given that the overcomers of 12.11 are said to have overcome owing to their witness, the hearers may discern that these too have overcome for their witness. Their song is demonstrative, as it is sung by those who have had their witness tried and proven through suffering, evident in that fact that they ‘have overcome the beast, and his image, and the number of his name’ (15.2). These faithful witness worship God ‘in Spirit and in Truth’ (cf. Jn 4.23–24). With their song, they prophetically ‘characterize the events depicted in the previous chapters in wholly positive terms, but to associate these acts of God within a much larger trajectory of history of

⁶⁰⁸ Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 234; Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 305.

⁶⁰⁹ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 484.

God's punishments and salvific work characterized in similar terms'.⁶¹⁰ Their song helps to bring theological and soteriological clarity to the suffering that John has witnessed 'in the Spirit'.⁶¹¹ Their following, witnessing, and singing is all fueled by the Spirit.⁶¹² On the backdrop of chaos and calamity, they sing of the character of God; the acts of the one who rules the nations are righteous.

The third beatitude comes on the heels of a warning, 'Behold, I am coming like a thief' (16.15). The reward is given to witnesses who live with an alert sense of readiness. 'Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps one's garments, so that they will not walk about naked, and they will not see their shame'. The keeping of their garments ('ἡρῶν τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτοῦ') is not a possessive keeping, but a protective or preservative keeping.⁶¹³ This reward recalls the witnesses in Sardis who had not defiled their garments and were found worthy, and the promises made to the overcomers (3.4). The reward also recalls the message to the church at Laodicea who was discerned to be 'wretched and pitiable and poor and blind and naked' (3.17). The 'shame' ('ἀσχημοσύνη') that is avoided because of their alertness is a term that suggests a public, earthly experience.⁶¹⁴ What this connection suggests is that the rewards for faithful witness are not all eschatologically reserved.

4.6 REVELATION 17.1–21.8 'IN THE SPIRIT' IN A WILDERNESS

4.6.1 REVELATION 17–18

After the pouring out of the seven bowls is completed, bringing the second and most expansive section of John's pneumatic experience to a close, he is beckoned by one of the angels to 'come here' ('δεῦρο') in order that he might witness the judgement of 'the great harlot'. She is described as one who sits on many waters, commits sexual immorality with the kings of the earth, and intoxicates 'those who dwell on the earth' with 'the wine of her sexual immorality' (17.1–2). Immediately following the invitation, John is carried away 'ἐν πνεύματι', to a wilderness (17.3). Although the second 'ἐν πνεύματι' experience was expansive, filled with numerous vision cycles

⁶¹⁰ Justin P. Jeffcoat Schedtler, 'The Hymns in Revelation', in Craig Koester (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Book of Revelation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 115–30 (126).

⁶¹¹ Schedtler, 'The Hymns in Revelation', p. 126.

⁶¹² John Christopher Thomas, 'The Spirit of the Book of Revelation', in Craig Koester (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Book of Revelation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 241–55 (251).

⁶¹³ 'ἡρῶν', *BDAG*, p. 1002.

⁶¹⁴ Moisés Silva (ed.), 'ἀσχημοσύνη', *NIDNTTE* I, pp. 435–36. Outside of Pauline literature, this is the only NT reference of the word group.

as the hearers encounter this phrase for the third time (1.9; 4.2), they are reminded that this prophetic vision is in continuity with all that John has been a witness to thus far.⁶¹⁵

Drawing the attention of the hearers to the change of scenery once again (‘καὶ εἶδον’), John beholds a woman sitting upon a scarlet beast which is ‘full of blasphemous names, having seven heads and ten horns’ (17.3). Although she sits upon the beast, her outward appearance is far from beastly. She is clothed in purple and scarlet and ‘adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls’ (17.4). As the vision unfolds, hearers would hardly miss the contrasts of this great harlot in the wilderness who is ‘clothed’ (‘περιβεβλημένη’), and the woman in heaven (12.1) who is ‘clothed’ (‘περιβεβλημένη’) who flees to the wilderness, to a place God prepared for her (12.6).⁶¹⁶ Nor would they fail to discern the color of her clothes (purple and scarlet), in contrast to the white clothes of faithful witnesses.⁶¹⁷ Notwithstanding the stunning appearance, the hearers would likely discern the deception of her beauty and luxury, for the motif of deception has appeared in the Apocalypse on numerous occasions, beginning with the prophetic messages to the churches, where things are discerned to be not as they appear.⁶¹⁸ In her hand is a cup ‘full of abominations and of the unclean things of her sexual immorality’, and a mysterious label appears on her forehead – ‘Babylon the Great, the mother of all harlots and of the abominations of the earth’ (17.4–5).

The scene does not change, but John draws his hearers in to behold more intently (‘καὶ εἶδον’). His continued gaze upon the woman causes him great wonder; she is ‘drunk with the blood of the saints, that is, with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus’ (17.6).⁶¹⁹ A golden cup, intoxication, and the blood of witnesses converge at this scene, carrying with them numerous implications for the hearers. First, the cup has been a symbol of divine judgement in the Apocalypse (14.10; 16.19),⁶²⁰ but only here is it detailed by its color. Outwardly, the cup gives the impression of satisfaction, but

⁶¹⁵ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 494; Archer, *I Was in the Spirit*, p. 254.

⁶¹⁶ Paul B. Duff, *Who Rides the Beast? Prophetic Rivalry and the Rhetoric of Crisis in the Churches of the Apocalypse* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 86–87, offers a list of comparisons between the two women. Davidson Razafiarivony, ‘Is the Woman of Revelation 17 the Same Woman of Revelation 12?’, *AJBT* 17.48 (November 27, 2016), pp. 134–49, explores this comparison at length; in it, noting scholars who argue that the two women are one and the same, owing to similarities in their narratives, such as those which Duff lists. Razafiarivony rightly concludes (p. 148) that they should be understood in contrast to one another, not as identical.

⁶¹⁷ Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, p. 310.

⁶¹⁸ Wiriya Tipvarakankoon, *The Theme of Deception in the Book of Revelation: Bringing Early Christian and Contemporary Thai Culture into Dialogue 2* (Claremont, CA: Claremont Press, 2017), p. 193.

⁶¹⁹ Here, I am reading the καὶ as exegetical. See Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 243; Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 316; Paul, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, p. 282.

⁶²⁰ Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 315.

inwardly its contents are abominable.⁶²¹ The ‘gold cup’ (‘ποτήριον χρυσοῦν’) which contains her abominations and sexual immorality might imply that her sinful actions may have been economic.⁶²² At such an implication, the hearers might recall the situation at Smyrna, where the witnesses experienced tribulation and poverty (2.9). Perhaps they can now discern further the potential socio-economic implications of faithful witness; followers of Jesus may endure economic hardship on account of their faithfulness in their witness.

Second, her intoxication reveals that she is a woman without discernment, as the term ‘drunk’ (‘ἔμεθύσθησαν’) implies a state of compromised judgement. This idea is apparent in the FG, where the master of ceremonies of the wedding at Cana questions Jesus for making good wine when the guests would not be able to discern its quality.⁶²³ Having no discernment, her actions are not sound; they may even be systemically oppressive.⁶²⁴ This would not be an unreasonable conclusion for the hearers to draw, when they learn that the heads of the beast represent mountains and kings (17.10). The hearers may recall Pergamum, where Satan not only dwelt, but had a throne (2.12–13). This cup and her intoxication may be representative of the climate in which faithful witness is put to the test.⁶²⁵

Third, the blood of the witnesses would certainly recall witnesses previously encountered in the Apocalypse, beginning with the Faithful Witness, *par excellence*, Jesus.⁶²⁶ It would recall those who modeled their witness after him, including Antipas (2.13), the souls beneath the altar (6.9), the 144,000 who were sealed (7.4), the innumerable multitude who came out of the great tribulation (7.9, 14), the two prophetic witnesses (11.3–8), the witnessing overcomers (12.11), and the followers of the Lamb (14.4). As much as the blood recalls faithful witnesses who have already lost their lives, owing to the prophetic nature of the Apocalypse, revealing ‘what will soon take

⁶²¹ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 430.

⁶²² Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, p. 312, suggests that the color of the cup being gold is key for situating its contents in economic terms. See also Tipvarakankoon, *The Theme of Deception*, p. 201, who notes that gold (χρυσίον) is generally associated with luxury and wealth.

⁶²³ Moisés Silva, ed., ‘μεθύω’, *NIDNTTE I*, p. 259, ‘The point is not that the guests are intemperate or that they are behaving in a disorderly manner, but rather that they have drunk enough to dull their senses so that they cannot appreciate the quality of the wine’.

⁶²⁴ Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, p. 960, posits that ‘sexual immorality is a metaphor for the political alliances’ and that her intoxication ‘suggests the victimization of the people of the world’. Boesack, *Comfort and Protest*, p. 111, notes here that ‘the impression of oppression is inescapable’.

⁶²⁵ Slater, *Revelation as Civil Disobedience*, p. 61, Kindle.

⁶²⁶ Fee, *Revelation*, p. 234, suggests that the blood of the witnesses recalls Antipas, but after that, looks prophetically ahead. This view is certainly plausible, as will be argued, however it seems equally plausible that the minds of the hearers would be drawn to witnesses whose lives have been lost for their witness thus far as well.

place' (1.1), the hearers may also recall the situation in Smyrna, where witnesses are anticipating imminent imprisonment, tribulation, and death (2.10). Thus, the blood on which she is drunk may represent the death of witnesses past, present, and future.

To the hearers, the picture would be clear; in her dress, her lack of discernment, and her parading the death of the witnesses of Jesus, this woman is the antithesis of a faithful witness. The antithetical picture that John sees in her is bewildering, for he utters (17.16b), 'And I marveled seeing her a great marvel' ('Καὶ ἐθαύμασα ἰδὼν αὐτὴν θαῦμα μέγα'). The Greek construction of John's words emphasize what a sight this must have been for him to behold.⁶²⁷ The language would be strikingly familiar to the hearers, as it recalls the worshippers of the dragon and the beast in 13.3.⁶²⁸ As the harlot is intoxicated with the blood of faithful witnesses, could John be intoxicated with the deception of her beauty and status?⁶²⁹ Would one who is 'in the Spirit' not be immune to such deception? Perhaps the reality of such a possibility of deception is what draws John to use such language here.⁶³⁰ Given the 'mystery' ('μυστήριον') written upon her forehead (17.5), he could be wrestling with its interpretation against the backdrop of all that he has witnessed. The hearers would be familiar with this term, in the FG, as it related to understanding some of the teachings of Jesus (cf. (Jn 3.7; 4.27; 5.20, 28; 7.15, 21)).⁶³¹ With these reasons for amazement being possible, and perhaps in mind for the hearers, the angel interrupts the vision, offering John (and subsequently his hearers) both correction 'Why do you marvel?' and clarity 'I will tell you the mystery' (17.7–8).⁶³²

The description of the beast gives witness to his limitation of power and authority; while God is noted to be one 'who was, and is, and is to come' (1.4, 8; 4.8), the beast 'was, and is not, and is

⁶²⁷ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 501.

⁶²⁸ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 501–502.

⁶²⁹ The status would be suggested by her purple adornment. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 354 notes that purple was a very expensive dye for materials, thus bore with it a mark of cultic or political status, as well as private affluence. The seductive power of the harlot becomes more pronounced in Rev. 18.3; see Tipvarakankoon, *The Theme of Deception*, p. 199. Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 317, does not seem to lean so far in this direction, while still making room for John's marveling. He suggests that regardless the contempt for her idolatrous immorality, one must acknowledge the power and splendor which she displays. See also, Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation*, p. 295.

⁶³⁰ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 502.

⁶³¹ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 502.

⁶³² Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 317. Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 502–503, understands the question as a rebuke, against Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 433, who insists that it should not be read as such. Thomas' view is preferred here, as it is helpful in appreciating the seriousness of the deception of Satan. As Thomas further explains, John and his hearers alike are made aware of the possibility of misinterpreting things while 'in the Spirit'.

about to come up out of the abyss and go to destruction'.⁶³³ His destruction will cause those whose name were not found written in the book of life to look upon in wonder. While explaining the mystery of the vision, the angel interjects a phrase reminiscent of 13.18, a call to pneumatic discernment – 'Having the wisdom, here is the understanding'. This interjection reiterates the idea that pneumatic discernment necessitates divine dependence.⁶³⁴ He continues, explaining that the seven horns represent kings without a kingdom, but they are given authority for one hour – only to give it to the beast. The hearers would likely recall that the Kingdom to which Jesus has made them to become (1.6, 9; 5.10), and that which they witness to (11.15). Hearing of the immanent destruction of the kingdom of the beast would encourage them to remain faithful witnesses to the true Kingdom, 'the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ' (11.15).

Having power and authority, these kings and the beast 'will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings' (17.14a). The hearers would not be surprised at the kings' warring efforts, for such is the behavior of those who worship and follow the beast.⁶³⁵ Equally, they would not be surprised to hear that the Lamb has overcome, as such has been conveyed in the Apocalypse (3.21; 5.5), even more, the faithful witnesses who follow the Lamb have been said to overcome as well (12.11).⁶³⁶ Thus, the angel reminds the hearers, 'and those who are with Him are the called and elect and faithful' (17.14b). The angel offers no job description or assignment of the followers,⁶³⁷ but the hearers would certainly understand that faithful witness, is to follow the Lamb into battle.

The angel explains the oppressive nature of the harlot, for the waters upon which the harlot sits (17.1) are 'peoples, crowds, nations, and tongues' (17.15).⁶³⁸ The four-fold expression, though slightly modified, is familiar to the hearers, and representative of humanity in general.⁶³⁹ With seemingly no explanation of the matter, the kings who were once intoxicated by the immorality and affluence of the harlot (17.2) will come to hate her; a hatred that leads to her ruin.⁶⁴⁰ The hearers learn, however, that while her destruction is at the hand of the kings, it is at the behest of

⁶³³ Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation*, p. 676.

⁶³⁴ Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, p. 316.

⁶³⁵ Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 322.

⁶³⁶ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 512.

⁶³⁷ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 319, raises this point which is, at first glance, insignificant in the broad scope of the Apocalypse, but at a second consideration, it may be significant that apart from the two witnesses in Revelation 11, no other individual or group of witnesses are described in matters of a specific task.

⁶³⁸ Boesack, *Comfort and Protest*, p. 111.

⁶³⁹ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 515.

⁶⁴⁰ Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, p. 233; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 515.

God who purposed it in their hearts (17.16–17). It is not likely that the hearers would find it troublesome to read such a graphic narrative and take offense to the destruction of the harlot,⁶⁴¹ for throughout the narrative, what has not been made clear is soon to be explained. The history of the African American experience provides a helpful lens through which to read this narrative – as John continues, the hearers come to understand whom the harlot represents. Her destruction is a vivid picture of what Julia Ward Howe’s ‘Battle Hymn of the Republic’ represented.⁶⁴² This anti-slavery anthem was a testament to God’s ultimate authority over the oppressive forces against the marginalized.

Finally, John is made aware of what in his mind may be the greatest mystery of this vision, that is the identity of the harlot. The angel identifies the woman as ‘the great city, which has a kingdom over the kings of the earth’ (17.18). This city recalls the first mention of the beast and the killing of the two prophetic witnesses (11.7).⁶⁴³ With the vivid picture of this mysterious harlot, Babylon the great city, explained, the hearers discover that there is yet more to be revealed. ‘After these things’ (‘Μετὰ ταῦτα’), John alerts his hearers to yet another change of scenery – ‘εἶδον’ (‘I saw’). An angel descends from heaven, proclaiming the defeat of the great harlot:

Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great!
And she has become a dwelling place of demons
and a prison of every unclean spirit,
and a prison of every unclean bird
and a prison of every unclean and hateful beast

⁶⁴¹ Pippin, ‘Eros and the End’, pp. 193–94, finds this passage problematic, and argues, ‘This grotesquely exaggerated vision of death and desire accentuates the ideology of hatred of imperial power—and of women. This story of death and desire is the most vividly misogynist passage in the New Testament’. She is not alone in her discomfort with the feminine personification of Babylon. See, also, Caroline Vander Stichele, ‘Re-membering the Whore: The Fate of Babylon According to Revelation 17.16’, in Amy–Jill Levine and Maria Mayo Robbins (eds.), *A Feminist Companion to the Apocalypse of John* (London: T&T Clark International, 2009), pp. 106–20. Troubling as the scene and language may be, not all female scholars are swayed by this issue.

⁶⁴² Julia Ward Howe, ‘Battle Hymn of the Republic’ (Public Domain: 1861). While Howe is not African American, her song has become an anthem to colored people for more than a century. As an African American scholar, I can certainly respect the sensitivity to perceived marginalization in reading Scripture, but rather than deconstruction that results in an altogether different view of the Bible, I would suggest reading through the difficulties, allowing room for the text to provide a solution for faithful witnesses today. An example of such ‘reading forward’ is evident in Crystal L. Hall, ‘Unholy Economics and Environmental Impacts Reading: Revelation’s Great Whore in the Climate Crisis’, *JRSSup* 23 (2021), pp. 24–36 (33), who comments, ‘This image of a fallen Babylon provides a glimpse into a theological understanding that, despite what seems like an overwhelming empire, the powers that govern this world have already fallen, revealed for what they truly are as enslaving and passing away’. Her conclusion seems to give evidence to her sensitivity to feminist readings, with the added desire to inform the behavior of the church today: ‘Reading Revelation in its socio–historical context of marginalization points churches in the U.S., which largely align with the dominant culture, toward the challenge and opportunities of returning to their socio–historical roots through developing relationships of solidarity and accountability with the marginalized’ (p. 34). It may be worth noting that Hall offers a political–environmentalist lens in her interpretation.

⁶⁴³ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 517.

For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her sexual immorality,
and the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality with her,
and the merchants of the earth have become rich by the power of her sensuality. (18.2–3)

It would not be missed by the hearers how far-reaching the influence of the great harlot is, nor the subtlety of her deception – ‘she *has become* a dwelling place’ (‘ἐγένετο κατοικητήριον’) of demons.⁶⁴⁴ Encountering these words, the hearers may be reminded of the prophetic message to the church at Pergamum where witnesses dwelt, Satan dwelt, and Antipas lost his life for his faithful witness. The term ‘dwell’ (‘κατοικέω’) has been used frequently in verbal form, throughout the Apocalypse, referring to the antagonists of God and witnesses (3.10; 6.10; 8.13; 11.10; 13.8, 12, 14; 17.2, 8).⁶⁴⁵ However, more than taking up residence, unclean spirits found themselves imprisoned there, along with unclean birds and beasts. Nations, kings, and merchants have been infected by the harlot’s sexual immorality.

The hearers soon come to understand that there are witnesses in the midst of this destruction, as the vision is interrupted by a call to action. John hears (‘Καὶ ἤκουσα’) another voice from heaven calling people out of the great city (18.4–5). Owing to the designation of the called ones, ‘my people’ (ὁ λαός μου), the hearers would likely discern this to be the voice of Jesus or an angel.⁶⁴⁶ They are beckoned to come out, ‘so that you will not participate (συγκοινωνήσητε)⁶⁴⁷ in her sins and receive of her plagues’. This beckoning would recall various OT warning narratives, calling out God’s people (Gen. 12.1; Num. 16.23; Isa. 48.20; 52.11; Jer. 50.8; 51.6, 45; Zech. 2.6–7).⁶⁴⁸ It is not likely that they are being called physically, rather participatorily; they are to be faithful witnesses through their discernment, discipleship (following the Lamb), and disengagement from the deception and lure of Babylon.⁶⁴⁹ The hearers would understand this command to ‘come out’

⁶⁴⁴ While numerous options exist for a definition of ‘γίνομαι’, *BDAG*, pp. 196–99, each of these definitions carry some idea of formation, development, or natural process. This idea is helpful to understand the subtlety of Babylon’s deception.

⁶⁴⁵ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 521.

⁶⁴⁶ Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 327, suggests that it is Jesus, owing to God being referred to in the third person; however, ‘my people’ does not necessitate ownership (God/Jesus), but it could refer to association (angel, cf. 19.10). Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation*, p. 699, suggests Jesus, an angel, or other heavenly being, ultimately concluding that ‘any case, the voice expresses God’s perspective’. See also Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 524, in support of this view.

⁶⁴⁷ ‘συγκοινωνέω’, *BDAG*, p. 952, ‘to be associated w. someone in some activity, be connected’. This word, taken in conjunction with ‘come out’; ‘ἐξέρχομαι’, *BDAG*, p. 348, ‘to discontinue an association, depart’, seems to suggest that they are not being instructed to physically change their geographic location. Rather, there seems to be an implied emphasis on engagement and association.

⁶⁴⁸ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 524–25.

⁶⁴⁹ So Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 376–77; Blount, *Revelation, A Commentary*, pp. 327–28; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 525.

as a clarion call to faithful witness. Owing to the death of Antipas in a city where Satan dwelt, the hearers would likely discern that this summons to be steadfast in faithful witness may lead to more suffering, even death.

Her torment will match her sensuality, self-glorification, and boasting (18.6–7). Suddenly, a command of vindication is given – to the degree of returning double that which she has afflicted upon the witnesses of Jesus. The command to ‘come out’ (‘ἐξέλθατε’), is followed by three additional ‘giving’ imperatives (18.6–7) – ‘repay’ (‘ἀπόδοτε’), ‘give double’ (‘διπλώσατε’), and ‘give’ (‘δότε’). Having no break in commands, the hearers may be left to wonder to whom these ‘giving’ imperatives are directed.⁶⁵⁰ Are they commands given to the faithful witnesses, ‘my people’?⁶⁵¹ The challenge with this view is that the retribution called for seems insurmountable, even for faithful witnesses, without some degree of divine assistance.⁶⁵² As the hearers have encountered angels and divine beings acting at the behest of God, perhaps these commands are divine agents.⁶⁵³ Owing to the vision given John earlier, that her destruction came at the hands of the Kings – that ‘God put it in their hearts to do his purpose’ (17.6), it is likely that the three ‘giving’ imperatives are directed toward the beast and the ten kings.⁶⁵⁴

Her boasting is the cause (‘διὰ τοῦτο’ | ‘for this reason’) for the strength of God to be displayed in Babylon’s judgment; a judgement in the form of plagues and consumption by fire (18.8). An ironic twist befalls Babylon, the boaster; although she touts that she will never see mourning (18.7), her destruction causes kings to mourn over her from a distance, owing to their fear of her torment. They sing a dirge unto the fallen Babylon – ‘Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon, the strong city! For in one hour your judgment has come’ (18.9–10). The merchants who had become wealthy from the immorality and ‘power of her sensuality’ (18.3) also cry and mourn, not because of their

⁶⁵⁰ For an exploration of this question at length, see Susan M. Elliott, ‘Who Is Addressed in Revelation 18:6–7?’, *BR* 40 (1995), pp. 98–113.

⁶⁵¹ Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, p. 994, notes that this indeed is ‘the most obvious possibility’. Though he offers several interpretive decisions, he concludes that ‘my people’ is the most probable, arguing that reasons against this are theological and not exegetical. Such is also the position of Elliott, ‘Who Is Addressed in Revelation 18:6–7?’. Ford, *Revelation* vol. 38, p. 297, suggests that ‘the subject of the sentence seems to be “My people”’, but offers ‘ministers of divine justice’ as a probable addressee.

⁶⁵² Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 329, views this as a vengeful call to witness, suggesting that this is the only place where witnesses are participant in violence.

⁶⁵³ So, Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, p. 237; Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 448; Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 258.

⁶⁵⁴ Though calling them ‘ministers of divine justice’, Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, p. 226, takes this view. See also Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 900; and Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 527.

affection for the city, but because of the economic impact of her destruction.⁶⁵⁵ John lists, extensively, the cargo which they are no longer able to sell. Twenty–eight categorical items are listed, emphasizing the great extent to which this economic impact reaches (18.12–13). The oppressive nature of Babylon is hard to miss as this list is offered up; the lament begins with ‘gold and silver and precious stones’ and ends with ‘bodies, *that is*, human lives’ (‘σωμάτων, καὶ ψυχὰς ἀνθρώπων’). Here, humanity (notably slaves, as these are merchants raising this dirge) is at the bottom of the list. While it would be difficult to discern the significance of the order of the list, the fact that slaves even make this list of traded goods at all speaks to the gravity of depravation in Babylon.

Taken exegetically, the καὶ here seems to suggest that John is intentionally drawing the hearers’ attention to the fact that these humans being sold in the slave trade are not to be reduced to mere chattel or animals.⁶⁵⁶ Moreover, John’s listing this way suggests that this prophetic narrative is a faithful witness to the fact that people – even marginalized people matter.⁶⁵⁷ Such an interpretive approach would have profound implications on the hearers, as it relates to the value of humanity. While the prophetic narrative shows God’s view of equitable justice and value of all humankind, the placement of the slaves at the conclusion of the list equally speaks to the diminished value of life placed on humankind by Babylon and her merchants.⁶⁵⁸

The lament is interrupted by words that seem to come from someone other than the merchants, perhaps an angel or other witness to the devastation:

And the fruit of your lustful soul has departed away from you,
And all the luxuries and the splendors have perished from you,
And no longer, never will they never find them. (18.14)

A voice draws the attention of the hearers away from the cargo and back to the merchants. Just as the kings sang a dirge for the fallen city, the merchants too have a dirge:

Woe, woe, the great city,
She who was clothed in fine linen
and purple and scarlet,

⁶⁵⁵ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 533.

⁶⁵⁶ Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 370, notes in interpretation: ‘That John gives both the common term for slaves in the slave markets (σώματα) and a scriptural description of slaves (ψυχὰι ἀνθρώπων) must mean that he intends a comment on the slave trade. He is pointing out that slaves are not mere animal carcasses to be bought and sold as property but are human beings.’

⁶⁵⁷ Boesack, *Comfort and Protest*, p. 120, writes, ‘What the Bible wants is an economy where people matter, where there is justice and equity’. See also Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 334.

⁶⁵⁸ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 534.

and adorned with gold
and precious stones and pearls;
for in one hour such great wealth has been laid waste!’ (18.16–17a)

Again, there is an interruption, a diverting of attention from these merchants to another group of mourners, namely ‘every shipmaster and every passenger and sailor, and as many as make their living by the sea’ (18.17b). These too stood at a distance mourning for the fallen city, ‘What is like the great city?’ they lament, throwing dust over their heads, as they offer a dirge of their own:

Woe, woe, the great city,
in which all who have ships at sea became rich by her wealth,
for in one hour, she has been laid waste! (18.19)

It is doubtful that these dirges would not remind the hearers of the implications of time and suffering that faithful witness involves. They hear refrains of time in these dirges; ‘no longer’; ‘for in one hour’; ‘for in one hour’. Luxuries and splendors no longer found, wealth and riches laid waste; having just encountered the beauty and splendor of the great city in the previous chapter, these dirges remind the hearers that the reward(s) of faithful witness are far more rewarding than the deceptive riches and splendor of Babylon.

Suddenly, a voice interrupts the dirges – the time for lamenting is over! All of heaven and the witnesses on earth are commanded to praise – ‘Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, because God has pronounced judgment for you against her’ (18.20). Would the hearers miss the weightiness of these words? It is doubtful that they would miss that what the faithful witnesses beneath the altar cried out for (6.9–11) is declared here – for the judgement upon the great city, has come from God for them!⁶⁵⁹ This call to rejoice, however, is not relegated to martyred souls. The martyrs are implied in ‘O heaven’, but the saints, apostles, and prophets would likely refer to living witnesses on earth.⁶⁶⁰ Moreover, the command to rejoice has a tone of familiarity,⁶⁶¹ reminiscent of the call to rejoice (‘rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them’) after the accuser was cast down and overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the testimony of his witnesses (12.11–12). The destruction of Babylon puts in view the salvation and power of God and his Kingdom and the authority of his Christ.⁶⁶²

⁶⁵⁹ Pattemore, *The People of God*, p. 102; Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 336.

⁶⁶⁰ Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 336.

⁶⁶¹ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 542.

⁶⁶² Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 542.

The praise is affirmed, visually, as a strong angel hurls a stone into the sea, representative of the destruction of Babylon, the great city! At her destruction, music will not be heard, trades will cease, darkness will overtake the city, and the voice of the bride and bridegroom will be heard no more. All of this is owing to the city's deception of the merchants who were the great men of the city, and the blood of the slain prophets and saints which was found therein (18.21–24).

4.6.2 FAITHFUL WITNESS IN REVELATION 17–18

When John encounters the great harlot, drunk on the blood of faithful witnesses in chapter 17, her inebriation serves as a reminder to the hearers that faithful witness is not only counter-cultural, but the suffering which faithful witnesses endure can be intoxicating to adversaries of the Lamb. In chapter 18, as Babylon, the great city, is coming to ruin, a divine voice calls to the witnesses (18.4), 'come out of her, my people' ('ἐξέλθατε ὁ λαός μου ἐξ αὐτῆς'). The hearers would understand this summons as a call to faithful witness, not one of escape. The dirges of 18.14–19 offer for the hearers the great contrast between faithful witnesses and those who are lured by the deception of Babylon. While faithful witness (for the living) is set against time and a backdrop of suffering, the end leads to life (cf. 2.7, 10; 3.5). On the contrary, the allurements of Babylon seem prosperous for a season, yet ends in death and destruction.

4.6.3 REVELATION 19.1 – 21.8

Hallelujah! After so many times of John's turning of the head and beholding (καὶ εἶδον) or hearing (καὶ ἤκουσα) scenes and sounds of violence, destruction, suffering, and 'woes', the hearers are alerted ('Μετὰ ταῦτα' | 'after these things') to a change of scene and of tone. While the hearers have encountered worship in the Apocalypse, none would be as extensive as what they will encounter here.⁶⁶³ John informs them of a loud voice from heaven, breaking forth in praise for both the attributes and the actions of God. The praise of heaven contrasts the dirges sung by the kings and merchants of Babylon.⁶⁶⁴

Hallelujah!
Salvation and glory and power belong to our God;
Because his judgements are true and righteous;
Because he has judged the great harlot
Who was corrupting the earth with her sexual immorality

⁶⁶³ Archer, *I Was in the Spirit*, pp. 257–58.

⁶⁶⁴ David J. MacLeod, 'Heaven's Hallelujah Chorus: An Introduction to the Seven "Last Things" (Rev. 19:1–10)', *BSac* 156 (January–March 1999), pp. 72–84 (73); Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, p. 327.

And he has avenged the blood of his slaves shed by her hand. (19.1–2)

Although the praise is not preceded by a command to join in, the hearers would no doubt find this praise inspirational to any and every witness!⁶⁶⁵ Without pause, the praise continues (19.3), and is echoed by the twenty–four elders and the four living creatures, as they fall and agree – ‘Amen, Hallelujah!’ (19.4). As slaves great and small who fear God are instructed by a voice from the throne to join in the praise, John alerts the hearers to yet another sound ‘Καὶ ἤκουσα’, described as ‘something like the voice of a great crowd and like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder’. The voice is another anthem of praise:

Hallelujah!
For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns.
Let us rejoice and be glad
and give the glory to Him
for the marriage of the Lamb has come
and His bride has made herself ready. (19.6–7)

The hearers would certainly discern that this worship bears a weight of irony; while the fallen Babylon is forced into silent waste, void of the voice of a bride or bridegroom (18.22–23), heaven resounds with praise and a proclamation of a coming marriage of the Lamb and his bride.⁶⁶⁶

The adornment of the bride is much different than that of the harlot. The identity of the bride is revealed in her preparation.⁶⁶⁷ While the harlot was clothed in deceptive apparel of seduction (17.4), the bride of the Lamb is dressed in ‘in fine linen, bright and clean’, which is symbolic for ‘the righteous acts of the saints’ – that is, their faithful witness (19.8). The hearers would likely discern that the bride is the community of faithful witnesses.⁶⁶⁸ The clean, fine linen that she is given recalls the witnesses in Sardis, who have not soiled their garments (3.4), as well as the promise (3.5) to be clothed in white garments, to those who overcome. The church at Laodicea who boasted of their independence are admonished to buy from Jesus white garments to clothe themselves (3.18). The twenty–four elders are clothed in white (4.4), as is the great innumerable multitude (7.9) who come out of the great tribulation (7.14). Perhaps the hearers may even discern

⁶⁶⁵ Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, pp. 338–39.

⁶⁶⁶ Tipvarakankoon, *The Theme of Deception*, p. 195, notes the contrast, that ‘The harlot signifies the qualities of abomination, impurity, and the deception of the city (17:4; 18:23), whereas the bride of the Lamb signifies the qualities of righteousness, purity, and fidelity of the new city (19:7–8)’.

⁶⁶⁷ Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 345; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 564–65.

⁶⁶⁸ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 483; Catherine Gunsalus González and Justo L. González, *Revelation* (Patrick D. Miller and David L. Bartlett [eds.]; Westminster Bible Companion; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), p. 126.

that the ones who obeyed the call to ‘come out from her’ (18.4) are now rewarded by participation in this wedding.

The fourth beatitude of the Apocalypse is introduced by way of a voice instructing John to write ‘the true words of God’ – ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb’ (19.9). Given that John has only been instructed to write by a divine being (1.11, 19; 2.1, 8, 12; 3.1, 7, 14; 14.13), the readers would likely understand this instruction to come from a divine being, but it is not until John falls to worship the one giving this command that the hearers are made aware that it is not Jesus. The angel will have no share in the worship that is only due God, for he admonishes John, ‘Do not do that! I am a fellow slave with you and your brothers who have the witness of Jesus’. Though the hearers have encountered scenes of worship that were contrary (the dragon, the beast, the image, and the great harlot), the angel makes it clear that not even the witnesses of Jesus – even those who are found worthy (cf. 3.4), nor angels in heaven are to be worshipped; to do so would be idolatry.⁶⁶⁹ Recalling John’s marveling over the great harlot and the angel’s correction (17.6–7), his action here and the angel’s response emphasize once again the propensity for human error, even when ‘in the Spirit’, and the dependency on divine guidance and pneumatic discernment.⁶⁷⁰

The angel continues (19.10), ‘the witness of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy’ (‘ἡ γὰρ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ ἐστὶν τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς προφητείας’). For the first time in the Apocalypse, faithful witness and prophecy are equated explicitly. While the hearers may have discerned this, implicitly, on account of the two witnesses who are commissioned to prophecy (11.3), the angel leaves nothing to the imagination. This explicit connection should bring at least three things to the minds of the hearers, in matters of faithful witness. First, they would understand that faithful witness and prophecy are inseparable works to which followers of Jesus are called.⁶⁷¹ Second, while they would already understand Jesus to be the Faithful Witness, *par excellence*, they would also understand that disciples of Jesus, that is those who emulate him, such as John (1.2, 9), Antipas (2.13), the souls beneath the altar (6.9–11), the two prophetic witnesses (11.3, 7), and others (7.9, 14; 12.11, 17;

⁶⁶⁹ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 571; Archer, *I Was in the Spirit*, p. 266.

⁶⁷⁰ Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, p. 329.

⁶⁷¹ Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, pp. 118–20, makes an argument for the relationship of prophecy and witness/testimony, but insists that this does not suggest that every Christian is a prophet, rather they are participant in the prophetic witness of the church. Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 348, aptly states, ‘Prophecy is not just a matter of predicting the future. It is instead the revelation of a present truth that demands appropriate present and future behavior. The testimony and the spirit of prophecy have the same focal subject matter: the lordship of God and the Lamb’. González and González, *Revelation*, p. 127; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 571.

14.4; 17.6), are engaged in prophetic activity through their faithful witness.⁶⁷² Third, the prophetic witnessing of the church is a pneumatic activity, completely dependent upon the Spirit; the hearers would understand that there is no witnessing, void of the Spirit.⁶⁷³

John turns the attention of the hearers to a magnificent scene (19.11–13) – ‘Καὶ εἶδον’. Seeing heaven opened, he beholds one who is called ‘Faithful and True’ riding a white horse, judging and waging war. His name and actions recall the messages to the churches. To the church at Laodicea, he addressed them as ‘the Faithful and True Witness’ (3.14). To the church at Pergamum, he threatened to come and wage war with the sword of his mouth (2.16). The souls beneath the altar cried out for his judgement and vengeance (6.9–10). His flaming eyes of fire recall the discerning eyes of Jesus in the message to the church at Thyatira (2.18). His head is crowned with many crowns, which recalls the crowns that he alone had the authority to give (2.10) or remove (3.11). Bearing a name that only he knows recalls the prophetic message to witnesses in the church at Philadelphia, who are promised Jesus’ ‘new name’ to be written on them if they overcome (3.12), but that name is not given.

With his blood-soaked garment, one of his names is given – he is also called ‘the Word of God’ (‘ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ’). Certainly, the FG (Jn 1.1) would come to mind when the hearers encounter this name – ‘Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος’. (‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God’). This rider is none other than the Lamb, the Faithful Witness – it is Jesus! The description of this rider is helpful for discerning the rider on the white horse in 6.2; the hearers would discern differences in the two. Whereas the rider in 6.2 is *given* a crown, the rider here possesses many crowns. The rider in 6.2 wields a bow, whereas the rider in 19.15 has a sword in his mouth.

That his robe is dipped in blood paints a stark picture for the hearers; it is as if he carries into battle with him a record of his slaughtered faithful witnesses.⁶⁷⁴ He is followed by the armies in heaven, dressed in white and riding white horses. The description suggests that this army is comprised of faithful witnesses – that is, those who have died in their witness, for they are ‘clothed in fine linen, white and clean’ and ‘following him’. Such language is reminiscent of witnesses

⁶⁷² Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 572.

⁶⁷³ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 947; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 572; Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation*, p. 328.

⁶⁷⁴ This is an elaboration of Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 578, who suggests that ‘it is next to impossible to believe that the hearers would not understand this mention of blood as somehow being informed by the numerous previous references to the death of Jesus and his saints (1.8; 5.9; 6.10; 7.14; 8.8; 12.11; 14.20; 16.6; 17.6; 18.24; 19.2)’.

previously encountered in the Apocalypse, the 144,000 who follow after the Lamb (14.4) and the chosen and faithful ones who join the Lamb in victorious battle (17.14), in particular.⁶⁷⁵ The sharp sword that was in the mouth of Jesus (1.16; 2.12, 16) is now in full swing, for with it ‘he may strike down the nations’ and ‘rule them with a rod of iron’. With it, he also ‘treads the winepress of the wrath of the rage of God, the Almighty’. On his thigh is another name, ‘King of Kings and Lord of Lords’ (19.14–16).

An angel standing in the sun arrests John’s attention (‘Καὶ εἶδον’), commanding birds to ready themselves for ‘the great supper of God’, where they will feast on the carcasses of kings, commanders, horses, slaves, and free people (19.17–18). Immediately, John sees (‘Καὶ εἶδον’) the beast and kings with their armies assembling to make war with Jesus and his army, but to no avail. The beast and his false prophet are seized, and thrown into the lake of fire, all others were killed with the sword from Jesus’ mouth, leaving their flesh for the birds to devour (19.19–21).

No sooner than the beast and his false prophet are thrown down, John’s attention is drawn to an angel (‘Καὶ εἶδον’) descending from heaven, ‘having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand’. Taking hold of Satan, the angel throws him into the abyss and seals it over him until a thousand years have been completed, prohibiting him from deceiving the nations during this time. However, John informs the hearers, that ‘after these things’ (‘μετὰ ταῦτα’), Satan will be temporarily released (20.1–3). As nearly every occurrence of time in the Apocalypse has provoked the minds of the hearers to consider the role that time plays against faithful witness, this span of one thousand years would cause them to contemplate what it means for witness during this time.

Without pause, John’s attention is turned to thrones (‘Καὶ εἶδον’), but the description of the scene, in its entirety, which he offers is marked with ambiguity:⁶⁷⁶

Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their witness of Jesus and because of the word of God, and who also had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. (20.4)

The sight of thrones would not be surprising, owing to the prevalence of thrones in the Apocalypse, be it the throne of God (1.4; 3.21; 4.2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10; 5.1, 6, 7, 11, 13; 6.16; 7.9, 10, 11, 15, 17; 8.3; 12.5; 14.3; 16.17; 19.4, 5), Jesus (3.21), the twenty–four elders (4.4; 11.16), or

⁶⁷⁵ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 580.

⁶⁷⁶ Pattemore, *The People of God*, p. 107; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 600.

antagonist thrones of Satan (2.13) and the beast (13.2; 16.10).⁶⁷⁷ The recent defeat of Satan would likely cause the hearers to rule out that these thrones might belong to Satan or anyone associated with him. Still, three interpretive challenges lie before the discerning hearers; (1) who is sitting on the thrones, (2) how to understand the judgement given them, and (3) who are the beheaded witnesses.⁶⁷⁸

Although the thrones are likely to be envisioned by the hearers in a positive light, the plurality of the thrones makes it hard to imagine God or Jesus seated here. However, two possible candidates come to mind for the hearers. First, they may consider the twenty-four elders seated here, as they have occupied thrones elsewhere in the Apocalypse (4.4; 11.16); however, where they have been mentioned seated, John has been clear to make his hearers aware of their identity.⁶⁷⁹ A more likely option, owing to their centrality of this portion of the vision, is that the ones occupying the throne are the souls of martyred witnesses.⁶⁸⁰

The judgment given them is equally ambiguous (‘καὶ κρίμα ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς’ | ‘and judgment was given to them’).⁶⁸¹ The hearers must discern, are the ones on the throne given the authority to cast judgement upon their adversaries – even those who were among their own company?⁶⁸² Perhaps

⁶⁷⁷ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 599–600; Paul, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, p. 328.

⁶⁷⁸ Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 282.

⁶⁷⁹ Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, pp. 282–83; Pattemore, *The People of God*, p. 107, adds that the elders ‘are always described at worship and seem to spend most of their time, not sitting on their thrones, but on their faces before God’s throne’.

⁶⁸⁰ This is a popular view among scholars. Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, pp. 282–83. Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 364, makes clear that this is his preferred reading, as seen in his translation of the text – ‘I saw thrones and those who sat on them were given authority to judge, that is, the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus, which is the word of God’. He adds:

While he does not identify the figures on the thrones, there is a strong contextual clue. The focus in this entire subsection is on believers who have been killed because of their testimony to the lordship of God and the Lamb. John even amplifies their importance by connecting them to the executed souls at 6:9–11, whose cry for justice and judgment motivates the book’s apocalyptic activity.

Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation*, p. 771, adds that all faithful witnesses may be a possibility as well.

⁶⁸¹ Popular Bible translations are not helpful in this ambiguity: ‘judgement was given to them’ (*KJV*); ‘seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed’ (*ESV*); ‘on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge’ (*NIV*); ‘Judgement was committed to them’ (*NKJV*); ‘those seated on them were given authority to judge’ (*NRSV*); ‘Judgement was given to them’ (*NASB*).

⁶⁸² Cf. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 364–65, who insists that ‘all we know for sure about the occupants of the thrones is that they have been given the authority to judge’; Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 505, ‘John is referring broadly to the faithful saints of God. They are the ones who are involved in judgement, and suffer for Christ’; Fee, *Revelation*, p. 282, ‘I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge’; Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 364, offers the translation, ‘I saw thrones and those who sat on them were given authority to judge, that is, the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus, which is the word of God’; Paul, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, p. 328, ‘Being given authority to judge (by God, expressed as a ‘divine passive’) is the clearest answer yet to their cry for vindication in 6:10’.

they begin to imagine the witnesses in Ephesus who do not tolerate false apostles (2.2). Does the indictment for a lack of discernment and promise to overcoming witnesses in Thyatira come to mind, having been promised authority over the nations (2.26)? Even the over-confident witnesses at Laodicea are promised to sit with Jesus on his throne if they learn to depend on him, accept his discipline, and open the door (3.18–21). Could this scene be a culmination of these promises?

If the hearers are inclined to understand martyred faithful witnesses seated and judging, they would be caught by surprise, as the souls under the altar, which this vision seems to recall, do not ask for the ability to judge. Their lament (6.10) is against the delay of God’s judgement, not their own. Moreover, a Johannine view of judgement would not permit, so hastily, this view of judgement. The hearers would be intimately familiar with Jesus’ view of eschatological judgement in the FG. They would recall three distinctly related points on the matter. First, judgement is something that has been restricted to the Son (Jn 5.22). Second, it is because Jesus is the Son of Man, who is subsequently seen in John’s inaugural vision, standing amidst the lampstands (Rev. 1.13), that Jesus is granted authority to judge (Jn 5.27). Third, those who reject Jesus and do not receive his words are not said to be judged by his disciples, prophets, saints, or witnesses; rather Jesus says, ‘the word I spoke is what will judge him on the last day’ (Jn 12.48). This recalls the rider on the white horse whose name ‘is also called the Word of God’ (Rev. 19.13), and who strikes the nations with the sword from his mouth (19.15, 21). For the adversaries of Jesus, this is judgement, but for those who follow the Lamb, holding fast to ‘*the Word of God and the witness of Jesus*’, this is justice! Such an understanding leads to a more liberating interpretation.

The context of 20.4 may cause the hearers to consider the cry of the souls beneath the altar as a hermeneutical tool by which to interpret ‘κρίμα’. In crying out for God to judge, what they ask for is *judgement* to be given to their adversaries, but what they are hoping to receive is *justice*. Given that the readers would understand both judgement and justice to be implied in ‘κρίμα’,⁶⁸³ as well as its uses elsewhere in the Apocalypse (17.1; 18.20), it is likely that they would hear, ‘and justice was given to them’.⁶⁸⁴ If Daniel 7.22 would serve as an aid in their pneumatic

⁶⁸³ ‘κρίμα’, *BDAG*, p. 567. Note a few of the interpretive options: (3) ‘action or function of a judge, *judging, judgment*’ (4) ‘legal decision rendered by a judge, *judicial verdict*’; and (5) ‘proper recognition of someone’s rights, *justice*’.

⁶⁸⁴ Although Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 600, does not offer ‘justice’ in his translation, it is clear that he takes this position. Understood this way, in his vision, John sees the *judgement* of the harlot (17.1) but hears that God has pronounced *justice* for his faithful witnesses (18.20).

discernment,⁶⁸⁵ such an interpretation would be supported. There, ‘justice was given to the saints’ (‘τὴν κρίσιν ἔδωκε τοῖς ἁγίοις’ | Dan. 7.22 LXX), which sounds almost verbatim to Rev. 20.4. The FG offers another interpretive aid to the hearers, where Jesus says, ‘for justice I came into this world (‘εἰς κρίμα ἐγὼ εἰς τὸν κόσμον’), so that those who do not see may see’ (Jn 39.40).⁶⁸⁶ In the Greek construction, location of the verb (ἔδόθη / ἔδωκε) after the dative noun (κρίσιν), would emphasize that in each case, those receiving ‘κρίμα’ are the beneficiaries.⁶⁸⁷ The hearers would logically conclude that the ones on the throne are not participants in the judgement, but that they are seated on thrones because judgement has been rendered in their favor – *justice!*⁶⁸⁸

If the hearers discern that the ones sitting on the thrones are faithful witnesses, and that those witnesses have received justice, the sudden appearance of another ‘Καὶ εἶδον’, may give further indication to the identity of the ones who sit upon the thrones. John encounters the souls of beheaded witnesses who did not worship the beast or his image, nor received his mark. That the souls beneath the altar cried out for vindication were ‘those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the witness which they had maintained’ (6.9), and the souls which John sees here in 20.4 are ‘those who had been beheaded because of their witness of Jesus and because of the word of God’, it would be likely that the hearers would consider these two groups one and the same.⁶⁸⁹

⁶⁸⁵ So, Pattemore, *The People of God*, p. 108.

⁶⁸⁶ So, Pattemore, *The People of God*, p. 108.

⁶⁸⁷ This translation of the Greek text considers ‘κρίμα’ as a ‘dative of advantage’, which according to Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics*, pp. 142–43, ‘Instead of the words to or for, supply for the benefit of or in the interest of’ (emphasis Wallace). This is grammatically opposed to Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 364–65, who insists that ‘all we know for sure about the occupants of the thrones is that they have been given the authority to judge’ (emphasis mine).

⁶⁸⁸ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 600, ‘While it is possible that the hearers might take these words to imply that those who sit on the thrones are involved in the dispensing of judgment ... it is more likely that the hearers would understand that those who sit on the thrones have received judgment in the sense of vindication’; Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation*, p. 771, ‘Judgment was given for them, or “in their favor.” The resurrected saints sit on thrones because God has judged them favorably’; Jon K. Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation*, p. 342, writes, ‘the more literal translation here may imply not so much that they become judges as that a verdict has been given in their favor (as in Dan 7:22)’.

⁶⁸⁹ Pattemore, *The People of God*, p. 109; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 601; Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 365. Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 283, observes that this issue ‘relates to their precise identity, and again hangs on the interpretation of a καὶ or ‘and’. Are the souls of those who had been beheaded also those who had not worshipped the monster or its statue? This would restrict participation in the millennial reign to those who have laid down their lives for continuing the witness which Jesus bore, that is God’s word’.

Moreover, if the two groups are one and the same, the hearers may likely draw a connection from the refusal to worship the image of the beast that results in death (13.15),⁶⁹⁰ to the resulted martyrdom (6.9), and ultimate vindication (20.4). Are these groups one and the same or are these two different groups, the beheaded and the true worshippers – both having suffered martyrdom? Adding to the ambiguity, these are those who ‘had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand’. The challenge here lies in the fact that those who refused this mark were not said to be killed (13.17), only denied commerce. Does John see three different groups here? Do these groups collectively refer to faithful witnesses in general? Perhaps ambiguity here is intentional – perhaps the point of the vision here is that the thousand-year reign to which they are invited with Jesus to live and rule requires faithful witness, even unto death.⁶⁹¹

The hearers would certainly find theological significance when they learn from John that these souls ‘ἐζήσαν’ (lived | came to life).⁶⁹² They would not likely mistake this for a spiritual resurrection,⁶⁹³ but a bodily resurrection, just as Jesus had experienced. Such was his promise to his disciples in the FG (Jn 6.57; 14.19).⁶⁹⁴ The hearers would recall that John encountered Jesus, physically, in his inaugural vision (Rev. 1.13–18). They would also remember that the wounded beast was resurrected to life, physically (13.14). The culmination of witness, suffering, death, and

⁶⁹⁰ Pattemore, *The People of God*, pp. 110–11, rightly notes that no execution is actually reported here, only the authority to do so is mentioned there in 13.15. Still, the likelihood must be appreciated.

⁶⁹¹ Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, pp. 283–85, engages this idea, positing (284) that ‘The millennial reign is presented as the reward for the martyrs, those serious enough in their Christian witness to shed their blood. But it would be out of character for the Apocalypse to deny it to those whose witness during the time of the monster, although faithful, had fallen short of the supreme sacrifice’. Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 602, offers a similar view, that ‘While the previous phrase seems to have reference to the martyrs exclusively, the latter phrase appears to be inclusive enough to include all those who offer faithful witness to Jesus by worshipping God not the beast in any form, whether their faithful witness results in a martyr’s death or not’. Pattemore, *The People of God*, p. 111, suggests that the focus is not on the distinction of the groups, but the inclusion of the witnesses.

⁶⁹² While it may seem, at first glance, that scholars are interpreting two different things here (living vs. resurrection), they are different sides of the same coin – those who experienced death, *following the Lamb in their faithful witness*, are resurrected to new life, together with the Lamb – the Faithful Witness, *par excellence*. See Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation*, p. 773; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 602; Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, pp. 365–66. Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation*, pp. 342–43. Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 284, explains this well, that ‘the enthroned witnesses came to life and shared Christ’s royal rule. This suggests that they have died (although the verb ἐζήσαν could simply mean ‘they lived’).

⁶⁹³ *Contra* Paul Gaechter, ‘The Original Sequence of Apocalypse 20–22’, *TS* 10 (1949), pp. 485–521 (491), who suggests a ‘purely spiritual’ resurrection – ‘the millennial kingdom does not contain any term that would force us to take it also as a bodily resurrection; on the contrary it concerns the “souls” only and belongs entirely to heaven’.

⁶⁹⁴ William J. Webb, ‘Revelation 20: Exegetical Considerations’, *BRT* 4.2 (Fall 1994), pp. 7–39 (31–32), notes that ‘It does not say, “the souls reigned with Christ.” Rather, the intervening step of resurrection precedes the reigning. The resurrection may well have embodied the souls, followed by their being seated on thrones.’ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 603, rightly notes that a spiritual resurrection ‘would likely be quite foreign to Johannine hearers’.

resurrection – motifs that are present throughout the Apocalypse, and foundational to Johannine theology, exist here in this scene.⁶⁹⁵

The resurrected faithful witnesses are now found living with Jesus, as promised in the FG (5.25; 6.51, 57; 11.25; 14.19), and they reign with him for a one thousand–year period. Only they come to life in this ‘first resurrection’, the rest remain deceased. Learning that there is a remnant that remain deceased (‘οἱ λοιποὶ τῶν νεκρῶν οὐκ ἔζησαν’ | the rest of the dead did not live), until this time was completed, might lead the hearers to ponder John’s words that Satan, while bound, would be unable to deceive the nations. Who are these who remain dead? If the faithful witnesses are seated on thrones and ruling, and the nations who warred against the Lamb have been destroyed, who are the enthroned witnesses ruling? A myriad of questions might first flood the minds of the hearers, except for the fact that their entire encounter with the Apocalypse has been an exercise in pneumatic discernment. Perhaps they would discern this to be a chance for the nations to reconsider their witness and their worship.⁶⁹⁶ After this second chance, there will be a reckoning (20.7–10, 13).

The hearers encounter a fifth beatitude (20.6), of which these faithful witnesses are the direct recipients – ‘Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection’. Two significant details in this beatitude would be discerned by the hearers. First, this is the first time that hearers encounter a beatitude that ‘blessed’ (‘μακάριος’) is coupled with any other term,⁶⁹⁷ which makes it significant enough, but that it is coupled with the word holy (‘μακάριος καὶ ἅγιος’ | ‘blessed and holy’) makes it even more significant.⁶⁹⁸ The hearers learn that the vocation of a ‘saint’ (same Greek word, cf. 13.7, 10; 14.12) is not relegated to the living, but a term that follows them in death and resurrection.⁶⁹⁹ Second, the beatitude is promised to ‘the one who has a part ...’ (‘ὁ ἔχων μέρος’), which recalls the above mentioned culminating motif of witness, suffering, death, and

⁶⁹⁵ Beate Kowalski, ‘Martyrdom and Resurrection in the Revelation to John’, *SS* 41.1 (Spring 2003), pp. 55–64 (58).

⁶⁹⁶ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 599, offers a great observation here:

As incredulous as this detail might at first appear, after all who would release the dragon after he has been captured, perhaps the hearers would suspect that if the nations are being given an opportunity to respond to the witness of the church without the deceptive influence of Satan during this thousand year period, then perhaps they would not be surprised that any such positive response on the nations’ part must of necessity be tested by the deception of the dragon.

⁶⁹⁷ Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, p. 1091.

⁶⁹⁸ David J. MacLeod, ‘The Fourth “Last Thing”: The Millennial Kingdom of Christ (Rev. 20:4–6)’, *BSac* 157 (January – March 2000), pp. 44–67 (65), notes ‘It focuses especially on the priestly position of God’s people in the millennial age’; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 606.

⁶⁹⁹ Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation*, p. 776.

resurrection – particularly in the FG.⁷⁰⁰ John continues, ‘Over these the second death has no authority, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years’. The hearers would recall the prophetic message to witnesses in the church at Smyrna, who were encouraged that the overcomers would not need to be afraid of the second death (2.11).

When the thousand–year reign is completed, Satan is released from the abyss, to resume his work of deceiving the nations, readying an innumerable amount of them for war (20.7–8). It appears that every turn of this vision presents ambiguities and questions! Who are the nations? From where do they come; that is, what do the four corners represent (20.8)? These are questions that the hearers would doubtfully be perplexed by; owing to the occasions of things disappearing and reappearing, they would discern that these nations functioning in the same manner, informing them that the development of the nations is not linear in the Apocalypse.⁷⁰¹ Although the nations were given a span of one–thousand years to follow the Lamb, unencumbered by the deception of Satan, when he was released, they succumbed to his trickery. Now they must suffer with him.⁷⁰²

⁷⁰⁰ See Thomas, *Footwashing in John 13 and the Johannine Community*, pp. 92–95, for a discussion on the significance of μέρος in the FG, particularly in regard to Jesus’ exchange with Peter. What Thomas’ study also leads one to discover is that the footwashing discourse is the only time in the FG where Jesus uses this word eschatologically. The above–mentioned motifs are present in the footwashing discourse as this occurs on the eve of Jesus’ betrayal, which sets in motion the passion of the Christ.

⁷⁰¹ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 598.

⁷⁰² The hearers may not wrestle with this, but the conclusion is far from clear for modern scholars. Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation*, pp. 776–78, offers five interpretive views in scholarship for the army here:

- (1) Ordinary nations that come from every direction; a universalization of Ezekiel’s vision (Ezek. 38.2–6). (this is Koester’s preferred position)
- (2) Nations that survive the battle of Rev 19.11–21 owing to their distance from the conflict. (Koester refuted this idea, arguing that ‘Revelation does not envision a neutral position in the battle’.)
- (3) Nations that were slain in the battle and resurrected immediately after the millennium. (He argues against this, noting that ‘The martyrs are raised at the beginning of the millennium and “the rest” of the dead come to life afterward (20:5)’). This is the view I espouse and will respond to his rebuttal below.
- (4) Beings from the underworld. The four corners of the earth could be the entrances to the underworld (1 En. 18:14), where demons or spirits of the dead resided. (Against this, he notes that ‘the nations are never identified in this way elsewhere in Revelation, and none of the traditions associated with Gog and Magog identify them as demonic spirits’.) For more on this view, see Paul M. Hoskins, ‘The New Jerusalem as the Beloved City of the Millennium in Revelation 20’, *TRINJ 42NS* (2021), pp. 151–66.
- (5) Those born during the millennial age who reject the gospel. (He rejects this dispensational view, on two grounds: first, that ‘this view is based on texts such as Isa 65:17–25, which John connects with the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:1–22:5), not with the millennium’, and second that it ‘interprets the OT texts with a kind of literalism that does not fit Revelation’s recasting of OT imagery’).

One might consider these five points and rightly struggle to understand how Koester can embrace (1) and reject (3). If understood properly, Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 605, offers great explanation for the challenge that Koester has with the third option. The ones who come to life until the thousand years are finished may not be referring to ‘dead’ in general, but those who fell to the Lamb and his army in the great battle but changed their allegiance during the millennial reign. Further, Koester does not say from where these ‘ordinary nations’ come.

When the devil and his massive army surround ‘the beloved city’, where the witnesses are encamped, the adversaries are consumed by fire. The devil, the beast and the false prophet are thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where they are tormented forever (20.7–10). John then encounters (‘Καὶ εἶδον’) a great white throne and one sitting on it ‘from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them’. Before the hearers can discern the meaning of this peculiar statement, their attention is diverted (‘Καὶ εἶδον’) to a company of dead people, ‘great and small’, standing before the throne.

In proximity of the throne are books, one of them being the book of life, by which the dead were judged according to their works (20.11–12). These books recall the prophetic message to Sardis, where witnesses are promised that their overcoming would lead to their names never being erased from the book of life (3.5). After their judgement, the dead ones from the sea and Hades were judged according to their works, then death and hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The hearers then discover that this lake of fire is the second death. There, anyone whose name was not written in the book of life would be cast therein (20.13–15). This scene should bring with it a sense of calm for the hearers, relieving any further sense of anxiety for what John may see next – ‘Καὶ εἶδον’. As the second death has now passed, and the devil, together with all his allies, has been forever banished, whatever they may encounter in the rest of the Apocalypse, it will be void deception and conflict with evil.⁷⁰³

After encountering judgement before the great white throne, the hearers would likely anticipate a ‘Καὶ εἶδον’ from John, but what would he see? Certainly not a beast, nor any idolatrous image; no false prophet or deceptive harlot, for these are all done away with. They find out soon enough (21.1–5a). John encounters (‘Καὶ εἶδον’) the passing away of heaven, earth, and the sea. A new heaven and new earth emerge, but no explanation is given for the discontinuity of the sea. Discerning that, perhaps, there is no longer a need for the sea, the hearers have no time to contemplate fully, nor appreciate, the significance of ‘ἡ θάλασσα οὐκ ἔστιν ἔτι’ (‘the sea is no longer’).⁷⁰⁴ Without pause, John also encounters (‘Καὶ εἶδον’) ‘the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband’.

⁷⁰³ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 618.

⁷⁰⁴ Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, p. 750, notes, ‘He nowhere explains the absence of the sea from the new earth; it must therefore be accounted for by some common thought regarding the sea, which makes its presence inappropriate’; For a considerable engagement with ‘ἡ θάλασσα οὐκ ἔστιν ἔτι’, see Jonathan Moo, ‘The Sea That is No More: Rev 2:1 and the Function of Sea Imagery in the Apocalypse of John’, *NovT* 51 (2009), pp. 148–67.

The ‘holy city’ (‘τὴν πόλιν τὴν ἁγίαν’) recalls numerous times throughout the Apocalypse where witnesses were referred to as saints (5.8; 8.3–4; 11.18; 13.7, 10; 14.12; 16.6; 17.6; 18.20, 24; 19.8; 20.9) as both ‘holy’ and ‘saint’ share the same Greek word, ‘ἅγιος’.⁷⁰⁵ Moreover, as they contemplate the entrance of the prepared (‘ἡτοιμασμένην’) bride, they would likely recall that her preparation (‘ἡτοίμασεν ἑαυτὴν’) was comprised of the faithful witness of the followers of the Lamb (19.78). Here is the wedding that the hearers anticipated earlier (19.7–9). The mention of ‘new Jerusalem’ (‘Ἱερουσαλὴμ καινὴν’ | 20.2) would recall the promise to witnesses in the church at Philadelphia who overcome (3.12). This name will be written upon faithful witnesses. A great voice (‘φωνῆς μεγάλης’) coming from the throne accompanies the wonderful scene:

Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and he will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and he will wipe every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain. The first things passed away (21.4–5).

This voice reiterates the sense of security felt by the hearers – for they corroborate the trustworthiness of the promises made to faithful witnesses in the seven churches, from Jesus, by way of the Spirit (Revelation 2–3). While the first voice was only identified as great and coming from the throne, a second voice interjects (21.5b) that it is identified as coming from ‘he who sits on the throne’ – ‘Behold, I am making all things new’. That the ‘great voice’ comes from the one sitting on the throne, the hearers would certainly discern that it is the voice of God (cf. 16.17).

What John hears next must hold special significance,⁷⁰⁶ as he notes, ‘καὶ λέγει’ (‘and he said’). The instruction to write is very similar to his last instruction to write; whereas an angel said to him that ‘these are true words of God’ (19.9), it is emphasized here by God himself ‘these words are faithful and true’. The hearers would not miss the significance of this statement, and from whom it comes – having been commissioned to write, on various occasions (1.11, 19; 2.1, 8, 12, 18; 3.1, 7, 14; 14.13; 19.9), only here does the instruction come directly from God. John interjects (21.6), ‘and he said’, but modifies the interjection ‘καὶ εἶπέν μοι’ (‘and he said to me’).

The change from λέγει to εἶπέν seems minor, but the hearers might discern more. Both terms convey communication from one to another;⁷⁰⁷ however, thus far in the Apocalypse, John seems

⁷⁰⁵ Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 377. ‘ἅγιος’, *BDAG*, pp. 10–11.

⁷⁰⁶ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 626.

⁷⁰⁷ See ‘εἶπον’, *BDAG*, pp. 286–87; ‘λέγω’, *BDAG*, pp. 588–90. One of the significant differences in these words, though unarguably related, is that ‘εἶπον’ can mean ‘to answer a question, *answer, reply*’ (p. 287).

to prefer the formula ‘εἶπέν μοι’ for those times when discernment or clarity is necessary.⁷⁰⁸ When John was asked to identify the 144,000 (7.14), one of the elders had to tell him (‘εἶπέν μοι’) who they were. When he stood in awe of the mystery of the great harlot, an angel had to explain to him (εἶπέν μοι) the mystery of the woman and the beast. Encountering this phrase, ‘καὶ εἶπέν μοι’, the hearers would be extra attentive at the next words which they are will encounter. They may, in fact, understand the words from God to bring clarity to what questions may be, even remotely, in the mind of John and his hearers ... *No tears?? No death, mourning, crying, or pain? What do you mean ‘They have passed away’?* Thus, God responds, not for John alone, but for all who will read and hear (and heed) the words of this prophecy (1.3); thus, the earlier command to write them down ... one word in the Greek, pregnant with such promise that it removes doubt and casts out fear ... ‘γέγοναν’ (‘they are complete!’ | 21.6). God continues:

I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be my son. But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and sexually immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death. (21.6–8)

These ‘faithful and true’ words are in direct continuity to all that John has been a witness to, and all that the hearers have encountered in his written account.⁷⁰⁹

4.6.4 FAITHFUL WITNESS IN REVELATION 19.1–21.8

The rejoicing from heaven (19.1–8) is demonstrative of the victory and vengeance of God on behalf of his faithful witnesses. The hearers are constantly reminded, by way of these heavenly scenes of worship, that these songs are didactic acts of witness in that they declare the righteous rule and reign of God, inspiring hearers to continue in their faithful witness. The armies in heaven who are ‘clothed in fine linen, white and clean’ (19.14) witness by following the one who ‘is called Faithful and True’ (19.11). What their witness demonstrates is that ‘following’ (‘ἠκολούθει’) is an act of witness that is both immediate and eschatological.

Implicitly, the fourth beatitude recalls the first, in that it states, explicitly, what time anticipates in matters of faithful witness – ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the

⁷⁰⁸ This observation is after tracing the lemma of both terms throughout the Apocalypse. λέγω is used ninety-four times, while εἶπον is only used eleven times. Of those eleven times, only four are direct communication from a divine being to John in the form of ‘εἶπέν μοι’.

⁷⁰⁹ Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, p. 1126; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 625.

Lamb' (19.9). This beatitude suggests an eschatological reward with multiple implications. First, the reward implies faithful discipleship by way of the word 'κεκλημένοι' ('those who are invited / called').⁷¹⁰ Second, the reward implies that faithful witness leads to eternal fellowship. Third, the reward invokes a sense of joy, indicating that faithful witness will not just be acknowledged in heaven, but celebrated.⁷¹¹

The souls who were resurrected to reign with Christ (20.4) are not recorded as speaking or performing an act; however, their presence on the throne is demonstrative, in that it validates the promises made by Jesus to the churches (2.26–27; 3.21). The fifth beatitude is announced immediately after John encounters the souls of beheaded witnesses, justified and sitting on thrones. John's response to what he has seen is a joyful validation of promises made to the churches. 'Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection. Over these the second death has no authority, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years' (20.6). For those who suffer for their witness, even unto death, they are assured by this beatitude that death is not their end (cf. 2.10–11). The promise also makes evident that the reward is both prophetic (they will be priests) and theocratic (and will reign with him).

4.7 REVELATION 21.9–22.5: WITNESS 'ON A HIGH MOUNTAIN'

4.7.1 REVELATION 21.9–27

After these words are spoken, John is ushered into his final pneumatic scene. One of the angels having the seven bowls of plagues invites him, 'ἐν πνεύματι', to a great and high mountain to behold the bride of the Lamb. John sees the bride, 'the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God' (21.9–10a). The description is given in vivid detail (21.11b–14). John notices a gold measuring rod in the hand of his angelic guide, which may recall when he was instructed to measure the temple and altar (11.1), however the measurement here will not be given by John, but the angel. The hearers would likely discern this gold measuring rod to have greater significance than that of the temple and altar of 11.1.⁷¹² After the temple and the altar are measured, John gives more description of the city (21.15–21).

The hearers may be surprised to hear, for the first time, 'Καὶ ... οὐκ εἶδον' ('and I did not see'). This conversion of John's familiar 'tell' that there is more to behold suggests that he was expecting

⁷¹⁰ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 567–68.

⁷¹¹ Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, pp. 346–47.

⁷¹² Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 550.

more. Amidst the beauty of the city, John sees no temple. Everything else that he has seen has been an upgrade to the earthly city – walls, gates, and streets. However, John needs no angelic interpreter to help him to discern how the temple has been transformed, he is now the interpreter for the hearers; ‘the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its sanctuary’.⁷¹³ The glory of their presence radiates the city – there is ‘no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it’:

And the nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. And its gates will never be closed by day, for there will be no night there; and they will bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it. And nothing defiled, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life. (21.22–27)

The hearers come to discover that the sea was not the only thing discontinued in this new creation. Perhaps the clarity that ‘it is done’, given him from God, has been a catalyst of pneumatic discernment for John, for these words (21.22–27) do not come from God, nor an angel – they are not even what John has seen (Καὶ εἶδον), rather, they are what John has pneumatically discerned. There is no night, no darkness to eclipse the light, and no sea, no more need for judgement.⁷¹⁴

John is taken to a scene reminiscent of the Garden of Eden, where he finds the river of water of life, the tree of life, bearing fruit, ‘and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations’. Certainly, the hearers would recall the promise to overcoming faithful witnesses in the church at Ephesus (2.7), to eat from the tree of life. For the hearers, the river and tree (recalling Ezek. 47.12 and Zech. 14.6–8) promise what humanity was denied, due to Adam’s sin (Gen. 3.8–14), that is life, health, and freedom from toil.⁷¹⁵ John continues:

there will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his slaves will serve him; and they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And there will no longer be any night, and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the

⁷¹³ Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, p. 198.

⁷¹⁴ Moo, ‘The Sea That is No More’, p. 167 writes:

[For John,] the new creation ‘has been brought beyond any threat of future evil, chaos or judgement. It is as if the first creation, while good in itself, had had the potential to develop in two directions. [John’s] intent is to assure the churches that they have not therefore been abandoned to a world of sorrow, pain and mourning. Instead, the triumph of the “Lamb that was slain” means that the creator’s fidelity to his creation—hinted at in the rainbow around the throne, sign of the Noahic covenant—is expressed finally through nothing less than the renewal of the cosmos, an event in which the world is brought beyond any threat of future rebellion or sin.

⁷¹⁵ Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, p. 287; Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, p. 199.

light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them, and they will reign forever and ever. (22.3–5).

4.7.2 FAITHFUL WITNESS IN REVELATION 21.9–22.5

John is carried ‘ἐν πνεύματι’ to a high mountain, where he received a vision of the holy city – the new Jerusalem. His proclamation of the benefits of the beautiful city is an act of witness (22.3–4). It is a prophetic act that is congruent with the witness of Jesus; in his proclamation, John verifies the promises given to the churches. ‘There will no longer be any curse’ would recall for the hearers the promise to the overcomers in Ephesus (2.7) to eat of the tree of life, which is a reversal of the prohibition brought about in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3.8–14), owing to Adam’s sin. ‘The throne of God and of the Lamb’ in the company of his slaves recalls the promise to faithful witnesses in Smyrna, who will not be hurt by the second death (implied in their presence, cf. 2.11), the promise to the faithful witnesses in Philadelphia, that they would be branded with the name of God (3.12), and the promise to those in Laodicea, that they will sit down with Jesus and the Father (3.21). His prophetic declaration demonstrates the pneumatic discernment that witness necessitates – seeing, in the Spirit.

4.8 REVELATION 22.6–21: EPILOGUE

As John is contemplating the significance of the moment, he is interrupted by the angel (‘εἶπέν μοι’ | ‘and he said to me’). Once again, the hearers may discern that this is a special formula for John, when more is to be discerned. After John’s describing the new creation from his own pneumatic perspective, the angel interjects, ‘οὗτοι οἱ λόγοι πιστοὶ καὶ ἀληθινοί’ (‘these words are faithful and true’). Perhaps here, the angel is affirming the veracity of the Apocalypse altogether.⁷¹⁶ But, perhaps something deeper is taking place.⁷¹⁷ Two things might cause the hearers to discern more to these words from the angel.

First, having heard these words directly from God in the vision immediately preceding (21.5), it is doubtful that John or his hearers would now question the trustworthiness of what has been recorded thus far. Second, since the words spoken by God in 21.5 would certainly include the

⁷¹⁶ Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, pp. 400–401.

⁷¹⁷ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 567; Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 313, observes that ‘at the very least, this refers to the preceding vision of the new Jerusalem, though almost certainly it means the whole book’. Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 666, raises a similar point as Boxall – as this phrase occurs at strategic spaces in the Apocalypse, raising the hearers’ discernment to pay close attention to what has preceded, while equally affirming the veracity of the Apocalypse as a whole.

words he immediately speaks next (21.6–8), and the words spoken by the angel, immediately following, are imperative, not indicative, ‘Come here, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb’ (21.9), the only indicative words spoken since, come from the mouth of John in his proleptic gaze into the meaning of the river of life and the tree of life (22.3–5). While John’s interpretation of this new paradise may indeed be allusions to OT prophecy (Ezek. 47.12 in particular), the hearers would notice that it has been modified to include the nations.⁷¹⁸ What John offers is no mere allusion to OT, but a revision of sorts. The revision of Ezekiel’s vision would likely disrupt the imagination of the hearers, and John may be keenly aware of such a disruption.⁷¹⁹ It is not difficult to imagine that the angel has in mind John’s discomfort in making such an edit.

In his humility, John has already alerted the hearers to occasions where he erred in judgement, even while ‘ἐν πνεύματι’, the most noticeable being his wonder when seeing the great harlot (17.6–7), and his worshiping the angel (19.10). It would be safe to imagine that if divine assistance is needed to restrain one who is ‘ἐν πνεύματι’, God would not leave his servants to err on the side of doubting the Spirit of prophecy at work in them. The prophetic, interpretive interplay of Rev. 22.2–5 would not be missed by the hearers. An African American, Pentecostal reading helps to appreciate the full scope of this passage.

From a Pentecostal perspective, one can appreciate how John, in the *Spirit*, interprets the *Word* (Ezek. 47.12), for the *community* (Israel – cf. Ezek. 40.4). However, while the prophecy of Ezek. 47.12 was for Israel with the sojourner as a beneficiary of the blessings (cf. Ezek. 47.22–23), John reinterprets this prophecy. In the Spirit, he interprets the Word for a *new* community (the nations) – he *imagines liberation* for the nations in his engagement, no longer imagining those outside of the nation Israel as sojourners, they are invited to share equally in the blessing here. The healing

⁷¹⁸ Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, p. 200, notes, ‘where Ezekiel simply said that their leaves would be “for healing” (Ezek. 47:12), John adds that the leaves will be “for the healing of the nations”’. Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, pp. 397–98, agrees, positing:

Ezekiel was interested in the healing and wholeness of a restored Israel, the ethnic people of God. John broadens God’s salvific range beyond Israel to any nation whose people testify to the lordship of God and the Lamb. Not ethnicity but response to God is the decisive criterion for the eschatological relationship symbolized by the therapeutic power of the new Jerusalem’s leaves.

⁷¹⁹ Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, pp. 81–82, is helpful in seeing this disruption:

John uses much of this but with significant changes. First, when alluding to the first part in Rev. 21:3 (‘He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples’), John probably uses the plural λαοί instead of the singular λαός. Secondly, John makes it quite clear that the nations are not just spectators but are fully part of the city ... Thus despite the impressive similarities between Revelation and Ezekiel, the differences are no less significant. By firmly making the reader think of Ezekiel’s visions and then confronting him or her with drastic changes, the reader is forced to stop and ask what is going on.

that comes from the tree of life is not offered based on the ethnicity of humankind, but on the sovereignty of God.⁷²⁰ The angel continues, ‘and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent His angel to show to His slaves the things which must soon take place’. The angel affirms for John that it is not his unbridled imagination that interpreted the beautiful scene which he had encountered in the Spirit, but ‘the spirits of the prophets’ which comes from God. All that John has seen, heard, discerned, interpreted, and written must be shared with the servants of God.

Immediately, there is a prophetic utterance! Jesus is not silent on the matter! Pronouncing his eminent return, he echoes the words of God and the angel, adding to them the sixth beatitude that the hearers will encounter, ‘And behold, I am coming quickly. Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book’.⁷²¹ One might imagine John overwhelmed with emotion, that heaven has endorsed his interpretation. The hearers would notice it in his next words; ‘I, John, am the one who was hearing and seeing these things’, referring likely not to the Apocalypse on a whole, but still having the vision of New Jerusalem in mind.⁷²² Perhaps it is humility and appreciation, not pride, that comes before John’s fall; but the hearers discover that in haste, John falls to worship an angel once again, but is rebuked by the patient pneumatic guide – ‘Do not do that! I am a fellow slave with you and your brothers the prophets and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God!’.

It is unclear whether the rebuke caused John to withdraw from his prophetic vocation to write or not, but the angel continues, ‘Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near’ (22.10). John must correct his worship, but he must also continue in his prophetic commission, for the message is not yet complete. The angel continues, ‘Let the one who does unrighteousness, still do unrighteousness; and the one who is filthy, still be filthy; and let the one who is righteous, still do righteousness; and the one who is holy, still keep himself holy’. Once again, a prophetic utterance comes forth from the mouth of Jesus, ‘Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every person according to his work’. The hearers would

⁷²⁰ John’s interpretive interplay of Ezek. 47.12, here in Rev. 22.2-5, presents a beautiful example of a Pentecostal hermeneutical formula of Spirit, Word, Community at play. Moreover, here is where an African American Pentecostal hermeneutic can equally be seen. As Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 398, has aptly said, the determinant here is ‘not ethnicity but response to God is the decisive criterion’.

⁷²¹ It is unclear why Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 403, hears these words on the lips of an angel. Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 313; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 668, agree that these words are Jesus interjecting.

⁷²² Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 403.

not miss the elevation of his pronounced imminent return – he is not soon returning simply to bless (22.7), he will return soon to judge (22.10–12)!⁷²³

The hearers would certainly recall the works that were discerned in the prophetic messages to the seven churches (2.2, 19; 3.1, 8, 15). Additionally, they would be reminded that each individual hearing this message (‘ἀποδοῦναι ἐκάστῳ’ | ‘every person’) would be called to account on the merit of their own works.⁷²⁴ Jesus continues, with a self-identification, ‘I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end’, immediately proceeded by the seventh and last beatitude that the hearers will encounter in the Apocalypse.

The eschatological reward for faithful witness includes access to the garden, where there is found the river of life and tree of life. This garden recalls the message to the faithful witnesses in Ephesus (2.7) who will eat of the tree of life, as well as Smyrna, who will not be hurt by the second death – implied in the tree and the river of life. The tree yielding fruit may cause the hearers to consider the promise to witnesses in Pergamum who will receive hidden manna (2.17). Witnesses in Thyatira are promised to receive authority (2.27) and the morning star (2.28). Here, it is revealed that there will be no need for the sun, owing to the illuminating presence of the Lord, with whom faithful witnesses will forever reign. Witnesses in Sardis are promised that their names will be forever written in the book of life (3.5), and that sense of security is found in this declaration. In Philadelphia, the witnesses are promised the name of God written on them, a reward stated here explicitly. Finally, witnesses in Laodicea are promised to sit on a throne (3.21), and the hearers would recall that when hearing the proclamation.

Therefore, considering this beatitude once more, and the preceding pronouncement of Jesus’ return, the hearers discern that the reward is more than a general blessing. The beatitude here is a reminder, after all the many ‘Καὶ εἶδον’ (‘and I saw’) encounters throughout the Apocalypse, this beatitude centers the mind of hearers back to the opening of the Apocalypse. Considering the imminent returning of Jesus, it is incumbent upon all who hear what the Spirit has said, and to obey the imperatives that are given, in order to partake in the reward of this blessed new Jerusalem.

The final reward is full of hope for those who struggle to be faithful in their witness. ‘Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and may enter by the gates into the city’ (22.14). The beatitude recalls the commendation regarding a few names at

⁷²³ Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 316.

⁷²⁴ Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation*, pp. 383–84.

Sardis ‘who have not defiled their garments’ (3.4). The commendation implies that some had defiled theirs, yet this reward is potentially for them. There is eschatological hope (the right to the tree of life and access by the gates) for those who have not been faithful in their witness, yet they have the discernment to correct their unfaithfulness by ‘washing their robes’. It is fitting that this beatitude is placed last – just before the beckoning of the Spirit and the bride... ‘Come’!

A most noticeable feature of this beatitude is that it is the seventh which they have encountered, likely alerting them to it being the final one, given John’s use of the number seven in the Apocalypse. The hearers would not dismiss the call to faithful witness that these beatitudes collectively inspire.⁷²⁵ Moreover, this beatitude reinforces the significance of the very first beatitude, ‘Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy and *keep the things which are written in it*, for the time is near’ (1.3). This final beatitude describes what ‘keeping the things which are written in it’ has looked like in the Apocalypse, ‘blessed are those who wash their robes’. The hearers would recall the significance of adornment throughout the Apocalypse.⁷²⁶ The final beatitude reminds the hearers of the opportunity before them to partake in the blessings of the new Jerusalem, ‘so that they may have the authority to the tree of life and may enter by the gates into the city’. (22.13–14)

The hearers are reminded (22.15) that not everyone will heed these words; that there are very real adversaries of the Lamb. But with this reminder, he reaffirms the commissioning of the Apocalypse for his church (22.15). With this reminder, the Spirit who once spoke with Jesus to the church, now joins the faithful church in beckoning all who will listen, ‘Come!’ (‘ἔρχου’). The Spirit and the church say it, and whoever responds to the faithful witness of the pneumatic church will join in saying it, ‘Come!’. To the one who is thirsty, they beckon ... ‘Come and drink freely of the water of life’ (22.17). John closes the prophetic narrative with a solemn warning to all who will read:

I bear witness to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book. And if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book (22.18–19).

Should the hearers need reminding of the imminence of Jesus’ return, John says once more what has been said since the opening of the Apocalypse, Jesus is witness to all of this, and he says, ‘Yes,

⁷²⁵ Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly*, p. 39.

⁷²⁶ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 676.

I am coming quickly' (22.20). As surely as the Spirit and the bride beckon all to come, John beckons to Jesus... 'Come, Lord Jesus!', and closes his prophetic, narrative witness with a benediction, (22.21), 'The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen'.

4.8.1 FAITHFUL WITNESS IN THE EPILOGUE

In the epilogue, the communicative and demonstrative acts are not unlike the prologue. First, John is instructed not to seal up 'the words of the prophecy of this book' (22.10). Additionally, it further sets witness against time, so far as humanity is concerned, 'for the time is near'. In the prologue, it is made clear that witness comes from God, through Jesus, by way of the Spirit. In the epilogue, it is validated and safeguarded by the same (22.17–20). The sixth beatitude, much like the first, appears rather broad and ambiguous, 'Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book' (22.7). And, like the third beatitude, it is preceded with what may be understood as a warning for some, but a hopeful promise for others, ('behold, I am coming quickly'). The ambiguity becomes clear when considering the fuller context of what John declares regarding the vision of the new city:

Then he showed me a river of the water of life, bright as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His slaves will serve Him; and they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads. And there will no longer be any night, and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them, and they will reign forever and ever. (22.1–5)

CHAPTER 5

TOWARD A THEOLOGY OF FAITHFUL WITNESS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Two figures in the Apocalypse (Jesus and Antipas) are called faithful witness by name. A handful (John and martyrs) are mentioned *in regard to* their witness. For some scholars, the motif does not seem significant enough to examine, beyond quoting the passages where witness is mentioned explicitly.¹ Other scholars, have taken to a deeper reading of the Apocalypse, discerning that faithful witness is not only an important theme, but central to the book of Revelation. Bauckham argues that witness is central to the message of the Apocalypse; that the way in which the conversion of the nations will occur is ‘by the participation of the Lamb’s followers in his faithful witness to the truth sustained to the point of death and subsequent vindication’.² He suggests that the account of the two prophetic witnesses of 11.3–11 ‘serves to show how it is that the prophetic witness of the church in the final period before the end can achieve a result which the prophecy of the past has not achieved: the conversion of the nations to the worship of the one true God’.³

Blount echoes Bauckham, suggesting that John’s reason for writing the Apocalypse is that ‘he was in encouraging a church filled with people committed to the ethical activity of witnessing to the lordship of Jesus Christ’.⁴ Speaking to the occasion for the Apocalypse, he adds:

if John’s people were not vulnerably standing out because they were finding ways comfortably to blend in and accommodate, then the seer’s immediate problem was ... more spiritual than social and historical. The social–historical crisis would not arise *unless* John’s people actually started living by the ethical mandate of witness that his apocalyptic prophecy demanded.⁵

Concerning John’s hearers, he adds, that ‘as the Lord’s representatives, they are to initiate his victory by living out a witness of active and aggressive resistance against any power, human or supernatural, that would contest his lordship by establishing and promoting its own’.⁶

¹ J. Ramsey Michaels, *Revelation* (The IVP New Testament Commentary Series 20; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), does not examine the theme beyond quoting the verses where witness is mentioned. This detail is ironic, owing to the numerous works consulted for his commentary which give great attention to the motif of witness, including Richard Bauckham.

² Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, p. xvi.

³ Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, p. 274.

⁴ Blount, *Can I Get a Witness*, p. 9.

⁵ Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 12.

⁶ Blount, *Can I Get a Witness*, pp. 14–15.

S. Joseph Kidder posits that since faithful witness ‘is mentioned at the beginning of the book [1.5;3.14], it sets the stage for everything that comes later. Therefore, a correct understanding of the meaning of the “faithful and true witness” will guide one’s understanding of the entire book of Revelation’.⁷ Mitchell G. Reddish interprets ‘μάρτυς’ as ‘martyr’ and suggests that ‘the theme of martyrdom is not just an incidental part of the book of Revelation but is the primary motif of John’s writing. Revelation is a book written for and about martyrs’.⁸ If scholars place such an emphasis on the interpretive lens that witness provides, through which to read and study the Apocalypse, a closer examination is warranted to discern what more the Apocalypse tells of faithful witness.

While it is evident, from the survey of contemporary literature, that scholars recognize the ubiquitous nature of the witness motif in the Apocalypse, no coherent argument exists for an Apocalypse-informed theology of faithful witness. This chapter will synthesize the findings from previous chapters, bringing them into dialogue with additional voices in scholarship for the sake of developing a theology of faithful witness. In the pages to follow, I will draw together what the Apocalypse reveals regarding faithful witness, by way of seven observations and offer a contextualized examination of those observations within the 21st Century, African American, Pentecostal Church.

5.2 OBSERVATIONS OF WITNESS IN THE APOCALYPSE

As the review of modern literature has shown, scholars engage the theme of witness in the Apocalypse in multi-faceted ways. The observations made in the narrative reading may help the reader to appreciate the ubiquitous presence of witness in the Apocalypse. The motif can be seen clearly in chapters 1–7; 11; 12; 14; 17; and 20. More than half of the chapters in the Apocalypse involve figures who are explicitly or implicitly recognized as witnesses – some of them *faithful* witnesses. We must not render the unlisted chapters as void of a witness; for the most permeating witness of all in the Apocalypse is the Spirit. Whether on Patmos or in heaven, in a wilderness or a great mountain, nothing is witnessed to – that is, heard or seen to be recorded, if John is not first, ‘ἐν πνεύματι’ (‘in the Spirit’).⁹

⁷ Kidder, S. Joseph. ‘The Faithful and True Witness of Revelation 1:5 and 3:14’, *JATS* 28.1 (2017), pp. 114–31 (114).

⁸ Mitchell G. Reddish, ‘Martyr Christology in the Apocalypse’, *JSNT* 33 (1988), pp. 85–95 (86). While I do not necessarily follow a ‘martyr reading’ of the Apocalypse, I do agree that it is a book written for ‘μάρτυς’ and about ‘μάρτυς’; I only suggest that ‘μάρτυς’ means witness, and a part of faithful witness is *willing* to die for it.

⁹ Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, p. 357.

By way of the same Spirit, Jesus exhorts and admonishes the seven churches (Revelation 2–3). The pneumatology of the Johannine community holds the witness of the Spirit in high regard, as the witness of the Spirit empowers their witness (Jn 15.26–27) and affirms their witness (1 Jn 2.27). But what is more, as Blount posits, the whole of the Apocalypse is ‘a witness to the revelation that God has disclosed: God, working through the historical expression of Jesus as the Christ, is Lord. John relays this testimony with a purpose. His hearers and readers must witness to others the truth that John reveals to them’.¹⁰ Ubiquity notwithstanding, seven observations can be made as to what the Apocalypse tells us about faithful witness.

(1) The first observation, from a close reading of the Apocalypse, is that the content and aim of faithful witness is the testimony to the victory of the Lamb and the righteous rule and reign of God, over all of creation. Readers of the Apocalypse will encounter the phrase, ‘the testimony/witness of Jesus’ (‘τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ’),¹¹ six times, explicitly throughout (1.2, 5, 9; 12.17; 19.10; 20.4; 22.16). The witness of Jesus is both telling *about* Jesus – that is, his victory over death, hell, and the grave (cf. Rev. 1.5–6, 18), and testifying *with* Jesus about the righteousness and sovereignty of God (Jn 5.19–47). Throughout the Apocalypse the hearers ‘are continually reminded of God’s kingship in the metaphor of the throne in heaven. He makes the faithful [witnesses] into a kingdom and priests to serve Him (1:6). Being a [witness to the] kingdom of God means to recognise [sic] his kingship on earth as it is in heaven.’¹² This witness is offered through communicating (writing, speaking, singing, praying) and demonstrating (loving, suffering, following, discerning, depending on the Spirit, even dying) the social, theological, and ethical implications of the righteous rule and reign of God. In the Apocalypse, John writes, angels, elders, beasts, and humanity sing hymns. Jesus, the Spirit, elders, and angels all have their part in speaking. On occasion, the sounds are antiphonal, on occasion, they are in unison. Closely connected to the communicative acts of witness are the demonstrative acts. It is fitting that the Apocalypse accounts thirty–eight times of John ‘seeing’ (‘εἶδον’ | ‘I saw’) various scenes while in the Spirit.

To be a witness, one must behold; equally, the activity of witness is to be beholden. The demonstrative (seen, felt, experienced) acts in the Apocalypse give credence to what has been

¹⁰ Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 27.

¹¹ The *Legacy Standard Bible* translates it ‘the witness of Jesus’.

¹² Jan A Du Rand, “‘Your kingdom come ‘on earth as it is in heaven’’: The theological motif of the Apocalypse of John’, *Neot* 3.1 (1997), pp. 59–75 (63).

communicated (read, sung, spoken, heard); what is said to soon take place is demonstrated visually. Evidence of the social, theological, and ethical implications that accompany witness is visible in the first beatitude of the Apocalypse (1.3). ‘The one who reads, and those who hear’ suggests social implications; ‘the words of the prophecy’ suggests theological implications; and ‘[those who] keep the things which are written in it’ implies an ethical demand placed upon the hearers. In Johannine terms, ethical demands would be expressed through ‘follow’ commands (Jn 1.43; 1.4–5, 27; 12.26; 13.36–37; 21.19, 22; Rev. 14.4). Implied in this ethical implication and the call to follow is the concept of discipleship.

The implications continue to unfold as the Apocalypse progresses. As John introduces Jesus in the greeting, the Faithful Witness, *par excellence*, is said to be ‘the ruler of the kings of the earth’ (1.5). John continues in his introduction, making clear that the authority of Jesus, and sovereign reign of God is present on earth, whether on Patmos, in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, or Laodicea – ‘he has made us to be a kingdom’ (1.6). The twenty–four elders and four creatures also testify to the victory of the Lamb and the reign of God (5.9–10). As the Spirit leads John on this pneumatic journey, especially in the seven prophetic messages, ‘the ideal of the New Jerusalem invades the present. [Witnesses] are not called in scriptures to await the kingdom of God but to make it present on this earth.’¹³ Koester sums well the content of witness in the Apocalypse:

On one level the earthly Jesus bore witness to the reign of God by his words, actions, and death. The legacy of Jesus’ witness circulated in the Christian community alongside the word and commandments of God (12:17), and John knew of such testimony before his visionary encounter with the exalted Jesus (1:9). On another level the risen Christ continues bearing witness through prophets. John tells of receiving the word that God gave to Jesus, who in turn gave it to John (1:1). Revelation assumes that testimony purportedly given by the risen Jesus will be congruent with that received from the earthly Jesus.¹⁴

While a Kingdom motif does not appear, on the surface, to be a major focus in the Johannine community, a close reading of the Apocalypse suggests that it is not altogether absent. With much of John’s visionary experience drawing from the book of Daniel, one can hardly miss the Kingdom vs. kingdom overtures (cf. esp. Daniel 7 and Revelation 13).¹⁵ As Jon Newton observes, ‘John is

¹³ John R. Yeatts, *Revelation*, (Believers Church Bible Commentary; Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2003), p. 430.

¹⁴ Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation*, p. 213.

¹⁵ Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 16, notes:

Daniel’s point, much the same point that John’s Apocalypse wishes to reveal, is that God is in control of history, no matter how unlikely such a claim appears to be in a present dominated by the Seleucid Empire (Rome in John’s

trying to encourage his hearers to “resist” the empire by refusing to submit to its extreme demands for loyalty and even worship, and to give priority in their loyalties to God’s kingdom and to Jesus as God’s messiah and Lord’.¹⁶ In a world where ‘The righteous suffer, the wicked flourish: the world seems to be ruled by evil, not by God’, it is the faithful witness of the church that answers the question, ‘Where is God’s kingdom?’¹⁷

Bauckham recognizes the significance of the Kingdom in the Apocalypse, suggesting that by writing, John ‘shows the Christians of each of the seven churches how the issues in their local context belong to, and must be understood in the light of, God’s cosmic battle against evil and his eschatological purpose of establishing his kingdom’.¹⁸ The Kingdom – that is, the righteous rule and reign of God over all of creation, is an inseparable theme implied in the Apocalypse,¹⁹ and it is only made evident through the identity and vocation of faithful witness.

(2) Second, the Apocalypse presents witness as a prophetic work of the Spirit, at its foremost. The prophetic nature of the Apocalypse is revealed at its onset (1.2–3). Of all the OT texts and narratives to which John may allude in the Apocalypse, it is evident that ‘his primary interest was not the Torah but the prophetic literature, along with the worship language of the Psalms’.²⁰ Midway in the narrative, John is instructed to ‘prophesy again about many peoples and nations and tongues and kings’ (10.11). This prophecy is included in John’s having ‘bore witness to the word of God and to the witness of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw’ (1.2). The account of the two prophetic witnesses of Rev. 11.3–11, which is said to be ‘the intertextual center of the role of the Spirit in the Apocalypse’,²¹ further reveals the relationship of prophecy, Spirit, and faithful witness.²² As Blount suggests, the prophetic nature of witness ‘is not just a matter of predicting

case). Despite appearances, God’s kingdom and God’s people would be vindicated on God’s final day. Daniel 7, one of the most influential apocalyptic passages in history, picks up on this theme with imagery that was instrumental for John’s crafting of Revelation.

¹⁶ Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation*, p. 15.

¹⁷ Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 8.

¹⁸ Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 15. He adds (p. 40):

The whole of Revelation could be regarded as a vision of the fulfilment of the first three petitions of the Lord’s Prayer: ‘Your name be hallowed, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven’ (Matt. 6:9–10). John and his readers lived in a world in which God’s name was not hallowed, his will was not done, and evil ruled through the oppression and exploitation of the Roman system of power.

¹⁹ Slater, *Christ and Community*, p. 170.

²⁰ Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, p. 15.

²¹ Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation*, p. 133.

²² Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, p. 161.

the future. It is instead the revelation of a present truth that demands appropriate present and future behavior.’²³

Perhaps no passage in the Apocalypse gives more validity to its designation of being a prophetic work of the Spirit than Rev. 19.10, ‘the witness of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy’. Waddell convincingly writes, ‘the churches’ role as faithful witnesses to Jesus is only possible by the anointing of the Spirit’.²⁴ Further, he adds that, in the writing of the Apocalypse, ‘John is calling the church to engage in its prophetic role by bearing witness to Jesus via the power of the Spirit’.²⁵ The same Spirit that ushers John into a pneumatic experience, whereby he can engage in prophetic witness (1.9; 4.2; 17.3; 21.10), speaks to the seven churches in regard to their witness (2.7, 11, 17, 29; 3.6, 13, 22). The Spirit also beckons to those who are thirsty, in concert with the body of faithful witnesses, ‘Come!’ (22.17).

Having considered the nature (testimony to the victory of the Lamb and reign of God) and divine aspects (Spirit, prophecy) of faithful witness, the next three observations will reveal that witness necessitates human agency also, as there are human agents of delivery and reception.²⁶ The Apocalypse is given from God, to Jesus, to an angel, but ultimately to John (1.1, 4). John is then instructed to deliver what he has received to other human recipients (1.11; 2.1, 8, 12, 18; 3.1, 7, 14). The very first beatitude (1.3) testifies to this agency as well. The Apocalypse demands a human reader and human hearers.²⁷ Additionally, there is the prototype for faithful witness. Many scholars agree that the faithful witness of Jesus, *par excellence* (1.5; 3.14), refers to the testimony offered by the incarnate son of God.²⁸ If Rev. 1.5 makes a clear connection to the witness and the death of Jesus,²⁹ then such a connection underscores the humanity that witness necessitates. Others in the Apocalypse share such a connection, including Antipas (2.13), the innumerable multitude before the throne, who came out of the great tribulation (7.9–14), the prophetic witnesses (11.3–

²³ Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 348.

²⁴ Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation*, p. 175.

²⁵ Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation*, p. 175.

²⁶ Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 27.

²⁷ Gerhard A. Krodel, *Revelation* (ACNT; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1989), p. 80. Admittedly, the beatitude does not specify humanity, but because it is given ‘to show his bondservants’ (1.1), such is implied.

²⁸ Paul Barnett, *Revelation: Apocalypse Now and Then* (3rd edn; Sydney, South NSW: Aquila Press, 2019), p. 25, notes that the future which with the Apocalypse is concerned, ‘is controlled by the great events of the past centered on Christ’s faithfulness in life (‘the faithful witness’ 1:5), his sacrificial death (he ‘loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood’ 1:5), and his resurrection (‘I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive forever and ever’ 1:18)’.

²⁹ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 92.

11), the ones who overcame by the blood of the Lamb and their witness (12.11), and the witnesses on whose blood the great harlot was drunk (17.6). These observations reveal three aspects of the human nature of faithful witness in the Apocalypse: community, suffering, and time.

(3) Our third observation, and first human aspect of witness in the Apocalypse, is the solidarity of the community. In the Apocalypse, faithful witnesses share in a social construct worth examining; a liminal permanence referred to as *communitas*.³⁰ In such a community, the in-group social roles often run counter-cultural to the wider out-group of society, ‘and the liminal experience leads to social and moral transformation’.³¹ Victor W. Turner explains that ‘*communitas* often appears as a union of free and equal comrades in an Eden or millennium. Myths vouch for the existence of past *communitas* and prophesy its coming in the fullness of time’.³² Turner’s explanation fits well with our understanding of the content of witness. Further, he expounds that it ‘is almost always thought of or portrayed by actors as a timeless condition, an eternal now, as “a moment in and out of time,” or as a state to which the structural view of time is not applicable’.³³ The *faithful witnesses* of the Apocalypse, that is, those who have been witnesses unto death, share an unspoken ‘togetherness’ at each mention, as will be examined below. For purpose of this section, we only need to observe that they have suffered together, cry out together, worship together, follow together, dress in unison, and rule together.

One of the immediate signs of *communitas* is John’s self-identification. He writes (1.1) that the Apocalypse was given by God ‘to show to his servants’, and subsequently that it was given ‘to his servant, The *communitas* that is experienced in the community of witnesses is reiterated in his greeting (1.5–6) where he reminds the hearers of the work of Jesus; namely, that he ‘loved’, released’, and ‘made’ ... ‘us’ (emphasis added). This unifying work of Jesus is echoed in the various hymns sang in heaven (cf. 5.9–10). John continues in 1.9, where he addresses himself as

³⁰ I was first introduced to this term by two of my dearest friends, Larry and Marilyn Johnson, who pioneered a great work on Detroit’s east side. What I first thought was a typo in their literature came to be one of the most beautiful expressions of the community in which they lived and ministered. They became equals with ‘the least of these’. Having encountered *communitas* through their ministry, it becomes more recognizable in Scripture.

³¹ Tina Pippin, ‘Eros and the End: Reading for Gender in the Apocalypse of John’, *Semeia* 59 (1992), pp. 193–210 (198). Such a state of existence is very familiar to the Pentecostal community, as Amos Yong, *In the Days of Caesar: Pentecostalism and Political Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), pp. 207–208, notes, it ‘enables the many members of the body to suspend their mundane social identities and adopt instead a counter-cultural posture toward the world’.

³² Victor W. Turner, ‘Passages, Margins and Poverty: Religious Symbols of *Communitas*’, *Worship* 46.7 (1972), pp. 390–412 (398).

³³ Turner, ‘Passages, Margins and Poverty’, p. 399.

‘your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance’. John’s recognition as a leader in the community does not imply hierarchy in matters of faithful witness. Writing in the authority of a prophetic leader,³⁴ John does not postulate himself as an authority figure; rather, he assumes the role of a prophetic colleague, exhorting his brothers and sisters on to faithful witness.³⁵ John, in fact, identifies himself in solidarity with those to whom he is writing.³⁶ This solidarity is a key factor in *communitas*, as ‘those who would maximize *communitas* often begin by minimizing or even eliminating the outward marks of rank’.³⁷

This sense of solidarity is echoed in the prophetic messages, when one considers the various promise to overcomers – these promises are made available to any person from ‘every nation, tribe, people, and tongue’, that is, ‘whoever has ears to hear’ and will keep the words that they hear from this prophecy. The souls in 6.9–11 are reminded of this solidarity when they cry out for justice; they learn that they have not suffered alone but are in community with more witnesses who must also remain faithful and receive justice for their faithfulness. Although John would understand that humankind was made ‘a little lower than the angels’ (Ps 8.5), in matters of faithful witness, he is informed of the solidarity that humanity shares even with angels (19.10; 22.9).

(4) Solidarity brings to light our fourth observation – the second human aspect of witness. In the Apocalypse, the motif of witness is illustrated on the canvas of suffering.³⁸ John is on Patmos for his witness (1.9), as ‘a fellow partaker in the tribulation’. The ‘toil and perseverance’ of the church at Ephesus is addressed (2.2). The church at Smyrna is experiencing tribulation and poverty (2.9). Those in the church at Pergamum dwell ‘where Satan’s throne is’ (2.13). The church in Thyatira is ever increasing in perseverance (2.19). At Philadelphia, the church is in need of power, and presumably facing internal opposition (3.9). Only the churches in Sardis and Laodicea seem

³⁴ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 41–42, rightly observes that while John does not call himself a prophet (nor leader) in the Apocalypse, ‘there are numerous indicators that he does indeed fulfill this function’.

³⁵ Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 29, does not suggest as much; rather, he insists that John ‘identifies himself as a link in the revelatory chain because he wants his hearers and readers to recognize his place of authority in their communal lives’. However, this seems to conflict with his later assessment (p. 41) that ‘John reinforces that collegial relationship with the filial metaphor. He does not use the term *adelphos* (brother/sister) often, but when he does, it is at critical points that indicate a nonhierarchical relationship of witness’. Perhaps, in Blount’s view, John presents himself as a leader, but not when it concerns witness.

³⁶ Jürgen Roloff, *A Continental Commentary: The Revelation of John* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), p. 32. Regarding 1.9, Roloff notes that John ‘forgoes all designations of a special office and function in order to identify himself emphatically with the recipients of the letter by means of the predicates that are added to his name. He is their brother—thus the familiar self-designation of the members of the Christian community ... because he is a participant in their journey and destiny defined by association with Jesus’.

³⁷ Turner, ‘Passages, Margins and Poverty’, p. 403.

³⁸ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 25.

to be free of opposition or suffering. These references are only the suffering of the living witnesses. The suffering extends beyond the seven churches to whom the Apocalypse is addressed. We must not forget Antipas (2.13), the souls beneath the altar (6.9–11), the innumerable multitude (7.9), the two prophetic witnesses (11.3–11), overcomers (12.11), and victims of the great harlot mentioned (17.6), whose suffering led to their death. Lest the Faithful Witness, *par excellence*, be considered exempt from this list of Apocalyptic sufferers, the reader must recall that Jesus is ‘the Firstborn among the dead’ (1.5) and ‘the Lamb, standing as if slain’ (5.6).

The suffering that is presented in the Apocalypse is cosmic in its source, but concrete in its expression.³⁹ The reading reveals that the opposition and suffering that the witnesses in the Apocalypse face come from Satan, the beast, and false prophet; the chief of these is Satan, also revealed as the great dragon (12.9; 20.2).⁴⁰ Revelation 17 presents a vivid picture of the concrete expression of suffering and opposition in the Apocalypse. Perhaps the most vivid is 17.6, where ‘the great harlot’, – that is, Babylon the great city, is intoxicated by the blood of faithful witnesses. Taken as a whole, the vision seems to suggest a degree of civic and civil hardship on account of the witness that they possessed.

(5) It is the death of the witnesses in the Apocalypses that brings us to our fifth observation, and the third and final human aspect of witness. In matters of humanity, faithful witness is set *en tempore* (against time). The temporal aspect of faithful witness is not to suggest that witness has an expiration date; indeed, it does not, for Jesus *is* the Faithful Witness and we encounter witnesses in heaven. What this aspect suggests is that, so far as the participation of humanity is concerned (on earth), witness is expressed past, present, and future. The finitude of humanity will always demand a starting point for their witness, whereas the rule and reign of God is as timeless as God himself (as it is in heaven).⁴¹

The temporality of witness is therefore not a factor that is measured against God, ‘the One who is and who was and who is to come’ (1.4), rather it is for the benefit of humanity that John is instructed to record ‘the things which must soon happen’ (1.1). Those reading and hearing must keep the words of the Apocalypse ‘for the time is near’ (1.3). His writing invites them to participate in the identity and vocation of faithful witness. Thus, the prologue itself sets witness against time,

³⁹ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 26–30.

⁴⁰ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 26–27.

⁴¹ This can be observed in God’s inquisition to Job – ‘Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you know understanding’ (Job 38.4).

and Jesus reiterates it in the epilogue, ‘Yes, I am coming quickly!’ (22.20). The coming of Jesus is but one of the temporal elements. Again, John is told that things must necessarily happen.⁴² This implies that witness anticipates – whether that anticipation is suffering (2.10), vindication (6.10–11), duration of an assignment (11.3), or Jesus’ coming (22.20).

What an examination of these Scriptures helps the reader to see is that witness is not purely supernatural; that is, not merely an other-worldly, Kingdom/Spirit/prophecy concept relegated to heaven and heavenly beings. Nor is witness a concept that is purely human (on earth). The very nature of faithful witness – the divine and humanity, creator and created, is what brings heaven to earth. Without the incarnation of the Son of God, there is no faithful witness, no prototype *par excellence* (1.5), no victorious Lamb (5.4), no one to follow the Lamb, wherever he may go (14.4). The Spirit of prophecy, which comes from heaven, meets humanity – a convergence of relationship and solidarity in suffering – but in what form(s)?

(6) The forms of witness in the Apocalypse bring us to our sixth observation. Witness is encountered in multiple ways throughout the text: humanity, divine beings, performance, adornment, acts, and more. The underexplored scholarship on the motif of faithful witness in the Apocalypse may be owing to the shortlist of witnesses that it contains. A cursory glance reveals that only two are called faithful witnesses, explicitly; Jesus (1.5; 3.14) and Antipas (2.13). Several other figures in the Apocalypse are mentioned *in regard to* their witness or testimony. John ‘bore witness to the word of God and to the witness of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw’ (1.2). The martyred souls beneath the altar were slain ‘because of the word of God, and because of the witness which they had maintained’ (6.9).

The ones who were accused by Satan (12.10) ‘overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their witness’ (12.11). Later, in the same chapter, the dragon goes off to make war against the seed of the woman, those ‘who keep the commandments of God and have the witness of Jesus’ (12.17). The great harlot is drunk ‘with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus’ in 17.6. In Revelation 19, the angel identifies himself to John as ‘a fellow slave with you and your brothers who have the witness of Jesus’ (19.10), implying that

⁴² Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament: Revelation* (London: Blackie & Son, 1884–1885), p. 34, notes: [John is] not implying that he showed all the things that would happen, but such as he judged to be needful that his people should know. The word would naturally embrace those things which, in the circumstances, were most desirable to be known. The phrase rendered ‘must come to pass’ (δεῖ γενέσθαι), would imply more than mere futurity; The word used (δεῖ) means it needs, there is need of, and implies that there is some kind of necessity that the event should occur.

the community to whom John writes are included as witnesses. The martyred souls in Rev. 20.4 have been beheaded owing to their witness.

A closer reading shows that faithful witness is not relegated to beings. If faithful witness can be described as *a testimony (communicated and/or demonstrated) to the victory of Jesus, and the righteous rule and reign of God over all of creation*,⁴³ then the designation must be broadened to include communicative and demonstrative acts as faithful witness. The Apocalypse itself is a written (communicative) witness, as is affirmed in 22.6, ‘These words are faithful and true’. Worship is a major communicative act of witness in the Apocalypse, as the declarations and songs that are presented speak to the righteous works of God and the sovereignty of his Kingdom (4.8, 11; 5.9–10, 12–14; 7.10–17; 11.15–18; 12.10–13; 14.3–5;⁴⁴ 15.3–4; 16.5–7; 17.14; 19.1–7; 21.7). The Apocalypse is replete with demonstrative acts of witness; the adornment of white (4.4; 6.11; 7.9, 13–14; 19.14) is a testament to the veracity of the promises (3.4–5) to overcoming witnesses, demonstrating that God is indeed a righteous king. The same can be said of crowns (cf. 2.10; 3.11; 4.4, 10) and thrones (3.21; 4.4; 11.16; 20.4).

(7) The seventh observation that we can take away from the Apocalypse is that faithful witness is not without reward. A surface reading would result in an expansive list of benefits, from crowns (2.10) to garments (3.5), to an eternity void of hunger, thirst, or sorrow (21.4), and much more. Indeed, these are rewards to those who follow the Lamb faithfully, even unto death – but a careful reading would recognize the categorical blessings presented in the seven beatitudes throughout the Apocalypse. It is not for literary aesthetics that seven beatitudes are featured, nor is their placement in the narrative a matter of literary convenience; rather, these blessings ‘lie at the heart of Revelation’s message of faithful discipleship to Jesus the Lamb’.⁴⁵ Taken together, they encompass all the blessings promised throughout.⁴⁶ As Bauckham elaborates:

Together they spell out the adequate response to John’s prophecy (reading/hearing and keeping: 1:3; 22:7; faithfulness as far as death: 14:13; 22:14; readiness for the Lord’s coming: 16:15) and the fullness of divine blessing that attends that response (rest from labours: 14:13; invitation to the Lamb’s marriage supper: 19:9; participation in the first resurrection: 20:6; the tree of life and entry into the New Jerusalem: 22:14; but these are only *representative* of the

⁴³ This is my working definition of faithful witness in short form.

⁴⁴ I include this undiscernible song, owing to the fact that every other song or declaration of the witnesses in the Apocalypse sing/speak of the things of God, the Lamb, and the Kingdom. Here, it is noted (14.5) that ‘there was no lie found in their mouth’; the truth of their proclamation would include the song that they sing.

⁴⁵ Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly*, p. 39.

⁴⁶ Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, p. 29.

complete blessing indicated by the number seven). The seven beatitudes comprise a kind of summary of Revelation’s message.⁴⁷

A survey of the beatitudes informs readers what the calls and rewards of faithful witness are:

Beatitude	Reference	The Call	The Reward
1	Rev. 1.3	Read, hear, keep the words written in the prophecy	Blessed
2	Rev. 14.13	Die in the Lord	Rest from labors
3	Rev. 16.15	Stay awake, keep garments	Not walk about naked nor see shame
4	Rev. 19.9	[Be] invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb	An invitation
5	Rev. 20.6	Have a part in the first resurrection	Second death has no authority. Will be priests of God and reign with him for a thousand years.
6	Rev. 22.7	Keep the words of the prophecy	Blessed (New Jerusalem)
7	Rev. 22.14	Wash robes	The right to the tree of life and entrance into the new city

A few notes can be made about the rewards of Faithful Witness. First, while most appear eschatological only (2, 4, 5, 6), some have immediate effect (1, 3, 7). Second, some of the rewards are tangible, such as an invitation to the marriage supper, thrones, access to the city and the garden, the eternal presence with the Lord, etc., but some are epistemological, such as assurance of the faithfulness of God and the opportunity for repentance and confession (washing robes). Third, regarding demands, discipleship is a non-negotiable requirement to receive the rewards. Discipleship is conveyed through words like reading, hearing, and keeping – all these words suggest the idea of learning. Those wanting to partake in the rewards of faithful witness must be willing to follow the Lamb wherever he goes (14.4).

The seven observations above have profound implications for understanding the social, theological, and ethical implications of the victory of Jesus, and the righteous rule and reign of God (your kingdom come, your will be done), and how the Church (on earth) can partner with God (as it is in heaven), by way of the Spirit, in its faithful witness to demonstrate as much. To that end, I offer below an overture to a theology of faithful witness. What can the Church read, hear,

⁴⁷ Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, p. 30.

learn, and do as faithful witnesses, based on this study in the Apocalypse. To answer this question, I first examine the important role that witness has played and continues to play in the Church, as it relates to her identity and mission.

5.3 FAITHFUL WITNESS IN THE AFRICAN AMERICAN PENTECOSTAL CHURCH

Taking these seven observations of faithful witness into account, I will now offer contextualized implications of this African American, Pentecostal reading for the African American, Pentecostal Church (AAPC). In 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic turned the world on its head, but the effects of quarantine, social distancing, and job loss were only the beginning of the issues facing African Americans in the U.S. The pandemic emerged during a presidential election year, in which political tensions exacerbated the racial and socio-economic tensions in the country. In that same year, the black community became outraged at the death toll of African American men and women who lost their lives, particularly at the hands of police officers.⁴⁸

It was during this time, at the start of a global pandemic, that politics, racism, and police reform began to pervade the pulpits of urban America – but not in the same S/spirit as the activist pastors and religious leaders of the Civil Rights Era of the twentieth century. In 2020, many African American churches engaged in protests and marches and gave homiletic address to the injustices and systemic pressures under which the backs of the African American community felt bent. The Apocalypse helps to inform the faithful witness of the AAPC, especially in difficult times such as that of the pandemic.

The implications and overtures provided below are offered considering the situation of the AAPC during the pandemic. They are not exhaustive; rather, they welcome further dialogue from scholars within the community. While the pandemic is in view, the overtures do not suggest that faithful witness necessitates a pandemic nor a global/regional/local crisis. Owing to the pandemic occurring during the development of this thesis, it serves as a significant case study. After considering these overtures, I will offer a brief note of contextualization unaccompanied by a pandemic.

⁴⁸ Li Cohen, 'Police in the U.S. killed 164 Black people in the first 8 months of 2020. These are their names.', CBS News (Sept. 2020), <https://www.cbsnews.com/pictures/black-people-killed-by-police-in-the-u-s-in-2020/>, reports that more than 150 African Americans were killed by police officers within the first eight months of 2020.

5.3.1 FAITHFUL WITNESS AS A TESTIMONY TO THE VICTORY OF THE LAMB AND THE REIGN OF GOD

Clinical research reports that the pandemic had an ‘insurmountable psychosocial impact on the whole [of] mankind. Marginalized community [sic], particularly those with substance use disorders (SUD), are particularly vulnerable to contract the infection and likely to suffer from greater psychosocial burden.’⁴⁹ This research suggests that the physical, social, and psychological ailments with which the marginalized (particularly African American, urban) community suffered were exacerbated by the pandemic. These ailments certainly inform the spiritual health of the individual as well.⁵⁰ To the Pentecostal community, these ailments fall within the broader category of sickness and disease. The amplification of these debilitating issues that are so descriptive of urban black communities (mental health, depression, social anxieties, drug and alcohol addictions, abuse, and much more) demand a response from the church. How does the Apocalypse inform the faithful witness of the AAPC under such conditions?

One important question which arises is how are these disparities viewed among Pentecostals? J.C. Thomas aptly notes that the opinions amongst Pentecostals, regarding sickness and disease, are not homogeneous, dividing the viewpoints into three camps: the first are those who believe that every ailment is from the devil, and deliverance is directly from God – the outcome of either is owing to the faith of the individual; the second group does attribute sickness and disease to Satan, but believes that sickness from ‘natural causes’ fall to both Christians and non-Christians, owing to the effects of sin upon all of humanity; the third group believes that God has the power to heal and the devil can inflict suffering, but they have become rather apathetic to the whole matter for various reasons.⁵¹ While much can be said on the topic, the Apocalypse makes some clear points regarding the victory of the Lamb, insofar as it relates to sin, sickness, and deliverance. To the above-mentioned groups, the disparities caused and or amplified by the pandemic would be addressed differently in prayer, outreach, and homiletics. However, as it pertains to faithful

⁴⁹ Mahua Jana Dubey, *et al.* ‘COVID-19 and addiction’, *DMS:CRR* 14 (September – October 2020), pp. 817-23 (817).

⁵⁰ Peter Scazzero and Warren Bird, *The Emotionally Healthy Church: A Strategy for Discipleship That Actually Changes Lives* (exp. edn; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), p. 51, raise the issue here, suggesting that ‘we slice out the emotional portion of who we are, deeming it suspect, irrelevant, or of secondary importance. Contemporary discipleship models often esteem the spiritual more than the physical, emotional, social, and intellectual components of who we are. Nowhere, however, does a good biblical theology support such a division.’

⁵¹ John Christopher Thomas, ‘The Devil, Disease and Deliverance: James 5:14-16’, *JPT* 1.2 (April 1993), pp. 25–50 (25–27).

witness, what must remain central in each of these efforts is the victory of the Lamb. With limited space for reflection here, I will point out three observations.

First, the Apocalypse gives evidence that sickness and pain, hardship and suffering will befall even those who follow Jesus. While scriptures have been noted in the previous chapter to support this claim, what I suggest here is that faithful witness testifies to the victory of the Lamb, despite the current sickness and disease that those who follow Jesus may face. This assertion finds support in Rev. 21.4 where the promise is made that there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain. Further, a promise is repeated (Rev. 7.17; 21.4) that every tear will be wiped away. This wiping away of tears, and ultimate healing is owing to the victory of the Lamb.

Second, in cases where sickness and disease are resultant of sin, the effects or consequences of sin may remain, but the current results of sin do not nullify the victory of the Lamb, ‘who released us from our sins by his blood’ (Rev. 1.5). While his blood has redeemed us from our sin, the propensity of humankind is to return to our folly; thus, the admonishment of Jesus made to the healed man at Bethesda not to return to his sin (Jn 5.14). However, the victory of the Lamb is far reaching, for it was because of the slain Lamb that those who were in sin ‘from every tribe and tongue and people and nation’ were purchased for God by the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 5.9).

Third, it must be noted that in some cases, it is not the devil who has caused the sickness, it comes from Jesus as well. No clearer evidence of this can be found than in the prophetic message to the church of Thyatira. The sickness that is to come to the one identified as ‘Jezebel’ is a result of leading people into sin (Rev. 2.22), but the sickness is at the hand of Jesus, not Satan. Further, the pestilence that is to befall those who are referred to as ‘her children’ (Rev. 2.23) are also at risk of suffering at the hands of Jesus. Such an act of discipline further demonstrates the victory of the Lamb, as his victory over sin is not merely eschatological or soteriological – it is also ecclesial, as this punishment to the church at Thyatira has major implications for the rest of the Church, for ‘all the churches will know that I am he who searches the minds and hearts’ (Rev. 2.23).

While the personal suffering of sickness and disease must be addressed, so too must the systemic issues that were magnified during the pandemic; namely, the racism, injustices, and political turmoil. As Boesack aptly notes, ‘In times of severe persecution, suffering, and death, the hearts of the faithful long passionately for signs of the power of God and for God’s intervention in their history for the sake of justice and liberation’.⁵² When the world is crying out to see the hand

⁵² Boesack, *Comfort and Protest*, p. 17.

of God, amidst oppression, it is the faithful witness of the church that reminds the world that God is, indeed, ‘the Lord God ... the Almighty’ (Rev. 1.8).

When hatred and corruption are words to describe the culture in which the Church is called to minister, it is critical that she bear witness to the righteous rule and reign of God in her speech and acts, just as the twenty–four elders and four creatures do, who cease not in declaring ‘holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty’ (Rev. 4.8). The Church must govern herself under such an authority, in order that the non-Christian might imagine a world in which evil and corruption are not determinant factors of their future. While the eschatological promise is comforting, that God will wipe away every tear (Rev. 7.17), the AAPC must present, in word and deed, the works on earth that garner such a promise – that is, total submission to the authority of God.

The AAPC must present herself as a faithful witness that while God does hear the cries for justice and liberation (cf. Rev. 6.10-11), there is yet the reality that we may occupy territory ‘where Satan’s throne is’ and ‘where Satan dwells’ (Rev. 2. 13). While its fullness may not yet be seen, at the backdrop of systemic injustice, racism, and other social challenges, only the Church can bear witness to the unveiled truth that ‘the salvation and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come’ (Rev. 12.10). Testimony to the sovereign reign of God is not without cost, as the faithful witnesses noted in this thesis have proven with their lives. However, just as it was with Jesus, Antipas, and others, it is indeed the faithful witness unto death that gives the ultimate testimony to the victory of the Lamb and the reign of God. Therefore, while attention to the historical and contemporary black struggle must be given, it must be balanced with the reality that liberation is not always immediate, yet a lack of immediate liberation does not rob God of his supreme authority as the Almighty one. Instead, he will reward those who overcome, as is a constant refrain in the Apocalypse.

5.3.2 FAITHFUL WITNESS AS A PROPHETIC WORK OF THE SPIRIT

‘In the Name of Jesus, standing in the office of the prophet of God, I execute judgment on you COVID-19. I execute judgment on you, Satan, you destroyer, you killer. You get out. I break your power. You get off this nation.’⁵³ These were the words of a popular U.S. charismatic televangelist, only several weeks into the onset of the pandemic, which held the nation in limbo for more than a

⁵³ Kenneth Copeland, ‘Judgment Is Executed on COVID-19: by Kenneth Copeland’, YouTube (March 2020), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OSIrQBGfUtw>.

year. He continued, '[Destroyer,] you will destroy through Covid-19, no more! It is finished! It is over! And the United States of America is healed and well again, said the mighty Spirit!'⁵⁴ This is but one example of the prophetic utterances that filled the airwaves of television, internet, and social media during the pandemic, and beyond.

Another wave of prophetic popularity, predominantly in the AAPC, is the 'bigger, better, blessed' type of prophecies, where the hearers are offered promises such as 'this is the year of increase' or 'everything the devil took from you, God is returning one hundred-fold'.⁵⁵ It was during the pandemic, and perhaps owing to the fact that it began during an election year, that prophetic words rose in popularity – many of which were unbiblical, unwarranted, and remained unfulfilled. In an article published by the University of Notre Dame, Emmanuel Katangole asks, 'What is it about this time that calls for "prophecy"? And how can prophecy and the prophetic tradition help us to navigate a time when the very foundations of our social, cultural, political, economic and personal lives are threatened?'⁵⁶ While he draws a fair conclusion, that prophecy should point us to solidarity, lament, and (implied) discernment, the Apocalypse suggests that prophecy should do more.

Since the inception of Pentecostalism, the AAPC has been known mostly for its emphasis on the Spirit at work in the community. As Estrela Alexander notes:

African American Pentecostals have never ceased speaking to themselves (and to anyone else who would listen) about their experience of the Spirit. Though their voices often have been muted by inattentive and unready ears, for those who would listen voluminous tracts, sermons, hymns, testimonies (spiritual autobiographies), and other material speak volumes about this vital aspect of Pentecostalism and allow a much broader picture to emerge.⁵⁷

The activity of the Spirit is evident in the broader worship experience of the AAPC, from her songs and prophetic utterances to the shouts and the dances. In matters of faithful witness, the most consistent prophetic work of the Spirit is the preached Word of God. Through their prophetic

⁵⁴ Kenneth Copeland, 'Judgment Is Executed on COVID-19: by Kenneth Copeland', YouTube (March 2020), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OSIrQBGFUtw>.

⁵⁵ These are not direct quotes from a particular source, but represent a particular theme in popular public prophecies at the time of the pandemic.

⁵⁶ Emmanuel Katangole, 'A kairos moment: Prophecy and hope in the time of COVID-19', Keough School of Global Affairs: University of Notre Dame; <https://keough.nd.edu/a-kairos-moment-prophecy-and-hope-in-the-time-of-covid-19/>.

⁵⁷ Estrela Alexander (ed.), *The Black Fire Reader: A Documentary Resource on African American Pentecostalism* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013), p. xiii.

preaching, African American pastors and preachers can address the issues that concern their partitioners. Carolyn Ann Knight contends:

The preacher who would preach on social issues is called to a prophetic ministry. To be prophetic is to be unpopular. Therefore, once I determine what ‘the mood of the environment’ is, I cannot abandon preaching on a particular issue just because I sense that it is not popular with the audience or listener. I must keep in mind that this is God’s Word for the people, and it must be preached even though it is an uncomfortable Word. The wise preacher on social issues will be able to help the people to see this.⁵⁸

As an African American community, the AAPC is burdened to hold the folk story, or historical narrative (that is, the trials and triumphs), of the African American experience in high regard. As a Pentecostal community, it carries the conviction that the canonical story of redemption must not be lost, and the leading of the Spirit not ignored. The prophetic work of the Spirit in the AAPC coalesces these burdens of Spirit, Word, and community into one unified expression, in order that she might present herself as a faithful witness.

To protect her from the nonsensical at best and heretical at worst prophetic performances that are ever so popular, the AAPC can find a rubric in the Apocalypse for faithful witness as it relates to the prophetic work of the Spirit (prophecy). Five observations outline this rubric. First, prophecy is not merely informational, but instructional; it is to be communicated, understood, and demands a response (Rev. 1.3; Revelation 2-3). Even in instances where the prophecy is in the indicative (informed), versus the imperative (instructed), an ethical response is still called for. An example of an indicative prophecy would be the worship of Revelation 4-5, where the elders and creatures testify to the victory of the Lamb, and the righteous rule and reign of God. Owing to the fact that John encounters this worship scene while in the Spirit, and it’s taking place before the throne, where the Spirit is (Rev. 1.4), the worship can be understood as a prophetic work in the Spirit. What the worship declares demands an ethical response from John, as well as those who read and hear the words which he records (cf. 1.3).

The second observation reminds us of the content and aim of faithful witness; prophecy testifies to the victory of the Lamb and the reign of God (Rev. 19.10). Especially in times of civic and social unrest, political turmoil, and societal uncertainty, the victory of the Lamb and reign of God serve as a north star, guiding the AAPC in her mission as a faithful witness. Whether

⁵⁸ Carolyn Ann Knight, ‘Preaching as an Intimate Act’, in Cleophus J. LaRue (ed.), *Power in the Pulpit: How America’s Most Effective Black Preachers Prepare Their Sermons* (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), p. 97.

addressing injustice, economic hardship, or even national crises, when the victory of the Lamb and the reign of God are kept at the fore, the Church is more likely to remain faithful in her witness.

Third, prophecy is not always a positive message to the hearers. As much as prophecy testifies to the victory of the Lamb and the reign of God, it also speaks to the hearer's faithfulness and/or unfaithfulness in following the Lamb or submitting to the authority of God. The seven prophetic messages to the churches are evidence for this. In the same way, the AAPC must remind her hearers (be that the church, or the nations) of the implications of the victory of the Lamb and reign of God – by way of the Spirit, they must continue to prophesy (Rev. 10.11; 11.3).

Fourth, where there is prophecy, there must be both discernment and discipline. Discernment is necessary to attest to the credibility of the prophet and the reliability of the prophecy. This lesson is learned in the message to Thyatira, and it is critical for the AAPC today. With discernment, the church can understand the word declared, as well as examine the character and conduct of the one(s) declaring that word. It is only by way of discernment that the AAPC can stand faithfully against immorality. Protection against immoral influences is but one side of discernment's coin. The other side is often less noticeable, but equally harmful – the tendency for individuals in prophetic communities to claim a deeper spiritual knowledge than to that which the Spirit bears witness. Discernment is, therefore, more than being watchful for immoral influence in the church; it 'brings to our attention the fact that besides the Holy Spirit and human spirits in the personal and corporate senses, there are also demonic spirits at work in the world'.⁵⁹ Pneumatic discernment that leads to discipline makes room for repentance and growth, whereas tolerance makes room for immorality and deception.⁶⁰

Fifth and finally, as we are reminded that the prophetic work of faithful witness is a discerning work which testifies to the victory of the Lamb and the reign of God; and owing to the fact that prophecy is not always a promise of good and better, but that which aligns the Word of God, regardless of its popularity in the culture – the prophetic work of the Spirit is a costly work. To be faithful in her witness, the AAPC must be willing to pay that price, even if that price is life itself (Rev. 11.3–11).

⁵⁹ Amos Yong, *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014), p. 154.

⁶⁰ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 149.

5.3.3 THE SOLIDARITY OF THE COMMUNITY OF FAITHFUL WITNESSES (*COMMUNITAS*)

One area in which the AAPC (as well as others) can struggle is a crucial element of faithful witness and noticeable in the Apocalypse; that is *communitas*. The pandemic presented many opportunities for division amongst churches. At the civic level, there were matters of politics and public safety. Nationally, the church was torn over multiple issues, including who was the right candidate for public office as president of the United States, and how serious to take the pandemic and the government-mandated safety protocols such as gathering sizes, face coverings, and social distancing. Locally, the challenges were exacerbated, as each state exercised a degree of autonomy in matters of public safety.

At the civic level, the social effects were clear, as political discord led to an attack on the U.S. capitol (January 2021), as well as an insurrection at the Michigan State capitol (April 2020) over the disagreement of safety protocols set by the state governor and health officials. The civil challenges were no less divisive. The rising toll of African American deaths elevated the #BlackLivesMatter movement to a national stage, with local impact. Riots, protests, marches, and social media outlashes ensued in its wake. Only for a short time did the social injustices draw attention away from the pandemic. Soon after, there were debates about masks versus no masks, in-person gatherings, or avoiding indoor gatherings, vaccine, or no vaccine.

All these issues, both civic and civil, national and local, had an impact on the AAPC. The theological matter behind most of these salient concerns was the *Imago Dei*, that is – *What was the inherent value of people? What were their rights?* While biblical truths regarding anthropology and the *Imago Dei* may have driven some of the sermons and public addresses in some of the AAPCs, exegetical accuracy did not make up for the lack of unity and love – a compassionate love for the lost, and a communal love for the body. The church was divided in her response to the outcry of the lost, as well as their fellowship with one another. In Johannine literature, the balance of doctrine and devotion, of correction and compassion, is a distinctive element of faithful witness,⁶¹ and should be the experience of the AAPC.

A unified love, for those within and outside of the community, is taught and demonstrated by Jesus in the FG and is visible throughout Johannine literature.⁶² Perhaps no greater evidence for

⁶¹ Craig R. Koester, *The Word of Life: A Theology of John's Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), p. 188.

⁶² Koester, *The Word of Life*, p. 112.

compassionate love can be given than Jn 3.16. Heaven exemplifies *communitas* by way of the Father giving his unique Son and Jesus' giving his life for humanity. We are reminded that the compassionate love of Christ was poured out for humanity while we were in a state of sin (1 Jn 4.10). This compassionate love is echoed in the Apocalypse – that Jesus freed us from our sins with his sacrificial love (Rev. 1.5). Such a love is counter-cultural but gives witness to the victory of the Lamb – a victory that was won through his love. This love could lead to marginalization and even death, but the rewards are promised to the overcomer who has witnessed faithfully, even unto death (12.11).⁶³

In matters of solidarity in the church's witness to the lost, U-Wen Low, a Pentecostal scholar explains well, that it 'in no way diminishes other experiences or compromises our faith, and if anything should challenge us to see other experiences of oppression and persecution around the world, and to work to alter them for the better'.⁶⁴ Additionally, Rev. Charles E. Blake, Presiding Bishop Emeritus of the Church of God in Christ (COGIC), the largest African American Pentecostal denomination, stood in solidarity with the Center of Disease Control, physicians, clergy, scientists, and more, in order to make an informed decision by which he would lead the COGIC body.⁶⁵ His aim was not to compromise the witness of the gospel message, rather it was to make an informed decision about the safety and health of the body that witnesses to an on-looking world.

A beautiful demonstration of solidarity and love within the community is offered in the FG, by way of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples. As J.C. Thomas observes:

On extremely rare occasions an individual, without obligation, might take this chore upon him or herself as an act of deep love and sincere honor. In John 13 such service issuing from love is evident, both from the emphasis on servitude and also from the prominence given in v. 1 to Jesus' love for his own, which is mentioned twice, once with εἰς τέλος. Yet, Jesus' action remains unparalleled in ancient literature, for no other master (superior) condescends to perform this act for a subordinate.⁶⁶

⁶³ Slater, *Revelation as Civil Disobedience*, p. 94.

⁶⁴ U-Wen Low, 'Black Lives Must Matter: A Historical Pentecostal Response', *Crucis: Research and Commentary From Leading Christian Academics* (5 June, 2020), https://crucis.ac.edu.au/black-lives-must-matter/?fbclid=IwAR28xbocF6B2xM_3YYGTjeEgIICDnzJ6V8l_O-iRjn4mdiJX2qLLdd2av0.

⁶⁵ David D. Daniels III, 'The Church of God in Christ, COVID-19, and Black Pentecostal Constructive Engagement', in R. Drew Smith, Stephanie C. Boddie, Bertis D. English (eds.), *Racialized Health, COVID-19, and Religious Responses: Black Atlantic Contexts and Perspectives* (London, England: Routledge, 2022), pp. 134–41 (136).

⁶⁶ Thomas, *Footwashing in John 13 and the Johannine Community*, p. 88.

Moreover, Thomas notes that foot washing has served as a sign of cleansing from sin, being attributed to ‘the removal of post-baptismal sin, the sins due to the frailty of the human condition, as well as errors committed daily by the disciples’.⁶⁷ What such an attribution suggests is that within the church, there should be a love which seeks to help cleanse one another from the residue of sin that distorts and hinders our witness. Emulating this manner of love for fellow brothers and sisters is a form of faithful witness (1 Jn 4.11–12).

In the community of faithful witnesses, solidarity is bound in love, but built in teaching, and the Apocalypse alludes to as much. To every church, Jesus instructs the hearers to listen to the words that come by way of the Spirit. It is particularly noticeable in the prophetic message to Pergamum, where solidarity was lacking. The church of Pergamum was not unified in its witness because it was not unified in its teaching and discipleship (Rev. 2.14-15). The same can be said of the AAPC, during the pandemic. With in-person gatherings restricted and prohibited, many parishioners turned to the internet and social media in search of new teaching. Unfortunately, what they encountered is descriptive of the situation in Pergamum – popular preaching that was driven by greed, prosperity, and cultural validation (cf. the teaching of Balaam, Rev. 2.14). If not popular preaching, they encountered the theology of the culture (cf. the teaching of the Nicolaitans, Rev. 2.15). The faithful witness of the AAPC was carried out by the churches who remained steadfast in their biblical preaching and teaching of the Word, and those who committed themselves to listening and obeying (Rev. 1.3).

5.3.4 FAITHFUL WITNESS ON A BACKDROP OF SUFFERING

It is, perhaps, the intensified suffering of the African American community, brought by the pandemic, that made unbiblical teachings so alluring. The prosperity gospel, a teaching that became popular in the Pentecostal and Charismatic community in the late twentieth century,⁶⁸ became increasingly popular. Suffering people were desperate for a word of hope amid their suffering. The prosperity gospel is among the most destructive teachings, and one that is certain to distort the witness of the AAPC.

⁶⁷ Thomas, *Footwashing in John 13 and the Johannine Community*, p. 15.

⁶⁸ Michael J. McClymond, ‘Prosperity Already and Not Yet: An Eschatological Interpretation of the Health-and-Wealth Emphasis in the North American Pentecostal-Charismatic Movement’, in Peter Althouse and Robby Waddell (eds), *Perspectives in Pentecostal Eschatologies: World without End* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2010), p. 293.

In the twenty-first century, and especially during the pandemic, ‘the preponderance of social media in North America has made the health and wealth gospel particularly visible among African American Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements’.⁶⁹ As Robert Franklin explains:

[The prosperity gospel] may be even more insidious and dangerous because it subverts particular elements of the Jesus story and of classical biblical Christianity in order to instill a new attitude toward capitalism and riches. It often deliberately suppresses, ignores, and/or deletes language about radical sacrifice for the sake of God’s kingdom. In other words, it excludes a core message of the Jesus story, namely, that which is symbolized by the cross. That symbol is an enemy to the underlying confidence people invest in material prosperity at the expense of trusting God.⁷⁰

In matters of faithful witness, ‘health and wealth’ are not to be expected over suffering and even death (be it figurative or literal death). For those who belong to Christ, suffering that leads to death is not a finality, but ultimately leads to the glory of God. The Lazarus narrative of John 11 is a reminder that suffering and death have a purpose. John makes clear, in his greeting, that suffering is a byproduct of witnessing (Rev. 1.9).⁷¹

The Apocalypse demonstrates that suffering is part and parcel to bearing witness to Jesus, and those who follow the Lamb wherever he goes cannot expect to escape suffering. Sometimes the suffering that witness involves is economic, sometimes, it is civic, sometimes, it is social or emotional. What the AAPC can anticipate, and even embrace with hope, is that those who witness to Jesus will die, but death is not final – quite the opposite, death is fruit bearing (cf. Jn 12.24). Dr. James C. Perkins, a pastor in Detroit, Michigan laments, prior to the rise in popularity of the prosperity gospel, ‘The church would speak out on political issues, issues of economic justice and injustice, racism and so forth. And I think now there’s much more emphasis on prosperity than there is on prophetic ministry.’⁷²

The prosperity message is destructive to the AAPC for multiple reasons. First, it misrepresents God as one whose goodness and benevolence is uniquely bound to the affluence and generosity of

⁶⁹ Vondey, *Pentecostalism*, p. 97.

⁷⁰ Franklin, ‘The Gospel of Bling’, p. 200.

⁷¹ Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Revelation* (Daniel L. Akin, David Platt, and Tony Merida [eds.]; Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary; Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), p. 21, notes, ‘John speaks of a “kingdom.” Jesus inaugurated His kingdom as a suffering Savior. We enter the kingdom and serve as suffering saints. Reigning and suffering are not mutually exclusive. It is the way of Jesus. It is also to be our way.’

⁷² Besheer Mohamed, Kiana Cox, Jeff Diamant, and Claire Gecewicz, ‘Faith Among Black Americans’ (Pew Research Center, February 16, 2021), p. 142.

humankind.⁷³ Second, it misinterprets Scripture.⁷⁴ Third, it ignores the principle of stewardship; the previous two problems combined offer an erroneous view of giving – that the sole purpose of financial generosity is to move God toward benevolence. Fourth, as Lewis Brogdon notes, and perhaps most visibly apparent in the urban church is the fact that:

Prosperity teaching ignores the legacy of slavery and racism and the multifarious ways it continues to impact people’s lives, which is a major oversight and a serious detriment to helping people understand why there is poverty in this country and why people of color struggle with poverty and unemployment. The language of obstacles of faith, trials and tribulations, and satanic and demonic attacks, while well intended and applicable in some sense, is very limiting and oftentimes distracting because it keeps people in ignorance about the machinations and systems of the world.⁷⁵

C. Peter Wagner attributes poverty to an accepted mindset of the church that emerged during the Constantine era,⁷⁶ and argues that it is not of God – citing Deuteronomy 28 as theological support for his conclusion. However, Wagner’s interpretation does not find support in the Apocalypse, particularly the prophetic message to the witnesses in Smyrna. Their poverty is not explained away by sin, mindset, or compromise. On the contrary, they are praised for their steadfast witness amid their poverty. This is the type of prophetic language that Perkins longs for, language that comes by way of the Spirit. It is such language that can speak hope into a marginalized community. Only the Spirit can speak to the suffering, and though warn of more imminent suffering, offer comfort and hope. The hope that the Spirit offers is not escape, but eternal reward.

5.3.5 FAITHFUL WITNESS IS SET AGAINST TIME

The pandemic was a global disruption that lasted for a particular time, though the effects may still linger. The presidential election season of 2020 was but for a time, after which, the elected president would serve a term for a set time. Marches would last for only a time, and protests would take place within a window of time. The troubles, trials, and triumphs of humankind are certain to occur within a determined or allowed time (cf. Rev. 1.1). Within these designated times are great

⁷³ Lewis Brogdon, *The New Pentecostal Message? An Introduction to the Prosperity Movement* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015), p. 65.

⁷⁴ Brogdon, *The New Pentecostal Message?*, p. 65.

⁷⁵ Brogdon, *The New Pentecostal Message?*, p. 69.

⁷⁶ C. Peter Wagner, *This Changes Everything: How God Can Transform Your Mind and Change Your Life* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2013), p. 208.

opportunities for faithful witness. To be a faithful witness is to be on alert – which includes paying attention to the time.

Much like the church of Sardis, the AAPC can be distracted by image and lose the power of influence. This tendency is owing, perhaps, to the increasing number of church members migrating from smaller urban churches to suburban megachurches.⁷⁷ Here is presented another challenge that was exacerbated by the pandemic. With more attractive, charismatic preaching and teaching accessible through streaming and social media (regardless of their biblical accuracy), some churches made a pivot from being alert to being attractive. This pivot creates a missional distraction, causing the church to be unaware of the brevity of time (cf. Rev. 3.2 ‘Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of My God’). Additionally, they lose focus of the nearness of the return of Christ (Rev. 3.3 ‘if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you’). Such a lack of awareness is certain to discredit one’s witness.

5.3.6 THE MULTIFACETED FORMS OF FAITHFUL WITNESS

Just as faithful witness is presented in many forms in the Apocalypse, the AAPC is replete with forms of witness that are noteworthy here. The most apparent are the people; the pastors and preachers, ministers and laity – all can be participants in the work of witness. But there are many other elements of the church and worship experience of the AAPC that take the form of faithful witness. Her songs and sermons, liturgical dances and testimony, are performative acts of witness. In most cases, upon entering an AAPC, one would discover displays of art or banners that also act as witness. In some worship services, the clergy are robed in ceremonial garb which can also serve as a witness, just as the white robes of the Apocalypse do.

While these elements of the AAPC worship experience may be identified as forms of witness, the Apocalypse is helpful for the church to be *intentional* in these areas. For starters, preachers in the AAPC can consider their sermons – to what do they bear witness? What is the content and aim of the sermon? From where do they build their theology? To what do the songs sung by their choirs and worship leaders bear witness? Casey Black, for example, shares how the shallow lyrics of one

⁷⁷ Scott Newman, 'Megachurches are getting even bigger as churches close across the country', NPR (July 2023), <https://www.npr.org/2023/07/14/1187460517/megachurches-growing-liquid-church>, reports that churches had to close their doors, owing to the loss of members to growing megachurches across the United States.

worship experience drove him away from the church.⁷⁸ It is not uncommon in the AAPC to encounter pop-culture worship songs, that is songs that are from billboards rather than the Bible. The Apocalypse has informed many worship songs, songs that give testimony to the victory of the Lamb, and the reign of God over all of creation. Such are the types of songs that serve as faithful witness.

5.3.7 THE REWARDS OF FAITHFUL WITNESS

The challenge that the AAPC faces is one that the African American community faces – trusting that God is mindful of the plight of his people. While the lament may not have come from the lips of martyrs, the cry of ‘how long, o Lord ...’ (Rev. 6.10) reverberated throughout the African American community during the pandemic. The Apocalypse is a great source of comfort for such a challenge. While four of the seven beatitudes in the Apocalypse are eschatological, ‘It is impossible to understand fully the significance of eschatology in African American religious experience without attention to its role in the freedom struggle of black people. Eschatology refers to the consummation and rectification of history and the persistence of hope.’⁷⁹

Three of the beatitudes speak to the freedom struggle and the persistence of hope. The first beatitude (Rev. 1.3) promises an equal blessing to the reader, hearers, and the ones who keep the words of the prophecy. Owing to the socioeconomic challenges to which the AAPC must minister, this beatitude is especially promising, as it is void of any educational, or situational requisite other than hearing and obeying. Such a promise puts the poor and illiterate in company with the wealthy and educated, in matters of faithful witness. The same can be said of the third beatitude (16.5), where hearers are promised that they will not walk around naked or see shame. All that is required for such a promise is alertness and purity. Again, ministering to a demographic that is from marginalized communities predominantly, this reward of faithful witness is attainable for all who hear. Finally, the right to the tree of life, though eschatological (22.14) has immediate effect. In the midst of struggle, this beatitude offers hope – that by washing their robes, a sign of repentance and purity, hearers are granted rights *now* to a *future* reality. These present rewards are comforting, especially to those who are currently suffering, but the eschatological promises are equally

⁷⁸ Casey Black, ‘How a terrible worship song drove me away from Christianity: Take Me From Church’, Nashville Scene (online blog; November 20, 2014), https://www.nashvillescene.com/music/how-a-terrible-worship-song-drove-me-from-christianity/article_0472d329-8f83-5262-a158-e624e8a57b45.html.

⁷⁹ Evans Jr., *We Have Been Believers*, p. 178.

consoling, as they remind hearers that there will be a supernatural end to all their suffering, but more – that eschatologically, there will not exist an opportunity for suffering or marginalization of any kind.

5.4 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have offered an exegetical blueprint of faithful witness, based on a 21st century, African American, Pentecostal reading of the Apocalypse. The content and aim of faithful witness are the testimony to the victory of the Lamb and the ultimate rule and reign of God, over all of creation. This content is communicated (spoken, written, read, sung) and demonstrated (love, suffering, death, discernment, discipline, discipleship, dependency, adornment, thrones, etc.) through divine and human means. The divine nature of witness is three-fold: first is the content – the victory of Jesus and the righteous rule and reign of God over all of creation, as previously noted. Second, it is prophetic, as it declares this victory and reign, and the implications that come with. Third, it is pneumatic, in that it is a work wholly dependent upon and empowered by the Spirit of God.

Witness also involves three elements, in matters of humanity: *communitas*, suffering, and time. As it pertains to *communitas*, bearing witness is a counter-cultural work of equality and solidarity – both of which are often birthed in suffering. The suffering that witness involves will sometimes lead to death, as figures in the Apocalypse have evinced, beginning with Jesus. As far as humanity is concerned, witness does not take place outside of time. I also explored the forms of which faithful witness takes in the Apocalypse; both figures mentioned explicitly, as well as implicit figures, actions, and adornment. Finally, reviewing the seven beatitudes found in the Apocalypse, I surveyed the categorical rewards for faithful witness.

Having developed an informed view of witness in the Apocalypse, I have offered some contextualized overtures to the contemporary African American, Pentecostal Church, with the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 as a case study. It should be noted, however, that faithful witness is to be the identity and mission of the Church. While the overtures situate the observations in the pandemic, they are no less relevant for the AAPC today. To be sure, the seven observations are worth noting:

- (1) The AAPC evidences the identity and mission of faithful witness when it testifies, both in word and action, to the victory of the Lamb and righteous rule and reign of God.

- (2) The AAPC cannot be a faithful witness without the Spirit. The work of the Spirit is a prophetic work that must be stewarded. Three points of order are made here:
- a. Prophetic stewardship necessitates pneumatic discernment and discipline.
 - b. Prophecy comes in varying forms (song, text, speech), and is not always a message of prosperity and increase; it can be convicting and instructive.
 - c. Whether indicative (information) or imperative (instruction), prophecy carries with it theological, social, and ethical implications that testifies to the victory of the Lamb and righteous rule and reign of God.
- (3) The faithful witness of the AAPC is a counter-cultural act of solidarity. Such a solidarity is rooted in truth and love, grace and compassion. It is both compassionate, as it relates to the out-group (non-Christian), and grace-filled truth, as it relates to the in-group (Christian).
- (4) The faithful witness of the AAPC will encounter, to varying degrees, suffering. The suffering is not necessarily an indicator of disobedience or a lack of faith – it can be the cost of faithfully bearing witness.
- (5) The faithful witness of the AAPC is set *en tempore* (against time), and as such, requires her to be vigilant for the things pertaining to her identity and mission, and be ever alert to the times, for the Lord's return is near.
- (6) The AAPC must be intentional in recognizing what constitutes faithful witness (both within and outside of her worship gatherings) and how. Having identified the various forms of witness, she must be diligent to ensure that through these forms, she is bearing witness to the victory of the Lamb and righteous rule and reign of God.
- (7) Though ministering in the margins, the AAPC can find hope in that her faithful witness is not in vain. The promises of Scripture in general, and the Apocalypse in particular offer great consolation, both immediate and eschatological, that faithful witness is rewarded.

These observations are in no way exhaustive but are offered in hopes that other African American Pentecostal scholars might pick up where the conversation has left off.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

6.1 NOW WHAT? CONTRIBUTIONS OF THIS STUDY

In the previous chapter, I sought to answer the question, ‘So what?’. In this conclusion, I answer the question, ‘*Now What?*’; that is, what does this study *now* offer the greater guild of scholarship and research? This study offers several contributions in matters of methodology, theology, ecclesiology, and Pentecostal studies.

First, by way of a modern literary review, this study offers the most comprehensive summary of witness engagement, in the Apocalypse, among scholarly sources, to date. The review gives evidence of the ubiquitous presence of witness in the Apocalypse, and the ambiguous definition found in modern scholarship.

Second, this work is the first to give critical examination to the Pentecostal triadic methodology of Spirit, Word, and community, against the backdrop of the African American engagement of Scripture. It is the first to present a proposed Twenty-First Century, African American (Liberation and Imagination), Pentecostal (Spirit, Word, Community) Hermeneutic (21CAAPH), based on such an examination.

Third, by means of reception history, *Wirkungsgeschichte*, this study is the first to explore how the early Pentecostal community (1906–1921) understood witness. Moreover, it is the first to explore how the Apocalypse informed their understanding of witness. This survey of Pentecostal reception explored the theme by way of early periodicals (sermons, studies, testimonies) from the two major Pentecostal streams, Wesleyan-Holiness, and Finished Work. The differences between the two were minor, and Dispensational readings of the Apocalypse did not seem to have much impact on the understanding of witness.

Fourth, this is the first study to offer a narrative reading of the Apocalypse through a liberated and pneumatically imaginative triadic negotiation of Spirit, Word, and community (21CAAPH). This reading presents the most comprehensive engagement of faithful witness in the Apocalypse, to date. The study elevates the faithful witness motif from appreciation to a place of prominence in the Apocalypse, proving it to be essential, if not central, to the Apocalypse as a whole.

Fifth, this study now brings other Pentecostal works in scholarship together under a central, unified theme. The previous works of my colleagues, who have explored various themes in the

Apocalypse, have contributed much to this study, and their studies find a home in the faithful witness motif: pneumatology (Waddell); worship (Archer); discernment (Johnson); suffering and theodicy (Chris Palmer).¹

Sixth, by way of a narrative reading, this work offers the most comprehensive engagement of faithful witness in the Apocalypse. It is the only monograph that offers such an engagement. Additionally, it is the first work to offer a theological construct on faithful witness, based on the Apocalypse, which includes: the content of faithful witness (the victory of Jesus and the righteous rule and reign of God); the nature of faithful witness (Spirit, prophecy, *communitas*, suffering, and time); the communicative (speaking, writing, reading, hearing, singing) and demonstrative (loving, suffering, dying, discerning/disciplining, depending on Jesus, adornment) forms of witness; and the rewards of witness, as categorized in the beatitudes.

Seventh, and finally, this is the first work to offer a theology of faithful witness, based on the Apocalypse. This theology provides a rubric in faithful witness, for the Church, based on the seven observations offered above.

6.2 WHAT NEXT? SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Considering the contributions made by this study, I offer several contributions for further studies. The first is a methodological ‘next’; while this study proposes and employs a 21CAAPH, much remains that could be said on the matter. Space has demanded that I only engage this topic within the confines of a chapter, but the subject can be expounded upon significantly.

The second ‘next’ is also methodological – I am intrigued by how a modified hermeneutic (liberation and imagination undergirding the Pentecostal triadic negotiation), might impact the previous studies of Pentecostal scholars. For example, does liberation and pneumatic imagination impact our reading of the Spirit in the Apocalypse? Worship? Pneumatic discernment?

A third ‘next’ is a matter of continuity; do the proposed seven observations of faithful witness present themselves anywhere else in Johannine writing, outside of the Apocalypse? Can they be discerned in the FG? Collectively in 1, 2, and 3 John? The fourth ‘next’ is similar, but with expanded scope; can the observations of faithful witness be found in Pauline texts? In the Synoptic

¹ Chris Palmer and I have been in cohorts for nearly eight years. At the time of this thesis, his work is not yet published. We completed our master’s degrees together and enrolled at Bangor together. As I took up the mantle of Faithful Witness, Chris studied suffering and theodicy in the Apocalypse. In this long journey, he and I were both faithful witnesses to each other’s suffering under the burden of research (especially during a global pandemic). Many late night and early morning calls were shared regarding how often our topics of study find common intersection.

Gospels? How different might a biblical theology of faithful witness look from that which is provided in the Apocalypse?

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