

REVELATION: A HANDBOOK FOR MARTYRS

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The early Christians were hated by the populace and persecuted by the Roman authorities for a number of reasons. Chief among them was their refusal, in the main, to participate in the imperial cult by worshiping the emperor-god and sacrificing to his image. As in Japan, the imperial cult gave a strong religious sanction to the empire, and was one of the means by which the heterogeneous peoples of the Mediterranean world were welded together into a nation of loyal subjects. The Jews, an ethnic group with a long-established monotheistic tradition, were exempt from the requirements of the cult, but their acceptance of this exemption did not increase their popularity in a world that was becoming increasingly anti-Semitic. The Christians, who for the most part were distinguished from the Jews, since the great majority were non-Jewish by race, were expected to conform. When they, in keeping with their concepts of monotheism which they had derived from Judaism, declined to do so, their refusal was considered by the authorities to be a very grave crime, combining as it did lese majesty and disloyalty to the state with "atheism" and sacrilegious contempt of the god who protected and guided the empire.

The authorities had no alternative but to punish, even with the penalty of death, those who could not be persuaded to deny Christ and worship the emperor. This, of course, led to persecutions of the Christians, which at first were local and sporadic, but which in time became general and systematic. In view of the police power of the empire, we may wonder how the Christians, a minority group, relatively small in number and without much influence, were able to withstand oppressive measures and survive persecutions.

Why, we may ask, did so large a proportion of the Christians, despite the repressive measures directed against their religion, remain loyal to the faith, confessing Christ, enduring punishments, and accepting, even seeking martyrdom?

That this did not just "happen" must be obvious to any student of social reactions in times of crisis. On the contrary, the martyr attitude was cultivated by Christian leaders; members of the faith were indoctrinated with the firm conviction that confession of Christ was infinitely preferable to denial and apostasy, even though this should lead to imprisonment, torture, and a martyr's death. Those who were tempted to weaken under dire threats of punishment and death were warned of the dreadful divine punishments reserved for them in the next age. Whereas those who remained faithful, even unto death itself, were promised glorious and blessed rewards in the life to come. The martyr did not suffer ignominy and defeat through a shameful death; instead, he was depicted as a victor, who like Christ himself had conquered the powers of evil and of death itself. Earthly rewards, such as the respect and esteem of their fellow Christians, were also held out to the prospective martyrs. That the Christian leaders, a number of whom gave their lives for their faith, realized the tremendous social force of martyrdom cannot be denied; that they cultivated the attitude to save Christianity as well as the souls of those who died seems highly probable.

The methods of indoctrination and the techniques of control which were developed and used are strikingly presented in Riddle's book, **The Martyrs: A Study in Social Control**. In it he shows how the Christian church,

through a number of instrumentalities, induced the proper attitudes and the desired norms of behavior during times of persecution and oppression. Among these were literary works, such as the martyrologies, which depicted how martyrs stood trial and met death, and treatises, letters, and exhortations composed by certain of the church Fathers. While Riddle was mainly concerned with these later works, he has also shown that some books in the New Testament itself, notably Mark, Hebrews, and Revelation, should be included in this literature of control and indoctrination which arose in times of repression and persecution.

Indeed, as we turn our attention to Revelation, while it is apocalyptic in form, it is martyrological in function; it may even be termed, without exaggeration, a handbook for martyrs. It is generally recognized that Revelation came out of a period of persecution which was marked if not precipitated by the refusal of Christians to participate in the worship of the emperor-god as required of its subjects by the Roman Empire. Just when this persecution occurred is a matter of some dispute; most of the authorities place it in the reign of Domitian towards the end of the first century, but others date it in the reign of Trajan near the beginning of the second century. However, in the discussion that follows the precise date is not too important. The persecution was apparently confined to Asia Minor, and seemingly had just begun, for but one Christian, a certain Antipas, is named as a martyr. The writer (whether he wrote in his own name or used a pseudonym cannot be determined) represents himself as one who had suffered with his fellow Christians in the persecution, and apparently was exiled on the isle of Patmos, near the coast of Asia Minor, for his testimony of Jesus; that is, he was being punished as a confessor. He anticipates a severe perse-

cution in the immediate future, in which there will be a large number of martyrs. Although translations have obscured this fact, and the commentaries have in the main neglected it, nevertheless his obvious purpose is to produce martyrs, to strengthen and encourage Christians so that they will be eager to accept martyrdom.

As stated above, the book of Revelation is an apocalypse in form. Unlike prophecy, apocalypticism is essentially dualistic in character. In the universe there are two forces, one the evil, headed by Satan, and the other the good, headed by God. Likewise, there are two distinct ages, one the present evil age, evil because it is under the control of Satan and his agents, demonic and human, and the other the age to come, which will be perfectly good and eternal, since it is to be under the direct control of God and his agents of righteousness. In this present evil age this world is pervaded with evil and wickedness, the righteous who are followers of God suffer grievously; they are oppressed and persecuted unto death itself. There is little that the righteous are able to do to improve conditions, to remedy the evil situation; it is, however, their duty to remain loyal to God and to their faith, and to suffer patiently, if this is required of them. They are buoyed up by the ardent expectation that very soon their God, who at present is transcendent in heaven, will intervene in a fearful and dreadful manner; that he will break into this evil age. For God and his heavenly hosts will engage in a cosmic conflict with Satan and his legions, beginning in heaven and ending on the earth. In due time, but only after a terrific contest, Satan and his cohorts are to be overcome and their power brought to an end. This victory will mark the end of the present age and the inauguration of the new and perfect one under God which is to be without end. Following a resurrection,

the wicked will be punished eternally, whereas the righteous will be rewarded by the enjoyment of the blessings and glories awaiting them upon a renewed and purified earth in the new age.

This is the basic apocalyptic pattern, the foundation upon which the elaborate superstructures of Revelation and other apocalypses are built. But beneath them all is the simple, dualistic structure just described. As Riddle has pointed out, the Jewish apocalypses are mainly concerned with the fate of the nation as a whole, and but secondarily interested in that of the individual. This is quite in line with the theocratic concept of Judaism that prevailed. However, it should be noted that even in the Jewish apocalypses there is a special interest in the martyrs. For example, in Daniel it is the martyrs who are to shine as the brightness of the firmament.

But in Revelation, while the author is aware of Christians other than those who are predestined to become martyrs, nevertheless he pays little attention to them; he is primarily, almost exclusively, concerned with the martyrs and the rewards in store for them. By promises of a most glorious and blessed life in the next age, indeed, by the prospect of an immediate ascension to heaven, martyrdom is exalted and made most attractive, if not compelling. Whether any of the rewards depicted in Revelation are for Christians other than prospective martyrs is highly problematical. As we read it with the martyr motif before us, it can be seen that the author is writing for the preparation of martyrs, for their indoctrination. While apocalyptic in form, Revelation is martyrological in function; to repeat, it is a handbook for martyrs.

That this is so is clearly indicated by the "letters" in the first three chapters, used as a literary device to introduce the main part of the work, setting the theme for the whole. For the martyr motif is quite prominent in these "let-

ters." Words which have a technical meaning in the martyrologies appear here, like "endurance," "be victorious," "deny," "confess," and "martyr," and should be recognized as such. Instead, their meaning is frequently obscured in the translations and their significance neglected in the commentaries. In these "letters" the glorious promises are made to martyrs, and for the most part to them alone.

But first let us note that in the benediction at the beginning of the introductory letter addressed to all seven churches, Jesus Christ is depicted as the faithful martyr, the first-born from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth, who has released his followers from their sins by his blood, and has made them a kingdom of priests unto God. It is he who is to return on the clouds, when all the tribes of the earth will wail because of him. To be sure, the translations regularly read "witness" instead of "martyr"; but why should the Greek word "martyrs", which may mean either "witness" or "martyr", or both, be rendered in so colorless a fashion? Jesus Christ is a witness, but he is much more; certainly, in this context he is a martyr, the first-born from the dead whose blood was shed for our sins. Indeed, he may be called the protomartyr, who by his faithfulness and death is the supreme example for all Christians to imitate. As the first-born from the dead he is the pledge that those who follow him to the end will likewise overcome death. This concept is not unique in Revelation but may be found in Mark 8:34-38 and Hebrews 12:12-16, two New Testament writings previously mentioned as definitely martyrological in character. Furthermore, in Revelation the faithful are assured that they are to be a kingdom of priests, a promise that is proleptically fulfilled in the depiction of the millennium in 20:6. Since Jesus Christ is the ruler of the kings of the earth, no Caesar has any

real control over his followers; in addition the prospective sufferers and martyrs are consoled by the promise that on his return to earth the apocalyptic Christ will avenge them so that all the peoples of the earth will mourn and wail.

Accordingly, in this brief passage we have a summary of the martyrological theme that pervades the entire work and is basic to it. This motif is repeated and amplified in the letters to the individual churches, which now engage our attention. It is significant that these letters are represented as the words of the glorified, risen, apocalyptic Christ who dictates them to the author during a purported vision. They are definitely hortatory in character, and contain warnings against false teachers and doctrines, immorality, and faintheartedness. All this, however, is secondary; the primary emphasis in the letters is upon the glorious rewards awaiting the Christian who shows endurance, who does not deny the name of Christ, who has been victorious through his martyr death.

As we take the letters one by one, with this theme in mind, we see that Christ praises the Ephesians for their steadfastness in time of persecution: "and you show endurance, and have undergone much for my name, and have not grown weary." Following a section of mingled censure and praise, the letter concludes with a glowing promise: "I will let him who is victorious eat of the fruit of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God." Who is this victor, to whom this glorious reward of eternal life is offered? The answer is obvious: he is the martyr designate, who becomes victorious through purity of life and faithfulness, and more through his sufferings and death, just as Jesus, the protomartyr, had previously resisted all temptation and had been a victor through his sufferings and death.

In the second letter, that to Smyrna,

Christ predicts that Satan is going to put some of the church there in prison, to be tested, and that for ten days they are to be persecuted. However, he urges them to be faithful, even unto death, that they may receive the crown of life, a symbol of both victory and immortality. He also promises that he who is victorious will not be hurt by the second death. This is a most compelling prospect, for it is a pledge from Christ himself that the martyr, by reason of his death for Christ, will escape the eternal tortures and damnation of those who are found guilty in the day of judgments. As a matter of fact, the martyr is to escape the judgment itself; his martyrdom is an absolute guarantee of a blessed immortality.

Christ highly praises the church in Pergamum, for it held fast to his name, and did not deny his name, even in the days when the faithful martyr, Antipas, one of their number, was put to death. However, just as the children of Israel proved faithless to God in the time of Balaam and Balak, and turned away from him to idolatrous practices, so some of the Pergamenes have proven faithless. They are warned that unless they repent Christ will punish them with the sword that is in his mouth. Positive sanction for steadfastness and martyrdom is found in the concluding promises that Christ will give him who is victorious some of the hidden manna, together with a white pebble with a new name on it which no one but the recipient knows. Apparently, the victor is to eat heavenly food, as symbolized by the manna, in the age to come. The significance of the pebble with the secret name is more obscure. The secret name may well be the potent one of Jesus (cf. 3:12,19:12); accordingly, the pebble inscribed with it is a powerful talisman which will protect the martyr from all danger and evil.

The church in Thyatira is warmly commended for its love, faithfulness, ministry, and endurance, which are

greater than they were at first. However, they are sternly admonished for tolerating a certain amount of unfaithfulness among their number. Indeed, the guilty ones are to be punished and destroyed. However, Christ will give to him who is victorious and keeps the works of Christ to the end authority over the heathen, to shepherd them with a rod of iron, and to shatter them as jars of pottery. In other words, the martyr is personally to avenge his sufferings and death upon his persecutors, the heathen. Unfortunately, to not a few Christians in a time of persecution this would be a most alluring prospect. In addition, Christ will give him the morning star, a promise that is somewhat mystifying. Its solution is to be sought in astrological thinking. According to Lohmeyer, in this passage the morning star is to be identified with the Holy Spirit which is to be given to the martyr. Or it may be that since the morning star, unlike the other planets which are malevolent in their influence, was thought to be benevolent and a planet of good omen, this reward may be similar in character to that of the white pebble inscribed with the secret name, the potent name of Jesus. Indeed, this seems to be the probable significance of this mysterious passage, for in the last chapter Christ is called the Morning Star, the Bridegroom of the faithful in the age to come (22:16). As such, the martyrs are under his supernatural protection and care.

In the next letter, Christ warns the Church at Sardis to wake up, repent, and strengthen itself, for he is to come secretly and unannounced like a thief. However, there are a few who have not soiled their raiment; they will be clad in white and shall walk with him. That these are the prospective martyrs is shown by the next verse, in which it is stated that he who is victorious will be dressed in white. The white garments, the usual symbol of purity

and immortality, are termed the righteous acts of the martyrs in 19:8, and are apparently reserved for them as collectively the bride of Christ, and for them alone among the Christians. A somewhat different assurance, at least insofar as the symbolism is concerned, is found in Christ's promise that he will never erase the name of the victor from the Book of Life, but will "confess" his name in the presence of his Father and the angels. "Confess" (rendered as "acknowledge" in most translations) is another technical term frequently used in the martyrological literature, designating the response of the faithful Christian, the "confessor," who does not "deny" Christ when brought before the Roman authorities, but "confesses" that he is indeed a Christian. In this passage, by a striking inversion, Christ promises to "confess" or acknowledge the names of those who have become martyrs by confessing his name during persecution, and to retain their names in the Book of Life, which insures their blessed immortality.

Similarly, Christ praises the church at Philadelphia for abiding by his message and not denying his name. For these the door of access to God will always be open. He promises that the Jews (who, like the heathen are the agents of Satan and enemies of the faith) will do homage at their feet. Because they have kept in mind the message of his own endurance (here again Christ is the protomartyr), he assures them that he will keep them safe during the hour of trial. He is coming very soon, and he warns them to see to it that no one deprives them of their crown. Finally, Christ pledges that he will make him who is victorious a pillar in the temple of God, from which he will never depart, and will write on him the name of God, the name of the new Jerusalem, and his own new name. What Christian of the time could resist this prospect of an eternal residence with God and

Christ in the new Jerusalem, provided only that he remain faithful, even unto death?

In the last of the seven letters Christ, as the Amen, the faithful and true martyr, and the originator or creator of creation, admonishes the Laodiceans, who have been neither hot nor cold, but lukewarm. He exhorts them to be earnest and repent, since he disciplines those whom he loves. He promises that he will dine with him who admits him as he knocks at the door, that is they will enjoy the messianic feast together. In conclusion, Christ gives the great and glorious promise that the victor, the martyr, will sit with him beside his throne, just as he himself has already taken his seat beside his Father on his throne.

As we summarize these "letters" we can readily see that they are definitely martyrological in character. One Christian has already become a martyr in the persecution; the author is preparing for an increased persecution in which many martyrs will die for Christ. He predicts that in their death they, like Jesus, the protomartyr, will be victors, and will receive the marvellous rewards awaiting them. It is most significant that these promises are made in the main, if not entirely, to prospective martyrs. By these means the author hopes to prevent defections and apostasies. More positively, he is greatly concerned with the indoctrination of Christians facing persecution so that they will develop a steadfastness, an endurance, that will make them willing to become martyrs, yes, even desirous of dying for the name of Jesus. By the literary technique of pseudonymity, in which the apocalyptic, glorified Christ makes the promises himself, the rewards are given the guaranty of divine, supernatural sanction. Through the prospect of rewards surpassing belief for faithfulness and endurance, the writer shapes and controls the attitudes and behavior of his

fellow Christians in a period of oppression and persecution by the state.

As stated above, these letters are closely related to the rest of the book, setting its theme. It will be noted that all but a few of the promises made in the letters are repeated in one way or another in the main part of the apocalypse, for the most part in the concluding chapters. Also, other martyrological features are to be found in the body of the work; these will be discussed in order. However, before doing so, it should be observed that there are a number of difficulties confronting the interpreter of Revelation. These, in part, are due to the rich symbolism used by the author. Many of these symbols are rather obvious, some can be understood by comparison with other apocalypses, others are window dressing, without much significance. A small residue, like the number of the beast, have been given no satisfactory explanation to date. A further obstacle is provided by inconsistencies throughout the book, but especially towards the end. These are to be attributed partially to the author's failure to harmonize sources which present variant and in some cases contradictory traditions. Other difficulties arise from the confused chronology of the work; future events are frequently presented proleptically or anticipatorily as present or even past events, probably for the sake of vivid depiction. A further problem is caused by the repetition of scenes and events. For example, in one form or another there are several accounts of the Gog and Magog saga (although these proper names appear in but one passage), while the various series of plagues show a great deal of similarity. Here again, in all probability, the cause for the repetition is to be found in the use of a variety of sources, without too much attention paid to their correlation. These hindrances to interpretation are not confined to Revelation; to a greater or less

degree they appear in most apocalypses. When they are recognized and due allowance is made for them, many perplexities evaporate and the work is much more readily understood.

With this in mind, let us turn to the martyrological aspects of the main body of the work. Chapter 4, which depicts the almighty and majestic God upon his throne in heaven, far removed for the present from the world, has no data. However, it does serve to impress upon the reader the majesty and power of him who created all things, thereby presaging his ultimate victory over the forces of evil.

In the next chapter the author presents Christ, the chief agent of God in carrying out his divine plan and bringing about the appointed consummation of God's will. At first he is called the Lion of Judah and the descendant of David who has been victorious. Thus his humanity, his messianic role, and his victory through death are briefly alluded to. But the figure changes immediately, and he is designated as a Lamb which appeared to have been slain, with seven horns and seven eyes. Although he has been slain, he has great power, as symbolized by the seven horns, and great knowledge and perception, as indicated by the seven eyes (which are also described as the seven planets who are messengers of God). He is acclaimed by the twenty-four elders as worthy to open the seals of the book of destiny, thereby precipitating the conflict by unloosing a series of plagues upon the world, for through his blood that was shed he has ransomed men from every tribe and nation and has made them (or, probably, will make them) a kingdom of priests who are to reign upon the earth. It is obvious that Jesus Christ is again represented as the triumphant proto-martyr through whose death his martyred followers will likewise triumph, as in the first three chapters.

But why is he described as a lamb?

This may in part be due to the Christian interpretation of Isaiah 53:7. Much more likely, however, we are reminded of the Passover lamb through whose blood the Children of Israel were preserved from the plague of death inflicted upon the Egyptians as God was delivering his people from their oppressors. In a similar way, the new Israel, that is, the faithful among the Christians from every nation, will be rescued from their oppressors, the Romans, and will be saved by the blood of Jesus, the new Passover lamb that was slain. It will be observed that in subsequent passages in Revelation the divine deliverance from Egypt is alluded to as a prototype of the supernatural deliverance of the Christians which is to occur very soon.

The seals are to be opened, one by one, but the martyr motif does not recur until the opening of the sixth seal (6:9-11). In this passage, in which the past tense is used, but the present or future is meant, the writer sees the souls of those who were slain for the word of God and for their testimony (martyria) or martyrdom underneath the altar, which presumably is in heaven. He hears them asking for judgment and vengeance upon the inhabitants of the earth. They are given white robes to wear and are told to be quiet until the predestined number of martyrs shall be complete. This passage contains a pledge that the martyrs will be avenged when the predetermined number have been slain. Furthermore, and this is most important, the presence of their souls under the altar in heaven is a guaranty that upon their death the souls of the martyrs do not go to the lower world, in Sheol or Hades, but that they go directly to heaven to be with God until the end of this age. This, I believe, is one of the most telling rewards offered to the prospective martyr; certainly it was quite influential in causing martyrdom to be attractive and alluring and played a prominent role in the development of the

cultus of the martyrs. Moreover, the connection of the souls of the martyrs with God's altar may have indicated that in some way their death, like that of Jesus before them, had a sacrificial and an intercessory significance (cf. 8:3). This, too, had its bearing upon the belief of the early centuries in the intercessory powers of the martyrs, as shown by a number of funereal inscriptions.

In the seventh chapter, prior to the breaking of the seventh seal, the author reveals that the predetermined number of martyrs is to be 144,000. By way of anticipation he pictures this great crowd standing before the heavenly throne and before the Lamb, wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands. The symbolism of the white robes has been mentioned before; the palm branches no doubt signify victory in spite of death. One of the twenty-four elders identifies this host as the people who are to come through the great persecution, whose robes are to be washed white in the blood of the Lamb. In keeping with certain of the promises in the seven letters, they are to be before the throne of God, serving him day and night in his temple, where God will shelter them. They will never be hungry or thirsty again; neither the sun nor any other heat shall strike them again. For the Lamb will be their shepherd (note the curious mixture of figures), and will guide them to fountains of living water, and God himself shall wipe every tear from their eyes. There can be no doubt whatever of the martyrological emphasis in this chapter, with its promises of the wonderful rewards prepared for those who are to die for their Christian faith.

The breaking of the seventh seal of the book of doom (8:1) sets the stage for another series of dreadful plagues, some of which are reminiscent of the Exodus. As in the previous series, a number are cosmic, not merely ter-

restrial, in their scope, indicating that the celestial warfare has already begun. Our attention should next be directed to the two "witnesses" in chapter 11. Just who these are is not wholly clear. The section is in part based upon traditions centering in the persons of Elijah and Moses, both of whom were thought to have been taken up into heaven. Their purported appearance from heaven at the Transfiguration is in keeping with this tradition. Also, in popular expectation, Elijah was to return to earth to preach repentance. Accordingly, John the Baptist (and Jesus as well) was considered by some to be Elijah redivivus preaching repentance and heralding the coming of the Kingdom. In some instances Moses was associated with Elijah in this role, in others Enoch, another heavenly resident. According to Revelation, when the two witnesses have completed their testimony, they will be killed by the beast that comes out of the abyss, that is, by the Antichrist, the Satanic personification of the emperors, but after a period of three and a half days they will be restored to life by God, and will reascend to heaven on a cloud. Apparently, by a process of reinterpreting the Elijah-Moses saga, these two witnesses symbolize the faithful Christians who are to die as a result of persecution by the state for their testimony, but as martyrs are to be taken up to heaven by God. Thus we are given another pledge that the martyrs will ascend to heaven, instead of descending to the infernal regions, when they are slain.

In coming to the next chapter, we need not consider the mysterious mythical woman clothed in the sun, an obvious adaptation of some astral myth. However, our attention is directed to the heavenly warfare between Michael and the Dragon, in which Michael and his hosts succeed in ejecting Satan and his forces from heaven, hurling them

down to earth. We then are told, proleptically, that the martyrs have conquered Satan because of the blood of the Lamb and by reason of their own testimony or witness (*martyria*), for they did not love life even in the face of death. Thus we see that the martyrdom of the faithful has great significance for the final overthrow of Satan and the redemption of the world from his power.

As we move into the 13th chapter we have the requirements of the imperial cult, the worship of the emperor who is symbolized by a beast, presented. Those whose names are not in the slain Lamb's book of life from the foundation of the world will worship the emperor. In the next chapter we see the 144,000 martyrs with the Lamb on Mount Zion—who are ransomed from among men as the first fruits of God. This scene, seemingly, is anticipatory of the millennium.

An angel in heaven crying out in a loud voice urges *all* people (despite the determinism noted above) to worship God who made heaven and earth and sea and the fountains of water, instead of the beast. A second angel prophesies the imminent destruction of mighty Rome (Babylon). Yet a third one warns that everyone who worships the emperor and his statue shall drink the wine of God's wrath, poured out unmixed in the cup of his anger, and shall be tortured by fire and brimstone before the eyes of the holy angels and the lamb. The smoke of their torture will go up forever, and they shall have no rest, night or day. Here, in contrast to the rewards promised the martyrs, is a most fearsome warning of everlasting punishment for apostates, for those who forsake the worship of God for that of the emperor. On this threat, the author assures his readers, rests the endurance of God's people, who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. A voice from

heaven is heard saying: "Write, blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from this time forth; yes, says the Spirit, let them rest from their toil, for their works go with them." Thus once more the glorious prospect for the martyrs is depicted; their martyrdom assures a blessed immortality.

The final plagues, which complete the wrath of God, are presented in the 15th and 16th chapters. These chapters are proleptic, and like earlier sections are reminiscent of the Exodus in some respects. The martyrs, those who come off victorious from the beast and his statue, are seen in heaven standing on one side of the glass sea mingled with fire, which no doubt is intended to be the heavenly prototype of the Red Sea. The reader presumes that they have crossed it in safety, while their persecutors are about to be engulfed in his fiery depths. As a result of their escape and victory, they sing a new song of Moses, which is also termed the song of the Lamb, of praise and adoration of God for his great and marvellous deeds. Following the singing of this song, seven additional plagues are inflicted upon their oppressors. In chapters 17-18 the writer gives us a preview of the impending destruction of Rome (Babylon), the great harlot who is drunk with the blood of the saints and martyrs (17:6) for God is about to avenge the blood of his slaves (19:2). Thus the stage is set for the overthrow of evil and the end of this age.

From now on the action is very rapid. In 19:6-8 we are given a preview of the bride of Christ, wearing clean, glistening linen which represents the righteous acts of the saints (i.e., martyrs). Indeed, it is possible that the bride is the personification of the martyrs alone, and not of the entire Christian church. Furthermore, the blessed who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb (19:9) are probably only those who have accepted the testimony (*martyria*) of Jesus (19:10), that is, of

course, the martyrs again, who are now considered the equal of the angels.

At this juncture heaven is thrown open, and a rider upon a white horse, called Faithful and True, wearing a garment spattered with blood, appears in the skies. His name is also the Word of God, and in addition he bears the title King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He is followed by a heavenly host arrayed in pure white linen and riding upon white horses. He is to strike down the heathen with a sharp sword that issues from his mouth, and he will rule them with a rod of iron, trampling the winepress of God's wrath. The majestic, triumphant rider is, obviously, the apocalyptic Christ about to avenge his martyrs. Like them, he is faithful and true. The blood on his garments is, of course, that of his own martyrdom. But who are his soldiers, his followers clad in white and riding white horses? They are not angels; instead, they are the martyrs (the equals of angels) who are at last to help gain their revenge and exercise the power over the heathen that was promised in 2:26 ff. They are to follow Christ wherever he goes, helping him to wage war against the Antichrist and his followers until they are utterly defeated and destroyed, and the beast and the false prophet cast into the fiery lake forever.

At the beginning of the 20th chapter we are told how an angel from heaven is to seize the dragon, the old serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, and will bind him and hurl him into the abyss where he will be kept for a thousand years. The author envisions thrones with those empowered to act as judges seated on them. Next, he sees the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony for Jesus and the word of God, who had refused to worship the beast and its statue. They are to be restored to life, and will reign on earth with Christ for a thousand years while Satan is bound. Just whom they are to reign over is not clear, since by

now all human life on earth has been destroyed. This is the first resurrection, the millennium, which is enjoyed only by the martyrs. The writer says that the man who experiences the first resurrection is blessed and holy. Moreover, the second death will have no power over the martyrs; they are to be priests of God and of Christ, and again it is stated that they are to reign with him for a thousand years. Thus a number of the more alluring and significant promises of reward for martyrdom made in the beginning of Revelation are repeated towards the end. Further, it should be observed that the rest of the dead are not to be restored to life until the millennium is over. In other words, the millennium and its blessings are reserved for martyrs only—and not for other Christians—as condition that is usually overlooked by modern premillennialists.

With Satan safely bound and securely sealed in the abyss the martyrs might be expected to reign with Christ in bliss and happiness for an everlasting period of time; but for some mysterious reason, which the writer makes no attempt to explain, after the thousand years are over the author of evil is to be released from his prison, and will go out to mislead the heathen. Under the leadership of the mythical Gog and Magog the heathen, as numerous as the sands of the sea, will besiege God's people in their beloved city. Just where these heathen are to come from is most puzzling, for they were supposedly all destroyed in the final woes. However, it does not make much difference, for fire from heaven will destroy them before they can do much harm, and the devil will be thrown into the fiery lake with the beast and the false prophet to be tortured forever and ever.

In this way, Satan and his forces are to be overcome and made impotent for all eternity; the old age, which is evil because it is under his control, is to come to an end. A new and everlast-

ing age, perfectly righteous and good, since God and Christ will be in complete power without any opposition, will be inaugurated. In conformity to the usual apocalyptic pattern, there will be the general resurrection, from which the martyrs are exempt, and the judgment. Death and Hades are to be thrown into the fiery lake. Those whose names are not to be found in the book of life will also be consigned to this same place of eternal punishment. This is the second death which has no power over the martyrs.

In this new age the old heaven and earth, polluted and imperfect as they had been, will pass away, and a new heaven and earth will appear. Then the new Jerusalem, the holy city, will descend from heaven to earth like a bride dressed for her husband. God also will come down to earth to dwell here with his people. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, there will be no more death, no grief or crying or pain, for the old order will have passed away. He, the Alpha and Omega, will give anyone who is thirsty water from the fountain of the water of life without cost.

This picture of the New Jerusalem with its marvellous and glorious prospects raises an interesting question: Is it to be for martyrs only, or will other Christians who survive the judgment be permitted to share in its blessings? In reply, it may be of some significance that the blessings depicted are those previously held out to prospective martyrs in the opening chapters; certainly, the case for martyrdom is materially weakened if Christians other than martyrs are to enjoy them too. This seems to be the viewpoint of the author, for following his description of the holy city he states explicitly that God himself promises that the martyr (he who is victorious) will inherit all this, and that he will be his God, and the martyr will be God's son (21:7). On the other hand God warns that the cowardly, the faithless, the abomin-

able, murderers, the immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and liars will find themselves in the fiery lake. Accordingly, those who weaken and become apostates under the threats of persecution will be excluded from the city and cast into the lake of fire along with the rest of the wicked. But there is no statement concerning the lot of the Christians who were faithful but did not suffer martyrdom. The author, engrossed with the cultivation of martyrs, has neglected the general run of Christians in his book, if he has not forgotten them almost altogether.

This conclusion is borne out by the data in the rest of the book. In a further description of the new Jerusalem it is stated that none shall enter save those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life (21:27). This, to be sure, is not too explicit, but it seems to be a fulfillment of the pledge, made to prospective martyrs in 3:5. Again, in 22:2 the tree of life is described. It will be recalled that in 3:7 he who is to be victorious (the martyr) is to eat the fruit of the tree of life in God's Paradise. In 22:3-4 we read that the slaves of God (a phrase earlier applied to the martyrs) who worship him in the new Jerusalem will have his name on their foreheads, a fulfillment of the promise made to those who are to become martyrs in 3:12. Furthermore, in verse 5, in keeping with the pledge in 3:21, they are to reign with God. And in verse 14 the blessed who have the right to approach the tree of life and enter the gates of the city are those who wash their robes. Who but the martyrs, who in 7:14 are depicted as having washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb, answer to this description? Finally, the mention of Christ as the morning star in 22:16 recalls the promise to the martyr in 2:28 that he would receive the morning star. Clearly, these data reinforce if they do not substantiate the belief that the new Jerusalem—like the interlude of the millennium—is designed for

none save the martyrs. But this, too, has been ignored or explained away by most commentators, even though the evidence seems to be unmistakably plain.

In this summation of Revelation attention has been directed to its martyrological aspects. It has been shown that the work is pervaded with promises of most glorious rewards to those who are to become martyrs during persecution for their refusal to deny Christ and worship the emperor, together with the proleptic fulfillment of these promises. From beginning to end, from the first chapter through the twenty-second, the martyr motif is the paramount interest of the writer, as this paper has attempted to show. Further, the rewards which are pledged and depicted, such as immediate immortality for the martyr, his automatic exemption from the general resurrection, the judgment, and the second death, the blissful enjoyment of both the temporary blessings of the millennium as well as the eternal joys of the

new Jerusalem, are primarily if not exclusively for those who are steadfast and die for their faith. Within the framework of an apocalypse, with its dualism of two forces, evil and good, and its two corresponding ages, the author has composed a handbook for the indoctrination of his readers so that they will not only endure persecution and remain faithful to their religion, but will be eager, even, to become martyrs. Christ is the protomartyr; he is their example and inspiration. Through his martyrdom he became victorious over evil and death itself; they too will achieve the same victory by their sacrificial deaths. Whatever our judgment of the martyr psychology may be, we must certainly recognize that the cultivation and development of the martyr spirit among the early Christians were instrumental in bringing about a victory for Christianity in its life and death struggle with the powerful Roman Empire. In this struggle the book of Revelation, a handbook for martyrs, probably played an important role.