

and the glad tidings that the judge is the One who has already paid the supreme penalty on behalf of the world. Though it is no less wrath for being so, the wrath is 'the wrath of the lamb' " (Boring, 127).

The martyrs had called for vindication (6:10). God has unleashed his "wrath." He is not, nor ever could be, a vindictive God. He is not aloof to injustice and the human suffering it involves. He has his own way of coping with it. His answer is the Lamb. His "wrath" is written on the Cross. We should read his message and act accordingly—act for justice and peace in our world. That way of facing and overcoming evil is the way of "the wrath of the Lamb."

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16. *The Sealing of the Faithful* (7:1-8)

1. After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth so that no wind should blow on land or sea or on any tree. 2. Then I saw another angel ascend from the rising of the sun, holding the seal of the living God, and he cried aloud to the four angels who had been given power to devastate land and sea: 3. "Do not devastate land or sea or trees until we have set the seal of our God on the foreheads of his servants." 4. I heard how many had been marked with the seal—a hundred and forty-four thousand from all the tribes of Israel: 5. twelve thousand from the tribe of Judah, twelve thousand from the tribe of Reuben, twelve thousand from the tribe of Gad, 6. twelve thousand from the tribe of Asher, twelve thousand from the tribe of Naphtali, twelve thousand from the tribe of Manasseh, 7. twelve thousand from the tribe of Simeon, twelve thousand from the tribe of Levi, twelve thousand from the tribe of Issachar, 8. twelve thousand from the tribe of Zabulon, twelve thousand from the tribe of Joseph, twelve thousand from the tribe of Benjamin.

NOTES

1. *after this I saw*: Introducing a fresh vision of special importance. See note on 4:1.
four angels: The notion that angels (of the lower orders) guarded elemental

forces was current. See Rev 14:18, "the angel who has power over fire," and 16:5, "the angel of water": personifications of natural forces.

four corners: The author assumes that the earth is four-cornered; see Isa 11:12; Ezek 7:2.

four winds: In Jewish tradition the winds that blew from the four angles or corners of an earth square in shape (as distinct from the winds that blew from the sides) were harmful. Besides, it was expected that a great storm would usher in the end. See Matt 24:31. The winds which will hurt the earth are restrained until God had sealed his elect.

2. *another angel*, see 10:1: Representing the divine will.

from the rising of the sun: There may be a reference to Ezek 43:2—the glory of God coming from the east. The Messiah was expected from the east (Matt 2:1-2). In Rev 16:12 danger comes from the east.

the seal of the living God: The divine signet ring, like that of an oriental monarch (see Gen 41:42; Esth 3:10; 8:2, 8, 10; Dan 6:17; 1 Macc 6:15) which marked the sealed as his property. See 2 Tim 2:19. This "seal" involves a word-play with the seven "seals." The four angels who are in charge of (or represent) the destructive winds are themselves depicted as devastators of land and sea.

3. *on the foreheads of his servants:* Ezek 9:4-6: "The Lord said to him [the angel scribe], 'Go through the city, through Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it.' And to the others [six destroying angels] he said in my hearing, 'Pass through the city after him and smite . . . but touch no one upon whom is the mark.'" In Revelation the sealing of "God's servants" does not symbolize protection from tribulation and death but means being sustained in and through tribulation.

- 4-8. *I heard how many:* John has not witnessed the sealing, but he hears the number of the sealed and their description.

a hundred and forty-four thousand: A thousand signifies an immense number and 144 is the square of 12. The 144,000 (to be identified with the group in 14:1-5) is symbolic Israel; in early Christianity "Israel" represents the Church as the continuation of Israel (see Rom 9-11; Gal 6:16; Eph 2:11-22; 1 Pet 2:9). Here, then, we have the twelve tribes of the old Israel and the twelve apostles of the new Israel (21:12-14). A multitude of 144,000 conveys the idea of a vast throng beyond reckoning—in fact, quite the same as the "great multitude" of 7:9. See the 10,000 talents of Matt 18:24—a well-nigh unimaginable sum.

from all the tribes of Israel: John portrays the Church as the Israel of God. The solemn (rather tedious) enumeration is typical of apocalyptic (see Rev 21:12-13, 19-20). Judah comes first in the list because the Messiah hailed from that tribe (see 5:5). The list includes both Joseph and Manasseh (whereas one might have expected either Joseph or Ephraim/Manasseh), so another tribe has to go: Dan has been dropped. We cannot say why the list should have taken just this form.

INTERPRETATION

Before the last seal was broken, the servants of God were signed with the seal of the living God, 144,000 of them. The opening of the last seal will unleash the plagues of trumpets (8:6-11:19), which are modeled on the plagues of Egypt. The sealing of the elect recalls the immunity of the Israelites to the plagues that struck the Egyptians. John's unexpected twist is that his servants will be sealed for protection *through* the great tribulation. They achieve their victory, yes, but in the only Christian manner: "love of life did not bring them to shrink from death" (12:11).

The four chariots of Zechariah went forth to "the four winds of heaven" (Zech 6:5). John had previously utilized the image of the chariots (transformed into horsemen); here he makes use of the reference to the four winds. In the context of a vision of destruction, he adverts to divine concern: the Lord does know his own. See 2 Tim 2:19, "God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: 'The Lord knows those who are his.'" John's message is that to be a bearer of the seal of God is costly. The seal of God is the seal of the Lamb, the Lamb "who was slain from the foundation of the world" (13:8). John is never a purveyor of cheap grace.

One should keep in mind that, for John, the victors are those who "loved not their lives even unto death" (12:11). The "sealing," assurance of divine concern, will entail no "rapture" for the elect. They will be "caught up" indeed, but caught up in the tribulation, helpless victims—helpless as their Lord on his cross. For them, as for him, there will be no legion of angels. We must look for no miracle, apart from the abiding miracle of our God's loving care.

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17. *Song of Victory* (7:9-17)

9. After this I looked, and there was a vast throng, which no one could count, from all nations and tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and the Lamb, robed in white and with palm branches in their hands. 10. They were shouting aloud, Victory to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb! 11. All the angels who stood round the throne and the elders and the four living creatures fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, crying: 12. Amen! Praise, glory and wisdom, thanksgiving and honor, power and might, be to our God for ever and ever. Amen.

13. Then one of the elders spoke to me and asked, "These people robed in white—who are they and where have they come from?" 14. I answered, "My lord, it is you who know." He said to me, "They are those who have passed through the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

15. That is why they stand before the throne of God and worship him

day and night in his temple,
and he who sits on the throne will be their tabernacle.

16. They shall not hunger anymore, or thirst anymore;
never again shall the sun strike them, nor any scorching heat.

17. For the Lamb who is at the center of the throne will shepherd them,

and will guide them to the springs of the water of life;
and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

NOTES

9. *a vast throng*: Not distinct from, but the same group as that of vv. 4-8 viewed under a different aspect: it is the Church triumphant in heaven. "The first vision [vv. 4-8] shows the church on earth *before the last day*. It is being sealed. . . . The second vision [vv. 9-17] shows the church at worship before the throne *after the last day*" (Krodel, 180).

which no one could count: In effect, 144,000 is also a countless multitude.

before the throne: As in chs. 4 and 5, the heavenly throne-room. The countless host of peoples from every nation and language stands before the throne of God and Lamb, celebrating a heavenly feast of Tabernacles.

palm branches: A symbol of victory and of rejoicing after war (see 1 Macc 13:51; 2 Macc 10:7). The feast of Tabernacles was celebrated in the seventh month, after the harvest; it was an occasion of great rejoicing (see Lev 23:33-36; Neh 8:13-18) when palm branches were carried and booths raised on the flat rooftops. In Zech 14:16-19 Tabernacles is set in the messianic era. The symbolism is clear; in our terms we might depict these martyrs as celebrating, in heaven, a perpetual Christmas.

10. *victory (sōtēria)*, lit. "salvation": See 12:10; 19:1. "Here one theme only is dwelt on—victory, deliverance, salvation—by those who have just emerged in triumph from the strife. . . . They know and proclaim that the victory, the deliverance (*hē sōtēria*), is not their own achievement, but that of God and of the Lamb" (Charles, 1:211). Again, the association of God and Lamb.
11. *all the angels*: See 5:11
12. The wording of this doxology, with its seven features, is very like the angelic praise of the Lamb in 5:12.
- 13-14. *one of the elders*: As in 5:5, an elder intervenes to interpret the vision. For the form of the dialogue see Zech 4:4-5; 6:4-5.
- My lord, it is you who know*: See Ezek 37:3.
- the great tribulation*: See Dan 12:1; Mark 13:19; Matt 24:21. For John, the tribulation through which Christians come triumphantly is imminent persecution (3:10; 13:7-10) sparked by their faithfulness to the Lamb.
- have washed . . . made them white*: Theirs is not a merely passive role: by the shedding of their blood they have joined their sacrifice to that of the Lamb; ultimately, it is their association with his death that has won their victory. Only those who have washed their robes have place in the New Jerusalem (22:14). There are very close parallels between the heavenly scene of 7:13-17 and the description of the New Jerusalem (21:2-22:5).
15. *worship (latreuosin)*: The idea is of a vast worshiping congregation rather than of an exclusive priesthood (*leitourgein*). Explicit mention, in a liturgy, of *worship* of God (and Lamb), is found here and 22:14 only.
- will be their tabernacle (skēnōsei)*: In the heavenly feast of Tabernacles, as God will dwell with his people in the New Jerusalem (21:3). There is reference, too, to the *shekinah*, the immediate presence of God among his people.
- 16-17. *not hunger . . . or thirst*: Isa 49:10, "They shall not hunger or thirst, neither scorching wind nor sun shall smite them, for he who has pity on them will lead them, and by springs of water will guide them." Isa 25:8, "The Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces." In the New Jerusalem God will give "water from the spring of the water of life" (21:6) and wipe away all tears (21:4).

INTERPRETATION

This "vast throng" is not a group distinct from the 144,000 (itself a 'great throng'): it is the same group now viewed beyond the great tribulation. In keeping with John's consistent outlook, these are presented as happy here and now; they stand before God and Lamb, celebrating a heavenly feast of Tabernacles. As martyrs—the ideal representatives of God's people—they have come triumphantly through the tribulation: the vision is proleptic. The angels, the countless host of 5:11, join in the

heavenly liturgy, first by adding their "Amen" to the prayer of the martyrs, and then with their own prayer. This heavenly liturgy forms the climax to the opening of the seals.

The victors, robed in white, have passed through the "great tribulation." This echoes Dan 12:1, "And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time," and reminds one of Matt 13:9, "For in those days there will be such tribulation as has not been from the beginning of creation which God created until now, and never will be." A "great tribulation" was expected to precede the end; for John, the tribulation through which these martyrs come triumphantly is imminent persecution (see 3:10; 13:7-10). These are the victors of the messages (2:7, etc.). The striking paradox (made *white* in the *blood* of the Lamb) has a haunting beauty; and, as beauty, it speaks truth. It expresses God's and the Lamb's definition of victory: they have won by suffering death, not by inflicting hurt.

In their priestly role (1:6) these faithful ones join the heavenly choir, as is their right. In their feast of Tabernacles they have no need to build their own booths: God himself will be their tabernacle. The texts of Isaiah (49:10; 25:8) which refer to the happy return from the Exile, find their fulfillment in the shepherding of the Lamb who leads his own sheep to the unfailing fountains of life (see John 10:27-28). For, in startling and lovely paradox, the Lamb has become a shepherd.

"Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" (Luke 24:26) is the rebuke of the risen Lord to the uncomprehending Emmaus disciples. John pictures the glory of the victors beyond their tribulation. They have triumphed, but not on their own. Victory is theirs because, and only because, the Lamb had first conquered. It is a conviction shared by the fourth evangelist, "apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5), and by Paul, "I can do all things in him who strengthens me" (Phil 4:13). It is a lesson we need to take to heart. A glorious destiny awaits us, yes; but precisely as faithful followers of the Lamb. If we cannot share John's expectation of imminent eschatological tribulation, we may well be failing to discern a more insidious and pervasive challenge. John saw through the empire of his day, discerned its distorted standard of values. We have become so much part of our contemporary empire, the lifestyle of the Western world, that we may no longer be stirred, excited, by prospect of heavenly joy.

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VII. THE TWO BEASTS

29. *The First Beast* (13:1-10)

1. Then out of the sea I saw a beast rising, with ten horns and seven heads; on its horns were ten diadems, and on each head a blasphemous name. 2. The beast I saw was like a leopard, but its feet were like a bear's and its mouth like a lion's mouth. The dragon conferred on it his own power, his throne, and great authority. 3. One of its heads was wounded, as it seemed, unto death, yet its mortal wound was healed. And the whole world gazed with wonder after the beast; 4. they worshiped the dragon because he had conferred his authority on the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast? Who can fight against it?"

5. It was allowed to mouth boasts and blasphemy and it was given permission to exercise authority for forty-two months. 6. It opened its mouth in blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven. 7. It was allowed to wage war on God's people and conquer them; and it was given authority over every tribe, people, tongue, and nation. 8. All the inhabitants of the earth will worship it, all whose names have not been written in the book of life of the Lamb, slain since the foundation of the world.

9. If you have ears, hear then! 10. Whoever is for captivity, to captivity he goes; whoever is to be slain by the sword, by the sword must he be slain. This calls for the endurance and faith of God's people.

NOTES

1. *out of the sea*: "Sea" is a hostile element, fitting home of evil. See Dan 7:2-8; 4 Ezra 11:1; 12:11; 1 Enoch 60:7-10; 2 Baruch 29:4.
with ten horns and seven heads: Like the dragon (12:3); note the many-headed Leviathan of Ps 74:14.
ten diadems: Symbol of kingly power (the ten horns of Daniel's fourth beast are ten kings, Dan 7:24). The seven heads stand for the fullness of might—a totalitarian state. The further significance of beasts and horns will be explained in 17:9-14; they identify the power as the Roman Empire.
on each head a blasphemous name: The divine titles affected by the emperors, e.g., *kyrios* (Lord), *sebastos* = *Augustus* (worthy of reverence), *divus* (divine), *dominus et deus* (Lord and God).
2. *leopard . . . bear . . . lion*: The beast of v. 1, like the fourth beast of Dan 7:7, is now described in terms of the other three beasts of Dan 7:4-6. More or less contemporaneously with Revelation, 4 Ezra sees Rome in Daniel's fourth beast: "The eagle which you saw coming up from the sea is the fourth kingdom which appeared in a vision to your brother Daniel" (12:11).
power . . . throne . . . authority: "Throne" is a symbol of God's authority throughout Revelation (e.g., 4:2; 20:11); the dragon, with his "throne," is a parody of God.
3. *wounded, as it seemed, unto death*, lit. "slain unto death": Parody of the Lamb that was slain (5:6, 12; 13:18).
its mortal wound was healed: Nero's suicide in 68 C.E. was followed by a year of civil war which threatened the existence of the empire; with Vespasian, the beast came to life again. Though, in the New Testament, the term "antichrist" is found only in the Johannine letters (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7), the beast is an antichrist figure, adversary of Christ and of God.
gazed with wonder, lit. "and the whole world wondered after the beast": John is very conscious of the seductive appeal of Rome; see chs. 17-18.
4. *they worshiped the dragon*: Emperor-worship is really worship of Satan. See 1 Cor 10:20, "I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons [and not to idols which are nothing]."
conferred his authority (edōken): Perhaps a parody on the "it was given" throughout; elsewhere it means the working out of a divine plan.
who is like the beast?: Parody of Exod 15:11, "Who is like thee, O Lord." There may be a touch of irony: in Rev 12:7-9 Satan is defeated by Michael, whose name signifies "Who is like God?"
who can fight against it?: The seeming invincibility of the Empire.
5. *it was allowed . . . it was given (edothē)*: Passive of divine action. Mysteriously, even the activity of the beast falls within a divine plan.
boasts and blasphemy: See Dan 7:8, 20. The blasphemous claims of the emperors echo those of Antiochus IV (the "little horn" of Daniel).

forty-two months: The beast's power endures as long as the time of the Gentiles (11:2), as long as the prophesying of the two witnesses (11:3), as long as the woman's abode in the wilderness (12:6, 14).

6. *blasphemies*: See Dan 7:25; 11:36. Likewise "the man of lawlessness" (Antichrist) of 2 Thess 2:4 "opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God."

his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven: John's "dwelling," his temple, is a people, not a place; see 11:1; 3:12. Some manuscripts read "his dwelling and those who dwell in heaven." Our translation renders the much better attested text—also the more difficult, a strong point in its favor.

7. *to conquer them*: See Dan 7:6, 21. This conquering involved killing (v. 15); the Lamb and his followers conquer by dying (5:5; 12:11).

was allowed . . . was given: *edothē* twice as in v. 5—even in this destructive warfare against his people God, mysteriously, is still sovereign. "Here is another example of the realism of John. He holds out no false hope of rescue from death for those who remain faithful" (Boring, 160).

authority over every tribe . . .: The authority of the beast covered the inhabited world, the *orbis Romanus*. The mission of the two witnesses had been equally widespread (11:9).

8. *whose names . . . book of life*: See 3:5; 20:12, 15. See note at 3:5. "We must not read more into John's doctrine of predestination than he intends. . . . His doctrine springs from the thoroughly biblical idea that salvation is from start to finish the unmerited act of God" (Caird, 168).

slain since the foundation of the world: The saving death of the Lamb was part of God's plan from the beginning. See Acts 2:23, "This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God." And 1 Pet 1:18-20, "You know that you were ransomed . . . with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was destined before the foundation of the world but was made manifest at the end of times for your sake."

9. *if you have ears, hear then!*: An admonition found at the close of each of the messages to the Churches. John is again turning directly to Christians with a special admonition to them. As in 2:7, 11, 17 this call for serious attention points ahead to the following proclamation.

10. *whoever is for captivity*: John is inspired by Jeremiah's oracle against Jerusalem: "Those who are for pestilence, to pestilence, and those who are for the sword to the sword; those who are for famine, to famine, and those who are for captivity, to captivity" (Jer 15:2).

whoever is to be slain by the sword: This is the reading of Alexandrinus. The widely attested reading, "if any one slays with the sword" (1828, versions) is, likely, influenced by Matt 26:52, "All who take the sword will perish by the sword." Charles asserts, emphatically, that A alone is right; the purpose of the text is to enforce an attitude of loyal endurance.

this calls for the endurance and faith, lit. "here the endurance": A salutary reminder of what is entailed in opposing the beast and refusing to worship it: captivity and death face the Christians who will not associate with "the inhabitants of the earth." Christian endurance is a sharing in the passion of Christ; faith sees there the only true victory.

INTERPRETATION

In Daniel 7:2-8 four beasts, representing world empires, emerged from the "great sea"; John also sees his beast, a composite of Daniel's four, come up out of the sea. In 4 Ezra we have a close parallel: "Behold, there came up from the sea an eagle that had twelve feathered wings and three heads" (11:1); "The eagle which you saw coming up from the sea is the fourth kingdom which appeared in a vision to your brother Daniel" (12:11). "Sea" has something of the sense of the *tēhôm*, the "deep" or "abyss" of Gen 1:2 (in Rev 11:7 the beast came "from the abyss"); and the "sea" will be excluded from the new order (21:1). It is a hostile element and, fittingly, home of monsters. In v. 11 John will describe another beast "which rose out of the earth." He follows an apocalyptic tradition that, on the fifth day (see Gen 1:21), God had created two mythological creatures, Leviathan and Behemoth, one to inhabit the sea and the other the land. See 4 Ezra 6:49-52: "Then you kept in existence two living creatures, the name of one you called Behemoth and the name of the other Leviathan. . . . And you gave Behemoth one of the parts which had been dried up on the third day, to live in it . . . but to Leviathan you gave the seventh part, the watery part." See 1 Enoch 60:7-10; 2 Bar 29:4. John had ample precedent for his beasts.

Already 4 Ezra had seen Rome in Daniel's fourth beast. John follows the same line, and he describes his beast in terms of the other three of Daniel—a fine example of his free use of sources. To the beast the dragon gave his own power, throne, and authority. Satan (though cast down from heaven) is still "the ruler of this world" (John 12:31) for a short time (Rev 12:12). He can still declare: "To you I will give all this authority and their glory; for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will" (Luke 4:6). John regards the empire as the agent of Satan, and the persecuting emperors as his vassals.

The beast is a parody of the Lamb (see 5:6). One of its heads had received a mortal wound, and the healing of a *mortal* wound is nothing less than return from the dead. Yet John is more precise. A "head" of the beast is an emperor. The head whose mortal wound was healed is the beast "that was, and is not, and is to ascend from the abyss" (17:8-11); he has in mind the legend of *Nero redux*—Nero returned (from exile, or death). The "whole world" gaped in wonder on this beast and its re-

stored head (see 17:8); the world is amazed to see Nero return from the abyss. A presence more sinister than Nero is here: emperor-worship is really worship of Satan. "Who can fight against it?" points to the motive that prompted the worship of the beast: not moral greatness but invincible power. Yet, God is the ultimate source of all authority and power; even Satan's activity falls mysteriously within the divine purpose, which is always a saving purpose. And the beast, in one form or other, will survive as long as the earthly duration of the Church. Already, though, this beast senses failure. His frustrated rage ("blasphemy" in a broad sense) is aimed at God's "dwelling"—this is to say "those who dwell in heaven" (v. 6), the martyrs who rejoice at the fall of Satan (12:12).

The beast is the dragon's instrument in his warfare against the seed of the woman (12:17), and his authority covered the New Testament world, the *orbis Romanus*. His worshipers are "the inhabitants of the earth" (see 3:10; 6:10; 8:13; 11:10), the enemies of God; here they stand out clearly in contrast to the followers of the Lamb, whose names are in the book of life. John does not thereby assert that the worshipers of the beast are predestined to damnation. He is clear that salvation is a free and unmerited gift of God (see 3:5).

At this point, John turns with a special admonition to Christians. The day of persecution is at hand. Christians will be saved through the tribulation, not from it. Captivity, exile, death: such may be the fate of the faithful Christian. Again there is a summons to *hypomonē*, patient endurance. It is precisely this suffering without resistance that calls for patient endurance and faith (see 1:9; 14:12). Caird's illuminating comment opens up a wider perspective: "When one man wrongs another, the other may retaliate, bear a grudge, or take his injury out on a third person. Whichever he does, there are now two evils where before there was one; and a chain reaction is started, like the spreading of a contagion. Only if the victim absorbs the wrong and so puts it out of currency, can it be prevented from going any further. And this is why the great ordeal is also the great victory" (170).

A great power, notably a totalitarian power, may seem to have an impressive permanence and a seeming invincibility. Yet, historically, empires have collapsed with dramatic suddenness. In our day we are witnessing the eclipse of a "superpower." But one empire may also succeed another. The "beast" may assume many guises. Assault on God's people—arising from the nature of the beast—may not be brutal; it may be an insidious infiltration, a weakening of the nerve of the Church. If John calls for endurance and faith in face of active persecution, he calls for no less endurance in face of what he regards as the threat of an alien culture—witness his messages to the Churches. This may well be the challenge to us in our Western world.

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30. *The Second Beast (13:11-18)*

11. Then I saw another beast rising out of the land; it had two horns like a lamb's, but spoke like a dragon. 12. It wielded all the authority of the first beast in its presence, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound had been healed. 13. It worked great miracles, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in the sight of people. 14. By the miracles it was allowed to perform in the presence of the beast it deceived the inhabitants of the earth, telling the inhabitants of the earth to set up an image to the beast which had received the sword-wound and yet lived. 15. It was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast might even speak, and to cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be killed. 16. It caused everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to have a mark put on the right hand or on the forehead, 17. and no one was allowed to buy or sell unless one had the mark, the name of the beast or the number of its name.

18. This calls for wisdom. Let anyone who has intelligence figure out the number of the beast, for it is the number of a human being; and its number is six hundred and sixty-six.

NOTES

11. *another beast*: In 1 Enoch 60:7-10 and 4 Ezra 6:51 Behemoth is a land monster; here, likewise, this second beast arises out of the land. Perhaps a more immediate reference is the fact that whereas in Daniel's vision the four beasts "come up out of the sea" (Dan 7:3), in the interpretation of the vision they "arise out of the earth" (Dan 7:11).

12. *all the authority of the first beast*: Which, in its turn, is authority of the dragon (v. 4).
made the earth . . . worship: If the first beast is a political symbol, it is the business of the beast from the land to promote the worship of the first; it is a religious symbol. It appears that the imperial religion in the service of Rome is principally in mind (v. 14); in Asia, cultic officials required that religious honors be addressed to the emperor.
13. *it worked great miracles*: As a false prophet (16:13; 19:20; 20:10) the second beast can work miracles. See Mark 13:22, "False Christs and false prophets will arise and show signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the elect"; see 2 Thess 2:9-10. Early Christian tradition expected that prodigies would precede the coming of Antichrist.
making fire come down from heaven: Aping the sign of the prophet Elijah (1 Kgs 18:38; 2 Kgs 1:10) and of the two witnesses (Rev 11:5).
14. *it was allowed (edothē) to perform*: Mysteriously, even the beast operates within a divine plan; God is wholly sovereign.
it deceived the inhabitants of the earth: As a tool of Satan, "the deceiver of the whole world" (12:9).
to set up an image to the beast: Reference to statues of emperors set up in temples of Rome and of the empire, to which divine honors were rendered. Even if, in practice, the emperor in the imperial cult was subordinated to the gods, for Christians imperial cult was one with the worship of the traditional gods, and, as such, unacceptable.
15. *allowed (edothē) to give breath*: Contrast "the breath of life from God" that brought about the resurrection of the witnesses (11:11); see Ezek 37:10.
so that the image of the beast might even speak: Speaking statues were engineered in various ways, e.g., by hiding somebody in a hollow statue or by use of ventriloquism. John suggests that the voices could be used to instigate violent action against those who refused to comply with the Caesar-cult (see Dan 3:5-6). Though this is our only evidence that the fraudulent practices of pagan cults were features of imperial cult, John's claim is entirely credible.
to be killed: Underlines the solemn warning of v. 10.
16. *it caused everyone*: See 6:15; 11:18; 19:5, 18; 20:12—the whole population of the empire.
a mark: *Charagma* is an official stamp, as well as the impress of the emperor's head on coins (see v. 17). The mark of the beast (14:11; 16:2; 19:20) is surely in contrast to the seal of the Lamb (7:3; 14:1). Servants of the beast are marked with the "stamp" of the beast—a travesty of the seal of God upon the servants of God (7:2-3). In neither case does John envisage a literal brand or tattoo.
17. *no one was allowed to buy or sell*: Economic pressure; note the problem of guild membership in Pergamum (2:13-16). There, Christian artisans who wished to earn a livelihood by practice of their trade, would have had to join pagan

guilds. More generally, the "mark" could allude to coins of the realm bearing the image, name, and insignia of the emperor. John may be calling on his readers to avoid using Roman coins—thus effectively ruling out buying and selling (Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 126f.).

18. *this calls for wisdom*, lit. "here (*hōde*) is wisdom": The shrewdness that can interpret this riddle; see 17:9.

the number of the beast: The number of the beast stands for its name, which can be discovered by the process of gematria, that is, by the addition of the numerical value of the letters of a name—in Hebrew and Greek, in place of numerals, the letters of the alphabet were given a numerical value. The snag is that the name must be known beforehand if it is to be identified with certainty. A Pompeii graffito reads, "I love her whose number is 545"—the girl and her friends would recognize the name.

it is the number of a human being, lit. "it is the number of a man": In other words, the beast (the Roman Empire) is here represented by an individual emperor (just as in Dan 2:27-28 Nebuchadnezzar stands for the Babylonian Empire). It is reasonable to believe that the emperor is Nero, much in mind throughout Revelation. It is scarcely coincidental that the Greek *Nērōn Kaisar*, transliterated into Hebrew script (*nrwn qsr*), gives 666. It is noteworthy that the Latin form *Nero Caesar* (in Hebrew script *nrw qsr*) gives 616, which occurs as a variant reading. One may not rule out a generic significance in the number 666. If seven is the perfect number, then six is the penultimate, incomplete number—"six-six-six" being emphatically negative. In contrast, *Iēsous* gives 888 (*Sib. Or.* 1. 324-29).

INTERPRETATION

This second beast (called the "false prophet" in 16:13; 19:20; 20:10), with the horns of a lamb, is a parody of the Lamb—for, when it speaks, it is the voice of the dragon that is heard: a wolf in sheep's clothing (see Matt 7:15). This beast, who wields the authority of the first beast, and—false prophet—induces all the "inhabitants of the earth" to worship the beast, is the imperial religion in the service of Rome. It is the interpreter and servant of the beast and, as false prophet, can work miracles. This beast still had to operate within a divine plan: "it was allowed." True sovereignty belongs solely to the One on the throne.

The false prophet causes all (see 6:15; 11:18; 19:5, 18; 20:12) of those who adopted the imperial cult to wear the mark of the beast. John is not thinking of a literal mark. We have seen that the servants of God receive his seal upon their foreheads (7:3), and the followers of the Lamb have his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads (14:1). So, too, the servants of the beast are marked with the "stamp" of the beast: it is a travesty of the seal of the living God (7:2). In each case the wearers

of the seal are under patronage: divine or satanic according to their allegiance. It seems that v. 17 envisages an economic boycott against those who stand aloof from the imperial cult. A totalitarian regime, especially in a sycophantic atmosphere, has many ways and means of bringing pressure to bear. The yellow star, which Jews were compelled to wear in Nazi Germany, victimized them. Christians in Asia, if not in quite the same manner, could be efficiently marginalized.

The beast—that is, the first beast—is effectively named. The empire-beast is represented by an emperor; all indications are that Nero is the emperor in question. For John, the second beast represented false religion—specifically, the imperial cult. Historically, even religion that is “authentic” has too often worn aspects of the beast. The word of Jesus stands as perennial challenge: “The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath” (Mark 2:27). Religion is for men and women; men and women are not meant to be slaves of religion. The beast “made” people to do, “caused” people to do things. Can we honestly claim that religion, even our Christian religion, has not been tyrannical, that it does not still, in some measure, dominate? We have it on the authority of Jesus that we ought not only to reject, but actively to oppose, this abuse of religion. To take such a stand may cost us dearly. Jesus paid his price.

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