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# Seeing Things John's Way: the Rhetoric of the Book of Revelation

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## Chapter 5

# Why Should We Listen to John?

### *The Construction of Ethos in Revelation*

Classical rhetorical theorists identified three fundamental kinds of appeal: the appeal to rational argument (logos), the arousal of strategic emotions in the hearers (pathos), and the construction of credibility (ethos). Aristotle regarded the last of these as the “most effective means of proof” (*Rhet.* 1.2.4), the sine qua non of persuasion. Four centuries later, Quintilian would still name “the authority of the speaker” as that which “carries greatest weight in deliberative oratory” (*Inst.* 3.8.13).

Aristotle broke down “credibility” into three main components: good sense, virtue, and goodwill (φρόνησις, ἀρετή, εὐνοία; Aristotle, *Rhet.* 2.1.5; see also 1.8.6; 2.1.3). He advised speakers to give attention to establishing credibility in the course of the speech itself, rather than relying on the audience’s prior knowledge of their character and behavior (though the latter would potentially help; see 1.2.4). They needed to convey possession of the requisite knowledge to speak authoritatively and sensibly concerning the subject at hand. Speakers needed to demonstrate a personal commitment to virtue that assured hearers of their commitment to lead them only in noble directions. They also needed to communicate favorable feelings toward the audience, having the hearers’ best interests at

heart, wishing them well, and thinking well of them. Displaying such qualities constituted the most important step toward securing the audience's assent.

The *Rhetorica ad Herennium* takes a more audience-centered approach to thinking about the task of establishing ethos, stressing the importance of rendering the hearers "receptive, well-disposed, and attentive" (1.4.7). This is but the other side of the coin.<sup>1</sup> Hearers are more "receptive" toward a speaker who displays mastery of the subject and an agreeable moral character. An audience becomes well-disposed as speakers show themselves to bear the audience goodwill and to hold them in esteem (e.g., by praising their past conduct or judgment), thus establishing a sense of connection. Attentiveness is a particularly important ingredient in ethos, not just in terms of inspiring an audience to invest the energy required to hear, process, and respond to one's speech, but also to direct their attention to things that the speaker elevates as worthy of attention (and perhaps away from other concerns in their immediate situation that might draw them in a direction unfavorable to the speaker's purposes).<sup>2</sup>

Establishing ethos becomes especially important when multiple speakers seek to sway an audience in different directions, whether to judge a defendant guilty or innocent or to commit to one course of action over another. Because speakers often addressed an audience that may have been won over by the preceding speaker's speech, or had to yield the floor to a subsequent speaker, rhetorical theorists emphasized the importance of establishing ethos in the opening paragraphs of a speech and reaffirming credibility in the concluding moments of the speech.<sup>3</sup> Dispelling prejudice (against oneself) or creating the same (against opposing speakers) became a major function of the exordium and peroration.

Quite in keeping with Greco-Roman rhetorical expectations, John gives explicit attention to establishing authority and credibility both at the outset (1:1–20) and at the close (22:6–21). These sections stand apart from the main body of Revelation as a frame, in which John gives direct, explicit attention to the metalevel of communicating the content of Revelation rather than to the content itself. John speaks about being commissioned to write the contents that fall within this frame. He gives details about the means by which the content came to him, speaking *about* the "words written in this book" (1:3; 22:7) rather than communicating those words themselves. It might be inappropriate to label these sections the "exordium" and "peroration" of Revelation, since the text does not follow the form of a typical oration; yet these framing sections nevertheless achieve many of the principal goals for the exordium and peroration.

John's situation reflects the more complex situation of multiple, opposing speakers, which may help to explain the level of attention he gives to establishing credibility at the outset and the close of Revelation. Not only are there rival

1. Aristotle also recognized the importance of positioning the audience to "be disposed in a certain way towards" the speaker (*Rhet.* 2.1.3), as did the author of the *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum* (1436a.33–37; 1436b.8–12).

2. *Rhet. Alex.* 1436b.8–10.

3. Quintilian, *Inst.* 3.8.7; *Rhet. Alex.* 1436a.33–37; Aristotle, *Rhet.* 3.14.6–7, 12; 3.19.1.

teachers within the congregations vying for a hearing and seeking to persuade the disciples to adopt a certain stance in regard to the surrounding culture and its institutions (notably “Jezebel” and the “Nicolaitans”). There are also the strong voices of the dominant culture beyond the congregations, whether their own neighbors and fellow citizens or official representatives of Roman power. John has significant competition for the right to speak and give direction to these communities.<sup>4</sup> In this chapter we will give attention to the primary strategies John employs both to present himself as possessing good sense, virtue, and goodwill, and to render the hearers receptive, well-disposed, and attentive. Although many elements within the visions themselves will also contribute to ethos, our focus will remain primarily on the opening and closing frames of Revelation.

### “AN APOKALYPSIS . . .”

If John had opened with the words of greeting found in Revelation 1:4, “John to the seven churches in Asia: Grace and peace to you,” Revelation would have begun in a manner quite in keeping with other writings collected within the New Testament. His audience would have heard him addressing them as Paul and the author of 1 Peter had, and as James and Jude had addressed their readerships. But Revelation opens quite differently, with a kind of introduction otherwise found only in the classical Hebrew prophets:

An apocalypse of Jesus Christ, which God gave him. . . . And he communicated it, sending it through his angel to his slave, John. (Rev. 1:1)

The vision of Isaiah son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. . . . (Isa. 1:1 NRSV)

The word of the LORD to Israel by the hand of my messenger [or by the hand of Malachi]. . . . (Mal. 1:1; cf. Hos. 1:1; Joel 1:1; Mic. 1:1; Zeph. 1:1)

The word of the LORD to Israel by the hand of his angel . . . (ἐν χειρὶ ἀγγέλου αὐτοῦ, Mal. 1:1 LXX).

Revelation opens in a manner reminiscent of writings that had been received as authentic prophetic words from God. The first voice that the audience hears is not John’s, but the more impersonal voice of “Scripture,” introducing John’s words as speech originating in the divine realm and communicated at God’s bidding. The “chain of revelation” is more complicated in 1:1–3 than in most of the classical prophets, reflecting intertestamental developments such as the emphasis on the angelic mediator of divine communications (a tendency already seen in the Septuagint of Mal. 1:1), but the ultimate Origin of the revelation remains the same.

4. The challenge of rival *Christian* teachers is often observed and has been the focus of significant study (e.g., Duff 2001). But John’s defusing of the voices of the Christians’ idolatrous neighbors and fellow citizens (deSilva 1998a, 94–97) and of representatives of Roman power (Schüssler Fiorenza 1985, 192) are equally important facets of John’s remedy for unhealthy ways in which his audience has potentially been won over by opposing speakers.

This impersonal voice applies the label ἀποκάλυψις (*apokalypsis*) to the communication as a whole. This Greek word gives us our label for the literary category to which Revelation is assigned: it is an “apocalypse,” like *1 Enoch*, parts of Daniel, *4 Ezra*, and *2 Baruch*. But John does not name his work an “apocalypse” as an indication of genre, for which it was not yet a technical term.<sup>5</sup> This opening does not set Revelation apart as something distinct from prophecy (προφητεία, Rev. 1:3), but rather makes a claim that its contents represent a particular kind of “prophecy,” originating in a particular mode of divine revelation.<sup>6</sup>

For the first hearers, the label ἀποκάλυψις would have signaled a kind of charismatic experience that generally combined visual as well as auditory impressions from the realm of the Spirit. Socialization into Christian culture would have led the hearers to accept such revelatory communications as at least worthy of testing in regard to their authenticity (and, therefore, authority).<sup>7</sup> The language of ἀποκάλυψις is especially prominent in Pauline Christianity. Paul himself twice uses the phrase that opens Revelation, once to refer to the end-time “manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ” (τὴν ἀποκάλυψιν τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, 1 Cor. 1:7; cf. 1 Pet. 1:7, 13), and once to refer to his own dramatic encounter with the glorified Jesus, which he experienced as a prophetic commissioning (δὴ ἀποκαλύψεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, Gal. 1:12).<sup>8</sup> In the second instance, Paul specifically contrasts instruction that comes through human agency against divinely revealed instruction, grounding his own apostolic authority in his experience of the latter. Paul also speaks of a “revelation” (ἀποκάλυψις) as an ecstatic experience by means of which visions or instructions are disclosed (2 Cor. 12:1, 7; Gal. 2:2), setting it alongside “prophecy” (1 Cor. 14:6). While “apocalypse” remains a useful label for a particular kind of “revelatory literature,” early Christians tend to use the term to refer to an ecstatic experience (that might later be written down) in which a message is communicated from the divine realm. They perceived a continuity between prophecy and apocalypse, since a “revelation” can constitute a “prophetic word.”<sup>9</sup>

The *titulus* summarizes the contents to follow as “whatsoever things he saw” (ὅσα εἶδεν, 1:2). The focus throughout Revelation remains on John’s “seeing” and “hearing,” not “creating.” John’s voice recedes beneath the voices of otherworldly beings, intruding chiefly to remind the hearers that he is not the inventor of this discourse by calling repeated attention to his own “seeing” and “hearing.” The knowledge that John purports to convey holds great value since it is otherwise inaccessible. “Knowledge is crucial to any speaker’s credibility.”<sup>10</sup>

5. Schüssler Fiorenza 1985, 150.

6. See Schüssler Fiorenza 1985, 150–51.

7. Knight (2001, 487) underscores the importance of this conviction within Christian culture for the development of apocalyptic rhetoric: “Apocalyptic rhetoric is founded on the belief that authoritative information can be discerned through heavenly revelation. Apocalyptic offered the development of human knowledge by more-than-human insight.”

8. Schüssler Fiorenza 1985, 150.

9. Schüssler Fiorenza 1985, 150–51.

10. Carey 1998, 753.

And there are some things John knows that he can't reveal (10:4); John reminds his audience that he is their conduit to knowledge of God's counsel, and that what he does not reveal, they do not know. His descriptions of his own physical and internal responses to what he sees and hears add vividness and authenticity to his reports of his ecstatic experience.<sup>11</sup> As John reports that he feels dread before the glorified Christ (1:17), experiences wonder at the sight of Babylon (17:6), or falls in awe before the feet of his angelic interlocutor (19:10; 22:8), he reinforces the impression of the "reality" of his ecstatic experience by speaking about the *effects* this experience had on him. Naming such effects reinforces the reality of the cause of these effects.

John's presentation does not automatically render his words unassailable, however, given the cultural reality of testing the prophets. But if he is received as a genuine prophet of God, the rhetorical gains of writing in this mode, rather than arguing in his own voice, are immense.<sup>12</sup> This has long been recognized as the foundation for the message's legitimation and hence, in rhetorical terms, for its appeal to ethos.<sup>13</sup>

John continues to give attention to the maintenance of ethos throughout the text, and hence throughout its oral performance as it is read to the churches. He reinforces the visionary aspect of the work, and thus its otherworldly origin, with every "I saw" (εἶδον) and "I heard" (ἤκουσα), anchoring the authority of the text in the otherworldly sources of the reported speech and vision.<sup>14</sup> This technique is common to apocalypses, even intrinsic to the essence of apocalypticism as revelations of realities beyond everyday experience.<sup>15</sup>

### EXCURSUS: DID JOHN REALLY SEE THINGS?

John presents this material as the result of being able to see into and listen in on realities to which people do not ordinarily have access. However, questions naturally arise among interpreters: Is this for real? Did John *really* converse with the glorified Christ—or at least, did John really *believe* that he had such conversations? Does Revelation have its origins in an ecstatic experience, or in John's terms, being "in a spirit" (ἐν πνεύματι, Rev. 1:10), in some alternate state of

11. Carey 1998, 756.

12. See Hall 1996, 438: "The argument convinces to the extent that the claim to inspiration is accepted, that the comprehensive picture fits with the readers' moral and physical universe, and that it satisfactorily answers the readers' questions." As we shall see in the following chapter, John's careful and faithful alignment of himself with the voice of the tradition preserved in the Hebrew Scriptures—thus "fitting with the readers' moral . . . universe"—is an important facet of his claim to authenticity.

13. See Aune 1981, 18; A. Collins 1984, 145; deSilva 1992a, 284; 1993, 49.

14. DeSilva 1992a, 284; 1998b, 789–90. John refers to his own act of seeing no fewer than forty-five times: Rev. 1:12, 17; 4:1; 5:1, 2, 6, 11; 6:1, 2, 5, 8, 9, 12; 7:1, 2, 9; 8:2, 13; 9:1, 17; 10:1, 5; 13:1, 2, 11; 14:1, 6, 14; 15:1, 2, 5; 16:13; 17:3, 6; 18:1; 19:11, 17, 19; 20:1, 4, 11, 12; 21:1, 2, 22.

15. See, e.g., 2 Bar. 22.1–2: "Lo! the heavens were opened, and I saw, . . . and a voice was heard from on high. . . ."

consciousness? Or does Revelation originate in John's quite conscious and self-guided processes of literary composition, crafting narratives of visions that he did not actually "see," but that he could approximate, for example, by reading other literary reports of visionary encounters such as Ezekiel 1–2 and Daniel 10? Is the seeing, hearing, conversing with otherworldly beings, and so forth, merely part of the generic trappings of apocalyptic literature (or less kindly, part of an elaborate attempt to deceive)?

Several scholars deny that any sort of ecstatic experience stands behind Revelation, preferring to view it as a purely literary creation. Schüssler Fiorenza argues that "a careful look at the inaugural vision demonstrates why one is justified in calling Revelation a 'literary vision.' It is impossible to pictorialize or draw this vision, since Revelation is full of image associations which cannot be depicted."<sup>16</sup> She revives an older argument against the visions' authenticity: the difficulty one would have in creating a painting of John's vision of the glorified Christ precludes John actually having "seen" or "visualized" such an image in a state of ecstasy.<sup>17</sup> Instead, Schüssler Fiorenza suggests that the correspondence between "the figure described in Daniel 10" and "that of Christ in Revelation 1 indicates that John worked in a literary fashion insofar as he utilizes Daniel 10 as his pattern and source text but changes this pattern in several ways (e.g., incorporating details from descriptions in Ezekiel and Exodus)." He "follows the text of Daniel 10" as he creates this description of seeing Christ, departing from the source text to introduce particular emphases of his own.<sup>18</sup>

Robert Royalty calls attention to the correspondences between John's description of the glorified Christ (1:12–20) and the actual words "chosen" by Christ to identify himself in each of the seven oracles. This suggests to him that John had not simply heard these oracles and transmitted the words of the glorified Christ verbatim. Rather, he argues, "Christ uses John's exact words when addressing the seven churches," borrowing, as it were, from John's description of Christ in the initial commissioning vision (1:12–20). For Royalty, this is one of several instances of "intratextuality" that "shows the literary artifice evident in John's careful rhetorical constructions throughout the Apocalypse."<sup>19</sup>

Other scholars forcefully maintain that genuine visionary experiences stand behind Revelation and that it is not merely the product of the writing desk. In 1971 Amos Wilder even spoke of a then-contemporary consensus—certainly now a jeopardized consensus—that "the writers not only took over earlier theophanies but that they [also] were themselves visionaries."<sup>20</sup> The fact that some of John's images are difficult to visualize all at once, being too strange or unnatural

16. Schüssler Fiorenza 1991, 51.

17. See Clemen 1920, 25–53.

18. Schüssler Fiorenza 1991, 29.

19. Royalty 1997, 611; 1998, 159.

20. Wilder 1971, 441; see also Böcher 1988a, 3851; Hemer 1986, 13–14; Fekkes 1994, 289–90. Aune (1986, 91) describes Revelation as "a literary replication of the original and unique revelatory experience of John the Seer which, when performed in a public, probably even a cultic setting, communicates the author's paraenetic message with divine authority."

or incoherent, seems to such interpreters *more* congruent with ecstatic experience rather than less.<sup>21</sup> Whether or not John's images can be pictorially represented (a factor of the imagination and skill of the artist) is hardly proof that he did not, in some sense, "see" something before formulating his written descriptions of those images. If dreams (another kind of alternate state of consciousness in which we "see" mental images) are difficult to recall, let alone paint graphically, yet are nevertheless real experiences that can even become the basis for literary works, then one should accord the same possibility to visions seen in other states of consciousness.

It does justice neither to the complexity of Revelation nor to the insights of scholars on both sides to persist in an either/or approach to the question. On the one hand, the intense degree of intertexture has to be plausibly explained. How are we to explain John's use of words snatched verbatim from Ezekiel 3:12 in his own first-person narration, "I heard a loud sound like a trumpet behind me" (Rev. 1:10),<sup>22</sup> or account for the stunning similarities both in detail and in lexical choices between John's vision of Christ and "Daniel's" vision of his angelic interlocutor (Rev. 1:12–15; Dan. 10:5–6)?

On the other hand, to exclude the possibility of ecstatic experience, particularly when there are so many contemporary attestations of ecstatic experience in Greco-Roman, Second Temple Jewish,<sup>23</sup> and early Christian sources, is to fall into the conceptual trap of discounting ecstatic experience on the basis of the antisupernaturalistic prejudices of the worldview pervasive in European and Eurocentric societies in general, and in academia in particular.<sup>24</sup> Such a worldview perpetuates Western prejudice against types of experiences (ecstatic, altered states of consciousness) that are *typical* among non-Western peoples. Contemporary anthropologists show a salutary reserve in this regard, avoiding "cross-cultural calculus of the relative authenticity of ecstatic experiences," paying attention rather "only where the actors themselves hold that some ecstatic states are false, whereas others are true."<sup>25</sup> This does not entail making faith claims

21. David Barr (1984, 43) finds the "element of incoherence" expected: "This is, after all, a book of ecstasy—or at least pseudoecstasy—and we ought to expect a bit of untamed disorder." Foerster (1970, 235–36) points out that while visionary experiences don't follow rational rules, the stock meaning of certain visual cues (like horns being power, heads being intelligence, and the like) could render the visual impression less difficult. The images are not, therefore, "completely plastic," but to some extent represent "visualized thought."

22. Substituting, however, the trumpet blast still resonating from Sinai in Exod. 19:16 for the loud rumbling heard by Ezekiel.

23. See the helpful survey in Levison 1999. The evidence he gathers suggests that an "emic" understanding of John's engagement with the Jewish Scriptures would not rule out the "charismatic" aspect of genuine interpretation of sacred texts. In the eyes of a Philo or Josephus, this differs from ecstasy in regard to the engagement of the interpreter's mind, but not in regard to the presence and the working of the divine to communicate through both processes (see esp. pp. 38–49). While a Ben Sira might be skeptical of dreams and visions, he nevertheless seeks the spirit's guidance—to hear the divine voice, a suprarational pursuit—through study of Scripture and other sources of wisdom (Sir. 39:6).

24. On this problem, pursued from the angle of sociology of knowledge, see deSilva 1992c.

25. Lewis 1971, 29.



that many professional academicians fear would skew, limit, or otherwise undermine the scientific nature of their inquiry. To say that God sent John this vision is a faith claim; but to say that John, in all likelihood, "saw things" is not.

Colin Hemer helpfully suggests that the seer's backgrounds and influences would naturally be drawn into an ecstatic experience.<sup>26</sup> John clearly possessed an encyclopedic command of the contents of the Jewish Scriptures and extracanonical apocalypses like *1 Enoch*. John's extensive knowledge of the visionary tradition supplies both his conscious and subconscious mind with the raw material for his own visionary experiences, as well as for their expression in written form. Schüssler Fiorenza's assumption that John is working in a strictly literary manner—that he "follows the text of Daniel 10"—is problematic. The similarities between the visions in Revelation 1 and Daniel 10 may not indicate that John is rewriting Daniel 10 like a scribe. He may be seeing Christ in a trance, as Daniel 10 (which he may have known by heart) and the other visionary texts alluded to therein set him up to "see." Just as dreams draw on that which has been processed by our conscious mind and seen in the light of day, so John's ecstatic experiences draw on the raw materials that John has accumulated in conscious activity.<sup>27</sup> Vision accounts in Daniel, Ezekiel, and *1 Enoch* do not, then, merely influence John's own vision accounts: they also influence the *visions* themselves. Giving weight to the role of experiences in "altered states of consciousness" in John's process of composition helps account for the often-kaleidoscopic blending of images from multiple sources across the Hebrew Bible (and beyond).<sup>28</sup> Thereafter, in the process of reflecting upon, shaping, and "inscribing" his visionary experiences, John again has extensive opportunity to draw quite consciously on these literary precursors.

### "OF JESUS CHRIST, WHICH GOD GAVE HIM . . ."

Aristotle observed that it was sometimes strategic, in the course of a speech, to "make another speak in our place" (*Rhet.* 3.17.16). Giving voice to the victims

26. Hemer 1986, 14.

27. John may have utilized prophetic texts as a means of entering into an ecstatic trance (as Evan Treborn uses his own diaries in *The Butterfly Effect*). The author of *4 Ezra* may have utilized the vision of the fourth beast in Dan. 7 in such a way, leading to his reimagining/revisioning of that figure as the great eagle. Such a procedure would account for both the similarities and differences between, for example, the vision of the glorified Christ and the angelic interlocutor of Dan. 10, or between the vision of the heavenly chariot in Ezek. 1 and the throne vision of Rev. 4. If texts were the launching point for entering into alternate states of consciousness for John, his verbatim recontextualization of Ezek. 3:12 (notably, itself an incipit to a visionary experience) as an introduction to his first visionary experience becomes intelligible as an element of ecstatic experience rather than a facet of a purely literary activity.

28. Similar models are also articulated and supported in Fekkes 1994, 289–90 and Witherington 2003, 36–38. Peterson (1969, 135) makes an important observation in this regard: "Interestingly, there is not a single exact quotation from any source. It would have been impossible for anyone to copy so many things with such uniform inaccuracy." The literary-scribal model of composition is not sufficient to explain *both* the similarities *and* the differences between Revelation and its resources.

of a crime could arouse greater indignation against the perpetrator of that crime. Giving voice to how an audience's forebears might evaluate their deeds could help motivate adoption of some course of action. What was an occasional strategy in routine oratory becomes the dominant strategy in apocalyptic oratory.<sup>29</sup> The implied authors of *1 Enoch* and *4 Ezra* introduce the voices of angels, God, and other supramundane beings into the discourse. In the case of those pseudonymous works, even the first-person speech of the implied author represents a voice that is distant from the actual author, just as the implied audience is removed from the actual audience by many generations.

In John's Revelation, which is not pseudonymous, we nevertheless hear many voices other than John's own addressing us. We hear Christ's voice commissioning John (1:17–20) and censuring behaviors and personalities in the seven churches (2:1–3:22). We hear angelic and other heavenly voices denouncing "Babylon" (18:1–24). We hear the souls of murdered Christians crying out for vindication (6:9–11) and joining the voices of angels to praise God for enacting judgment against their enemies (16:5–7).<sup>30</sup> Angelic beings challenge allegiances and behaviors, while other heavenly voices, like the Spirit, pronounce felicitation upon those who walk in line with the angels' exhortations (14:6–13). Otherworldly voices, identified or not, highlight the importance of particular words (words found now within John's text) by issuing a special command to "write" them down (e.g., 14:13; 19:9),<sup>31</sup> affirming their otherworldly origin for the hearers who share the early Christian conviction that the gift of prophetic utterance had been renewed and accept that John genuinely exercises the prophetic gift (rather than being a "dreamer" like those denounced in Jude 8).<sup>32</sup> We even hear the voice of God, declaring his identity (1:8), announcing the renewal of creation (21:5a), authenticating the divine message (21:5b), and reiterating promises to those who remain faithful and pronouncing warnings against the unfaithful (21:6–8). This catalog could continue for a considerable

29. See Carey 1999b, 137–41.

30. An ancillary gain of John's introduction of so many otherworldly voices in this regard is that it serves to cut off objections, a goal that any good orator would keep in mind. On this point, see Carey 1999b, 128–32, who argues that this technique silences the possibility of criticizing John for being too harsh and uncompromising in his assessment of Rome and its alignment against God's righteous standards (and thus, of course, John's assessment of what Rome "deserves"). John, in fact, *never* speaks harsh, condemnatory words in his own voice. Rather, he harnesses heavenly voices to justify the severity of his visions against Rome and the beast worshipers (Rev. 15:2–4; 16:5–6; 16:7; 19:2–5). John is merely the spokesperson for "a chorus of heavenly witnesses" who, cumulatively, "protect John from objections that he is rash, violent, or exclusive" (Carey 2001, 175). Those who would object to what they hear must object against speech presented as the words of angels, martyrs, the Spirit, Christ, and God's own self. The voice of the Hebrew Scriptures and other authoritative traditions (Royalty 1997, 605; deSilva 2002b) could be added as one more voice (or chorus of voices) that John draws in as a harmonious witness to, and legitimating foundation for, his own voice.

31. Giesen 1997, 68–69.

32. Indeed, five of the macarisms in Revelation are uttered by heavenly lips (14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 22:7, 14; Bertram and Hauck, "μακάριος," 369), the first by an unknown voice that, however, does not present itself as John's own voice. Only the macarism in 20:6 is spoken in the narrator's (John's) own voice.

length. John rarely speaks in his own voice, except to narrate what he saw and heard, his responses to the experiences, and to establish the epistolary frame of the whole (1:4, 9).

A clear rhetorical gain of this tactic is that, by submerging his own voice beneath the voices of the glorified Christ, angels, the Spirit, and other supernatural beings who speak through him to the audience, for whom he merely serves as mouthpiece and scribe, John causes more authoritative figures to confront his audiences.<sup>33</sup> To the extent that these figures are accepted as the “source” of the content, the content is less likely to be challenged and, therefore, authoritative pronouncements may often be leveled without much supporting argumentation or evidence.<sup>34</sup>

This strategy also minimizes the speaker's risk of alienating the audience, since John rarely addresses even words of exhortation, let alone rebuke and correction, directly.<sup>35</sup> Rhetorical ethos is fostered by nurturing a receptive frame of mind in the hearers toward the speaker, which is in turn supported as the speaker communicates goodwill toward the audience. Neither is well served by berating an audience for its failures to live up to the group's standards or values. So when challenge and critique must be leveled, doing so in the voice of another—while still standing alongside the audience rather than opposite them—is a strategic tack. Apocalypses that employ pseudonymity allow an author to apply a further layer of insulation in this regard insofar as the speaker (e.g., Enoch or Baruch) does not address the actual audience directly, who rather overhear the implied author addressing a more ancient audience, leaving the actual audience to apply the words to themselves.<sup>36</sup>

Both facets are apparent in the seven oracles in Revelation 2 and 3. The glorified Christ confronts each congregation with its failures, censures particular teachers, and issues warnings against those who fail to respond. John steps out of the way, simply passing along—out of faithfulness both to Christ and to these congregations—what he was commanded to pass along. Each oracle's introduction leaves no doubt concerning the speaker (2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14), and therefore who is “to blame” for the harsh words. And since it is the glorified Lord to whom the congregations have pledged their loyalty and whose return to mete out rewards and punishments they anticipate, the hearers will be less likely to defend themselves against those harsh words by rejecting the speaker. The closing summons of each oracle, “Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches,” is not merely an attempt to claim the Spirit's authentication for each message (though it does accomplish that as well).<sup>37</sup> It is also “an echo of the Synoptic parables,”<sup>38</sup> a kind of stylistic “signature” connect-

33. So A. Collins 1984, 145; Kirby 1988, 199; Schüssler Fiorenza 1991, 115, 137–38; O'Leary 1993, 388; Royalty 1997, 607–10; Knight 2001, 478.

34. See chap. 9 (below).

35. See Carey 1998, 759 on this rhetorical gain in apocalyptic literature generally, particularly those that employ pseudonymity.

36. Carey 1998, 759.

37. Knight 2001, 478.

38. Royalty 1997, 610.

ing the oracles with Jesus' known speech patterns. Other echoes of Jesus traditions throughout the oracles reinforce further the impression that it is, indeed, Jesus that they are hearing (see, e.g., 3:2a, 3b, 5b).

Second, Jesus addresses his words not to the churches in the first instance, but to the *angels* of the seven churches. In this way, John and the congregations are, much of the time, each one step removed from the confrontation. The identification of these angels remains an area of significant debate. Do they represent the heavenly guardians of the churches? Such an understanding casts these angels in a role comparable to Michael, the angelic guardian of Israel (Dan 12:1), or to the angels who serve as guardians of individuals and as their representatives before God's throne, who are thus available to be addressed by God in regard to their charges (*Jub.* 35:17; *Matt.* 18:10; *Acts* 12:15), or to the angelic teachers of humankind who, in the case of *1 Enoch* 6–16, led their charges astray. They have also been seen as human representatives of the churches, possibly their bishops or messengers sent by the churches to John,<sup>39</sup> and even as personifications of the churches. Appreciating the rhetorical gain does not depend on solving this riddle. To a large extent, the congregation does not experience itself as being directly confronted by Jesus.

This layer of indirectness, however, is not consistently sustained, with the result that the hearers will not miss the fact that the subject matter pertains to them directly. For example, the speech shifts frequently from *σὺ* (addressing the "angel" of the church) to *ὑμεῖς* (addressing the congregation as a collective) or from second-singular verbs to second-plural verbs, showing "holes" in the veil of indirect address. Revelation 2:10 affords an instructive example: "Fear nothing [singular command] that you [singular] are about to suffer. The devil is about to throw some of you [plural] into prison in order that you [plural] might be tested, and you [plural] will have tribulation during ten days. Be faithful [singular command] unto death, and I will give to you [singular] the crown of life." The angels, moreover, are not threatened with punishment themselves, though the guilty "listeners" are. Also, the refrain clearly shows that what is written "to the angel" by John at Jesus' behest is also spoken "to the churches" by the Spirit (2:1, 7; etc.).

Since Jesus is the primary speaker addressing the congregations in the opening chapters of Revelation, John also gives strategic attention to developing Jesus' ethos as well. In part, this supports John's attempt to construct, in opposition to the authoritative voices of Rome and her emperors, "an alternative locus of authority in [his] vision of the risen Christ."<sup>40</sup> If the emperors and their representatives are impressive and weighty figures whose voices carry authority, John wishes to show that Christ is much more so. In part, it also reflects the basic conviction that a speaker's ethos should not be assumed—even though this would be natural within the Christian assembly, since none but those who accept

39. Hemer 1986, 32.

40. Carey 1999b, 1.

Christ's word as authoritative would even be found among the audience—but rather created afresh within the speech.

John presents Christ in ways that will render the congregations more receptive to his "speech," first dwelling on Jesus' demonstration of favor and goodwill toward the hearers. This Jesus is "the one who loved us and released us from our sins by means of his blood," who "made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father" (1:5–6). John reminds the hearers of Jesus' principal acts of beneficence toward them, and the personal cost of securing the same, so that they will hear his words as coming from one who has shown them the utmost goodwill, commitment, and personal investment in the past. This will, in turn, dispose them to accept his words of rebuke and correction more readily, having been reminded of the heart from which those words spring.

John's vision of the glorified Christ also contributes powerfully to Jesus' ethos (1:12–16). Using images recognizable from Daniel, and perhaps inspired overall by the transfiguration traditions that foreshadowed Jesus' postresurrection glory, John paints a truly impressive word picture of the speaker who will shortly turn his attention away from John and toward the churches and their heavenly guardians. Jesus emerges as the supreme *kyrios*, trumping the pretensions of human rulers and their manufactured aura. John also draws attention to this Christ's infallible ability to see both what we show and what we hide (2:23), even from ourselves (as is the case at least among Laodicean Christians; 3:17). This superior knowledge gives his words authority beyond the hearers' potential objections, since the latter would be based on inferior knowledge. As a claim concerning the speaker's knowledge, one that is itself grounding in an authoritative Scripture (Jer. 17:10), it would enhance the ethos of this speaker.

It is the voice of *this* Christ, *this* Lord, that speaks to the churches, confronting them and opposing the rival voices that at least some among them entertain. It is *his* strength that encourages them and shores them up in the face of hostility or deprivation, but also *his* strength that stands behind the threats and warnings against disloyalty and compromise. The self-revelation formulas that introduce each of the seven oracles recapture some facet of this overall image of power and authority, economically recalling the whole and positioning the congregations to encounter the words as John encountered the glorified Christ—with the fear and awe that cause them to prostrate themselves before his speech.<sup>41</sup>

The word that confronts the hearers is thus not *John's* word, but the words of the glorified Christ (1:1–2). This is reinforced in detail and enacted explicitly in Christ's appearance to and commissioning of John, and in the seven oracles themselves, in which Christ addresses the congregations (and their angels) in the first person. To the extent that the hearers accept Revelation as a genuine word of prophecy, a communication of the speech of the glorified Christ that has its source ultimately in God, it will carry great authority. Though John does not universally depend on this (e.g., his use of the authoritative Scriptures and Jesus traditions

41. See Kirby 1988, 202.

also contributes forcefully to both the authority and argumentation of the work), many of his arguments ultimately depend on the audience's accepting that they are spoken by Christ, who has the power, for example, to enact the consequences that he announces as "arguments" to adopt a particular course of action.

### "TO SHOW . . . WHAT MUST HAPPEN SHORTLY"

According to Aristotle, one goal of the exordium of a deliberative speech was to "magnify or minimize the importance of the subject" (*Rhet.* 3.14.12). Speakers needed to be able to define the precise challenge or opportunity facing the hearers, as well as capture their interest and willingness to invest themselves in meeting that challenge. Hence "amplification" was often a feature of exordia where a speaker sought to evoke a positive response to a course of action, or "minimization" when a speaker wanted to dampen enthusiasm for an opposing speaker's proposal.

John uses several topics of amplification as he opens Revelation. In the *titulus*, he employs topics of imminence. John's message will address "what will take place quickly, . . . for the time is near" (ἐν τάχει, . . . ὁ γὰρ καιρὸς ἐγγύς, 1:1, 3). Imminence, which also provides a foundation for the appeal to two particular emotions (fear and confidence), here advances ethos by heightening audience attention: what is presented as immediately "relevant" by virtue of being imminently forthcoming captures our attention more readily than an exercise in long-range planning.

John's announcement of Christ's "coming with the clouds" also heightens audience attentiveness. John uses the technique of vividly presenting some scene as if before the speaker's eyes, here underscored by the imperative to "look!" (Ἴδού), with the result that the audience is invited to imagine the scene unfolding before them (1:7):

Look! He comes with the clouds,  
and every eye will see him—  
Even those who pierced him,  
and all the tribes of the earth will wail on account of him.

This vivid presentation of a critical encounter that will have a sorrowful outcome for many (even "all") suggests that the author is about to treat matters of the utmost importance to the audience, since the content of his "revelation" will have some bearing on how they encounter the returning Christ. The credibility of this announcement is enhanced by the fact that it is taken directly from the authoritative texts of the community. This specific combination of Daniel 7:13, used to refer to the event of the Son of Man's coming, with Zechariah 12:10, 14, used to postulate the results or significance of the event for the majority of humankind, already appears in traditions ascribed to Jesus (Matt. 24:30 and par.). The prior combination suggests that not only the texts but also their combination

and interpretation would be received as “traditional” and, therefore, authoritative here.<sup>42</sup> *This* event represents the primary “crisis” to which John would draw the hearers’ attention, and which John will use to motivate particular responses to the situations faced by the congregations in their “here and now.”

John’s use of such “crisis rhetoric” serves the goals of establishing ethos. “The urgent—the unique, the precarious, and the irremediable—is a rhetorical commonplace (*topos*) sure to get attention.”<sup>43</sup> Amplifying the significance of the challenges the author purports to address augments the audience’s attentiveness. Framing the speech as an attempt to help the hearers successfully meet and survive a crisis helps the speaker to appear to offer advice out of pure rather than self-interested motives. “John is simply telling his audience what they so desperately need to know.”<sup>44</sup> Positing a crisis—here, the well-known crisis of God’s judgment—provides John with a means of addressing problems in the seven congregations from the vantage point of simply helping them overcome obstacles in their midst to successfully encountering that crisis. The focus shifts to surviving “that day” and away from criticism of the congregations, rivalry (power struggles) between prophets and teachers, and other potentially alienating facets of the discourse.

### “COMMUNICATING IT . . . TO HIS SLAVE, JOHN”

Despite being the physical “author” of the text, John distances himself considerably from the “invention” of the text. In the opening lines, John is ranged alongside the recipients rather than presented as the originator of the message (1:1):

A revelation from Jesus Christ,  
which God gave to him to show to his slaves [τοις δούλοις αὐτοῦ]  
what things must happen quickly,  
and he made it known,  
sending (it) through his angel to his slave, John [τῷ δούλῳ αὐτοῦ Ἰωάννη].

The principal links in the chain of communication are: God—Christ—slaves. John only figures in the further expansion of this chain in the second half of the verse: Christ—angel—the slave John, through whom Christ’s word comes to the larger circle of God’s slaves.<sup>45</sup>

42. Interesting in this connection is the recitation of Zech. 12:10 in John 19:37, applied to the crucifixion.

43. Carey 1998, 736; see also Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 91–92.

44. Carey 2001, 176; 1998, 736, 760.

45. Aune (1997, 13) suggests that “slaves” may refer to a circle of prophets in Rev. 1:1; 22:6. “Slaves” clearly denotes “prophets” in 10:7, less clearly (contra Aune 1997, 13) in 11:18: “the time [came] . . . to give the reward to your slaves, to the prophets and to the holy ones and to those fearing your name.” It is not apparent that “your slaves” is renamed only by “the prophets” here, rather than by all three classes of servant (prophets, holy ones, those revering God’s name).

While the title “slave of God” may strike the reader as self-deprecating, it is also a traditional title of distinction, appearing frequently in early Christian literature to designate a leader (cf. Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:10; Phil. 1:1; Titus 1:1; Jas. 1:1; 2 Pet. 1:1; Jude 1:1).<sup>46</sup> On the one hand, the entire body of Christian disciples is referred to collectively as “God’s slaves” throughout Revelation (2:20; 7:3; 19:2, 5; 22:3, 6), as probably here in Revelation 1:1 as well, with the result that John stands alongside the hearers as one of their number. In this regard, as he diminishes his own status, he also augments the status and authority of the words that he will speak, since they are not his own. On the other hand, however, John’s identity as “Christ’s slave” (1:1) may also single him out from the pack as exercising a leadership role, alongside the many other Christian leaders who used that title. As that “slave” who receives this revelation and through whom it is communicated to God’s *many* “slaves,” John enters the scene in the role of a prophet, and it is as a prophet, by virtue of charismatic authority rather than some traditional, authority-invested office, that he exercises authority among the congregations.

Two commissioning scenes establish John’s prophetic authority. In the first (1:9–20), a heavenly voice “like a trumpet” commands John to “write what you are seeing in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea”(1:11). John turns to discover that this voice belongs to the glorified Christ, who once again orders John to “write the things you saw, and the things that are, and the things that are about to come into being after these things” (1:19). The command to “write” will be repeated throughout the book (2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14; 14:13; 19:9; 21:5), keeping John’s prophetic commission, and the otherworldly authorization of the message, ever before the hearer. This opening episode “establishes, in the customary fashion of Judaeo-Christian rhetoric, [John’s] *ethos* as a prophet.”<sup>47</sup>

The connections between John’s vision of, and response to, the glorified Christ, and traditional visions of otherworldly figures experienced by prophets like Ezekiel and Daniel (cf. Ezek. 1:26–28; Dan. 10:5–6, 9) also advance *ethos*. John’s commissioning “looks” like an authentic one, since it resembles those received in the authoritative tradition of prophetic encounters. His reaction to it confirms its authenticity, since Daniel and Ezekiel experienced similar reactions in their ecstatic encounters. The same applies to the second commissioning scene (Rev. 10:1–11), which is strongly reminiscent of Ezekiel’s prophetic commission (Ezek. 2:8–3:6) without being a mere imitation or reiteration of the same.<sup>48</sup>

46. Royalty 1998, 136. Moses the “servant of God” (παῖς κυρίου in Josh. 1:13 LXX) provides the prototype for this titular usage.

47. Kirby 1988, 199.

48. Witherington finds it “improbable that the content of the scroll [in Rev. 10] is about a prophetic commission, since that was already depicted at the outset of Revelation” (2003, 157 n. 226). While the scroll *itself* is not about prophetic commission, the scene of John being commanded to *eat* the scroll clearly reinforces John’s prophetic commission to speak the words that God has put in his mouth. Multiple prophetic commissions would be a contextually appropriate way for John



While John gains the authority typically ascribed to a prophet, he also establishes connections with his hearers by speaking of himself as a fellow slave (1:1) and as a “brother” and “partner” (1:9).<sup>49</sup> John evokes goodwill by presenting himself as a “brother,” a term that carries an affective dimension likely to arouse feelings of friendship and favor supportive of ethos. Similarly, calling himself a “partner” or “fellow sharer” (συγκοινωνός) in the difficult circumstances that accompany awaiting God’s kingdom (i.e., “tribulation” and “patient endurance”) evokes a sense of connection with John as one who understands and experiences the same trials faced by his audiences. Indeed, his experiences of hardship become a sign of John’s steadfast faithfulness to the message of Jesus, the faithful witness, and thus tokens of his sincerity and pure motives—as opposed to Jezebel and the Nicolaitans, whose accommodationist policies position them for comfort rather than tribulation, for pleasure rather than patient endurance, and hence betray the self-serving nature of their agenda. Additionally, the epistolary greeting of “grace and peace” familiar from Pauline epistles, with which John first speaks in his own voice (1:4), suggests a pastoral relationship between John and the audience, hence one marked by both caring and goodwill on his part.<sup>50</sup>

Credibility is also advanced as the moral virtue of a speaker is demonstrated. In regard to John, this begins as early as the *titulus*, in which the “slave, John,” is further described as one “who attested to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus [ἐμαρτύρησεν τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ]” (1:2).<sup>51</sup> This phrase provides a snapshot of John’s activity and character, presenting him (for he is not speaking about himself, but is being attested by the faceless voice of the incipit) in terms that denote praiseworthy, divinely approved behavior throughout the work (1:5, 9; 2:13; 6:9; 12:17; 19:10, 13). John immediately reinforces this picture as he claims to be present on Patmos “on account of the word of God and the witness of Jesus [διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ]” (1:9). John steps onto the scene already as a faithful disciple, an imitator of Jesus who is himself a “faithful witness [ὁ μάρτυς, ὁ πιστός]” (1:5). This quality will be shared by Antipas, “my [i.e., Jesus’] witness, my faithful one [ὁ μάρτυς μου, ὁ πιστός μου]” (2:13); by the many martyrs beneath the celestial altar slain “on account of the word of God and on account of the witness that they had given [διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν ἣν εἶχον]” (6:9); by the offspring of the woman clothed with the sun who “keep the commandments of God and have the witness of Jesus [τῶν τηρούντων τὰς ἐντολάς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἐχόντων τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ]” (12:17); and by those who come to life and rule with Christ for

to reaffirm his authority—his ethos—in the midst of the speech. If the hearer heard Ezek. 2 in the background, moreover, is it difficult to see how the hearer would have understood Rev. 10 as something other than a (renewed) prophetic commission.

49. Schüssler Fiorenza 1985, 196; Royalty 1997, 144.

50. Carey 2001, 173.

51. See Kirby 1988, 205 n.17: “The groundwork for John’s *ethos* is laid as early as 1.2” (though no discussion follows).

a thousand years, who include “those who were beheaded on account of the witness of Jesus and on account of the word of God [διὰ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ καὶ διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ]” (20:4). John is part of a web of associations involving “witness,” an honorable group into which the readers will also be inducted as they live in line with the testimony of Jesus in their speech, actions, and demonstrations of single-hearted allegiance.<sup>52</sup>

The “word of God” and “witness of Jesus” are a risky business, bringing the threat of substantial loss rather than temporal gain. It led to death for Antipas, the souls beneath the altar, and those who were (and were yet to be) beheaded. It has led to exile (*relegatio ad insulam*, deportatation to an island) for John. This fact bolsters John’s ethos insofar as it shows him to be sincere in his motives rather than engaged in the religion business for the sake of material gain like the sophists and charlatans lampooned by Lucian (see his *Alexander, The Passing of Peregrinus*, and *Philosophies for Sale*).<sup>53</sup>

Finally, John’s superior access to otherworldly knowledge reinforces his authority. Though he shares this knowledge with the hearers, they are continually reminded that they depend on John for this knowledge, having access to it only through him. However, John knows some things that the audience cannot,<sup>54</sup> for example, the meteorological message that John receives but must withhold: “And when the seven thunders had spoken, I was about to write, and I heard a voice speaking from heaven: ‘Seal up the things that the seven thunders spoke, and do not write them’” (Rev. 10:4). This subtly reminds the hearers that John is more in the know than he can let on, enhancing both authority and the need for trust.<sup>55</sup> He surely *would* have shared it but was explicitly commanded not to do so.

John’s tendency to use “as” and “like” (ὅμοιος, ὡς) may serve a similar function. The word ὅμοιος is frequent in (Greek) apocalyptic discourse, expressing the seer’s struggle to find the right words to evoke precisely the visual impressions that the seer witnessed, since those visions go beyond the normal experiences for which we have words.<sup>56</sup> The author is thus always closer to the vision than the audience: the words do not allow them quite the same access to those scenes. John employs this word chiefly in regard to the opening Christophany

52. Carey 1999b, 122.

53. Paul uses hardship catalogs in 2 Corinthians similarly: a teacher’s perseverance in commitment to a religion or philosophical school when such commitment has brought financial or other loss rather than gain or fame demonstrates that teacher’s sincere commitment to that way of life (see Furnish 1984, 281–82).

54. So also Carey 1998, 753. Carey (1999b, 124–25, following Ruiz 1994, 201) regards the consumption of the little scroll as another “distinction in knowledge and status” separating John from the hearers, with whom he otherwise claims to share everything. This is debatable, however, since the episode of consuming the scroll can also be seen as the impetus for the revelations in chapters 12 and following, which impart the scroll’s contents.

55. By attempting to recover this missing information (referring the reader to Mark 13:32 and Matt. 24:36, where no one can know the day or the hour of Christ’s return, and inferring that this must be the information John hears but must suppress), Schüssler Fiorenza (1991, 75) seems to have missed the point of John’s sealing up what the seven thunders revealed.

56. L. Snyder 2000, 411.

(1:13, 15), the vision of God upon the throne and his angelic court (4:3 [2x], 6, 7 [3x]), and the fifth and sixth woes (9:7 [2x], 10, 19; see also 11:1; 13:2, 11; 14:14; 21:11, 18). Positively, John's use of simile engages the hearers' imaginations as they listen, inviting them to visualize beyond the words themselves; yet it also reminds them that John's experience is larger than the words that he can find, that the words (to which they can have access) are *not* the experience (to which only John had access). This, again, subtly distances the hearers from the experience itself, reminding them that they are completely dependent upon John's mediation for access to the otherworldly insight, and thus affirming his authority by virtue of his superior knowledge.

### “FAVORED ARE THOSE WHO . . . KEEP WHAT IS WRITTEN HEREIN”

A number of striking assertions about the words of Revelation, and about reading and “keeping” these words, also contribute to the authority of this message. These assertions carry weight because they are not spoken in the author's own voice, but rather in the voices of entities other than John, who become “independent witnesses” to the credibility of the text—otherworldly “endorsements,” as it were.

The macarisms of 1:3 and 22:7 are important examples. The first is spoken in the impersonal voice of the book's introduction, imitating the *titulus* of the scriptural prophetic books, in which John is himself spoken of in the third person. The second is spoken to John by the angelic guide who had shown John the vision of the New Jerusalem (21:9; 22:6).

Favored is the one reading the words of the prophecy out loud, and the ones who hear the words and heed the things written therein [Μακάριος ὁ ἀναγινώσκων καὶ οἱ ἀκούοντες τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας καὶ τηροῦντες τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ γεγραμμένα]. (1:3)

Favored is the one who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book [Μακάριος ὁ τηρῶν τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας τοῦ βιβλίου τούτου]. (22:7)

These two macarisms are essentially the same, framing the whole experience of reading Revelation and hearing Revelation read, except that the latter omits the felicitation of the reader and hearers. At the close of the text, these experiences are almost completed, and all that remains is to “heed” (lit., “keep”) what has been read and heard. The first macarism helps to render the hearers attentive and well-disposed, since the acts of reading, hearing, and keeping the message are presented as signs of standing in a highly privileged position (“favored,” “honored,” “felicitated”). The second reaffirms the privilege accorded the audience, reinforcing their inclination to walk in line with what they have heard.

At the other extreme, Revelation concludes with a curse formula:

I myself attest [μαρτυρῶ ἐγὼ] to each person who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to that person the plagues that stand written in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away that person's share in the tree of life and in the holy city described in this book. (22:18–19)

Context shows the “I” pronouncing this curse to be the glorified Christ. In the following verse, “the one attesting these things” (ὁ μαρτυρῶν ταῦτα, 22:20, echoing the opening of 22:18) also says, “Indeed, I am coming quickly,” indicating the speaker to be the ascended Jesus, as John’s response—“Indeed, come, Lord Jesus” (22:20b)—renders certain. In this curse, the glorified Christ personally attests to the importance of the whole text in all its particulars and threatens any who would dare to edit it. Given John’s expectation of Christ’s imminent intervention, he was probably not so concerned to preserve the integrity of the text over the course of a long history of transmission as to prevent local readers or others in the congregations from adding qualifying glosses or omitting details to make the reading of the indictments of the churches and local figures within them, or of the Roman domination system as a whole, less uncomfortable or awkward.<sup>57</sup>

In addition to blessings and curses, subtle transformations within the text enhance its authority as “the word of God and the testimony of Jesus” come to be closely identified with the words of this particular text. John’s angelic interlocutor highlights this transformation:

I am your fellow slave and that of your brothers and sisters holding on to the witness of Jesus [σύνδουλός σου εἰμι καὶ τῶν ἀδελφῶν σου τῶν ἐχόντων τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ]. (19:10)

I am your fellow slave and that of your brothers and sisters the prophets, and those keeping the words of this book [σύνδουλός σου εἰμι καὶ τῶν ἀδελφῶν σου τῶν προφητῶν καὶ τῶν τηρούντων τοὺς λόγους τοῦ βιβλίου τούτου]. (22:9)

Revelation relies heavily on verbal repetition to suggest meaning by creating webs of association, reinforcing boundaries and incompatibilities, and the like.<sup>58</sup> It may be significant, then, that the most extensive and exact verbal repetition within Revelation occurs between 19:10 and 22:8b–9.<sup>59</sup> “Holding on to the witness of Jesus” has become, in the second iteration, “keeping the words of this book.” The second may be heard as a clarification and specification of the first. Similarly, the visions that the angel was showing John (“The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel *to show* to his slaves what must happen

57. Carey (1999b, 111) suggests that the blessings and curses function as topics of amplification, heightening awareness of the importance of John’s message by calling attention to the high stakes of hearing and heeding the message in its entirety.

58. See deSilva 1999a, 73–81.

59. Both passages begin with John falling before the feet of the angel and the angel prohibiting this action, using many of the same words in each.

quickly," 22:6) have become "these words" (22:6; see also 22:9). The sights, for example, of the new Jerusalem, are transformed into the words John has used to record the things seen (and heard, 1:2). An especially noteworthy transformation is also evident as one moves from 1:2 to 22:20. Now, at the very conclusion, "the one testifying these things [ὁ μαρτυρῶν ταῦτα]" is not merely John, "who bore witness [ὅς ἐμαρτυρησεν] concerning . . . whatever he saw" (1:2), but also Christ himself, the same "I" of the "Indeed, I am coming quickly." The words of Revelation, therefore, are not merely John's "testimony" (1:2), but also the testimony of the glorified Christ (22:20).

There are also explicit words of authentication throughout Revelation. In two instances these affirmations concern primarily the reliability of a particular utterance. In 19:9, after commanding John to "write" the words of the fourth macarism, the angel further authorizes the words that John has just inscribed: "He says to me, 'These words are genuine words of God' [οὗτοι οἱ λόγοι ἀληθινοὶ τοῦ θεοῦ εἰσιν]." Similarly in 21:5, John is commanded to write—apparently by God—that "these words are reliable and authentic/genuine [οὗτοι οἱ λόγοι πιστοὶ καὶ ἀληθινοί]. Here the authenticating statement refers immediately to a pronouncement made by "the one seated on the throne," "See! I am making all things new" (21:5a), but probably also includes the previous speech by the same speaker, which in turn comprises recontextualizations of familiar promises from the Jewish Scriptures (21:3–4).

In 22:6a, however, we encounter a much more sweeping authentication. Here, the angelic conversation partner repeats the affirmation made in 19:9: "These words are reliable and genuine [οὗτοι οἱ λόγοι πιστοὶ καὶ ἀληθινοί]," affirming them to originate with "the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets" (22:6b). But unlike the occurrences in 19:9 and 21:5, the angel uses this formula not to authenticate a discrete pronouncement, but rather, at the very least, the whole of John's description of the new Jerusalem (21:9–22:5).<sup>60</sup> However, 22:6b–7 may be heard to authenticate the entire body of Revelation since it explicitly recalls 1:1, 3 and forms an *inclusio* with the same:

*God gave to him to show to his slaves what must happen quickly, and he signified it, sending it through his angel. . . . Favored is the one who reads out loud and the ones who hear the words of the prophecy and who keep what is written therein. [Ἐδωκεν αὐτῷ ὁ θεὸς δεῖξαι τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει, καὶ ἐσήμανεν ἀποστείλας διὰ τοῦ ἀγγέλου αὐτοῦ. . . . Μακάριος ὁ ἀναγινώσκων καὶ οἱ ἀκούοντες τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας καὶ τηροῦντες τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ γεγραμμένα.] (1:1, 3)*

*The Lord God . . . sent his angel to show to his slaves what must happen quickly. . . . Favored is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book [Ὁ κύριος ὁ θεὸς . . . ἀπέστειλεν τὸν ἀγγέλου αὐτοῦ δεῖξαι τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει. . . . Μακάριος ὁ τηρῶν τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας τοῦ βιβλίου τούτου.] (22:6–7)*

60. These affirmations of reliability and genuineness appear to cluster around the visions of Christ's victory and the new Jerusalem.

Just as the macarisms themselves, together with the final curse, frame Revelation in a manner heightening audience attention and receptivity, so the angel's words of authentication, opening the epilogue to the work and recalling the opening commendation through verbal repetitions, provide a supramundane testimony to the credibility of *this* message in a situation of competing prophetic messages.

## DECONSTRUCTING RIVAL VOICES

In a situation in which multiple voices vie for the audience's assent, appeals to ethos may involve undermining the credibility of rival speakers alongside positively establishing one's own. The speaker may have to give considerable attention to exciting prejudice against other speakers so as to neutralize their claims on the audience's attention and trust, as well as remove prejudice against himself or herself resulting from the rival speakers' attention to this same strategy (Aristotle, *Rhet.* 3.14.12).<sup>61</sup>

There are several voices competing for attention and for the right to define the boundaries of a "correct" response to the call of Jesus among the seven congregations. "False apostles" have tried to gain a hearing in Ephesus. The "Nicolaitans" have been active in Ephesus and Pergamum, although their message seems to have been rejected in the former congregation. A teacher in Thyatira claims to exercise the prophetic gift and has gathered a substantial following. Outside the churches, the local Jewish communities in Smyrna and Philadelphia have made their "voices" heard in ways that would tend to draw disciples away from the Christian assemblies ("slander," 2:9). Finally, the congregations hear the "voices" of imperial representatives and local non-Christian populations, both witnessing to Roman imperial ideology (as heard, for example, in public acclamations of the emperor or in cultic settings) and censuring individuals like Antipas (2:13) and the commitments he represented.

The fact that John submerges his own voice and allows other, supramundane voices to speak throughout Revelation is an important strategy also in regard to this "deconstructive" side of appeals to ethos. John never speaks an ill word against his rivals. At most he merely provides descriptive narration that casts them in a bad light (e.g., the emperors, their local representatives, and the general masses that involve themselves in idolatry). But it is the voice of the glorified *Christ* that denounces the Thyatiran prophetess, the Nicolaitans, the false apostles (if these are not the Nicolaitans), and the synagogue (2:1–3:22). Voices from heaven accuse and sentence Babylon, while the voices of murdered witnesses cry

61. See also Aristotle, *Rhet.* 3.19.1; 3.17.16; *Rhet. Her.* 1.5.8; Cicero, *De or.* 2.43.182; Quintilian, *Inst.* 4.1.14–15. These texts are cited in Carey 1998, 738. Carey has done admirable work in laying out John's techniques for casting rival speakers in the worst possible light for the sake of undermining their credibility and thus their "pull" with an audience (see Carey 1999b, 137–63; summarized in Carey 2001, 177–79). Schüssler Fiorenza (1991, 132) was an early voice calling attention to this aspect of John's rhetorical strategy.

out for vindication, arousing indignation against Roman domination. Words that might appear self-serving or hateful if John had spoken them in his own voice are placed on the lips of those whose ethos is above suspicion and beyond question. In other words, we do not hear John seeking to undermine a rival local leader (thus exposing John's potential self-interest), but rather Christ seeking to protect his congregation from the continued influence of a dangerous threat to their loyalty and therefore their eschatological destiny.

### Jezebel and the Nicolaitans

One blatant strategy for undermining the more threatening rivals (i.e., those that have gained a foothold among the congregations) involves naming them not by their proper names, but by strategically chosen pseudonyms associating them with unflattering characters from the Jewish Scriptures, names that reveal their "true" character.<sup>62</sup> Just as John's voice is linked with praiseworthy figures like Antipas and Christ himself through the association of each of these characters with faithful witness, John's rivals are associated with notorious false prophets, associations that will adversely color the churches' perception of them—and their promotion of lower group boundaries.

As we have seen in chapter 2, the "Nicolaitans" are closely linked with Balaam (2:14–15), and their teaching with Balaam's plan to erode the identity of the people of God by luring them into participation in the cults of, and sexual intercourse with, the surrounding people groups (Num. 25:1–2; 31:16). The etymological similarity between Balaam and Nicolaus, even if not conclusive, may reinforce the connection among some of the hearers. Balaam is the prototype of the false prophet, and his teaching leads to the outbreak of a deadly plague throughout the congregation of Israel (Num. 25:8–9). Through this association, the hearers are led to view the Nicolaitans and their boundary-relaxing position as a grave threat to the integrity and safety of God's new congregation.

Jezebel was prominently associated with the prophets of Baal, for whom she acted as a patroness and protector, thus promoting the worship of false gods in ancient Israel. But she was also infamous as the "harlot queen" from the story of ancient Israel. Second Kings 9:22 LXX uses the term πορνεία (sexual immorality, fornication) to sum up Jezebel's activity, which may explain the foregrounding of sexual imagery in the oracle to Thyatira. Πορνεία also sums up the work of this prophetess, who "is not willing to repent of her fornication," with whom some members of the congregation are said to have "committed adultery," and who is ultimately to be thrown down "upon a bed" (Rev. 2:22).<sup>63</sup> Greg Carey speaks of this focus upon the prophetess's sexual activity as

62. So Johns 1998, 765: "'Naming' in the Apocalypse . . . evokes stories and images, and places value—both positive and negative—on the individuals, groups, or deities thus named."

63. The NASB's addition of the qualifier "of sickness" to describe the "bed" (κλίνη) onto which Christ will throw this adulteress may represent an attempt to avoid the sexual overtones of the scene John creates.

an example of “debasement” as a means of undermining credibility, in his view an objectionable technique.<sup>64</sup> While it is possible that the prophetess was involved in sexual affairs within the congregation (this is not unheard of in the history of the church), it is more likely, in keeping with the use of sexual imagery throughout Revelation, that John is labeling her activity of mentoring, teaching, and leading those who are influenced by her as “fornication” and “adultery” in order to make her activity stand out as all the more morally objectionable, arousing disgust toward her prophetic activity by painting it with the figurative overtones of uncontrolled, sexually immoral behavior. This would, in turn, place her and her teaching in a less appealing, less credible light.

Since this prophetess teaches that involvement in the local economy and in a bare minimum of the cultic activities that inevitably accompany such activity is compatible with the confession of Christ, it is perhaps not surprising that John depicts her in ways that will resemble Babylon, that domination system with which she will allow some measure of partnership for the sake of short-term security.<sup>65</sup> Babylon and Jezebel are linked through the repetition of the phrase “of her fornication” (τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς, 2:21; 14:8), suggesting implicitly that the ministry of this prophetess leads believers to enter into the webs of “fornication” (that is, entangling alliances with an idolatrous domination system opposed to God’s vision for human community) spun by Babylon, and thereby making a strong case against her authority and the appeal of her message.<sup>66</sup> According to the *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum* (1437b.18–21), a speaker can arouse prejudice against another by suggesting that the other advocates “making a discreditable peace.” John uses this topic to his advantage against Jezebel, the Nicolaitans, and anyone who promotes cooperation with Roman imperialism. And, as Jezebel contributed to the northern kingdom’s downfall,<sup>67</sup> so following the Thyatiran prophetess promises to lead to downfall for all those connected with her (2:22–23).

John links “Babylon” and “Jezebel” in many other particulars as well. Both Rome and the rival prophetess are identified with a negative name from Israel’s history. Both are presented as inappropriate mothers—one, a mother of whores and abominations (17:5), the other, a mother who fornicates and commits adultery (2:20–22). Both “lead astray” (2:20; 18:23), as do Satan and the false prophet. The use of the verb πλανᾶν (to lead astray) in 2:20; 13:14; and 19:20 binds Jezebel’s activity to that of the land beast (the “false prophet”) as well as to the activity of the dragon (12:9) and Babylon (18:23). Since this land beast makes fire come down from heaven before a false god, he is a kind of anti-Elijah, making him an appropriate counterpart for “Jezebel,” Elijah’s nemesis.<sup>68</sup>

64. Carey 1999b, 157–59.

65. This is the focal point of the important study by Duff (2001).

66. DeSilva 1998b, 796.

67. Carey 1999b, 143.

68. Duff 2001, 125. The portrayal of Babylon in Rev. 17–18 would further call to mind the OT portrait of Jezebel among the more biblically literate, which would in turn further identify the



John creates such “homologies” (correspondences between images, effected through repetitions of words, phrases, and so forth) throughout Revelation, linking Jezebel, Babylon, Satan, and the second beast (notably, also called “the false prophet”). The resulting webs of contrast and correlation link acceptance of Jezebel’s teaching with deception by Satan and with the crimes of the Roman order.<sup>69</sup> Creating homologies that link Jezebel with Satan and, more especially, with the second beast (the false prophet), leaves John in the role of true prophet—in many ways enacting the role of a new Elijah opposing Jezebel.<sup>70</sup> John also presents two female figures—the woman clothed with the sun and the new Jerusalem—who correlate closely with one another *and* contrast strikingly and specifically with both Jezebel and Babylon. The result is that John further censures Jezebel (and Babylon) by contrast with these positive models, a strategy recommended in Demetrius, *Style* 5.292.<sup>71</sup>

It is not, however, the case that John, “having little that he can use against his rival’s position,” simply “undertakes to malign her (as Quintilian recommends).”<sup>72</sup> The Thyatiran prophetess is promoting (or at least justifying) some kind of behavior that puts Christian disciples into closer contact with food offered to idols, and thus promotes lower group boundaries in an area *essential* to the group’s identity and the group’s witness in the midst of an idolatrous society. In other words, John has just cause for concern and calls attention both to this behavior (2:20) and to the dangers that it promotes, namely, becoming more closely linked with the “sins” of Babylon (cf. 18:4).

It is noteworthy that Balaam (with whom the Nicolaitans are identified) and Jezebel are historically the opponents of Moses and Elijah, the two faithful prophets par excellence. Indeed, Moses and Elijah are types for the true prophets and witnesses in Revelation 11, who call down fire from heaven and strike the earth with plagues. As the hearers are drawn into the role of the witnesses who resemble Moses and Elijah, they are strategically ranged against the false prophets in their midst. And John thus emerges as the “true” prophet in this contest with Jezebel and the Balaamites.

### Representatives of Roman Imperialism

The Thyatiran prophetess and the “Nicolaitans” represent John’s most immediate rivals for the “right” to advise and lead the congregations, but they are not

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Thyatiran prophetess with “Babylon” (Duff 2001, 90). The “historical” Jezebel was guilty of spilling the blood of the prophets of God (1 Kgs. 18:3–4, 13; 2 Kgs. 9:7—the last text is closely recontextualized in Rev. 19:2), as was John’s Babylon (Rev. 17:6; 18:24), and her flesh was ultimately devoured (1 Kgs. 21:23–24), as the flesh of Babylon would be (Rev. 17:16).

69. The indirect technique of commending or undermining by “homology” had, of course, been discussed before as “identifications” (Carey 1999b, 118–28, 141–49), under the heading of “repetitive texture” (deSilva 1998b, 796; 1999a, 73–81), or more colorfully, as “tarring with the same brush” (Royalty 1998, 163–64, 210). However, Duff’s study substantially advances these incipient insights.

70. Duff 2001, 128. The parallels between Babylon and Jezebel in this paragraph are found in Duff 2001, 91.

71. Duff 2001, 75.

72. Duff 2001, 75.

the only opposing voices to which the congregations are listening. Voices in the cities shout out, “Who is like the beast, and who is able to fight against him?” (13:4). Of course, they do not use exactly those words, stolen away here from the praise of God (cf. Exod. 15:11). But the seven cities are each, in varying degrees, home to discourse about Rome and her emperors, and about the allegiance and honor due these pillars of the Roman imperial system. While John is concerned that teachers within the churches not draw the disciples back into partnership with the larger society, especially in matters involving idolatry, he devotes far more space to undermining the credibility of, the authority of, and any positive emotions felt toward Rome and her emperors. Though we will explore this more fully through the appeals to emotions John will orchestrate throughout the visions, it may be appropriate to give some attention to this aspect of his rhetorical strategy under the heading of “ethos.”

John uses the technique of “debasement” once again in regard to Rome. He gives no attention to her positive achievements, no credit to the ideals that the principate sought to embody at its best. Rather, he presents Rome as a depraved and self-indulgent prostitute, such that the “normal” practice of everyday business is overlaid with the negative connotations of playing with a whore.<sup>73</sup> Representing the goddess Roma as a drunken, bloodthirsty prostitute allows John also to create a new mythology (and destiny) for Roman rule, radically different from the publicly articulated one, and thus promote distance between his audiences and Rome.<sup>74</sup>

A technique closely related to debasing is dehumanizing. John presents the emperors, who are flesh-and-blood human beings, as a collective, monstrous animal: the “beast” (Rev. 13:1–10). This “beast,” moreover, is painted with the brush strokes of the mythic chaos monster, casting the head of the Roman Empire as a force of disorder and subversion in the cosmos. John obscures the emperor’s humanness and any legitimate claim that the emperor might have on the audience’s loyalty and gratitude, which is particularly significant in cities that celebrate the emperor’s patronage so enthusiastically.<sup>75</sup> The local voices charged with promoting the imperial cult receive similar attention: their humanity is also suppressed, as they constitute merely another beast, “leading people astray” (13:14) and employing coercive measures to enforce adulation of the emperors where deception and chicanery fail (13:15–17). John knows that Rome, her emperors, and their local promoters have previously attracted many members of the churches, and so he portrays them here as unsympathetically as possible so

73. Carey 2001, 179; see also Royalty 1998, 191. I disagree, however, that John employs “taunting” as a means of further debasing Babylon. If Rev. 18 represents a taunt, its restraint when compared to the taunts represented, for example, in the reported speech of the psalmist’s enemies is extraordinary. Whether or not one hears “John’s glee over the catastrophe” (Carey 1999b, 156–57), moreover, is a function of the emotional tone supplied by the reader/interpreter. One could with perhaps more justification hear sincere regret over the tragic waste that accompanies Babylon’s inevitable judgment, and over the personal tragedies that it entails. See the section “Such a Pity?” in chap. 8 (below).

74. Carey 2001, 178.

75. See deSilva 1998b, 799; 1999a, 109.

as to undermine any appeal they might have and arouse revulsion rather than attraction.<sup>76</sup>

Finally, John attacks the credibility of the voices of those non-Christian neighbors who would be closest to the members of the congregations in a variety of ways, insulating the disciples from the persuasive power of their non-Christian peers' practice and pressure. The credibility of the non-Christian Jewish neighbors voicing their critique of the disciples' convictions is assaulted with the label "synagogue of Satan" (2:9; 3:9), and their speech dismissed as "slander" (βλασφημία, 2:9).<sup>77</sup> John neutralizes the persuasiveness of the voices (and social pressures) of the believers' non-Christian Gentile neighbors by displaying their lack of virtue and knowledge. The idolaters behave unjustly insofar as they take the worship due the One God who gave them life and give it to the demons that lurk behind their idols (9:20). These idolaters are, moreover, the deviant source of every social ill (9:20–21), laboring under demonic deception and unable to perceive the truth of their situation (12:9; 13:14; 18:23), and therefore unable to formulate a reliable assessment of the Christians or their commitments. These neighbors, moreover, will maintain their folly to the end (16:9, 11).<sup>78</sup> Whatever social sanctions they impose upon the believers, however much they display their contempt for the Christians, the disciples must bear in mind that it all stems from a deadly error and a commitment to vice on the part of the outsiders, and so they must not allow any such trials to turn them away from God's truth.

### DOES JOHN GO TOO FAR?

Scholars studying John's construction of his own authority and deconstruction of other voices often express concern or discomfort in regard to John's aims and methods. This is justified to some extent. In recent times we have had sufficient reminders of the dangers of authoritarian prophets who claim to be the sole spokespersons for the divine will, and who will not engage—nor allow their followers to engage—in open dialogue with other, potentially critical viewpoints. On the other hand, many modern people are simply challenged by John's conviction that God's perspective can be truly known and brought to bear on a particular situation, to the exclusion of other positions. These critics write from a modern cultural preference, placing a higher value on inclusiveness, recovering all imaginable voices, and bringing everyone to the table rather than on commitment to a particular tradition and on discerning its correct interpretation

76. So rightly Carey 1999b, 159.

77. Royalty (1998, 163–64) observes that "Rome, the Jews, and other Christian teachers [especially Jezebel] . . . are united by John's rhetoric under Satan's name" (see Rev. 2:9, 13, 24; 3:9). However different these parties are from one another, John groups them all together as tools being used by God's archenemy as part of his rebellion against the cosmic order.

78. DeSilva 1998a, 94–97.

or application. To put it another way, we tend, particularly in postmodern discourse, to value “perspective” over “Truth.”

In their critique of John, however, recent scholars have unduly exaggerated John’s authoritarian stance and distorted his claims to unique and exclusive authority—and then criticized John on the basis of those distortions. Robert Royalty reads the curse of 22:18–19 (regarding adding to, or taking away from, the message of Revelation) as a proscription of “text criticism, editing, translation, or allegorization,” as well as borrowing John’s words, for example, to keep them alive in the liturgy of the worshiping community (where Revelation has had its broadest and most lasting impact).<sup>79</sup> He works in a rabbinic manner to erect a considerable fence around this proscription, but then criticizes *John* for that fence and the ways that fence limits engagement with the text.

From another angle, Paul Duff claims that “John’s followers [must] accept his leadership to the exclusion of any other person.”<sup>80</sup> Similarly, Greg Carey cites 1:1 as evidence that John presents his work as the “only revelation of Jesus Christ.”<sup>81</sup> But this reading of 1:1 says more about Carey’s aversion to John’s claims to authority than about those claims. In point of fact, John does not even use the definite article to preface his claim: it is simply “a revelation of Jesus Christ,” presented as one more among any number of valid revelations. It is not John, but the prejudice of the interpreter, that turns this into an *exclusive* claim.

In making such statements about John’s exclusivity, Duff and Carey (and all the more, Royalty) do not give adequate attention to the role of the other prophets whose voices and activity are affirmed. The angel who shows John the new Jerusalem, to whom he twice bows down and must be corrected, describes himself as “your fellow slave, and that of your brothers and sisters, the prophets [σύνδουλος σοῦ εἶμι καὶ τῶν ἀδελφῶν σου τῶν προφητῶν]” (22:9). While many of the references to “prophets” throughout Revelation could refer to the classical prophets of the Hebrew Bible or the larger, transtemporal company of prophets, this particular reference suggests prophets who are John’s contemporaries. David Aune sees this same group of prophets behind the “you” (plural) in 22:16: “I, Jesus, sent my angel to attest these things to you [ὑμῖν] for the churches.”<sup>82</sup>

Although some have suggested that these prophets are all part of one “school” or “guild” of which John himself is the head, evidence for this position is difficult to come by.<sup>83</sup> Rather, such a claim functions subtly to support the image

79. Royalty 2004, 291.

80. Duff 2001, 49.

81. Carey 1999b, 133.

82. Aune 1998b, 1225–26; so also Schüssler Fiorenza 1985, 106. In an earlier study, Aune (1989, 110) blended together the hypothesis that the “you” (plural) refers to a circle of prophets with the possibility that they were the envoys who bore John’s message to the seven churches. This position explains, in part, the addition of the strange preface (1:1–3), which locates these prophetic envoys in the chain of revelation and dissemination (“his slaves,” 1:1).

83. Schüssler Fiorenza (1985, 106–7, 112 n. 76) deduces the existence of a school on the basis of the author’s knowledge of prophetic-apocalyptic traditions and forms, access to the traditions of other schools (e.g., Pauline and Johannine), and use of “coded” language and imagery.” The first of these, however, requires not a school context for the exercise of prophecy in Asia Minor, but merely

of John as authoritarian and concerned primarily about power and influence rather than the spiritual health of the congregations. The mention of the “other prophets” who exercise a discerning role in 1 Corinthians 14:29–33, a primary witness for proponents of the hypothesis of prophetic “schools” or “guilds” in the first Christian century, need refer to nothing more than those who have an established record of exercising the prophetic gift, without any claims concerning their organization, functioning as a unit, or internal leadership.<sup>84</sup> Moreover, Paul’s very democratic view of the gifts of the Spirit—“for you are all, each one of you, capable of prophesying” (1 Cor. 14:31)—militates against any notion of a closed circle of prophets in Corinth (even if it is offered as a corrective of such a practice, though glossolalia seems to have been the preferred and more prized gift there). In other words, claiming that John only acknowledges the prophets under his authority or in his school is another example of reading too much into the text in a way that is prejudiced against John.

While John clearly believes that not all prophets adequately represent Christ’s intentions for the churches (and this might be the crux of the problem for some modern interpreters), he does acknowledge other prophets who stand alongside him under the authority and guiding norms of the Hebrew Scriptures and the Jesus tradition, who are deeply concerned that the commandments of God, the warnings of the prophets, and the witness of the Psalms (e.g., to God’s kingship, to the necessity of acknowledging this kingship above all others, and to the future, in which all nations will come and do the same) be preserved and lived out in the churches of Asia Minor (and elsewhere).

John’s self-representation fits the expectations of the early Christian culture that God would communicate to God’s people through those who experienced alternate states of consciousness, and moreover, that these words would be “tested” or weighed in order to discern their authenticity and therefore credibility. In Pauline circles (which overlap considerably with the churches addressed by Revelation; certainly Ephesus and Laodicea were influenced by Paul and his legacy), the expectation both of allowing ecstatic utterances *and* testing them is well attested (see 1 Cor. 14; 1 Thess. 5:19–22). The guidelines for such testing are not fully developed, but alignment with the received tradition is underscored at two points. In the exordium to Galatians, Paul asserts that a new proclamation, even if delivered by an angel (perhaps through a prophet or charismatist), must not be accepted if it conflicts with the apostolic proclamation of the gospel (Gal. 1:6–9). In Johannine circles, such testing clearly involved doctrinal litmus tests at one point in the community’s history (1 John 4:1–4). Notably, 1 John

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the author’s access to hearing and reading formative texts throughout the course of his life. The second requires only attention to the emerging patterns of Christian discourse, such as would be expected of someone so involved in the life and leadership of the churches. The third is, frankly, a myth whose expiration date is long overdue. Revelation is not written in “code” for an esoteric conventicle, unless by “code” we simply mean “OT language” and by “esoteric conventicle” we mean the Christian assemblies themselves. See further chap. 2, n. 8 (above).

84. Although citing 1 Cor. 14:29–33 as evidence for prophetic “schools,” Aune (1989, 111) recognizes that the text conduces to other readings.

itself begins by calling attention to the received tradition of the community as the larger context for testing new proclamations. In perhaps the most important extracanonical witness to the phenomenon of early Christian prophecy, the *Didache*, communities are directed to discern whether or not the prophet is acting out of self-interest, using (the appearance of) prophetic speech as a cloak for gain (11–13).

John communicates his prophetic word within this Christian culture of “testing” prophecy, especially by other prophets (1 Cor. 14:29). John knows this culture to exist in these churches and even encourages the practice, for after all, the Ephesian community “tested” some teachers claiming to be apostles and found them lacking by some criterion or criteria (Rev. 2:2). This larger context, and the established tradition of weighing prophecy, allows for the possibility that John is himself quite antiauthoritarian, submitting his word to the other prophets in the community for testing and verification. This culture creates the reasonable expectation for John that he will be held accountable to standards external to his own speech, thus mitigating what modern critics regard as his authoritarian strains and keeping him honest in regard to a larger stream of received tradition. Prophecies would surely not be weighed simply on the basis of who was “louder” or more extravagant in one’s claims concerning divine inspiration. Christians were well accustomed to charlatans claiming inspiration, but who were in reality merely “dreaming” (Jude 8). Prophets would be tested, rather, at least in part on the basis of their consonance with the foundational beliefs, ethos, and traditions of the group. John’s thoroughgoing alignment of his own voice with the voice of the Hebrew Scriptures may, in fact, reflect John’s awareness of this need to conform himself to, and to discover and “invent” his argument in line with, the greater norm under which he, other prophets, and his audiences stand. It is to John’s use of the Jewish Scriptures and other early Christian traditions, and the contribution of the same to John’s message being “approved,” that we turn in the following chapter.