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### The Reign of Christ and the Mission of the Church

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THE REIGN OF CHRIST  
AND THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

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A Seminar Paper submitted to the Faculty  
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requirements for the degree of  
Master of Sacred Theology

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by

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Approved by James A. Righton  
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There is a mission crisis in the world today. More than 5 billion people live on this planet, a massive mission field. Yet, three out of four people, about 75 percent of the world's population, are not Christian.<sup>1</sup> In North America, a "Christian" nation, an estimated 23,000 murders are committed each year. More than 1 million legal abortions are performed annually. The average American church member gives less than 3 percent of his income for the Lord's work. More than 100 million are unchurched. Many are Christians in name only.<sup>2</sup> Many churches are either plateaued or declining in growth.

There was a crisis in mission among the churches of Asia Minor to whom the Book of Revelation was written. Apathy, immorality, materialism and persecution combined to bring about a crisis in mission and faith among the seven churches. Jesus Christ gave His revelation to John to give to the seven churches so that they might be strengthened in their faith and accomplish their mission task.

This paper will explore the reign of Christ and the mission of the Church in the Book of Revelation. Specifically, it will be a study of Revelation 11:3-13. In the exegetical study of those verses, the great theme of the Church's mission will then be related to the book as a whole. First, the situation of the churches in mission will be discussed. Then a word study of the word  $\mu\acute{\alpha}\rho\tau\upsilon\varsigma$  will be presented. The specific study of Revelation 11:3-13 will follow and finally the conclusion will draw out implications for the Church in mission today. The Church of John's day was to see the glory of the exalted

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<sup>1</sup> The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Board for Mission Services, Sharing God's Mission. (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, 1989-90), 3.

<sup>2</sup> The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Board for Communication Services, Challenges in World Mission. (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, n.d.), 12.

Christ and be strengthened for her mission. The book of Revelation was written so that the Church of today could see and be strengthened by the same.

### **I. The Situation**

In the letter of Pliny to Trajan, Pliny related how those charged with being Christians were brought before him. If the accused confessed faith in Christ, he was led away for punishment. If any denied they were Christians, they were asked to repeat a formula of invocation to the gods and make an offering of wine and incense to the statue of Trajan. Further, they were asked to revile the name of Christ. Pliny told Trajan that there were some former Christians who had left the faith twenty years earlier. These former Christians, in the words of Pliny, all revered the statue and the images of the gods and reviled the name of Christ. Pliny claimed that in Bithynia, the temples had been deserted and the sacred sacrifices had been neglected. He implied that the influence of Christianity brought about the disuse of pagan customs. Pliny's letter proudly claimed that now the people were beginning to throng the temples once again because of his action against the Christians.<sup>3</sup>

The book of Revelation is usually dated somewhat earlier than the time of Trajan. Early Christian tradition is almost unanimous in dating it about the end of the reign of Domitian (95 AD).<sup>4</sup> Yet the letter of Pliny is only a few years later than that. Using the letter of Pliny as an example, one could easily imagine the situation of the Christians of the

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<sup>3</sup>Pliny, Letters, Loeb Classical Library (1935), 401-405.

<sup>4</sup>Henry Barclay Swete, The Apocalypse of St. John (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub. Co. 1968), xcix.



seven churches in the book of Revelation. Simply a reading of the seven letters in chapters 2 and 3 reveals similar pressures under which the churches attempted to remain faithful.

The Church at Ephesus had remained true. They had not grown weary. Yet their work was not that of the first days. The exalted Christ declared that they had lost their “first love” (Revelation 2:4). At Pergamum and Thyatira there were things to be commended, but also things to be censured. In each church there was a “Nicolaitan” circle. At Thyatira a local prophetess promoted sexual immorality and the eating of the pagan sacrificial offerings (Revelation 2:20). At Sardis, the Church had the reputation of being alive, but Jesus called them νεκρὸς. At Laodicea self-satisfaction and financial prosperity was eating the heart out of their Christian faith and witness (Revelation 3:15-17). Only Smyrna and Philadelphia deserved unmixed praise and in both cases such praise had been earned under the discipline of suffering (Revelation 2:9-10; 3:10). H. B. Swete comments: “Only at Philadelphia do we seem to hear of progress; before this Church an open door had been set in the great trade route which connected the town with the highlands of Phrygia, and some attempt had perhaps been made to take advantage of it for missionary work.”<sup>5</sup> At Pergamum, Antipas is commended by Jesus as “my faithful witness” and he witnessed to the point of death. He is the only person named among the seven churches. He is given the same title as the Lord Himself: ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστός (Revelation 1:5; 2:13).

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid. , lxxiv.

In the face of creeping conformity to the pagan world around them, the book of Revelation calls the churches to witness and to be faithful to the calling they received in baptism. The book of Revelation is

“ . . . not so much an attack on the world to encourage the Church, as an attack on the Church, which is embracing the world - to its own deadly danger, and in betrayal of its true role of convicting the world by its witness, for the world’s salvation.”<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, as one looks at the *Sitz im Leben* of the seven churches, it is possible to conclude that the Church in Asia Minor was in a time of extreme crisis. John, the last living apostle was in exile on Patmos. The enticement of the pagan world was making inroads into the life of the Church. The pressure of the government and the pagan obligations of the workplace were making Christianity a risky venture. The book of Revelation and the revealing of the glory of the exalted Christ came at a critical moment in the life of the Church. Revelation 1:3 says: “Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time (καιρός) is near.” The message of the book of Revelation and the vision of the reign of the exalted Christ comes at just such a critical moment for the Church in mission today, as it did in John’s day.

An inescapable parallel to Revelation 11 and the two witnesses is found in the Transfiguration accounts in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 17:1-13; Mark 9:2-13; Luke 9:28-36). Jesus revealed His glory on the mountain and there appeared with Him, two

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<sup>6</sup> William Horbury and Brian McNeil, eds., Suffering and Martyrdom in the New Testament (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 102-3.

Old Testament prophets, Moses and Elijah. In Revelation 11:3ff, two witnesses are “standing in the presence of the Lord of the earth” and they have characteristics of the prophets of old. They have the power to shut up the heavens so that it will not rain, to turn the water into blood, and to strike the earth with plagues during the time of their testimony. In all these signs they resemble the Old Testament prophets, Moses and Elijah, who also stood in the presence of the glory of the Lord of the earth on the mountain of Transfiguration.

Why did Jesus reveal His glory on the mountaintop? In each of the synoptic accounts, the context immediately surrounding the transfiguration is the confession of Peter at Caesarea Philippi. In Matthew 16:21ff, immediately following the confession of Peter, Jesus began to predict His suffering, death and resurrection. Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. Peter did not want the cross, suffering and death for His Master, the Christ, the Son of the living God. Peter had a problem with suffering, with the cross, the mission of Jesus. Jesus then declared: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it" (Matthew 17:24-25). The words of Jesus are an encouragement for Peter and all Christians to take up the mission of Jesus, even if it means self-denial, suffering and the cross. The Transfiguration was

“God’s own confirmation of Peter’s great confession of 16:16, and God’s own seal upon the death of the Son who is to die and to rise again. As far as Jesus and God were concerned, they certainly left nothing undone to prepare the disciples for what was impending.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> R.C.H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961), 659.



Thus, Jesus, by revealing His glory, prepares His disciples for the mission which He is about to accomplish on the cross. The vision of His glory was to strengthen them by giving them a foretaste of the resurrection and the glory of Jesus. Adolf Schlatter also clearly connects the Transfiguration with the preceding prophecy:

“Zugleich enthüllt es aber auch die Tiefe, die der Weissagung seines Todes eigen ist. Was dieser Entschluss Jesu bedeutet, wird dadurch sichtbar, dass er aus solcher Verbundenheit mit Gott heraus in das Gericht und die Not des Kreuzes tritt.”<sup>8</sup>

Peter’s attitude toward the cross is descriptive of the churches in the book of Revelation. They too needed to see the vision of the glory of the exalted Christ ruling the universe. The goal of that vision was to strengthen them for mission and to help them to remain as the faithful witnesses of Jesus Christ. The two witnesses of Revelation 11:3ff provide an interesting parallel to Moses and Elijah, as they bear witness and prophesy, “standing the presence of the Lord of the earth” (Revelation 11:4). In Revelation 11 they serve as an inspiration to the Church to follow the Lord Jesus in His mission.

## II. A Word Study of Μάρτυς

To properly understand the two witnesses and the mission of the Church in the book of Revelation, one must first study the word μάρτυς, the term used for the two witnesses described in chapter 11. In non-Biblical Greek

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<sup>8</sup> Adolf Schlatter, Der Evangelist Matthäus (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1963), 525.

“ . . . the proper sphere of μάρτυς is the legal, where it denotes one who can and does speak from personal experience about actions in which he took part and which happened to him, or about persons and relations known to him.”<sup>9</sup>

The function of the witness is denoted by the verb μαρτυρεῖν. The noun, μαρτυρία, is used for the coming forward of a witness or the giving of the witness, but it can also be used for the witness itself.<sup>10</sup>

Yet, μάρτυς, μαρτυρεῖν, and μαρτυρία are also used outside of the legal sphere and there, they undergo a broadening of meaning. The group can refer

“ . . . not merely to the establishment of events or actual relations or facts of experience on the basis of direct personal knowledge. It also signifies the proclamation of views or truths of which the speaker is convinced. It thus relates to things which by their very nature cannot be submitted to empirical investigation.”<sup>11</sup>

So the word can mean simply a statement about objective events in the legal sense, or it can mean the statement of personal convictions:

“On the one hand statements are made about objective events, on the other personal convictions are made known. On the one hand the point at issue is whether a thing is or was really so, on the other whether it is true and valid from the standpoint of the one who states it.”<sup>12</sup>

In the LXX, μάρτυς also belongs to the legal world and signifies the witness before the judgment (Numbers 5:13; 35:30; Deuteronomy 17:6-7; 19:15). In the religious sense, two sections of note are found in Isaiah 43:9-13 and 44:7-11. Yahweh arranges a

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<sup>9</sup> Hermann Strathman, “μάρτυς, μαρτυρέω, μαρτυρία, μαρτύριον”, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, vol. IV, Gerhard Kittel, ed. and Geoffrey Bromiley, ed. and trans. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1967): 476.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. , 477.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. , 478.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.



trial before the nations in which Yahweh or the gods of the Gentiles will be proved to be truly God. The nations are both the spectators and the judges who will decide the case.

“But they are also interested parties as advocates and witnesses on behalf of their gods. They are interested witnesses who must come forward to demonstrate the deity of their gods from their experiences (43:9; 44:9).”<sup>13</sup>

In contrast, Yahweh declares to Israel three times: “You are my witnesses”

(43:10,12; 44:8). In verse 10, the Suffering Servant is also connected with this witness:

“You are my witnesses, declares the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me. I, even I, am the Lord, and apart from me there is no savior” (Isaiah 43:10-11).

In this trial between the nations and their gods, Israel, on the basis of the guidance and revelation which it has experienced, will declare to the nations of the world the uniqueness, reality and deity of God. They are His witnesses.<sup>14</sup>

Μάρτυς is used in the NT in both of the senses mentioned above. Examples of the legal sense are found in Mark 14:63 and Matthew 26:65. In Luke the use of μάρτυς becomes unique, that is, a combination of witness to facts and witness as an evangelistic confession. In Luke 24:48, a μάρτυς is one who declares facts directly known to him.

“The facts in question, however, are the facts of the history of Jesus, especially His resurrection, which is treated by Luke as no less objective than the passion. But witness cannot be borne to these facts unless their significance is also indicated and an emphatic appeal is made for their recognition in faith.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid. , 484.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. , 492.

Jesus declared that the Gospel must be preached to all nations beginning at Jerusalem.

“You are witnesses of these things”, said Jesus (Luke 24:48).

“They are fitted because from experience they can bear witness to the factuality of the suffering and resurrection of Jesus, and also because they have grasped in faith the significance of Jesus, and can thus attest it. They discharge the task by proclaiming both the facts and their significance as they have grasped this in faith.”<sup>16</sup>

A similar charge is repeated in Acts 1:8. The disciples will witness the facts of the story of Jesus from first hand knowledge. Yet they will also emphasize its saving significance (Acts 10:42).<sup>17</sup>

In the writings of John, only Revelation uses μάρτυς. In two of the five references, Jesus Himself is a μάρτυς (1:5; 3:14). In Revelation 11:3 μάρτυς refers to the two prophets. They are not called μάρτυσιν because they are put to death, but they are witnesses because of their prophetic activity. Similarly Antipas in Revelation 2:13:

“. . . is not a witness because he is put to death; he is put to death because he is a witness, i.e., in the sense of proclamation of the Gospel. Yet his is a faithful witness (emphatic) because he cannot be deflected from his witness by death.”<sup>18</sup>

In Revelation 17:6 the harlot is drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the μάρτυρων of Jesus. The word μάρτυς does not mean simply “martyr” here. Μάρτυς did not acquire that specialized meaning until nearly the end of the second century.<sup>19</sup> In 17:6 the “saints” have also been killed and are not called “martyrs”.

“Those who suffer death for their evangelistic witness are mentioned as well as those who are killed simply because of their faith. Not every committed Christian

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid. , 492-3.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. , 495.

<sup>19</sup> Allison A. Trites, “Μάρτυς and Martyrdom in the Apocalypse” *Novum Testamentum* 15 (1973): 79.

who dies for his faith is called μάρτυς. The name is reserved for those who are at work as evangelistic witnesses.”<sup>20</sup>

The key point concerning μάρτυς in the book of Revelation is that Jesus Christ Himself is called ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστός in 3:14 and 1:5. In Revelation 1:1-2 the ἀποκάλυψις is the revelation of Jesus Christ, who simply passes on what He has received from God. It is called the ἀποκάλυψις of Jesus Christ. He was faithful in being a μάρτυς of that revelation. In John 18:37 Jesus said, “I was born and have come into the world in order that (μαρτυρήσω) I might bear witness to the truth.” Jesus’ confession or μαρτυρία is both his verbal witness to his Father, summed up at his trial, and his obedience to his Father, summed up in Gethsemane and on the Cross.”<sup>21</sup>

In Revelation 1:2, 1:9 and 12:11 the μαρτυρία of Jesus Christ is taken by many scholars to be a subjective genitive. Thus it would mean the testimony borne by Jesus.<sup>22</sup> Some verses speak of the testimony of Jesus which the Christians “had” or “held” (Revelation 1:2, 9; 12:17; 19:10; 20:4). That implies something that they had first received. “Christian witness in Revelation seems to be not specifically testimony to Jesus (though it may include that) but the witness of Jesus in them, inspiring them to bear witness.”<sup>23</sup> In Revelation 19:10 it says: “For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy”. Jesus Himself is the faithful and true witness. The Christians “hold” His testimony, which is the inspiration of true prophecy.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Strathmann, 495.

<sup>21</sup> Horbury and McNeil, 104.

<sup>22</sup> Trites, 75.

<sup>23</sup> Horbury and McNeil, 104.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.



In Lyons and Vienne in the last quarter of the second century, those who had suffered persecution and survived refused to be called martyrs. “Instead they yielded that title to Christ alone, ‘the faithful and true witness and firstborn of the dead.’”<sup>25</sup> It is clear that the early church saw Jesus Christ as **the witness** Who was the model for their own witness. One cannot overlook the fact that Antipas bears the same title as Christ: ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστός (2:13). “The crucified Lord is the model of the Christian witness.”<sup>26</sup>

### III. A Study of Revelation 11:3-13

Chapters 10 and 11 of the book of Revelation are a unit. The two chapters are an interlude between the sixth and seventh trumpets. At the end of chapter 10, John is given a scroll by the mighty angel and he is told to eat it. In 10:11 there is a plural voice that speaks to John (λέγουσιν) and says: “It is necessary for you again to prophesy to people and nations and tongues and many kings.” Who is the plural voice? Is it the mighty angel and the voice that John refers to in verse 8: “which I heard from heaven”? Is it the four living creatures? Is it the Trinity itself, adding solemnity to this important mission of the Church? Many of the commentators are silent. Swete simply says it is not “obvious or material.”<sup>27</sup> Yet the plural voice does signify the importance of the mission to follow. “It is necessary for you . . .” recalls the commission given to Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:10) and Ezekiel (Ezekiel 4:7). The same word, δεῖ, is used in Mark 13:10: “And the gospel must

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<sup>25</sup> Mitchell Reddish, “Martyr Christology in the Apocalypse” Journal for the Study of the New Testament 33 (1988): 85.

<sup>26</sup> Strathmann, 496.

<sup>27</sup> Swete, 131.

first be preached to all nations.” It is used by the Lord Himself in speaking of the necessity of His mission (Mark 8:31).

In Revelation 11:3 a voice says: “I will give to my two witnesses and they will prophesy . . .”. What will be given? Swete identifies the voice as Christ or His angel-representative.<sup>28</sup> It is natural to assume that the two witnesses will be given a prophecy to proclaim, just as John had just received. They are also called prophets in Revelation 11:10, as John was called in 10:11. They received the testimony of Jesus and they “have” it and hold it at all cost. Just as the saints under the altar in Revelation 6:9, these two witnesses receive the word of God.

“The word is the word given by God (1:2), the testimony is the testimony borne by Jesus . . . (it) implies a testimony which has already been given to them by Christ and which they have faithfully maintained and preserved . . . the testimony of Christ to God which they ‘had’, that is had received, and for which they were prepared to die (6:9; 19:10; 12:11,17)”.<sup>29</sup>

The prologue of the book of Revelation uses and connects the terms μαρτυρία, λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ, ἀποκάλυψις, and προφητεία. These two witnesses in chapter 11 are the “slaves” in 1:1 to whom Jesus showed His ἀποκάλυψις. They received it and they must prophesy.

There are **two** witnesses. In Deuteronomy 17:6, 15, 19, 19:15 and John 8:17 it is noted that two witnesses make for competent legal testimony. Throughout Scripture, no less than two witnesses are demanded. “In all His contests with the Jews, Jesus ever pointed to more than one witness and in John 5:31 declared that His own lone witness

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid. , 134.

<sup>29</sup> Trites , 75.



could not be accepted as being sufficient.”<sup>30</sup> In Luke 10, Jesus sent out His disciples two by two.

Who are these two witnesses? They have the characteristics of Moses and Elijah. Moses was given the power to strike Egypt with plagues, such as turning the water to blood. Elijah told Ahab that the heavens would be closed and there would be neither dew nor rain except at the word of the Lord (1 Kings 17:1). Elijah called down fire from heaven to consume the messengers of King Ahaziah (2 Kings 1:9-16). The two witnesses have the power to make fire come forth from their mouths to consume their enemies (Revelation 11:5). Following these clues, many have considered that these witnesses are Elijah and Moses returned to earth.<sup>31</sup>

Jews, and later, Christians held that both Moses and Elijah were residents in heaven along with Enoch. Elijah’s ascension is in 2 Kings 2:11 and the ascension of Enoch is in Genesis 5:24. Jewish tradition, in the apocryphal Assumption of Moses, stated that Moses likewise had been taken to heaven. The Samaritans taught that their Messiah would be Moses *redivivus*.<sup>32</sup>

Swete however, correctly notes that neither Moses and Elijah, nor Elijah and Elisha, nor Enoch and Elijah can exhaust the meaning of these two witnesses.<sup>33</sup> These witnesses transcend the Old Testament images. Malachi 4:4, 6 and the story of the Transfiguration in Matthew 17 might suggest that the witnesses are Moses and Elijah.

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<sup>30</sup>R.C.H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. John’s Revelation (Columbus, Ohio: The Wartburg Press, 1963), 334.

<sup>31</sup>The Interpreters Bible: Vol. 12, ed. George Buttrick (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957), 445.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, 446.

<sup>33</sup>Swete, 134.

Yet in the context of Revelation 10 and 11, Swete contends that these two witnesses are a symbol of the Church in her function of witness bearing (Acts 1:8).<sup>34</sup> The entire church is being symbolized as two witnesses or prophets. Two was the minimum number of witnesses required for admissible testimony.

David Hill also argues that in chapter 11, the entire church is symbolized as two witnesses or prophets: "--two, perhaps because that was the minimum number of witnesses required for admissible testimony in Judaism, or because the church is made up of believers from Israel *and* from the nations."<sup>35</sup> In Revelation 12:11, in the victory song of the angels, it is "our brothers", namely, all Christians who bear the name of the Lamb and His Father on their foreheads (Revelation 14:1), who defeat the dragon accuser "by the word of their testimony". In Revelation 12:17 the dragon is enraged at the woman and goes off to make war with her seed, those who keep the commandments of God and who "have the testimony of Jesus". In these two places, it is also the entire Church which bears testimony (μαρτυρία).

In Revelation 11:4 imagery of Zechariah 4:2ff is used. The two witnesses are "the two olive branches and the two lampstands standing in the presence of the Lord of the earth" (11:4). In Zechariah 4, the two olive trees stand for the priestly and royal offices. They represent Joshua the priest and Zerubbabel from the royal house of David. A commentator writes:

"Joshua and Zerubbabel wait on the unseen Lord, who is the source of their authority and power. They in turn give themselves to build both the Temple and

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> David Hill, "Prophecy and Prophets in the Revelation of St. John" New Testament Studies 18: 408.

community. By daily life and worship the whole people is to be a light to others. The city set on a hill cannot be hid (Matt. 5:14). If we ask how such a thing could be true of people who had so recently been exiled for their failures, the answer lies in the supply of oil through the 'anointed ones' which kept the lights burning. It was 'by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts.'"<sup>36</sup>

In Zechariah 4:14 it says: "These are the two who are anointed to serve the Lord of all the earth." In Revelation 11 the two witnesses are "standing in the presence of the Lord of the earth" (11:4). The witnesses bear the testimony in the presence of the Lord and not just before the "inhabitants of the earth". "The witness of the Church borne by her martyrs and confessors . . . and by the words and lives of all in whom Christ lives and speaks, is one continual prophecy . . ."<sup>37</sup> Is it a coincidence that only two of the seven lampstands of Asia Minor, Smyrna and Philadelphia, were fully faithful in their witness?<sup>38</sup>

The two witnesses are to prophesy for 1260 days, the identical time period that the Gentiles trample the outer court of the Temple in Revelation 11:2. It is also the length of the Woman's sojourn in the wilderness (Revelation 12:14), where she is taken care of by God for 1260 days. This number, 1260 days, 3 1/2 years or 42 months is a time of triumph for the unbelievers. During this time period, the outer court of the Temple is given to the Gentiles and they "trample" it. In chapter 12, the Woman flees into the desert out of the serpent's reach. The serpent tries to destroy her there with a torrent of water from his mouth. Yet, she is protected by God and He takes care of her during this time of persecution (Revelation 12:14-17).

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<sup>36</sup> Joyce Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, Vol. 24. (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1972), 124.

<sup>37</sup> Swete, 134.

<sup>38</sup> Horbury and McNeil, 106.



Swete has suggested that 3 1/2 years or 42 months was the time period of the sufferings of the Jews under Antiochus Epiphanes. He notes that the time period can be reckoned from June 168 to December 165 or from December 168 to the middle of 164 BC.<sup>39</sup> In the book of Revelation itself, the 1260 days, 42 months, or time, times and half a time is a period of testing for the Church. The Woman described in Revelation 12 is in the wilderness, where Satan tries to destroy her. The outer court of the Temple is given over to the Gentiles and the holy city is being trampled under their feet. It is a time when the Church is hard pressed to maintain her testimony.

Yet the Church is protected in that time. The Temple is “measured”, set apart, preserved from overthrow by the Gentiles.<sup>40</sup> In Revelation 7, angels hold back the four winds so that the earth might not be harmed, until all the servants of God are sealed upon their foreheads. The Church is protected during its time of mission. Revelation 12 declares the same in different imagery. There the Woman has a place prepared by God, where she is fed and cared for during the 1260 days. It is a time of great testing and difficult witness for the Church. Yet, the witnesses labor under the protection of Christ Himself.

In Revelation 11:3 the witnesses are described as wearing “sackcloth” (σακκουός). Their garb is in stark contrast to the mighty angel of chapter 10, who wears a cloud, symbolic of the very presence of God. In Revelation 1:13, the Son of Man is clothed in a ποδήρη, a “robe reaching to the feet”, reminiscent of the OT high priest. In 6:9 the saints

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<sup>39</sup> Swete, 134.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. , 133.

under the altar are given a “white robe”. In 7:9 the multitude standing before the Throne is wearing white robes. Yet, the Church in mission, the suffering Church, is wearing sackcloth, not white robes.

Sackcloth could be a reference to the rough garments worn by the prophets (Zechariah 13:4; Mark 1:6).<sup>41</sup> Yet more likely it is a symbol of repentance. It is a symbol of the attitude of the Church in her time of mission. She must be penitential and not triumphant in the vital task of witness.<sup>42</sup> Repentance is also the content of her witness, as Jonah proclaimed in Nineveh, a call and a testimony to all those who are outside to repent (John 3:6-8; Matthew 11:21).<sup>43</sup>

John describes these two witnesses as having ἐξουσίαν. In Revelation 11:5 it says that anyone who wishes to harm them shall meet with disaster, fire coming forth from the mouths of the witnesses and consuming them. It is impossible to kill God’s witnesses as long as their testimony remains unfulfilled.<sup>44</sup> Jesus’ own words reflect that truth in Matthew 28:18-20:

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Jesus rules heaven and earth by His authority and by that authority the Church shall accomplish her mission. The gates of hell shall not prevail against the Church of Jesus. The ascended and glorified Christ rules heaven and earth for the sake and for the benefit of

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid. , 135.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Lenski, 335.

<sup>44</sup> Swete, 135.



His Church. All things that happen on earth must serve the Church of Christ and His mission. (Ephesians 1:20ff). Certainly, the imagery of these verses can be pushed too far. The Church can be seen as having vindictive authority over those who reject the Gospel, as James and John wished to call down fire from heaven upon the unbelievers. Yet the authority of these two witnesses, given the imagery of the authority of the OT prophets, is the power of the Word of the Lord. In 1 Kings 17:1, Elijah told Ahab that there would be “neither dew nor rain in the next few years except **at my (the Lord’s) word.**” In Exodus 4, Moses is given the authority to turn the water of the Nile into blood. It was a sign and a testimony that the word of Moses should be given authority as the very word of Yahweh.

The fire that comes forth from the mouth of the two witnesses is reminiscent of the fire that came down from heaven and consumed the soldiers from Ahaziah in 2 Kings 1:10. In Jeremiah 5:14, the word of Yahweh in the mouth of Jeremiah is “a fire and these people the wood it consumes”. The vision of Christ in Revelation 1:9-20 pictures the Son of Man with a sharp, double-edged sword coming forth from His mouth. The Lord threatens to come and fight against those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans with the “sword of my mouth” (Revelation 2:16). The authority of the two witnesses over nature is the very authority of the Word of the “Lord of the earth” in Whose presence they stand (Revelation 11:4).

Jesus gives to His Church the very authority of His Word which is able to lock or unlock heaven itself (John 20:22-23). The Gospel message has power: “I am not ashamed

of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16). In Revelation 12:10, when Satan is cast out of heaven by Michael and his angels, a loud voice declares:

“Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.”

They, the Christians, overcame Satan by the **word** of their testimony (μαρτυρία). That testimony is the μαρτυρία of Jesus Christ which they “have” (Revelation 6:9; 11:3).

Their authority is the authority of Christ, the power of His very witness in them. The fact that they have this authority to strike the earth with every sort of plague is “symbolic language for the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (cf. Isaiah 11:4; Mark 13:11; Luke 21:15; John 16:8ff).”<sup>45</sup>

In Revelation 14 the proclamation of the Gospel is not simply the announcement of God’s love, but a proclamation of His victory and a summons to submit: “Fear God and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come. Worship Him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water” (14:7). The coming destruction of Babylon and the punishment of those who worship the beast is announced.<sup>46</sup> The perseverance in that mission and its faithful proclamation is urged in 14:12: “This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God’s commandments and remain faithful to Jesus.”

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<sup>45</sup> Horbury and McNeil, 107.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

When the μαρτυρία of the two witnesses is completed, they are killed by the beast from the abyss. For the time of their testimony, they enjoy invulnerability from destruction by Satan (Revelation 20:3). Yet this witness, faithfully maintained, brings suffering and death as it did to Jesus in His ministry.<sup>47</sup> Their murder by the beast and the resulting merriment by the “inhabitants of the earth” shows the hostility of the world and the agents of Satan to the Church and her mission. For the Christians of the seven churches, the book of Revelation called them not only to verbal witness that attracted persecution, but also to obedience to the commands of God. That also is witness: “purity of life, over against the immorality that stems from idolatry...is equally painful to the godless.”<sup>48</sup> In the Wisdom of Solomon it says:

“Let us lay a trap for the just man . . . he is a living condemnation of all our ideas. The very sight of him is an affliction, because his life is not like other people’s, and his ways are different . . . Outrage and torment are the means to try him with . . . let us condemn him to a shameful death” (2:12-20).

The witness of the Christian life, faithfully lived as a testimony to Christ, attracts the hostility of Satan and the world. In Revelation 12:17 the dragon goes off to make war on the rest of the woman’s seed, those who keep the commandments of God and maintain the testimony of Jesus. Witness brings suffering.<sup>49</sup>

The beast has not been mentioned in Revelation to this point. He will not appear until 13:1ff. Perhaps the image of the beast from the abyss (Revelation 11:7), who kills the witnesses, is from Daniel 7:3,8; 8:10-12, 23-25. Clearly the beast comes from the

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid. , 105.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. , 106.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.



same abyss mentioned in 9:1ff. His origin is from hell and his power is from Satan himself. Similar imagery is used to describe the same event in other passages of the Revelation: 20:7-9; 19:19; 16:14-16; etc. In Revelation 11, the witness of the Church is finally silenced by the war that the beast wages against it.

The corpses of the two witnesses lie upon the street of the great city, where “also their Lord was crucified”(Revelation 11:8). In Psalm 79:1-4, the psalmist speaks of the scorn of the nations that do not acknowledge Yahweh:

“They have given the dead bodies of your servants as food to the birds of the air, the flesh of your saints to the beasts of the earth. They have poured out blood like water all around Jerusalem, and there is no one to bury the dead. We are objects of reproach to our neighbors, of scorn and derision to those around us.”

In Revelation 11, those from “peoples and tribes and tongues and nations” (11:9), those who were the objects of the mission of John and the two witnesses (Revelation 10:11), show their contempt for the witness of the Church as they let their bodies lie on the street of the great city. They were tormented by their witness (11:10) and their joy at the death of the Church has no bounds.

The scene of this conflict is the “great city which is called spiritually Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified” (Revelation 11:8). The city is called Sodom because it is devoted to evil and destined to destruction (Genesis 19:1-29; Isaiah 1:9; Amos 4:1). It is termed “Egypt” because in it the people of God are persecuted and oppressed (Exodus 1:11-14; 2:23; 3:7-9; 5:4-18). This city is the Earthly City, the city of this sinful world, which is opposed to the Heavenly City, the New Jerusalem, and which is

now represented by the satanic power of Rome, “the great city” (Revelation 16:19; 17:18; 18:10).<sup>50</sup>

John describes this city as the city “where also their Lord was crucified”. If it is Jerusalem that is meant, it is no longer regarded as the Holy City, but a city given over to the heathen and thus representing the world. The measured Sanctuary remains in its midst as a protected fortress, but in the street of the city, the power of the Beast is supreme and when their witness is finished they are killed.<sup>51</sup>

Their Lord Jesus also was put to death for His testimony. The Lord and His obedience to death, “even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:8), is the model for the faithfulness of the witnesses as well. In the opening vision of Revelation 1:9-20, Jesus unveils Himself as the One who was dead and now lives forever and ever (1:18). In Revelation 5:6, Jesus appears as a “. . . Lamb, looking as if it had been slain . . .” The image of the Lamb in the book of Revelation is an image that would strengthen the Church in witness. The reference to the Lamb being slain is a reminder of the cross and the death of Jesus as the faithful witness. He was the powerful Lamb, pictured with seven horns and seven eyes, but also the Lamb Who had been slain. Those who would participate in the reign of this Lamb must be willing to follow him wherever he goes, even to death (Revelation 14:4).<sup>52</sup> These two witnesses show such willingness to follow Jesus even to His death on the cross.

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<sup>50</sup> Allison A. Trites, The New Testament Concept of Witness (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 168.

<sup>51</sup> Swete, 138.

<sup>52</sup> Reddish, 89.



The two witnesses are also like their Lord in that they too have a resurrection and an ascension. The exultation of the pagan world at the death of the witnesses is short lived. After 3 1/2 days, they return to life. Their resurrection is described in terms of Ezekiel 37:10, where breath enters into the corpses of the nation of Israel and they stand upon their feet as a vast army. A great fear enters into the spectators. Their revival, after the utter defeat of the proclaimed Word, can only be from God.

1 Peter 1:23 says: "The Word of the Lord endures forever". The final task of the Word and those who proclaim it has been completed. The Word has revealed the guilt of the hard-hearted stubbornness of those who reject the Gospel.<sup>53</sup>

The resurrection of the witnesses is followed by their ascension to heaven "in the cloud", just as their Lord ascended. Yet in contrast to the Lord's ascension, witnessed only by His disciples, the ascension of the two witnesses is in full view of their enemies. Their triumph is public. This is the fulfillment of what Paul foresees in 1 Thessalonians 4:17: "After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever."<sup>54</sup>

The interpretation of the earthquake in this section is surrounded by controversy. "At that very hour there was a severe earthquake and a tenth of the city collapsed. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven" (Revelation 11:13). Lenski sees the earthquake as the end of the world. The Word, in the person of the two witnesses, has been withdrawn and there is

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<sup>53</sup> Lenski, 348.

<sup>54</sup> Swete, 140.

no chance for conversion. He sees the 7000 killed as a symbolic number, only a partial number of the inhabitants of the city, but the firstfruits of the rest who will also die. The fear of those who remain and give glory to the God of heaven is not repentance according to Lenski. The judgment has descended and it is too late for them.<sup>55</sup>

Caird and Swete regard this verse as a repentance and a movement toward the Lord just before the end. Caird contends that where punishment had failed to bring men to repentance, the death of the martyrs would succeed. He regards Revelation 11:13 as an expression of the success of the witnesses.<sup>56</sup>

Allison Trites also offers somewhat convincing proof that the fear of the inhabitants of the city is the fear of repentance. According to Trites, with the exception of Revelation 1:17 and 2:10, φοβέομαι in Revelation always has a positive meaning. It expresses the worship which the Creator expects from His creatures: "Praise our God, all you His servants, who fear Him, small and great" (Revelation 19:5; 11:18; 14:7; 15:4).

Secondly, he argues that the positive interpretation of "fear" is in harmony with the words immediately following: ". . . and they gave glory to the God of heaven". He defines that phrase as paying the honor "due to God by changing one's attitude and confessing, speaking, or doing the truth as the truth of God" (Revelation 16:9; Jeremiah 13:16; 1 Esdras 9:8; 1 Peter 2:12).<sup>57</sup> Further, he contends that the Old Testament speaks favorably of those who "fear the Lord" (Genesis 22:12; 1 Kings 18:3,12; Psalm 113:2; Haggai 1:12;

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<sup>55</sup> Lenski, 351.

<sup>56</sup> G. B. Caird, The Revelation of St. John the Divine (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1966), 139-140.

<sup>57</sup> Trites, Concept of Witness, 169.

Malachi 3:16). There are also numerous exhortations to “fear the Lord and serve Him faithfully” (1 Samuel 12:24; Deuteronomy 6:2,13,24; Joshua 24:14; 2 Kings 17:39).

Trites states that the prophets and psalms looked forward to the time when the nations would “fear God” and acknowledge his sovereign power and holiness (Psalm 67:7; 22:27-29; 65:2; 86:9; Isaiah 45:23; 52:10; 66:23). He argues that John was conscious of this expectation from his quotation of Psalm 86:9: “All nations shall come and worship You” (Revelation 15:4). According to Trites, John is saying that the testimony of the witnesses is not in vain. Despite the impenitence in the face of the judgments of God, the witness of the Church in life and in death is effective, for through it a great multitude responds to God by revering His name and worshipping Him. “Here is a classic illustration of the familiar adage, ‘the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church’.”<sup>58</sup>

Trites’ argument also fits with the final part of Revelation 11, the seventh trumpet. If the earthquake in 11:13 is the end of the world, then what is the seventh trumpet? The seventh trumpet seems to announce the coming of the Kingdom in its final glory. Certainly one would not want to argue for a “rapture” of the Church before the end and then an opportunity for repentance during a tribulation as the dispensationalists do. Yet, Swete contends that the resurrection of the two witnesses is the revival of the Church as a missionary organization before the end. Swete concludes that at the end “the Seer foresees a general movement towards Christianity, induced by fear or despair (cf. Acts 24:24ff)--a prediction fulfilled more than once in ecclesiastical history.”<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Swete, 141.



#### **IV. Conclusions**

“The time is near” (Revelation 1:3). The book of Revelation is a powerful motivation for the Church to be constant, unwavering and absolutely faithful in her witness, the mission of Jesus Christ. The seven churches were in a struggle for their lives with the immorality of the pagan world. The Church in mission today is in the same struggle with Satan Himself, the beast, and the false prophet (Revelation 12:13). In that mission, the Church will suffer as did her Lord and faithful witnesses such as Antipas (Revelation 2:13).

Yet the book of Revelation is full of comfort for the Church in mission. Christ reigns in glory for the sake of His Church. Even though the dragon and his cohorts seem as though they are in control, Christ is in the midst of the lampstands. The churches and their angels belong to Him, as the vision in chapter 1 declares. He stands ready to defend her until her mission is accomplished and then, as His Bride, He will adorn her for eternal life. Christ controls all history, every event in the cosmos, for the sake of His Church. He reigns in glory so that the Church may carry out that mission (Revelation 4-6; Acts 1:8; Luke 24:44ff).

During this time of mission the Church is sealed (Revelation 7:1-8; 11:1-2), protected, and the judgment is held back until the full number of those who are to be sealed is reached with the saving Gospel (Revelation 7:3). The Glorified Christ supplies His Church with all she needs in mission. He prepares a place for her in the desert (Revelation 12:6,14). He feeds and cares for her so that this mission may be carried out.

In the seven letters it is apparent Who is in charge of the events that the seven churches are facing. It is the Christ Who reveals His glory in the vision of Revelation 1:9-20. He rules the universe for the sake of His Bride, the Church. He adorns her with the sun, the moon and the stars, signifying the cosmic importance of the Church and her mission. He gives her His very authority, the authority of His Word, the μαρτυρία of Jesus Christ Himself (Revelation 11:3ff). The end of the world will not come until the Church has completed her mission.

Mission permeates the entire book beginning with the Prologue, the ἀποκαλύψις of Jesus Christ delivered to His servants that they might be His slaves in mission. “For the time is near.” The pages of this ἀποκαλύψις are an invitation to believe. The invitation of the Church before the end of time is delivered to the whole unbelieving world: “And the Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come’. And let the one who hears say, ‘Come’. And the one who thirsts, let him come, the one who wishes let him take of the free gift of the water of life” (22:17).

The Church today needs to see the glory of Christ, as the seven churches saw through this letter, the book of Revelation. Only with the vision of the exalted Christ can the Church withstand the onslaught of Satan and remain faithful in witness. “The forces of evil are overcome through faithful witness, not through violent resistance nor through acquiescence and denial. Christ won the victory with the sword of His mouth and the cross. His followers continue the battle in the same way.”<sup>60</sup> With the prompting of the

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<sup>60</sup> Reddish, 90.

Spirit, Who Himself inspires prophecy, the Church of today prays: "Amen, come Lord Jesus!" The answer to that prayer is the mission of the Church before the end.

*Soli Deo Gloria*



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