

# AGATHOS

# WITNESS



LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE  
**Book of Revelation**

**SPRING 2021**

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# agathos

(n.) whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, admirable, excellent, praiseworthy;

about us **whatever is good.**

The Agathos Journal is an annual publication of the Joseph and Alice McKeen Study Center by the Christian Fellowship at Bowdoin. The publication is a member of the Augustine Collective, a national network of undergraduate Christian journals. After a year of scripture study, our community of believing college students, mentors, and families works to write on the truth that the Bible has for our academic, social, and cultural campus context. We invite you to read here the ways we hear God speaking into our lives at Bowdoin College and this world at large.

## Meet the Team

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Student	Juliette Min '22
Student	Joshua Lin '22
Student	Espoir Byishimo '22
Student	Ismerai Ortiz '22
Student	Taylor Jorgensen '22
Student	Adam Nelson '24

Executive Director to the Joseph and Alice McKeen Center     Robert B. Gregory



## Letter from the Editor

Dear Reader,

This year, students at the Joseph and Alice McKeen Study Center read the Book of Revelation. Throughout our study, we saw numerous examples of God's people bearing witness to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ until the very end – John obeying the Lord's command to write and send what he saw to the seven churches, the living creatures and twenty four elders worshiping Him who sits on the throne, and the two witnesses prophesying for 1,260 days. These are just a few of many examples that we have witnessed during our study.

In the first chapter of Revelation, we see that Jesus walks among the lampstands that symbolize the churches. We believe that the churches are embodied in these lampstands for their interpretive power as lights in the world. To be lights in this word includes bearing witness to the beautiful testimony of salvation and the kingdom to come in a world marked by sin, for the Lord commanded us: "I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth" (Acts 13:47). It also includes exposing and disengaging from unfruitful works of darkness, no matter how difficult this task may be (Ephesians 5:11). Thus, we realized from the first chapter of Revelation that the Book is very much about the call to be witnesses in this world.

A beauty of God's work in the JAM Study Center is that while we sat around the table (or on Zoom) each week, each person had unique revelations and contributions to the study of the text. Like John, who was invited to eat the little scroll in Revelation 10, we considered the possibility that God gives each person a little scroll – an invitation to know Him and His word through the various contexts of our lives – and then calls us to testify to what we have learned, bitter and sweet, with those near to us.

We entertain different mediums and dimensions of witnessing (after all, John sees, hears, writes, eats, and speaks), and this journal serves as one medium of one portion of our testimony. We invite you to read about the small, unique insights we have gleaned through our studies this year.

Sincerely,  
The Bowdoin Agathos Team



# Conspiracy at a Christian Study Center

by Robert Gregory

## The JAMS Conspiracy – Breathing Together

The Joseph and Alice McKean Study Center at Bowdoin College (affectionately referred to as the JAMS by the students) was conceived as a place for Christian students to meet around square tables, elbow to elbow, reading scriptures aloud, singing songs in crowded rooms, praying prayers with hands locked in solidarity. Some students have reported that this is one place on campus where Christian students can breathe the same air together. According to the Latin conspirare or to “breathe together,” we must say that the Study Center movement, of which the JAMS is a part, is therefore a conspiracy. Located on college campuses across the country Christian Study Centers are intimate venues - often houses like ours in Brunswick, Maine - where students learn to breathe together the words of God, in scripture, publications, readings, song and prayer.

This essay is inspired (this too from the Latin inspire or to “breathe upon”) by my wife of 45 years and a Community College course she is taking to continue her Maine teaching certification into her 43rd year. One assignment led her to create a presentation on the environmental triggers for asthma and how to address the resulting breathing impairment. With multiple asthmatic children, it is a topic she knows well.

How are we breathing together in these campus Study Centers? This season of dealing with the Covid-19 respiratory pandemic is forcing us all to think about our breathing impairments. I have learned from family members in the healthcare profession that securing airway management is the first responder’s top priority. Is there airway obstruction?



## Life and Breath – Harmony with God

An interesting feature of the biblical languages is that sometimes words carry the same meaning in both the Hebrew language of the Old Testament and Greek language of the New Testament. Our studies at the JAMS last year focused on the prophet Jeremiah where we learned the Hebrew word for ungodliness (Jeremiah 23:15) carried the double meaning of obstructed worship and impaired moral virtue in line with the Greek word for ungodliness (e.g., Romans 1:18). The Hebrew word for breath (ruach) - Genesis 3 similarly carries a double meaning for spirit, as does its Greek counterpart (pneuma). The Spirit of the Lord who hovered over the waters in Genesis 1.2 is the one who gives breath to living things (Number 27:16) and by that breath, man became a living creature (Genesis 2:7). Life is an inspiration and a conspiracy where God breathes on man and we in turn learn to live and breathe in harmony with God, both morally and in our worship.

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## Jesus Breathes His Last

When the Roman tyrants were considering a public execution that would reach maximum pain and suffering on the victim, as well as maximum value in deterrence, they implemented crucifixion as the means of death by asphyxiation. Death came when the condemned was no longer able to lift himself on the cross foot rest (called a suppedaneum) or a small seat (sedile) in the middle of the vertical post of the cross. The Gospel writers inform us of the death of Jesus in such respiratory terms: "And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last" (Mark 15:37)

## Jesus Breathes Again

Earlier in his ministry, Jesus was explaining to his disciples the way they might understand his life mission as a shepherd, as a door to the sheepfold, and one who would lay down his life (pointing to the cross) in order that he could take it back (pointing to his resurrection).



*I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father. (John 10:14-18)*

John later records Jesus appearing to his disciples on the evening of the very day of his resurrection in a room, behind closed doors, reminiscent of the meetings we hold in the JAMS at Bowdoin College. In that confined space Jesus bestows the blessing of peace and a commission that sends these disciples on their own mission. John then records both what Jesus does (he breathes on the disciples) and the meaning he assigns to it (their reception of the Holy Spirit) with these words:

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld" (John 20:19-23).

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*"Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."*

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## The Apocalypse of John and Two Witnesses

The evidence is strong that the same John who wrote the gospel account of Jesus breathing on his disciples and commissioning them ("I am sending you") to forgive sins and to gather disciples, some 60 years later received a vision while he was on a penal colony located on the Mediterranean island called Patmos. That vision has been the subject of our study during the 2020-2021 academic year for the Bowdoin College students at the JAMS. In the middle of that vision in Revelation chapter 11, we read of two witnesses. They are not given names, since they are probably symbolic of the way God has often paired his servants whom he has authorized to declare the liberating message of his plan to set men free. Moses and Aaron, Elijah and Elisha, Joshua and Zerubbabel (priest and king mentioned by Zechariah), Paul and Silas, Paul and Barnabas, Paul and Timothy, Peter and John, are all examples of such pairings.

These "Two Witnesses" were given special protections while they carried out their ministry, productive as two olive trees and enlightening as two lampstands.

John writes,

"If anyone would harm them, this is how he is doomed to be killed. They have the power to shut the sky, that

*no rain may fall during the days of their prophesying, and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague, as often as they desire" (Revelation 11:6).*

John understands in this vision that these Two Witnesses were unstoppable... until they finished their assignment. The Gospel conspiracy evokes another conspiracy in the Apocalypse of John. Combinations of political, economic, political, and cultural forces "breathe together" in their own conspiracy to make war on the Two Witnesses:

"And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that rises from the bottomless pit will make war on them and conquer them and kill them, and their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city that symbolically is called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified. For three and a half days some from the peoples and tribes and languages and nations will gaze at their dead bodies and refuse to let them be placed in a tomb, and those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry and exchange presents, because these two prophets had been a torment to those who dwell on the earth" (Revelation 11:7-10).





## Resurrection and the Breath of Life — Breathing Again

The vision that John received on the Island of Patmos is the one we have received at the JAMS in 2020-2021. Death could not come until they had finished their testimony. But it did come. The heart of the conspiracy of which we are a part at the JAMS is the one that anchors our belief in the power of God, by the Holy Spirit, to raise Jesus from the dead after he breathed his last on the cross. The resurrection and the cross, we learned, do not stand in equilibrium. Rather, the resurrection overpowers the death of the cross.

The Apocalypse given to John was a Revelation of Jesus Christ. It was from Christ (Revelation 1:1) and about Him (Revelation 1:2). The conspiracy of the Christian message is not that death robs men of life, but that God robs death of the last word. Just as he did with the first man Adam, God breathes life into the Two Witnesses:

"But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood up on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here!" And they went up to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies watched them. And at that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven (Revelation 11:11-13).

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## The Conspiracy — Breathing Together Against Christ and the Saints

In the vision given to John about the Two Witnesses we read about the conspiracy to make war on them. War is a group activity, and many must conspire and breath together to plan and implement its strategies and objectives. So central to John's message is that there was and will be a war on Christ, his offspring, and on the Saints that he repeats this four times after Chapter 11:

Revelation 12:17 Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus. And he stood on the sand of the sea.

Revelation 13:7 Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation, Revelation 17:14 They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful."

Revelation 19:11 and 19 Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. . . And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army.

In my preparation to work with the students of Bowdoin College through the Joseph and Alice McKean Study Center, I came upon one of those books that you add to the list of readings that force you to see something you have never seen before. The Bible occupies that place for me and for all Christians who are looking to a life guided by one who authored the beginning and has purposes that point to an end. At a lesser level, but important for my growth, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* by Robert Pirsig, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* by Thomas Kuhn were books that fit that description before my conversion. *Personal Knowledge* and *The Tacit Dimension* by Michael Polanyi, *The Desire of Nations*, *Resurrection and the Moral Order* and *The Ways of Judgment* by Oliver O'Donovan are on that list for my days as a disciple. The serendipitous discovery this summer was a 1958 treatise by a Dutch theologian Hendrikus Berkhof who authored *Christ the Meaning of History*.

Berkhof has helped me to see that the conspiracy against Christ and the saints does not arrive until the Christ of the Scripture has been proclaimed. There is a "double mystery" in the proclamation of the freedom which Christ won in the resurrection. The missionary instruction which Christ gave to his disciples when he *breathed on them* included two responses, not one. The alternative response to faith, reception and obedience was that of counterforce, hostility, persecution, competitive doctrines of salvation and apostasy (p 99-104). It is not until Christ has been preached that the counterforces are awakened and believers, like the Two Witnesses of Revelation 11 are called to share in the struggle and suffering that it brings.

Berkhof taught me that it was apparently a core part of the confession of the early church that the Antichrist must of necessity come before the return of Christ. (2 Thessalonians 2:5) Paul reprimands the church in Thessalonica that this was ground he had already covered: *Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?* The context for that admonition is that he was reminding them, as Berkhof writes: "The antichrist, then, cannot originate in paganism, but only in a becoming Christian de-Christianized world" (p 115). In other words, it is only when, and in response to, the Two Witnesses (you and me) that the conspiracy of antichrist is awakened. Again quoting from Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians:

*Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? And you know what is restraining him now*

*so that he may be revealed in his time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way (2 Thessalonian 1:3-7).*

That "mystery of lawlessness" is in fact the double mystery which includes the necessity that the Gospel be preached, and a second mystery that it will necessarily make war with those who bear witness to it. If this confession was a core belief of the early church, then we might do well during this season to receive the Covid-19 pandemic as a time to reconsider the breath God breathed into the first Adam, the cross on which Jesus breathed his last, the commissioning breath by which Jesus sent his disciples into all the world to preach the Gospel to every nation, tribe and people, and the hope of the promise that God will breathe new life into all of those who following the "Two Witnesses" and finish our testimony.

## The Final Breath

One final word on this subject. I have wondered who will be the last person to breathe a human breath? The question I ask is in the context of this "breathing together" conspiracy against the Saints, the conspiracy that makes war against the Lamb, the conspiracy against the Two Witnesses, all of which will not and cannot prevail. I propose that the end of this conspiracy will come by the breath of Jesus. That final breath brings to nothing that which is pure negativity (evil). That breath brings an end to all those who have as their king over them that angel whose name in Hebrew and Greek respectively are Abaddon and Apollyon which mean the Destroyer (Revelation 9:11). That end is the end of history, and it happens when there is no more delay, the seventh trumpet blows, and it comes with the end of evil. The end of history will vindicate God's creation and its original purposes. The end of history will reveal that Christ accomplished all of that by the word of his testimony. Perhaps the last breath by a human agent will be the breath of the God-Man who and will bring evil to naught by the breath of his mouth: Again from Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians:

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*And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming. The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. (2 Thessalonians 2:8-10)*

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Why do the nations rage  
and the peoples plot in vain?  
The kings of the earth set themselves,  
and the rulers take counsel together,  
against the LORD and his Anointed, saying,  
"Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us."

He who sits in the heavens laughs;  
the Lord holds them in derision.  
Then he will speak to them in his wrath,  
and terrify them in his fury, saying,  
"As for me, I have set my King  
on Zion, my holy hill."

I will tell of the decree:  
The LORD said to me, "You are my Son;  
today I have begotten you.  
Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage,  
and the ends of the earth your possession.  
You shall break them with a rod of iron  
and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."

Now therefore, O kings, be wise;  
be warned, O rulers of the earth.  
Serve the LORD with fear,  
and rejoice with trembling.  
Kiss the Son,  
lest he be angry, and you perish in the way,  
for his wrath is quickly kindled.  
Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

PSALM 2

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# Weep No More

by Espoir Byishimo

Revelation chapter 5 begins with the scene of the scroll in the throne room of heaven. John writes, “*then I saw in the right hand of Him who was seated on the throne, a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals.*” The scroll is locked tightly, not with one seal, but with seven seals.

John is full of excitement when he sees this scroll. But first, the scroll has to be opened. He writes, “*And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, ‘WHO IS WORTHY TO OPEN THE SCROLL AND BREAK ITS SEALS?’*” John hears this proclamation and awaits with great anticipation for anyone worthy to step forward and open the scroll.

John's joy-filled anticipation doesn't last long but is replaced with great despair. He writes, “*And none was found in heaven or on Earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it....I began to weep loudly because none was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it.*” We may ask, why is John weeping? What is it about the scroll that is so important to him? Why doesn't he stand up and open it?

The scroll contains mysteries about the past, present, and future. John doesn't want to miss any of this. He longs to be among the blessed, whom “*the secrets of the kingdom of heaven*” are made known (Matthew 13:11).

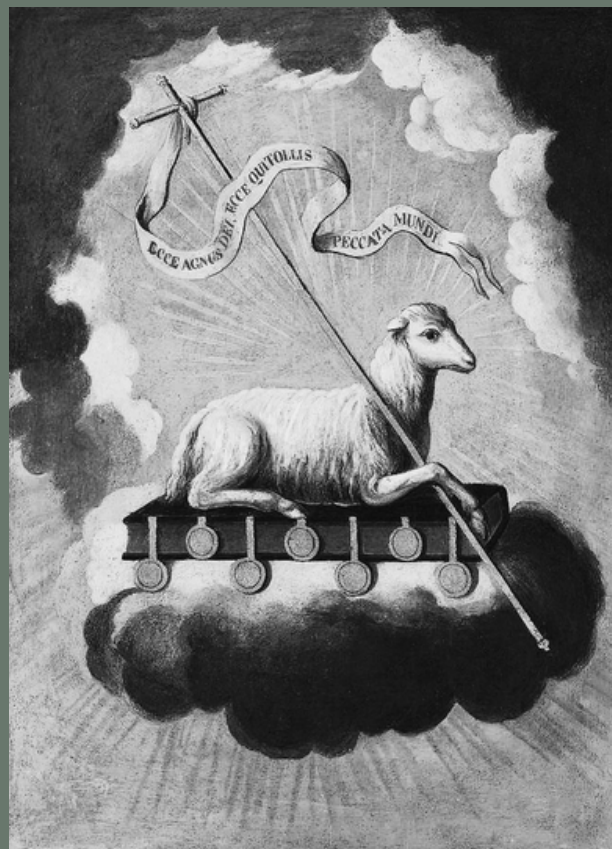
John's weeping is reminiscent of Mary Magdalene's mournful cry. When Mary was asked why she was crying in front of Jesus' tomb, she said, “*they have taken away my Lord.*” For John, he couldn't see the mystery of ages unless the scroll was opened. So, at the moment, it appears that Mary and John's hopes for the future were dashed.

But suddenly the condition for John and Mary changes: despair turns into great jubilation. An elder says to John, “*weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.*” And to Mary's amazement, Jesus appears to her alive. Mary joyfully runs to the disciples, calling, “*I have seen the Lord.*” The power and righteousness of Christ solely and definitively restores their hope and joy. And they weep

no more.

Like John and Mary, we wait with great joy for the day of the Lord. We will see the Lamb of God—and we will weep no more.

“*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. **He will wipe away every tear from their eyes,** and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.’*” (Revelation 21)



Lamb of God, Agnus Dei by Jose Campeche



# Big Prayers, Small Prayers

by Ismerai Ortiz

In an increasingly self-reliant society, asking for something is not something a lot of people like to do. Mostly, we choose to figure things out for ourselves or to just suffer in silence. I have suffered a lot in college with this mentality, both in my academics and in my social life. Yet I find that this silence is present not just in the way I interact with my career, school, family, and other things, but also in the way I interact with God.

So how do we interact with God? There are many ways, which include worship, reading the Word, silence, interacting with His creation, and many more. However, in this piece, I will focus on what Revelation 8 tells us about our prayers. In our prayers, we thank God, but we also ask for things - we ask for forgiveness, for guidance, for rest, for good grades and good jobs. When I was young, I would pray mainly to ask God for good grades or something of the sort. However, as I got older, I felt increasingly unsure and uncomfortable with asking things from God because it felt like I was demanding something from Him. And who was I to demand something from God?

Even more, while I understood that prayer was a sacred time with God, the importance of this time made me feel like my prayers should be eloquent and have a deep recognition of God's power in prayer. For me, this recognition of God's power had meant that there were things I should ask for in my prayers - the bigger and more important things - and things I should not. I felt the need to censor my prayers and not ask God for the little things because I thought they didn't matter as much as other prayers. My prayers did not feel eloquent or worthy or wise enough to be offered up to such a powerful God. I had made a distinction between what I thought were worthy and unworthy prayers, for I did not recognize that God has the power to take imperfect prayers and make them perfect:

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God has the power to take imperfect prayers and make them perfect.

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*"And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne, and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel" (Revelation 8:3-4).*

In our study of Revelation, we considered the possibility that when our prayers are offered with incense on the golden altar before the throne, our prayers are made perfect with the smoke of incense as they rise to God. There are no prayers unworthy to be offered up to God. Even when my heart questions the importance of my prayers, I am reminded that "God is greater than our heart" (1 John 3:20). In the same way, God's power in the incense with which our prayers are mixed is greater than our small and imperfect prayers. My understanding of God's power had previously moved me to not pray my seemingly small and ineloquent prayers, but this passage reminds me that there is no prayer too inadequate or small for the Lord.

We have Jesus as our intermediary, and although it is awkward to pray for things that feel like they would be insignificant in the eyes of God, just know that your prayers, even if spoken ineloquently and appear small, are made perfect and complete by Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray so that our prayers can reach God in heaven.

Dear Heavenly Father,

I thank you for this message God, that tells me no prayer is unworthy to be brought to you, because you make them perfect. Thank you God, for listening to each and every one of my worries, joys, desires, and reflections. God, help me bring everything to you in prayer, from the smallest joy, to the biggest worry. I thank you for everything you do for us.

In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

REVELATION 8:1-5 ESV

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When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne, and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel. Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth, and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.

# An Examination of Revelation Chapter 4: The Throne Room as a Place of Worship, Rule, and Government

by Adam Nelson

## The Significance of Creation in Worship

*"Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!"* (Rev. 4:8). As a Christian, it is almost impossible to have never heard those words in succession, and everyone likely has at least a vague recollection of an idea of a God so powerful and almighty, He transcends our simple understanding of time that says all things are finite. One might question why so many people across all nations, regardless of the many differences that stand to separate us, continuously give praise to a higher being they have not personally witnessed. But in truth, we have all seen God every day of our lives – through the works of His hands.

How can one not appreciate the extravagance of abstract, theoretical science and mathematics, or wonder longingly at the stars in the dimly lit night sky, or be amazed by the punctual revolution of the Earth around the Sun that gives us the light of day, or marvel at the endless expanse of water that is the oceans, or ponder how water sustains all life on Earth, and without it, life would be impossible? Through an endless array of miracles observed by the human eye each and every day, we must gain a deeper sense of awe that this world is someone's masterpiece. Admittedly, we may not have had the fortune of seeing Jesus come down from Heaven to perform miracles as he walked the Earth, but we have irrefutably witnessed God's immaculate creation, and that is reason enough alone to offer Him who sits on His Heavenly throne undying praise and worship.

Within The Revelation of Jesus Christ given to John on the Isle of Patmos, the initial mesmerizing description of the Heavenly throne room and its four living creatures beyond human comprehension may distract from what this passage actually reveals to us. One on each side of the grandest throne, these creatures have an abundance of eyes and six wings, signifying God's perfect wisdom and judgment and great haste in performing God's will across the four corners of the Earth. They each take the individual resemblance of a lion, an ox, the face of man, and an eagle in flight. These creatures, in their unique attributes of power and strength, servitude and humility, intelligence and rationality, and swiftness – like all of Creation – praise their Creator. Taking that into account, we realize we

are not so different from these extraterrestrial beings, or at least we were not intended to be by our Creator, for these four creatures constantly offer praises and worship the one on the center throne, proclaiming, *"Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come"* (Rev. 4:8).

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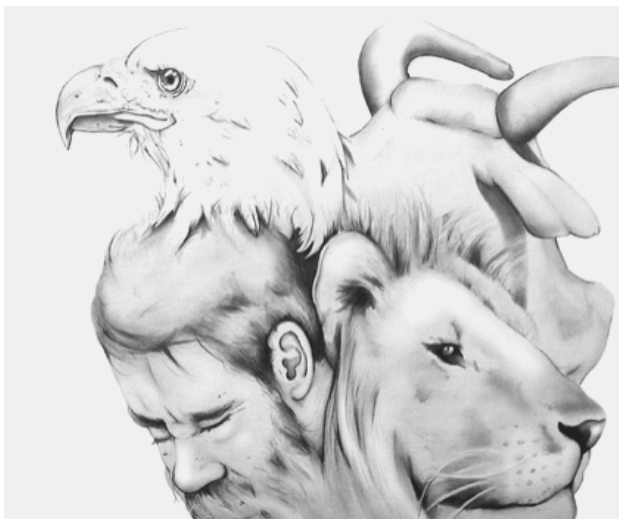
In response to the four creatures, we see 24 elders on their thrones surrounding the throne of the Most High fall down before the Lord and cast their crowns before him, their symbols of authority, chanting, *"Worthy are You, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for You created all things and by Your will they existed and were created"* (Rev. 4:11). The praise of these elders acknowledges God on the grounds that He alone brought all of creation into existence. This explicit display of never-ending, profound, and passionate Heavenly worship should be a stark call to action for all of us on Earth. Firstly, we should be reminded of the constant praise that only the Lord, our God deserves as Creator of Heaven and Earth. And with that praise, we must summon and maintain at all times the same sense of joy we find in worship when God exhibits His will in our lives. Each time we give thanks to Him for the act of creation alone, it cannot lose meaning and become disingenuous as though we are going through the motions of prayer.

If a friend, neighbor, or family member performed a simple favor, one would be reasonably courteous and thank them; should we not approach things similarly when it comes to the maker of all Heaven and Earth just because the work He's done is so fundamental to our existences we take it for granted? Has he not given us all things with the gift of His only son to bear the cross

for all sin on our behalf? Yet, all He asks in return is that we give Him thanks and honor His will, and even that is often too difficult or too arduous for us to fulfill!

How often do we turn to God only when things have gone wrong or when we want to ask something of Him? How rarely do we offer anything in return for His awesome and unending grace, love, and kindness? Of course there's nothing we can offer Him that can equal or even compare to a fraction of the continuous and tremendous grace He has shown for us, but the least we can do as faithful witnesses to His deeds is to pray always. Now, I don't necessarily mean that every waking moment of our lives needs to be spent in conversation with God, although that would be ideal. But we must seek a life which regularly reflects on God's goodness – for He created all things good, and all good there is, He created. We must raise worship, devotion, glory, honor, and praise to Him and strive to reclaim and rediscover our love for Him each day. In all of this, we must return to (or find) the heart of worship.

Even if we cannot find the words to express our thanks, He will once again come to our rescue and guide us. How ironic that even the most articulate words and beautiful things we can present at His feet actually come through Him! As the Hymn writer said, "All things are thine, no gifts have we, Lord of all gifts to offer thee; and hence with grateful hearts today, thine own before thy feet we lay." Nevertheless, when we make a habit of *worshiping* our Lord and savior this way, we must not let repetition turn into monotony and thus lose the strong love and meaning behind our words of praise. So let this be a reminder to worship and pray fervently, "Worthy are You, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for You created all things, and by Your will they existed and were created" (Rev. 4:11). Revelation may be a depiction of the end of all things, but it still undeniably has much to say about the beginning of all things and the necessity of devout worship for the act of creation alone.



## Submission to Authority: Rule and Government

In addition to its explicit reminder to worship, there is no mistaking that Chapter 4 of the Revelation to John also instructs on the motifs of rule and power. Jesus provides John a vision of ascending to the Heavens to bear witness to the heavenly purpose of government within the created order and to the direction and delegation of tasks to others through an authoritative command chain. In this case, John must spread word of what he has seen in Heaven to the seven churches, informing them to withstand the trials of this life and take action to address their shortcomings, for the end times are approaching soon.

In this vision, after John ascends to Heaven to witness the Revelation of Jesus Christ, he immediately falls down on his face, the same reaction Ezekiel had when he was granted a very similar vision. The almighty power and glory of God are further symbolized through the flashes of lightning, rumblings, and peals of thunder. John and Ezekiel's awe of God's might is so potent they lose the ability to stand in His presence and instead assume the position of worship of the one seated on the throne. This delivers such a physical and tangible image of the power and majesty held by our God, so of course John and Ezekiel's natural response is to fall to their knees and obey the commands of a ruler so wise.

The themes of rule and government are even more developed in Ezekiel's vision where four very similar living creatures follow wherever the Spirit orders them. These heavenly creatures accomplish God's commands without even having to turn their bodies since they have the face of a lion, ox, man, and eagle on each side of their head. This shows how quickly and harmoniously heavenly beings embark to perform God's will and busily traverse the four corners of the Earth conducting God's work without hesitation.

Even the mesmerizing throne of this vision projects the rule and authority of God over the nations and their people, as the Lord's throne is surrounded by the creatures and 24 elders while directing them. This imagery and positioning of God at the center of the Kingdom of Heaven displays the concept of governmental rule even further.

Generally, the concept of despotism suggests a negative connotation of absolute power abused in a cruel or oppressive manner, but with this vision of our Heavenly Father, we know He retains the most high rule and judgment, yet treats His humble servants with love and grace. In the throne room in Heaven, submitting to the one true authority of the Father, there are 24 elders who have been redeemed by Christ and invited to jointly rule with Him. They are clothed in white and each given



their own throne surrounding Him and a golden crown to rest above their heads, symbolizing their own fraction of authority delegated by their ruler. However, each time they give thanks to the Lord, they cast away their crowns and fall from their thrones, for they know God is wholly responsible for their rewards and possessions. This illustrates the power dynamic that these elders have some authority in Heaven, but they willingly submit to the most-high God. Furthermore, their white clothes symbolize that God has forgiven them and purified them of all their sins. It is hard to imagine such modesty and restraint from earthly rulers.

Similarly, God shares His kingdom with all the inhabitants of the Earth who choose to follow the narrow path, for John tells us:

*"I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years ... This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with Him for a thousand years"* (Revelation 20:4-6).

In addition, we know that God will then share His new Jerusalem, His new Heaven, and His new Earth with His followers too: *"The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son"* (Revelation 21:7). God proves the sole example of power and dominion not corrupting one's judgment and kindness, for He is always faithful, provides wisdom and nourishment for our souls all the time, and generously offers his new eternal creation to those who refuse to give in to temptation and Earthly things while we patiently wait for His coming. Then, at last, we may dwell with our creator!

## Conclusion

The themes of wholehearted worship and God's absolute authority in Revelation Chapter 4 display clearly defined requirements of us as God's children. The beauty and mystery of the Bible is that every passage contains information directly relevant to us. In this case, the Father commands us to submit to His authority and acknowledge His strength, rule, power, and authority as Creator and Governor of all things. We are to be His hands and feet like the winged creatures. We are to follow His orders to testify of His love and compassion. We are to give thanks that our King is not a tyrant but a humble, wise, and graceful leader in whom we can put our faith and trust. And we are to praise God for giving us this life and all creation, just as the 24 elders do in Heaven.

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The Father commands us to submit to His authority and acknowledge His strength, rule, power, and authority as Creator and Governor of all things . . . We are to give thanks that our King is not a tyrant but a humble, wise, and graceful leader in whom we can put our faith and trust.

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# Lyrics to "Revelation Song"

Worthy is the Lamb who was slain  
Holy, holy is He  
Sing a new song to him who sits on  
Heaven's mercy seat

Worthy is the lamb who was slain  
Holy holy is He  
Sing a new song to him who sits on  
Heaven's mercy seat

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty  
Who was and is and is to come  
With all creation, I sing praise to the King of Kings  
You are my everything, and I will adore You

Clothed in rainbows of living color  
Flashes of lightning, rolls of thunder  
Blessing and honor, strength, and glory, and power  
Be to You the only wise King, yeah

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty  
Who was and is and is to come  
With all creation, I sing praise to the King of Kings  
You are my everything, and I will adore You

Holy, holy  
You are holy

Filled with wonder, awestruck wonder  
At the mention of Your name  
Jesus, Your name is power, breath, and living water  
Such a marvelous mystery, yeah

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty  
Who was and is and is to come  
With all creation, I sing praise to the King of Kings  
You Are my everything, and I will adore You

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty  
Who was and is and is to come  
With all creation, I sing praise to the King of Kings  
You Are my everything, and I will adore You

“

The victor will thus be dressed in white, and I will never erase his name from the book of life but will acknowledge his name in the presence of my Father and of his angels

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REVELATION 3:5

”



# Marked for Christ

by Taylor Jorgensen

Though the Book of Revelation can seem intimidating or scary, it is not as frightening as it is encouraging of our own accountability and dedication to God. It reveals to us that though we may look around the world and see it only at the surface, we are all a part of something deeper. There are rewards and consequences for our lives that we can miss without this kind of context. Revelation reminds us that the clock is ticking and that we should be engaging with our faith, preparing for the future. So, while many argue that the Bible is a book of the past, the Book of Revelation shows otherwise. If Revelation is the end, then we, living in the years after Jesus walked the earth and before the end of days, are in the midst of God's plan. It has unfolded to bring us to where we are today and will continue to bring us to the moment when Christ returns.

Revelation also raises questions about Christian identity. The mark of a Christian is not as widely discussed or debated as the "mark of the beast" (Rev 19:20). It seems that the message of avoiding the mark of the beast overwhelms the other side of this coin: to actively seek to be marked for God.

To seek this kind of divine marking, we can still look to the Book of Revelation. In Revelation 6, the fifth seal is broken open and we are introduced to *"the souls of those who had been slaughtered because of the witness they bore to the word of God"* (Rev 6:9). These followers had been faithful to God on earth and now ask when He will *"sit in judgment and avenge [their] blood on the inhabitants of the earth"* (Rev 6:10). Instead of a specific answer, they each receive a white robe, and these souls are encouraged *"to be patient a little while longer"* (Rev 6:11). This white robe sets them apart. It is a gift they receive for their faithfulness and it effectively marks them as God's own.

The white robe is symbolic in its very color. Looking back to chapter 3 of Revelation, we learn the relevance of those who wear white: *"The victor will thus be dressed in white, and I will never erase his name from the book of life but will acknowledge his name in the presence of my Father and of his angels"* (Rev 3:5). These robes mark the souls as God's own, but the white color calls back to this earlier verse. Additionally, white is traditionally a symbol of purity. The souls have been forgiven and are being fully welcomed into a relationship with God.

In chapter 7 of Revelation, an elder asks, *"Who are these wearing white robes and where did they come from?"* (Rev 7:13). The white robes are a noticeable sign that cannot be overlooked. One has to wonder why they have been set apart and what makes them significant? He goes on to answer his own question: *"These are the ones who have survived the time of great distress; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb"* (Rev 7:14). These are the same souls who are said to have "been slaughtered" for their testimony, but we learn something more about why they have these robes. It is not just a reward for their witness that God chooses to set them apart. It is a representation of what Christ has done for them and for us. They are made clean and pure through Jesus's sacrifice on the cross.

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[The white robe] is not just a reward for their witness that God chooses to set them apart. It is a representation of what Christ has done for them and for us.

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The souls under the altar have devoted their lives to serving God, but this faith is also tied to the protection they receive during God's judgment. The souls are introduced alongside their witness and martyrdom on earth, a time of great struggle. However, with these sacrifices come a right relationship with God. These souls experience His grace and protection in the great tribulation. In this way, we see that protection and faith are linked. A genuine faith sets believers apart for God's use, which empowers devotion and offers divine protection for eternity. If our mark as Christians comes from our faithful devotion to God, then we must consider more deeply what this kind of devotion looks like.

For those souls under the altar, their method of devotion is their witness and willingness to die for their faith in God. We are able, however, to get more specific. Deuteronomy 6:6-8 shares:

*“Take to heart these words which I command you today. Keep repeating them to your children. Recite them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up. Bind them on your arm as a sign and let them be as a pendant on your forehead” (Deut 6:6-8).*

Not only do these verses give specific instructions, guidance to live a purposeful, dedicated life, but it also acknowledges the need for an outward sign of inward devotion to God.

For many Christians, this may seem counterintuitive, having been encouraged to act humbly in faith, but these outward signs are a part of the Christian story. We are not supposed to be hidden, secretive believers in Jesus, but clearly devoted people of faith. This cannot be limited to what is within us. We must take the internal changes, our personal devotion to God, and live lives of faith, though we are not told to wear a particular robe or marker of our faith on earth. Ephesians 6 tells us to *“Put on the armor of God so that you may be able to stand firm against the tactics of the devil”* (Eph 6:11). Here again, we hear the message of devotion and protection. In devoting ourselves to Him, we are also finding protection, putting on the “armor of God.” This verse demonstrates that we are regularly encouraged to show markers of our faith, in this practice, we need to be mindful of our intentions. We should not do anything out of a desire to “appear” as though we are serving God as followers of Christ, but to truly grow closer to Him. Putting on the spiritual “armor of God” is not visible to us, but to truly grow closer to Him. Putting on the spiritual “armor of God” is not visible to us, but this invisible mark should make visible differences in our lives. If we go through life shaped by our faith in God, we will be marked as His own.

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## We are not supposed to be hidden, secretive believers in Jesus, but clearly devoted people of faith.

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In John 13, verse 35, Jesus tells His disciples, and this includes us, how to mark ourselves as Christians: *“This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another”* (John 13:35). This is what we are called to do, and in some ways it is a simple command. We can be the ones to give a friend a ride to their appointment, take notes for someone who could not make it to class, or take the time to freely tutor someone in a subject we know well. Sometimes we can devote our time, serving others at food pantries, shelters, and schools, or it could mean we donate money to our churches, communities, and others across the globe. Even in our secular work, we can choose to

dedicate all that we do to furthering the glory of God. Even this mental shift has the power to change how we behave and the benefits of what we produce. We can take on the mission to speak and act with kindness, thoughtfulness, patience, and humility.

This love encompasses compassion, generosity, and kindness, but this love for one another ultimately leads us to desire a lasting goodness, salvation, for one another. The souls under the altar were specifically “slaughtered because of the witness they bore to the word of God.” The souls’ witnessing is both the reason for their death and for their closeness to God. Their mission to witness is how they demonstrated their love for other human beings. Desiring their ultimate salvation and closeness to God, they sought to bring others into relationship with Jesus Christ.

While recognition of our fundamental mission to love may be daunting, we can ensure that we are always aiming to do even just a little better each day. If we are not confident in sharing our faith with others, it is wise to look to nurturing our own faith and relationship with God. When in doubt, make time to read the Bible and pray. 1 Thessalonians maintains a useful guide for us: *“Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus”* (1 Thess 5:16-18). Prayer can happen anywhere at any time. If each day we remain prayerful and spend time with the Lord, we will grow closer in our relationship with God and more confident in sharing our faith.

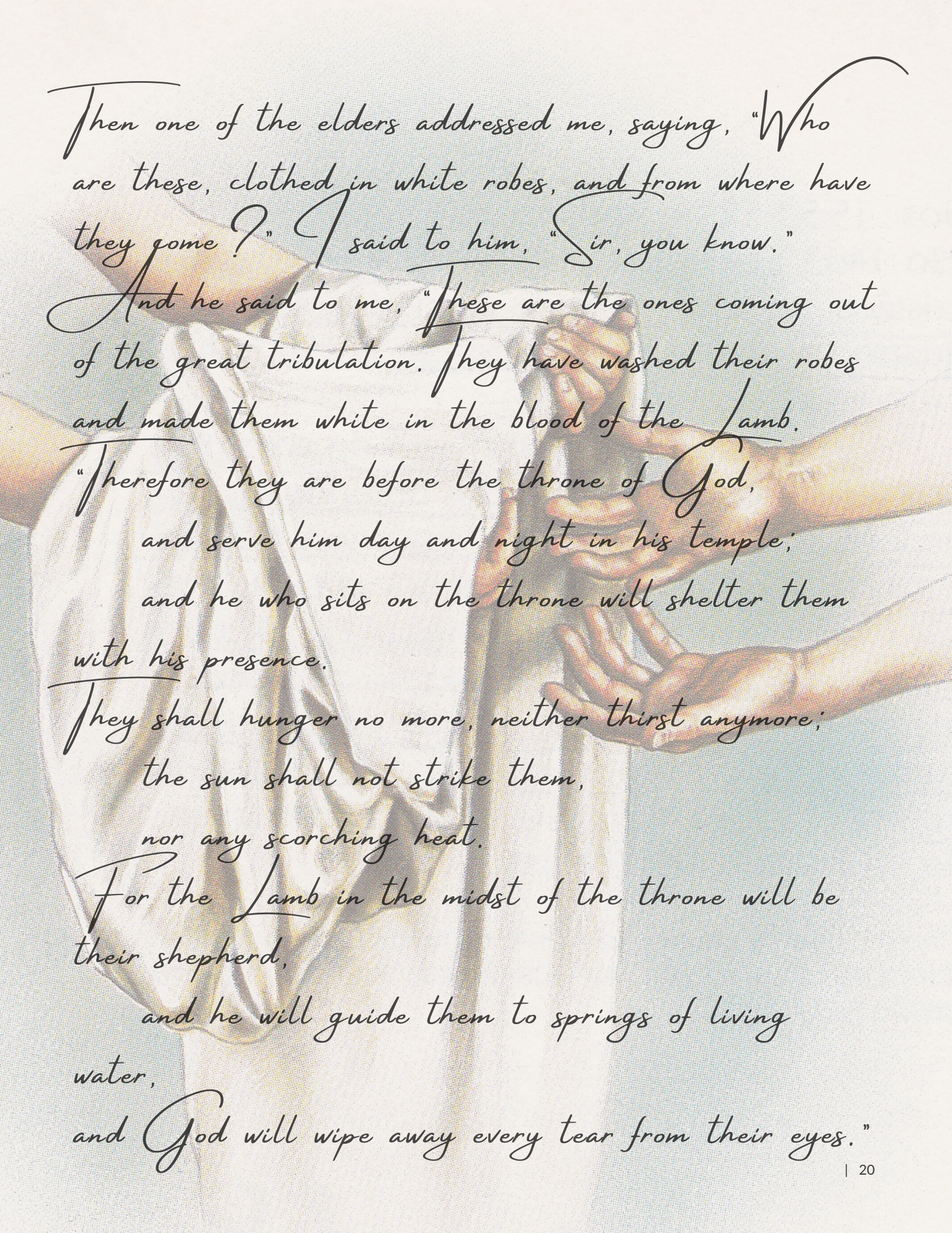
The souls under the altar during their time on earth were marked for God, but all were martyred. This points to a greater truth: there is an inherent risk in being marked for God, living a life devoted to Jesus. We may be comfortable volunteering or being kind to others, but we can be nervous about sharing our faith – perhaps because the Gospel is a light, and in more ways than one. This light reveals truth and freedom, but also the sin and shame we all try to hide. This Gospel might be accepted readily by some and met with apathy, offense, or opposition by others. We can see all kinds of good reasons to be afraid, but when we look to God, we see an infinitely greater call to share our faith and Him with others. We are called to be disciples of Jesus, bravely facing the age in which we live, devoting ourselves to God, knowing that we are protected and loved. God wants us to bravely live our faith. If we can do this, make our best effort, all there is left to do is *“be patient a little while longer”* (Rev 6:11).

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## We are called to be disciples of Jesus, bravely facing the age in which we live, devoting ourselves to God.

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Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?" I said to him, "Sir, you know."

And he said to me, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

"Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.

They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat.

For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd,

and he will guide them to springs of living water,

and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."





# A New Kingdom

by Joshua Lin

The end-times: What picture comes to your mind when you hear this phrase? Is it one of disaster or one of hope?

Regardless of what comes to mind, imagination alone cannot reveal anything about what the end times will look like. The book of Revelation speaks to this exact situation, revealing God's plan for the end of life on this earth and, just as amazingly, what comes next! That said, despite Revelation's prophetic character, it also speaks to our lives in the present.

The prologue (Rev 1:1-3) to the book of Revelation ends with the following promise:

*"Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near" (Rev 1:3).*

While there is much to explore in this verse, I was struck by the promise of a blessing to those who take to heart the words written. In what way do the words of this prophecy (i.e., the book of Revelation) bless those who read it aloud, hear it, and keep it?

It begins with the words, "The revelation of Jesus Christ..." (Rev 1:1), so right away we see that the subject of Revelation is clear. The natural follow-up for us then is to see what about Jesus is revealed.

When you introduce a friend, you may find it natural to make mention of how they've helped you in the past. In introducing my parents, I wouldn't hesitate a moment to acknowledge them as the ones who raised me. For a close friend, I would perhaps say they are someone who has kept me company through the ups and downs of life.

John introduces Jesus in this fashion, acknowledging what Jesus has done not only for John but also for all those who entrust their lives to him whether in the past, present, or future - this is an open invitation! The profound statements made by John here are easy to gloss over without grasping their meaning, so let's take a moment to process them.

First, John acknowledges Jesus as one "...who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood..." (Rev 1:5). John reminds us that, as a result of Jesus' atoning death for all of humanity on the cross, we are no longer slaves to a self-destructive way of life. As affirmed in Paul's letter to the Romans, "*You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.*" (Romans 6:18). How wonderful is this? To me, the implications here are twofold. In an earthly sense, the kings of pride, selfishness, lust, and the other temptations that we helplessly endear to ourselves for the sake of short-term satisfaction, are *all* dethroned. These stumbling blocks which fracture families, friendships, and communities can be overcome by finding lasting satisfaction in a relationship with God. It may not be easy, but the promise of freedom from sin here is one that permits a priceless revitalization of our relationship with ourselves and others.

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Jesus' redemptive death [makes] way for us to have a restored relationship with God. Believing in Jesus mends the fractures that sin makes in our relationship with God.

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In a supernatural sense, Jesus' redemptive death also makes way for us to have a restored relationship with God. Believing in Jesus (*John 3:16*) mends the fractures that sin makes in our relationship with God. Thus, we are given a way to live life as fully as we were meant to when we leave this world, that is, satisfied as part of God's family.

Second, Jesus is acknowledged as one who has "...made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father..." (Rev 21:5). The thought of living in a kingdom as priests may seem a little odd from a 21st-century lens, but consider just a few more verses of context, and it becomes a bit easier to appreciate the beauty of what is being said here.

The second to last chapter of Revelation begins with John seeing "...a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more." (Rev 21:1). This is the kingdom that John is talking about. In this new heaven and earth, "...the dwelling place of God is with man." (Rev 21:3)

As of right now, the earth in its imperfection cannot be the final dwelling place of God. Nonetheless, when this reality comes to pass, *"He [God] will wipe away every tear from their [our] eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."* (Rev 21:4)

What a relief! For those who keep the words of this prophecy, the future is promised to be free of pain, mourning, and even death. Given the abundance of suffering on earth, it's difficult for me to even imagine how good such a world would be. Nonetheless, when this comes about, life will finally be what it was meant to be from the beginning. We will once again dwell with the God who lovingly created each one of us. Until then, those who hear the words of this prophecy will groan along with all of the created world in eager anticipation of this future.

When Jesus appears to John in Chapter 1 in all his glory, there is a sense of fear, and John "...fell at his [Jesus'] feet as though dead." (Rev 1:17) However, Jesus' intention is not to surprise; Jesus is showing who he truly

is. Approaching John, Jesus comforts him saying "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades." (Rev 1:17-18).

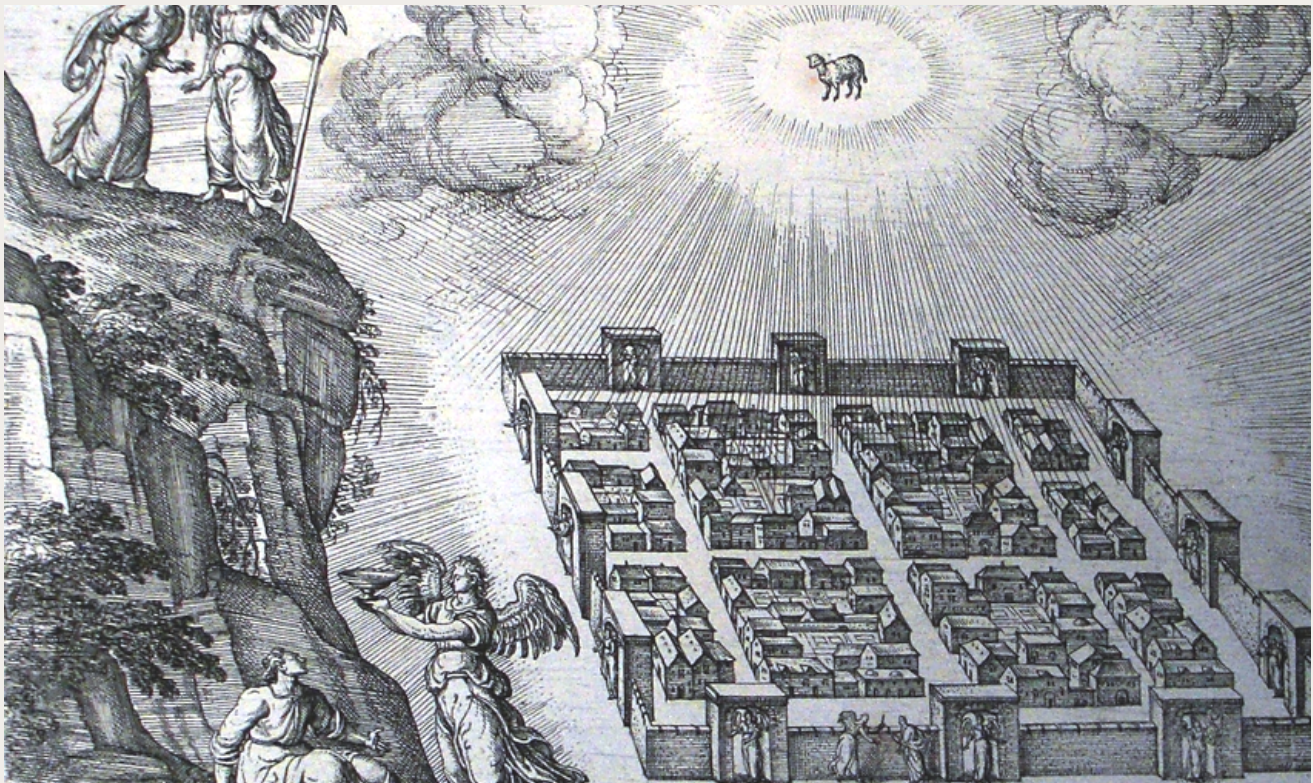
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For those who keep the words of this prophecy, the future is promised to be free of pain, mourning, and even death.

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This is encouraging for all readers. Knowing death itself has been conquered by Jesus opens us up to living life unafraid of death. Developing a relationship with Jesus is how we can most fully enjoy being human while we are still on the earth. In the Gospel of John, Jesus says that while "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." (John 10:10)

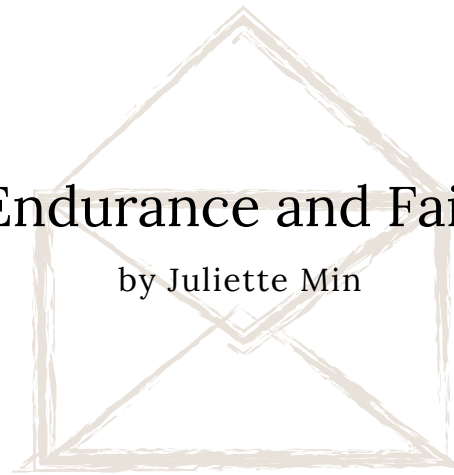
Consequently, while God still calls us to love the world as Jesus did while he was alive - let us earnestly look forward to the day when all of earth, humanity, and nature, will be redeemed. At that time, Revelation tells us that all things will be made new by God. But, until then, may we be among those who read aloud, hear, and keep the words of this prophecy!



Petrus van der Borcht

# A Call for the Endurance and Faith of the Saints

by Juliette Min



Dear future students of the Joseph and Alice McKeen Study Center,

Where all dwell, everyone is charged to make a choice to be on the winning or losing side. Yet where you dwell, the choice of following Christ will be met with even more toil, persecution, rejection, and struggle.

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Rob, our study center leader, once told me about the time he interviewed with the New York Times and was asked the question - "Is Bowdoin following culture or making culture?" This seems like a simple question, and one who spends a sufficient amount of time at Bowdoin would easily be able to say, "both." But the nature of this question hints at a deeper observation that Bowdoin is both the originator and propagator of alluring moral viewpoints in our communities. Contemplating this truth can help us frame the way we as Christians can and should engage with the changing moral backgrounds of the college.

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Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.

When I contemplate the new and emerging secular social gospels that claim to bring freedom and justice to the marginalized and oppressed – gospels that Bowdoin prides itself in championing – I am cautious, primarily because they are *new*, as in their foundation is not in the Gospel of Jesus Christ that we have first heard. I recall John 1 whenever I engage with these new ideologies. The First Letter of John was addressed to a group of churches in which false prophets preached a gospel contrary to the one they first received, causing division in the orthodox church.

John writes,

*Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of*

*us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.*

*But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge. I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth. Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son.*

*Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that he made to us— eternal life.* (1 John 2:18-22,24-25)

These verses have always been so striking to me because they emphasize that the Gospel of Jesus, the risen Christ is enough. This means that throughout the passage of time, the Gospel will continue to be enough to address and be the solution to all events and occurrences under the sun. And in our context as students of an American liberal arts college in the 21st century, it means that the Gospel provides us with enough language and the means to reckon with and combat the injustices of our society – oppression, racism, poverty, slavery. The Gospel has always given us the language, understanding, and *charge* to do justice (Micah 6:8).

The Church has one Advisor and Consultant. The person who walks among the lampstands (i.e. the churches) in the Book of Revelation is not the government, an educational institution like Bowdoin College, or an institution of history and culture, but is Jesus Christ. All ideas, practices, and dispositions are filtered through this one person, who is the Standard and the Judge by which all things are measured.

As Jesus walks among the lampstands he commends and reproves us, giving guidance to those who are willing to listen. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches (Revelation 2:17).



The Book of Revelation is one of the means God gives to us to better discern what new and emerging ideas point us towards God and which ones drive us further away under the disguise of good. In particular, I look to the image of the First Beast in Revelation 13.

In Revelation 13, a beast appears out of the sea, which is a place identified with evil, chaos, and a resistance towards God. This beast is granted authority, power, and a throne by the dragon – it represents a world leader empowered and supported by Satan.

This beast sports a mortal wound which is then healed, a similar image to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This marvels the whole earth, who worships the beast, saying, “Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?” When the beast is given a mouth, it pounces at the opportunity to utter haughty and blasphemous words, tainting God’s name and those who dwell in heaven (Revelation 13).

This image reflects an essential character of evil, which is to parody God in order to appear praiseworthy. While the beast is a character in the revelation for the end times, this characterization of evil that is present in the beast has always existed and can be seen as early as the story of Adam and Eve. We see how the serpent in Eden coaxes Eve by making disobedience appear like a good choice, for at the moment of decision, Eve sees that “*the tree was good for food, and it was a delight to the eyes, and [the] tree was to be desired to make one wise*” (Genesis 3:6).

Evil can disguise itself so well that if not careful to test and discern all that is around us, we may easily be one of many who not only mistake evil for Good, but we will also support the blaspheming of God’s name by those whom evil has delegated authority to.

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This image reflects an essential character of evil, which is to parody God in order to appear praiseworthy.

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Another essence of evil is that it willingly makes itself clear that it is not of God or the Church. For John writes in the First Letter to the churches, “they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us” (1 John 2:19). The beast in the story above blasphemes against the Lord the moment it receives a mouth to speak.

Thus, be careful to test and discern the ideas that you encounter throughout your life – as a student at Bowdoin, as a citizen, but more importantly, as an image bearer of Christ in a fallen world. You need only to look for those that seek to imitate the work of Jesus

in freeing the enslaved, caring for the poor and marginalized, and doing justice while leaving Christ out of the picture – performing a parody of the character of our Lord Jesus – or speaking blasphemies against the Lord when given the platform. God certainly calls the Church to understand the language of culture, to “*be all things to all people*” (1 Cor. 9), but that should never be at the expense of the Gospel. The Church is not given license to assimilate to the values of the world while losing its distinct identity as followers of Christ who speak the truth as “salt and light” in the world (Matt. 5:13-16). Instead, we are called to be a community that is rooted in the truth of the Gospel, testifying to the reality of the perfect love, freedom, and satisfaction that is found only through faith in Jesus Christ. This itself is not an easy task. But not only do we have to test and discern all things, but we also have to love and witness well in this space, a world plunged in a spiritual battle where the means, with or without Jesus, to achieving common ends (e.g. human flourishing) compete.

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The Christian life does not entail an absolute freedom to abdicate our responsibility to witness in difficult spaces.

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We live in a culture that sees freedom as a proxy for human flourishing, and historically, freedom in the face of oppression has been a great means through which justice and flourishing are brought about. However, we must remember that this freedom was never meant to be absolute. Even in Eden, God defined prohibitions in addition to Adam and Eve’s privileges so as to preserve the flourishing of mankind.

*The Christian life does not entail an absolute freedom to abdicate our responsibility to witness in difficult spaces. Freedom of true human flourishing is liberation from enslavement to sin into complete surrender to the authority and command of God. Bowdoin College is a difficult space to witness, but Jesus who walks among the lampstands in tribulating situations commands them to hold fast His name and keep His word, for those who endure faithfully will be given the crown of life (Revelation 2-3). In this delineated box, however it is shaped and filled, we operate. Within this box we must witness and give our testimony.*

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During our four years at Bowdoin College, this looks like holding fast to Jesus' name and not denying our faith in Him amidst a campus community that not only rejects Him, but also appears to be the first of earthly rulers who take counsel against the Lord and against his Anointed, plotting in vain (Psalm 2). In this space, we are called to toe the line between meaningfully engaging with our peers in love and learning how to walk away when the pressure to conform is too great (Acts 19:9).

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Be vigilant – but do not live in fear. We witness and live from a place of victory, for Christ has already inaugurated the beginning of His Kingdom on the cross, and has written the fulfillment of His Kingdom into a coming reality.

“Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

“It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end” (Revelation 21).

To the one who conquers, God will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God (Revelation 2:7). Life in the full, a relationship fully restored to our Father is our reward, and we only need to remain faithful (John 10:10).

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Finally, do not lose your love. It is a curious thing that John, in his first letter to the churches, writes successively in the same chapter to not only “test the spirits to see whether they are from God,” but also “love one another, for love comes from God” (1 John 4). It is important to be vigilant, but our vigilance must not be so large that it sows seeds of anger and judgement in our hearts. We must be critical enough to test falsehood while not losing our love (Revelation 2:4). For Jesus says to us, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:44-45). God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. Let

us love, because He first loved us (1 John 4).

Where all dwell, all are charged to make a choice to be on the winning or losing side. Yet where you dwell, the choice of following Christ will be met with even more toil, persecution, rejection, and struggle. In this space, the love of Christ that dwells in and pours forth from us gives us confidence – not only in the midst of trials, hardship, and suffering, but also on the day of judgement – that we will be recognized as His own, as a lampstand that has testified faithfully until its appointed course is complete (Revelation 11).



# JOIN OUR STUDY

WEDNESDAYS  
5:15-7PM

Every year, students at the JAMS meet weekly at this time to study one book of the Bible. In the academic year 2021-2022, we will be studying the Gospel of John. Join us at the Joseph and Alice McKeen Study Center or email [cmine@bowdoin.edu](mailto:cmine@bowdoin.edu) for more questions!

THURSDAYS  
8PM-9:30PM (TBD)

To further reflect on our Wednesday studies and encourage one another, students of the JAMS meet on Thursday nights to fellowship and pray for one another. Please email [jlin2@bowdoin.edu](mailto:jlin2@bowdoin.edu) or [ebyishime@bowdoin.edu](mailto:ebyishime@bowdoin.edu) for more details!

WANT TO WRITE  
FOR THE  
AGATHOS?

All of the written pieces in the Agathos are reflections of one year of Wednesday Bible Studies under the guidance of Rob and Sim Gregory in one book of the Bible. We find that transcribing the ideas and lessons we have learned onto written pages gives us space to better understand what we believe and witness to those near to us. The Agathos Journal also serves as a piece of history for following students of the JAMS about the experiences and thoughts of Christian students at Bowdoin in previous years. If you would like to be a part of this process, we invite you to join us at our study or email [cmine@bowdoin.edu](mailto:cmine@bowdoin.edu)!

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The Joseph and Alice McKeen Christian Study Center  
[agathos.bowdoin@gmail.com](mailto:agathos.bowdoin@gmail.com)  
[www.mckeenchristianstudycenter.org](http://www.mckeenchristianstudycenter.org)

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**whatever is good.**

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