

Could the Author of Revelation step forward, please?

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Abstract

The article explores the issue of Revelation's authorship and the impact it has on the interpretation of the document, particularly some of its most crucial places. The Revelation literature on the topic is reviewed and all the avenues so far advanced to solve the riddle are discussed at length in the light of the evidence available. In this context, the standard arguments against John the Apostle as an authorial option are pondered. As a result of his quest, the author of the article proposes to leave the door open to further research on the topic without rejecting the viability of an Apostolic origin of the Apocalypse.

Keywords

Revelation's autor – Authorship and interpretation – Papias – John the Elder – Johannine school – John the Apostle – Johannine corpus

Resumen

El artículo explora el problema de la autoría del libro de Apocalipsis y el impacto que tiene en la interpretación del documento, particularmente en algunos de sus lugares más cruciales. Se revisa la literatura sobre el tema y se analizan detalladamente todas las posibles soluciones a la luz de la evidencia disponible. En este contexto, se evalúan los argumentos usados comúnmente para rechazar la autoría del apóstol Juan. Como resultado, se propone dejar la puerta abierta a investigaciones más profundas sobre el tema, sin rechazar la viabilidad de un origen apostólico del Apocalipsis.

Palabras clave

Autor del Apocalipsis – Autoría e interpretación – Papias – Juan el Anciano – Escuela Juanina – Juan el Apóstol – Corpus Juanino

Introduction

The issue of the authorship of the book of Revelation is, among some erudites, still open to debate, with the balance of the opinion against John the Apostle for a number of reasons. In the discussion on the authorship of Revelation, I shall present the reasons why some reject the authorship of John the Apostle and then present alternatives.

Why not John the Apostle

One of the reasons for not accepting the apostle John as author of the book is that he does not claim to have seen Jesus during his earthly ministry and makes no reference to his teaching, miracles or other actions.¹ However, it has also been noted that references to Christ would be natural, even indispensable, in a gospel, like that of John, but not necessarily in an apocalypse. Different genres and contents reflect different circumstances and purposes.² Furthermore, the objection is based on the silence of the source rather than on solid evidence.³

Against the apostle as the author of Revelation it has also been noted that when he refers to the twelve in 21,14, he does not suggest that he himself was one of them.⁴ This argument, again, is based on the silence.⁵ One should point out that the author of the fourth gospel and the three epistles attributed to John is also consistently reluctant to identify himself as one of the twelve.⁶ Moreover, as some have also argued, perhaps John the revelator does not call himself “apostle” because he wrote the book in the capacity of “seer”.⁷

It is true, as some have pointed to, that Revelation does not link itself with John the Apostle.⁸ But should it, had the author been known as such by his audience? On the other hand, the same argument could also be

¹ Craig R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 48; M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation*, IBC (Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1989), 34; Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, rev. ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 12.

²Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 13; Otto Böcher, “Johanneisches in der Apocalypse des Johannes”, *New Testament Studies*, 27 (1981), 310-321; quoted in Jon Paulien, *Decoding Revelation's Trumpets: Literary Allusions and the Interpretation of Revelation 8:7-12*, AUSDDS 11 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1987), 41; Siegbert W. Becker, *Revelation: The Distant Triumph Song* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern, 1985), 10.

³E.g., Gerhard Krodel, *Revelation*, ACNT (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1989), 62.

⁴Koester, *End of All Things*, 48; Boring, *Revelation*, 34; Ben Witherington III, *Revelation*, NCBC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 3; Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1984), 27. Alan J. P. Garrow's proposal to solve this is that 21,14 is a later non apostolic addition by an editor who was not, unlike the author, an apostle (*Revelation, New Testament Readings Series* [New York, NY: Routledge, 1997], 59).

⁵Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 12; Krodel, *Revelation*, 62.

⁶See Jon Paulien, *John* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1995), 21; Witherington, *Revelation*, 3.

⁷William Hendriksen, *More than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), 12.

⁸Koester, *End of All Things*, 48.

raised against the Johannine origin of the fourth gospel and the three epistles, which do not incontestably link themselves with the apostle John.

From a different angle, since one of the problems of the churches was that of false prophets and self-appointed apostles (e.g., Rev 2,2), perhaps these designations were already too devaluated to convey any special authority, even coming from a true apostle.⁹ Perhaps John thought a better way to assert his authority was by demonstrating to his public that his prophetic message derived its authority from the same Source who inspired the Scriptures, particularly the OT prophets who addressed a situation of ancient Israel so closely linked with the one faced in Asia. Since the OT was authoritative “Scripture” for his readers, John profusely alludes to it so that his message will be recognized and accepted as originated in God.

For others, since the author of the book does not provide any clue on his identity other than the common name John, this should be taken as an evidence of a non-apostolic authorship, an objection, however, already answered by some in the following terms:

The very fact that he merely calls himself *John* indicates that he was very well known, not only in one particular locality, but throughout the churches of Asia...there was only one John who did not need to add “the apostle,” for the very reason that he was known as such.¹⁰

The authority of John the Seer in the churches of Asia Minor was so great, his relationship with them so well established, [that] it is unlikely that another Christian leader of that name lived in Ephesus at the same time.¹¹

Thus, the authoritative tone¹² of the Apocalypse requires not only a familiarity between its author and his readers, but implies also a very high

⁹From a linguistic perspective, the title “prophet” (“one who speaks as God’s spokesperson”) is far more authoritative in the context of Revelation than “apostle” (“one sent”), as Rev 2,20 suggests.

¹⁰ Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, 11, 12. See also William M. Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1963), 75, 79, 80, 81; Hanns Lilje, *The Last Book of the Bible: The Meaning of the Revelation of St. John*, 4th ed. (Philadelphia, PA: Muhlenberg, 1955), 34; Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting* (Sheffield, England: JSOT, 1986), 30; Janice E. Leonard, *Come Out of Her, My People: A Study of the Revelation to John* (Chicago, IL: Laudemont Press, 1991), 18.

¹¹ George R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, NCBC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 33, 34.

¹² Cf. Acts 4,13 on John’s and Peter’s *παρορησία* before the Jewish authorities who were prohibiting them to witness for Jesus.

rank in the earliest Christian army, one only a person very close to the top would have enjoyed, the kind an eyewitness of the Lamb, a chosen apostle could perhaps only afford. Only the prophetic authority of a cofounder, so to say, of Christianity would back up a rebuke like that of the Apocalypse among gentile converts as those of Asia, already familiarized with the Hebrew Bible through the LXX.¹³

Perhaps the most serious objection raised against John the Apostle as the author of Revelation has to do with the differences in grammar, style and general tone between this book and the Gospel,¹⁴ noticed as early as the third century A.D. by Dionysus, bishop of Alexandria, according to Eusebius of Caesarea. Among these differences is the absence in Revelation of wordings common in the Gospel, such as the attracted relative pronoun, the genitive absolute, the negative μή with the participle, and the narrative use of οὖν.¹⁵

Several explanations have been advanced to account for such perceived differences. Among them, John could have counted with literary assistants when he wrote his gospel at Ephesus, while that help would not have been available when he penned the Apocalypse in Patmos.¹⁶ Also, since the author was no doubt from a Jewish background, he could have been thinking in a Semitic language while writing in Greek since his Greek reflects Aramaic grammar and syntax.¹⁷ In that respect, some go so far as to say that the book was originally written in Palestinian Aramaic or

¹³ See Frederick C. Grant, *An Introduction to New Testament Thought* (New York, NY: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1950), 84, 85.

¹⁴ Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 7.25; Hendriksen, *More than Conquerors*, 11; Boring, *Revelation*, 34; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1985), 85ff; Leonard L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1990), 12; Witherington, *Revelation*, 3; Charles H. Talbert, *The Apocalypse: A Reading of the Revelation of John* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 2.

¹⁵ Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, 35.

¹⁶ Albertus Pieters, *The Lamb, the Woman, and the Dragon. An Exposition of the Revelation of St. John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1937), 18 ff, quoted in Hendriksen, *More than Conquerors*, 12; A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 6 vols. (New York, NY: Harper, 1930-1933), 6:274. See also Herschel H. Hobbs, *The Cosmic Drama* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1971), 13; Becker, *Revelation*, 10.

¹⁷ Harold H. Rowley in a private communication with Beasley-Murray (*Revelation*, 35). See also Hobbs, *Cosmic Drama*, 13. On the other hand, Swete has noticed a series of uncommon grammatical and stylistic uses exclusively shared by the fourth gospel and Revelation, such as the partitive ἐκ with its dependent noun or pronoun as the object or subject of the verb; the preposition μετά after the verbs λαλεῖν and περιπατεῖν, and ἐκ after the verbs ζῶζειν and τηρεῖν, and the particle ἵνα in an unusual sense (*The Apocalypse*, cxxviii).

Mishnaic Hebrew, and later translated into Greek by a disciple of John,¹⁸ an option challenged, however, by others on linguistic grounds.¹⁹ Furthermore, linguistic and stylistic differences between John's gospel and the Apocalypse have also been explained as more a matter of genre than of theology.²⁰

Others allege that the differences in style and language between the Apocalypse and the Gospel should not be exaggerated in view of the comparatively more numerous and striking resemblances and similarities,²¹ even in peculiar grammatical constructions and in characteristic expressions.²² To this should be added some shared literary features: a

¹⁸ Charles C. Torrey, *Documents of the Primitive Church* (New York, NY: Harper, 1941), 158; Greg H. R. Horsley et al. eds., *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity*, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981), 5:5-35.

¹⁹ Steven Thompson, *The Apocalypse and Semitic Syntax* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 1, 2. See a brief, but illuminating discussion on this in Donald A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 471.

²⁰ Otto Böcher, "Johanneisches in der Apocalypse des Johannes," *New Testament Studies* 27 (1981), 310-321; Richard C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Revelation* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1963), 7-10; Hendriksen, *More than Conquerors*, 12; Vern S. Poythress, *The Returning King: A Guide to the Book of Revelation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P. & R. Publishing, 2000, 50; Becker, *Revelation*, 10.

²¹ After a thorough comparison between the vocabulary of the fourth Gospel and that of Revelation, Swete concludes that: "The balance of the evidence is perhaps in favor of some such relationship between the two writings. This probability is increased when we compare them from the point of view of their grammatical tendencies. There is a considerable number of unusual constructions common to the two books...The bearing of this evidence on the question of authorship . . . creates a strong presumption of affinity between the Fourth Gospel and the Apocalypse in spite of their great diversity both in language and in thought" (*The Apocalypse*, cxxviii, cxxx).

²² E.g., cf. John 3,36 with Rev 22,17; John 6,63 with Rev 11,11; John 10,18 with Rev 2,27; John 20,12 with Rev 3,4; John 1,1 with Rev 19,13; John 1,29 with Rev 5,6. On this, see Hendriksen, *More than Conquerors*, 12; Hendriksen notes the similarities between the Gospel, the Johannine epistles and the Apocalypse in Johann P. Lange et al., *The Revelation of John, A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures* (New York, NY: Scribner, Armstrong & Co., 1874), 10:56 ff, quoted in Hendriksen, *More than Conquerors*, 12. On the words and expressions only found in Revelation and in the Johannine corpus see Swete, *Apocalypse*, cxxvi-cxxx, cxxi, cxxvii; Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, 34; Matthias Rissi, *Time and History: A Study on the Revelation* (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1966), 64 note 43; Leonard, *Come Out*, 18. Another distinctive trait shared by John's gospel and Revelation is polysemy or the use of semantically ambivalent terms to convey several complementary ideas at the same time. On this, see James L. Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 230, 231; Sweet, *Revelation*, 1; Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, N'IT (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 27, 55-58; Witherington, *Revelation*, 29; Kenneth A. Strand, "The 'Spotlight-On-Last-Events' Sections in the Book of Revelation," *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, 27 (1989): 220-221; Merrill C. Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1967), 28, 29; Paulien, *John*, 65. On some shared thematic emphases and special meanings given to certain words, see William H. Shea, "The Covenantal Form of the Letters to the Seven Churches," *Andrews University*

marked use of irony or satire,²³ duo-directionality,²⁴ staircase parallelism,²⁵ the reversal of images and concepts,²⁶ a growing complexity on a deeper

Seminary Studies 21 (1983): 73, 76; Boring, *Revelation*, 95; Paulien, *John*, 94, 95; Swete, *Apocalypse*, cxxviii; Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 34, 127, 128; Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 14, 15; Sweet, *Revelation*, 40-42; Corsini, *The Apocalypse*, 60. On some characteristic words and phrases in common, see Swete, *Apocalypse*, cxxviii; Witherington, *Revelation*, 2, 3, 32; Rissi, *Time*, 168. On the shared concept of the antichrist as not only a human, but also a supernatural entity impersonating Christ in the Gospel (e.g., 5,43), the epistles (e.g., 1 John 4,1-3) and Revelation (e.g., 13,11 ff) see Rissi, *Time*, 66, note 83, 69. This is contrary to Witherington, for whom even though some distinctively Christological words, such as λόγος, are used both in Revelation and in John's Gospel, there are differences in usage. "In the Gospel (John 1), the word is used in the context of creation and redemption, while in Revelation, in the context of judgments (19,13). Here the Word, as in Wisdom of Solomon, is involved in judgment" (*Revelation*, 32). See, on the contrary, John 12,44-48; 5,24, where the λόγοι of the λόγος shall judge the world in that they will make manifest the verdict pronounced by each human being in response to the person and the message of the λόγος about himself, his nature and mission (on this see also Witherington, *Revelation*, 2, 3). On the λόγος as creator of everything in Revelation, see Rev 14,7b. On the peculiar use of the verb πλανῶ as related to the worship of the false gods in the Johannine literature see Robert Louis Thomas, *Revelation 8-22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1995), 176; on the phrase ποιῆν ἑμεῖα as distinctively Johannine in the Gospel and Rev 13, see also p. 175.

On the differences and the similarities between Revelation and the rest of the NT literature traditionally attributed to John, Witherington concludes that the person who produced the *final* form of Revelation did not also produce the *final* form of the Gospel of John or the Johannine epistles (*Revelation*, 3), something that still leaves the door open to John the apostle as the possible originator of the whole. In fact, we do not even know the "final form" of either document. All we have are copies of copies, no one knows how distant in time from the autograph.

In sum, the differences among the three documents would mean something in regard to the authorship if we had the autographs. As it is, they can only suggest different amanuensis, copyists, and/or translators, in case the autograph of one or of all three documents were written in a language other than Greek. On Palestinian Aramaic or Mishnaic Hebrew, as such a language, see Torrey, *Documents of the Primitive Church*, 158, quoted in Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 35; Horsley, *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity*, 5:5-35, quoted in Witherington, *Revelation*, 3; Charles C. Torrey, *The Apocalypse of John* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1958), 13-58.

²³ Paulien, *John*, 222, 223; Koester, *End of All Things*, 131; Roland J. Falley, *Apocalypse Then and Now: A Companion to the Book of Revelation* (New York, NY: Paulist, 1999), 116, 117.

²⁴ On duo-directionality in the fourth Gospel, see Paulien, *John*, 172. On the same device in Revelation, see Jon Paulien, *The Deep Things of God: An Insider's Guide to the Book of Revelation* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2004), 115-119; Krodell, *Revelation*, 58, 59; David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, WBC 52a (Dallas: Word Books, 1997), c; cf. also Witherington, who terms this device "the overlap or chain link construction of transitional material" (*Revelation*, 17).

²⁵ On the staircase parallelism in John's gospel see Paulien, *John*, 37, 43, 44. On the same resource in Revelation see Witherington, *Revelation*, 17; Swete, *Apocalypse*, cxxix.

²⁶ On this rhetorical resource in the Fourth Gospel, see Paulien, *John*, 88, 89. The same device is clear in Rev as 11,8,12 and 17,18.

literary and structural level,²⁷ structural “sevenfoldness,”²⁸ and what Sweet calls “a texture of cross-references and allusions which is not accidental.”²⁹

Others, while still open to the possibility of a Johannine authorship of Revelation, have pointed to the fact that one should not expect to find the same style in a history of events (the Gospel), a personal letter (the Johannine epistles), and a prophetic unveiling as the Apocalypse, since all of them represent different genres.³⁰

Finally, in the words of Hendriksen: “The transcendent nature of the subject-matter, the deeply emotional state of the author when he received and wrote the visions, and his abundant use of the Old Testament” could be responsible to a large extent for the differences in style.³¹

An objection out forth is the alleged doctrinal differences between the last book of the Bible and the fourth Gospel, something that would seem to point to different authors for the Gospel and Revelation.³² In response, it has also been stated that the two documents exhibit remarkable doctrinal agreement in their Christology, soteriology, and eschatology.³³

Still against John the Apostle as the author of the book, it has been said that some fathers of the Greek church, such as Dionysius of Alexandria and Eusebius of Caesarea, ascribed the Apocalypse to “another John” quoting an alleged tradition on two Johns buried at Ephesus, one of them

²⁷ Paulien, *John*, 17, 18. On this same feature of Revelation, Spilsbury comments: “Revelation . . . [is] not a straightforward story [in prose]. In many ways it is more like a poem, with its many figures of speech, literary images and metaphors. So we have to make a special effort to understand what we are reading. *More is going on that appears on the surface*” (Paul, Spilsbury, *The Throne, the Lamb and the Dragon* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002], 29; emphasis supplied).

²⁸ Swete, *Apocalypse*, cxxxvi; Leonard, *Come Out*, 30, 31.

²⁹ Sweet, *Revelation*, 13. Endor M. Rakoto also points to Revelation’s hypostatic voice recalling John 1, where Christ is the Word incarnate, and also where the Baptist identifies himself with the voice in the wilderness of Isa 40 (“Unity of the Letters and Visions in the Revelation of John” [ThD dissertation, Lutheran School of Theology, Chicago, 1991], 221).

³⁰ Hendriksen, *More than Conquerors*, 12; Poythress, *Returning King*, 50; Böcher, “Johannisches in der Apocalypse des Johannes,” 310-321; Lenski, *Revelation*, 7-10.

³¹ Hendriksen, *More than Conquerors*, 13.

³² Willibald Beyschlag, *New Testament Theology: or Historical Account of the Teaching of Jesus and of Primitive Christianity according to the New Testament Sources* (Edinburgh, UK: T. & T. Clark, 1895), II:362, quoted in disagreement in Hendriksen, *More than Conquerors*, 11.

³³ Hermann Gebhardt, *The Doctrine of the Apocalypse and its Relation to the Doctrine of the Gospel and the Epistles of John* (Edinburgh, UK: T. & T. Clark, 1878), especially 304 and following pages, quoted in Hendriksen, *More than Conquerors*, 13; George B. Stevens, *The Theology of the New Testament* (New York, NY: Scribner, 1899), 536, 547, quoted in Hendriksen, *More than Conquerors*, 13.

the apostle and author of the Gospel, the other probably the seer. In regard to this, some have pointed out that the evidence of two tombs, of two different Johns is tenuous.³⁴ Furthermore, this view would rest upon a misreading of a statement of Papias of Hierapolis (II A.D.) by the later Eusebius in his *Historia Ecclesiastica*,³⁵ which seems to reflect some fourth-century Eastern opposition to the chiliastic views of Montanism, which sought to base its assertions on John's Apocalypse.³⁶ Moreover, the early church was almost unanimous in ascribing the Apocalypse to the apostle John. Such authors include Justin (*circa* A.D. 140); Irenaeus (*circa* A.D. 180), disciple of John's disciple Polycarp of Smyrna; the Muratorian Canon (around A.D. 170); Clement of Alexandria (*circa* A.D. 200); Tertullian of Carthage (*circa* A.D. 200); Origen of Alexandria (*circa* A.D. 223); and Hippolytus (*circa* A.D. 240).³⁷

Furthermore, the minds reflected in the Gospel and in Revelation would require that two different authors be well-acquainted with each other, in view of the several and meaningful points of contact and similarities. Thus, either one author was the other's disciple (the hypothesis of the two Johns) or both were disciples of a common master deceased some time before the two books were written, perhaps John the Apostle.³⁸

³⁴ Beasley-Murray, *The book of Revelation*, 33.

³⁵ Becker, *Revelation*, 8-11.

³⁶ Hendriksen, *More than Conquerors*, 11, 13; Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 33. The quotation is discussed at length in Lenski, *Revelation*, 8; see also Becker, *Revelation*, 8-11. In the quotation, Papias never says that the Apocalypse was written by a John different from the apostle. That is the artificial interpretation Eusebius made of his words two centuries later. On the anti-chiliastic polemic behind Dionysius's stand on the non-apostolic origin of Revelation, Krodel says: "The chief reason for Dionysius's antipathy against Revelation lay in the realistic eschatology of the book... The spiritualized Origenists preferred an individualistic eschatology of souls with Christ in heaven, and they rejected the expectation of Christ's reign on a new earth free from sin, death, and the devil" (*Revelation*, 24). On this, Sweet comments: "Alexandrian Christians rejected it [the Apocalypse] not primarily on literary grounds, but because of the crudely physical millennial expectations which their contemporaries [the Montanists] drew from it; it [its rejection] was part of their overall rejection of apocalyptic Christianity" (*Revelation*, 47). Witherington adds: "John was indeed a millenarian prophet, which is one of the reasons folks such as Eusebius had such an allergic reaction to Revelation. They had grown weary of 'the chiliasts', as Eusebius calls them" (*Revelation*, 20, note 59). According to Irena Backus, "Revelation was held in great esteem among the millenarian ante-Nicene fathers, for whom John the apostle was the author. But later on, when millenarianism began to lose hold in the Eastern church, particularly at Alexandria, Revelation's respectability began to be challenged" (*Reformation Readings of the Apocalypse* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000], xii). See also Garrow, *Revelation*, 54.

³⁷ Hendriksen, *More than Conquerors*, 13; Poythress, *Returning King*, 49.

³⁸ Beasley-Murray, *The book of Revelation*, 36. A noticeable example of this reluctance to admit the possibility that John the apostle could have written the book is Tenney, for whom the author was instead one of Jesus' earliest disciples from the Aramaic speaking Palestine

However, this poses a problem in the light of the authority the author of Revelation had in the churches of Asia he addressed. In view of that, could he have been only a disciple of John the apostle?³⁹ It seems unlikely.

Many scholars see John as an early second century Christian convert from Judaism, perhaps even a disciple of the apostle,⁴⁰ or part of a Johannine school circle, or community, giving expression to the son of Zebedee.⁴¹ However, this option faces several problems, not the least of them the absolute silence of the early fathers on the existence of such a school/circle/community,⁴² together with the lack of any other known literary production by them.⁴³ Moreover, it seems rather unlikely that any second-century Christian—most of them no longer rooted in Judaism, but converts of paganism—would have exhibited such a radical anti-syncretic stand in such an increasingly syncretistic time of church history as was the early second century postapostolic period.⁴⁴

(*Interpreting Revelation*, 15), which sounds as saying “not John the apostle, but someone identical to him in every respect.” Cf. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, lvi. On the hypothesis of “John the Elder” as the author of Revelation, Swete categorically concludes: “Perhaps no conjecture hazarded by an ancient writer [i.e., Eusebius] has been so widely adopted in modern times. A conjecture it still remains, for no fresh light has been thrown on the enigmatic figure of John the Elder” (*The Apocalypse*, clxxvi).

³⁹ Beasley-Murray, *The book of Revelation*, 36.

⁴⁰ Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation*, 15.

⁴¹ E.g., Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 258. He quotes, however, no convincing evidence of the existence of such groups within the first century Christianity and even recognizes the problem in the following terms: “References to prophets and prophecy in Revelation are both maddeningly general and intriguingly ambiguous. Only one prophet, Jezebel, is specifically mentioned . . . little is known of any of these Christian prophetic groups . . . the evidence is scanty and problematic . . .” (ibid., 259). See also Hans Lietzmann, *A History of the Early Church* (Cleveland, OH: World Publishing, 1961), 2:89; Witherington, *Revelation*, 32; Pierre Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 49, 50.

⁴² On the Johannine-School hypothesis, Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza concludes that it is: “the presupposition of historical critical inquiry and not its result” (“The Quest for the Johannine School: The Apocalypse and the Fourth Gospel,” *New Testament Studies*, 23 (1977): 409; Frederick D. Mazzaferri, *The Genre of the Book of Revelation from a Source-Critical Perspective* (New York, NY: Walter de Gruyter, 1989), 29, 32.

⁴³ For a thorough discussion of the issue see Ison T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John: Studies in Introduction with a Critical Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1967), 343-393.

⁴⁴ On the syncretism of the early postapostolic period due to the influence of the converts from paganism see, Edwin Hatch, *The Influence of Greek Ideas on Christianity* (New York, NY: Harper, 1957), 295 ff; Cumont, *Oriental Religions*, xvi, 202; Charles Bigg, *The Church's Task under the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905), 83, 84; Samuel Angus, *The Mystery-Religions and Christianity: A Study in the Religious Background of Early Christianity* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925), 275, 282, 283. On the same state of fluidity within rabbinic Judaism, see James H. Charlesworth, “Christians and Jews

Finally, some have invoked an early martyrdom for John the Apostle, between A.D. 64 and 70,⁴⁵ as the reason for his not penning the Apocalypse.⁴⁶ This hypothesis has not merited the attention of scholars due to the feeble evidence invoked in its favor.⁴⁷

An Anonymous John

“John, to the seven churches in the province of Asia” (Rev 1,4). That is how Revelation begins. For this reason pseudonymity has never been proposed as a possible answer to the question on the authorship of the book. Because there was no emblematic figure called John in the OT, and there was no NT as such yet, a pseudonymous author could not have invoked someone called John to recommend his message to his targeted audience.⁴⁸ Moreover, pseudonymous authorship was not an accepted practice, either in Jewish or in Christian circles in the first and second centuries A.D.⁴⁹

Anonymity, someone carelessly signing “*John Doe*,” is out of place here, given the nature and the tone of the document. Who would have taken seriously something suspicious of being a nobody’s flaming pamphlet? Also, who would have taken the time to write such a piece of artistry as Revelation, had there been the minimum chance of its not being heeded to

in the First Six Centuries,” in *Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism: A Parallel History of Their Origins and Early Development*, ed. Hershel Shanks (Washington, DC: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1992), 305-311.

⁴⁵ John’s death between about A.D. 67 and 70 would only mean a problem for the Domitianic dating of Revelation, but not necessarily for John the Apostle as its author.

⁴⁶ In the words of Robert H. Charles: “John the apostle was never in Asia Minor, and he died a martyr’s death between about A.D. 64 and 70” (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 2 vols., ICC [Edinburgh, UK: T. & T. Clark, 1920], 1:xliv-1).

⁴⁷ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 13.

⁴⁸ Sweet, *Revelation*, 37.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* Contrary to the prevalent opinion, neither anonymity nor pseudepigraphy seem to have been practices either current or uncritically accepted within the early church (see Craig A. Evans, *Noncanonical Writings and New Testament Interpretation* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1992], 152, 153; Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 3d ed. [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1970], 671-684). Evidence of this are texts such as 2 Thess 2,2; Gal 1,8 and Rev 22,18-19, together with the abundant apocryphal and pseudepigraphical Christian literature that flourished from the early 2d century on, but never managed to enter the NT canon. In this respect, the church from as early as the second half of the first century only accepted as inspired and authoritative the documents of proven apostolic origin or vinculation, such as Luke-Acts and Mark (see Witherington, *Revelation*, 2, 3). That the early church never seriously doubted the apostolic Johannine origin of Revelation strongly speaks in its favor.

at all? Furthermore, anonymity was not the standard epistolary procedure at the time,⁵⁰ and Revelation is intended to be, among other things, a letter.

So, who was this John? Can this by any means be settled? This question has been perceived by some from as early as the third century as one among many other hard to solve mysteries surrounding the book of Revelation. Perhaps the answer should be looked for within the document itself.⁵¹ And this brings us to another set of questions on its authorship. How does this John perceive himself? Who does he say he is?

John the Prophet

If there is something John is certain of, it is his prophetic call⁵² and, consequently, the divine provenance of his message.⁵³ John says he is a

⁵⁰ Sweet, *Revelation*, 37.

⁵¹ On a possible intertextual link between Revelation and the fourth Gospel, as well as a hint on the identity of the author of Revelation, see Rev 1,2; 3,14; John 1,1.14; 21,24; 1 John 1,1-4, where the object of John's μαρτυρία is Ἰησοῦς Χριστός as God's divine λόγος. Such a linguistic and thematic linkage would be further strengthened if the καί between τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ and τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ in Rev 1,2 would be explicative or appositional ("that is," "namely") rather than only conjunctive. This would make Rev 1,2 a parenthetical authorial marker pointing to John's gospel as its natural antecedent.

⁵² See Rev 1,1-3.11.19; 2,1.8.12.18; 3,1.7.14; 10,11; 14,13; 19,9.10; 22,6-10.18.19. In Rev 22,9, and unlike a number of scholars, I see no evidence that the author was or saw himself as part of a group of contemporary itinerant charismatic prophets. The most natural reading of the expression "your brothers the prophets" in a scenario of conflict over prophetic credentials seems to be John's validation of his own position and mission as a prophet in the lineage of his OT predecessors, both in the matter of moral behavior ("fornication" was one of the main issues at stake, while morality seems not to have been the strong point of "Jezebel," "Balaam" and the Nicolaitans) and of genuine prediction. The plural "prophets" in the book is most probably a reference to the OT prophets. See Rev 10,7, where the allusion is most probably to Daniel; see also 16,6 (cf. Matt 5,12); 18,24.20 (cf. Matt 23,37). On John including himself "in the vocation of the prophets of Israel," see Paul S. Minear, *I Saw a New Earth: An Introduction to the Visions of the Apocalypse* (Washington, DC, WA: Corpus Books, 1968), 233; cf. John Philip McMurdo Sweet, "Revelation," in John Barclay and John Sweet eds., *Early Christian Thought in its Jewish Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 162; Mazzaferri, *Genre of Revelation*, 56; Boring, *Revelation*, 23; Greg Carey, *Elusive Apocalypse: Reading Authority in the Revelation to John*, SABH 15 (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1999), 24; cf. Rev 1,1; 4,1. All of them seem to be in the same implied vein of Isa 41,22-26; 46,9.10; Deut 18,20-22. On the yearning for divine revelation and for the uncovering of the future as a paramount characteristic of the Hellenistic age, and on the satisfaction of such a longing as one of the main traits and appeals of the first century A.D. pagan religious milieu see Frederick C. Grant, *Roman Hellenism and the New Testament* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962), 51. On the false ecstatic prophetism in the Asian mystery religions as possibly behind the language and imagery of Rev 13,11 ff, see Paul Touilleux, *L'Apocalypse et les Cultes de Domitien et de Cybele* (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1935), 85, 86; Brooke Foss Westcott, and Fenton John Anthony Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek*, 2 vols. (New York, NY: Harper, 1882), 2:138. On the mystery-religions-referentiality probably

prophet in the OT likelihood,⁵⁴ in the broad sense of one who is supernaturally enabled by God to see the reality behind the appearances, the sovereign action of God in history, past, present and future, including prediction.⁵⁵

In fact, he did not see himself as merely a genuine prophet in the lineage of his OT colleagues and forerunners, but as the very heir of Daniel's cloak,⁵⁶ as the one explaining what Daniel's far in the future vision was all about (8,26; 12,4.9).⁵⁷ There was no doubt in his mind. The same angel who commanded Daniel "to seal up the vision" for it concerned "the

behind some of John's selected images and words, Ramsay comments: "The converted pagan readers for whom the Apocalypse was originally written were predisposed through their education and the whole spirit of the contemporary society to regard visual forms, beasts, human figures, composite monsters, objects of nature or articles of human manufacture, when mentioned in a work of this class, as symbols [cf. the σύνβολλα in the initiations in the mysteries] indicative of religious ideas. The predisposition to look at such things with a view to a meaning that lay underneath that was not confined to the strictly oriental (e.g., Semitic like the Jews) races; and the symbolism of the Apocalypse ought not to be regarded as all necessarily Jewish in origin" (*Letters*, 288, 289).

⁵³ See 1,1; 2,7.11.17.29; 3,6.13.22; 10,8-10; 17,7.8. Interestingly, Rev 13,1 is perhaps the place where such a prophetic self-consciousness is more evident and clearly noticed in the light of Dan 7.

⁵⁴ On this, Minear comments: "John's role of clarification [good from evil, false from genuine] puts him in the vocation of the prophets of Israel" (*I Saw a New Earth*, 233). This goes against those who see the expression "your brothers the prophets" in Rev 22,9 as an evidence of John's pertaining to a "prophetic itinerant community" in Asia (e.g., Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 258, 259).

⁵⁵ E.g., 1,19; 2,10; 4,1; 22,6. See Sweet, *Revelation*, 162. On the seven letters as noticeably reminiscent of the prophetic oracles of the OT, particularly the seven oracular messages of Amos 1-2 see Eduard Lohse, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, DNTD 11 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1960), 21, quoted in Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 22.

⁵⁶ On the canonic Daniel of the Hebrew Bible as an exilic, Babylonian sixth century B.C. document rather than a postexilic, Palestinian second century B.C. writing, see Gerhard F. Hasel, "The Book of Daniel and Matters of Language: Evidences Relating to Names, Words, and the Aramaic Language," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 19 (1981): 211-225; "Establishing a Date for the Book of Daniel," 2:84-144; Arthur J. Ferch, "Authorship, Theology, and Purpose of Daniel," in *Symposium on Daniel: Introductory and Exegetical Studies*, edited by Frank B. Holbrook, 3-21 (Washington, DC, WA: Biblical Research Institute, 1986); Arthur J. Ferch, "Daniel and the Maccabean Thesis," *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, 21 (1983): 129-138; Wick Broomall, *Biblical Criticism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1957), 252-277.

⁵⁷ Gregory K. Beale, *John's Use of the Old Testament in Revelation*, JSNTSup 166 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 115; cf. Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Apocalypse*, NTM 22 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1990), 90. Some have seen a further evidence of this in the reversed order in which John presents the four great empires relevant to God's people's *heilsgeschichte*. While the Roman ten-horned beast is the last emerging from the sea in Daniel 7, the Roman component in John's composite sea beast is closest in time to him and then mentioned first (Philip Mauro, *The Patmos Visions* [Boston, MA: Scripture Truth Depot, 1925], 396, 397).

distant future” (Dan 8,26), “the time of the end” (Dan 12,4.9) was now telling John *not* to seal up the words of the prophecy, “because the time is near” (Rev 22,10). What Daniel longed so much to know (“what after these things?” [מָה אַחֲרַיִת אֵלֶּה]; 12,8b), was now revealed to John: “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this” (Rev 4,1).⁵⁸

Being part of the long and venerable OT prophetic tradition would be a far more pressing argument against the Jezebel-Balaam-Nicolaitan band than being one among other contemporary, itinerant, self-perceived prophets, no matter how genuine. But conviction is not all one needs to be a genuine prophet. The Thyatiran “Jezebel” also regarded herself as a genuine prophetess (2,20), as it surely did the “Balaamites” in Pergamum (2,14), as well the “Nicolaitans” (2,6.14).

Being conscious of the conflict about his person, it is strange that John, if he was in fact the beloved disciple, the son of Zebedee, did not show his apostolic credentials. Some think it was not necessary since his audience knew very well who he was.⁵⁹ If that was the case, a genuine Christian, OT fashioned prophet would have probably been thinking of the actual fulfillment of the predictions,⁶⁰ as well as his character and behavior as the acid tests of true prophecy.⁶¹

In favor of John as prophet and beloved disciple of Christ are the sharing of distinctive themes, motifs, words, and emphasis not witnessed elsewhere in the NT, the “boanergetic” psychological profile of the apocalyptic writer,⁶² and the early patristic consensus, etc. Even some

⁵⁸ On the eschatological consciousness of John in the light of his use of the technical phrase “the time is near” in Rev 22,10, in comparison to its negative use by Jesus in the synoptic apocalypse (Mar 13 and parallels), see Jon Paulien, “Introduction and Overview,” in *Revelation*, The Bible Explorer Audio-Cassette Series (Harrisburg, PA: Ambassador Group, 1996), cassette 1, part 1.

⁵⁹ Leonard, *Come Out*, 18; Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 12; Lilje, *Last Book*, 34.

⁶⁰ Compare John’s insistence on his genuine prophetic call and his revealed knowledge of the future as one of his validating credentials with the foretelling of the future under ecstatic delirium by the sibyls and prophets-priests of the Asian mystery cults during their rituals of initiation (Cumont, *Oriental Religions*, 54).

⁶¹ Rev 1,19; 2,10; 4,1; 22,6; cf. Deut 18,21.22; Isa 41,22.23; John 14,29; cf. Paul’s defense of his ministry and his validation of his apostolic credentials by appealing to his exemplary conduct inside and outside the Christian community (e.g., Acts 20,18).

⁶² In the words of Beasley-Murray: “The impression made by the Gospel as to the character of John the Apostle accords uncommonly well with what one might imagine of the Seer of Revelation” (*Revelation*, 34, quoting Swete, *Apocalypse*, clxxx). See also Hobbs, *Cosmic Drama*, 10; Swete, *Apocalypse*, clxxx, clxxxi; Paulien, *John*, 19.

unwilling to take sides think the whole issue is rather immaterial to the interpretation of the book.⁶³

Authorship and Interpretation

Does the whole issue on the authorship of Revelation affect in any way its interpretation? Does it make any difference who John really was or if he was an apostle? How relevant could be an authorship shared by the Gospel and the epistles to the understanding of Revelation?

While it could perhaps be conceded that an apostolic origin for Revelation is not crucial for understanding its original message,⁶⁴ it is quite different to easily renounce the common authorship shared by the Gospel and the Johannine letters.⁶⁵ Thus, it is important to determine if there is any relationship between Revelation and the other less debated books of the Johannine corpus, something currently denied by many scholars.⁶⁶ This relationship would be especially useful in any exegetical approach to the book.⁶⁷

Revelation's Authorship and Exegesis

As already seen, most Revelation scholars agree that John the Apostle was not the author of the book, while see no effect of such a denial on the authority of the document or on its interpretation, provided the writer was

⁶³ E.g., Hemer, *Letters*, 2, 3. Apart from the options so far discussed, only Josephine Massyngberde Ford has advanced John the Baptist's candidacy for the authorship of Revelation (see *Revelation*, AB 38 [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975], 28-37), a view that has found no acceptance (see Mazzaferri, *Genre of Revelation*, 26-28, 32).

⁶⁴ Beckwith, *Apocalypse*, 361.

⁶⁵ On this common heritage shared by the NT Johannine corpus, Prigent says: "Despite the indisputable differences in form and language, we find in the background of the fourth gospel and of the book of Revelation the same theological presuppositions. On these bases were constructed two original literary edifices...each possessing its specificity... Revelation comes from the same milieu" its specificity...Revelation comes from the same milieu" (*Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, 49).

⁶⁶ Besides such a usefulness of a shared authorship on a purely literary basis, a shared Christ-centered, Jewish-Christian Johannine theology would prove to be highly rewarding and indeed a must for any serious exegetical approach to Revelation. See on this, for instance, Paulien, *Trumpets*, 45, 48-55, 70-72, 119; idem, "Dreading the Whirlwind: Intertextuality and the Use of the Old Testament in Revelation," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 39 (2001): 19, 20.

⁶⁷ E.g., Gordon D. Fee, *New Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors*, 3d ed. (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1983), 44.

part of a “Johannine circle or school”⁶⁸ or even a disciple of the apostle.⁶⁹ One of the most immediate negative effects of such a denial of an apostolic origin for the book is perhaps the consequent suppression of any connection with the rest of the NT corpus traditionally attributed to John, which is profitable for the interpretation of Revelation.⁷⁰

For instance, the harsh critique of the synagogue in 2,9; 3,9 could be profitably illuminated by the fourth Gospel’s distinctive⁷¹ attitude toward “the Jews” [οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι] as a technical designation of the Palestinian leaders of Judaism opposed to Jesus and the church.⁷² Thus, a Johannine authorship shared by Revelation and the fourth Gospel would contribute to release the author of Revelation from any suspicion of “anti-Semitism,”⁷³ something unlikely in a writer rooted in Judaism as was the author of Revelation.

⁶⁸ E.g., Swete, *Apocalypse*, clxxxiii; Fiorenza, “The Quest for the Johannine School,” 402-427. However, the existence of such a “circle,” “school” or “community” is still wanting to be based on solid evidence. The silence of the patristic sources on such a Johannine community is worth to be noticed in this respect. See on some other problems of such a view Carson, Moo, and Morris, *Introduction*, 154.

⁶⁹ E.g., Hemer, *Letters*, 2, 3.

⁷⁰ Those who deny an apostolic origin for Revelation generally agree on the Johannine apostolic origin of the fourth gospel. Interestingly, Corsini points to this shared attitude of the fourth gospel and Revelation toward “the Jews” as an evidence favorable to a common authorship (*The Apocalypse*, 37). See on this also Swete, *Apocalypse*, clxxxiv.

⁷¹ The expression οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι never occurs in Matthew, and it happens only once with that nuance in Mark and Luke (though it is present several times in Acts), while it is attested close to forty times in John’s gospel.

⁷² E.g., Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John (I-XII)*, AB 29 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), I:lxx – lxxiii, 42, 43; Paulien: *John*, 67, 176; Swete, *Apocalypse*, cxxviii: “both [Revelation and John’s gospel] use Ἰουδαῖος of the Jew considered as hostile to Christ or the Church;” see also clxxxii note 1; Hemer agrees with that when he says: “The term ‘Jew’ is throughout a title of honor, which is wrongly usurped by one section of John’s opponents” (*ibid.*, 12). Swete extends to 2 John 10f this distinctively Johannine attitude toward “the Jews” (*Apocalypse*, clxxxii, clxxxiv).

⁷³ On the lack of anti-Semitism in John’s Apocalypse see for instance Sweet, *Revelation*, 47 note t; Gregory Stevenson, *Power and Place: Temple and Identity in the Book of Revelation* (New York, NY: Walter de Gruyter, 2001), 227; Hemer, *Letters*, 12; Mathias Rissi, *The Future of the World: An Exegetical Study of Revelation 19.11-22.15*, SBT 23 (Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson Inc., 1966), 16; J. Charlesworth, *Christians and Jews*, 309. On a misunderstanding of the use of the technical phrase “the Jews” in the fourth Gospel as an alleged trace of anti-Semitism, see John T. Pawlikowski: “Acts is by far the most anti-Jewish book in the New Testament, posing far more difficulties in the long run than the celebrated Fourth Gospel” (John T. Pawlikowski, Review of Norman A. Beck’s book *Mature Christianity: The Recognition and Repudiation of the Anti-Jewish Polemic of the New Testament* [Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 1985], in *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 49 (1987):137, 138.

On the beastly antichrist of chap. 13, the contemporary, detailed picture in 1 John 2,18f (cf. 4,3; 2 John 7) could help to complete the identity of at least some of the layers of evocative meaning probably concurring in the devilish trio.⁷⁴

Another example of how illuminating such a cross-reference search of the Johannine corpus could be is the classical discussion on the chronological aspect of the sea beast in chap. 13, regardless of what it may stand for. Was it somehow already present at the time John wrote or it is an exclusively future agency, no matter how far distant? The temptation of the *either/or* approach⁷⁵—so pervasive as well as hindering in the field of Revelation scholarship—is easier to resist when the distinctively Johannine realized or inaugurated eschatology⁷⁶ and the “now while not yet” antichrist of 1 John⁷⁷ are brought to mind.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Rissi, *Time*, 71. Interestingly, some of the most prominent characteristics of the antichrists in 1 John are their negative to recognize Jesus Christ as the Messiah announced by the OT prophets as well as his divine nature (cf. John 6,30 f., especially v. 69; 8,39 ff), by far the foremost issue in the agenda of the fourth gospel and the epicenter of most of the storms between Jesus and “the Jews” in that gospel.

⁷⁵ See Paulien, “Dreading the Whirlwind,” 17, 18; Judith Kovacs and Christopher Rowland, *Revelation: The Apocalypse, Blackwell Bible Commentaries*, eds. John Sawyer, Christopher Rowland and Judith Kovacs (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 148.

⁷⁶ See Paulien, *John*, 28, 29, 144-149; idem, “The Role of the Hebrew Cultus, Sanctuary, and Temple in the Plot and Structure of the Book of Revelation,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 33 (1995): 262; idem, *Trumpets*, 42; Garrow, *Revelation*, 55; Krodell, *Revelation*, 47; Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 14; Michaels, *Revelation*, 163, 167; Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 127, 128; Corsini, *The Apocalypse*, 60; Rakoto, “Unity,” 220; Rissi, *Time*, 69-71. On this overlapping of present inauguration and future consummation—or of past and future merging in the present—as a general theological frame pervading the NT see Graeme Goldsworthy, *The Gospel in Revelation. Gospel and Apocalypse* (Exeter, UK: Paternoster, 1984), 73; Kenneth Strand, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, 2d ed. (Naples, FL: Ann Arbor Publications, 1979), 43-58; cf. Matt 24,15-31 and par.; 2 Thess 2,8-12; 1 John 2-4.

⁷⁷ E.g., 1 John 2,18,22; 4,3,4; 2 John 7; cf. 2 Thess 2,7-8; 2 Cor 6,14-16; Matt 24,3-14,15-31 and parallels; see on this Paulien, “Hebrew Cultus,” 262; Beale, *Revelation*, 686. On a possible inaugural dimension of the antichrist in John’s day, according to some verbal features of Rev 13,11-18, see Ramsay Michaels, *Revelation*, 163, 167. On this multi-temporality of the Johannine antichrist Rissi comments: “The Johannine conception (of the antichrist) stands much the nearest to the Revelation... In 1 John 2,18-22; 4,3; 2 John 7 (as well as in the synoptic apocalypse; 2 Cor 6,14-16; 2 Thess 2,1-12)... the Antichrist is seen in action during the entire intermediary time. This conception of the Antichrist is indistinguishable from that of the Revelation. 1 and 2 John present an Antichrist a singular, supernatural satanic person (cf. John 8,44; 1 John 2,22) as well as human and plural (the false teachers and prophets sent by the Devil). In 2 John 7 both dimensions of the Antichrist: singular and plural; supernatural, satanic and human” (*Time*, 71; see also 69-70).

⁷⁸ On a possible contribution of such a cross-reference within the Johannine corpus to the right comprehension of Rev 13,8, Sweet states: “If we may take a hint from the other Johannine writings (John 1,29; 3,16; 1 John 2,2), the Lamb’s death is for those who are not

Finally, false prophetism within the church as one of John's main concerns in Revelation is somehow confirmed by the shared use of some distinctively Johannine terminology connected with the leading of people to the worship of false gods and with Christ's miracles in the Gospel, the letters and Revelation.⁷⁹

The Question about the Author in Light of the Document Itself

A closer look to the content of Revelation could prove highly rewarding as to the identity of its author.⁸⁰ In that respect, several clues seem to have been overlooked in the Revelation literature, mostly by writers unfavorable to an apostolic Johannine origin for the book.

John does not feel the need of showing any credentials to address his audience. He simply identifies himself as "John, a fellow servant of yours" in 1,1.4, a way of speaking perfectly likely in a living apostle in view of some precedents as 1 Cor 9,1-2; 2 Cor 11,21-23; Eph 1,1; 2,20; 2 Pet 3,1-2. This is a noticeable contrast with the pseudepigraphic Jewish and Christian apocalypses,⁸¹ and implies that he was well known by his public (e.g., 1,1.4).

Related to this is the fact that, unlike most of the Pauline corpus (e.g., Romans, Galatians and Corinthians), our author does not feel the need to defend his God's given authority or his prophetic call—something of which he was utterly convinced—from any attack by a party opposed to his leadership.⁸² What this seems to imply is that there were no serious

written in his book, excluded by their worship of the beast like Israel by its worship of the golden calf (Exod 32,8.32 ff)" (*Revelation*, 212).

⁷⁹ On the peculiar use of the verb *πλανῶ* as related to the worship of the false gods in the Johannine literature see Thomas, *Revelation* 8:22, 176; cf. the phrase *ποιεῖν σημεῖα* as distinctively Johannine both in the Gospel (John 11,47) and in Rev 13,13 in regard to the miraculous signs validating the Messiah. See also 311 note 514.

⁸⁰ Even though he himself is opposed to John the apostle as the author of Revelation, or at least uncertain on that, Sweet recognizes this fact when he says that: "We cannot know more about the author than his book tells us" (*Revelation*, 38).

⁸¹ Beasley-Murray, *The book of Revelation*, 14, 15, 33; George E. Ladd, *A Commentary on the Book of Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 22, 23; Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 14.

⁸² Garrow, *Revelation*, 59.

internal disputes about his authority as a leader of the church in Asia.⁸³ On the contrary, he challenged the authority of some false self-appointed prophets he called “Jezebel” and “Balaam.”

In the light of Revelation itself, he was not only well known to and highly respected by his audience, but also closely linked to them by sharing in their religious experience (“he loved *us* and cleaned *us* from *our* sins,” 1,5b) and struggles (1,9). This resembles the Aristotelian ἤθος-πάθος-λόγος rhetoric structure so common in the Pauline paraenetic materials (e.g., 1 and 2 Thess)⁸⁴ and also evident in Revelation through the use of some expressions denoting former knowledge and affection, as when John says in 1,9: “I, your brother.”

The content of the book of Revelation seems to speak strongly in favor of the Jewishness—even the Palestinian Jewishness—of John, mostly in view of his familiarity with the OT,⁸⁵ an OT closer to the Palestinian targum than to the Greek Septuagint. On the other hand, the centrality of the temple, although the one in heaven, and its services as representations of more subtle spiritual realities would be hard to explain in a Diaspora Jew,⁸⁶ much less in a Gentile Christian writer.

⁸³Lilje, *Last Book*, 34. Contrary to Sweet, for whom the author is clearly a leader but not an apostle since his authority, “far from being accepted as that of one of the twelve, is challenged at Thyatira by the ‘prophetess’ he calls Jezebel” (*Revelation*, 38). However, the same could be said of Jesus and certainly of Paul, who was also an apostle though not one of the twelve, and whose apostolicity was questioned by some judaizers from the very beginning of his ministry. Unlike Paul in Rome, Galatia and Corinth, the problem John seems to have faced in Asia was not a challenge to his authority as an apostle and a prophet, but the claim by some to be sharing in that same authority.

⁸⁴See on this Jean Malherbe, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, AB (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 35:154-156.

⁸⁵Hobbs, *Cosmic Drama*, 10.

⁸⁶For obvious reasons, the Jews living outside of Palestine in the 1st century A.D. had, from necessity, organized their religious and social life around a gravitation center other than the Jerusalem temple and its priesthood. This is clear even from the reading of some postexilic literature produced outside Palestine, as that by Philo and the Wisdom of Solomon. Moreover, the Palestinian Jewish apocalypses contemporary with John’s (e.g., 4 Ezra, 2 Apocalypse of Baruch) are also heavenly temple-centered or oriented, unlike the Gentile Christian pseudepigraphic apocalypses from the 2d century A.D. On the place of the Jewish temple and its ceremonies in the literary and theological structure of Revelation as a whole see Paulien, “Hebrew Cultus;” Robert A. Briggs, *Jewish Temple Imagery in the Book of Revelation*, Studies in Biblical Literature 10 (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 1999); John and Gloria Ben-Daniel, *The Apocalypse in the Light of the Temple: A New Approach to the Book of Revelation* (Jerusalem: Beit Yochanan, 2003). On the Jewish religious calendar as related to both John’s gospel and Revelation see Sweet, *Revelation*, 40-42.

Perhaps a suitable example of the relationship between the identity and background of the book's author and its interpretation is Torrey's suggestion on John's intended meaning behind the land beast of Rev 13:

The two lamb-like horns of the beast don't mean lamb horns since the lambs have no horns at all. Thus, the only remaining interpretative option is to find the animal John could have had in mind. And the only possible option is the Palestinian ox, whose horns resemble those of a ram, the adult stage of a lamb.⁸⁷

Conclusion

The evidence, external as well as internal of the book, seems to favor the consensus that a Palestinian, Jewish-rooted Christian was the author of the book of Revelation. Could that author have been the apostle John after all? It seems that the most balanced and fair treatment of the available evidence should incline the interpreter to leave the question still open to further reflection and dialogue,⁸⁸ without denying John the Apostle as a still viable option.⁸⁹

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⁸⁷Torrey, *Apocalypse*, 127. On Israel represented as a white bull in the Jewish apocalyptic literature see p. 168 note 89, 301 note 481. Another way to solve the seeming riddle of the second beast's lamb-like horns would be to see them as a reference to the beast's mimicking of the almighty seven-horned lamb of chap. 5, the same way as the beast's speaking as dragon would be connected with Gen 3,1-13, of which Rev 12-13 would be a Christian midrash (cf. Rev 12,7).

⁸⁸Martin Kiddle, *The Revelation of St. John* (New York: Harper), 1940, xxxv, xxxvi.

⁸⁹In the words of Poythress: "On balance, it is still probable that the apostle John was the human author" (*Returning King*, 49). See also Guthrie, *Introduction*, 256-258; Swete, *Apocalypse*, cxxvi-cxxx, clxxx, clxxxi; Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 14, 15; Stephen S. Smalley, *Thunder and Love: John's Revelation and John's Community* (England: Word Books, 1994), 40; Deissmann, *Light*, 69, 131; Feuillet, *The Apocalypse*, 9; Lenski, *Revelation*, 7; Lilje, *Last Book*, 34; Corsini, *The Apocalypse*, 14, 60; Leonard, *Come Out*, 18. On the surmountable obstacles to accept one and the same mind behind the Gospel and Revelation or one common author with a freely working amanuensis, Beckwith candidly admits: "The present commentator ventures to say that his earlier conviction of the impossibility of maintaining a unity of authorship has been much weakened by a study of the books prolonged through the years" (*The Apocalypse*, 361, 362; see also Swete, *Apocalypse*, clxxxi, cxxxiv). Although his stress is on "oneness of authorship, not apostolicity" (*ibid.*, 361). Sweet recognizes that: "Though the differences in language and thought [between John's Gospel and Revelation] are such as to make common authorship improbable, the affinities are so deep and pervasive that a number of scholars hold to it nevertheless" (*Revelation*, 40).