

# 24

## *Shalom* in the Book of Revelation

God, Church, Judgment, New Creation

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The title of this essay is counterintuitive, if not oxymoronic. One is tempted to look at it and cry, “Peace, peace’ when there is no peace” (Jer 6:14; 8:11). The Greek word *eirēnē* only appears twice in Revelation (1:4; 6:4). Moreover, the book’s unpeaceful, even violent character has led some to criticize its content sharply and even question its presence in the Christian canon, as Willard Swartley and others have noted.<sup>1</sup>

Despite such concerns, there is more to Revelation than scenes of violence. As even the sharpest critics must recognize, there are beautiful, peaceful scenes in the book’s conclusion—which is also, of course, the conclusion to the Christian canon. Furthermore, a careful reading of Revelation unveils several dimensions of *shalom* within its pages. We will briefly explore four of these dimensions—God, church, judgment, and new creation—and consider their theological significance both for the book itself and for those who receive it as Scripture.<sup>2</sup>

1. Swartley, *Covenant of Peace*, 324; cf. Gorman, *Reading Revelation*, 1–4.

2. This is a huge subject that can be touched on only lightly in this essay. For recent work stressing peace and/or nonviolence in Revelation, see Swartley, *Covenant of Peace*, 324–55; my *Reading Revelation*; Bredin, *Jesus*; Hays and Alkier, eds., *Revelation and Politics of Interpretation*; Neville, *Peaceable Hope*, 217–45; and Yoder Neufeld, *Killing Enmity*, 123–35.

## SHALOM

There has been significant recent work on shalom/*eirēnē*/peace in the Bible, not least in the writings of the two scholars honored in this book, and in the ripple effects of their work.<sup>3</sup> For our purposes, we will define shalom rather generally. First, negatively, shalom is the cessation—and henceforth the absence—of chaos, conflict, broken relations, and the evil powers that cause these things. Second, positively, shalom is the establishment, and henceforth the presence, of wholeness, reconciliation, goodness, justice, and the flourishing of creation.

Shalom, therefore, is clearly a thick theological term (and reality), a kind of semantic magnet that draws other terms (and realities) into its orb. Swartley contends that shalom in the Christian OT is semantically and theologically related to righteousness and justice, salvation, eschatology, the kingdom of God, covenant, and grace. *Eirēnē*, in the NT, is related to love of God, neighbor, and enemy, including nonretaliation; faith, hope, holiness, and harmony in the corporate body; blessing and wholeness; reconciliation and new covenant; salvation and grace; and kingdom of God, righteousness, justice, and justification.<sup>4</sup>

Shalom, then, is relational and specifically covenantal, a situation in which humans are in proper relation to one another, God, and the whole creation. This is a situation for which God's people long, experiencing it only partially and proleptically in the present, having an eschatological hope for shalom in its fullness. At the same time, a distinguishing mark of NT theology, even in Revelation, is that the eschatological reality of peace has broken into the present through God's gifts of the Son and the Spirit.

## GOD'S GIFT OF SHALOM AND THE SOCIOPOLITICAL CONTEXT OF REVELATION (REVELATION 1)

The first of the two occurrences of the word *peace* in Revelation seems, at first glance, innocuous, part of a standard epistolary greeting:

John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and

3. I am honored to make this small contribution to a subject so important to these scholars. In addition to this book, see, e.g., Swartley, *Covenant of Peace*; Swartley, "Peace in the NT"; P. Yoder, *Shalom*; Smith-Christopher, "Peace in the OT"; plus the bibliographies therein.

4. See Swartley, *Covenant of Peace*, 30, 41, where he supplies helpful graphics to illustrate these semantic connections.

from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1:4–6)<sup>5</sup>

Much like a Pauline letter, Revelation begins (after a preliminary word in 1:1–3 identifying the letter as containing an apocalypse-prophecy) with a greeting of grace and peace. The source of these twin gifts is triadic: the eternal God on the heavenly throne (cf. chap. 4), the seven spirits before the throne,<sup>6</sup> and Jesus the Messiah, about whom much is said. He is identified with three noun-phrases (faithful witness, firstborn of the dead, ruler of the kings of the earth) and three verb-phrases (loves us, freed us from our sins by his blood, made us to be a priestly kingdom<sup>7</sup>), all part of an acclamation of Christ's eternal glory and dominion.

This Christological doxology anticipates various aspects of the graphic narrative that is about to unfold, but it also provides commentary on the words *grace* and *peace*. Jesus's liberating, loving, kingdom-and-priesthood-forming death was an act of grace and of peacemaking, the benefits of which continue to flow to John's addressees. And because in that death—by crucifixion at the hands of Rome, as John's audience knows—Jesus was a faithful witness, God has raised him from the dead and made him “ruler of the kings of the earth”—i.e., Lord of the nations. These are not narrowly religious claims and gifts but also political ones.

The political ideology of imperial Rome—*Roma aeterna*—was theological. Its emperors and their various propagandists claimed that Rome was the gods' agent of peace and harmony in the world.<sup>8</sup> Military conquest, or victory (*victoria*), and peace went hand in hand, from Rome's perspective. But for John the Seer, the *pax Romana* is a pseudo-peace, even an anti-*pax*. It is such because Rome is (or at least is animated by) an anti-Christ, opposed to the person and the community of the slaughtered Lamb. Imperial Rome is not a divine agent but a satanic one (chaps. 12–13). It does not practice the things that make for peace, but just the opposite (chaps. 17–18). We will not appreciate the intensity of John's imagery and narrative, or of his seemingly violent brand of peacemaking through horrific divine

5. All biblical quotations are taken from the NRSV unless otherwise indicated..

6. Bauckham (*Theology*, 109–15) persuasively interprets this image as a reference to the divine Spirit (and not, e.g., angels).

7. Cf. Exod 19:6.

8. Carter, *Roman Empire*, 83–99; Wengst, *Pax Romana*, 46–51.

judgments, until we understand the gravity of the Roman anti-*pax* from his perspective, which he holds to be God's perspective. As Marianne Meye Thompson has put it, "The exaggerated images of the book . . . are all enlisted to make the point: the world is not as you see it, and in order to see it as God does, all its features must be exaggerated. Rome is not *Dea* (Goddess) sitting on seven hills offering the benefits of the *Pax Romana*, but a whore seated on a seven-headed monster, beguiling and corrupting the inhabitants of the earth."<sup>9</sup> The claim that the crucified-by-Rome Jesus brings peace, and the acclamation that he deserves glory and dominion forever over his royal priesthood and over all earthly rulers, both echo and subvert the Roman imperial claims of *pax Romana* and *Roma aeterna*.

Thus the entire opening of Revelation is an "epistolary shot across Caesar's imperial bow."<sup>10</sup> Jesus has created a people by shedding his own blood rather than by shedding their blood. God's resurrection of the crucified Jesus means that Roman power amounts to nothing in the face of God's power. The universal lordship of the resurrected Jesus means that the messianic age of shalom has been inaugurated, and will soon be brought to completion. Rome, however, is not the agent of this peace. Indeed, despite claims like those of Rome, no empire offers the shalom of God inaugurated in Jesus and now brought to his followers by the power of the Spirit.

Already, therefore, in the midst of temptation and tribulation, the churches addressed in Revelation, both then and now, are part of Jesus's messianic kingdom of priests. Thus they can know the peace of the Messiah's reign even in their times of trouble, even in the midst of the anti-*pax* of Rome and its imperial heirs throughout the centuries.

### **THE CHURCH: COMMUNITY OF THE LAMB, COMMUNITY OF SHALOM (REVELATION 2-5 AND OTHER TEXTS)**

In the opening of Revelation, its recipients are reminded of the peace that has come, and continues to come, from the divine triad of God, the Spirit, and Jesus. Throughout Revelation, the church is a community of shalom in two respects. First, its constituency is international, an assembly of the nations. Second, it is a community of shalom in its "uncivil" practices of

9. Thompson, "Reading," 166.

10. Blount, *Revelation*, 34.

worship and witness—including prophetic, nonviolent resistance, even to the point of suffering and death.<sup>11</sup>

One of the most significant aspects of the age of shalom in the “holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God” (21:10) is its international character: “The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. . . . People will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. . . . On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations” (21:24, 26; 22:2b).

This vision of a community of nations is anticipated already in the throne room vision of chapter 5, with echoes in the vision of God’s people in chapter 7: “They [the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders] sing a new song: ‘You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation; you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God, and they will reign on earth’” (5:9–10). And, “[T]here was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!’” (7:9–10). This multitude is identified as those who “have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (7:14b). Because these people from every nation have been victorious through the great ordeal, they enjoy the worship of God forever, without any future threat of harm, under the protection of God and the Lamb (7:15–17, with language that reappears in chaps. 21–22).

This passage depicts an international body of faithful disciples of Jesus. By reverse extrapolation, we can—indeed we must—conclude that John understands the kingdom of priests created by Jesus’s death (1: 5b–6; cf. 7:10) to be a universal body, a global church, a reality much bigger than the network of seven communities to which Revelation is addressed.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, this body will continue to expand, even in tribulation, as the eternal gospel is proclaimed to “every nation and tribe and language and people” (14:6), rescuing people from those groups who are currently in the grip of the beast.<sup>13</sup> Although Revelation attributes this evangelistic work to an

11. By *uncivil* I mean in contrast to civil religion (e.g., the imperial cult); see my *Reading Revelation*. On the importance of worship and especially witness in Rev, see also Peters, *Mandate*.

12. Seven represents fullness: all followers of the Lamb in all places are addressed.

13. E.g., 13:7; 14:8; 17:15. The Lamb’s disciples “have been redeemed from

angel, the angel also announces what the church proclaims: “Fear God and give him glory, for the hour of his judgment has come; and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water” (Rev 14:7).

These followers of the Lamb (14:4), worshipers of God from every people and place, constitute a body that anticipates the constituency of the new Jerusalem, in which the nations worship God and the Lamb together and are healed (21:24, 26; 22:2b, quoted above). Furthermore, they constitute the truly “ecumenical” reality (cf. Gk. *oikoumenē*, often used of the Roman Empire), brought into being by the life-giving, liberating blood of the Lamb, as the divine counterpoint to Rome’s oppressive and bloody subjugation of the nations. The true divinely peace-endowed community, then, is the church, not the empire created by military conquest and pacification.

As the recipients of this divine peace, brokered by the one who is called the Faithful Witness (1:5; 3:14), the church in Revelation is commissioned to embody this faithful, peaceful, missional, prophetic witness. John makes this vocation clear in several ways. For one thing, the theme of victory, or conquering—which ends each message to the seven churches and runs throughout the book—is ultimately a sharing in the victory or conquest of the slaughtered Lamb (5:5)—a “clear contrast to the Roman *victoria*.”<sup>14</sup> The story of Jesus is the “hermeneutical key” to the churches’ life.<sup>15</sup> This comes to its most poignant expression in the description of those pursued and accused by Satan (chap. 12). Their victory is won not by violence but by their identification with the slaughtered Lamb and by their corollary, even participatory, resistance and faithful witness: “But they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they did not cling to life even in the face of death” (12:11).<sup>16</sup> Jesus, the martyrs/witnesses, and John himself (1:9) all embody this peaceful, missional, prophetic paradigm. As Swartley says, “[t]he Lamb Christology combined with the faithful word-witness is the heartbeat of Revelation’s distinctive contribution to peace theology.”<sup>17</sup>

The church’s prophetic task, symbolized also by the two witnesses (11:3–13), may, then, lead to opposition and even martyrdom. The witnesses’ only weapon against opponents is their message (portrayed as a

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humankind as first fruits for God and the Lamb” (14:4b).

14. Wengst, *Pax Romana*, 134.

15. Alkier, “Witness or Warrior?” 136.

16. Swartley (*Covenant of Peace*, 343) rightly notes that the church is to exhibit both passive and active resistance, the former in noncooperation, the latter in worship and witness.

17. *Ibid.*, 333. See also Pattemore, *People of God*.

consuming fire from their mouth; 11:5).<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, even when martyrs cry out for God to avenge their deaths (6:10), there is not a single word suggesting that those still living on earth should take up arms. Indeed, the opposite is the case, even when violence is directed at the still living: “If you are to be taken captive, into captivity you go; if you kill with the sword, with the sword you must be killed. Here is . . . the endurance and faith of the saints” (13:10).<sup>19</sup>

This is not to say that the church on earth already fully embodies this reality, as even a superficial reading of Rev 2–3 quickly proves. But if one of the main purposes of Revelation is to unveil reality from a transcendent perspective, and thus to “counter the Roman imperial view of the world,”<sup>20</sup> then the visions of the church triumphant speak directly both *about* and *to* the church on earth. The individual churches must see themselves as one ecumenical body, created and defined by the peacemaking God, not by Rome. And they do so most fully and most imaginatively when they join with one another, the elders, the martyrs, and all creation in the uncivil worship of God and the Lamb (chaps. 4–5). With an imagination refurbished in worship, the church can be what it is called to be.

The church (i.e., the body of Jesus’s faithful disciples), then, as a global, peace-graced, worshiping community, is both a foretaste of the eschatological healing of the nations and a sign of how that healing has been inaugurated—by the faithful death of the Lamb. In its lifestyle, the church bears faithful witness to the Faithful Witness, while in its very constitution as an international community it bears witness to God’s ultimate plan for humanity. As such, it is a contrast-society or alter-culture drawn from the nations.<sup>21</sup> Canonically speaking, the visions in Rev 5, 7, and 14 re-present—and augment—the ecclesial reality described by Pauline texts such as Gal 3:28, Rom 9–11 and 14–15, and especially Eph 2–3. In Christ the dividing wall of hostility has been broken down, and reconciliation has taken place; the healing of the nations has begun.

18. See, e.g., Aune, *Revelation* 6–16, 613–14.

19. I have deleted the NRSV’s phrase “a call for,” which is not in the Greek text. For similar conclusions, see (inter alia), Hays, *Moral Vision*, 169–85, esp. 175–79; Bauckham, *Theology*, 77–79; Boxall, *Revelation*, 125; as well as Bauckham (*Climax*, 210–13) and Massyngbaerde Ford (“Shalom,” 71), who contrast Revelation with the Qumran War Scroll, in which God enlists humans to fight. For Bauckham, Revelation is a (non-violent) Christian war scroll enlisting Christians to “fight” by witnessing and suffering (*Climax*, 210–37).

20. Bauckham, *Theology*, 6. He adds, “The visual power of the book effects a kind of purging of the Christian imagination, refurbishing it with alternative visions of how the world is and will be” (*ibid.*, 17).

21. So also McNicol, *Conversion*, 21–24.

## SHALOM AND THE JUDGMENTS IN REVELATION (REVELATION 6–20)

The shalom anticipated in the constituency and practices of the church is realized fully in the new Jerusalem (chaps. 21–22). But there is a long road between Rev 1–5 and Rev 21–22, and it passes through many visions of judgment. At the very first stop on this road, the vision of the four horsemen (6:1–9), we encounter the second and last occurrence of *eirēnē* in Revelation (6:4)—referring to the removal of peace, perhaps the (pseudo) *Pax Romana*. What can the ensuing scenes, most quite violent, have to do with peace?

Visions of shalom in the Christian OT often possess two closely related features that reappear in Revelation. The first feature is that shalom is a kind of “tough love” requiring the removal of evil. Shalom does not come naturally to the human community by means of an ethical glissando from the present state into a future utopia. The second, related feature is that the Bible often portrays this removal of evil in terms of royal or divine warfare. Both of these features find a happy home in an apocalyptic document like Revelation, even though they are also transformed in that document. Neither of these two biblical/apocalyptic emphases is particularly welcome, however, in contemporary culture (and perhaps not in contemporary theology either), but there they are, unavoidable in the texts.

The narrative of Revelation appears to follow a pattern established by expectations of royal figures in the ancient Near East, and particularly in Israel. An ideal king was expected to bring about justice, peace, and human flourishing (shalom), but to do so he (or God) was expected not only to execute justice for the people, especially the vulnerable, but also to remove evil from the land by subjugating, punishing, banishing, or even destroying enemies (e.g., Ps 72).<sup>22</sup> Only then would there be true shalom. Stress is often placed on the order of these elements: first, the removal of evil; then, the arrival of justice and peace: “When the oppressor is no more, and destruction has ceased, and marauders have vanished from the land, then a throne shall be established in steadfast love in the tent of David, and on it shall sit in faithfulness a ruler who seeks justice and is swift to do what is right” (Isa 16:4b–5; cf. 9:2–7).

This expectation sometimes comes to expression in ways that are so idealistic that it is couched in mythic, imaginative language pointing to a future reality beyond normal human hopes. In Isa 11, for instance, the hope is for a Davidic king, filled with God’s Spirit, who will judge righteously

22. Allan McNicol (*Conversion*) has independently argued that Revelation follows an OT pattern about the conquest and conversion of the nations. If he is correct, my proposal supplements his, which does not focus on removing evil and establishing shalom.

for the poor and slay the wicked: “He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked” (Isa 11:3b–4). The consequence of this divine benign invasion, through a human agent, is a paradisiacal peace: “The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. . . . They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Isa 11:6–9; cf. Isa 65:25). Although, surprisingly, the second part of this text from Isa 11 is not echoed with any volume in Revelation,<sup>23</sup> the earlier part (Isa 11:3b–4) is:

He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, wearing fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron; he will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. . . . And the rest [the kings of the earth with their armies] were killed by the sword of the rider on the horse, the sword that came from his mouth; and all the birds were gorged with their flesh. (Rev 19:13–15, 21; cf. 1:16; 2:16)

As in Isa 11 and elsewhere, in Rev 21–22 the vision of shalom is the conclusion of a larger narrative in which evil is first removed, and that by means of a royal word, a royal pronouncement—a performative utterance. This pronouncement is, in fact, the means of warfare in both Isa 11 and Rev 19. In the case of Revelation, at least, we should not imagine this speech-as-war as a reference to any form of literal warfare. This unique performative utterance is the word not of a human king but of the divine Word of God, who is also the Lamb of God and thus the slaughtered faithful and true witness.<sup>24</sup> The sword signifies the ability of the Word of God, Jesus, to speak evil out of existence in preparation for the permanent presence of peace. It signifies the ultimate victory of the slaughtered Lamb over evil. Whether this powerful speech should be understood as the unfolding of the consequences of Jesus’s death, the testimony of the martyrs, the spread of

23. But see the reference to “a great, high mountain” in Rev 21:10.

24. The epithet “Faithful and True” (19:11; cf. 1:5; 3:14), together with the blood on his robe before the battle is even announced, identifies the Word of God with the slaughtered Lamb. See, e.g., Johns, *Lamb Christology*, 184; Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, 1057, 1069. On Revelation’s inclusion of Jesus in the divine identity, see Bauckham, *Theology*, 54–65; Hays, “Faithful Witness, Alpha and Omega.”

the gospel, and/or a final word of judgment, it is clearly not a literal military campaign any more than its aftermath is a literal ornithological feasting on the war-dead (19:17, 21).

That is, despite the use of violent imagery and language to express the divine eradication of evil as part of the process of bringing shalom and salvation, *we would be wrong to imagine John imagining a God or a Messiah who literally uses violence to terminate evil*. Rather, this is symbolic language about a divine mystery, and John, I am convinced, was completely aware that he (or the Spirit) was reworking the holy-war tradition in light of the slaughtered Lamb.<sup>25</sup> As I have written elsewhere:

The language and images of death and destruction symbolize—in comprehensible, if disturbing, idiom—the *universality* and *finality* of God’s ultimate eradication of evil *rather than the means by which God brings about that eradication*. As the omnipotent One who spoke creation into existence, God hardly needs to resort to literal violence to effect the cessation of evil. . . . Instead, Revelation should be understood as portraying *symbolically* what God does *actually* with a divine performative utterance, an effective word not unlike the word that spoke creation into existence. It is a word of *new* creation. Revelation’s symbolic language uses the only kinds of realities known to humans to approximate the universality and finality of God’s eschatological dealing with evil. What, after all, is more comprehensive and permanent in human experience than total destruction?<sup>26</sup>

Where do these observations lead us? *We should describe Rev 6–20 as an extended narrative interpretation of the prophetic pattern of the conquest and removal of evil prior to the establishment of shalom*. At the same time, however, we must note a transformation of this prophetic pattern. If part of the pattern includes the defeat of Israel’s enemies and their subsequent obedience to YHWH (see also Ps 2; 110; Rev 15:4), in Revelation the nations are not merely judged and defeated (e.g., 16:19; 19:15); they are healed. Their final fate is found in the last chapters of Revelation.

### THE FULLNESS OF SHALOM (REVELATION 21–22)

Revelation ends where Genesis began: in a garden of peace. It is a spectacular conclusion to the biblical narrative, and to both the human hope for and the divine promise of peace.

25. So also Barr, “Lamb,” esp. 213.

26. Gorman, *Reading Revelation*, 152–53.

Revelation's culminating vision of shalom is noteworthy for what is absent—the antitheses of peace:

- the sea (21:1), associated with chaos in the biblical tradition;
- pain and death (21:4; cf. 1 Cor 15:26);
- tears, mourning, and crying (21:4);
- perpetrators of evil (21:8, 27; 22:3);
- night (21:25); and
- closed gates (21:25).<sup>27</sup>

These absences, as indicators of new creation and peace,<sup>28</sup> were anticipated in Isaiah (25:7–8; 35:10; 52:1; 60:11, 18–20; 65:19). God has taken the entire creation “beyond the threat of evil.”<sup>29</sup> Also significant is the location of the garden—in a city; it is an urban garden. The normal city, which is often thought of as a dangerous place that needs constant security, has been transformed into a place of absolute security without its gates ever closing.

This grand and beautiful vision is also noteworthy for what—actually, who—is present. The nations that have been the target of divine judgment are present in the new Jerusalem (21:24–26), and not merely as defeated enemies but as participants in the healing—the shalom—of God: “Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations” (Rev 22:1–2; cf. Ezek 47:12).

How has this happened? Through the preaching of the eternal gospel? Through repentance in the face of God's judgments? John is not explicit. But the presence of the nations means that whatever else we say about the judgments in chapters 6–20, we must conclude that such divine judgment is coherent with an overall divine goal of restoration and healing, which in turn is coherent with an understanding of the Lamb's death as that which nonviolently overcomes evil and sin, and creates thereby a people of every nation, tribe, people, and language.<sup>30</sup> The healing of the nations portrayed in

27. In addition, there is no temple, because the city's temple “is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb” (21:22), and there is no sun, moon, or other luminaries, and yet no night (21:23, 25; 22:5; cf. Isa 60:19–20).

28. Cf. Isa 60:17; 65:17; 66:22.

29. Bauckham, *Theology*, 53.

30. “We do not and cannot know how God might judge ultimately, but a christologically conditioned religious epistemology leads to the view that divine judgment is more likely to be restorative than strictly retributive” (Neville, *Peaceable Hope*, 240).

Revelation's final, glorious vision of shalom is the divine *telos* to which the church has borne peaceful and prophetic witness, sometimes by martyrdom, throughout the pages of Revelation—and of history.

## CONCLUSION

We must of course acknowledge that the Christian church has struggled not only with this book but with the very meaning of discipleship as an adventure in shalom. The church has not always been the faithful, peaceful, prophetic, missional, multinational community of the Lamb's followers that God through John the Seer has called it to be. Some would blame the book of Revelation, in part, for this problem. If read rightly, however, as Christian Scripture bearing witness to the divine peace initiative displayed in the gifts of Jesus and the Spirit, Revelation has the potential to help restore the church as a community of shalom in anticipation of the new creation God has promised.<sup>31</sup>

31. I am grateful to my research assistant Daniel Jackson for his assistance in preparing this essay.