

The Central Prophecy of the Book of Revelation

In the previous talk, we identified a self-contained prophecy recorded in two parallel or overlapping passages in the central part of the Book of Revelation (Rev 11,1-13 and 12,1–15,4) and in the all the other interruptions to its ‘baseline prophetic narrative’ (namely Rev chs. 7, 10, and 17-18).

The best place to start to examine this ‘central prophecy’ is with chapter 10, because it forms the introduction. In this part of the narrative, the author John finds himself on earth again, after being taken up to the heavenly throne and shown ‘what will happen in the future’ (4,1). The sixth trumpet has sounded and the seventh is about to be blown. Suddenly he is confronted by a mighty angel who swears that the blast of the seventh trumpet will coincide with the fulfillment of God’s mysterious plan for mankind (10,7). At this point, John is told to go and take the little open scroll from the hand of the angel and eat it (10,9). After swallowing the little scroll, he is told he must “*prophesy again about many races and nations and tongues and rulers*” (10,11).

This commission to ‘prophecy again’ recalls the prophetic vocation of Ezekiel in the Old Testament (Ez 2,8–3,3) and leads us to expect a new burst of prophetic activity. The prophecy we are going to examine today follows in the text and therefore constitutes the main content of the author’s renewed prophetic inspiration. We should note the entirely prophetic context of this part of the text and its tight association with the blowing of the seventh trumpet – the last trumpet – the one that announces the conclusion of history and the consummation of God’s promise of salvation.

The central importance of this prophecy is another point we need to note. The transfer of the little scroll from the hand of the angel to the author, John, recalls last part of the chain of transmission outlined in the opening verse of the book: “*The Revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave to him to show his servants what must soon take place, and which he signified by sending his angel to his servant John, who bears witness to the Word of God and the Witness of Jesus, of all that he saw*” (Rev 1,1-2). The implication is that the text we are about to consider is the original “Revelation of Jesus Christ”, whose purpose is to show God’s servants what must take place soon. In a word, this renewal of the author’s prophecy generates the central message of the entire book of Revelation – central not only in position but also in significance and purpose. The evocation of the first lines of the text also leads us to identify this part of the text as the real beginning to the “Revelation of Jesus Christ” given to John.

With this in mind, we come to one of the most enigmatic passages in the entire text: “*And a cane similar to a rod was given to me while saying: Get up and measure the Sanctuary of God and the altar and those who are worshipping in it. And reject the court which is outside the Sanctuary and do not measure it, because it was given to the nations, and they will trample the Holy City for forty-two months. And I will give to my two witnesses and they will prophesy for one thousand two hundred and sixty days dressed in sackcloth.*” (Rev 11,1–3).

Instead of being commanded to write the prophecy inspired by the ingestion and assimilation of the little open scroll from heaven, John was given a measuring rod and was commanded to measure those elements that define the inner part of the temple, and to reject the rest—the outer part. Immediately after this command, the theme of prophecy becomes explicit again with the prophetic mission of the two witnesses.

As we remarked in the last talk, the only way to interpret the divine command to measure the temple, and yet remain coherent with its entirely prophetic context, is to understand this as the command to prophesy again expressed in a metaphorical way. So, taking the command to do the measuring in the construction of a new temple (Rev 11,1-2) as a metaphorical expression representing the preceding command to “*prophecy again about many races and nations and tongues and rulers*” (10,11), the measuring rod given to the author is the prophecy, the act of measuring is the act of witnessing the prophecy, and the new temple is the people of God (as in Rev 3,12 and other parts of the NT: Eph 2,19-22; 1 Pet 2,4-10; Heb 12,22-24).

The formulation of this command in metaphorical terms allows it to convey a deeper, more spiritual meaning than would be possible with ordinary speech. Since it is spoken by a spiritual being, we can go so far as to say it indicates the spiritual significance of the prophecy given to the author ‘to prophecy again’: this prophecy helps in the building of God’s new temple, which is the Church. More precisely, it helps in the building up and bringing together of the more holy, inner part of the Church, and leads to its separation from the profane outer part of the Church. It performs an ecumenical and edifying function in the first sense, and a judgmental function in the second.

What then is the new prophecy that St. John was commanded ‘to prophecy again’? It is reasonable to suppose that it immediately follows the command, especially since the text here can be recognized as a piece of narrative prophecy. It speaks about two witnesses or prophets of the Lord, who prophesy for a period of 1,260 days before being killed by an antagonist, called the ‘beast’ from the abyss (Rev 11,3-13).

In fact, the description of the prophetic mission of these two witnesses, at this point, just as the author starts writing the prophecy, presents itself as the way by which the author’s written prophecy will be publicly announced. These two prophets are called and empowered, at a given time, to announce the prophecy given to the author at this central point in the text.

However, the mission of these two prophets is not limited to announcing this prophecy. As the first event recorded in the prophecy, their mission also brings it to realization, and with the ‘realization’ of the prophecy, there will be no further need to witness it. So the mission of the two witnesses, and their public announcement of the prophecy, will complete precisely what John was commanded to do: to measure the inner part of the temple, and to reject the outer part. This is to say that their mission will complete the process of building up and bringing together the faithful people of God, while at the same time causing the rejection of those who have lost their Faith. With such a practical and specific purpose in

mind, the mission of these two prophets begs to be understood literally. Perhaps we could go so far as to say that without the completion of the task given to St. John, by the literal mission of these two witnesses, the Church cannot reach her eschatological perfection.

We should therefore reject the proposal of many interpreters that these two prophets and their prophetic mission should be understood non-literally, or symbolically. Just to prove that point, the text states that the two witnesses are symbolized by “*the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth*” (Rev 11,4). If the two witnesses were themselves symbols, then the “the two olive trees and the two lampstands” would be symbols of symbols, which is an absurdity in the prophetic literature of this period. Clearly, in the context of this passage, the two witnesses are the symbolized element and not the symbol. They represent the people of God, not as symbols in a text, but as two real Christian witnesses embodying the Law and the Prophets, and actively prophesying at a certain time.

If we have not yet said enough to convince you that this prophetic mission is real, please note the temporal and geographical specificity of the text at this point. The two Christian witnesses prophesy for 1,260 days (approximately 3½ years), at the end of which they will be put to death in the “city where their Lord was crucified”, which can be no other than Jerusalem (Rev 11,8). The author could really not have been more literal and precise than that.

Although their spiritual powers remind us of those of Moses and Elijah, these two witnesses are not exactly identical to Moses and Elijah. Unlike these two ancient prophets, the two eschatological prophets work together, hand in hand, at every stage of their mission. They exercise their powers as a pair, and not as two separate individuals. Since they will be dressed in sackcloth, signifying mourning and sorrow in the biblical tradition, it is evident that their prophesying will be accompanied by an invitation to contrition and repentance. Finally, in their death, they witness to the Resurrection of Christ. So ultimately, our capacity to understand them as two real people depends very much on whether we believe in the supernatural powers manifested in Christ’s Resurrection and in the lives of Moses and Elijah.

The prophetic narration of their mission is followed in the text by the sounding of the seventh and last trumpet (11,15) announcing the end of history and the consummation of all things (cf.10,7), and leaving us wondering about the rest of the prophecy given to John ‘to prophecy again’—especially the part that will be announced by these two witnesses.

In fact, this can be deduced by recalling its role in the measuring of the new temple. One would expect the prophecy with this function to end with the completion of the new temple, which is indicated in the text, as in the Old Testament (Ex 40,34-35; 1 Kgs 8,10-13), by the filling of the heavenly Sanctuary with the smoke of the Power and Glory of God (Rev 15,8). This event immediately follows the ceremonial opening of that Sanctuary, which is mentioned twice in the text, once at 11,19 and again at 15,5, even though we understand it refers to a single eschatological occurrence, whose significance need not concern us just now. On the basis of this repetition, we can infer that the intervening passage (12,1–15,4) is an

inclusion that refers back to the mission of the two witnesses, and contains the part of the prophecy that they must announce.

This is confirmed by the fact that the temporal markers mentioned in this passage, 1,260 days and 42 months, (12,6.14; 13,5) are exactly the same as those mentioned previously, at the start of chapter 11, indicating that the two passages (11,1-13 and 12,1–15,4) are indeed parallel and deal with events in the same time-frame. From the literary context, we know that this is the period of time immediately preceding the end of history and the consummation of all things.

On closer inspection of these parallel or ‘overlapping’ passages, the 1,260 days links the mission of the two witnesses (11,3) with the flight of the woman to the desert (12,6), and the 42 months links the trampling of the Holy City (11,2) with the brief but global reign of the beast from the sea (13,5). Despite the temptation to see these two time-periods as the same, with 42 months of 30 days being equal to 1260 days and both representing 3½ years, there are good reasons to understand them as different.

Firstly, according to the ancient Hebrew lunar calendar, not all months are 30 days in length: some are 29 days and some are 30 days, with the result that 42 months are actually about 20 days less than 1,260 days.

Secondly, the mission of the two witnesses is clearly incompatible with the reign of the beast: during their mission, the two witnesses have the power to put to death anyone wanting to kill them, among whom is the beast, and during his reign, the beast has the authority to put to death all the people of God, among whom are the two witnesses. The two periods are therefore mutually exclusive, otherwise the beast and the two witnesses would end up destroying each other, but that is not what is described.

In fact, the text indicates that these two periods are consecutive, because it says: “*when they [the two witnesses] have finished their witnessing, the beast coming up out of the abyss makes war on them and kills them*” (11,7). The 1,260 day mission of the two witnesses and the exodus of the woman to the desert are therefore followed by the 42-month reign of the beast and trampling of the Holy City, which are brought to conclusion by the final war and the end of history. The two consecutive periods of approximately 3½ years constitute a final septennium, or ‘week of years’, which revives a well-known eschatological prophecy from the Book of Daniel (Dn 9). This final seven year period is the basic temporal structure of the prophecy given to the author and recorded as the central message of the Book of Revelation.

Having elucidated this structure, the prophetic content of the mission of two witnesses comes into greater focus. As they clearly do not have to prophesy about themselves or their 1,260-day mission, the main content of their prophesying therefore concerns the events of the 42-month period, which immediately follows their mission and concludes with the final battle and the end of history. As we have seen, this period of time is characterized, in the text, by two concurrent events: 1) the trampling, or profanation, of the Holy City and 2) the reign of

the beast from the sea or abyss, aided by a beast from the land (Rev 13). In the remaining part of the talk, we will concentrate on what the prophecy says about these events.

The first mention of the 42-month time period is in an appendix to the command given to the author (11,2), and examined above in some depth: “*And a cane similar to a rod was given to me while saying: Get up and measure the Sanctuary of God and the altar and those who are worshipping in it. And reject the court which is outside the Sanctuary and do not measure it, because it was given to the nations, and they will trample the Holy City for forty-two months*” (11,1-2).

From this we learn that during the period of 42 months, the unbelieving ‘nations’ will ‘trample’, which means desecrate or profane, and not necessarily destroy, the Holy City. On the basis of biblical tradition from Deutero-Isaiah to the Second Temple period (cf. Mt 4,5; 27,53), ‘Holy City’ is a clear reference to the historical city of Jerusalem. Since Jerusalem remains the Holy City in Christian tradition, up to this day, the ‘trampling’ for 42 months has not yet begun and so must be understood as a future event. Although disputed by many scholars, this is a solid indication that Revelation has something specific to say about historical Jerusalem.

The main objection to the Holy City as historical Jerusalem is the view that the Holy City here refers to the people of God, just as ‘the Sanctuary, the altar, the worshippers and the outer court’ in the first part of the instruction in Rev 11,1-2. It is argued that, for the sake of consistency, the Holy City must be understood symbolically as a reference to the people of God. This view, however, does not take into account the particular structure of the instruction, which carefully distinguishes the fate of the outer court (given over to the nations) from that of the Holy City (trampled by the nations). It accomplishes this by presenting the ‘trampling’ of the Holy City by the nations as the final outcome of the giving over of the outer court to the nations. After the outer court has been fully given over to the nations, these nations will then ‘trample’ the Holy City.

Furthermore, the giving over of the outer court to the nations lasts for an undefined period of time, while the trampling of the Holy City lasts only for a specific, and brief, period of 42 months, which happens to coincide exactly with the end-time reign of the beast described later in the text, in Rev 13. Therefore the time period of 42 months links the brief but global reign of the beast with the ‘trampling’ (profanation) of the Holy City, and carries the implication that the two events are causally related, i.e., that the coming of the beast to power leads to the profanation of the Holy City, historical Jerusalem.

This observation on the destiny of the Holy City, at the end of time, is further supported by the text at Rev 11,8. When, at the end of their mission, the two witnesses are killed by the beast ascending from the abyss, in the city where ‘their Lord was crucified’, namely historical Jerusalem, the title of this city has become ‘the Great City’, and its spiritual name is ‘Sodom and Egypt’. The changing of Jerusalem’s spiritual name from ‘Zion’ to ‘Sodom and Egypt’, both places from which God’s people fled at short notice (cf. Gn 19; Ex

12; cf Mt 24,15-28; Mk 13,14), conveys the same significance here, namely the rapid exodus of God's people from the city at this time (Rev 12,6.14). Concerning the change of Jerusalem's status from Holy City to Great City, we simply have to read on and see that Babylon was called Great City because of her intimate relation with the beast (Rev 17-18). The implication is that the beast, after ascending from the abyss to reveal himself fully at this particular point in time, selects Jerusalem to be the place of his throne during his subsequent reign (cf. 16,10).

So who is this beast that we have already mentioned many times, and what does he do during his brief 42-month reign? Above all, why does the reign of the beast constitute the main subject of the two witnesses' prophecy?

Since the 'beast' inherits the devil's 'power, throne and great authority' (13,2), and is described as a conflation of all four beasts seen by the prophet Daniel (Rev 13,1-2; cf. Dn 7,2-8), he is most simply regarded as the 'embodiment' of the devil (let's reserve the word 'incarnation' for the divine mystery). He is one of the most important characters in the Book of Revelation and his figure looms large over the entire second half of the book. The amount of text applied to him is substantial: almost two full chapters (Rev chs. 13 and 17) with cross-references in four other parts of the text (Rev 11,7; 16,13; 19,19-20; 20,10). This material describes the beast's career in two stages, rather confusingly arranged in reverse chronological order. In chapter 13, he is described in his full and final manifestation at the end of history, while chapter 17 speaks about his semi-concealed condition prior to this full self-revelation. The transition between these two stages is referred to his 'ascent' from the abyss (11,7; 17,8), or sea (13,1), which are therefore synonyms for the beast's concealed abode, before he rises up and fully reveals himself at the end of history, in order to kill the two witnesses and start his 42-month reign. For the sake of simplicity, we will start with the first stage (ch.17) and proceed in chronological order (ch.13).

So before the beast rises from the abyss, or sea, he provides support for the Great City called Babylon, and thereby participates in a mystery (17,5.7). As the evil counterpart of the 'mystery of God...announced to his servants the prophets' (10,7), we can identify this mystery as 'the mystery of iniquity', mentioned in a very similar context by St. Paul (2 Thess 2,3-12). And since Babylon, the Great City, is sitting on 'many waters', whilst also sitting on the heads of the beast (Rev 17,1 and 3) before he ascends from this abyss or sea (17,8), we can deduce that the 'many waters' is another term for this concealed environment. Finally, the seer is informed that "the waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are races and crowds and nations and tongues" (Rev 17,15), which is a standard expression used elsewhere to denote the multitudes of unredeemed humanity (cf. Rev 5,9; 7,9). The abyss, the sea and the waters, then, do not refer to the physical oceans surrounding the continents, but rather to the collective spiritual and physical home composed of unredeemed human beings. St. Augustine was remarkably accurate when he wrote that the abyss symbolizes "*the countless number of godless men whose bitter hatred of God's Church comes from the abysmal depths of their hearts*".

This is important because it allows us to move beyond a crudely literalistic understanding of the beast as some kind of mythological sea monster. A monster he may be, but one with real human faces and composed of real human beings, among whom he remains more or less unidentified until his full revelation at the end of history.

At a certain point, however, the clandestine relationship between Babylon and the beast suffers a dramatic reversal: the beast removes his support from Babylon and ascends from the abyss, or sea, to reveal himself fully (11,7; 13,1) and start his reign over the world. We saw previously that this takes place at the end of history and coincides with the death of the two witnesses in Jerusalem, which now inherits the title of Great City. Then, at some point during his brief reign, the beast and his allies turn against the former Great City of Babylon and utterly destroy her. It is significant that in this action they are actually performing God's will (17,16-17).

The beast appears, in history, as a series of seven heads, which represent individual rulers (17,9). However, in his full and final manifestation, he is enigmatically described as an eighth head, but also one of the seven: "*Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and whenever he comes he must remain for a short time. And the beast which was and is not, even he is an eighth, is also of the seven, and goes to destruction*" (17,10-11). Because the author is placing himself immediately before the ruler represented by the final head, most modern interpreters see here a reference to the succession of Roman Emperors up to the time of the author, and a prediction that the next will be the last. There is, however, no satisfactory match. Furthermore, all our work up to this point has shown us that this passage is referring to the end of history, and not to the period of the ancient Roman Empire.

So the first thing to note is that, by placing himself just before the identification of the seventh and last ruler, the author is not referring to the time of writing, but to the time at which his prophecy will be publicly announced by the two witnesses. This is the time of the sixth head. The next head is the seventh and he must remain for a short time, but although he is the last, in some sense he is not the last, because the text goes on to mention the "*beast which was and is not, even he is an eighth, is also of the seven, and goes to destruction*". How can one explain the curious appearance of an eighth head, on a beast with only seven heads?

The answer is actually quite simple, because we have already been told that "*one of his heads was like one that had been slain to death, and his fatal wound had been cured*" (13,3). The 'beast which was and is not, even he is an eighth, is also of the seven, and goes to destruction' can therefore be identified as the revived and transformed seventh head. As the title suggests, the revived beast is an eighth head, an octave, which—as in music—is a repetition of the first on a new level. But he is also the seventh and last. He is therefore a kind of 'first and last', which not only represents the whole beast in his entirety, but is also a point of resemblance with the risen Christ, who is the First and the Last (cf. Rev 1,17; 2,8; 22,13). This is further endorsed by the fact that the ruler represented by the seventh head is described as a human being (13,18), who is mortally wounded, revives and ascends from the abyss, in a

movement that appears to be a crude imitation of the death, Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus Christ (cf. Rev 13,3.12.14; 11,7; 13,1).

A further indication of the beast's divine pretension is in the title: the "beast which was and is not, even he is an eighth, is also of the seven, and goes to destruction", which parallels the title of Almighty God as "The One who was, and who is, and is to come". But we must not be deceived: unlike God, the beast, right now 'is not' and his imminent 'coming' will be quickly followed by his 'going to destruction'.

Unfortunately, though, many will be deceived. Since the beast is the embodiment of the devil's 'power, throne and great authority' (13,2), both the devil and the beast receive worship from all those unredeemed people on earth who are not written in Christ's book of Life from the foundation of the world (13,8). They praise the beast and the devil with words that recall the praise addressed to God in certain Psalms (Ps 113,5; 89,7.9; 86,8; 35,10; Ex 15,11): "*Who is like the beast, and who can make war against him?*"(Rev 13,4), reminding us once again of his divine pretension and indicating that it is backed up by awesome military power. In fact, the personality cult of this beast is such an important aspect in the establishment and consolidation of his reign that it is promoted and enforced by a second beast, one that is said to arise from the Land, but is also a man, because he is called the 'false prophet' (13,11-17; cf. 19,20; 20,10). This character is able to perform miracles that deceive people into worshipping the first beast, through a speaking image of him (13,13-14). Those who do not comply will be killed, and those who do not show their loyalty to his regime, by receiving a mark of his name on their flesh, will be unable to participate in any economic activity. We are talking about a degree of social control that was unknown, and unimaginable, at any time in the past.

One of the greatest miracles wrought by the false prophet is to 'make fire come down from heaven on to the earth in the sight of men' (13,13). To what could this refer? Well, in the Old Testament, the descent of fire from heaven was a sign of divine approval at the consecration of a new altar (Lev 9,24; 1Chr 21,26; 2Chr 7,1; 2Macc 1,18-36), and since a new altar could only be built in Jerusalem, this reference seems to be hinting at the reconstruction of the temple in Jerusalem. It would appear to indicate the third temple as the locus of the personality cult of the beast promoted by his false prophet—a finding that corresponds very well to the previous observation, that the beast abandons Babylon in order to establish the seat of his reign in Jerusalem, which therefore inherits the titles Great City, Sodom and Egypt. It would also indicate the beast's role as the messiah of the Jews, for according to the religious laws clarified by Maimonides, and now considered binding, the messiah of the Jews is to be identified as the leader who supervises the rebuilding of the temple in its original place.

We are told that the reign of the beast will be global and will last for 42 months. During this time he will be "allowed to make war against the saints and overcome them" (13,5-7). The context for this persecution, called the Great Tribulation, is given elsewhere in the prophecy announced by the two witnesses: God's people are warned not to worship this ruler, and not to receive the mark of his name, because to do so leads directly to eternal

perdition (14,9-11). Countless multitudes are martyred for passively resisting the deception and coercion of the beast's regime. St. John sees them in heaven, before the throne of God, celebrating their salvation (7,9-17; 15,2-4; 19,1-8). The blasphemous reign of the beast is brought to an end by the last of God's judgments (ch.16), which lead into the final battle, at a place called Armageddon. Here the beast and his armies are resoundingly defeated by the returning Christ and his armies. He, the false prophet and finally the devil are then condemned and thrown into the Lake of Fire, which is eternal perdition.

In summary, the beast is the embodiment of the devil's power, throne and great authority. Throughout the centuries he has been supporting the Great City, Babylon, in a clandestine way, never openly revealing himself, but appearing partially as a succession of rulers. The prophecy of St. John, announced by the two witnesses, focuses especially on the reign of the ruler represented by the seventh and final head of the beast. After being mortally wounded, he revives and returns to rule in an open and powerful way, in a form that recapitulates the entire history of the beast. In this form, the beast is represented by a particular human being, the letters of whose name add up to 666 (13,18). Because of his great power and status, his unrepentant hostility to Christ and his followers (Rev 11,7; 13,7; 17,14), and because of those aspects of his career that impiously try to imitate God and the Paschal mystery of Christ (Rev 13,3.12.14; 11,7; 13,1), the 'beast' can be identified with certainty as the last and most powerful manifestation of the antichristian spirit, the ultimate antagonist of Christ and his people, known for centuries in Christian tradition as the 'Antichrist' (1Jn 2,18-23), or 'the man of lawlessness, the son of perdition' (2Thess 2,3.8). This is confirmed by his position in a hierarchy of three evil figures (the devil, the Beast and the false prophet) that the author contrasts with God, his Messiah and their prophet, John. Through this person, evil is permitted to rule the world for a brief period of time, referred to as 42 months, at the end of history (13,5-7). His reign concludes with the final judgments of God and the second coming of Christ.

Perhaps we can conclude with some reflections on why this diabolical 'beast' will be allowed to reign for a brief period at the end of history. Several explanations can be put forward:

1. The first has already been mentioned in passing: the beast and his allies are doing God's will by turning against and destroying Babylon the Great City (17,15-18). At this, all the saints, apostles, prophets, and all who dwell in heaven, are invited to celebrate (18,20). This act of destruction recalls the role given to foreign invaders in Old Testament times, to test or punish God's people, but just as these agents of God's anger tended to exceed the task assigned to them and therefore merit their own punishment (Is 10,5-26; 14,4-21), so also the beast fatally oversteps his limits by blaspheming God and persecuting the followers of Christ. For this he goes on to receive a condemnation that is eternal. It's difficult to understand how anyone, even the beast, could receive such a terrible fate as eternal damnation, unless that person has knowingly chosen the devil as his master and freely follows him in his rebellion against God, the source of love, life and forgiveness. This does indeed seem to be the case of the beast and those who are persuaded to identify with him by receiving the mark of his name. If we could express, in the form of a motto, the psychological equivalent of this mark,

it would be something like “Sin is nonsense, forgiveness is absurd, be proud always and do as you desire!”

2. The final and eternal judgment and condemnation of evil requires that it fully manifests itself beforehand, on the principle that only then will divine justice will be seen, understood and praised (cf. 15,3-4). The risk is that many will be deceived by the beast and be led into the same judgment and eternal condemnation.
3. This takes us on to the final point, which is that the full revelation of evil, prior to its final judgment and condemnation, forms an integral part of the final judgment of the earth’s inhabitants. This explanation has already been proposed by St Paul in 2 Thessalonians: *“The coming of the lawless one by the activity of Satan will be with all power and with pretended signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are to perish, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sends upon them a strong delusion, to make them believe what is false, so that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness”* (2Thess 2,9-12). The same principle underlies the beast’s reign in the prophecy of the Book of Revelation, and in particular the exclusion, from Christ’s Book of Life, of those who identify themselves with the beast. Those whose names are not recorded there, will worship the beast and be deceived by him (Rev 13,8; 17,8). And *“If anyone was not found inscribed in the Book of Life he was thrown into the Lake of fire”* (20,15), which is the ‘second death’, namely eternal perdition. This simply repeats the angelic warning at 14,9: *“If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives the mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also shall drink the wine of God’s passion, poured unmixed into the cup of his anger, and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of the torment goes up for ever and ever; and they have no rest, day or night, these worshippers of the beasts and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name”* (14,9-11). Therefore identifying oneself with the beast is a certain way to be sent to eternal perdition, and here lies the fundamental importance of the prophecy given to St John, and announced beforehand as a warning by the two witnesses.

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