

After Satan

After Satan:
Essays in Honour of Neil Forsyth

Edited by

Kirsten Stirling
and Martine Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère

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P U B L I S H I N G

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AFTER SATAN: INTRODUCTION

MARTINE HENNARD DUTHEIL
AND KIRSTEN STIRLING

In a sense, the Satan-serpent here shows himself to be the first literary critic, that peculiar species that loves to replace the words of the primary text with its own, clarifying, language.

—Neil Forsyth, *The Satanic Epic*

This volume is the result of a collective desire to pay homage to Neil Forsyth, whose work has significantly contributed to scholarship on Satan, a notoriously multifold and complex figure who has long fired human imagination. This volume is “after” Satan in more ways than one, tracing the afterlife of both the satanic figure in literature and Neil Forsyth’s contribution to the field, particularly in his major books *The Old Enemy: Satan and the Combat Myth* (1987, revised 1990) and *The Satanic Epic* (2003). All the essays in this volume draw on Forsyth’s work in these two books and elsewhere as a focus for their analyses of a variety of literary encounters with evil or with the Devil himself.

Neil Forsyth’s compelling argument in *The Old Enemy* is that the invention of Satan (or his avatars) is bound up with myth-making. Long before representing evil, “the old enemy” fulfilled a crucial narrative function, if only because without an adversary or antagonist, there would be no “agon,” no plot, no story to tell. Playing a key role in the dialectical structure of epics both ancient and modern, Satan becomes the dynamic principle of literary discourse itself. While *The Old Enemy* reflected the influence of formalist and especially Proppian notions of the dynamics of narrative, *The Satanic Epic* reassessed the role of Satan in *Paradise Lost* by accounting for his seductiveness, both inside and outside the poem, by way of his psychological complexity, political savvy, and rhetorical mastery, and as an embodiment of Milton’s own subversive energies. Neil Forsyth also demonstrated that Satan was inextricably linked to the

author's creative project not merely as the "hero" of his epic poem but also as the very principle that informs its structure and language. This reevaluation and rehabilitation of Satan as a dynamic, critical, and creative force, from its archaic sources up to Milton's sympathetic refiguring in *Paradise Lost*, which shaped Romantic perceptions and representations of evil, informs the following essays, which bear witness to the continuing presence and endless reinvention of the Satan figure.

The essays collected here are also *after* Satan in that they follow his traces through western literary history. The contributions are arranged in the chronological order of their primary texts, and they reveal the rise and fall of Satan's fortunes over time. The cluster of essays on *Paradise Lost* forms a nexus in this volume, which is partly in honour of Neil Forsyth's work on Milton in his many articles and most recently his biography (2008), but also because it is almost impossible to consider Satan in western literature without looking through what Gordon Campbell here calls the "literary prism" of Milton's great work. Thus in the earliest of the pre-Milton papers collected here, both Elaine Pagels and Margaret Bridges, writing on the early Christian and the early British church, discuss evil through the lens of Forsyth's writing on Milton's Satan, which considers the (inter)textual construction of Satan for strategic purposes but also the inevitable complications and ambiguities surrounding the binary oppositions of the Satan figure. Closer to Milton's own time, but reflecting a similar ambivalence, Anthony Mortimer's essay on Cromwell's elegists begins with Forsyth's assertion that "[Milton's] Satan has in him Cromwell as well as Charles." While these essays trace sources and inspirations—pre-texts—for Milton's Satan, they also demonstrate that reading evil after Milton's Satan can never be the same again. The question of how evil is "mediated" textually, to use Lukas Erne's term, and the satanic figure (re)constructed poetically and strategically, is a primary concern of many of the articles.

The textual presence of the Devil and his works is one of the strongest themes to emerge from the essays, from his physical presence in early Christian and medieval texts to his elusive imprint in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The chronological range of the essays charts how Satan becomes written into the political and cultural discourses of different times. In her *Origins of Satan* (1996), Elaine Pagels demonstrated that the sectarian demonization of "intimate enemies"—notably Jews and heretics—shaped early Christianity. Here, in "The Social History of Satan: John of Patmos and Ignatius of Antioch: Contrasting Visions of 'God's People,'" she traces the source of the Miltonic topos of "War in Heaven" in John's Gospel, and contextualizes his use of Leviathan, the mythical dragon, as

the embodiment of evil. She shows how the Evangelist's use of traditional imagery serves social, political, and ideological interests as the topos is manipulated to stigmatize the "enemies within" and strengthen the idea of a homogeneous community of believers, a strategy that is also found in the writings of his student, Ignatius of Antioch.

While Elaine Pagels shows the strategic manipulation of the figure of Satan for socio-political ends in the early days of Christianity, Margaret Bridges focuses on questions of origin and filiation, but in relation to a famous figure in the early Middle Ages, as she documents the interplay of antagonistic forces in the fabrication of a saint's genealogy. "Satan's Posterity: The Strange Filiation of Vortigern and Faustus" focuses on a striking example of the paradoxical affiliation of the opposites of good and evil, the demonic and the saintly, in the association of the well-known bishop Faustus of Riez with the incestuous Celtic overlord Vortigern. Nennius's *British History and the Welsh Annals* not only ascribes a Breton, pagan, and unholy origin to the saint, but also goes on to narrate the displacement of this incestuous, ineffectual, and demonized biological father by two sets of foreigners, Saint Germanus and the Germanic tribes under Hengest.

The tension between hagiography and demonization is also explored in Anthony Mortimer's piece "Domesticating the Devil: Cromwell and His Elegists." Mortimer traces the satanic shadows that cling to Cromwell's memory and haunt the elegists who attempt to both immortalize and exonerate him. Mortimer's focus on literary negotiations with evil is picked up by many other authors in this volume. Lukas Erne's article, "Mediating Evil: The Editorial and Critical Reception of Shakespeare's Villains," demonstrates how moral editorial judgments, particularly in nineteenth-century editions of Shakespeare, may divert attention from the "grandeur of evil" in Shakespeare's works, and can obscure, or in the worst cases eliminate, Shakespeare's subtle development of characters such as Iago and Richard III, from whom, as Forsyth points out in *The Satanic Epic*, Satan learned a lot.¹ Samuel Johnson described footnotes as a "necessary evil";² Erne demonstrates how editorial annotations, in "building the bridge" between seventeenth-century authors and their later readers, reshaped and to some extent domesticated evil as part of Shakespeare's canonization.

Satan's worldliness is connected not only with the production of texts and the materiality of books, but also with the technological production of wealth and a rhetoric of economy and profit.³ Rick Waswo, in "Devilish and Divine Economies in *Paradise Lost*," explores the satanic aspect of Pandemonium as a world ruled by economic processes and vocabulary,

whether in the unearthing of precious stones or in metaphysical speculations. A focus on the poem's economic lexicon nevertheless confronts the paradox whereby "profit" and "redemption" are used as metaphors for forgiveness and grace, and Eve's utilitarian views on the division of labor complicate the ascription of an economic worldview to satanic forces, moving towards a more broadly postlapsarian condition that contaminates paradise and hell alike.

Roy Flannagan and Gordon Campbell both address, in very different ways, God's laughter, and connect this to the "sometimes bitter edge" of Milton's own humour. In "Funny as Hell, or Humbaba to the Rescue," Flannagan picks up on Forsyth's discussion, in the opening chapter of *The Old Enemy*, of the ancestor of the Christian Satan, Humbaba, whose funny name (at least for a modern reader) casts an embarrassing shadow on Satan, and explores the ways in which Satan is a figure of fun for God. Referring to his own close textual work in his edition of *Paradise Lost* (1993), Flannagan documents Milton's epic sense of humor, and explores the comic side of Satan as a "cosmic fool," pathetic voyeur, and misinterpreter of words. The "flying fiend" of *Paradise Lost* finally flies in cowardly retreat from the scene of his crime, thereby justifying God's derision. But while there is biblical precedent for God laughing at his enemies, Gordon Campbell points out in "Godly Reflections" that Milton's God also pokes fun at Adam's folly, and this vision of a cruelly humorous God who laughs at his own creation is specific to Milton. Campbell also discusses in detail Milton's anti-Trinitarian theology in *Paradise Lost*. Arguing against the interpretation that the incestuous trinity of Satan, Sin, and Death is a diabolical mirroring of the Holy Trinity in heaven, he demonstrates that for Milton the only trinity was in hell.

After Satan, or after *Paradise Lost*, the post-Milton essays trace the parodic exploitation and deflation of the devilish figure, as well as a reassessment of his significance, after his Miltonic highpoint. Milton's Satan, returning in triumph to Pandemonium to report on the successful temptation of Adam and Eve, called on the devils to "enter now into full blissssssss" (as Neil Forsyth always reads this line in his Milton seminars) to find himself greeted with "a dismal universal hiss" as the devils are all turned into serpents.⁴ A similar fate befalls the post-*Paradise Lost* Devil in literature, who seems to slink into the background, or be relegated to the margins. He is internalized, as anticipated in Milton's description of hell as a state of mind, and gradually dismissed as a pretext or a superstition. Kirsten Stirling's reading of James Hogg's *Private Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) and Elizabeth Kaspar's essay on Hawthorne's "Alice Doane's Appeal" (1835) both explore, in their very different

contexts, the authors' consideration of Satan in a near historical past. In Hogg's novel, set largely in eighteenth-century Scotland, folk belief in the Devil clashes with an Enlightenment rationalism which proposes a psychological explanation to counter any supernatural explanation for evil. The whole narrative is framed by a nineteenth-century "editor" who casts skeptical doubt on the existence of the Devil at all. In Hawthorne's tale too, the supernatural story, taking place around the time of the Salem witchcraft trials—"the satanic moment in American history," as Kaspar puts it—is told by a nineteenth-century narrator to a skeptical audience. Both Hogg and Hawthorne place Satan in a context that raises questions about the nature of belief. Kaspar's essay traces a shift in the textual history of the Devil in America, from actual presence to "the Devil as man", from historical "fact" to historical fiction.

Kaspar's essay looks forward to the Devil in later nineteenth-century American literature, where he becomes a comic or satirical figure, and in "Poe's Poor Devils," Agnieszka Soltysik develops this theme. Contrary to what we might expect, Poe's devils are not figures of horror but figures of fun: they are physically impaired, often represented as old men wearing spectacles, a far cry from the majesty of Milton's Satan. Outwitted by humans, they come to represent the demonic nature of modern men and society. Poe's influence on Baudelaire, evoked by John Jackson in "The Devil Doesn't Only Wear Prada: Dialectics of Evil in Baudelaire's Poetry," is based on his acknowledgement of the power of evil in the life of men and also functions as a double for the author. Jackson explores the paradox of Baudelaire's poetry, whereby evil reigns supreme in man, but as the mask of God. For the French poet, Satan's attractiveness lies not only in man's fascination for knowledge but is also an aesthetic necessity, insofar as poetry results from the tension between the aspiration toward God and the satanic nature of human desires.

Adam Piette's Miltonic-Forsythian reading of Samuel Beckett's *Ill Seen, Ill Said* continues the story of the depletion of Satan in the twentieth century. In Piette's reading Satan is reduced to a narrative eye watching Beckett's Eve-Mary in her garden. Milton's Satan lurking in the Garden becomes a presence lurking in the fabric of the text itself, an intertextual echo. But Satan dies hard, and with a vengeance. This volume ends with his triumphant return to the literary scene in the aftermath of the publication of *The Satanic Verses*, or rather after the Rushdie affair, when Salman Rushdie was demonized and sentenced to death by Ayatollah Khomeini for blasphemy—once again demonstrating that Satan, writing, and politics are inextricably linked. We come full circle back to the beginning, as it were, since Rushdie's transgressive gesture was to use the

figure of Satan (and the conflict between the angel and the demon) to explore the enigma of origins and creation by fantasizing the historical circumstances of the birth of Islam and by satirizing the ascription of evil to the “other within,” be it women, immigrants, or rival poets.

The essays in this volume show how evil can function as a necessary other against which to define a community or a society, and how it generates ambivalent responses in the recognition that it is inevitably bound up with its opposite, if only through the workings of discourse and textuality. The cowardice of the satanic other may inspire contempt, but his grandeur may inspire creativity, as his presence is almost always associated with language, stories and the writing (even the making) of books. The multiple responses to evil and the continuous reinvention of the Devil figure through the centuries all reaffirm his textual presence, his changing forms necessarily inscribed in the shifting history of literary culture. This book delineates certain moments in the history of the Devil in western culture. More importantly, it is a tribute to the work of Neil Forsyth, whose scholarship has illuminated and guided the study of the Devil in English and other literatures.

Notes

¹ Neil Forsyth, *The Satanic Epic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 12.

² Samuel Johnson, “Preface to Shakespeare,” *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*, ed. Arthur Sherbo (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 7:111.

³ See Forsyth, *Satanic Epic*, 112 and 132.

⁴ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, bk. 10, lines 503 and 508.

THE SOCIAL HISTORY OF SATAN: JOHN OF PATMOS AND IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH: CONTRASTING VISIONS OF “GOD’S PEOPLE”

ELAINE H. PAGELS

Leviathan and Satan—A Composite Image of Evil

At the climactic moment of the cosmic drama in the book of Revelation, the seer tells how two great portents appeared in heaven, the first a woman “clothed with the sun” (12:1).¹ As in a dream, the scene changes, and he sees her pregnant, “crying out in the agony of giving birth,” being menaced by a “great red dragon with seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns on each of its heads” (12:3); thus the seer pictures Israel in danger, confronting her enemies, the foreign oppressors.

At this point John transforms traditional imagery, as he does throughout his prophecy, veering into a startlingly non-traditional direction. John knew, of course, that the imagery he revises here, with echoes from Genesis and the psalms to *1 Enoch*, had been developed especially by Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel to characterize Israel’s alien enemies—“the nations” such as Egyptians and Babylonians—as mythological monsters, often dragons like Behemoth and Leviathan who have fought against God from the beginning of time.² John takes his cues in particular from Isaiah 26:17–27:1, where the prophet depicts Israel as a woman crying out “in the pangs of giving birth” (26:17), until “that day” when the Lord will come “to punish the inhabitants of the earth” (26:21), and “with his cruel, and great, and strong sword will punish Leviathan, the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will kill the dragon that is in the sea” (27:1).

Abruptly, however, John breaks with tradition to reveal a new—composite—image of evil. Having pictured Leviathan menacing Israel as scene 1 of the cosmic drama, John suddenly shifts the expected course of the narrative to scene 2, the messiah’s birth, which signals the outbreak of “war in heaven”:

Michael and his angels [were] fighting against the dragon. The dragon and his angels fought back, but they were defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. (12:7–9)

But, a traditionalist might object, when was the dragon ever up “in heaven”? And how could the primordial monster have angels as allies? According to a tradition well known to John, as he had already shown in his own narrative, God’s ancient adversary dwells far below, as “the beast that comes up from the bottomless pit” (11:7). When he appears, he emerges from the “depths”—from the abyss, or the primordial sea. How, then, could the dragon ever have claimed a “place” for himself and his allies in heaven, or stood at the head of an angelic army, making war against “Michael and his angels”? Is John simply getting his stories scrambled, or is he making what is for him a central point of his revelation?

Yet John boldly combines the Satan tradition of the rebellious angelic commander with the Leviathan traditions involving the dragon from the abyss in order to reveal a great secret: that the one who once held power in heaven and fell down from there like a star was actually none other than

the great dragon, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. (12:9)

Scholars long have noted that John is the first to identify the serpent of Eden with Satan,³ and the only author of any Jewish or Christian literature of his time to speak of “war in heaven.”⁴ While other scholars have noted these bold innovations and have traced the theological and literary means by which he makes them, what I intend to ask here is for what reasons John does so. What, for example, do these innovations have to do with social history—how John envisions holy war here on earth? What urgent and pressing concerns impel John to make them?

This article thus continues research published in two previous articles (“The Social History of Satan,” parts 1 and 2),⁵ and makes three suggestions, here sketched in brief. First, I suggest that John’s graphic description of “war in heaven” is the key to understanding his practical concerns as a prophet: namely, that he combines the Satan and Leviathan traditions in order to persuade his constituency, God’s “holy ones,” that they now have to fight on two fronts at once. What he reveals in Revelation 12 is what he recognizes as the great secret—that the enemy in heaven is none other than God’s ancient enemy, the dragon, a.k.a. both “Leviathan” and “Satan.” John intends to show that those he identifies as “intimate enemies” among Jesus’ followers now have joined forces with

hostile outsiders in an unprecedented—and unholy—alliance. Since he takes this to mean that the forces of evil thus have gained overwhelming power, John believes he is impelled to sort out who really does belong to God's people and who does not. For much as he detests the "beasts," John sees inside enemies as even more dangerous: he says that Jesus praises those who truly are "holy ones," but warns that there are others, lurking among them, whom he "hates," as well as some in the middle.⁶ Thus from the first century to the twenty-first, John's powerful and innovative narrative has offered his readers an example of how to "out" certain insiders by identifying deviants among them as, in effect, secret agents for forces they see rampant in the monstrous culture outside.

Second, when asking who the enemies are that John warns against, we probably all would agree about the alien enemies. John gives such obvious clues that we cannot fail to identify them with the Roman forces and their supporters. Much more complicated—and much more contested—is the question of whom he sees as Satan's allies within the "assemblies" he addresses. To what extent, as one scholar puts it, can we locate actual first-century followers of Jesus behind John's polemical characterizations?⁷ No doubt the most complicated question, recently addressed again by Paul Duff and David Frankfurter, among others, is whom the prophet has in mind when he denounces "those who say they are Jews and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan" (2:9, 3:9).⁸ Although we must consider this question, we cannot claim to resolve it here; instead, we only make some observations about the discussion.

Traditionally, of course, most commentators have assumed that this polemic is not about insiders at all; instead, it refers to Jews hostile to Christians. So our answer to this question has much to do with the question now engaging heated discussion, of how we envision these Asian groups of Jesus' followers at the end of the first century and, in particular, what we assume about boundaries between Jews and Christians. For the purpose of this article, I agree with those who point out that John, like other Jews devoted to Jesus Christ among his first-century followers, sees himself and his fellows not as Christians but as Jews (Paul, of course, called himself an "Israelite")—the "holy ones" who await the return of God's messiah. If John does know the term *Christian*, he does not use it, much less apply it to himself, perhaps because, as we shall see, those who coined and used the term in late first- and early second-century Asia most often applied it to Gentile converts.

Third, I suggest that we may find some help understanding John's specific concerns with "intimate enemies" when we compare his vision of these Asian assemblies with that of Ignatius, who wrote letters to groups in

some of the same towns John had addressed, about ten years later. This Syrian believer who called himself “bishop of Antioch,” a devoted follower of Paul, was the first, so far as we know, to insist that only those who are called “Christians” truly belong to God. In contrast to John, Ignatius is the first to demand that Jesus’s followers preach, in his words, only “Christianity—not Judaism.”

To address these issues, we begin by asking: what do John’s characterizations of evil powers show about the way John sees himself and his fellow saints in relation to specific “enemies on the ground”—both inside and outside of his group? What do his prophetic visions suggest about his own situation and that of those with whom—and against whom—he identifies? For, in Peter Brown’s apt phrase, John and his fellow believers see the story of the fallen angels, like the stories of the archaic chaos dragon, “not as a myth, but as a map on which they plotted the disruptions and tensions of the world around them.”⁹ As is well known, John follows tradition when he identifies Israel’s “outside” enemies, whom he sees embodied in the Roman forces, as “the great dragon” and his two allies, the “beast from the sea” and the “beast from the land.”

To appreciate the impact of John’s revisionism, let us briefly recall how the Gospel writers characterize the cosmic war they see manifest in Jesus’s execution. As noted above, in two previous articles I have shown that the New Testament evangelists chose to deal with the question of who embodied evil forces by drawing upon and amplifying, in varying ways, a handful of biblical stories that came to be associated with “the *satan*”—an angelic being who defected, so to speak, to the dark side. Genesis 6, for example, tells how the angelic “sons of God,” seduced by the beauty of human women, descended to earth where they spawned heroes and warriors, half angel and half human—what the Greeks would call demigods—but who, later commentators declared, generated, in turn, demonic powers and evil spirits.¹⁰ The famous folktale in Numbers 22 tells how the foreign prophet Balaam found his way blocked on a journey by an angelic figure, whose obstructiveness hints at his association with “the *satan*” (note that the Hebrew noun that describes him, שָׂטָן, suggests his adversarial role). John of Patmos draws upon this same story to derisively suggest that some insiders follow the teaching of “Balaam,” a false prophet whose notorious name suggests that he is a “deceiver of the people.”¹¹ Followers of Jesus later connected these passages with others that tell of an angelic accuser who stands before the Lord to accuse humans, a kind of “devil’s advocate” (Zech 3:1–2; Job 1–3), and with Isaiah’s account (14:7–15) of the luminous heavenly being called “day star, son of the dawn,” who, having defied his commander in chief, was

cast out of heaven, demoted, and disgraced—a passage that apparently inspired Revelation 12—and, over a thousand and five hundred years later, inspired Milton’s account of Satan’s fall in *Paradise Lost*.¹²

In “The Social History of Satan,” part 1, we noted that the Satan traditions flowered especially in Jewish pseudepigraphic sources from ca. 165 BCE to 200 CE, finding their deepest resonances among certain groups of so-called “dissident Jews” ranging from the Qumran sectarians to followers of Jesus of Nazareth. The authors of such works as *1 Enoch* and *Jubilees* amplified and retold such biblical stories of fallen angels to tell how the angelic “watchers,” often called “sons of God,” and leaders in the angelic army rebelled against God and finally became his enemies. Thus, we suggested, members of certain sectarian Jewish groups adapted such stories to characterize their own situation—above all to interpret their own marginal status, and the apostasy with which they charged the majority of God’s holy people. Thus they could explain that just as God’s own angels once turned against their commander in chief, so now many of his own people have turned against their God. The moral of the story is that even Israelites, although they are called God’s own “sons,” they, like the angels themselves, could fall from their rightful place to become, in effect, his enemies—and thus enemies of the “remnant” who remained faithful to God—who, such sectarians explained, in this case were themselves.

At first it may seem strange—if not absurd—that the authors of Matthew, Mark, and John sought to blame other Jews for Jesus’s death, since it was well known, of course, that Jesus had been sentenced by the Roman governor, and executed by his soldiers on charges of sedition against Rome. Had these evangelists chosen to follow the well-known prophetic tropes they found in the writings of Isaiah, Daniel, and Ezekiel, they could have told the story of Jesus’s death in a far more traditional—and historically plausible—way. They might have told it instead as the story of a righteous man like Daniel, sentenced to death by “the nations,” Israel’s hated foreign oppressors. Had they done so, they probably would have characterized the powers of evil as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel had, by retelling stories of Yahweh’s battle with the dragon, who embodies the monstrous power of evil—a dragon associated with the sea, the primordial chaos—and thus with Israel’s foreign oppressors.

Surprisingly, however, the evangelists ignored such familiar tropes and drew instead upon the far more peripheral Satan traditions, in order to make the astonishing claim that although Romans crucified Jesus, it was his Jewish enemies who actually killed him; Luke and John go so far as to

identify these diabolical powers explicitly with those they see as Jesus's Jewish enemies.¹³

When I asked for what reasons they told the story as they did, I recognized that they did so primarily as a defensive tactic. Writing in the shattering aftermath of the failed Jewish war, themselves known to be followers of a man convicted of sedition against Rome, Jesus's followers fell under suspicion on the same charge. In that dangerous situation, they apparently hoped to deflect outsiders' suspicion and hostility by telling the story of their leader's death in a way calculated to show that even the Roman procurator found Jesus innocent of sedition—and to imply the innocence of the rest of his followers. Thus they chose to tell the story of Jesus's death in a way that showed the Romans treating Jesus in the historically implausible but fair-minded and respectful way that his followers hoped to be treated themselves, should they come to trial. Luke and Matthew both insist that Pilate not only repeatedly declared Jesus innocent, but resolved several times to release him—before giving in to a shouting mob of hostile Jews.

When we turn to John's revelation, however, we see at once that John of Patmos makes no such defensive moves. While sharing the evangelists' conviction of Jesus's innocence, John makes no attempt to placate Gentile fears and suspicions. Instead of the apologetic charge Luke has Peter address to the "men of Israel" ("*you* killed the righteous one, and delivered him into the hands of lawless men," Acts 2:23), the author of Revelation clearly indicts Roman forces, whom he sees as the ominous shadow government for those who actually wield power—namely, the supernatural forces of evil that he depicts as the "great dragon" and his allies.

Yet hostility toward "the nations" need not—and often does not—preclude hostility toward those identified as "intimate enemies." For while the author of Revelation takes as his dominant theme how monstrous evil powers "war against God," he simultaneously weaves into his narrative the second, more minor theme, showing how fallen angels challenge—and impersonate—divine power, and how, at the same time, intimate enemies infiltrate God's people.

For while the prophet says that Jesus "hates" these false insiders, he never makes any charge against them so harsh as the one that dominates the passion narratives—the charge that Jews themselves engineered Jesus's arrest, passion, and death. Instead, John of Patmos adopts the prophets' traditional view: that foreign enemies—in this case, the Romans—had slaughtered the "lamb of God." John of Patmos leaves no doubt that those guilty of killing Jesus, as well as his witness Antipas, and the other martyrs John saw in heaven ("those who had been slaughtered

for the word of God,” 6:9) are those whom he, following Isaiah, calls “the inhabitants of the earth” (Isa 26:21).

When John conflates Leviathan with Satan, as we noted, he wants to show that the powers of evil have grown more powerful than ever, now having taken not one, but two quite different manifestations—both, however, working toward the same end. In a moment we will ask who John believes these enemies are, but first let us note how ingeniously he relates what he sees as the practical effect of this unprecedented—and unholy—alliance.

John proceeds to tell how the dragon, having united in himself all the forces of evil, now cast out of heaven and raging with fury, “went off to make war” upon “those who keep the commandments of God and hold the witness of Jesus” (13:17). To do so, he takes his stand on the seashore and manifests himself first as the “beast rising from the sea,” who combines within one monstrous form the characteristics that Daniel had ascribed to the four beasts who represent four foreign empires. Now, John says, the “beast from the sea” wields the dragon’s irresistible “power, and . . . throne, and great authority” (13:2).

When John goes on to describe the dragon’s second manifestation, his innovations are even more evident. For John goes on to say that he then “saw another beast that rose out of the earth; it had two horns like a lamb, and it spoke like a dragon” (13:11). Thus this form of evil power bears some resemblance to the “lamb”—Jesus the Messiah, the “son of man coming with the clouds of heaven,” whom John, like Daniel, sees as the antitype of the “beast from the sea”¹⁴—but it speaks “like a dragon.” What this beast does is promote the authority of the first by making them bow down to worship its image and by forcing everyone to bear the mark of the beast. Although John, like most of his contemporaries, does not definitively separate military and political power from religious authority, he pictures the “beast from the sea” above all as the active evil energy that wields and manipulates “signs and wonders,” images, symbols of submission, and its secret identifying number.¹⁵

No wonder, then, that as John’s narrative proceeds to the final battle—the Word of God leading his armies into battle against the combined forces of the evil powers—he calls this beast from the land “the false prophet.” So, although John says that the “beast from the land” is actually a second manifestation of the dragon, he wields powers traditionally associated with Satan—inverting the powers of God’s Messiah, and deceiving people into worshipping that which is evil. Thus John’s portrait of this multiform diabolical usurper is meant to demonstrate how “intimate enemies” are now secretly collaborating with openly hostile outsiders. Christians in later

generations, sensing these connections, would conflate John's account of this "beast" and "false prophet" with warnings found in the Johannine letters against the coming "Antichrist."

Intricate as is John's narrative, what he conveys by conflating this powerful imagery speaks clearly to many readers. One message it communicates is that, evil as are the powers that rule the earth, "intimate enemies" are even more dangerous, since some of them, like the beast from the earth, are actually undercover agents working for "the dragon." As Paul Duff has shown from a somewhat different perspective, one of John's primary concerns is to unmask these intimate enemies.

The Identity of the "Intimate Enemies"

As noted above, the identity of the alien enemies is not in doubt. Besides the well-known association of the dragon with Israel's traditional foes, few readers could miss the allusions to the Roman empire and its rulers behind John's caustic portrait of the rich and decadent city of "Babylon" enthroned on seven hills beside a river. Probably some in his audience knew, too, that other contemporary Jewish writers also called Rome "Babylon," since the Romans had destroyed the second temple as the Babylonians had destroyed and desecrated the first. And while many have puzzled the riddling "number of the beast," virtually all recognize that it signifies, one way or another, an imperial name.¹⁶

More complicated—and more contested—is who John has in mind when he castigates the intimate enemies whom he implicates along with the "false prophet" and charges with deflecting worship away from God. First of all, I agree with the scholarly consensus, recently well articulated by Steven Friesen, that shows that John associates the "false prophet" with the religious ideology of the Roman empire—perhaps especially, as Adela Yarbro Collins has suggested, with officials promoting the imperial cult.¹⁷ Second, and more ambiguously, John goes on to implicate certain groups of Jesus' followers, suggesting that these, although ostensibly worshipping God and His Messiah, actually deceive people into worshipping that which is evil—which means for John that covertly they lend their support to the demonic powers that lurk behind Rome's gods and rulers.

Can we understand whom John has in mind when he castigates insiders? We recall that after opening his "revelation" with a stunning vision of "one like a son of man," John says that this radiant being entrusted him with messages directed to "the seven assemblies [ἐκκλησίαι] of Asia" (1:1–11). John addresses the members of these tiny Asian assemblies as "kings and priests of God" ["βασιλείαν ἱερείς τῷ θεῷ"] (1:

5-6), echoing the famous words Moses first addressed to God's people Israel at Sinai (see Exodus 19:6: Greek "*βασιλείαν ἱεροῦ*," the Septuagint translation for "מִמְלַכְוֹתָהּ קְדוֹשִׁים"). Yet John's Jesus warns that nearly all of these assemblies contain a mixed group, some of whom he praises, others whom he "hates," and some, apparently, in the middle.¹⁸ Since "Jesus" addresses these messages to "God's holy ones" to sort out who actually does belong among them and who does not, we are not surprised to find that these messages contain the densest concentration of allusions to Satan in the entire book.

While weaving together threats from the inside and from the outside, the prophet's warnings suggest that he regards evil insiders as the most dangerous of all. Thus his letters to the seven assemblies open as "Jesus" praises those in Ephesus because, he says, "you cannot tolerate evildoers" who "say that they are apostles and are not" (2:2). He praises them because they have tested—and rejected—these false apostles, and because "you hate the works of the Nicolitains, which I also hate" (1:6). When John addresses those in Smyrna, where arrests occurred, and those in Pergamon, where one "witness" was killed, the prophet makes sure they know that outside threats, too, come from the Evil One: thus Jesus warns the former that "the devil is about to throw some of you in prison" and reminds the latter that they live "where Satan lives," apparently referring to the great temple to Zeus or the imperial temple to the *augusti*, "where Satan's throne is" (2:13).¹⁹

John unleashes an even more vehement denunciation upon a rival leader in Thyatira, who "says she is a prophet" but whom he calls "Jezebel" and accuses of "teaching and seducing my servants to practice fornication and to eat food sacrificed to idols." Shortly before, addressing those in Pergamon, John had accused some people of accepting "the teaching of Balaam," that, he says, encourages the same practices. Of course, the term *πορνεία* has a long history in prophetic literature that suggests consorting with foreign culture and flirting, so to speak, with foreign gods. Finally, as John addresses the two assemblies in Smyrna and Philadelphia, which Duff identifies specifically as "strongholds of John's loyalists,"²⁰ he bitterly denounces those who "say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan" (2:9), and who "are lying" (3:9).

We can see, then, that every one of John's accusations against these various enemies charges that they are subverting God's people internally. Above all, like members of the "synagogue of Satan," some, apparently, pretend to be God's people while actually being Satan's agents. Such charges, as is well known, are familiar among such dissidents as the Qumran sectaries, who apply them to those they regard as apostate.²¹

While earlier generations of scholars scrutinized John's rhetoric to delineate specific groups among these detested insiders, more recently commentators have recognized that at least several of the groups he describes are more likely to be variations on a composite portrait. Many now tend to agree, at least in general, with the scenario described in detail by Paul Duff: that when John indicts the three groups mentioned above, he is challenging followers of Jesus who accommodate more to outside culture than this rigorist prophet would allow—in particular, those who follow Pauline teaching. For when we discount John's polemical vehemence, we can see that the specific accommodations condoned by those he denounces as "false apostles" and "false prophets" look very much like the practices Paul allows to his converts in 1 Corinthians 7–10: eating meat sacrificed to idols, and allowing sexual practices that rigorously observant Jews often prohibited, such as marriage to outsiders.²² I agree with Collins, Duff, and others that John's target includes followers of Jesus who accept Pauline teaching—teaching already widespread in Asia Minor, especially among Gentiles.

More difficult, however, and more debated is whether those whom John denounces in Smyrna and Philadelphia, who "say they are Jews, and are not—but a synagogue of Satan" (2:9; 3:9), are to be grouped with the others addressed in such a composite portrait. Are we to take John at his word and assume that these people are not Jews, but Gentiles—presumably followers of Jesus—who "say they are Jews, and are not, but are lying" (3:9)? Or are they, as Collins, Duff, and others have assumed, actually not only Jews, like John himself, but outsiders hostile to the Jesus movement?²³ Recently David Frankfurter, taking up and modifying what Ferdinand C. Baur and other members of the Tübingen School suggested over a hundred years ago,²⁴ has argued that these, like the other insiders John censures, are predominantly Gentile followers of Jesus who anger John by claiming Israel's legacy while neglecting religious practices incumbent upon devout Jews.²⁵ Paul Duff, while rightly rejecting often restated tropes about Jewish persecution of Christians, which are based on anachronistic assumptions, recently has offered instead a detailed textual analysis for taking these as Jewish outsiders.²⁶

How we assess their views has much to do with how we envision the first-century groups John has in mind. During past decades, most commentators have concluded, with Aune, Fiorenza, and Collins, to mention a few, that when speaking of "those who say they are Jews and are not," John is drawing a line between himself and his fellow believers on the one hand and non-Christian Jews in Smyrna and Philadelphia on the other. Many take this as indicating "the parting of the ways"; most

have shared the assumption, restated by Paul Duff in his book, that “Judaism and Christianity would probably have been separated by this time.”²⁷ David Aune speaks for many, too, when he characterizes John as a “Jewish-Christian prophet who had moved from Judaism to Christianity at some point in his career.”²⁸ Both Aune and Collins have expressed the widely shared view that John “denies the term *Jew* to actual Jews of the local synagogues,” most likely because they participated in hostile acts against Christians. Both conclude that John, consequently, denies them the name *Jews* because he holds that “followers of Jesus are . . . the true Jews,” which Aune characterizes as “a widespread Christian view.”²⁹ Aune’s view of John’s evolution from “Jew” to “Christian” gives rise to his theory of two editions of the Apocalypse that account for what Aune interprets as the author’s psychological and theological “development,” one that conveniently recapitulates what Christians typically have seen as a progression from Judaism to Christianity.³⁰

Yet this kind of interpretation projects onto John’s autobiography, as onto the first-century Asian groups he addresses, what Christians in later generations came to see as the course of salvation history. But when we step back from this interpretation and attempt to read what John says in the context of first-century history—before the invention of “Christianity,” so to speak—we can see that what John writes does not support this view. Instead, as Aune acknowledges, “one of the striking features of Revelation is the virtual absence of the typical features of the polemic between Jews and Christians . . . and an absence of the threat of Judaising.”³¹ But Aune somehow takes this as evidence that the prophet himself stands firmly within the “Christian” camp—and goes so far as to conclude that the absence of warnings against “Judaising” indicates that the seer “espoused a ‘Pauline’ type of inclusivism.”³²

In this paper, I tend to agree with—and extend—the views of those whose research has led to a very different conclusion: that far from “espousing a kind of ‘Pauline’ inclusivism,” John here again excoriates the groups that do—groups that apparently consist largely of Gentile converts who follow Pauline and neo-Pauline teaching. Especially during the past ten years, many of us have recognized that the traditional discussion often has turned upon anachronistic use of the terms “Jew” and “Christian.” For if, indeed, John knows the term “Christian,” he never uses it—and certainly never applies it to himself or those of whom he approves—apparently because, as Philippa Townsend has persuasively shown, the term, adapted from a self-designation current among groups of Paul’s Gentile converts who followed Paul’s lead and called themselves “ὄτι τοῦ Χριστοῦ,” probably was coined by Roman magistrates to refer in

particular to Gentile converts.³³ While we can only sketch her argument here, we note that the author of Luke-Acts associates the first use of the term with Paul and Barnabas's mission to Gentiles in Antioch (Acts 11:26) and that governor Pliny also uses it apparently to designate Gentiles who have made themselves conspicuous by joining those who "pray to Jesus as a God."³⁴ Perhaps it is no accident that Ignatius, himself a Syrian convert writing perhaps ten years after John (depending on how we date his writing) to believers in several of the same Asian towns, is the first, so far as we know, to aggressively identify himself and his fellow believers as "Christians" over against what he sees as the adherents of an inferior and obsolete "Judaism."

Furthermore, while we have no indication that John thinks of himself as a "Christian," we have noted that he strongly identifies himself in *positive* terms as a Jew, specifically as one whose concern with the holiness and purity of God's people impels him to advocate certain practices and abominate others. Intriguingly, within about a generation of his writing, some of John's earliest commentators assumed that those whom John attacks largely consist of Gentile converts; thus Irenaeus (and later Hippolytus, following his lead) associates those whom the seer calls "Nicolitains" with the figure of Nicolaus, described in the book of Acts as a Gentile proselyte from Syria.³⁵

But were they wrong? Paul Duff recently has argued that the structure of the letters to Smyrna and Philadelphia, which are, in his words, "strongholds of John's supporters," shows that they lack the structure common to John's correspondence to insiders. The latter, Duff says,

include both a call for repentance (aimed at some or all of the church members) and a threat from the risen Jesus (directed against the recipients of the letter) if that repentance does not occur. The latter set, on the other hand, includes neither of these elements.³⁶

Duff makes some incisive points about style. Yet an addressee of either of these letters could hardly avoid hearing the bitter denunciation of "Satan's synagogue" by "Jesus" as a serious warning. Who among the group John denounces could miss his threat that when the Son of Man comes back—very soon!—he will put such wrongdoers in their place, humiliating them so that they will have to "bow down" before God's own people?

If, on the other hand, John's Jesus here addresses Gentile converts, the punishment Jesus threatens would precisely fit the crime against Jews of which such converts apparently were often guilty. Paul himself, writing forty years before John, admits that he had found such attitudes widespread among his own followers, and he repeatedly chastises them for

“boasting” of their superiority to “Israelites.” Yet Paul acknowledges that many Gentile converts have taken his own words as encouragement to think of themselves as being, spiritually speaking, the *real* Jews. Many could have taken that to be his meaning when, for example, in his letter to the Romans he speaks of who the “real Jews” are:

For he is not a Jew, who is one externally, nor is circumcision what is external in the flesh; but a person is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is in the heart, spiritual, not literal. (Rom 2:28–29)

In the same letter, of course, Paul goes on to say that he grieves continually for “my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites,” since, as he explains, “not all who are from Israel are Israel; not all who are the seed of Abraham are his children,”—for “it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise” (9:1–8). In his letter to the Galatians, he assures Gentile converts there that “if you belong to Christ, you are Abraham’s seed, heirs according to the promise,” children of Sarah, “born according to the spirit”; thus, he admonishes his hearers, “you are children of the promise, like Isaac” (Gal 3:1–4:28). Concluding this letter, Paul proclaims the blessing of peace upon all who belong, he says, to “the Israel of God” (6:16). Finally, when Paul writes to converts in Corinth, he compares their experience—favorably—to that of “Israel according to the flesh” (1 Cor 10:18).³⁷

Paul’s letters, along with the various supercessionist views expressed in such writings as the letter to the Hebrews and the Gospel of John, show how widespread such views had become, even around the end of the first century. We need not, then, indulge in elaborate speculation, as scholars often have, about what these “would-be Jews” had done to anger John. For while neglecting the very practices that John believes keep God’s people holy—observing the commandments and strictly maintaining purity—these Gentile converts dare not only to “say they are Jews” when they are not, but even to boast of their superiority. If they have, indeed, “blasphemed” by imagining that God no longer loves his people, no wonder the prophet longs for the day when Jesus will come to punish them in a way that perfectly fits their crime:

I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but are lying—I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you.

This reading tends to support Frankfurter’s observation that

scholars who have cast John of Patmos as a Christian, as opposed to a Jew, distort his text and obscure a proper understanding of his relationship to Jews who were not devoted to Jesus. “Christian” would imply that his Jesus devotion somehow displaces or preempts his Jewishness.³⁸

While we may not be able to solve entirely the problem of whom John addresses in Revelation 2:9 and 3:9, for our present purpose, we need not do so. In any case, Frankfurter makes a perceptive point when he says that for observant Jewish followers of Jesus like John, “the term ‘Christian,’ of course, is the least useful label, either for denoting separation from Jews as a taxonomic category, or for denoting ancient religious self-definition.”³⁹

In regard to John of Patmos, we agree. Yet this comment raises another question noted earlier: when, and for whom, did *Christian* become not the *least* but the *most* useful label, even a *necessary* one? This question points us toward one obvious source: the famous letters written about a decade after John wrote Revelation by Ignatius, bishop of Antioch. It is hard to know what to make of the famous statement we noted from the book of Acts that “the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.” Yet we cannot help noting that some twenty or thirty years after Luke wrote these words, Ignatius, who calls himself “bishop of Antioch,” is the first, so far as we know, not only to insist on calling himself “Christian,” but also to define what he calls “Christianity” to separate his own stand from what he calls “Judaism.” At the same time, Ignatius insists on separating himself and his fellow “Christians” from Jesus followers who, like John, both apparently *are* Jews and proudly claim the name. Like John, of course, Ignatius wrote seven extant letters to groups of Jesus followers in Asia Minor, including groups in three of the same Asian towns that John had addressed, directing them to those whom he, of course, does call “Christians”—and, as noted above, the term as he uses it specifically denotes Gentile converts.

John and Ignatius: Early Diversity among Followers of Jesus

Let us compare, then, the rhetorical strategies of John of Patmos and Ignatius of Antioch as each of these two intense, passionate polemicists attempts to circumscribe the boundary of “God’s people” against “others” who, each charges, falsely claim a place within that magic circle. Of course we need not assume that the two were in direct communication, or even that Ignatius knew of John’s writing, separated as they were by over a decade and by the distance between Syria and the regional towns near Ephesus in Asia. Yet Christine Trevett finds in Ignatius’s writing evidence

to show not only that he was familiar with John's writing, but that he intended certain passages of his own letters to Jesus's followers in Philadelphia to challenge some of John's claims and teachings.⁴⁰ And while keeping in mind that the evidence is too dense and complex to allow us to characterize their respective standpoints as if they were simply diametric opposites—for we acknowledge, indeed, that various groups of Jesus's followers coexisted, and sometimes competed, in Asia Minor at the turn of the first century—the contrasts are intriguing.

In the first place, while Ignatius seems to be responding to similar issues, his perception of the \square *κκλησία* he addresses differs sharply from John's. As we noted, John apparently identifies himself not only as a prophet but also as a priest who stands among a "kingdom of priests," perhaps intending to characterize the whole community of "holy ones" (or, at least, the men among them) as, in effect, a group of priests—words that, as noted above, echo Exodus 19:6, in which the Lord addresses the Israelites through Moses, saying, "You shall be for me a kingdom of priests" [יְקַדְּשׁוּם תְּהִי־לִי מְמִלְכַת כֹּהֲנִים]. John envisions each group of saints standing under the leadership of a protecting angel, to whom is entrusted divine revelation mediated through prophets like John. But when it comes to human leaders, John recognizes above all prophets like himself. Despite his elaborately phrased modesty about his own prophetic role, the prayer of the twenty-four elders in heaven indicates that he regards the prophets as leaders of the "holy ones," that is, members of the congregations they address (2:20; 10:7; 16:6; 8:24; 22:6; 22:9). Furthermore, as we have seen, John reserves his bitterest invective for the two prophets he denounces as false—perhaps, as we have seen, because the practical teaching of both these "false prophets" echoes that of Paul, and perhaps because one is female.⁴¹

John regards apostles quite differently from Paul—and, as we shall see, very differently from Ignatius, who takes Paul as the primary model for his own life. Occasionally John mentions apostles with some respect—but only those who are dead and safely enshrined in past tradition. Thus John envisions apostles in heaven, praising God's judgment along with the saints and prophets who are already there. But when he designates specific apostles, he mentions only those he calls "the twelve apostles" (21:14) whom Jesus chose, whose names he envisions inscribed upon the foundations of the twelve gates of the heavenly Jerusalem.

Yet, among his contemporaries, John seems to regard "apostles" only with suspicion. Thus the Jesus he channels opens his first address to the Ephesians praising those who, in his words, "do not tolerate evildoers," which means, he explains, that "you have tested those who call themselves

apostles, but are not, and you found them to be false” (2:2). Did John have in mind, among others, the most famous self-professed apostle, Paul—one whom John never mentions (if, indeed, he knew of him) but whom others among his near contemporaries in Asia called simply “the great apostle”⁴² and revered even above “the twelve”? Paul himself says, of course, that his missionary work was dogged by charges that he falsely claimed to be an apostle. Note, too, that when Paul himself enumerates those divinely gifted for leadership among the churches, he ranks apostles and prophets in reverse order from John: “God has appointed in the churches first apostles, second prophets, third teachers” (1 Corinthians 12:28). Paul’s own letters indicate, of course, that “apostles” were prevalent among his groups, and Ignatius, some sixty years later, acknowledges among Pauline groups not only “apostles,” but also bishops, presbyters, and deacons.

Not surprisingly, then, Ignatius envisions apostles, not prophets, standing as the primary leaders of his churches. Thus Ignatius gives advice to the groups he addresses that is the reverse of John’s: test prophets, not apostles. Although he does not deny that there are some prophets among Jesus’s followers—as we shall see, his *Letter to the Philadelphians* shows that he knows how highly many revered them, perhaps especially in Asia Minor—Ignatius apparently follows the view expressed in Luke-Acts that bishops, understood as latter-day agents of the apostles, now hold the essential leadership role in the churches (Acts 20:17–38). Ignatius, of course, takes the suggestions made in Acts 20 to a far more radical and systematic conclusion. Not only does he identify himself as the sole authentic leader of Jesus’s followers in Antioch, but he insists that every genuine *ἐκκλησία* must have a bishop, like himself, as leader. “Without the bishop, nothing can be called an *ἐκκλησία*”⁴³—fighting words, one would imagine, when resonating among groups whose members agreed with John that their assembly was divinely guided by an angel who gives divine direction through prophets. And should such prophets have taught, as John had, that all members of God’s people are priests, Ignatius apparently felt compelled to set them straight.

For when Ignatius writes to the *ἐκκλησία* at Philadelphia, where only ten to fifteen years before, John of Patmos had written to “a stronghold of [his] loyalists” who lived there, Ignatius at first treads carefully. When he takes up the question of the roles of priest and prophet, far from metaphorically characterizing all of God’s people as priests, as John had, Ignatius defines “priests” as church functionaries specifically authorized and assigned to the second rank of leadership, below the bishop and above the deacons. Thus he defines them as three formal ranks belonging to the *κλήρος* “clergy” by contrast with what he calls “the laity” (*λαός* “the