

THE LAMB AND HIS FOLLOWERS



Vaipil John

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ABBREVIATIONS

1. Biblical Books

Old Testament

Gen	Genesis
Exod	Exodus
Lev	Leviticus
Num	Numbers
Deut	Deuteronomy
Josh	Joshua
Judg	Judges
Ru	Ruth
1-2 Sam	1-2 Samuel
1-2 Kgs	1-2 Kings
1-2 Chr	1-2 Chronicles
Ezra	Ezra
Neh	Nehemiah
Tob	Tobit
Jdt	Judit
Esth	Esther
1-2 Mac	1-2 Maccabees
Job	Job
Ps	Psalms
Prov	Proverbs
Qoh	Qoheleth
Cant	Canticle
Wis	Wisdom
Sir	Ecclesiasticus
Isa	Isaiah
Jer	Jeremiah
Lam	Lamentations
Bar	Baruch

Ezek	Ezekiel
Dan	Daniel
Hos	Hosea
Joel	Joel
Amos	Amos
Obad	Obadiah
Jonah	Jonah
Mic	Micah
Nah	Nahum
Hab	Habakkuk
Zeph	Zephaniah
Hag	Haggai
Zech	Zechariah
Mal	Malachi

New Testament

Matt	Matthew
Mark	Mark
Luke	Luke
John	John
Acts	Acts
Rom	Romans
1-2 Cor	1-2 Corinthians
Gal	Galatians
Eph	Ephesians
Phil	Philippians
Col	Colossians
1-2 Thess	1-2 Thessalonians
1-2 Tim	1-2 Timothy
Titus	Titus
Phlm	Philemon
Heb	Hebrews
Jas	James
1-2 Pet	1-2 Peter
1-3 John	1-3 John
Rev	Revelation

2. Apocryphal and Pseudepigraphical Books

2 Bar	2 Baruch or The Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch
Barn	Epistle of Barnabas
4 Ezra	4 Ezra
1-3 Enoch	Ethiopic, Slavonic, Hebrew Enoch
Jub	Jubilees
SibOr	Sibylline Oracles

3. Dead Sea Scrolls

1QM	Milhāmāh (War Scroll) from Qumran Cave 1
4QpIs ^d fgt. 1	Pesher on Isaiah from Qumran Cave 1
11 QTemple	<i>Temple Scroll</i> from Qumran Cave 11

4. Other Abbreviations

cfr.	confer
ch.	chapter
ed.	edited by
eds.	editors
e.g.	for example
Gk	Greek
Heb	Hebrew
i.e.	that is
LXX	the Septuagint
n.	note
no.	number
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
v.	verse
vv.	verses
vol.	volume
voll.	volumes

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Our research, *The Lamb and His Followers*, Revelation 14,1-5, deals with the vision of John concerning the Lamb and his faithful followers, the 144,000, upon Mount Zion. This visionary experience is accompanied by an acoustic experience by which John hears a New Song accompanied by heavenly sounds. Both the vision and the audition reveal the identity and the threefold explanation concerning the 144,000 followers of the Lamb. Revelation 14,1-5, is situated in the context of Rev 14, which forms the climax to the visions of Rev 12 and Rev 13. The victory of the Redeemer over the dragon that persecuted the messianic community is illustrated in Rev 12 and Rev 13 depicts the great persecution of the faithful followers of the Lamb by the two beasts. In the threat of total annihilation of the messianic community – which is illustrated in Rev 12, Rev 13 and Rev 14 conveys the assurance of vindication for the followers of the Lamb and of judgement upon those who follow the beast.

Our study is divided into three chapters, besides the general introduction and the general conclusion. The first chapter is entitled “Rev 14,1-5: The Text and its Articulation”. Here we study the pericope in its literary and exegetical aspects. It is evident that our pericope is presented as a well-structured unit. This structure provides a gradual literary growth in the explanation of the identity of the 144,000.

In order to analyse Rev 14,1-5, we divide it into two segments: (1) the Lamb, the 144,000 and the New Song (Rev 14,1-3b), and (2) the threefold explanation about the 144,000 (Rev 14,4-5). In the first segment, we analyse the scriptural background and usages of images such as the Lamb, Mount Zion, the 144,000 and the New Song. We also study here the literary elements and the semantic nuances of the text. Each

image and symbol of the pericope is studied here in its biblical and linguistic background. It is not easy to come to a consensus on the many riddles we find in our pericope. In order to arrive at a balanced conclusion, we classify and evaluate various interpretations of major scholars. Here we try to decode the significance of the main images of our text so as to ensure a deeper comprehension of the text.

In the second segment we see how with the aid of a triple characterization John highlights the identity of the 144,000 and gives precision to their relation to the Lamb and to his Father. According to this triple characterization, they are (1) those who have not defiled themselves with women (Rev 14,4a); (2) those who follow the Lamb wherever he goes (Rev 14,4b); and, (3) those who have been redeemed from humankind as the first fruits for God and the Lamb (Rev 14,4c). And then, as a conclusion to the second segment, we explore the characterization of the 144,000: no lie was found in their mouths for they are spotless (Rev 14,5). Through the analysis of these two segments we seek the true identities of the Lamb and his 144,000 faithful followers as well as their relationship to him.

After having specified the identity of both the Lamb and his 144,000 followers, we seek parallel texts that help us to comprehend our pericope better. The second chapter deals with such passages as well as those that stand in contrast to them. The parallel passage to our text is Rev 7,1-8. Like our pericope this text too contains the numerical symbolism 12. Along with this, there are three more texts that contain the numerical symbolism 12; these are 12,1; 21,12.14.21 and 22,2. Chapter 13, which stands as antithetical to our text, is to be analysed here. It deals with the two beasts, which pose a mortal threat to the followers of the Lamb. Rev. 7,1-8 adds what is lacking in our pericope and Rev 13 adds to the perfection and optimistic flavour of our pericope.

The second chapter is divided into three parts. The textual analysis of Rev 7,1-8 as a parallel text to our pericope will form the first part. The second part contains two sections. In the first section we will examine the reference of the “woman with a crown of 12 stars” (12,1) as a reference that contains the number 12 as an arithmetic symbol for the People of God. The measurement and the peculiarities of the New Jerusalem will constitute the second section of the second part. Here, the descriptions of the New Jerusalem will be examined in detail, especially the 12 gates (21,12), the 12 foundations (21,14), and the 12 fruits (22,2). The people of God of the Old Testament, as represented by the 12 tribes of Israel, and the people of God of the New Testament, as represented by the 12 Apostles of Christ, are meaningfully alluded to in the depiction of the New Jerusalem. Hence the second part will examine how John has made use of the numerical symbol 12 to present the people of God of both the Old and the New Testaments. The third part of this chapter is on Rev 13, a chapter bristling with opposition to the Lamb and the 144,000. Here we will examine the identity and the description of the ruthless activities of the beasts. Then we will decode the numerical mark of the beast, i.e., 666, and evaluate its multiple interpretations.

In the third chapter we examine in detail the two characteristic figures of our study, namely the Lamb and his faithful followers symbolized by 144,000. Here we give more emphasis to the theological richness and implications of these two figures. In order to accomplish this aim we divide this chapter into two parts. The first part will analyse all the occurrences of the Lamb-figure in the book of Revelation. These Lamb references are divided into eleven groups, taking their contexts into account. By analysing all these references we aim to obtain a comprehensive picture of the Christological figure, Christ the Lamb. In the second part we focus on the faithful followers of the Lamb, who constitute the Church in the book of Revelation. This part consists of three sections. The first section will show how the Church is portrayed in Revelation. In order to get a comprehensive picture of the

Church in Revelation, we examine nine important terms used to illustrate the community of the faithful. The second section will examine the efficacious presence and decisive intervention of the Risen Lord among the seven churches. The third section focuses on the salient features of witness in the particular context of Revelation and the commitment of the faithful followers of the Lamb as a witnessing community.

Through these three chapters, we seek an in-depth understanding of both the Lamb and his faithful followers. This study can encourage the contemporary ecclesial community to re-examine its basic commitment to the Lamb. It invites the Church to recognize and appreciate the Lamb as her true Lord and Shepherd. For a genuine acknowledgement of the identity and the unique role of the Lamb helps the Church to actualize its own identity in present-day society as a witnessing community.

Different research works have already been done on certain images and aspects of this pericope, as general studies on the Lamb of God or the Lamb in Johannine Literature, the Lamb in the structure of the Fourth Gospel and the followers of the Lamb. Our research confines itself to a close examination of Rev. 14,1-5, i.e., the vision which deals with both the Lamb and those who follow him. It highlights both the Christological symbol of the Lamb, the identity of the followers and the intimate affinity of the Lamb to the followers. The author of Revelation presents this vision as a point of hope and challenge to all those who follow the Lamb wherever he goes.

We aim at a close reading of the text and conclude with theological reflections that emerge from the exegesis.

CHAPTER ONE

REVELATION 14,1-5 THE TEXT AND ITS ARTICULATION

Introduction

The subject of our research is the Lamb and the 144,000 in Revelation 14,1-5. This pericope, Rev 14,1-5, is the first among the four textual units of Rev 14. The other three textual units are:

- i) The three announcements of the three angels¹
- ii) The third exhortations with the $\omega\delta\epsilon$ (v. 12) and a beatitude confirmed by the voice of the Spirit (v. 13)
- iii) Two announcements of judgement given with the symbolic actions of reaping and the vintage (vv. 14-20).

These four textual units are framed at the beginning in Rev 14,1 by the introductory formula "I saw, and behold" (*Καὶ εἶδον, καὶ ἰδοῦ*), and at the end by an expression that introduces a new textual unit in Rev 15,1, "Then I saw another sign" (*Καὶ εἶδον ἄλλο σημεῖον*).

Rev 14 forms the climax to the visions of Rev 12 and Rev 13. Rev 12 portrays the victory of the Redeemer over the dragon that has been persecuting the Messianic community. Rev 13 describes how the persecution is carried out by the conjoint agency of the beast from the sea and the beast from the earth. In face of the threat of total annihilation of the messianic community, which is illustrated in Rev 12, Rev 13 and Rev 14 conveys the assurance of vindication for the followers of

¹ The three announcements of the three angels are: a). Invitation to the praise of God and to the announcement of judgement (vv. 6-7); b). Announcement of the fall of Babylon (v. 8); and, c). Announcement of the judgement of the worshippers of the beast (vv. 9-11).

the Lamb and of judgement upon those who follow the beast. Thus the twenty verses of Rev 14 can broadly be divided into two groups:

- 1) Verses that illustrate hope and protection to those who follow the Lamb (e.g., Rev 14,1-5)
- 2) Verses that illustrate threat and punishment to those who do not follow the Lamb (e.g., Rev 14,6-20).

In this chapter we analyse Rev 14,1-5, and then explore its articulation. In order to analyse the text we divide it into two segments:

- 1) The Lamb, the 144,000 and the New Song (Rev 14,1-3b)
- 2) The threefold explanation of the 144,000 (Rev 14,4-5).

In the first segment, we analyse the scriptural background and usages of images such as the Lamb, Mount Zion, the 144,000 and the New Song. We also study here the literary elements and the semantic nuances that are seen in the text. Here we try to decode the significance of the main images of our text and that will open the way to a deeper comprehension of the text.

In the second segment, we will see how, with the help of a triple characterization, the author makes clear the identity of the 144,000 and gives precision to their relation to the Lamb and to his Father. The triple characterizations are:

- 1) They are those who have not defiled themselves with women (Rev 14,4a)
- 2) They are those who follow the Lamb wherever he goes (Rev 14,4b)
- 3) They are those who have been redeemed from humankind as the first fruits for God and the Lamb (Rev 14,4c).

And then, as a conclusion to the second segment, we will examine the characterization of the 144,000: no lie was found in their mouths for they are spotless (Rev 14,5).

Through the analysis of these two segments we aim at the identity of the 144,000 faithful followers of the Lamb and their relationship to the Lamb.

1. The Lamb, the 144,000 and the New Song (Rev 14, 1-3b)

This segment includes three elements: John's vision (Rev 14,1), John's audition (Rev 14,2-3a) and John's realization (Rev 14,3b). It deals, then, with two types of perceptions: one is through vision and the other is through audition. Through these visionary and acoustic experiences, John realizes the unicity and the identity of the 144,000.

We analyse now John's vision.

1.1 John's Vision (Rev 14, 1)

Then I looked,
and lo, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb,
and with him a hundred and forty-four thousand
who had his name
and his Father's name written
on their foreheads.

*Καὶ εἶδον,
καὶ ἶδον τὸ ἀρνίον ἑστὸς ἐπὶ τὸ ὄρος Σιών
καὶ μετ' αὐτοῦ ἑκατὸν τεσσαράκοντα τέσσαρες χιλιάδες
ἔχουσαι τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ καὶ
τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ γεγραμμένον
ἐπὶ τῶν μετώπων αὐτῶν*

Rev 14,1 contains in a nutshell the whole of the vision. But the vision is given as something mysterious with the use of numeric symbolism. The description of the vision is indeterminate and less accurate. But really it denotes the absolute insufficiency of the human language. The vision is one of the means of revelation. But in the apocalyptic tradition, vision and audition are inseparable elements. The language that the author has used to communicate his message is symbolic.

The vision begins with the appearance of the Lamb. The vision is characterized by the verb ὀράω and the exclamatory particle ἰδοῦ. The objects of vision are the Lamb and the 144,000 and the place of vision is Mount Zion.

1.1.1. The Lamb on Mount Zion

The seer *saw* (εἶδον) the Lamb upon Mount Zion. It is the proper seeing of the seer. The verb εἶδον appears 45 times in Revelation and all these occurrences are always in the first person. These references are complex and prolonged processes that illustrate the experience of John for the ecclesial community. The vision that is referred to in our pericope is the point of arrival of this long process. In the New Testament, the verb εἶδον has a vast semantic background. But in apocalyptic context this verb has a symbolic figurative sense: “see”, and in addition “understand” and “comprehend”. Thus it includes both the visual and mental perception.

Together with the verb εἶδον, the author uses the strong exclamatory term ἰδοῦ. This term denotes surprise and above all draws attention² to the Lamb and the 144,000.

1.1.1.1 The Lamb

The dragon that stood on the sand of the sea (12,18) and the beasts that parodied the Lamb (13,11) disappear from view, and in their place is the true Lamb standing on Mount Zion. The Lamb does nothing here but stand, and it is as though his mere presence is enough to defeat the beasts.

It is noteworthy that the seer sees simply the animal: the Lamb. It is the privileged title among all the Christological titles in the book of Revelation. To the author, the Lamb is a fixed, complex and multiphased apocalyptic figure. In order to understand the significance of this theriomorphic symbol³, we

² F. W. DANKER, «εἶδον», in *A Greek- English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 279.

³ U. VANNI, *L'Apocalisse: ermeneutica esegesi teologia*, Edizioni Dehoniane Bologna, Bologna 1988, 167.

analyse now its role and significance in the Old Testament, in apocalyptic literature and in the New Testament.

1.1.1.1.1 *The Lamb in the Old Testament*

The term כֶּבֶשׂ⁴ (kebeś) is found in the Old Testament for lamb. From very ancient times, sheep were the source of milk, meat, wool and skins. More importantly, young and pure lambs were used extensively in sacrifice, symbolizing not only gentleness and innocence (2 Sam 12,3) but also the offering to God of a creature very relevant to human existence. Jeremiah speaks of the defencelessness of the Lamb (Jer 51,40). The eschatological imagery of Isaiah notes the incongruity of wolf and lamb together (Isa 11,6; 65,25).

The Lambs were used as sacrificial victims in several different types of sacrifice in the Old Testament. The Old Testament sacrifices can be grouped into:

1) The “burnt offering” (עֹלָה⁵): this sacrifice is repeated regularly in the morning and in the evening as part of the regular temple ritual that opened and closed each day⁶. Two additional lambs were offered each Sabbath (Num 28,9-10), and two young bulls, one ram, and seven male lambs were sacrificed on New Moons (Num 28,11-14), one each day of the Passover (Num 28, 19-24), and on the Feast of Weeks (Num 28,26-29), on the first day of the seventh month (Num 29,1-3), and on the tenth day of the seventh month, i.e., the Day of atonement (Num 29,7-8).

2) The “peace offering” (שְׁלָמִים): the institution of the Passover lamb (Exod 12,1-20.43-49; Lev 23,5; Num 9,2-5; Deut 16,1-8) was a type of the “peace offering” (שְׁלָמִים). The lambs were killed in the temple, roasted whole, and consumed by all Israel within the same day (Exod 12,47).

⁴ F. BROWN - S. R. DRIVER - C. A. BRIGGS, «כֶּבֶשׂ», in *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 461.

⁵ D. KELLERMANN, «עֹלָה», in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 6, 96-113.

⁶ Exod 29,38-46; Num 28,3-8; Dan 8,11; 11 QTemple 13,8-16; Philo *De Specialibus legibus* 1.169-170; Josephus *The Jewish Antiquities* 3,237-247; 14,65-66.

- 3) The “purification offering” (ܩܘܪܒܢܐ) (Lev 14,19a).
- 4) The “guilt offering” (ܩܘܪܒܢܐ): a yearling lamb was sacrificed as a “guilt offering” for Nazirite (Num 6,12).

And along with the above sacrifices, the behaviour and innocent death of the Servant of God is described in Isa 53 under the metaphor of a sacrificial lamb; this metaphor is applied to Jesus in Acts 8,32.

It is clear that the historical reality of Israelite sacrificial cult examined above provide a general context to the Lamb figure of Revelation. The figure of the “Lamb” in Revelation must be understood at least in part on the basis of the Old Testament sacrificial ritual.

There are two important proposals for the background of the “Lamb” figure of Revelation. Some prefer to see it as a reference to the “Passover Lamb” (Exod 12,5; 20,24; Lev 1,10), while others favour the “Suffering Servant” (Isa 53,7). A number of scholars⁷ favour the view that the Lamb of Revelation is based on the metaphor of Christ as the Passover lamb. However, neither should be excluded, since both have in common with the metaphorical picture in Rev 5,6 the central function and significance of the sacrifice of a lamb, which accomplishes redemption and victory for God’s people. The Isa 53 background especially highlights the atoning aspect of the lamb’s sacrificial death. The combination of Passover lamb and the Suffering Servant of Isa 53 is supported by the use and meaning of the Aramaic term, ܩܘܪܒܢܐ, for ἀρνίον which means not only “lamb”, but also “servant” and “boy”. If that is the case, then ἀρνίον would be a most suitable word to combine the Passover lamb with the Suffering Servant lamb of Isa 53⁸.

⁷ J. COMBLIN, *Le Christ dans l’Apocalypse*, Desclée, Paris-Tournai 1965, 26; J. D’SOUZA, *The Lamb of God in the Johannine writings*, St. Paul’s Publications, Allahabad 1968, 25-27; T. HOLTZ, *Die Christologie der Apokalypse des Johannes*, Akademie Verlag, Berlin 1971², 45-47.

⁸ J. JEREMIAS, «ἀρνός ἀρνίον ἀρνίον», in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1, 338-341; C. F. BURNEY, *The Aramaic Origin of the Fourth Gospel*, Clarendon, Oxford 1922, 107-108. Burney, followed by Jeremias,

The term *ἀρνίον* occurs four times in the LXX, where it means “lamb” or “sheep” (Jer 11,19; 27,45; Ps 113,4,6), though in the last two passages *κριοί*, “rams”, in the first line of each couplet is paralleled by *ἀρνία προβάτων* “lambs of the sheep”, in the second line.

1.1.1.1.2 *The Lamb in Apocalyptic Literature*

Has the author of Revelation any link with the apocalyptic literature that precedes him in using the figure of the Lamb? There are three texts that are to be considered: *the Ethiopic Apocalypse of Enoch* (especially 1 Enoch 90,9; 1 Enoch 90,30 and 1 Enoch 95,45), *the Testament of Joseph* and *the Testament of Benjamin* (3,8). F. Spitta⁹ maintained that the term *ἀρνίον* could indicate a ram as well as a lamb and was used as a messianic designation in 1 Enoch 85-90. *The Ethiopic Apocalypse of Enoch* presents the classic term *ἀρνίον* and many symbolic terms related to the pastoral field. *The Testament of Joseph* and *the Testament of Benjamin* use theriomorphic symbols and pastoral images. But they are considered a posterior Christian interpolation¹⁰. Though there are different Lamb figures in Jewish literature, a direct reference to Christ as the Lamb is not seen.

Josephus¹¹ distinguished between a *κρίος* and an *ἀρνίον*. In Philo, *ἀρνίον* occurs in *De legatione ad Gaium* 362. In the Apostolic Fathers, *ἀρνίον* occurs three times, all in 2 Clement 5,2-4, a brief allegory of wolves and lambs in which the latter represent the Christian community. The synonym *ἀμνός*, on the

observed that the Aramaic term *ܐܪܢܝܘܢ*, which could mean “child, servant”, as well as “lamb”, was interpreted in the latter sense in John 1,29,36, based on Isa 53,7. The other meaning of *ܐܪܢܝܘܢ*, is reflected in the title *παις θεοῦ*, “child [or servant] of God”, which was an early title of Jesus (Acts 3,13; 4,27,30) reflecting the Servant of the Lord in Isa 53, who is referred to in Isa 53,12 as “bearing the sins of the many”.

⁹ F. SPITTA, *Streitfragen der Geschichte Jesu*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1907, 186.

¹⁰ J. H. CHARLESWORTH (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, Darton Longman & Todd, London 1983, 824.

¹¹ JOSEPHUS, *The Jewish Antiquities*, 3.221, 226, 251.

other hand, occurs twice, as an allusion to Isa 53,7 in Barnabas 5,2 and as a quotation of Isa 53,7 in 1 Clement 16,7.

1.1.1.1.3 The Lamb in the New Testament

The New Testament makes use of three terms for Lamb: Ἀμνός, Ἀρῆν and Ἀρνίον.

Ἀμνός means a one year old sheep¹². It occurs a total of 4 times¹³ in the New Testament, in Christological contexts: Jesus is compared to a Lamb (Acts 8,32; 1 Pet 1,19) or called a Lamb (John 1,29.36) as the one who suffers and dies innocently and representatively.

Ἀρῆν refers to lamb as an animal for slaughter and it is used in Luke 10,3 in the plural to refer metaphorically to the disciples of Jesus.

Ἀρνίον means sheep or lamb with a special designation of Christ. It was originally a diminutive of ἄρῆν but in line with the general tendency of colloquial koine Greek in the New Testament period to use forms ending in -ιον, the diminutive sense is lost¹⁴. The diminutive ending -ιον emphasizes the idea of meekness and innocence, or conveys a term of endearment equivalent to “precious lamb”¹⁵.

1.1.1.1.4 The Lamb in the Fourth Gospel

The Fourth Gospel mentions three times the lamb. Twice it occurs as John the Baptist speaks of Jesus: ὁ ἄμνός τοῦ θεοῦ,¹⁶

¹² F. W. DANKER, «ἄρῆν ἄμνός», in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 130; J. JEREMIAS, «ἄμνός ἄρῆν ἄρνιον», in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1, 340-341.

¹³ W. F. MOULTON - A. S. GEDEN, «ἄμνός», in *A Concordance to the Greek Testament according to the Text of Westcott and Hort, Tischendorf, and the English Revisers*, 52.

¹⁴ G. DAUTZENBERG, «ἄμνός ἄρῆν ἄρνιον», in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1, 70; R. INFANTE, «L' Agnello nel Quarto Vangelo», in *Rivista biblica* 43 (1995), 331.

¹⁵ N. HILLYER, «The Lamb' in the Apocalypse», in *Evangelical Quarterly* 39 (1967), 229.

¹⁶ For “the Lamb of God” in the Gospels, see I. H. MARSHALL, «Lamb of God», in J. B. GREEN - S. MCKNIGHT (eds.), *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, Intervarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL 1992, 432-434.

who takes away the sin of the world! (John 1,29), and ὁ ἀμνὸς τοῦ θεοῦ (John 1,36). The third (Ὅσπου οὐ συντριβήσεται αὐτοῦ, John 19,36) is given in connection with the crucifixion of Jesus. But the lamb is not named here. According to Barrett¹⁷, the Fourth Evangelist uses the expression “the Lamb of God” in his manner concentrates into a single epigrammatic utterance a number of Christological notions, and at the same time expresses the primitive apocalyptic material in a form intelligible to the Hellenistic Church of about A. D. 100.

But the author of Revelation uses one unique term: ἀρνίον. Why has he opted for ἀρνίον rather than ἀμνὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, of the Fourth Gospel? Johannine Christology has two phases. The earthly suffering Jesus is depicted by the expression ὁ ἀμνὸς τοῦ θεοῦ and the resurrected heavenly Christ is presented by the term ἀρνίον. The first one has its scope till the crucifixion of Jesus¹⁸. The second one has its origin and growth from the “hour” of the Fourth Gospel. From “Lamb of God” to “Lamb” there is a gradual and complementary growth. There is no comprehensive vision of the Lamb of God without the continuity of the Lamb and there is no actual understanding of the Lamb without following the content and development of the Lamb of God¹⁹. Thus the author of Revelation has created the original theme of the Lamb to go in line with the Johannine School and its thought pattern concerning the Lamb of God. It is really a Johannine product in its subtlety²⁰.

¹⁷ C. K. BARRETT, «The Lamb of God» in *New Testament Studies* 1 (1954-1955), 217.

¹⁸ The switch from ἀρνίον to ἀμνός may well be occasioned by John's wish to portray Jesus' death (so central to the theology of this Gospel) as a fulfilment of Isaiah 53 (where the same Greek word is used in the LXX) too, as well as his hope for a powerful “lamb” who will overcome Israel's predatory enemies. cfr. G. R. BEASLEY-MURRAY, *John*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, TN 1999³, 24-25.

¹⁹ U. VANNI, *L'Apocalisse*, 181.

²⁰ N. HOHNJEC, *Das Lamm, τὸ ἀρνίον, in der Offenbarung des Johannes*, Herder, Roma 1980, 149; G. DAUTZENBERG, «ἀμνός ἀρνίον», in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1, 71. According to M. G. REDDISH, «Martyr Christology in the Apocalypse», in *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 33 (1988), 88, «During John's time several connotations

1.1.1.1.5 The Lamb in the Book of Revelation

The most common designation for Christ in Revelation is *ἀρνίον*. Of the 30 occurrences of *ἀρνίον* in the New Testament, 29 are in Revelation²¹; of these, 28 refer to the exalted Christ.

The meaning of *ἀρνίον* in Revelation is disputed as to whether the author intends to convey more the picture of a lamb or of a ram. On the one side, it is argued²² that “ram” is the correct translation in view of

- 1) The reference to wrath (Rev 6,16-17)
- 2) The mention of horns (Rev 5,6), which are found only on mature animals
- 3) The prediction regarding the warfare and the triumph of the Lamb (Rev 17,14)
- 4) Parallels with the apocalyptic rams of Dan 8,3 and I Enoch 90,9.37.

In addition, the fact that the *ἀρνίον* is also described as “slain” (Rev 5,6; cfr. 5,9.12; 13,8) shows that we cannot separate the statements of Revelation from what the New Testament says about Jesus as the sacrificial Lamb (*ἀμνός*). In the image of the *ἀρνίον* the weakness and impotence of a lamb point to the lowliness of the crucified one, whereas its possession of seven horns and seven eyes indicate the omnipotence and omniscience of the heavenly Christ (Rev 5,6).

probably existed concerning the word Lamb. John has drawn on all of these, shaping his materials and creating a new symbol. For John, the Lamb was an excellent symbol to convey his understanding of Jesus and his mission».

²¹ W. F. MOULTON - A. S. GEDEN, «*ἀρνίον*», in *A Concordance to the Greek Testament According to the Text of Westcott and Hort, Tischendorf, and the English Revisers*, 107. Among the 29 Lamb references in Revelation, 28 references are about Christ and the exception refers to the false prophet (Rev 13,11). The twenty eight *ἀρνίον* references in the Book of Revelation are: Rev 5,6; 5,8; 5,12; 5,13; 6,1; 6,16; 7,9; 7,10; 7,14; 7,17; 12,11; 13,8; 14,1; 14,4 (bis); 14,10; 15,3; 17,14 (bis); 19,7; 19,9; 21,9; 21,14; 21,22; 21,23; 21,27; 22,1; 22,3.

²² O. BÖCHER, *Die Johannesapokalypse*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt 1980², 47.

From the twenty eight ἀρνίον references in Revelation, we see some important titles of the Lamb: the Lamb as Shepherd (Rev 7,17), the Lamb as the Supreme object of Worship (Rev 5,8.12; 7,9.10; 21,22), the Lamb as Judge (Rev 5,6; 6,16; 14,10), the Lamb as Redeemer (Rev 7,14; 15,3), and the Lamb as Ruler (Rev 5,6.8; 6,1; 12,11). Again we see some images connected with the Lamb, such as the blood of the Lamb (Rev 12,11), the song of the Lamb (Rev 15,3), the victory of the Lamb (Rev 17,14), and the marriage of the Lamb (Rev 19,7.9; 21,9). The Lamb is referred as temple (Rev 21,22) and light (Rev 21,23). Again, the slain Lamb that is standing (Rev 5,6) is associated with the Book of Life (Rev 13,8), the throne (Rev 22,1.3) and the 144,000 (Rev 14,1). The Lamb is presented in all these references as both name and figure of Christ. The figure of the Lamb is apt for Christ as victor over death, leader of his followers, Lord of the universe and partner of God the Father²³. This original figure comprises the whole Christological nuances of the book of Revelation²⁴.

²³ The Lamb is presented as always belonging to God the Father and is always in relation to God the Father in all that he does. Seven of these are in phrases coupling God and the Lamb together (Rev 5,13; 6,16; 7,10; 14,4; 21,22; 22,1.3). God the Father and the Lamb have much parity: the Lamb has seven eyes as God the Father (Zech 4,10 = Rev 5,6). The Lamb is also the bearer and executor of wrath like God the Father (Rev 6,16-17). The Lamb has undertaken the shepherd function, which is seen in the Old Testament as belonging only to God (Ezek 34; Ps 23). The Lamb is like God the Father the recipient of the first fruits (Rev 14,4). The Lamb is also similar to God the Father in title: Lord of lords and King of kings (Deut 10,17; Dan 2,47; Rev 17,14; 19,16). Together with the Lamb, the Lord God the Almighty is the temple. And the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb (Rev 21,22-23). Like God the Father, the Lamb too possesses the fullness of the Spirit (Rev 4,5; 5,6). Just like God the Father, the Lamb too enthrones throne (Rev 5,6; 7,16-17; 22,1-5).

²⁴ R. BAUCKHAM, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, University Press, Cambridge 1993, 89; N. HOHNJEC, *Das Lamm, τὸ ἀρνίον, in der Offenbarung des Johannes*, 108. According to P. A. HARLE, «L'Agneau de l'Apocalypse et le Nouveau Testament», in *Études Théologiques et Religieuses* 31 (1956), 26-35, the Lamb image is a true and proper Stereological and Christological figure.

The Lamb is one of the three great Christological images of Revelation, the other two images being “the one like a Son of Man” (Rev 1,13; 14,14), and “the victorious rider on the white horse” (Rev 19,11). If the image of the “one like a Son of Man” interacts with the local situations, the image of the “Lamb”, through its Christological nuances, points to its universal horizons. In Revelation there is a gradual Christological development and these Christological dimensions are reunited and synthesized in the apocalyptic eschatological figure of the Lamb, which reassumes the whole mystery of Christ²⁵.

The seer saw this Lamb standing (ἑστός)²⁶ upon Mount Zion. *Ἰστημι*, the Greek word for “standing”, indicates a corporeal position and its participle ἑστός normally means the simple presence, but here it alludes to the resurrection of Christ²⁷. Thus the standing Lamb refers to the resurrected Christ and the erect position of the Lamb indicates the positive energy of his resurrection and the fullness of Messianic efficiency²⁸. The author intentionally combines here the two aspects of the Paschal Mystery in a simultaneous relationship: the Christ Lamb is standing as if dead; Christ carries here the whole vitality of his passion and resurrection all together.

The seer saw the Lamb upon Mount Zion (Σιών). We study here the significance of Zion based on both the Old Testament and the New Testament.

1.1.1.2 Mount Zion

Mount Zion is the location of John’s vision. Within the literary context of the book, mountains have ambivalent connotations. In the cosmic disasters portrayed in

²⁵ U. VANNI, *L’Apocalisse*, 181.

²⁶ ἑστός functions as a finite verb, cfr. G. MUSSIES, *The Morphology of Koine Greek as Used in the Apocalypse of St. John: A Study in Bilingualism*, Brill, Leiden 1971, 325. 350.

²⁷ R. INFANTE, «L’Agnello nell’Apocalisse», 323; U. VANNI, «Questi seguono l’Agnello dovunque vada (Ap, 14,4)», in *Parola Spirito e Vita* 2 (1979), 174.

²⁸ U. VANNI, *L’Apocalisse*, 377.

Rev 6,14-16, mountains offer false security for the worried people because they themselves are subject to removal. On the second trumpet, 'something like a great mountain', thrown into the sea, devastates marine life and commerce (8,8). Subsequently the whore Babylon is seated on seven mountains (17,9). Conversely, a lofty mountain is also the site for John's vision of the holy city (21,10). But here we are specifically on Mount Zion; let us analyse its significance through out the Bible.

1.1.1.2.1 Mount Zion in the Old Testament

The Hebrew noun צִיּוֹן (*ṣîyôn*) occurs 154 times in the Old Testament. However, there is an addition: in 20 cases this is the geographical and topographical designation הַר, "Mount."

In the topographical sense, *Σιών* is the southeast hill of Jerusalem, adjacent to the Kidron valley and the spring Gihon. At the beginning of the Monarchy King David conquered this ancient Canaanite settlement. "The stronghold of Zion" was the name for this Jebusite fortress that David conquered, subsequently known as the "the city of David" (2 Sam 5,7; 1 Chr 11,5; 2 Chr 5,2). The city at that time was built entirely on the southern part of the southeastern hill (i.e., ophel). As Jerusalem grew, the name Zion came to be poetically used for the entire city (Ps 14,7; 48,2; 50,2). In poetic usage the city is personified as the "daughter of Zion" (2 Kgs 19,21; Ps 9,14; Isa 1,8) and its inhabitants the "sons of Zion" (Ps 149,2; Cant 3,11).

In the Jewish apocalyptic tradition, Zion is equated to Jerusalem (Jubilees 1,29). While the name "Jerusalem" can represent both the political and eschatological aspects of the city, the name "Zion" evokes, particularly after the exile, the aspect of salvation more strongly: Zion is above all the locus of the Temple Mount or of the Temple itself. It is the seat of God (Ps 65,1; 99,2; 135,21) and this makes Zion the legitimate cultic centre and the sign of the revelatory presence of God. It is the

symbol of eschatological hope²⁹. It is the place of eschatological salvation³⁰ and security³¹. It is God's sanctuary (Ps 20,3); his holy mount and residence (Joel 2,1) and his city (Isa 60,14). Zion is also a term for Israel (Isa 46,13) or Judah (Jer 14,19). Particularly in the post-exilic period, Jerusalem is often called Zion as the city of anticipated salvation (2 Kgs 19,31), to which the nations will flow together (Isa 2,2-4) and from which God will carry out his judgement (Joel 4,16).

In Jewish eschatological expectation, Mount Zion served as the center of the eschatological kingdom and the place of deliverance (Joel 2,32; Isa 24,23; 31,4; Mic 4,7; Zech 14,4-5; Jubilees 1,28; 4 Ezra 13,29-50). The Messiah will come on the top of Mount Zion and will defeat his foes and will judge them (2 Apocalypse of Baruch 40,1-3). It is the place where tradition locates the manifestation of salvation (Ps 48,1-14; Isa 24,23; Joel 2,32; Obad 17,21; Mic 4,1.7; Zech 14,10; Heb 12,22) and the classical place of meeting together of the redeemed.

The author of Revelation keeps in mind all these Old Testament significances and recognizes here, especially, the relevance of Zion as the mountain of divine revelation.

1.1.1.2 Mount Zion in the New Testament

The Greek noun *Σιών*³² appears 7 times in the New Testament: five times as an Old Testament quotation or allusion (Matt 21,5 [Isa 62,11; Zech. 9,9], John 12,15 [Isa 40,9; Zech 9,9], Rom 9,33 [Isa 28,16], Rom 11,26 [Isa 59,20; Ps 14,7] and in 1 Pet 2,6 [Isa 28,16]); and twice as freely formulated references (Heb 12,22; Rev 14,1).

²⁹ H. BALZ, «Σιών», in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 3, 246-247; G. FOHRER, «Σιών», in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 7, 293; W. H. MARE, «Zion» in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 6, 1096-1097.

³⁰ T. VETRALI, «I Vergini seguono l'Agnello (Ap. 14,4)», in *Parola Spirito e Vita* 12 (1985), 191.

³¹ U. VANNI, *L'Apocalisse*, 376.

³² E. LOHSE, «Σιών», in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 7, 336.

This concrete topographical reference occurs only here in Revelation. We discuss here the location of the Zion that we encounter in Rev 14,1.

The problem of the location of Mount Zion is complex and scholars are divided concerning the exact place of Zion. There are two main suggestions:

- 1) Mount Zion is in heaven³³. Those who keep the view that Mount Zion refers to heaven suppose that the 144,000 have been exalted to heaven.
- 2) Mount Zion is on the earth³⁴. Those who follow this view accept that the scene in Rev 14,1 is set on the earth.

John does not say whether Mount Zion has or not any connection with the ancient, historical Zion. We are not told whether it is in heaven or on earth. But since earth is the site of the acts depicted in Rev 13, and since there is reference to the heavenly Jerusalem only at the end of the book, this is probably the earthly Zion. Our text also favours an earthly view because v. 2 introduces an audition of a heavenly voice, thus clearly distinguishing Mount Zion and heaven.

³³ E. LOHMEYER, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, Mohr-Siebeck, Tübingen 1926, 121; M. KIDDLE, *The Revelation of St. John*, Hodder and Stoughton, London 1940, 262-271; R. H. MOUNCE, *The Book of Revelation*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI 1977, 267; H. GIESEN, «Symbole und mythische Aussagen in der Johannesapokalypse und ihre theologische Bedeutung», in K. KERTELGE (ed.), *Metaphorik und Mythos im Neuen Testament*, Herder, Freiburg 1990, 268.

³⁴ H. B. SWETE, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, Macmillan, London 1906, 177; I. T. BECKWITH, *The Apocalypse of John*, Macmillan, New York, NY 1919, 657; R. H. CHARLES, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John* (ICC, vol. 2), T & T Clark, Edinburgh 1920, 4-5; E. B. ALLO, *Saint Jean: L'Apocalypse*, Lecoffre J. Gabalda, Paris 1921, 195; A. WIKENHAUSER, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, Pustet, Regensburg 1947, 111; T. VETRALI, *I Vergini seguono l'Agnello (Ap. 14,4)*, 191; C. H. GIBLIN, «Recapitulation and the Literary Coherence of John's Apocalypse», in *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 56 (1994) 93; J. R. MICHAELS, *Revelation*, Inter Varsity Press, Downers Grove, IL 1997, 168-169.

According to Rev 14,1 John sees the Lamb and the 144,000 on Zion, where they are protected from persecution and suffering (cfr. Rev 13) and can at the same time hear and learn the New Song (Rev 14,3). At the end, John views those rescued on Zion in the heavenly Jerusalem itself (Rev 3,12; 22,3): He probably thinks of the saving Mount Zion as a prefiguration of the heavenly Jerusalem³⁵. The Lamb's location on Zion emphasizes his genuineness, since that is one of the names for the true city of God in the Old Testament³⁶.

1.1.2 The 144,000 Faithful

John saw the "144,000" (ἑκατὸν τεσσαράκοντα τέσσαρες χιλιάδες) faithful who have circled the Lamb upon Mount Zion. Here we are moving from a theriomorphic symbol, i.e., the Lamb to an arithmetic³⁷ symbol, i.e., 144,000.

The number 144,000 occurs four times in Revelation (Rev 7,4; 14,1; 14,3 and 21,17). While Rev 7,4; 14,1 and 14,3 speak of the number of people surrounding the Lamb, Rev 21,17 speaks of a measurement. In Rev 14,1 the number 144,000 is presented without an article but in Rev 7,4 and 14,3 it is presented with an article. The lack of the definite article before "144,000" does not distinguish this group from the one in Rev 7,4-8, where the definite article does occur³⁸. Throughout the Apocalypse,

³⁵ H. BALZ, «Σιών», in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, 246-247.

³⁶ G. K. BEALE, *The Book of Revelation*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI 1999, 731.

³⁷ U. VANNI, *L'Apocalisse*, 52.

³⁸ H. HAILEY, *Revelation*, 302-303. Those who support the view that they are identical are: E. LOHMEYER, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 122; W. HADORN, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, Deichert, Leipzig 1928, 149; A. WIKENHAUSER, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 111; R. DEVINE, «The Virgin Followers of the Lamb», in *Scripture* 16 (1964), 1; H. KRAFT, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, Mohr-Siebeck, Tübingen 1974, 187; J. LAMBRECHT, «A Structuration of Rev. 4,1-22,5», in J. LAMBRECHT (ed.), *L'Apocalypse johannique et l'Apocalyptic dans le Nouveau Testament*, University Press, Leuven 1980, 98; R. ZIMMERMANN, «Die Virginitäts-Metapher in Apk. 14,4-5 im Horizont von Befleckung, Loskauf und Erstlingsfrucht», in *Novum Testamentum* 45 (2003), 48; S. PATTEMORE, *The People of God in the Apocalypse. Discourse, Structure, and Exegesis*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2004, 118. Those who say they are not identical are: W. BOUSSET, *Die Offenbarung Johannis*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1906⁶, 380; E. B. ALLO, *Saint Jean L'Apocalypse*, 92-93; J. SICKENBERGER, *Erklärung der Johannesapokalypse*, Peter Hanstein, Bonn 1942, 137; H. M.

images are repeated, sometimes without the article in later occurrences³⁹.

The identification of the 144,000 is much debated by scholars and their conclusions are based on two understandings: a literal understanding of 144,000 and a figurative one.

1.1.2.1 The Literal Understanding

This view is based on the presupposition that John's language is to be understood literally except where he states explicitly otherwise.

1.1.2.1.1 *The 144,000 as Remnant of Ethnic Israelites*

Those who follow this view understand the number 144,000 as literal and conclude that those who are sealed are a remnant of ethnic Israelites⁴⁰. According to them, the detailed enumeration of 12,000 sealed from each of the twelve tribes of Israel (7,4-8) suggests that Jews are in view. The eschatological tradition of the future gathering of Israel and the gentiles at the New Jerusalem at the coming of Christ is found elsewhere in early Christian literature⁴¹. And again, the supporters of this view keep the idea of a remnant of Israel that remains faithful to the covenant, as found in the Old Testament⁴².

FÉRET, *L'Apocalypse de Saint Jean. Vision chrétienne de l'Histoire*, Corrêa, Paris 1946, 244; W. J. HARRINGTON, *Revelation*, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN 1993, 98.

³⁹ I. T. BECKWITH, *The Apocalypse of John*, 650. In Revelation we see occurrences of terms and images with articles and sometimes without articles. For example: 'Son of Man' in 1,13 and 14,14; 'mark' or 'brand' in 13,16-17 and 14,9; 'glass sea' in 4,6 and 15,2.

⁴⁰ J. A. SEISS, *The Apocalypse: A Series of Special Lectures on the Revelation of Jesus Christ*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI 1966, 160-169; H. KRAFT, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 126-128; R. L. THOMAS, *Revelation 1-7, An Exegetical Commentary*, Moody Press, Chicago, IL 1992, 473-482.

⁴¹ *Testament of Benjamin* 9,2; JUSTINE, *Dialogus cum Tryphone Judaeo*, 24.3; 80.1

⁴² In support of this view is the normal use of "Israel" in the New Testament as referring to the physical descendants of Jacob. According to P. RICHARDSON, *Israel in the Apostolic Church*, Cambridge University

Arguments against this view are the following:

i) Against the identification of 144,000 with the historic Israel, two terms are important; the mention of *χάραγμα* (Rev 13,16-17) and *σφραγίς* (Rev 7,3). The *χάραγμα* is the sign of the beast and *σφραγίς* is the sign of the Lamb and both of these signs are opposite to each other. Those who have the counter sign of *χάραγμα* are always persecuting the Church and not the historical Jews. Thus the 144,000 and the Christians of Rev 13 can be identified.

ii) In Revelation, the author uses the term “Jew” to call Christians⁴³. At the same time the author calls the historical Jews of Smyrna and Philadelphia as “Synagogue of Satan” (Rev 2,9; 3,9).

iii) The author attributes 12 doors to Jerusalem (Rev 21) and each one with one of the 12 tribes of Israel and says there will be entrance through this door to the eschatological city to those who are from gentiles too (Rev 21, 24-26).

Here too the 12 tribes do not signify the historic Israel but those who believe in Jesus⁴⁴. The names of the 12 tribes

Press, Cambridge 1969, 74, «Strong confirmation of this position, i.e., ‘Israel’ refers to the Jews in the New Testament, comes from the total absence of an identification of the Church with Israel until A. D. 160; and also from the total absence, even then, of the term ‘Israel of God’ to characterize the Church». According to A. F. JOHNSON, *Revelation*, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI 1981, 478, «Reference to the twelve tribes (vv. 5-8) would most naturally be understood to refer to the ancient historic Israel and not to the Church».

⁴³ According to A. YARBRO COLLINS, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse*, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, PA 1984, 85, «The name “Jews” is denied them because the followers of Jesus are held to be the true Jews. The name “Jews” has not become a term for the distant other, derogatory in and of itself, as it has in much of the Gospel of John». Also C. R. SMITH, «The Portrayal of the Church as the New Israel in the Names and Order of the Tribes in Revelation 7,5-8», in *Journal of the Study of the New Testament* 39 (1990), 39. See the application of Exod 19,6 in Rev 1,6 and 5,10; Dan 7,8,22 in Rev 5,9; Isa 62,2 and 65,15 in Rev 2,17 and 3,12; Isa 43,4; 45,19; 49,23 and 60,14 in Rev 3,9.

⁴⁴ G. BIGUZZI, *I settenari nella struttura dell’Apocalisse*, Edizioni Dehoniane Bologna, Bologna 2004, 138.

and the 12 apostles form part of the figurative structure of the heavenly city of God, “the New Jerusalem”. This city represents the whole people of God (Rev 21,9-10) in whose midst God and the Lamb dwell (Rev 21,12-22,5). The city has 12 foundation stones on which are written the names of the 12 apostles. The integral part that the apostles have together with the 12 tribes in the construction of the New Jerusalem must mean that the former are considered part of the true Israel. Already Christians have been depicted as the true Israel.⁴⁵ Again, the twelve tribes did not literally exist any longer in the first century A.D., and the hope of their eventual restoration belonged not to the real but to the ideal world.⁴⁶

1.1.2.1.2 *The 144,000 as Jewish Christians*

Those who support this view⁴⁷ frequently cite Rom 11,7, where Paul refers to the “elect” or “remnant” of Israel (i.e., Jewish Christians) who believed that Jesus was the Messiah of Israel while the rest of Israel had rejected the messianic status of Jesus. The 144,000 as Jewish Christians are the “first fruits” of those first chosen to receive the gospel.⁴⁸ The author equates the 144,000 in Rev 7,4-8 with the 144,000 in 14,1-5, and the latter cannot be considered Jews or even Jewish Christians.⁴⁹

1.1.2.2 *The Figurative Understanding*

Many commentators rightly understand the number to be figurative, since nearly all other numbers in Revelation have a figurative significance. Here the 144,000 represent the complete number of God’s people.

⁴⁵ See the application of Exod 19,6 in Rev 1,6 and 5,10; Dan 7,8,22 in Rev 5,9; Isa 62,2 and 65,15 in Rev 2,17 and 3,12; Isa 43,4; 45,19; 49,23 and 60,14 in Rev 3,9.

⁴⁶ G. B. CAIRD, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine*, Harper and Row, New York, NY 1966, 95; R. H. MOUNCE, *The Book of Revelation*, 168.

⁴⁷ W. BOUSSET, *Die Offenbarung Johannis*, 283. According to A. FEUILLET, *L’Apocalypse: État de la question*, Desclée de Brouwer, Paris 1963, 28, «the 144,000 are “Virgin Christians”».

⁴⁸ E. B. ALLO, *Saint Jean L’Apocalypse*, 93.

⁴⁹ M. E. BORING, *Revelation*, John Knox Press, Louisville, KY 1989, 128.

1.1.2.2.1 *The 144,000 as Army for the Ironic Holy War*

The 144,000 stand for the totality of the redeemed formed as an army to conduct an ironic holy war⁵⁰. Bauckham⁵¹ has argued convincingly this view based on the reference in 7,4-8 and suggests that it has the literary form of a census of the tribes of Israel, and every Old Testament census is a military census (e.g., Num 1,3.18.20). An Israelite army composed of twelve equal tribal contingents conforms to practice (Num 31,4-6; 1 QM 6,11). The notion of a messianic army composed of all twelve tribes fits the Jewish eschatological expectation of the re-gathering of the tribes to fight in the eschatological war. Those who counted in the Old Testament were males of military age, and the 144,000 in 14,1-4 are “male virgins”. He concludes that the author of Revelation has reworked Jewish military traditions and language to show that the faithful witness and death of Jesus have already won the decisive battle against evil through non-military means. Disciples are therefore urged to participate in this war by witnessing faithfully as Jesus did even to the point of death. Long before Bauckham, Tambyah⁵² also followed this position: these 144,000 are the “warrior bodyguards of the Lamb”.

1.1.2.2.2 *The 144,000 as the Community of Resurrected Martyrs*

The group as the entire community of resurrected martyrs⁵³.

The literal views and the above two figurative views are unacceptable because of limitations: to limit the number to a select group of believers dilutes the figurative force of completeness connoted by the number.

⁵⁰ G. B. CAIRD, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine*, 178; S. LAWS, *In the Light of the Lamb: Imagery, Parody, and Theology in the Apocalypse of John*, Michael Glazier, Wilmington, DE 1988, 27.

⁵¹ R. BAUCKHAM, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies in the Book of Revelation*, T & T Clark, Edinburgh 1993, 210-37.

⁵² T. I. TAMBYAH, «Virgins in Rev. 14,4», in *The Expository Times* 32 (1920), 139.

⁵³ R. H. CHARLES, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of St. John* (ICC, vol. 2), 4.

1.1.2.2.3 *The 144,000 as the Whole People of God*

As a number, 144,000 does not have any specific significance but, when we take into account different indications that the author has given in Revelation, it can be said that the 144,000 has a strong symbolic value of perfection⁵⁴ and stands in contrast to the name of the beast, which is numbered as 666 (Rev 13,18), the figure of imperfection⁵⁵. The 144,000 is the result of the multiplication of $12 \times 12 \times 1000$ ⁵⁶. The number 12 signifies the people of God either that of the Old Testament or that of the New Testament (the 12 tribes represent the people of God of the Old Testament and 12 apostles represent the foundation of the people of God of the New Testament; cfr. Rev 22,12-14). So the author works on an ideal multiplication between the 12 tribes and the 12 apostles of the Lamb⁵⁷. In the Old Testament, the symbolic number 12 is sufficiently elaborated (Num 13,1-16; Num 33,9; Deut 1,23; Josh 4,1-20; Exod 28,21) and the author of Revelation has made use of it and further developed it to refer to the immense folk of the followers of the Lamb. Thus the people of the Old Testament and those of the New Testament are considered here as a single unit. The number 1000 is the symbolic number of divine time, the time of the reign of God and Christ in history before the final judgement and the eschatological renovation (Rev 20,1-10).

The number 144,000 is thus the result of a symbolic arithmetic sum, formed not to explain directly a quantity but a quality to create a new theological significance through numbers⁵⁸. It symbolically represents the whole people of

⁵⁴ W. BOUSSET, *Die Offenbarung Johannis*, 206; W. HADORN, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 92.

⁵⁵ J. MASSYNGBERDE FORD, *Revelation*, Doubleday, Garden City, NY 1975, 115.

⁵⁶ G. BIGUZZI, *I settenari nella struttura dell'Apocalisse*, 137; U. VANNI, *L'Apocalisse*, 54; G. K. BEALE, *The Book of Revelation*, 417.

⁵⁷ T. VETRALI, *I Vergini seguono l'Agnello (Ap. 14,4)*, 188; U. VANNI, *L'Apocalisse*, 54.

⁵⁸ G. RAVASSI, *Apocalisse*, Edizione Piemme, Casale Monferrato (AL) 2000², 72.

God who love and follow the Lamb. Consequently, the group being sealed cannot be a special group of martyrs who are protected against physical harm until they have opportunity to give their witness⁵⁹. Nor are they a last generation of believers living at the end of the age who are protected from severe destruction coming on the earth⁶⁰. Unlikely also is the speculation that they are an unconverted Jewish remnant who are physically protected through the tribulation, after which they are converted as they see Christ descending at his second coming⁶¹. Nowhere else in Revelation nor the New Testament is there any thought of a preference or advantage granted Jews over Gentiles during the age between Christ's first and second comings⁶²

Thus, to limit the number to a select group of believers dilutes the figurative force of completeness connoted by the number⁶³. The 144,000 are the totality of God's folk⁶⁴ throughout the ages as His unique property⁶⁵.

The 144,000 has "his name and his Father's name (τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ) written on their foreheads", 14,1c):

This is one of the five references to God the Father in Revelation (Rev 1,6; 2,28; 3,5,21; 14,1). Here the name of the Lamb is referred to first and God the Father is mentioned as *His* Father. Thus the name of Christ is placed at the same level of the name of God the Father. The author takes utmost care to establish the equality between Christ and God the Father. This is clear from the interchangeable

⁵⁹ Against M. KIDDLE, *The Revelation of St. John*, 133-136; G. B. CAIRD, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine*, 96-99.

⁶⁰ Against R. H. MOUNCE, *The Book of Revelation*, 164.

⁶¹ R. H. GUNDRY, *The Church and the Tribulation*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI 1973, 82-83.

⁶² I. T. BECKWITH, *The Apocalypse of John*, 536.

⁶³ G. K. BEALE, *The Book of Revelation*, 733.

⁶⁴ A. WIKENHAUSER, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 67; S. PATTEMORE, *The People of God in the Apocalypse*, 184.

⁶⁵ J. SICKENBERGER, *Erklärung der Johannesapokalypse*, 88.

presentation throughout Revelation of divine titles⁶⁶, which can be applied to both Christ and the Father. Christ praises the Church of Pergamum because it accepted his name (Rev 2,13;3,12). The Church of Philadelphia is praised because it kept the name of Christ and did not deny it (Rev 3,8). The mention of “his father” together with the Lamb further confirms Christ as the Father’s only legitimate heir⁶⁷. Thus we find here Christ’s unique relation with the Father. Usually the followers have relation with God the Father through the Lamb, but here we see an exception. In Revelation, God the Father is never mentioned as the father of the faithful (Rev 1,6; 2,28; 3,5; 3,21) but our text, Rev 14,1c, explicitly says that the followers carry the name of the Father upon their forehead.

What does the author understand by the *name* (τὸ ὄνομα)? According to the Old Testament background, by giving someone a name one establishes a relation of dominion and possession towards him (person: Gen 2,19; city: 2 Sam 12,28 or lands: Ps 49,11; possession: Isa 4,1. Dan 1,7). The name⁶⁸ denotes the person and establishes its identity and thus becomes an indispensable part of his personality. The name, the personhood and the work of God the Father are indissolubly linked in the New Testament with the name, personhood and work of Jesus Christ. The name of Christ contained the fullness of his salvific work and is available for the community of the redeemed. *ὄνομα* thus expresses the concrete connection between God and man, the personal relationship which declares itself in a specific approach of God and which demands a specific approach from man. Thus the name in our context means the concrete relation between the Lamb and his Father towards the followers who carry the name. This special relation is clear from Rev 14,3-4 (redeemed) and 14,4-5 (the characterization of the faithful). To have the

⁶⁶ Examples for the interchangeable presentation of divine titles: ‘Alpha and Omega’ in 1,8 refers to Father while 22,13 refers to Christ; ‘beginning and end’ in 21,6 refers to Father while 22,13 refers to Christ.

⁶⁷ G. K. BEALE, *The Book of Revelation*, 733.

⁶⁸ H. BIETENHARDT, « *ὄνομα* », in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 5, 272.

name signifies a relationship of personal communion. And it is a link that keeps the 144,000 as a definitive and untouchable possession of the Lamb and of the Father. It denotes a direct and personal relation with the Father and the Lamb. This personal relationship gives the followers protection⁶⁹ and care by the Lamb and the Father. The name written on their foreheads show that they belong to God, and not to the beast (Rev 13,16-17). It is noted that the followers of the beast bear a general imprint (*χάραγμα*) and that the followers of the Lamb bear a seal (*σφραγίς*).

The significance of the name and the very action of writing are clearer when we observe the place where it is written; his name and his Father's name are written on their *foreheads*. The anthropological and apocalyptic symbolism of forehead is significant. The forehead is on the head and the head controls and guides the whole body. The head thus stands as an image of sovereignty. A sign upon a person had special significance in antiquity. The blood that was sprinkled upon the doors of the Israelites before their departure from Egypt (Exod 12,13) served as a sign that saved them from punishment. And this sign indicates that they are God's own. In Ezek 9,4, YHWH gives orders to his followers to carry the imprint of *ת* (*taw*) upon the forehead. This imprint exhibits them as his own and he will protect them from their enemies.

The term "forehead" (*μέτωπον*) is part of the typical vocabulary of the author. Though *μέτωπον* appears 8 times in the New Testament, only in Revelation it always refers to a sign on (*ἐπί*) the forehead: the seal of God in 7,3; the name of God in 14,1 and in 22,4; the evil sign of the beast in 13,16, and the name of Babylon on the forehead of the woman in 17,5. Throughout Revelation (e.g., Rev 7,2-3; 17,3.5; 19,12; 22,4), the forehead is a favourite place to make a mark on the body to indicate one's identity and owner⁷⁰. Rev 9,4 gives the same tradition of Ezekiel that all those who have signs are saved. Again, Rev

⁶⁹ G. K. BEALE, *The Book of Revelation*, 733.

⁷⁰ L. L. THOMPSON, *Revelation*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN, 1998, 144.

14,6-20 depicts the judgement of those who have not the sign upon their forehead. The divine imprint upon the forehead of the followers carries much significance and it denotes the complete and definite belongingness of the followers to Christ. The name imprinted upon the forehead shows that the Father will not abandon them. It gives an atmosphere of security.

1.2 John's Audition (Rev 14, 2-3a)

And I heard a voice from heaven
 like the sound of many waters and
 like the sound of loud thunder;
 the voice I heard was
 like the sound of harpers playing on their
 harps,
 And they sing
 a new song
 before the throne and
 before the four living creatures and
 before the elders.

Καὶ ἤκουσα φωνὴν ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ
 ὡς φωνὴν ὑδάτων πολλῶν καὶ
 ὡς φωνὴν βροντῆς μεγάλης,
 καὶ ἡ φωνὴ ἦν ἤκουσα
 ὡς κιθαρῳδῶν κιθαριζόντων ἐν ταῖς κιθάραις
 αὐτῶν.

καὶ ᾄδουσιν

[ὡς] ᾠδὴν καινὴν
 ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου καὶ
 ἐνώπιον τῶν τεσσάρων ζώων καὶ
 τῶν πρεσβυτέρων,

This section narrates the audition of the song that the seer heard in his visionary experience. We analyse here the peculiarities of this acoustic experience, a perception of revelation by means of audition. The audition is noted by the presence of two acoustic verbs (*ἀκούω* and *ᾄδω*), an acoustic noun (*φωνή*) and a musical instrument (*κιθάρα*). The content or

the wording of this song is not given but we are told that it is a New Song.

The author affirms that he hears a sound that comes *from heaven* (ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ). The biblical revelation establishes a link between heaven and the mystery of God. Heaven is the residence of God (1 Kings 8,30.32.34.36.39; Ps 2,4; Matt 5,16.45; 6,1.9; Mark 11,25). At times, the biblical authors employed the term heaven to refer to God (Dan 4,23; 1 Macc 3,18; 4,10.24.55; 12,15; Mark 8,11; 11,30; Luke 15,18.21; John 3,27). Thus the concept of “heaven” assumes a forceful theological sense. It is the sphere of God and of everything divine, the proper zone of God⁷¹. So the seer hears the sound that comes directly from the divine sphere.

Though the seer says that the sound is from heaven, he does not say that its origin is from heaven. Moreover, the author does not say what the sound is or to whom the sound belongs, but it is simply described by means of a fourfold comparison: as the sound of many waters and of loud thunders, as the sound of harpers playing on their harps and as the New Song. We analyse now the first two comparisons of celestial voice: as the sound of many waters and of loud thunders.

1.2.1 The Celestial Voice as Sound of Many Waters and of Loud Thunders

The audition is presented as if the author only gradually becomes aware of the sound he hears, for he first compares it to loud sounds found in nature: roaring water and loud thunder. Through these images he tries to explain the sound of heavenly singing.

The loud sound of heavenly singing is compared first to the sound of many waters. The sound is compared here not with mere water but with *many waters* (ὡς φωνῆν ὑδάτων πολλῶν), to powerful water. This powerful symbol is seen

⁷¹ F. W. DANKER, «οὐρανός», in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 738.

again in Rev 1,15 and in 19,6. This comparison is explicitly used in Ezek 43,2 to characterize the divine sound. Relayed on the Old Testament background, the apocalyptic notion of water is a powerful eschatological symbol for the voice of God. In Rev 14,2a, through the comparison of the sound presented as a sound of many waters, the author characterizes the sound as a divine sound.

In the second comparison the sound is compared to the sound of loud *thunders* (ὡς φωνήν βροντῆς μεγάλης).

Already in the Old Testament, thunder has a special significance: it refers to transcendence and to the sound of God (cfr. Exod 19,16; Ezek 1,13). The sound of thunder issuing from the throne of God is an accompanying phenomenon of the theophany⁷². In the LXX it is often used of the terrifying revelation of God (except in Job 40,4).

The Greek term for thunder, βροντή⁷³, occurs 10 times in Revelation (Rev 4,5; 6,1; 8,5; 10,3.4[bis]; 11,19; 14,2; 16,18; 19,6). The thunder in Revelation is linked to the presence of God and often to the imminent judgement (Rev 8,5). As in our text, the noun “thunder” both in Rev 6,1 and in Rev 19,6 alludes to the superhuman and divine power of a sound. The phraseologies in Rev 14,2 and 19,6a are particularly similar, and in both passages there are three similes introduced with ὡς which the author uses to characterize the magnificent and otherworldly sound he hears. It occurs with other natural phenomena in Rev 4,5; 8,5; 11,19; 16,18. In all these references βροντή is used as a metaphor for an extremely loud voice and there can hardly be reference to the thunderous course of the planets.

Thus the author makes use of two cosmic symbols to interpret the sound. The uttered sound is great as the many waters and the great thunder. This way of comparison really

⁷² V. HASLER, «Βροντή», in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1, 227.

⁷³ W. FOERSTER, «Βροντή», in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1, 640.

shows the inexplicability of God's sound. The author finds it difficult to narrate the content of the audition and to explain the nature of the audition.

1.2.2 The Celestial Voice as Sound of Harpers Playing on their Harps

To interpret the audition further, the author presents here a new comparison: the comparison of "sound of harpers" (ἡ φωνή ἣν ἤκουσα ὡς κιθαρῶδων κιθαριζόντων ἐν ταῖς κιθάραις αὐτῶν) and he makes use of different figures progressively.

Through the repetitive introductory phrase, "the sound which I heard" (Rev 14,2a and 14,2b) the author emphasizes that he has a clearer impression of the sound he hears and to characterize that sound he uses a simile drawn from human life, namely, the sound of a group of kithara players. The φωνή here in Rev 14,2b has an anaphoric definite article⁷⁴ (ἡ φωνή) referring to the previous anarthrous use of φωνή in 14,2a, indicating that the metaphor of kitharists playing on their instruments refers to the same sound referred to in 14,2a.

The triple use of κιθαριζόντων κιθάρα and κιθαρῶδων (Rev 14,2b) is noteworthy. The verb κιθαρίζω indicates music from harps⁷⁵ and cord instruments and it occurs in the New Testament only here and in 1 Cor 14,7. The participle κιθαριζόντων (harping) functions as a finite verb and so is continued by the finite verb ἕδουσιν (they sing) in Rev 14,3. The coordination of the participle with the finite verb is an example of Semitic style⁷⁶. The musical instrument κιθάρα expresses a liturgical celebration⁷⁷, which is lyrical and festal. The harp music has its ancient tradition and in the biblical world this music expresses joy and thanksgiving (2 Sam 6,5). Later Jewish sources foresaw

⁷⁴ D. E. AUNE, *Revelation 6-16* (Word Biblical Commentary 52B), Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville TN 1998, 807.

⁷⁵ F. W. DANKER, «Κιθαρίζω», in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 544.

⁷⁶ S. THOMPSON, *The Apocalypse and Semitic Syntax*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1985, 67.

⁷⁷ P. PRIGENT, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, Mohr-Siebeck, Tübingen 2001, 432; U. VANNI, *L'Apocalisse*, 191.

that God would be praised by harps and “a New Song” in the Messianic days and in the “world to come”⁷⁸.

1.2.3 The Celestial Voice as New Song

The phrase *ᾠδὴ καινὴ* occurs twice in Revelation (Rev 5,9; 14,3). In our text, it is the fourth and the last comparison by which the author illustrates the sound. The scene of this comparison is verbally and symbolically parallel to the introductory vision (Rev 1,15) and to the presentation of the Lamb scene (Rev 5,6-14). Here the author compares - like (*ὡς*) a New Song - the sound with a New Song. The manner in which *ὡς* is combined with the substantive *ᾠδὴ* and takes the place of *ᾠδὴ* as object (they were singing, as it were, a New Song) reflects Semitic influence⁷⁹.

In the New Testament, *καινός* means “not yet used” (cfr. Matt 9,17; Mark 2,21; Luke 5,36; Matt 27,60; John 19:41), and “unusual” or “interesting” (cfr. Acts 17,21; Mark 1,27; Acts 17,19, cfr. v. 20), but especially “new in kind,” (cfr. Matt 13,52). It occurs 7 times in Revelation (Rev 2,17; 3,12[bis]; 5,19; 14,3; 21,2.5).

The author consciously preferred this adjective and it signifies newness in its qualitative⁸⁰ sense. It has a strong theological value: the newness that the whole universe has at the end time because of the work of God. Wherever this adjective appears in Revelation, it always has a Christological connotation, which explains profoundness (cfr. Rev 5,9; 21,1; 21,2). The newness is not in the song itself, but in the relationship that Christ has with the faithful too⁸¹. The term “new” also includes everything that is characteristic of apocalyptic promise.

⁷⁸ *Midrash Rabbah* on Numbers 15.11 and *Babylonian Arakhin* 13b.

⁷⁹ F. W. DANKER, «*ὡς*», in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 1104.

⁸⁰ J. BEHM, «*καινός*», in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 3, 447.

⁸¹ U. VANNI, *L'Apocalisse*, 145.

John hears a New *Song*. The Greek term for song, *ὠδή*⁸² means:

- a) "Song" as such
- b) "A song" of any kind, accompanied by *κιθάρα* and *αὐλός*.

There are 7 occurrences of *ὠδή* in the New Testament and among these, 5 are in Revelation (Rev 5,9; 14,3 [bis]; 15,3 [bis]). In the New Testament there is still no precise differentiation between of *ὠδή ψαλμός* and *ῥυμος* (cfr. Col 3,16; Eph 5,19), in contrast to a later time, when *ὠδή* came to be used only for biblical songs used in the liturgy and thus the inspired cultic songs of the community. But in Revelation, it is added with an eschatological nuance (cfr. 5:9; 14:3; 15:3).

Thus, the song defined by newness indicates the eschatological newness. The New Song is the song of the eschatologically redeemed, which no one else can learn other than the 144,000. The song is new because it refers to the Messianic newness that it intends to express. The Messianic newness of Revelation is the newness of Christ: Christ is the content of the message that comes directly from God. The recurrences of *καινός* in Revelation and above all the expression *ὠδὴν καινὴν* refers to Christ the Lamb. They properly celebrate the newness of Christ⁸³ as it is realized in history.

The author affirms the reality of the song but does not reveal the content of the song⁸⁴ and the addressee of the song.

⁸² H. SCHLIER, «ὠδή», in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1, 165; W. RADL, «ὠδή», in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 3, 506.

⁸³ U. VANNI, *L'Apocalisse*, 145.

⁸⁴ Regarding the song there are different suggestions: «the song is an angelic choir», R. H. CHARLES, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John* (ICC, vol. 2),7; E. LOHMEYER, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 119; «The song is like a prayer, sanctity and true love», F. GRÜNZWEIG, *Johannes-Offenbarung* (vol. 2), German Bible Society, Stuttgart 1989, 15; «The song fundamentally remains a mystery. It is the personal prerogative of the followers of the Lamb», C. H. GIBLIN, *The Book of Revelation: the Open Book of Prophecy*, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN 1991, 103. Regarding the origin of the sound: «the sound is not that of the

He simply says that this song is heard before the throne, the four living creatures and the elders. The analysis of these three will help us to understand the sense of the song.

The song is being sung *before the throne* (ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου)⁸⁵: here we notice the simple reference to throne (θρόνος), with no precision as to whom the throne belongs. But in the light of Rev 14,1 (the throne of Father) and Rev 14,4c (the throne of God), we can assume that this throne is that of God the Father. So the reference here regarding “before the throne” signifies “before God”. θρόνος here is a circumlocution for the name of God and it is used four times in Revelation (Rev 4,10; 7,9; 8,3 and 14,3).

As a symbolic expression of God’s sovereign majesty, the throne of God stands at the heart of the vision of the throne in Revelation (cfr. Rev 4). It is located in heaven, and in the vision it is inseparably linked with Him that sits on it. In the vision, the worship of the living creatures (Rev 4,8-9) and of the elders (Rev 4,10-11) is concentrated on Him that sits on the throne. This expression is almost a name for God in terms of His illimitable glory as the Creator (Rev 4,9- 5,1.7.13; 7,15; 21,5; cfr. also 19,4). It is thus the more significant that the adoration of all creation (Rev 5,13) is addressed “unto him that sits upon the throne, and unto the Lamb” (cfr. also Rev 6,16; 7,10). For the author of Revelation the exalted Christ shares the throne of God. This is most plainly expressed in the vision of the New Jerusalem (Rev 22). Whereas in Rev 7,15, the “great multitude” clothed in white garments is said to be “before the throne of God,” where “the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them” (Rev 7,17), in Rev 22,1 the stream of living water proceeds “out of the throne of God and of the Lamb,” and in Rev 22,3 it is explicitly said of the city of God that “the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it.” When the throne

144,000 but rather the sound of the heavenly assembly», H. B. SWETE, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, 177; D. E. AUNE, *Revelation 6-16*, 806; but according to A. WIKENHAUSER, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 111, «it is “that of the angels”».

⁸⁵ O. SCHMITZ, «θρόνος», in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 3, 165; D. E. AUNE, *Revelation 6-16*, 808.

of God has “descended to earth” at the consummation, it is called the throne both of God and of the Lamb. The more telling, then, is the fact that in the new world of God at the end of the days the seat of God’s rule is also the throne of the Lamb. And the exalted Christ shares the throne of God.

The New Song is sung *before four living creatures* (ἐνώπιον τῶν τεσσάρων ζώων) and the elders: together with the throne, the four living creatures are mentioned here (Rev 14,3; cfr. 4,6,8; 5,6.8.14; 6,1,6; 7,11; 15,7; 19,4). The “four living creatures” is a theriomorphic⁸⁶ symbolic image. In order to understand its meaning, an analysis of Rev 4,6b-8 will be helpful. Rev 4,6b-8a describes who they are and 4,8b describes what they perform. Here the author presents them in five successive symbolic levels:

- a) In front (ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου) and in the middle of the throne (ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου)
- b) Full of eyes in front and behind (γέμοντα ὀφθαλμῶν ἔμπροσθεν καὶ ὀπισθεν)
- c) They are like lion, ox, man and flying eagle
- d) With six wings (ἔχων ἀνὰ πτέρυγας ἕξ)
- e) Full of eyes all the way round as well as inside (κυκλόθεν καὶ ἔσωθεν γέμουσιν ὀφθαλμῶν)

Thus, it is clear that these living creatures are the dignitaries of the divine court. Their presence in front and in the middle of the throne signifies their nearness⁸⁷ to Almighty God, who is seated upon the throne. The multiple eyes signify their omniscience and omnipotence. As heavenly beings they continuously praise the Almighty. Their praise includes the triple phase of salvation history and the glorious coming of Christ (ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος). This praise is exactly like that of the Seraphim in Isa 6,2-3.

In spite of the angelic features that are derived from the illustration of seraphim in Isaiah 6, the living creatures can be

⁸⁶ U. VANNI, *L’Apocalisse*, 38.

⁸⁷ U. VANNI, *L’Apocalisse*, 171-172.

interpreted in a cosmic perspective. Each of them in its own aspect represents in a better way the animal world. John starts to speak from the forest (lion), continues with the domestic ambience (ox and man) and reaches heaven (eagle). Thus they include the totality of places where life is manifested.

The symbolism of the number “four” is one of the cosmic totality⁸⁸ and the universal action of God put in act through the angels. The number “four” is also the number of living creatures who sing eternally his praise in the heavenly liturgy.

The author very creatively fuses here the actions of the creatures who praise God in Ezek 1,5 and of the Seraphim in Isa 6,2-3. They have a particular role of nearness to God and this nearness constitutes the scope of transcendence. They always have a direct or indirect relation with Christ the Lamb, who is always central to them.

The song is also presented *before the elders* (ἐνώπιον τῶν πρεσβυτέρων 14,3a): πρεσβύτερος⁸⁹ occurs 65 times in the New Testament.

In order to understand the significance of elders, their first occurrence in Revelation is helpful, which is the vision of the throne (Rev 4,4). They are associated with and participate in the royalty of God and sit upon the throne, the unique throne of God. They are vested with white vestments, the symbol of festal joy and resurrection⁹⁰ and are adorned with golden

⁸⁸ G. BIGUZZI, «I numeri nell'Apocalisse di Giovanni e il loro linguaggio», in *Liber Annuus* 50 (2000), 150; H. BALZ, «τέσσαρες», in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 8, 134; U. VANNI, *L'Apocalisse*, 170. The arithmetic symbol “four” again signifies the cardinal points of the earth (Ezek 7,2; Rev 7,1); the four principal winds (Dan 11,4; Zech 6,5; Rev 7,1) and the four seasons.

⁸⁹ G. BORNKAMM, «πρεσβύτερος», in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 6, 668; J. ROHDE, «πρεσβύτερος», in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 3, 149. The 65 occurrences of πρεσβύτερος: 24 times in the Gospels, Once in John, 17 times in Acts, 5 times in the Pastoral Letters, Once in Hebrews, 5 times in the Catholic Epistles, and 12 times in Revelation.

⁹⁰ According to T. STRAMARE, «Apocalisse», in T. BALLARINI (ed.), *Introduzione alla Bibbia* (vol. 5/2), Casa Editrice Marietti, Torino 1968², 473, «Il vestito bianco, caratteristica del mondo divino per ragione della sua

crowns, gold being the typical metal of liturgy and of the nearness of God. The throne, the white robes and the crowns show that they are heavenly beings. Yet there is no mention of God sitting in council with them nor do they seem to discharge a judicial office (cfr. Rev 20,4). Their function is not the exercise of their own dominion: it is simply adoration of the majesty (Rev 4,10; 19,4) and of the exalted Lamb (Rev 5,8-10) with songs of praise (Rev 4,11; 5,9-14; 11,17-18; 19,4). Except in Rev 5,5 and Rev 7,13 they have representative (Rev 4,4; 7,11; 14,3) and cultic-worship functions (Rev 4,10; 5,6.8.11.14; 11.16; 19,4).

Though these elders are distinguished from the angelic hosts (Rev 5,11; 7,11), they are a higher class of angels, which is closer to the throne of God. "One of the elders" functions as *angelus interpres* (Rev 5,5; 7,13) or "interpreting angel"⁹¹ and John addresses him by the title of majesty, *κύριος* (Rev 7,14).

The different comparisons that the author has presented to explain the song, serve as a solemn introduction to the true audio-revelation of 14, 4-5: the identification of the 144,000.

1.3 John's Realization (Rev 14, 3b)

And no one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who had been redeemed from the earth.

No one could learn that song
except the hundred and forty-four thousand
who had been redeemed from the earth

καὶ οὐδεὶς ἐδύνατο μαθεῖν τὴν ᾠδὴν
εἰ μὴ αἱ ἑκατὸν τεσσαράκοντα τέσσαρες χιλιάδες,
οἱ ἡγορασμένοι ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς.

luminosità, è il colore di Dio, degli angeli, dei beati e degli uomini santi (1,14; 3,4.18; 6,11; 7,1; 14,14; 19,8.11), il colore della trasfigurazione (Mark 9,2), il colore degli angeli alla Risurrezione (Matt 28,3), più particolarmente, il simbolo della vittoria (19,11)»; U. VANNI, *L'Apocalisse*, 176.

⁹¹ D. E. AUNE, *Revelation* 6-16, 472.

As the result of the above visionary and acoustic experiences John realizes the unicity and identity of the 144,000. According to him the 144,000 are the redeemed ones and no one can learn the New Song other than these 144,000 faithful.

1.3.1 The Unicity of the 144,000 in Learning the New Song

The description of the sound is concluded with the affirmation that no one could learn the song (*καὶ οὐδεὶς ἐδύνατο μαθεῖν τὴν ᾠδὴν*) except the 144,000 who are redeemed from the earth. This affirmation seems to be the scope of the whole audition. The same expression of “learning the New Song” of the heavenly liturgy is already reported in Rev 5,8-10. But Rev 5,8-10 elaborates the content of the New Song and Rev 14,3 focuses on those who can learn it (*μαθεῖν*).

The question is whether *μαθεῖν* simply means “to learn” in the ordinary sense or in a more technical sense for understanding of a higher kind. Though a clear-cut decision is hardly possible, there are certain passages in the New Testament which seem to favour the second view. Thus we might refer to 2 Cor 12,4, where Paul speaks of his rapture into Paradise: *καὶ ἤκουσεν ἄρρητα ῥήματα ἃ οὐκ ἐξὸν ἀνθρώπῳ λαλῆσαι* (And he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter). It is true that the 144,000 of Rev 14,3 are not *ἄνθρωποι* after the manner of the *ἄνθρωπος* of 2 Cor 12,3ff. In this light the *μαθεῖν* of Rev 14:3 might be understood as “a deepened hearing”⁹² and in this sense *μανθάνω* is sometimes expressly differentiated from *ἀκούω*.

1.3.2 The Identification of the 144,000 as the Redeemed

From Rev 14,3 onwards the author begins to illustrate the characteristic of the 144,000 as redeemed. Until now they were presented by means of a number, i.e., 144,000. The author here affirms that the 144,000 are redeemed from the earth.

⁹² K. H. RENGSTORF, «μανθάνω», in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 4, 408; W. HADORN, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 150; D. E. AUNE, *Revelation 6-16*, 809.

The 144,000 are those *redeemed* (ἀγοράζω) from the earth. The verb ἀγοράζω⁹³ derives from the noun ἀγορά, (market), which denotes any place of public assembly. The ἀγορά became identified in classical times with the market place: a centre of community life which was regularly used for political meetings, judicial hearings, and especially for trade. Ἀγοράζω came to mean ‘buy in the market place’ and hence ‘buy’ in general. In Hellenistic times it was also in common use as a term for ‘buying slaves’.

In LXX, ἀγορά is used, by metonymy, to describe the trading activity of Tyre (Ezek 27,12-22). It is also the place where a girl seeks her lover (Cant 3,2). Qoh 12,4 refers the phrase “shut doors of the agora” as a figure of deafness. Where the verb ἀγοράζω is used, the reference is normally to commercial purchase (Gen 41,57; Neh 10,31).

Ἀγοράζω occurs 25 times in the New Testament and among these 6 times it occurs in Revelation (Rev 3,18; 5,9; 13,17; 14,3.4; 18,11). Along with the verb ἀγοράζω, another word group, popular in the LXX, represented by λυτρόω (“to redeem”), is also commonly used to speak of redemption in the New Testament. It is clear that the New Testament writers used imagery both from Exodus and from the ‘redemption of slaves’⁹⁴ to speak of redemption. Exodus imagery predominates in Col 1,14; 1 Pet 1,18-19; Rev 5,9 and 14,3-4. On the other hand, the picture of the ‘redemption of slaves’ underlines 1 Cor 6,20; 7,23 and Gal 4,5. This is not to say that there are two or more kinds of redemption in the New Testament; but the authors were free to choose from two images of liberation to describe the saving action of God in Christ.

The 144,000 have been bought by Christ, not in a fictitious manner similar to that in which the slaves of the gentiles used

⁹³ F. BÜCHSEL, «ἀγοράζω», in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol.1, 125-126; D. H. FIELD, «ἀγοράζω», in *The New Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 1, 267-268; C. SPICQ, «ἀγοράζω», in *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, vol. 1, 26.

⁹⁴ S. LYONNET - L. SABOURIN, *Sin, Redemption, and Sacrifice*, Biblical Institute Press, Rome 1970, 110-112.

to be bought by some god⁹⁵, but in the manner in which the people of Israel had been acquired by YHWH himself by means of a covenant, sealed with blood, in order that they might become God's property, his exclusive and most dear possession. The 144,000 therefore has been given freedom by God and has become, indeed, 'the slave of God' and of Christ' just as the people of Israel had been freed from the Egyptian slavery so that they became "the people of God" (Exod 29,45).

Thus in Rev 14,3,4 ἀγοράζω celebrates the greatness of the achievement of the Lamb⁹⁶. It indicates how, from what and for whom the Lamb has purchased the 144,000. Thus in the present context of Rev 14,3, ἀγοράζω has a strong Christological connotation.

The 144,000 are redeemed *from the earth* (ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς): the Greek noun γῆ can refer here either to the earth in a geographical sense (emphasizing that the redeemed come from all parts of the world) or to the earth in the sense of that which is in

⁹⁵ A. Deissmann points out a certain 'sacred manumission' of slaves which had the aspects of selling and buying, was widespread among the Greeks of those days, and showed a striking similarity with the New Testament use of "redemption". According to him, therefore, Christ did not buy or redeem men from the slavery of sin in the manner in which "purchases" are conducted in the ἀγορά, but in the manner in which slaves were often freed by a religious act in which the slave who wished to buy his freedom did not remit "the price of his redemption" directly to his master, but to some god. In the same way it must be understood that Christ paid "the price of our redemption" not to the devil, but to God the Father. cfr. G. A. DEISSMANN, *Licht vom Osten, Das Neue Testament und die neuentdeckten Texte der hellenistisch-römischen Welt*, Mohr-Siebeck, Tübingen, 1923⁴, 271. But S. LYONNET - L. SABOURIN criticises the position of Deissmann: «although the verb ἀγοράζω frequently used in Greek literature, never occurs in a case of sacred or profane manumission of slaves. It is hardly probable that the New Testament took the use of the verb ἀγοράζω concerning the redemption wrought by Christ from the manner in which the Greeks used the word when speaking of manumission». cfr. S. LYONNET - L. SABOURIN, *Sin, Redemption, and Sacrifice*, 107.110.

⁹⁶ According to R. INFANTE, «L'Agnello nell'Apocalisse», 326, «Il verbo ἀγοράζω esprime l'idea di liberazione per mezzo di un riscatto. L'autore non esplicita il potere o la sfera da cui l'Agnello riscatta, ma solo la destinazione dell'acquisto: "per Dio"; il verbo cioè esprime in positivo il passaggio dalla non appartenenza all'appartenenza».

opposition to God, as the “place of unbelief”,⁹⁷ similar to the Johannine understanding of *κόσμος* as the world hostile to God and his people (John 15,18-19). While both views are possible, the first is more likely for two reasons:

1) In Rev 5,9 the term *ἀγοράζειν* is applied to those redeemed “from every tribe and tongue and people and nation,” emphasizing their universal origin.

2) The phrase *οὔτοι ἠγοράσθησαν ἀπὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων* (Rev 14,4), is clearly parallel to *οἱ ἠγορασμένοι ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς* (Rev 14,3), so that the “earth” and “humanity” must be understood as interchangeable.

Both terms emphasize the universality of the people of God. So *from the earth* can be understood as the universality of faithful who are redeemed by and who belong fully to God. It is significant that the phrase *from the earth* (*ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς*) occurs only here in Revelation.

2. The Threefold Explanation of the 144,000 (Rev 14, 4-5)

It is these who have not defiled themselves with women,
 For they are chaste;
 it is these who follow the Lamb
 wherever he
 goes;
 these have been redeemed from mankind
 as first fruits for God and the Lamb,
 and in their mouth no lie was found,
 for they are spotless.

*οὔτοι εἰσιν οἱ μετὰ γυναικῶν οὐκ ἐμολύνθησαν,
 παρθένοι γάρ εἰσιν,
 οὔτοι οἱ ἀκολουθοῦντες τῷ ἀρνίῳ
 ὅπου ἂν ὑπάγη.
 οὔτοι ἠγοράσθησαν ἀπὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων
 ἀπαρχὴ τῷ θεῷ καὶ τῷ ἀρνίῳ,
 καὶ ἐν τῷ στόματι αὐτῶν οὐχ εὐρέθη ψεῦδος,
 ἄμωμοί εἰσιν.*

⁹⁷ E. LOHMEYER, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 122.

In Rev 14,4-5, the author keenly illustrates the identity of the 144,000 with a threefold explanation in a hymn form. These explanations of the 144,000 are presented in a progressive way. In Rev 14,3 the author gives the fundamental characteristic of the 144,000 that they are redeemed. But here he gives further explanation of the identification of the 144,000 with the aid of the demonstrative pronoun *οὗτος*⁹⁸ and the verb *εἰμί*, and *οὗτος* refers back to *οἱ ἠγορασμένοι* at the end of v. 3. The third description repeats that these are people who “were purchased from among people”, forming an *inclusio* together with the conclusion of v. 3, and thus emphasizing that the middle two descriptions are attributes demonstrated on earth by all who are truly redeemed⁹⁹. The phrase *οὗτοί εἰσιν* (v. 4), introduces an explanatory passage that includes vv. 4-5 and is therefore an interpretive expansion of the vision recounted in vv. 1-3.

The explicit interpretation of the vision in Rev 14,4-5 does not center on the figure of the Lamb or on Mount Zion, but on the threefold explanations of the identification of 144,000. We see now exclusively these threefold explanations.

2.1 The 144,000 are Those who have not Defiled Themselves with Women

Here the author gives the first explanation about the 144,000 redeemed: they are those who have not *defiled* (*οὐκ ἐμολύνθησαν*) themselves with women (Rev 14,4a).

This first explanation about the identification of the 144,000 is hard, apparently anti-woman and with androcentric language¹⁰⁰. According to Robert Mounce¹⁰¹ this phrase is the

⁹⁸ D. E. AUNE, «Following the Lamb: Discipleship in the Apocalypse», in R. N. LONGENECKER (ed.), *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI 1996, 272.

⁹⁹ G. K. BEALE, *The Book of Revelation*, 738.

¹⁰⁰ E. SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA, *The Book of Revelation. Justice and Judgement*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, PA 1985, 181-82; D. M. SCHOLER, «Feminist Hermeneutics and Evangelical Biblical Interpretation», in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 30 (1987), 414; T. PIPPIN, *Death and Desire: The Rhetoric of Gender in the Apocalypse of John*, Westminster Press, Louisville, KY 1992, 53.

¹⁰¹ R. H. MOUNCE, *The Book of Revelation*, 266.

most enigmatic phrase in the book of Revelation. George Caird¹⁰² considers this to be the most puzzling sentence of John. J. P. M. Sweet¹⁰³ adds that these are the most misunderstood words in Revelation.

*Μολύνω*¹⁰⁴, the Greek noun for *defilement*, has a fundamental sense, which is very powerful with a strong negative nuance: stain, soil and defile. It occurs 3 times in the New Testament in the sense of religious and cultic defilement (1 Cor 8,7; Rev 3,4; 14,4).

As the explanation of the identification of 144,000, defilement is the subject of serious debate among scholars. R. H. Charles¹⁰⁵ would simply consider the last line of Rev 14,3 and the first line of Rev 14,4 as an interpolation by a monkish scribe with an ascetical bias against marriage. But he does not have any manuscript evidence.

In order to understand the meaning of “defilement”, let us consider the approach of Daniel Olson. He continues his studies from the assessment of Yarbrow Collins¹⁰⁶, who has recognized for the first time the presence of an allusion to 1 Enoch in Rev 14,4. Olson tries to explain John’s choice of words effectively by asking why John has specially chosen this phrase and terminology. According to him, the language of Rev 14,4a is a conscious literary allusion to the *Book of Watchers* rather than to the historical practices in John’s Churches. He presents the similarity that our text shares with the book of Enoch, especially with the *Book of Watchers* of chapters 1-36 of 1 Enoch. In 1 Enoch, it is used of the behaviour of the Watchers,

¹⁰² G. B. CAIRD, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine*, 179.

¹⁰³ J. P. M. SWEET, *Revelation*, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, PA 1979, 222.

¹⁰⁴ F. W. DANKER, «μολύνω», in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 657.

¹⁰⁵ R. H. CHARLES, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of St. John* (ICC, vol. 2), 8-9.

¹⁰⁶ A. YARBROW COLLINS, «Women’s History and the Book of Revelation», in K. H. RICHARDS (ed.), *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers 26*, Scholars Press, Atlanta, GA 1987, 89.

who, as angels, are forbidden to marry. Chapters 6-19 of Book of Watchers tell the famous tale of the angelic “sons of God”, who commingle with the “daughters of men” before the flood and generate ugly progeny. God, then, condemned them because of this offence. The content of these chapters tells us that the angels are intended by God to remain virgins. But they have “defiled” themselves and have fallen short of divine expectation. According to Olson, the redeemed 144,000 stand in radical opposition to the fallen angels of the Book of Watchers: “They are those who have *not defiled* themselves with women”. The intended emphasis falls on the negation. Thus the 144,000 virgins of Rev 14,4 are anti-image, not only to the devotees of the beast, but also to the fallen angels. The faithful followers of the Lamb substitute the angels of Book of Watchers¹⁰⁷.

This first explanation about the identification of the 144,000 is further explained by the positive affirmation “they are virgins” (*παρθένοι γάρ εἰσιν*).

2.1.1 The Interpretation of *Παρθένοι*

The term *παρθένος* is usually reserved for a young woman of marriageable age. But in our text, the masculine plural *παρθένοι* is used to conform to the preceding *οἱ* and *οἱ ἠγορασμένοι*. This masculine application of the term *παρθένος* is very rare¹⁰⁸. Mounce¹⁰⁹ gives the explanation for this problematic male imagery that the apparent confusion of the sexes is of no moment since the entire figure is to be understood symbolically.

But how can *παρθένοι* be interpreted? The main understandings of *παρθένοι* are two: literal understanding and figurative understanding.

¹⁰⁷ C. D. OLSON, «Those who have not Defiled Themselves with Women: Revelation 14:4 and the Book of Enoch», in *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 59 (1997), 496-507.

¹⁰⁸ D. E. AUNE, *Revelation* 6-16, 811.

¹⁰⁹ R. H. MOUNCE, *The Book of Revelation*, 270.

2.1.1.1 The Literal Understanding

Those who hold the literal view argue that *παρθένοι* can be either celibate male¹¹⁰, or celibate male and female¹¹¹, within the early Christian communities.

There are many difficulties in accepting the literal understanding. If we accept that the author emphasises here that the community of faithful includes only the male virgins, then we must say that he considers marriage as a contamination. Such an extremely low regard for the married state seems incompatible with the view found in the rest of the New Testament and especially of Revelation. Nowhere else does the Bible view sexual relations within the bond of marriage as sinful (cfr. Matt 19,4-6; Heb 13,4; Eph 5,31-32)¹¹². Above all, the apocalyptic vision of marriage is highly positive and remarkable (see Rev 21,9). Furthermore, if the 144,000 is a symbol for the entire people of God, that would mean that the author required celibacy for the whole people of God, which is improbable¹¹³. Again why should John stress celibacy as the hallmark of the redeemed 144,000 when he ignores this theme in the rest of his Apocalypse? John nowhere else distinguishes between men and women in terms of their membership of

¹¹⁰ M. KIDDLE, *The Revelation of St. John*, 268; T. F. GLASSON, *The Revelation of John*, Cambridge University, Cambridge 1965, 85; C. H. LINDIJER, «Die Jungfrauen in der Offenbarung des Johannes xiv», in *Novum Testamentum Supplements* 24 (1970), 124-142; C. SPICQ, «παρθενία παρθένος», in *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, vol. 3, 52; D. E. AUNE, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy, and Magic in Early Christianity*, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI, 2006, 69. But according to J. MASSINGBERD FORD, «The Meaning of "Virgin"», in *New Testament Studies* 12 (1966), 294, *παρθένοι* refers to those who have been married only once. According to J. ROLOFF, *The Revelation of John*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, MN 1993, 171-172: John is here presenting celibacy as the ideal for discipleship.

¹¹¹ A. YARBRO COLLINS, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse*, 99-100.

¹¹² G. E. LADD, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI 1999, 191.

¹¹³ G. A. KRODEL, *Revelation*, Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, MN 1989, 263.

the community of faith and nowhere else takes a misogynist stance. So the literal interpretation is inadequate.

2.1.1.2 The Figurative Understanding

The logic behind the figurative understanding is clear from the question: if the 144,000 is a figurative number for completeness, why should not the mention of *παρθένοι* also be figurative in like manner?. The figurative understanding of *παρθένοι* has been understood in two different ways.

2.1.1.2.1. *Virginité as Cultic Purity*

G. B. Caird is the main proponent of this view. According to him the symbolism of v. 4 is based on the background of Israelite soldiers being required to preserve ceremonial purity before battle¹¹⁴ (Lev 15,16; Deut 23,9-10; 1 Sam 21,5; 2 Sam 11,11; 1QM 7,3-7) or the abstinence requirements for priests under particular ritual circumstances (Lev 15,18). He concludes that now the power inherent in Christian warfare lies in the self-sacrifice involved in the imitation of the Lamb. Bauckham¹¹⁵ has developed this idea further and has presented the most plausible case for the 144,000 in Rev 14,1 and those described in Rev 14,4-5 being Christians fighting the eschatological holy war of the Lord.

But those who follow this view limit unnecessarily the 144,000 to a remnant of the true Church. These scholars connect the reference of Rev 14,4b with 17,14; 19,14 and 19,19. But the cited references for holy war and cultic purity do not call for anything like virginité from the troops. They call for temporary abstinence. No clear instances can be found which refer to a short-term foregoing of sexual relations.

¹¹⁴ G. B. CAIRD, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine*, 147. Those who favour the holy war theme are: E. LOHMEYER, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 120; G. B. CAIRD, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine*, 179; W. J. HARRINGTON, *Revelation*, 147; G. R. BEASLEY-MURRAY, *Revelation*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI 1974, 223; J. P. M. SWEET, *Revelation*, 222.

¹¹⁵ R. BAUCKHAM, *Climax of Prophecy*, 229-32.

2.1.1.2.2 *Virginity as Refusal of Idolatry*

Other scholars consider *παρθένος* as a figurative term for the purity of the faith of those who refuse to worship the beast (i.e., idolatry¹¹⁶) and the emperor¹¹⁷ (imperial cult). This approach considers *παρθένοι* in a metaphorical sense and interprets the text to mean that these are the faithful members of the Church who have not committed spiritual fornication by worshipping the beast.

This figurative view has substantial scriptural basis. The fact that in the Old Testament, unchastity is frequently used as a metaphor for turning away from the true worship of God to the idolatrous worship of false gods (Jer 3,2; 13,27; Ezek 16,15-58; 23,1-49; 43,7; Hos 5,4; 6,10) lends this view immediate plausibility. The figurative approach is further enforced by the fact that “virgin” is repeatedly applied to the nation of Israel in the Old Testament (2 Kgs 19,21; Isa 37,22; Jer 14,17; 18,13; Lam 1,15; Amos 5,2).

Revelation has spoken earlier of preventing “pollution” in reference to Christians who have not identified themselves with idolatrous institutions such as emperor worship or trade guild idolatry (Rev 2,9.13-15.20; 3,4). In the same way, in Rev 2,14.20-22, *πορνεία*¹¹⁸ is a metaphor referring primarily

¹¹⁶ K. RÜCKERT, «Die Begriffe *παρθένος* und *ἀπαρχή* in Apok. 14,4-5», in *Theologische Quartalschrift* 68 (1886), 405; G. DELLING, «*παρθένος*», in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 5, 836; R. H. MOUNCE, *The Book of Revelation*, 270; T. VETRALLI, *I Vergini seguono l’Agnello (Ap. 14,4)*, 193; J. A. FITZMYER, «*παρθένος*», in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 3, 40; G. E. LADD, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 191; J. J. SCHMITT, «*Virgin*», in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 6, 854; G. BIGUZZI, *I settenari nella struttura dell’Apocalisse*, 210.

¹¹⁷ E. SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, MN 1991, 88; The same idea is held by: R. DEVINE, *The Virgin Followers of the Lamb*, 3; P. CARRINGTON, *The Meaning of the Revelation*, SPCK, London 1931, 337-340.

¹¹⁸ T. Stramare explains *πορνεία* (fornication) as *matrimoni misti* (mixed marriages). Mixed marriage (*matrimoni misti*) is the valid union of a Hebrew (or, likewise, Christian) with a pagan. The term *πορνεία* designates such situation, and not adultery or concubine. cfr. T. STRAMARE, *Matteo*

to believers being tempted to engage in spiritual intercourse with pagan gods (cfr. Rev 2,14).

The 144,000 described in Rev 14,1-5 are in contrast with the beast-worshippers in Rev 13,11-18. This too suggests that the idea of virgins is figurative, since the followers of the beast are guilty primarily not of immorality but of idolatry. Consequently, the followers of the Lamb are primarily characterized by loyalty to him and not by idolatry to the beast, and virginity is one way of portraying that loyalty¹¹⁹.

The second explanation about the identification of the 144,000 is that they are those who follow the Lamb wherever it goes. When we read the mind of the author, we can say that the first identification supports this second one: to follow the Lamb faithfully and unconditionally. Those who follow Christ need particularly their unconditional fidelity. So the phrase, "Those who have not defiled themselves with women", and the supportive statement, "They are virgin", together emphasize

divorzista?, Paideia Editrice, Brescia 1986, 89-90. In page 47 he explains « Il termine «formicazione» è presso sempre in senso religioso, ossia l'azione del *fornicare* tanto per gli abitanti del paese, come per le loro figlie e i figli degli israeliti, non si realizza tra di loro, ma costantemente «con i loro dèi». Tale fornicazione si concretizza nel *fare sacrifici* e nel *mangiare* le vittime sacrificali. Causa di tale fornicazione è per i figli di Israele il *matrimonio* con le figlie dei popoli stranieri. *Matrimonio* con pagani e *fornicazione* sono talmente collegati da consentire lo scambio reciproco dei due termini». Regarding the different significances of *πορνεία*, cfr. E. HATCH – H. A. REDPATH, «*πορνεία*», in *A concordance to the Septuagint and the other Greek Versions of the Old Testament*, vol. 2, 1194.

¹¹⁹M. E. BOISMARD, «Notes sur l'Apocalypse», in *Revue Biblique* 59 (1952), 163-164. According to B. M. METZGER, *Breaking the Code: Understanding the Book of Revelation*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN 1993, 78, «John appears to adopt the imagery found frequently in the Old Testament where any contact with pagan worship was called "fornication" or "adultery". Hence, the 144,000 are those who have not defiled themselves by participating in pagan worship». According to O. K. PETERS, *The Mandate of the Church in the Apocalypse of John*, Peter Lang, New York, NY 2005, 68, «The purity of the 144,000 is a symbol of religious fidelity originating from several Old Testament texts (2 Kgs 19,21; Lam 2,13; Jer 3,6; Amos 5,2; Hos 2,5). This then is a symbolic description of the Church kept pure from all defiling relationships with the pagan world system».

the identity of the 144,000 as those unconditionally faithful to the Lamb.

2.2 The 144,000 are Those who Follow the Lamb wherever He Goes

The 144,000 are those who follow the Lamb wherever he goes (Rev 14,4b): this second explanation of the identification of 144,000 is totally positive and dynamic. The author has selected ἀκολουθέω, the technical term to describe the following of Christ.

Ἀκολουθέω¹²⁰, the Greek verb for ‘follow’, occurs 90 times in the New Testament and among these 6 are in Revelation. Altogether 73 of the 90 occurrences of this verb refer to being a disciple of Jesus. This verb has two literal meanings:

- a) “To follow”, “go behind someone”
- b) “To follow” in the sense of “to accompany”.

Figuratively the term signifies “to be a disciple of” in the sense of “adhering to the teachings or instructions of a leader and in promoting the cause of such a leader”. This meaning is found only in the Gospels and in our text (Rev 14,4), which is obviously an application of Matt 10,38. In the New Testament both meanings are used with Jesus as the object; e.g., when it is said that the crowd followed Jesus and, on the other hand, that the disciples followed Jesus. The subjects of ἀκολουθεῖν normally are persons¹²¹ and the object of ἀκολουθεῖν is always a person or group of persons. The one who is followed stands in the dative¹²². The combination of ἀκολουθέω and μετα, with genitive appears in the New Testament only in Rev 6,8 and in 14,13. Two groups of statements dealing with ‘following Jesus’

¹²⁰ G. KITTEL, «ἀκολουθέω», in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1, 214; G. SCHNEIDER, «ἀκολουθέω», in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1, 49-52.

¹²¹ An exception to this is Rev 14,13, which states that the “deeds” of who have died in the Lord “followed” them.

¹²² cfr, XENOPHON, *Historia Graeca* 5.2.26; IGNATIUS, *Letter to the Philadelphians* 11.1; SHEPHERD of HERMAS, *Visions* 3.8.4.7.

must be distinguished. Only in the case of the disciples can one speak of ‘following’ in the truest sense. The crowd follows Jesus on his way for a time but does not as a whole take on ‘following’ as disciple (Mark 2,15). In both cases what is meant is a physical “following”, that they go along behind Jesus, but the disciples’ “following” possesses a special quality. The verb ἀκολουθέω not only signifies mere following after another person, but an existence of belongingness, of service, of obedience and of similarity to that person.

In our text ἀκολουθέω is used in its present tense, which indicates the continuation of following of the 144,000. Thus it does not exclude anything in the past or in the future but stresses the actual and present state of time¹²³. The reality of following after Christ in Revelation meant, of course, not the historical Jesus, but rather the exalted Christ¹²⁴. To follow Christ means to participate more closely in his resurrection in a personal assimilation and to make Christ resurrect in all the dimensions of life¹²⁵. In Revelation, the context of the 144,000 and their explicit relation to the figure of Christ the Lamb altogether gives to the reality of following a rare expression: a personal assimilation unto the death and resurrection of Christ in daily life as a sign of personal commitment (cfr. Rev 6,9; 12,11). The following is a permanent and strong bond that links the 144,000 and the Lamb¹²⁶.

¹²³ E. B. ALLO, *Saint Jean L'Apocalypse*, 196; S. PATTEMORE, *The People of God in the Apocalypse*, 188.

¹²⁴ M. HENGEL, *The Charismatic Leader and his Followers*, T & T Clark, Edinburgh 1996, 86.

¹²⁵ T. VETRALI, *I Vergini seguono l'Agnello (Ap. 14,4)*, 196.

¹²⁶ In the Fourth Gospel we see the notion of discipleship in a profound way. In John 13,36 Jesus is reported to have said: «where I go you are unable to follow me now, but you will follow me later». Here discipleship clearly means following Jesus to death (cfr. 21,18-19). John 13,36 is thematically linked to 12,26: «if anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am there shall my servant be also». Finally, in John 14,3, Jesus speaks of the eventual reward for disciples who follow him to death: «where I am you may be also. And you know the way I am going». These Johannine passages provide versions of the tradition found in Rev 14,4. According to this tradition true discipleship means following Jesus to the death, with the promise of then

Following Jesus means self-denial, loss of earthly comfort and security, allegiance to Jesus above any other relationship, acceptance of suffering and possible death for his sake. But it also means companionship with Jesus and entry into the Father's house, the kingdom of God. Both of these dimensions of discipleship are relevant in John's portrayal of the 144,000¹²⁷.

They are those who follow the Lamb *wherever* he goes. This formula (ὅπου ἂν) here signifies the habitual disposition of the 144,000: an availability without limit¹²⁸ and a following regardless of the cost, i.e., even to the point of death (Matt. 10,38; Mark 8,34-35; Luke 17,33; John 12,25). And again this phrase, *wherever he goes*, signifies giving witness to Christ until death. This theme of witness is intrinsically contained in the affirmation that the 144,000 carry the name of the Lamb and the Father upon their foreheads. This giving witness includes both the phase of joy and hope (Rev 3,20-21) and of tribulations and sufferings.

They are those who follow the Lamb *wherever* he goes. The verb ὑπάγω is used here in its present form. The grammatical construction suggests¹²⁹ an indefinite and frequent action. Here the verb ὑπάγω is presented in its very powerful theological significance: the unconditional continuity of going. Thus the author clearly emphasizes that the followers must stay firm in the act of following Christ, all the way, wherever he goes, without any deviation¹³⁰.

sharing Jesus' relationship with the Father. cfr. D. E. AUNE, «Following the Lamb: Discipleship in the Apocalypse», 276.

¹²⁷ E. SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA, «The Followers of the Lamb: Visionary Rhetoric and Socio-Political Situation», in *Semeia* 36 (1986), 132-133, D. E. AUNE, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy, and Magic in Early Christianity*, 77.

¹²⁸ U. VANNI, «Questi seguono l'Agnello dovunque vada (Ap, 14,4)», 184; R. BAUCKHAM, *Climax of Prophecy*, 230.

¹²⁹ R. H. CHARLES, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of St. John* (ICC, vol. 2), 10.

¹³⁰ F. GRÜNZWEIG, *Johannes-Offenbarung*, 22.

2.3 The 144,000 are Those who have been Redeemed from Humankind as Firstfruits for God and the Lamb

The author here gives the third explanation of the identification of the 144,000 redeemed.

They are those who have been *redeemed*: the technical term ἀγοράζω is already seen in Rev 14,3, where the author gives the identification of the 144.000 as redeemed and able to learn the New Song. The author gives here precisely in which way and for whom the Lamb has redeemed the 144,000: they are redeemed in order that they may become *firstfruits* to God the Father and to the Lamb. Here the dative τῷ θεῷ καὶ τῷ ἀρνίῳ with the passive may express agency: “by God and the Lamb”. But it is better to see God and the Lamb as those to whom the redeemed are presented as “firstfruits”, since the dative does not directly follow the verb (four words intervene) and possibly because of the parallel with 5,9. There the Lamb “purchases” people “to God”¹³¹.

2.3.1 The Firstfruits

The term “firstfruits”, (ἀπαρχή), originated as a technical term drawn from the language of cultic offerings and sacrifice found throughout the ancient Mediterranean world. In the ancient Mediterranean world, there were three primary types of sacrifice or gifts to the gods: offerings of food, offerings of objects (votive offerings), and animal sacrifices. The offering of firstfruits, which belongs to the first category, was regarded by the Greeks as “the simplest and most basic form of uncorrupted piety”.¹³² The manner of offering firstfruits exhibited a wide spectrum: they may be offered to any god; they may be left at a holy place until they decompose or are eaten by animals or scavengers; they may be thrown into ponds, rivers, or the sea; they may be buried. We analyse here the meaning and significance of ἀπαρχή in the Old Testament, LXX and in the New Testament.

¹³¹ G. K. BEALE, *The Book of Revelation*, 742.

¹³² W. BURKERT, *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual*, University of California, Berkeley 1979, 52.

2.3.1.1 The Firstfruits in the Old Testament

In the Old Testament, “firstfruits” most often refer to a literal portion of the agricultural harvest. Two Hebrew words are rendered “firstfruits”:

a) בְּבוּרִים (bikkûrîm)¹³³ specifically refers to first-ripe grain and fruit, which were harvested and offered to the Lord according to the sacerdotal prescriptions. This term always appears in the masculine plural and it may refer generally to the first produce of the soil (Exod 23,16; Num 28,16; Neh 10,35) or specifically to wheat (Exod 34,22) or the product of grain (Exod 44,30). The gift of the earth after the exodus gave the people of God the conviction that they belong to him and he is the sovereign owner of the whole universe. In order to respond to this lovable gift and to the sense of belongingness they have brought offerings to God at the sanctuary.

b) רֵאשִׁית¹³⁴ (rē’shît) usually translated as first or beginning of a series. In a special sense, it can mean “choicest”, and the substantive based on this idea is translated “firstfruits” (dough in Num 15,20, grain in Lev 23,10, new wine in Deut 18,4 and oil in Deut 18,4).

Though both בְּבוּרִים and רֵאשִׁית refer to the firstfruits, it is not at all clear what difference, if any, existed between them in Israelite sacrificial protocol.¹³⁵ However, in addition to its literal meaning, the word is figuratively applied to Israel as the firstfruits of YHWH’s harvest (e.g., Jer 2,3).

Several times (e.g., Exod 23,19; 34,26; Ezek 44,30), the two terms are used together, as “the first of the firstfruits”.

¹³³ F. BROWN - S. R. DRIVER - C. A. BRIGGS, «בְּבוּרִים», in *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 114.

¹³⁴ F. BROWN - S. R. DRIVER - C. A. BRIGGS, «רֵאשִׁית», in *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 912.

¹³⁵ M. TSEVAT, «בְּבוּרִים», in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 2, 122.

The LXX¹³⁶ uses ἀπαρχή as a sacrificial vocabulary and it occurs seventy-six times with the following meanings:

- 1) “Offering” (Exod 25,3)
- 2) “The first (offering)” (Exod 23,19; Deut 18,4; 26,2.10; Num 18,8-12)
- 3) “Portion” (1 Sam 10,4)
- 4) “Firstfruits” (Exod 22,28)

So in the LXX context, it has to do with the unblemished firstfruits of natural products, the firstfruits of human beings and animals, all of which are owed to YHWH.

Though בכורים can mean firstfruits, it is inexplicably never translated with ἀπαρχή in the LXX, though rather frequently it is rendered by πρωτογενήματα (firstfruits: Exod 23,16.19; Lev 2,14; Num 18,13; 2 Kgs 4,42), once by ἀρχή (beginning: Exod 34,22), once by πρόδρομοι (forerunners: Num 13,20), and once by τὰ νέα (the new things: Num 28,26).

2.3.1.2 The Firstfruits in the New Testament

Ἀπαρχή¹³⁷ occurs nine times in the New Testament (Rom 8,23; 11,16; 16,5; 1 Cor 15,20.23; 16,15; 2 Thess 2,13; Jas 1,18; Rev 14,4), which includes both literal (Rom 11,16) and figurative usages (of persons; firstfruits of Christians in Rom 16,5; 1 Cor 16,15; 2 Thess 2,13; Jas 1,18; Rev 14,4; 1 Cor 15,20; of things in Rom 8,23).

From the New Testament perspective, ἀπαρχή can have two nuanced meanings. First, it may designate the initial ingathering of the farmer, after which others come. Then it may mean a pledge¹³⁸ or down payment with more to follow

¹³⁶ J. LUST - E. EYNIKIEL - K. A. HAUSPIE, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint*, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart 1992, 45.

¹³⁷ A. SAND, «ἀπαρχή», in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol.1, 116-117; R. O. RIGSBY, «Firstfruits», in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 2, 796-797; F. W. DANKER, «ἀπαρχή», in *A Greek- English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 98.

¹³⁸ J. R. MICHAELS, *Revelation*, 167.

(Rom 8,23; 11,16; 1Cor 15,20; 16,15). Second, it may simply designate an offering to God in the sense of being separated for him and sanctified, where no later addition is made, because the firstfruits constitute the whole (Num 5,9; Deut 18,4; 26,2; Jer 2,3; Jas 1,18). The consecrated part has an influence on the whole. In general, the firstfruits metaphor includes both the idea of anticipation and of representation.

Our context favours more the second usage¹³⁹. As a people that God has acquired for himself, the 144,000 are indeed a group consecrated to God, devoted to his worship and service.

Let us study the reference of ἀπαρχή in Rev 14,4 in its detail: the term ἀπαρχή is used only here in the whole of Revelation. Here ἀπαρχή is a collective singular functioning as a nominative of apposition modifying οἱ and gives the appearance of being a gloss on the text. This possibility is suggested by a parallel text in Rev 5,9 where the term ἀπαρχή is missing: καὶ ἠγόρασας τῷ θεῷ ἐν τῷ αἵματί σου ἐκ πάσης φυλῆς καὶ γλώσσης καὶ λαοῦ καὶ ἔθνους. The parallelism between these two passages is even more clear when it is noted that ἀπὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων is a summary of the more typical ἐκ πάσης φυλῆς καὶ γλώσσης καὶ λαοῦ καὶ ἔθνους. The connection between οἱ ἠγοράσθησαν and ἀπαρχή is far from clear. In this context ἀπαρχή represents 144,000 people who are part of a much larger group, all humanity and it makes little sense to construe ἀπαρχή as the first of a set, the others of which will follow, i.e., all humanity.

The 144,000 are the ἀπαρχή, but let us examine who the ἀπαρχή really are. The main suggestions are the following:

- a) Christian martyrs¹⁴⁰, whose complete number must be fulfilled before the end of history.

¹³⁹ L. L. THOMPSON, *Revelation*, 145; R. DEVINE, *The Virgin Followers of the Lamb*, 4.

¹⁴⁰ A. T. ROBERTSON, *The General Epistles and the Revelation of John*, Broadman Press, Nashville, TN 1960, 410; G. B. CAIRD, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine*, 178-181.

- b) Jewish Christians¹⁴¹ of the early Church, to be followed by a harvest of Gentile converts.
- c) A remnant of Jewish believers¹⁴² to be followed by the salvation of the whole nation.
- d) The totality of believers¹⁴³ throughout the ages who finally receive their full and final redemption.

This fourth view is supported by the identification of the group in Rev 14,1-5 with the group in Rev 7, which represents the total number of God's people. And again the entire nation of Israel was called God's "firstborn" in the Old Testament (Exod 4,22; Jer 31,8; Hos 11,1), a concept related to that of the firstfruits. Likewise, "firstfruits" here alludes to the whole people of God, as in Jas 1,18. The use of ἀγοράζω twice in Rev 14,3-4 requires the conclusion that the complete number of redeemed saints be in mind. Revelation's only other use of the word with a redemptive meaning is in Rev 5,9, which speaks of the salvation of all, not a select group. In each case ἀγοράζω is followed by ἐκ or ἀπό and a universal reference. All three clauses (ἐκ πάσης φυλῆς καὶ γλώσσης καὶ λαοῦ καὶ ἔθνους) thus speak of the totality of believers from all ages who have been redeemed as the firstfruits.

They have been redeemed from mankind as firstfruits *for God and the Lamb*: the same expression, *for God and the Lamb*, is found in Rev 7,10 and 22,1-3. It denotes the unique role of the Lamb with regard to the salvation of human beings. That is, once again the divine plan of salvation cannot be seen apart from Christ¹⁴⁴.

And in their mouth no lie was found. They are blameless (14,5): these sentences constitute the last part of an inclusio

¹⁴¹ G. QUIPEL, *The Secret Book of Revelation*, McGraw-Hill, New York, NY 1979, 85. According to G. DELLING, «ἀπαρχή», in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1, 486 note 13, it is most unlikely that the Jewish Christians are called ἀπαρχή.

¹⁴² J. F. WALVOORD, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, Marshall, Morgan, and Scott, London 1966, 216; J. A. SEISS, *The Apocalypse*, 354.

¹⁴³ G. E. LADD, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 192.

¹⁴⁴ P. PRIGENT, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, 436.

with v. 4a (they are those who have not defiled themselves with women for they are chaste) indicating that vv. 4-5 constitute a single short unit of text. The two phrases “in their mouth no lie was found” and “they are blameless” are found only here in Revelation. The phrase ἐν τῷ στόματι αὐτῶν οὐχ εἰρέθη ψεῦδος recalls by contrast the self-styled apostles whom the Ephesians found to be lying (2,2) and the Jews of the ‘synagogue of Satan’ in Philadelphia (3,9), falsehood both within and without the Churches.

And in their mouth no *lie* (ψεῦδος) was found: the formula “and in their mouth no lie was found” may be inspired by Zeph 3,13b (καὶ οὐ μὴ εἰρεθῆ ἐν τῷ στόματι αὐτῶν γλῶσσα δολία), where it is said of the remnant of Israel. A similar saying is found in Isa 53,9 (οὐδὲ εἰρέθη δόλος ἐν τῷ στόματι αὐτοῦ), where it is said of the Servant of the Lord. Similar forms of this saying occur in Ps 32,2 in the context of a beatitude (μακάριος ἀνὴρ οὐ μὴ λογίσηται κύριος ἁμαρτίαν οὐδὲ ἔστιν ἐν τῷ στόματι αὐτοῦ δόλος. and in Jdt 5,5 (καὶ οὐκ ἐξελεύσεται ψεῦδος ἐκ τοῦ στόματος τοῦ δούλου σου). These Old Testament references help us to understand the significance of this expression in Revelation.

The term ψεῦδος¹⁴⁵ indicates different dimensions of falsehood. The primary meaning of ψεῦδος is “false” in the broad sense: ‘breach of an agreement’, ‘false assertion’, and ‘a deliberately false statement’. It deprives of honour and is an assault on human dignity.

The Hebrew equivalent for ψεῦδος are

- 1) כָּזַב (kāzab [“to lie”, “to deceive” cfr. Ps 116,11; Job 24,25])
- 2) שָׁקַף (kāḥash [“to lie”, “to deny” cfr. Gen 18,15])
- 3) שָׁקַר (shāqar [“to give false witness” cfr. Exod 20,16])
- 4) כָּהַד (kāḥad [“to hide” cfr. Job 6,10])

¹⁴⁵ H. CONZELMANN, «ψεῦδος», in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 9, 594-603.

According to the Old Testament understanding, lying is a transgression because YHWH is the protector of the right. In the Old Testament, falsehood is profane to the name of God (Lev 19,12) and again it is a crime, because YHWH is the custodian of both law and truth.

In the Synoptic Gospels and Acts the verb – *ψεύδομαι* – is found at Matt 5,11 and at Acts 5,3. The catchword *ψεύδομαι* is used by Paul according to Old Testament and secular models in Rom 1,25 and there the noun *ψεύδος* characterises the total conduct of sinful humanity in exchanging the truth of God for a lie. Again we see a profound vision of falsehood in the New Testament (Col 3,9; Eph 4,25; 1 Pet 2,22).

Again, in Revelation we see texts that condemn falsehood. “To do falsehood” signifies to receive the mark of the false prophet (Rev 13,11-17; 16,13)¹⁴⁶. The falsehood here is that which actively opposes God and His economy of salvation. In Rev 21,27 the falsehood is placed on the same sphere of abomination. Those who practice falsehood and live in it are excluded from the city of God. In Rev 22,15 falsehood is the sin that Christ cannot tolerate. In Revelation, falsehood is presented as something that destroys the communion between God and his people and between the members of the community. To live in falsehood signifies to be subdued by the enemies of the truth. Against all of these, the followers of the Lamb are seen as a people, not of falsehood, but of sincerity and truth. The 144,000, in whose mouth there is no falsehood, are characterised by a life based on the truth and word of Christ.

They are *blameless* (*ἄμωμοι*): The author uses the present form of the verb *εἰμί*, by which he emphasises a permanent

¹⁴⁶ According to D. E. AUNE, «Following the Lamb: Discipleship in the Apocalypse», 277, «“No lie was found in their mouth” does not mean simply that they were honest, but rather that they refused to acknowledge the claims of the beast on their lives and chose to remain faithful to God and to the Lamb (cfr. 14,9.11; 15,2)».

relation. The meaning of ἄμωμος is that they are blameless in the moral and the religious sense with regard to persons¹⁴⁷.

According to the levitical prescription of sacrificial offering, the offered animal must be *without fault* (Lev 23,12; Exod 12,5). The term ἄμωμος can again refer to a priest who is in a state of ritual purity (1 Macc 4,43). The LXX often uses ἄμωμος to denote sacrifices that are acceptable because of their purity.

Ἄμωμος means unblemished in the cultic sense of free from defects, and hence Christ is described as “a Lamb spotless and without blemish” (1 Pet 1,19). He presented himself as an offering with out blemish to God (Heb 9,14).

In our text, ἄμωμος is used in the moral and religious sense of blameless of the Christian community (Rev 14,5; cfr. Eph 1,4; 5,27; Col 1,22; 2 Pet 3,14; Phil 2,15).

Conclusion

We have seen that Rev 14,1-5 is presented as a well-structured unit that gives the identity of the 144,000 and provides a gradual literary growth in the explanation of that identity. The vision, the identity of the persons and their mutual relationship are ingeniously presented in this structure. In Rev 14,1-5, the two realities of vision and audition are well integrated. This pericope depicts the audiovisual experience of the seer, John, who sees the Lamb and the 144,000 upon Mount Zion and hears a New Song from heaven. After having described the audiovisual experience, John illustrates the identity of the 144,000 and the uniqueness of the New Song.

It is upon Mount Zion that John sees the Lamb and the 144,000. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament depict Mount Zion as the unique symbolic place of messianic events. It is from this symbolic place of redemption that the 144,000 learn the New Song. Thus John combines here the

¹⁴⁷ F. W. DANKER, «ἄμωμος», in *A Greek- English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 56.

terrestrial reality – Mount Zion – with the celestial reality – the New Song that comes from heavenly court – to show that the 144,000 have an affinity with the heavenly singers and this entails them that they can learn and appreciate the New Song.

The 28 Lamb references in Revelation clearly present Jesus as the Shepherd, the Supreme object of worship, the Judge, the Redeemer, and the Ruler. The Lamb is presented in all these references as both the name and the figure of Christ. This original figure is apt for Christ as victor over death, leader of his followers, Lord of the universe and partner of God the Father. Thus it embraces the whole Christological richness of the book of Revelation.

John sees the 144,000 along with the Lamb upon Mount Zion. The number 144,000 is the symbolic number, which is the result of the multiplication of $12 \times 12 \times 1000$. The number 12 signifies the people of God, either that of the Old Testament (the 12 tribes) or that of the New Testament (the 12 apostles as the foundation of the new people of God). The author works on an ideal multiplication between the 12 tribes and the 12 apostles of the Lamb. Thus the 144,000 symbolically represent the whole people of God throughout the ages as God's unique property.

After his visionary experience of the Lamb and the 144,000, John narrates the audition of the song that he heard immediately after the vision. To interpret the audition further, he compares the celestial voice to the sound of many waters, to loud thunders, to the sound of harpers playing on their harps and to a New Song. Then it is confirmed that the song is new by its very nature and content. As the result of the above visionary and acoustic experiences, John comprehends the unicity and identity of the 144,000. Accordingly, the fundamental characteristic of the 144,000 is that they are redeemed and no one can learn the New Song other than these 144,000 faithful.

Then John definitively identifies the 144,000 with a threefold description which evolves in a progressive way:

(1) they are those who have not defiled themselves with women; (2) they are those who follow the Lamb wherever it goes; and, (3) they are those who have been redeemed from among humankind as firstfruits for God and the Lamb. Those who follow Christ must prove their unconditional fidelity to him. The phrase “those who have not defiled themselves with women” and the supportive statement “they are virgin” together emphasize the identity of the 144,000 as those unconditionally faithful to the Christ, the Lamb. Thus the author clearly emphasizes that the followers must stay firm in the act of following Christ, all the way, wherever he goes, without the slightest deviation. Likewise, ‘firstfruits’ here alludes to the whole people of God. As the ‘firstfruits’, the 144,000 followers of the Lamb stay by his side, exhibit his name upon their foreheads and continue their act of following him, their Shepherd and Lord. Thus, in a variety of ways, this pericope presents the identity of the 144,000 as the intimate witnesses and faithful followers of the Lamb. It gives hope and certitude for the people of God who are undergoing persecution by those who are opposed to the Lamb.

CHAPTER TWO

THE RELATIONSHIP OF REV 14,1-5 WITH THE PARALLEL AND THE CONTRASTING TEXTS

Introduction

In chapter one, we reached the conclusion that the numerical symbol 144,000 is the sum total of the People of God and that the number 144,000 is the result of the sum of $12 \times 12 \times 1000$. Then we noted that the number 12 signifies the people of God of both the Old Testament and of the New Testament. The numerical symbol 12 and its multiples occur in four different texts of Revelation: the sealed 144,000 (7,1-8); the “woman with a crown of 12 stars” (12,1); the 144,000 faithful followers of the Lamb (14,1-5); and the space and time of the New Jerusalem (21,12.14.19-20.21 and 22.2). Among these four references, we have already seen the third one in chapter one. In chapter two we shall see the sealed 144,000 in 7,1-8 as the first part and will consider it as a parallel text to 14,1-5. Then we will discuss the second and fourth references as texts that speak of the numerical symbol 12. Thus, we find these three references as parallel and supporting texts to 14,1-5.

Chapter two is organized into three parts. The first part has again three sections. In the first part we will do the exegesis of 7,1-8 under two sections, i.e., the winds of destruction (7,1-3), and the preservation of the 144,000 (7,4-8). The first section includes two consecutive angelic visions. These angels are from the living God and their primary mission is to put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of God. The second section is an audition that John has experienced that the number of those to be sealed is 144,000 out of the 12 tribes of Israel. Then as the third section, we will seek the relationship between 7,1-8 and 14,1-5.

In the second part we will examine the number 12 with its multiples as a number of the People of God. As the first section, we study the “woman with a crown of 12 stars” (12,1). This section will seek answers to questions such as the following: Who really is the “woman with a crown of 12 stars”? How is this woman situated in the general context of the book of Revelation? Then we will seek the relationship between 12,1 and 14,1-5.

The measurement and the peculiarities of the New Jerusalem will be the second section of the second part. The descriptions of the New Jerusalem will be examined in detail, especially the 12 gates (21,12), the 12 foundations (21,14), and the 12 fruits (22,2). The people of God of the Old Testament as represented by the 12 tribes of Israel and the people of God of the New Testament as represented by the 12 Apostles of Christ are alluded to meaningfully in the descriptions of the New Jerusalem. We will examine then the relationship between 21,12.14.21; 22,1 and 14,1-5. Thus the second part will examine how John has made use of the numerical symbol 12 to present the people of God of both the Old and the New Testaments.

The third part of this chapter is on Rev 13, which stands altogether against the Lamb and its faithful supporters. Rev 13 comprises two sections, i.e., a beast from the sea (13,1-10) and another beast from the earth (13,11-17). These two sections illustrate the identity and the role of these beasts in detail. These two beasts deceive the sealed 144,000 faithful. The description of their identity and the illustration of their cruel deeds culminate in the proclamation of the numerical mark of the beast, i.e., 666. The decoding of the numerical figure 666 and its various interpretations will be discussed in detail. Finally, the identical and contrasting characteristics of the beasts will be summarised.

1. Rev 7,1-8 as a Parallel text to Rev 14,1-5

Rev 7 consists of two visions, i.e., vv. 1-8 and vv. 9-17. Using these two visions this chapter as a whole explains the

vision of chapter 6 in greater depth and provides a larger background against which it may be better understood: the first vision immediately precedes the time of 6,1-8 and then the second vision focuses on the time after the final judgement, which has been portrayed in its initial phase in 6,12-17. And again, these two visions separate the sixth and the seventh seals¹. The obvious purpose of this pair of visions is to contrast the preparedness of God's people to face the emergency with the panic of the world that is completely unprepared². These visions answer the question, "who shall be able to stand?" (6,17), and act as a stimulus to the hope for the followers of the Lamb. Though the world around is apparently falling apart, God's restraining and protecting hand is outstretched to undertake the cause of the faithful. In this first part we analyse the first vision (7,1-8), which speaks of the sealing of the 144,000.

In the first vision (7,1-8) there are mainly three allusions to explicate. First of all, the insistence on the act of holding of the winds on the part of the angels (vv. 1,3) is an insistence on the negative function of the winds themselves, namely that of devastating. In 9,4 one will learn that their action is equivalent to the divine plagues of the trumpets against those who are not servants of God. This entails that the cosmic devastations may not have yet brought the end, but only announced the day of wrath.

In the second place, if the fifth angel commands the first four to continue to hold the winds until the sealing is not executed, it means that afterwards the winds will be permitted to rage. Even if John does not say anything about it, the action of the winds, temporarily replaced in the narrative procedure, should be placed immediately after the marking of the seal on the foreheads of the servants of God, and before the following scene, that of the innumerable crowd that has great tribulation in its past.

¹ R. H. MOUNCE, *The Book of Revelation*, 164.

² H. B. SWETE, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, 95.

Finally, even though one speaks of three occurrences of earth, sea and trees (vv. 1-3), the real objects of the action of the winds are men. Meanwhile, some are marked so that the winds may spare them. Just as the cosmic devastations of 6,12-17 had repercussions on seven groups of men, the three “woes” of 8,13 will strike the inhabitants of the earth.

1.1 The Winds of Destruction (Rev 7,1-3)

John has two angelic visions here: the first vision of four angels (7,1) and the second vision of another angel (7,2a.b). These two visions follow an angelic announcement (7,2c-3).

Rev 7,1-3 must be referring to a time immediately preceding the plagues of 6,1-8, a time when God gives believers a seal to protect them against the onslaught of the woes³. The very close relationship of 7,1-3 and 6,1-8 is also indicated by the significant links between the two visions, especially the authorization clauses in 7,3 and in 6,4 and 8; for example, ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς ἐξουσία ἐπὶ τὸ τέταρτον τῆς γῆς “authority was given to them over a fourth of the earth”, in 6,8. If the time of 7,1-3 did not directly precede that of 6,1-8, there would be an irreconcilable contradiction between chapter 6 and 7,1-3, since it is clear in chapter 6 that the first six seals harm the earth and its inhabitants, while in the beginning of chapter 7 the earth and its inhabitants are portrayed as not yet harmed. Such a discrepancy within the space of so few verses is unlikely. Therefore, God’s servants must be sealed before the wrathful events of 6,1-8 can be set in motion. Indeed, there would be no apparent purpose for providing believers with a protecting seal if they had already experienced the tribulations of chapter 6. Therefore, this sealing activity must take place before those woeful events.

1.1.1 The Threatening of the Winds (Rev 7,1)

This first vision of John is introduced with a formulaic phrase μετὰ τοῦτο εἶδόν “after this I saw”. This phrase is used

³ G. K. BEALE, *The Book of Revelation*, 408.

here to signal a change in subject and to introduce a new unit of text (cfr. 7,1,9; 15,5; 18,1)⁴.

In his first vision, John saw “four” angels standing at the four corners of the earth restraining the four winds. “Four”, *τέσσαρες* has already been a prominent number, i.e., four living creatures (4,6) and four horsemen (6,1-8). The threefold repetition of “four” is a means of denoting the completeness of God’s control through his angels over the created order⁵. In Revelation we see references in which the forces of nature are often pictured as under the charge of angels: the angel who “has power over fire” (14,18), and “the angel of the waters” (16,5). John has shown here that the angels stand behind the destructive powers unleashed on the earth, being responsible for both restraint and catastrophe.

The phrase “the four corners” is part of a widespread cosmological conception in the ancient world (Job 37,3; Isa 11,12; Jer 49,36; Rev 20,8) of a square earth⁶. And again, “standing on the *four corners of the earth*” refers⁷ to their sovereignty over the *whole world*⁸. The language is figurative to indicate the worldwide nature of these angels’ responsibility.

These four angels are holding back the “four winds of the earth”. In ancient Israel the four winds represented the

⁴ R. H. CHARLES, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John* (ICC, vol. 1), T& T Clark, Edinburgh 1920, 203; R. L. THOMAS, *Revelation 1-7*, 463; W. J. HARRINGTON, *Revelation*, 97; D. E. AUNE, *Revelation 6-16*, 450.

⁵ J. B. SMITH, *A Revelation of Jesus Christ*, Herald Press, Scottsdale, PA 1961, 128; J. P. M. SWEET, *Revelation*, 14. According to M. ADINOLFI, *Apocalisse: Testo, simboli e visioni*, Edizioni Piemme, Casale Monferrato (AL), 2001, 31, In Rev 7,1 «four angels standing at the four corners of the earth» dominate the whole earth. Thus the number four is a cosmic number: four cardinal points, four winds of the earth (cfr. Rev 4,6; 7,1; 21,16).

⁶ J. MASSYNGBERDE FORD, *Revelation*, 115; W. J. HARRINGTON, *Revelation*, 98; R. H. MOUNCE, *The Book of Revelation*, 165.

⁷ R. H. MOUNCE, *The Book of Revelation*, 165; H. HAILEY, *Revelation*, 201.

⁸ So Ezek 7,2; Isa 11,12; Rev 20,8; cfr. 2 Baruch 6,4-7,2; *Testament of Asher* 7,1-7; *Greek Apocalypse of Ezra* 3,6.

four cardinal points of the compass and included all winds⁹. Jer 49,36 presents “the four winds” as the divine agents of judgement against a nation. Hos 13,15 speaks of the hot east wind as the “wind of the Lord...rising from the wilderness”, drying up springs and foundations. 1 Enoch 76,4-14 gives a terrific picture of the wind that “brings destruction on all the earth and the water on it, on all who dwelt thereon, and on everything that is in the water and on the land”. This destruction, as in 7,2-3.15-17; 8,7-9,21, etc., includes “drought”, “heat”, “locusts”, “burning”, and “plagues”. There is wind in the destructive sense just described in 6,12-17, but it is only a simile. There the wind did not figure in John’s vision, but he used it metaphorically to compare something he had never seen in real life (i.e., stars falling to the earth) with something familiar to him (i.e., ripe figs falling from the tree). But here the wind becomes part of the vision, where John sees four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree (7,1). All the disasters of 6,12-17 are now wrapped up in the single disaster of “wind”. Our context speaks of unfavourable winds, those that when unleashed will bring harm to the earth (7,2-3). Each of the four angels is presumably restraining one of the four winds.

1.1.2 The Threatening Hold for a While (Rev 7,2-3)

In this second vision John sees “another angel”, ἄλλον ἄγγελον. This “another angel” is best seen as another of the angels who is distinguished because of the exalted mission committed to him, because ἄλλον expresses numerical difference and indicates another of the same kind. And again, by the use of first person plural in this angel’s address to the other four (σφραγίσωμεν “we seal”) and ἡμῶν (7,3), he identifies himself with them in a common task.

⁹ Greco-Roman texts also refer to the four winds: PLINY, *Naturalis Historia*, 2,46.119; VETTIUS VALENS 140,6; *Papyri Florentini* 20.19; 50,104; PGM III. 273,496; IV. 1606. cfr D. E. AUNE, *Revelation* 6-16, 450.

The author sees him “rising from the east” (“from the rising of the sun” ἀναβαίνοντα ἀπὸ ἀνατολῆς ἡλίου). It is suggested that the eastern origin¹⁰ of the angel is appropriate, for in Jewish thought God’s gracious manifestations are especially connected with the east. Paradise was set in the east, the glory of God comes to the temple from the east, and the Messiah is expected to come from the east (Gen 2,8; Ezek 43,2-4; Matt 2,1; *Sibylline Oracles* 3.652; cfr. 1 Enoch 61,1). What follows in 7,2b is sufficient to demonstrate that this angel is a herald of grace, since he has the seal of the living God.

The angel coming from the east bears the seal of the living God. His command secures a further but limited delay before the angels are allowed to harm the earth, for the purpose of “sealing” the servants of God¹¹. The evocation of this theme brings connotations of the imminence of divine judgement and of the grace of God in preserving his people. Let us go deep into the background of the term “seal”.

At the very outset, σφραγίς¹², “seal” (v. 2b), was usually a signet ring that an Oriental monarch affixed to official documents to give them validity or to mark his property (cfr. Gen 41,42; Esth 3,10; Dan 6,17). It represents the power and authority of its owner. The sealing¹³ is a sign of belonging and a sign of protection, in the first case from its use in antiquity for animals and slaves¹⁴, and in the second case from its biblical symbolism.

¹⁰ A. FARRER, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, Clarendon, Oxford 1964, 106-8; G. R. BEASLEY-MURRAY, *Revelation*, 142; J. P. M. SWEET, *Revelation*, 148; R. H. MOUNCE, *The Book of Revelation*, 167; J. THEKKEMURY, *Unveiling the Apocalypse*, St. Pauls, Mumbai, 2011, 218.

¹¹ Such postponements of judgement are familiar from apocalyptic texts: Ezek 9; 1 Enoch 66,1-2; *Apocalypse of Baruch* 6,4-5. See G. R. BEASLEY-MURRAY, *Revelation*, 143; J. ROLOFF, *Revelation*, 96.

¹² E. SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, 66; W. J. HARRINGTON, *Revelation*, 98; D. E. AUNE, *Revelation* 6-16, 457.

¹³ Σφραγίς occurs, apart from chapter 7, at 5,1.2.5.9; 6,1.3.5.7.9.12; 8,1; and 9,4.

¹⁴ R. H. CHARLES, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of St. John* (ICC, vol. 1), 197-198; E. SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA, *Revelation*, 66.

The immediate context to which the mention of a seal and of sealing leads, before any cultural or inter-textual contexts are considered, is the inner-textual environment of 5,1-8,1, in which the scroll with seven seals is the overarching symbol. The seals on the scroll, which is first seen in the hand of the one seated on the throne (5,1), presumably bear the imprint of God's own seal. The opening of the seven seals reveals the wrath of God against disobedient humanity. Against the background of the unsealing of the scroll, with its attendant disasters, the people of God are made secure by a sealing. Such a sealing is found here in our context. Thus the inner-textual context of the sealed scroll and its unsealing place the security of the people of God in dramatic contrast with the insecurity of the world in the face of God's judgement.

There are two examples of sealing in the Old Testament. They are:

- 1) The reality of God's people in connection with the Passover in Exod 12,21-30.
- 2) The reality of "those who sigh and groan all the abominations" in Ezek 9,1-11¹⁵.

These two Old Testament examples recall the sealing in Rev 7,3. In Exodus it is narrated that the doors of the Israelites were protected from the extermination destined for the houses of Egyptians by the sealing of the blood of the lamb. In the vision of Ezekiel "the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in Jerusalem" were marked with a τ . One can then infer a connection with the sealing of the servant of God in Rev 7 with Exodus and Ezekiel. From their connection we can summarize the following points. First of all, it confirms what has already been said, that is, that the intervention of God is destined to strike not the cosmic atmosphere or the inhuman beings but only men. Secondly,

D. E. AUNE, *Revelation 6-16*, 456-459.

¹⁵ G. B. CAIRD, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine*, 96-97; M. E. BORING, *Revelation*, 128; W. J. HARRINGTON, *Revelation*, 98.

it clarifies how like the two sealings of the Old Testament, Rev 7 also calls for severity of the scourges for some, and at the same time salvation from them for others. Thirdly, it allows one to define the sealing of Rev 7,1-8 as the preservation from the scourges of the “exodus”.

There are two possibilities regarding what the sealing protects¹⁶: the threat can come either from God Himself, and it is for this that for some, the sealing protects them from His judgment; or it comes from the Devil, and then the sealing would preserve above all from apostasy. The second solution, however, openly contradicts the text of 9,4 where the sealing defends from the locusts which are a scourge coming from God that, while it spares his servants, torments the non-servants. But it is unthinkable that it protects only from the locusts. On the contrary, it is much more justifiable to extend the indication of 9,4 to the other scourges of the trumpets for homogeneity presumably inside the pattern of seven; and eventually, also to the scourges of the cups, first for the similarity between the sevenfold-trumpets and cups, and secondly for the fact that the scourges of the cups strike those who have the antithetical mark of the beast. The protection guaranteed by the seal of God is, then, in reality, a protection from the exodus-scourges that will strike the non-servants of God.

The present seal is distinguished because it is distinctively “of the living God”. Since the seal is “of the living God” (7,2),

¹⁶ Scholars are very particular in giving explanations regarding what the sealing consists of in. E. LOHMEYER, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 64.66 speaks of protection from apostasy and from final catastrophe. W. BOUSSET, *Die Offenbarung Johannis*, 287-288 also shares the same view. J. BEHM, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1956⁷, 44 speaks of the sealing as the protection from the cosmic catastrophe and from the demons. Those who share the same view: R. H. CHARLES, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of St. John* (ICC, vol. 1), 205; E. LOHSE, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1971³, 45; U. B. MÜLLER, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, Mohn, Gütersloh-Würzburg 1984, 178 speaks of protection from temptations and from the judgement of God announced in the cosmic upsetting. H. KRAFT, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 128 also shares the same view.

no one doubts that the belongingness is a belonging to God. Upon crossing the Jordan, Joshua tells the people that “the living God” is among them (Josh 3,10). Hezekiah calls upon God to deliver Israel out of the hands of Sennacherib, who sent his messenger “to defy the living God” (2 Kgs 19,4). Though in Revelation, the phrase occurs only here in 7,2, there are other occurrences of this phrase in the New Testament (Matt 16,16; John 6,69; Rom 9,26). The title is appropriate wherever God is about to intervene on behalf of his people. It contrasts the one true and eternal God with all the false and idolatrous gods. This title, “the living God” adds solemnity and vitality to the seal it identifies¹⁷.

Then the other angel “called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given, ἐδόθη¹⁸, power to harm earth and sea” (7,2c). Here “called with a loud voice” indicates the urgency of his mission¹⁹.

He commanded them “not to hurt the earth or the sea or the trees”. The prohibition “do not hurt”, μὴ ἀδικήσητέ tells the four angels to continue their restraint of the four winds a little longer. They are not even to allow the damage to begin²⁰ until the sealing work is done. The resistance from the part of the angels indicates that they have not yet carried out the end in its fullness but just announced the day of wrath²¹. The four angels had power to damage “the earth or the sea or the trees”²² in that their function was to set free the four winds and thus cause ruin.

¹⁷ R. L. THOMAS, *Revelation 1-7*, 469.

¹⁸ The aorist passive verb ἐδόθη is an example of the divine passive, indicating that God has given these angels the task in question. cfr. G. K. BEALE, *The Book of Revelation*, 408.

¹⁹ R. L. THOMAS, *Revelation 1-7*, 469.

²⁰ The prohibition is expressed by μὴ and the aorist subjunctive. This is an ingressive use of the aorist: “do not begin to hurt”. cfr. A. T. ROBERTSON, *The General Epistles and the Revelation of John*, 349.

²¹ G. BIGUZZI, *I settenari nella struttura dell'Apocalisse*, 136.

²² The same three spheres of Nature are also in v. 1, but in v. 2 the trees are omitted.

The infliction of destruction must wait until “we seal”, *σφραγίσωμεν*, the slaves of our God upon their foreheads”. The angel from the east includes others who assist him in the task of sealing. The first person plural *σφραγίσωμεν*²³ refers to help from the angels holding the four angels. Whoever the agents of sealing are, their mission is executed on behalf of the “servants of our God” (v. 3). The fact that those who are sealed are called “servants of our God” (*τοὺς δούλους τοῦ θεοῦ*) highlights the idea of ownership, since it was a common practice in the ancient world to mark slaves on the forehead to indicate who owned them and to whom they owed service²⁴.

There is nothing in this context which would lead the audience to limit the reference of *τοὺς δούλους τοῦ θεοῦ* to any particular segment of the Christian community, such as prophets or even martyrs²⁵. It is the people of God who face the calamity of the sixth seal who need to be marked out as God’s possession²⁶.

Before the four angels release the elements, these selected ones must be sealed, *σφραγίς*. The *σφραγίς* (v. 2) is not further described, nor is that which is sealed on the foreheads of the servants of God explained (v. 3).

Those who are protected are sealed “on their foreheads”. The forehead is chosen because it is the most conspicuous and the noblest part, the part by which a person is usually identified²⁷. It will be obvious to whom these servants belong and whom they serve.

²³ R. L. THOMAS, *Revelation 1-7*, 470.

²⁴ C. SCHNEIDER, «*Μετώπον*», in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 4, 636-637.

²⁵ M. G. REDDISH, *The Theme of Martyrdom in the Book of Revelation*, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY 1982, 169-172.

²⁶ J. S. CASEY, *Exodus Typology in the Book of Revelation*, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY 1981, 177-178; E. SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, 67; A. J. P. GARROW, *Revelation*, Routledge, London 1997, 21; D. E. AUNE, *Revelation 6-16*, 443.

²⁷ J. P. LANGE, *The Revelation of John*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI 1968, 189.

According to 7,2-3, God's seal identifies his people and sets them apart from sinful compromise with the world. The restraint of the winds and the seal of God together assure the audience that behind the catastrophe, God remains in control of history and is just as capable and willing to preserve them by sealing as he is to demonstrate his wrath by unsealing. God's people are marked out by the seal as his possession with the further strong implication of protection. But this protection does not mean that they are exempt from or that they physically survive the disasters. What is ensured by the sealing is that their status of belonging to God will not be affected by whatever happens.

1.2 The Preservation of the 144,000 (Rev 7,4-8)

Rev 7,4-8 constitutes an acoustic section following the visionary section of 7,1-3. This section does not narrate the sealing of the 144,000; rather it consists of a list that John claims to have heard. The number of the sealed is "144,000". A detailed enumeration of those sealed in v. 4 is stated in vv. 5-8, that 12,000 from each of the 12 tribes are sealed.

1.2.1 The Number of the Sealed: the 144,000 (Rev 7,4)

The statement "And I heard the number of the sealed..." (v. 4a) is a literary device used to explain how John knew that which was not part of this audition (cfr. 9,16), namely, the actual number of those who were sealed. John does not *see* the 144,000 until 14,1-5.

John then continues that the "144,000 were marked from every tribe of the sons of Israel" (v. 4b). In Revelation, this term "Israel" occurs only here and in 21,12 and is unusual since "Israel" was normally the self-designation of Jews in post-biblical Jewish literature²⁸. The phrase "from all tribes of Israel" is a solemn enumeration typical of apocalyptic writings (cfr. Rev 21,12-13.19-20). Feuillet's suggestion that John intends here to refer to Jewish Christians has not found widespread

²⁸ D. E. AUNE, *Revelation* 6-16, 460.

support²⁹. There is no context thus far in the book, which would lead the audience to believe that John has a particular interest either in ancient Israel (other than as a source of imagery) or in Jewish as opposed to Gentile Christians. On the contrary, John has applied Old Testament affirmations and images of Israel to the new people of God, composed of peoples of all nations.

The 144,000 are mentioned already in chapter one and we have found that in both places the number refers to the same group³⁰. The 144,000 is a numerical symbol for the fullness of the new people of God, composed of both historical Israel and the Israel of the Messianic time, the mature fruit of historical Israel³¹.

1.2.2 The Enumeration of those Sealed (Rev 7,5-8)

John presents here the list of the 12 tribes. In order to understand the author's list, we shall go through the Old Testament listing of 12 tribes. They are the following: Gen 29,32-35,18; 35,22-26; 46,8-25; 49,3-27; Exod 1,2-5; Num 1,5-15; 2,3-31; 13,4-15; 26,4-51; 34,19-28; Deut 27,12-13; 33,6-25; Josh 13,8-22; Judg 5,12-18; 1 Chr 2,1-8,40; 12,24-37; 27,16-22, and Ezek 48,1-7.23-28.31-34. These are 19 arrangements of the names that differ from each other in one way or another. They can be sorted on the basis of the order of birth³², on the order of

²⁹ A. FEUILLET, «Les 144,000 Israélites marqués d'un sceau», in *Novum Testamentum* 9 (1967), 191-224. This idea is seen also in W. BOUSSET, *Die Offenbarung Johannis*, 282-284. Against this see G. R. BEASLEY-MURRAY, *Revelation*, 139; R. H. MOUNCE, *The Book of Revelation*, 168; D. E. AUNE, *Revelation* 6-16, 440-442.

³⁰ W. HADORN, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 149, writes «Kein Leser des Buches konnte zweifeln, daß Johannes von den gleichen 144,000 rede, deren Versiegelung er 7,4 berichtete an Ihren Stirnen».

³¹ P. E. HUGHES, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI 1990, 94; G. BIGUZZI, *I settenari nella struttura dell'Apocalisse*, 140.

³² Sons of Leah (Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah), Sons of Bilhah, the maid of Rachel (Dan, Naphtali), Sons of Zilpah, the maid of Leah (Gad, Asher), Sons of Leah (Issachar, Zebulun), Sons of Rachel (Joseph, Benjamin), cfr. Gen 29,32-35,18.

Jacob's blessing³³, on the order of encampment (Num 2,3-31), on the order of the census before the invasion of Canaan (Num 26,4-51), on the order of blessing and cursing (Deut 27,12-13), on the order of Moses' blessing³⁴, on the order of "the princes" (Num 1,5-15), on the order of inheritance (Josh 13,7-22,34), on the order by the wives and concubines (1 Chr 2,1-8,40), and finally by the order of the gates of the city (Ezek 48,31-34).

It is clear that with regard to either order or content there is no list of tribes listed above that corresponds exactly to the list of 7,4-8³⁵. According to R. H. Charles³⁶ the list of 7,4-8 is unintelligible because it is dislocated. Buchanan Gray³⁷ has recognised this dislocation and set right by transposing 7,5c-6 after 8: first the sons of the first wife Leah (Judah, Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zebulun); next the sons of the second wife Rachel (Joseph and Benjamin); next, the sons of Leah's handmaid (Gad and Assher); and finally, the sons of Rachel's handmaid (Naphtali and Dan); but we have on certain grounds Naphtali and Manasseh instead.

There are irregularities in the listing of the 12 tribes. The first is that the tribe of Judah rather than Reuben heads the list. There is general agreement that Judah is placed first here because it is the tribe from which the Messiah came³⁸. In all non-geographical listings in the Old Testament, there is a connection with the messianic expectation through Judah

³³ 1) Reuben, 2) Simeon, 3) Levi, 4) Judah, 5) Zebulun, 6) Issachar, 7) Dan, 8) Gad, 9) Asher, 10) Naphtali, 11) Joseph, and 12) Benjamin, cfr. Gen 49,3-27.

³⁴ 1) Reuben, 2) Judah, 3) Levi, 4) Benjamin, 5) Joseph, 6) Zebulun, 7), Issachar, 8) Gad, 9) Dan, 10) Naphtali, and 11) Asher.

³⁵ J. R. MICHAELS, *Revelation*, 113.

³⁶ R. H. CHARLES, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of St. John* (ICC, vol. 1), 207.

³⁷ B. GRAY, «The Lists of the Twelve Tribes», in *The Expositor* 6 (1902), 225-240.

³⁸ H. B. SWETE, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, 98; R. H. CHARLES, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John* (ICC, vol. 1), 207; W. A. MEEKS, *The Prophet-King: Moses Traditions and the Johannine Christology*, Brill, Leiden 1967, 67; G. R. BEASLEY- MURRAY, *Revelation*, 43; R. H. MOUNCE, *The Book of Revelation*, 169; W. J. HARRINGTON, *Revelation*, 98.

(Gen 49,10; 1 Chr 2,3-4,43; 5,2). At the same time, the tribe of Judah is also listed first in the military order of the tribes in the camp (Num 2,3; 7,12; 10,14), perhaps because of the later importance of Judah as the tribe of the Davidic dynasty. As a positive designation, the Qumran community used the term "Judah" to refer to themselves³⁹. According to C. R. Smith⁴⁰, the list has been Christianised and John replaced the tribe of Levi, which probably headed the list, with Judah, since John has already referred to the Lamb as the messianic lion of the tribe of Judah in 5,5.

Another peculiarity of the tribe list is that the tribe of Manasseh (v. 6) substitutes the tribe of Dan. The following reasons explain this noticeable absence:

1) The tribe of Dan was omitted because of its early connection with idolatry. When the tribe of Dan migrated to the north and settled in Laish, they set up for themselves the graven image (Judg 18,30). Later Dan became one of the two great shrines in the northern kingdom (1 Kgs 12,29). Scripture gives regular notice of this tribe's offensiveness in this regard (Judg 18,2.30.31; 1 Kgs 11,26). The other tribes were guilty of the same sin, but Dan was the leader in idolatrous practices.

2) The post-biblical tradition refers to the tribe of Dan as an apostate tribe (*Testament of Dan* 5,4-8).

3) There was an expectation of the arrival of the Antichrist from the tribe of Dan⁴¹. Along with Hippolytus, Irenaeus⁴² gives the earliest references to

³⁹ D. R. SCHWARTZ, «To Join Oneself to the House of Judah (Damascus Document IV, 11)», in *Revue Qumran* 10 (1981), 435-446.

⁴⁰ C. R. SMITH, «The Portrayal of the Church as the New Israel in the Names and Order of the Tribes in Revelation 7,5-8», 115-116.

⁴¹ R. H. CHARLES, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* (vol. 2), Clarendon, Oxford 1913, 234; C. R. SMITH, «The Tribes of Revelation 7 and the Literary Competence of John the Seer», in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 38 (1995), 217.

⁴² IRENAEUS, *Adversus haereses*, 5.30.2, commenting on Jer 8,16, understood as a prophecy of the coming of Antichrist from the tribe of Dan in the east, and HIPPOLYTUS, *Demonstratio de Christo et Antichristo*. 14.5-6

this tradition and their views influenced the Christian understanding of 7,8.

- 4) This list has been partially assimilated to the list of 12 Apostles in which, just as Matthias substitutes Judas, so Manasseh replaces Dan⁴³.
- 5) “Δάυ” was omitted due to a scribal error⁴⁴ and thus the abbreviation “Μαυ [ασσῆ]” replaced “Δάυ”.
- 6) The simplest solution is that Dan was dropped to keep the total number of tribes to 12⁴⁵.

The tribe of Levi (v. 7) is often omitted (Num 1,49; 2,33; 26,1-51; cfr. 1 Chr 21,6) in the tribe’s list for the simple reason that Levi had no traditional allotment of land. His place in the 12 tribes substitutes the sons of Joseph, Ephraim, and Manasseh.

The tribe of Joseph substitutes the tribe of Ephraim and then the tribe of Manasseh is presented together with the tribe of Joseph (v. 8). Such a substitution occurs elsewhere (Judg 1,22.35; Ezek 37,16.19), being based on the fact that the tribe of Ephraim, like that of Manasseh, is closely associated with their father Joseph through whom they received their inheritance (Josh 17,16-17). The inclusion of Joseph in the present list accomplishes the purpose of including Ephraim without the unpleasant connotation⁴⁶ that the name carried. Ephraim was foremost in the defection from the house of David (2 Sam 2,9; Isa 7,9.17) and was an ally of the enemies of Judah (Isa 7,2.5).

writes: «as the Christ was born from the tribe of Judah, so will the Antichrist be born from the tribe of Dan».

⁴³ C. R. SMITH, «The Portrayal of the Church as the New Israel in the Names and Order of the Tribes in Revelation 7,5-8», 115-116.

⁴⁴ G. V. SANDERSON, «In Defence of Dan», in *Scripture* 3 (1948), 114-115.

⁴⁵ R. BAUCKHAM, «The List of the Tribes in Revelation 7 again», in *Journal of the Study of the New Testament* 42 (1991), 113.

⁴⁶ Ephraim like Dan was addicted to idolatry (cfr. Judg 17,1-13; 18,2.30.31; 1 Kgs 12,25-29; Hos 4,17).

Irregularities in the list of the tribes are undeniable. The preceding discussion seeks to explain some of them, but doubtless has not captured the full significance of these peculiarities. What can be said with certainty is that these are the ones protected from the effects of God's wrath and are the followers of the Lamb.

1.3 The Relationship between Rev 7,1-8 and Rev 14,1-5

Rev 6 announces disasters that signal the beginning of the unfolding of divine wrath on the world. The same way, Rev 13 ends with fear and anxiety because of the cruel deeds of beasts. These events are so terrifying that a question immediately came to the lips of John: who will be able to endure this storm without surrendering? In response chapter 7 and 14 revealed that God intends to watch over his own, the 144,000 whom he has marked with his seal. Thus in 7,4-8 and in 14,1-5 we see the same numerical symbolism 144,000, which is based on 12, i.e., the numerical symbol of the people of God. Since we have examined both pericopae in detail, we are going to compare them here to verify whether they are the same group or different. We examine now their similarities.

1.3.1 Similarities

- 1) In both passages, groups of 144,000 are mentioned⁴⁷ (7,4; 14,1.3).

⁴⁷ Those who support that they are same group: R. H. CHARLES, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John* (ICC, vol. 1), 201; G. SCHRENK, *Die Weissagung über Israel im Neuen Testament*, Gotthelf, Zürich, 1951, 73-74 n. 91; R. J. MCKELVEY, *The New Temple: The Church in the New Testament*, Oxford University Press, London 1969, 173; M. RISSI, *The Future of the World: An Exegetical Study of Revelation 19,11-22-15*, SCM Press, London 1972, 71; A. F. JOHNSON, *Revelation*, 539; E. SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA, «The Followers of the Lamb: Visionary Rhetoric and Socio-Political Situation», in *Semeia* 36 (1986), 129-134; P. E. HUGHES, *The Book of Revelation*, 157; T. B. SLATER, *Christ and Community: A Socio-Historical Study of the Christology of Revelation*, Sheffield, England 1999, 193; PIKAZA Ibarrodo Xabier, *Apocalisse*, Edizioni Borla, Roma 2001, 172; M. GILBERTSON, *God and History in the Book of Revelation*, The University Press, Cambridge 2003,

- 2) In both passages the members of the groups of 144,000 are sealed on their foreheads that distinguish them from others (7,3; 14,1).
- 3) Both recount the deliverance of the faithful from the great tribulation (7,15-17; 14,3).
- 4) Finally, both relate how the 144,000 have faithfully followed the Lamb and even given their lives for their religious convictions (7,14; 14,4).

The two groups speak of the same number of 144,000. Now we go further to verify their true identity. Since the 144,000 are described as from every tribe of Israel (7,4), it has sometimes been thought that this group represents “Jewish Christians” in contrast to the “great multitude from every nation” of 7,9-17. But this cannot be the case, since John identifies this group with the same number in 14,1-5, which cannot be limited to Jewish Christians. “Israel” is obviously not meant in a literal sense; there were no literal 12 tribes in the first century⁴⁸. Judaism knew that the original role of 12 tribes had been disrupted by the Assyrian deportation (2 Kgs 17; Jer 16,10-15; Ezek 47,13-48,29; Baruch 4-5; *Testament of Moses* 2,3-9) and had never been restored, but at the *eschaton*, God would reassemble Israel (*Psalms of Solomon* 17,28-31; 1 QM 2; 2 Baruch 78-87; Matt 19,28; Luke 22,30) in its fullness. John declares that the eschatological hope for Israel is realized in the Church. Judaism had long since been more of a religious community with people of various ethnic backgrounds than a racial group identified by genealogy.

The key argument for identifying the 144,000 as intended to represent the Church as such, however, is the theological understanding of the Church as the continuation of Israel⁴⁹. This view was widespread in early Christianity (Matt 10,5-6;

102; O. K. PETERS, *The Mandate of the Church in the Apocalypse of John*, 67. See further chapter 1, footnote 36.

⁴⁸ E. M. BORING, *Revelation*, 129.

⁴⁹ W. BARCLAY, *The Revelation of John* (vol. 1), Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY 2004³, 28

Luke 1,68-79; 2,29-32; John 1,47; 5,43-47; Acts 2,14-21; James 1,1). In support of the view which identifies Israel with the Church is the fact that the New Testament identifies the followers of Christ as “Abraham’s seed” (Gal 3,29), as “the true circumcision” (Phil 3,3) and as the “Israel of God” (Gal 6,6).

It is possible that the usage of the term “Jew” among Christians had undergone a historic change from the earlier days when Paul wrote Romans (A.D. 56) until Revelation was written toward the close of the century⁵⁰. Paul made a distinction between the true, spiritual Jew and the physical descendants of Abraham (Rom 2,28-29; 9,8). According to him, only those Jews who recognized Jesus as Messiah could rightly be called “Israel” in the strictest sense (Rom 9,6), though the term might be used with qualifications to refer to the historic descendants of Jacob (i.e., “Israel after flesh”, 1 Cor 10,18). Moreover, even Gentiles who received Jesus as the Messiah were considered “Abraham’s seed” (Gal 3,29) and the true “circumcision” (Phil 3,3).

St. Peter (1 Pet 2,49) likewise described the Church in terms drawn from the Old Testament that historically describe the true people of God among the Jewish descendants, i.e., “holy priesthood... chosen people... royal priesthood... holy nation”.

Furthermore, John himself makes a distinction between “the true Jew and the false” (i.e., “those who say they are Jews but are not”, Rev 2,9; 3,9) and that could imply that here in chapter 7 he intends to designate the true Israel or the Church. Moreover, John used the Old Testament image of the People of Israel as a kingdom and priests to God to designate the followers of Jesus (1,6). Similarly, many of the promises to victors in the Church of Asia (chapters two and three) are fulfilments of Old Testament promises given to the true people of Israel. In Rev 21,9-12, the Church is called the “bride, the

⁵⁰ A. F. JOHNSON, *Revelation*, 479; G. E. LADD, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 480.

wife of the Lamb"; she is identified with the New Jerusalem, and on its twelve gates are inscribed the "names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel". When we study Revelation very closely it is clear that John presents the 144,000 as the Church. The main supporting points are four:

- 1) The first tribe mentioned in Rev 7 is that of the Judah – because Jesus belongs to it by origin (Rev 5,5) – and not that of Reuben.
- 2) In 14,1, the 144,000 carry at their forehead the name of Jesus the Lamb.
- 3) In Rev 14,3-4 they are mentioned as being redeemed from the earth as the first fruits for God and for the Lamb.
- 4) In Rev 14,4 we read that the 144,000 follow the Lamb wherever he goes.

All these suggest that in John's mind, the followers of Jesus (14,4) are the true servants of God, the Israel of God⁵¹.

1.3.2 Dissimilarities

The arguments that state they are two different groups⁵² are following:

- 1) In 7,3, the verb *σφραγίζειν*, "to seal", is used, but what this seal looks like is not mentioned; in 14,1, the term "seal" is

⁵¹ It is to be noted that John's listing of the "twelve tribes" corresponds to none of the numerous lists in the Old Testament. Yet as is the case with the New Testament's various lists of the "Twelve Apostles", the significant aspect is the number twelve representing the whole People of God, not the names of the tribes and apostles, which vary from list to list. According to G. BIGUZZI, *I settenari nella Struttura dell'Apocalisse*, 140, «Rev 14, however by its 144,000, in one side is in continuity with Rev 7 and on the other side adds new elements. The important of which is the relation with the Lamb. Thus in Rev 7, the 144,000 are not the historical Israel but the Israel of the messianic times, i.e., the Church».

⁵² W. BOUSSET, *Die Offenbarung Johannis*, 122-123. Bousset interprets the 144,000 to be a body of Christian ascetics and, therefore, different from the 144,000 in 7,4-8; J. SICKENBERGER, *Erklärung der Johannesapokalypse*, 137.

not used, but the 144,000 are said to bear the name of the Lamb and his Father's name on their foreheads.

2) In 7,1-8, nothing is mentioned that is distinctively Christian while in 14,1-5, the 144,000 are described as followers of the Lamb (14,4), bearing the name of the Lamb and of his Father on the foreheads (14,1), and so are clearly Christians.

3) In 14,1-5, in contrast to 7,1-8, there is no mention of Israelite tribes.

4) In 14,1-5, the 144,000 have several characteristics that are not mentioned in 7,1-8.

a) They are virgins.

b) They follow the Lamb wherever he goes.

c) They have been redeemed from humankind as first-fruits for God and the Lamb.

d) The moral character of the 144,000 is stressed: they do not lie for they are blameless.

The discontinuities of the details are above all to be explained with the metamorphosis by which John habitually undermined the same symbol or image.

1.3.3 Are They Same Group?

At the literary level, the mention of the 144,000 in 14,1-5 must be connected with the earlier mention of the 144,000 who were sealed in 7,1-8. Two motifs link the two passages:

1) The mention of 144,000 (7,4; 14,1)

2) The mark of the seal of God (7,2-8; 14,1)

Taking into consideration the arguments that we have provided in the section on similarities, we can assume that both refer to same group.

1.3.4 Contributions of Rev 7,1-8 to the Understanding of Rev 14,1-5

In Rev 14,1-5, we have seen the 144,000 faithful followers of the Lamb. This numerical symbol 144,000, as we have

already seen, is based on the number 12, which symbolizes the people of God. The first context among the three contexts where appear the number 12 and its multiples as the numerical symbol for the people of God is 7,4-8⁵³. Here we see the enumeration of 12 tribes of Israel and each one includes 12,000 sealed with the seal of the living God. Not only the 12,000 of every tribe (12x1000) but also the total of the 144,000 (12000 + 12000 + 12000 etc = 144,000) that is announced in 7,4 (and then repeated in 14,1.3) is a multiple of 12. It is clear that Rev 7 utilizes the language of the 12 tribes as Rev 14 keeps the 144,000 in relation to the Lamb. The numerical symbol 12 here stands as the number of the people of God of past. It stands as the basis for the people of God of the present seen in 14,1-5. What is provided in 7,1-8 is complimented in 14,1-5. Taken together, these pericopae provide the identity and the role of the 144,000 as the faithful followers of the Lamb.

2. The Number 12 with its Multiples as a Number of the People of God

We have seen 7,1-8 as the parallel text to 14,1-5. Now we will consider texts that include number 12 with its multiples as a number of the People of God. In this part there are two sections. The first section deals with the “woman with a crown of 12 stars” and the second section deals with the number 12 in the description of the New Jerusalem.

2.1 The “Woman with a Crown of 12 Stars” (Rev 12,1)

After the temple scene of 11,19, John sees another “sign”, *σημεῖόν*, which “appeared in heaven” (12,1). The sign appears in the same heaven in which he saw the temple scene. He sees

⁵³ According to G. BIGUZZI, *I settenari nella Struttura dell'Apocalisse*, 137, «Il numero di base, quello delle dodici tribù d'Israele, non figura mai esplicitamente, ma è da ottenere dalla somma di “1+1+1 ecc. = 12”. Poi il 12,000, ripetuto 12 volte, è il risultato della moltiplicazione di “12x1.000”, in cui si gioca sul numero delle tribù e si prepara il calcolo matematico della somma finale. E infine il 144.000 di 7,4 è il risultato della soma di dodici volte 12.000».

“a woman clothed with the sun and the moon under her feet and on her head a crown of 12 stars”.

The “woman with a crown of 12 stars” is the key attraction of Rev 12. Therefore, Rev 12 has always been considered exaggeratedly as the “culminate centre and the key to the entire book”⁵⁴ and the much studied chapter of the New Testament in the last three centuries⁵⁵.

Rev 12 can be divided into three scenes⁵⁶ based on the antagonists with whom the dragon battles:

- 1) vv. 1-6
- 2) vv. 7-12
- 3) vv. 13-18

Versus 1-6 and 13-18 deal the battle of the dragon with the woman and vv. 7-12 deal the battle of the dragon with the Archangel Michael and his angels. Each scene can again divide

⁵⁴ E. B. ALLO, *Saint Jean: L'Apocalypse*, 155; P. PRIGENT, *Apocalypse 12. Histoire de l'Exégèse*, Mohr-Siebeck, Tübingen 1959, 1; E. SCHMITT, *Das apokalyptische Weib als zentrale Enthüllung der Apokalypse*, Köln 1965; A. YARBRO COLLINS, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation*, Scholars Press, Missoula, MT 1976, 231; A. PAUL, «La dimension christologique d'un drame existential (Ap. 12)», in E. FRANCO (ed.), *Mysterium Regni. Scritti in onore di mons. V. FUSCO*, Bologna 2001, 649.

⁵⁵ E. LOHMEYER, «Das zwölfte Kapitel der Offenbarung Johannis», in *Theologische Blätter* 35 (1925), 258; B. J. LE FROIS, *The Woman Clothed with the Sun (Ap. 12). Individual or Collective?*, Herder, Roma 1954; A. TRABUCCO, «La “Donna ravvolta di sole” (Apoc 12). L'interpretazione ecclesiologica degli esegeti cattolici dal 1563 alla prima metà del secolo XIX», in *Marianum* 19 (1957), 1-58; U. VANNI, *L'Apocalisse*, 227; P. FARKAŠ, *La “Donna” di Apocalisse 12. Storia, bilancio, nuove prospettive*, Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, Roma 1997.

⁵⁶ E. LOHMEYER, *Das zwölfte Kapitel der Offenbarung Johannis*, 94; B. J. LE FROIS, *The Woman Clothed with the Sun (Ap. 12)*, 189; J. A. FITZMYER - R. H. FULLER, «The Woman in Revelation 12», in R. E. BROWN et al. (ed.), *Mary in the New Testament. A Collaborative Assessment by Protestants and Roman Catholic Scholars*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, PA 1978, 227; E. COTHENET, «Le signe de la femme (Ap. 12)», in *Exégèse et Liturgie*, (1988), 310.

into sections of presentation and narration and are interlinked among themselves with a relation of cause and effect⁵⁷.

- 1) 12, 1-6
 - a) Presentation of the Woman and the dragon (vv. 1-4)
 - b) Narration about the delivery and the salvation of the Son and the Woman (vv. 5-6)
- 2) 12, 7-12
 - c) Narration about the battle between Michael and the dragon and dragon's defeat (vv. 7-9)
 - d) Presentation of the song about the defeat of dragon (10-12)
- 3) 12, 13-18
 - e) Narration about the envy of the dragon against the Woman and the salvation of the Woman (vv. 13-16)
 - f) Presentation of the passage of narration about the appearance of the beast on the sea (vv. 17-18)

The "woman with a crown of 12 stars" (12,1) belongs to the first scene and according to Gollinger vv. 1-2 is called the attributes of the woman⁵⁸.

The significance of the 12 stars by which the woman is adorned could be sought on a cosmological line because the stars are cosmic elements like the sun and the moon of the same verse. But to consider the stars as generating light at night like the moon is difficult to understand by motive of the stronger light of the sun in which the woman is being immersed. Moreover, the sun and the moon also have disparity. The symbolism of the sun is positive (luminous halo, divine

⁵⁷ G. BIGUZZI, *L'Apocalisse e i suoi enigmi*, Paideia Editrice, Brescia 2004, 197.

⁵⁸ H. GOLLINGER, *Das "Grosse Zeichen" von Apokalypse 12*, Echter, Würzburg 1971, 73.92.

privilege) and the symbolism of the moon is probably negative (submission to the woman, transient nature of time, opacity of the inferior world).

The stars that crown the woman can instead be reasonably put in some parallelism with the seven stars that are the seven angels of the Church (1,20), because above all in 21,12 we read that upon the 12 gates of the New Jerusalem stand 12 angels. These angels represent human groups, i.e., the tribes of Israel. If the interlinked comparison of 12,1 with 1,20 and 21,12 invite us generally to put the stars in relation with human groups, the numerical symbol 12 invite us to see in the astral crown of the woman a particular reference to the tribes of Israel. The symbolic language of Revelation indicates that the number 12 and its multiplications throughout Revelation always stand in relation to the people of God. Because of her crown of 12 stars, the woman has therefore to be linked with the 144,000 protected by the seal of living God, with the Lamb and his 12 Apostles, and with the perfectly measured eschatological city, all based on 12 and its multiplication⁵⁹.

It is evident enough that the woman of chapter 12 represents the messianic people and not the single person of the mother of God⁶⁰. The main arguments against a mariological interpretation of Rev 12 are the following⁶¹:

The first problem comes from the fact that her progeny includes also "those who observe the commandments of God and have the witness of Jesus" (12,17). It is clear that with this periphrasis, John alludes to the Christians of his time and of all times and that, therefore, he speaks here of a non-physical

⁵⁹ G. PERRELLA, «Senso mariologico dell'Apocalisse XII», in *Divus Thomas* 43 (1940), 219; F. M. BRAUN, «La Femme vêtue de soleil (Apoc. XII). Etat du problème», in *Revue Thomiste* 56 (1955), 669.

⁶⁰ J. KOSNETTER, «Die Sonnenfrau (Apok. 12,1-17) in der neueren Exegese», in *Theologische Fragen der Gegenwart*, Fs Kard. Theodor Innitzer, Domverlag, Vienna 1952, 94; A. TRABUCCO, *La "Donna ravvolta di sole" (Apoc 12)*, 294.331; H. GIESEN, «Symbole und mythische Aussagen in der Johannesapokalypse und ihre theologische Bedeutung», 268.

⁶¹ H. GOLLINGER, *Das "Grosse Zeichen" von Apokalypse 12*, 31-40.

and universal motherhood of the woman. And above all, 12,17 does not seem to imply a relation between children and mother other than that of generation and progeny. The narration that follows (Rev 13-22) gives witness that God and his angels work for the defence and salvation of those children and never for the woman. It is curious to note that she is never reported in chapter 12 with the same task and she does not appear in the rest of Revelation again. If we accept the woman as the messianic people of God, everything goes well. But if we must accept woman as the Mother of God, then it must be asked what kind of scope her motherhood has. To affirm the woman as the Mother of God in those days would have involved a maximalised Mariology, which would be unimaginable for the first century⁶².

The second analogical argument is based on the good probability that the number of the stars by which the woman is adorned point to the 12 tribes of Israel⁶³. The hypothetical Marian symbolism would become uselessly twisted and overabundant: beyond being the Mother of the Messiah, Mary would represent in the first place the patriarchs of Israel by reason of the number 12, but also the 12 Apostles by reason of her belonging to the messianic community. But to consider Mary as such an all-embracing and towering figure⁶⁴ would be incompatible with the theological thought of the Primitive Christianity.

It is A. Kassing⁶⁵ who presents the third major difficulty. According to him, the flight and the stay of the woman in the desert are not integrated into the personal events of Mary. The fact that the child is kept safe in heaven will prevent us from identifying the flight of the woman with the flight of Mary into

⁶² J. A. FITZMYER - R. H. FULLER, *The Woman in Revelation 12*, 235; G. A. KRODEL, *Revelation*, 238; G. BIGUZZI, *L'Apocalisse e i suoi enigmi*, 225.

⁶³ G. K. BEALE, *The Book of Revelation*, 626.

⁶⁴ J. LE FROIS, *The Woman Clothed with the Sun* (Ap. 12), 211-262, argues that the woman is Mary, embodying the collective body of the Church in herself.

⁶⁵ A. KASSING, *Die Kirche und Maria. Ihr Verhältnis im 12. Kapitel der Apokalypse*, Patmos Verlag, Würzburg 1958, 57.61.

Egypt in order to save the Infant Jesus (Matt 2,13), because the Infant Jesus is not saved and kept in heaven. The flight of the Judeo-Christian Church of Jerusalem (70 A.D) also cannot be identified with this flight because the “rest of her children” were not kept safe in the desert. The heavenly glorification of Mary also cannot be considered here, because the desert has never the significance of eschatological happiness⁶⁶ and also the glory of Mary could not be limited to the woman’s 1260 days’ stay in desert⁶⁷.

All these indications lead us to the probability that the woman of chapter 12 is a collective identity rather than a personal identity⁶⁸. Though the mother of Jesus may be secondarily⁶⁹ in mind, the primary focus here is not on an

⁶⁶ F. M. BRAUN, *La Femme vêtue de soleil* (Apoc. XII), 660-662.

⁶⁷ A. KASSING, *Die Kirche und Maria*, 57.62; J. MICHL, «Die Deutung der apokalyptischen Frau in der Gegenwart», in *Biblische Zeitschrift* 3 (1959), 307; J. ERNST, «Die “himmlische Frau” im 12. Kapitel der Apokalypse», in *Theologie und Glaube* 58 (1969), 39-58.

⁶⁸ H. B. SWETE, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, 148; M. KIDDLE, *The Revelation of St. John*, 218-240; M. C. TENNEY, «The Revelation», in F. H. HENRY III (ed.), *The Biblical Expositor*, A. J. Holman Company, Philadelphia, PA 1960, 475; M. S. TERRY, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI 1961, 291; J. E. BRUNS, «The Contrasted Women of Apocalypse 12 and 17», in *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 26, 459; R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Church in the New Testament*, Herder and Herder, New York, NY 1965, 115; M. RISSI, *Time and History: A Study on the Revelation*, John Knox Press, Richmond, VA 1966, 93-96; T. STRAMARE, «Apocalisse», 479; R. H. MOUNCE, *The Book of Revelation*, 234-47; M. E. BORING, *Revelation*, 152-153; B. M. METZGER, *Breaking the Code*, 74; C. H. TALBERT, *The Apocalypse. A Reading of the Revelation of John*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY 1994, 48-51; J. LAMBRECHT, «The People of God in the Book of Revelation», in J. LAMBRECHT, *Collected Studies on Pauline Literature and on the Book of Revelation*, Roma 2001, 383.389; J. L. RESSEGUIE, *Revelation Unsealed: A Narrative Approach to John’s Apocalypse*, Brill. Boston. Köln, 1998, 143; BOXALL Ivan, *Revelation: Vision and Insight*, SPCK, 2002, 245-261; G. R. OSBORNE, *Revelation* (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament), MOISES SILVA (ed), Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, 457.

⁶⁹ The word “woman” in 12,1: see note b at Rev 12,1 in *New Jerusalem Bible*, 2041, «The Woman represents the holy people of the messianic era (Isa 54,60; 66,7, Mi 4,9-10), and so the Church militant. It is possible that the

individual but on the community of the faithful within which the messianic line ultimately yielded a kingly offspring⁷⁰.

2.1.1 The Relationship between Rev 12,1 and Rev 14,1-5

The second context where the number 12 appears as the numerical symbol for people of God is in 12,1, i.e., the vision of the Messianic woman⁷¹ crowned with 12 stars. Just as the 144,000 followers of the Lamb in 14,1-1-5 symbolizes the People of God, the Messianic woman in 12,1 too symbolizes the same community, which gives birth to the Messiah, and whose other offspring⁷² are the Christians. The Church unites

author was thinking also of Mary, the new Eve, the daughter of Zion, who gave birth to the Messiah».

⁷⁰ K. STOCK, *L'Ultima Parola è di Dio*, Edizioni ADP, Roma 1995, 94; W. J. HARRINGTON, *Revelation*, 174-175.

⁷¹ This image makes use of metaphorical language that is frequent in the Old Testament: in Ezek 16 the history of Israel is told as that of a guilty woman with numerous children. The image of the woman who gives birth to her children in suffering is also traditional (cfr. Isa 26,17; Micah 4,10). The woman who appears to Esdras (4 Ezra 9,38-10,24) symbolizes the heavenly Jerusalem, the mother of us all (cfr. 10,7). Primitive Christianity inherited this symbolism (cfr. Gal 4,26) and the book of Revelation makes use of it on several occasions (19,7; 21,9). cfr. A. TH. KASSING, *Die Kirche und Maria*, 148; A. FEUILLET, *L'Apocalypse*, 94-98; F. MONTAGNINI, «La Chiesa alla Ricerca di Cristo», in *Bibbia et Oriente* 15 (1973), 31, «Nel contesto dell'Apocalisse, è difficile negare che la donna che partorisce il Messiah è la chiesa»; P. PRIGENT, *L'Apocalypse de Saint Jean*, Labor et Fides, Genève 2000, 372; M. KOCH, *Drachenkampf und Sonnenfrau. Zur Funktion des Mythischen in der Johannesapokalypse am Beispiel von Apk 12*, Mohr-Siebeck, Tübingen 2004, 193. On account of the symbolic number 12 and also for the fact of having the Messiah and his disciples (12,5; 12,17) as sons, and because of the protection that God reserves to them (as the Exodus event, vv. 6.14) for three and half years in the desert, the Woman is the Messianic people of the Old Testament and of the New Testament. cfr. G. BIGUZZI, *L'Apocalisse e i suoi enigmi*, 136.

⁷² The term "offspring", σπέρμα, occurs only here in Revelation. This abrupt mention of "the rest of her offspring" symbolizes individual Christians, the spiritual children of the woman. H. GOLLINGER, *Das "grosse Zeichen" von Apokalypse 12*, 179. And again the clause in 12,17c (i.e., "who kept the commandments of God and maintained their witness to Jesus") defines more closely the identity of "the rest of her offspring". Keeping the commandments of God is one of the major reasons that faithful gives for their willingness to suffer and rather than to compromise their faith.

both *tôrâ* (the commandments of God) and the Gospel (the testimony of Jesus), because according to John the Church of the 12 apostles of the Lamb is founded together with the 12 tribes of Israel in one people⁷³.

In both 12,1 and 14,1-5, the people of God are depicted with the help of the symbolic number 12. In the book of Revelation, this number, its multiples and its half are constantly related to either the pre-messianic or the messianic people of God. Number 12 and its multiples are used in reference to the 144,000 faithful (who are protected by the seal of the living God and by the Lamb), the 12 apostles of the Lamb, and the perfect measurement of the eschatological city. Importantly, the woman with the 12 stars on her head participates in their significance too.

When we look into the narrative art of John, we see a gradual progression from catastrophe to hope and fulfilment. Chapter 12 is placed within the narratives of the sounding of the seventh trumpet (11,15-18) and the narrative of the seven bowls (15,1-16,21). Within these two boundaries there are three subtexts (11,19-12,17; 12,18-13,18; 14,1-20). We see in chapter 12 the woman that symbolizes the people of God, the birth of the child who was “caught up” to heaven⁷⁴, the defeat and expulsion of the dragon from heaven by Michael, and then

⁷³ Could it then be the people of God of the old covenant, the community of Israel, which can indeed be seen as the mother of the Messiah and of the Church? But this identification once again gives a problem, in the form of the observation that the book of Revelation never seems to distinguish between the people of God of the old and the new covenants, except in order to show that the latter fulfil the prophecies detected in the history of the former. Furthermore, it is not felt justified in distinguishing in Revelation any trace of the problem of Jewish vs. Gentile Christianity. The present context does not seem capable of overturning these conclusions. We must therefore identify the woman as the Church, although it should immediately be recalled that for our author, the Church has taken root in the history of Israel.

⁷⁴ According to T. STRAMARE, «Apocalisse», 477, «Si tratta della Ascensione di Gesù... l'unico verbo ἠρπάσθη sembra designare e la morte violenta e l'estasi gloriosa».

the persecution of the Church. The beast from the sea and the beast from the land then appear, and with the authority of the dragon kill those who will not worship the beast (Rev 13). John then sees the 144,000 followers of the Lamb on Mount Zion (14,1-5).

The Church is presented here in chapter 12 in its concrete reality combined with the suffering that it undergoes and the witness that it is carrying. Rev 14,1-5 gives consolation and hope to the same community and gives encouragement in their way of following after the Lamb.

2.2 The Number 12 in the Description of the New Jerusalem (Rev 21,12.14.21; 22,1)

The Revelation of John is constructed with the New Jerusalem in mind and unfolds inexorably toward this culmination⁷⁵. According to Beasley-Murray, the New Jerusalem describes the ultimate goal, namely communion with God⁷⁶. And again, according to Du Rand, the heavenly Jerusalem portrays the security of salvation despite the threatening persecution and deprivation⁷⁷. The vision of the New Jerusalem is the longest and the most elaborate vision of Revelation⁷⁸.

⁷⁵ According to R. H. Charles, «The imagery of the New Jerusalem forms the natural climax and the fitting close to all that has gone before, and the nature of the blessedness of the new heaven and the new earth and the new city is in keeping with all that is foreshadowed in the earlier visions of the seer». cfr. R. H. CHARLES, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of St. John* (ICC, vol. 2), 200.

⁷⁶ G. R. BEASLEY-MURRAY, *Revelation*, 305.

⁷⁷ J. A. DU RAND, «The Imagery of the Heavenly Jerusalem (Revelation 21,9-22,5)», in *Neotestamentica* 22 (1988), 71.

⁷⁸ Babylon is fallen (18,2). The two Beasts are thrown into the lake of fire (19,20). The kings of the earth are slain with the sword of truth (19,21). The dragon, too, is hurled into the lake of fire (20,10), as are those “whose name could not be found in the book of life” (20,15). God and the Lamb have defeated the coalition that claimed divine status yet practiced incalculable injustice. In seeing these things behind the veil, John was reminded that God is more powerful than empire. The vision of Babylon as fallen prepares the way for the vision of New Jerusalem. cfr. W. HOWARD-BROOK – A.

In his vision John sees that the New⁷⁹ Jerusalem, *Ἰερουσαλὴμ καινὴν*, has four sides (21,16) and each side of the city has three gates (21,13) and three foundations (21,14). Upon the 12 gates are the 12 angels and the 12 names of the tribe of the sons of Israel (21,12), and upon the 12 foundations, the 12 names of the Apostles of the Lamb (21,14). The foundations are composed of 12 different precious stones (21,19-20) and the 12 gates are of 12 pearls made of a single pearl. The 12 tribes of Israel and 12 Apostles of the Lamb speak of the one people of God for whom is prepared the New Jerusalem. Thus in the presentation of the New Jerusalem John makes use of 12 in all its symbolic richness.

The symbolic use of 12 as the number of the completeness of God's people renders the equation of the Church with the Holy City a virtual certainty⁸⁰. Interestingly enough, the 12 tribes are indiscriminately combined with the 12 Apostles in the numerology of the city. This combination is an indication of the inseparable unity of the People of God and their essential continuity under both the Old and the New Covenants. Hence, the number 12 is the number of the people of God of the past generation (i.e., the 12 tribes of Israel) and of the present generation (i.e., the 12 disciples of the Lamb; the 144,000 protected; the woman persecuted by the dragon). John uses the symbolic number 12 in historic-salvific key for the universal and one Israel of God of the Old and of the New Testaments⁸¹.

GWYTHYR, *Unveiling Empire: Reading Revelation then and now*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY1999, 184.

⁷⁹ The New Jerusalem is not merely new in time (*νέος*), but new in quality (*καινός*). R. J. MCKELVEY, *The New Temple: The Church in the New Testament*, 170.

⁸⁰ P. LEE, *The New Jerusalem in the Book of Revelation: A Study of Rev 21-22 in the Light of its Background in Jewish Tradition*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, 2001, 275; J. W. BOWMAN, «New Jerusalem», in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 3, 545; J. LAMBRECHT, «The People of God», 414.

⁸¹ K. H. RENGSTORF, «δώδεκα», in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 3, 324; G. BORNKAMM, *Jesus of Nazareth*, Fortress, Minneapolis, MN 1960, 150; M. S. TERRY, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 291; D.

The New Jerusalem is secured by 12 gates (21,12), built upon 12 foundations (21,14), and decorated with 12 fruits (22,2).

2.2.1 The 12 Gates (Rev 21,12.21)

The presentation on the gate of the New Jerusalem belongs to the textual unit of 21,9-22,9 in which 21,9-10a functions as an introduction to the vision of the New Jerusalem. And then 21,10b-22,5 portrays the external and internal description of the New Jerusalem⁸².

The New Jerusalem city had a wide and high wall with 12 gates (21,12a): The enormous detail with which the city wall⁸³ and its meaning are treated in Rev 21 is astonishing, since the vision of Ezek 40-48, which John has before his eyes, does not exclusively mention the wall at all, and speaks of the city gates only in the last verses (Ezek 48,30-34). During the Roman Empire, city gates were the most popular expression of imperial triumphal architecture in Greece as well as in Asia Minor⁸⁴. The wall surrounding the city has 12 gates, each one named after one of the 12 tribes⁸⁵ of the sons of Israel, though

SCHMITZ, «δῶδεκα», in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 2, 695; J. L. RESSEGUIE, *Revelation Unsealed*, 64; G. BIGUZZI, *L'Apocalisse e i suoi enigmi*, 137.

⁸² D. E. AUNE, *Revelation 17-22* (Word Biblical Commentary 52C), Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, TN 1998, 1146.

⁸³ Of the architectural structures of the New Jerusalem, the wall is the first to be described. The wall is great (μέγα) and high (ὑψηλόν) (v. 12); the height is a hundred and forty-four cubits by man's measure, namely, an angel's measure (v. 17). As W. J. Harrington remarks, «144 (12 x 12) is a fitting symbolic description of a wall that associates the twelve tribes of Israel with the twelve apostles of the Lamb». cfr. W. J. HARRINGTON, *Revelation*, 214.

⁸⁴ C. C. VERMEULE, *Roman Imperial Art in Greece and Asia Minor*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1968, 16.

⁸⁵ The unusual phrase "the tribes of the sons of Israel" was used earlier in 7,4. The association of the names of the 12 tribes of Israel with the gates of the New Jerusalem implies the realization of one of the central concerns of Jewish eschatology, namely, the restoration of the 12 tribes of Israel, which is repeatedly mentioned in post-exilic Old Testament and early Jewish literature (Isa 49,5-6; Jer 31,10; Ezek 34,37, *Jubilees* 1,15-17; *Testament of Benjamin* 9,2). cfr. D. E. AUNE, *Revelation 17-22*, 1155.

specific names are not mentioned (cfr. 7,5-8), undoubtedly because the author is primarily interested in the symbolic significance of the number 12 as a whole.

Twelve angels were at the gates (21,12b): According to Gen 3,24 and Ezek 28,14.16, angels were thought to act as the guardians of Eden, the garden of God, and since the New Jerusalem is the eschatological counterpart of Eden (2,7; 22,1-5), angelic guards at its gates seem appropriate⁸⁶. Angels were prominent in the decoration of the Solomonic temple, and their presence on the doors of the temple (1 Kgs 6,29-35; 2 Chr 3,7; Ezek 41,17-25) may reflect one of their roles as the guardians of the garden of God. Angels are occasionally depicted as armed (Josh 5,13; Num 22,23; 1 Chr 21,16.30; 3 Enoch 22,6) and therefore as capable of protecting the temple of God (4 Macc 4,10) or the people of God (3 Macc 6,18-19) and Rabbinic Judaism understood these watchmen as the angels Michael and Gabriel⁸⁷.

The 12 gates that John describes underline the invitational character of the New Jerusalem⁸⁸. This is different from the gates of Ezek 40-48, the text on which Revelation's vision is modelled. Ezekiel's 12 city gates are "exits" (Ezek 48,30), not entrances. Their function is to provide the 12 tribes with a way to go *out* from the city to cultivate their inherited land. But in Revelation, the gates provide entrance *into* the New Jerusalem. This is made explicit in the beatitude of 22,14 with its repeated preposition "into": "Blessed are they who wash their robes... so that by the gates they might enter into the city". The gates of New Jerusalem are entrances, not exits, and they are never shut (21,25). A terrifying threat concludes the architectural

⁸⁶ Cfr. "On your walls, O Jerusalem, I have appointed watchmen" (Isa 62,6). R. H. MOUNCE, *The Book of Revelation*, 379; J. P. M. SWEET, *Revelation*, 304; D. E. AUNE, *Revelation* 17-22, 1155.

⁸⁷ Cfr. *Exodus Rabba* 18,5; *Pesiqta de Rab Kahana* 6.2; A. SCHLATTER, *Das Alte Testament in der johanneischen Apokalypse*, Bertelsmann, Gütersloh 1912, 102.

⁸⁸ M. RISSI, *The Future of the World: An Exegetical Study of Revelation* 19,11-22-15, 71; B. R. ROSSING, *The Choice between two Cities: Wore, Bride, and Empire in the Apocalypse*, Trinity Press International, Harrisburg, PA 1999, 154.

tour of 21,27, making clear that only those whose names are written in the book of life of the Lamb may enter the city.

And the 12 gates were 12 pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl (21,21). The gates of pearl are a concluding part of the allusion to Isa 54,11-12. The 12 pearls are good examples of the figurative nature of the whole vision since it is ridiculous to conceive of literal pearls so big that each one suffices for a gate proportional to a wall approximately 216 feet high⁸⁹. In the light of Isa 54, the precious stones together with the foundation, wall, and gates of the city in Rev 21 are best seen as symbolizing the permanent safety of God's people together with God's glorious presence (e.g., 21,2-4.10-11.18-23).

2.2.2 The 12 Foundations (Rev 21,14)

The New Jerusalem is built upon 12 "foundation stones" *θεμελίου* on each of which the name of one of the 12 Apostles is written.

It is striking that in 21,14 we are told that the Apostles are part of the foundation, whereas the 12 tribes are part of the gates in the wall built on that foundation (cfr. v. 13). One might have expected the opposite portrayal since Israel preceded the Church in redemptive history. But the reversal figuratively highlights the fact that fulfilment of Israel's promises has finally come in Christ, who, together with the apostolic witness to his fulfilling work, forms the foundation of the new temple, the Church, which is the new Israel⁹⁰.

⁸⁹ G. K. BEALE, *The Book of Revelation*, 1088.

⁹⁰ E. W. HENGSTENBERG, *The Revelation of St. John* (vol. 2), Carter, New York, NY 1853, 407- 408; H. LILJE, *The Last Book of the Bible: The Meaning of the Revelation of St. John*, Muhlenberg, Philadelphia, PA 1957, 266; G. A. KRODEL, *Revelation*, 358. The New Jerusalem does not consist of two kinds of people: the New Testament people (Church) and the Old Testament People (Israel). By the progression of Revelation, during the Old Testament period, God's people are represented by 'Israel', and in the time of the New Testament, God's people are represented by 'Church'. The New Testament Church built by the 12 apostles is the fulfilment of the Israel represented by the 12 tribes. Here there are not two separate people but only one people. The people were called Israel in the past but now they are called Church.

The 12 foundations of the New Jerusalem were “adorned with every precious stone” (21,19a). John then goes on to list the individual names of the foundation stones as follows (vv. 19b-20): 1) ἴασπις, 2) σάπφειρος, 3) χαλκηδών, 4) σμάραγδος, 5) σαρδόνυξ, 6) σάρδιον, 7) χρυσόλιθος, 8) βήρυλλος, 9) τοπάζιον, 10) χρυσόπρασος, 11) ἰάκινθος, and 12) ἀμέθυστος.

The list of the “12 precious stones” adorning the foundation stones of the New Jerusalem is based on the list in Exod 28,17-20 and 39,8-14⁹¹. These Exodus references describe the 12 stones on the high priest’s “breastpiece”, which was a small bag containing the *Urim* and *Thummim*⁹². On each side, the “breastpiece” was set with 12 precious stones in four rows of three stones each (Exod 28,16-20 = 39,9-13). On each stone was engraved the name of one of the 12 Israelite tribes (Exod 28,21 = 39,14). The priest was to “carry the names of the sons of Israel in the breastpiece of judgement...when he enters the holy place, for a memorial before the Lord continually”. Therefore, these stones symbolized all Israel, so that the priest in all his cultic actions represented all Israel before the presence of God in the temple (Exod 28,29).

How does John transfer the imagery from the high priest’s breastpiece to the foundation of the city? Second Isaiah

All God’s people before the Church have been incorporated into the Church after she appears. cfr. P. LEE, *The New Jerusalem in the Book of Revelation*, 280.

⁹¹ E. F. JOURDAIN, «The Twelve Stones in the Apocalypse», in *The Expository Times* 22 (1911), 448-450; R. H. CHARLES, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of St. John* (ICC, vol. 2), 165; E. LOHSE, «Die alttestamentliche Sprache des Sehers Johannes», in *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 52 (1961), 122-126; A. VANHOYE, «L’ utilisation du livre d’Ezéchiel dans l’Apocalypse», in *Biblica* 43 (1962), 436-476; L. P. TRUDINGER, «Some Observations Concerning the text of the OT in the Book of Revelation», in *The Journal of Theological Studies* 17 (1966), 82-88.

⁹² H. KRAFT, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 271-272; W. W. READER, «The Twelve Jewels of Revelation 21,19-20: Tradition, History and Modern Interpretations», in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 100 (1981), 435; J. A. DRAPER, «The Twelve Apostles as the Foundation Stones of the Heavenly Jerusalem and the Foundation of the Qumran Community», in *Neotestamentica* 22 (1988), 43.

describes the restoration of Jerusalem: “Behold I will set your stones in antimony, and lay your foundations with sapphires. I will make your pinnacles of agate, your gates of carbuncle, and all your wall of precious stones” (Isa 54,11-12). And, in interpreting this text, 4QpIs^d fgt. 1 links the stones of the high priest’s breastpiece to the stones in Jerusalem’s foundation⁹³. Thus, John would appear to have followed a similar process of interpretation as the Qumran commentator.

The accounts of the arrangements of the precious stones both in Exodus and in Revelation are different and therefore much debated, especially in relation to the 12 signs of the Zodiac. Bousset⁹⁴ relates this to speculation concerning the mythical “heavenly city”. Charles and Caird⁹⁵ saw a deliberate reversal of the order of the precious stones associated with the Zodiac, indicating a Christian rejection of the power of the Zodiac. Reader⁹⁶ has shown this to be unlikely, especially since there is no clear correlation of gemstones in Hebrew and Greek, nor is there any clear evidence concerning the identification of particular gems with particular signs of the Zodiac. Certainly, the signs of the Zodiac would have been familiar to contemporary Jews. In fact, in Philo and Josephus, the garment of the High Priest is seen as a replica of the universe, so that the 12 stones of the *Urim* and *Thummim* are equated with the Zodiac⁹⁷.

However, if the author of Revelation knew such a speculation, it plays no clear role in his thinking. According to

⁹³ A. YARBRO COLLINS, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation*, 242.

⁹⁴ W. BOUSSET, *Die Offenbarung Johannis*, 447.

⁹⁵ R. H. CHARLES, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of St. John* (ICC, vol. 2), 168; G. B. CAIRD, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine*, 274-277.

⁹⁶ W. W. READER, *The Twelve Jewels of Revelation 21,19-20*, 455. Against Reader, O. BÖCHER, «Zur Bedeutung der Edelsteine in Offenbarung 21», in *Kirche in Zeit und Endzeit: Aufsätze zur Offenbarung des Johannes*, Neukirchener Verlag, Neukirchen-Vluyn 1983, 148-149; 154-155.

⁹⁷ PHILO, *De Monarchia*, 2.5; *De vita Mosis*, 3. 14; JOSEPHUS, *Antiquitates*, 3.7.7

Kraft⁹⁸, John “did not want to do any more than enumerate a list of 12 precious stones...costliness and splendour of the heavenly city are expressed, and more is not intended”. And above all, according to Swete, he has managed to find out an order and pattern of his own with regard to the precious stone list⁹⁹.

The colours of the stones are various shades of blue, green, red, and yellow. Though it is possible that the diverse colours figuratively connote saints with varying gifts and characters, the significance rather lies in another direction. Both Exodus and Isaiah link God’s glory with the precious stones, so that it may be deduced that one of the purposes of the variously coloured precious stones in Rev 21 (e.g., 21,11.23; 22,5) is to reflect the luminous divine glory. Rev 4,3.9-11 confirms this, where three of the precious stones are mentioned and their significance is directly linked with emphasizing God’s glory. As the high priest represented the 12 tribes before God in the temple, so the 12 stones reflect God’s glory¹⁰⁰. They symbolize the presence of God, the divine origin of the city, and the new people of God¹⁰¹. In their present context in Revelation, the 12 stones pose a contrast to the jewels adorning the whore of Babylon (17,4; 18,22.16). The end-time city of God is diametrically opposed to the lascivious ruling city of this present world.

2.2.3 The 12 Fruits (Rev 22,2)

Rev 22,1-5 continues the depiction of the New Jerusalem in 21,9-27 with a last expanded view¹⁰². John sees God who sat upon the great white throne and then hears his proclamation

⁹⁸ H. KRAFT, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 271-272. H. HOEKSEMA, *Behold He Cometh: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, Reformed Free Publishing Association, Grand Rapids, MI 1969, 699, suggests a hermeneutical principal in understanding the description of the jewellery as follows: «we must not attempt to allegorise every detail here; that would be in conflict with the whole idea of the vision and would involve us in hopeless difficulty».

⁹⁹ H. B. SWETE, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, 290-294.

¹⁰⁰ O. BÖCHER, *Zur Bedeutung der Edelsteine in Offenbarung 21*, 28.

¹⁰¹ W. W. READER, *The Twelve Jewels of Revelation 21,19-20*, 456.

¹⁰² G. K. BEALE, *The Book of Revelation*, 1103.

concerning the end of the old world and the creation of the new. He sees the new heaven and the new earth and the descent of the New Jerusalem, and hears that God himself will henceforth abide with men. Then the angel showed John the river of life, rising from the throne of God and of the Lamb. Down the middle of the city street, on either bank of the river were the trees of life, which bear 12 crops of fruit in a year, one in each month (22,2).

Producing 12 kinds of fruit, each yielding its fruit each month: this is an allusion to the trees of Ezek 47,12, “they will bear fresh fruit every month”, though here the trees even more miraculously bear 12 different kinds of fruit, one kind each month, while in Ezek 47,12 the trees simply yield a fresh crop of fruit each month. A total of 12 months of fruit bearing together with “12 kinds of fruits” in 22,2 reinforces the repeated multiples of 12 already used in the vision to highlight fullness of redemptive provision¹⁰³.

2.2.4 The Relationship between Rev 21,12.14.21; 22,1 and Rev 14,1-5

Just as the 144,000 in 14,1-5 stands for the people of God based on the symbolic number 12, in the New Jerusalem presented in 21-22, also we find 12. Here, in the description of the New Jerusalem, the number 12 denotes, in spite of all and above all, the spaces of the city first, and then its times¹⁰⁴. The city, as it is seen, has four sides (21,16) and each side of the wall has three gates (v. 13) and three foundations (v. 14). The number 12 can be arrived by the multiplication of 4 x 3 both for the gates and for the foundations. But, John has explicitly stated that upon the 12 gates are the 12 angels and the 12 names of the tribes of Israel (v. 12), and upon the 12 foundations are the 12 names of the apostles of the Lamb (v. 14). The foundations are composed of 12 different precious

¹⁰³ M. KIDDLE, *The Revelation of St. John*, 442.

¹⁰⁴ John introduces numbers as means of expressing important theological concepts. cfr. B. R. ROSSING, *The Choice between two Cities*, 63.

stones (vv. 19-20) and the 12 gates with the 12 pearls (v. 21). It is to be noted that the 12 of the tribes and 12 of the apostles of the Lamb tell diachronically about the one people of God for whom the New Jerusalem is prepared. The 12 comes again in its multiples in the measurements of the length, breadth and height of the new city that are 12,000 *stadia* (v. 16) and the perimeter of its wall, i.e., 144,000. In the New Jerusalem the tree of life, irrigated by the river of the water of life, produces 12 fruits, one for each month (22,2). Thus in the New Jerusalem, 12 is the measurement of the times as well as that of the spaces.

So both in 14,1-5 and in 21-22 we see the people of God presented through the symbolic number 12. The people of God presented in 14,1-5 as standing upon the Mount Zion around the Lamb are specifically said to stem from the people of God of the Old Testament and of the New Testament. The people of God is presented in 14,1-5 in its brevity, but in 21-22 it is presented in its details. The Lamb is the Bridegroom with whom his bride¹⁰⁵, the people of God, is now united in a state of everlasting blessedness (19,7-9). The faithful are the vibrant components of the New Jerusalem. Thus 21-22 helps us to grasp the theological purpose of John regarding the people of God in its detail.

As we have been searching the relationship of 7,4-8; 12; 13; and 21-22 with 14,1-5 we can come to the conclusion that 12 is the number of the people of God of the past, i.e., the 12 tribes (7,4-8), and of the present, i.e., the 144,000 sealed (14,1-5) and the woman crowned with 12 stars (12,1), and of the future, in its eschatological finality, i.e., the New Jerusalem (21-22).

Conclusion

In these first and second parts we have analysed 7,1-8, 12, 1 and, 21,12.14.21; 22,1 as parallel and supporting texts to understand well 14,1-5. In all these texts we saw the presence

¹⁰⁵ A. YARBRO COLLINS, «Feminine Symbolism in the Book of Revelation», in *Biblical Interpretation: A Journal of Contemporary Approaches* 1 (1993), 25.

of the numerical symbol 12 and its clever application by John as an effective symbol to represent the people of God.

In 7,4-8, we see the enumeration of 12 tribes of Israel and each one includes 12,000 with the seal of the living God. This 12,000 is the multiple of 12×1000 . Along with this 7,4, precisely mentions the sum total 144,000 ($12000 + 12000 + 12000$ etc = 144,000). This number, 144,000, is also the sum of 12. So in 7,4-8, the numerical symbol 12 stands as the number of the people of God.

In the first section of the second part we saw the appearance of the number 12 in the presentation of the “woman with a crown of 12 stars” (12,1). The scholars are divided into two major groups regarding the identity of the “woman with a crown of 12 stars”. Some say that this figure symbolizes Mary, the mother of God and the others would say it represents the people of God. After having analyzed the text, we arrived at the conclusion that the vision of the “woman with a crown of 12 stars” symbolizes the people of God. Here too we can see how John uses the numerical symbol 12 to present the Messianic people of the Old Testament and of the New Testament.

In the second section of the second part, we saw the eschatological Jerusalem where we notice the presence of 12 regarding the people of God. Here the number 12 denotes, in spite of all and above all, the spaces of the city and then its times. We saw that the number 12 can be arrived at by the multiplication of 4×3 both for the gates and for the foundations. In addition, John has explicitly stated further that upon the 12 gates are the 12 names of the tribes of Israel (21,12), and the 12 names of the disciples of the Lamb are upon the 12 foundations (21,14). We saw that the 12 of the tribes and 12 of the apostles of the Lamb point to the one people of God for whom the New Jerusalem is prepared. The tree of life situated in the New Jerusalem produces 12 fruits, one for each month (22,2). Thus in the eschatological city 12 is the measurement of the times as well as that of the spaces.

Thus, the above two parts present the numerical symbol 12 as the number of the people of God both of the past (indicated by the 12 tribes), and of the present (indicated by the woman crowned with the 12 stars and the 144,000 faithful followers of the Lamb), and for the future, in its eschatological finality (indicated by the space and time of the New Jerusalem).

3. Rev 13: The Contrasting Chapter to Rev 14,1-5

Introduction

In this third part of chapter two, we study Rev 13, which stands in total contrast to 14,1-5. Rev 13 can be divided into two parts: the emergence of the first beast, the beast from the sea, (13,1-10) and the emergence of the second beast, the beast from the earth (13,11-18).

The first beast enjoys the power, throne and immense authority of the dragon. The second beast, instead, exercises the power of the first beast and makes the world and its people worship the first beast. It compels everyone to be marked on the right hand or on the forehead. These two beasts thus protect and support the people for being on the side of evil, in opposition to the 144,000 faithful of the Lamb.

The New Testament has 38 occurrences of the word 'beast', *θηρίον*. 37 of these are to be found in Rev 13. Here the first beast is referred to 36 times and the second just once (v. 11). Significantly, all these references have a strongly negative flavour. It is negative above all the semantically. The Commentators on Revelation contrast *θηρίον* with *ζῷον*, and observe that the first term applies to animals only when it is used in contrast to human beings and that the second term denotes animals themselves there are no ferocious beasts and can be used for humans as living beings¹⁰⁶ (cfr. 4,6). The animals are symbols of strength and they excel human possibilities, but always under God's control and power¹⁰⁷.

This section is divided into three parts:

¹⁰⁶ W. FOERSTER, «*θηρίον*», in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 3, 135; J. MASSYNGBERDE FORD, *Revelation*, 219.

¹⁰⁷ U. VANNI, *L'Apocalisse*, 39.

- 1) The emergence of the first beast from the sea.
- 2) The emergence of another beast from the earth.
- 3) The two beasts: both parallel and contrasting characters.

3.1 The Emergence of the First Beast from the Sea (Rev 13,1-10)

In this section we study the first beast that comes from the sea, its attributes and its devilish activities.

In Rev 13,1-10, we can see a vicious reflection of the presentation of the Lamb in Rev 5. Just as the Lamb received the sealed scroll from the one seated upon the throne (5,7), and thereby received power and authority (5,12), so the first beast receives authority from the dragon (13,2). Just as the Lamb is the ruler over people from all tribes, languages, and nations purchased through his blood (5,9), so the first beast rules over tribes, peoples, languages, and nations (13,7). Just as the heavenly cherubim, representing the entire created order, offer their homage to the Lamb (5,12), so the inhabitants of the earth fall prostrate before the first beast, pay him homage, and offer him a song of praise (13,4). Just as the sign of recognition of the Lamb is the marks of his slaughter (5,6), so the first beast also bears a mortal wound that has been healed (13,3).

3.1.1 The Description of the First Beast (Rev 13,1-2a)

The description of the first beast starts with the emergence of the same “from the sea” ἐκ τῆς θαλάσσης. The prepositional phrase ἐκ τῆς θαλάσσης immediately following the verb and its object is unusual, but this serves to emphasize the phrase “from the sea”, thus showing that 13,1 is linked with 12,18, which mentions the sea as the place where the dragon took his stand¹⁰⁸. That the first beast arises from the same place of origin of the dragon shows it to be of the same devilish nature and to be on the Devil’s side (cfr. 12,3; Ps 73,13-14; 89,10; Isa 30,7; 51,9;

¹⁰⁸ H. KRAFT, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 172.

Ezek 29,3; 32,2-3; Hab 3,8-15). In Revelation, the sea symbolizes at times a force which is hostile to God (20,13; 21,1). The sea is the sphere of primeaval chaos; and, as an alternative source of evil to the abyss (11,7), it is a fitting point of departure for the beast who is characteristically violent¹⁰⁹.

The “sea” reference would again speak of a sea upon which appear the many regions in which inhabit various tribes and ethnic groups (cfr. v. 7). The “sea” is the means of communication that touches all and unifies many territories under one reign or empire¹¹⁰. This “sea” is different from that of Patmos. W. Hadron¹¹¹ says the “sea” here is “the western sea”, and H. Conzelmann and A. Lindemann¹¹² say explicitly: the “sea” here is the Mediterranean Sea, the *mare nostrum* of the Roman Empire.

This beast that is “from the sea”, has “ten horns” and “seven heads”, with “ten diadems” upon its horns and a blasphemous name upon its heads. The order in which the various parts of its body are mentioned (i.e., horns, head, body, feet) has led some to find here an eyewitness account of the beast’s actual emergence from the waters¹¹³.

The horns, *κέρας*, are typically metaphorical of power¹¹⁴ (e.g., Num 23,22; Deut 33,17; Ps 21,22; 1 Enoch 90,6-18.37-39;

¹⁰⁹ S. S. SMALLEY, *The Revelation to John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse*, Intervarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL 2005, 335.

¹¹⁰ G. BIGUZZI, *L’Apocalisse e i suoi enigmi*, 59.

¹¹¹ W. HADRON, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, Deichert, Leipzig 1928, 139.

¹¹² H. CONZELMANN - A. LINDEMANN, *Arbeitsbuch zum Neuen Testament*, Mohr-Siebeck, Tübingen 1975, 346. See also, E. SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA, *Revelation*, 83, «The seashore envisioned here is probably that of the Mediterranean Sea with Rome geographically located on its opposite shore».

¹¹³ R. H. CHARLES, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John* (ICC, vol. 1), 347; W. HENDRIKSEN, *More than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation*, Baker Press, Grand Rapids, MI 1962, 176.

¹¹⁴ C. H. TALBERT, *The Apocalypse*, 52; G. BIGUZZI, «I numeri nell’Apocalisse di Giovanni e il loro linguaggio», in *Liber Annuus* 50 (2000), 148.

Rev 5,6). As with the dragon's horns and heads, so here the number of "seven heads" and "ten horns" emphasizes the completeness of oppressive power and its worldwide effect. This understanding is supported further by the oppressive power presented by the horses' heads in 9,17-19 and the crowns on the afflicting locusts' heads in 9,7.

The diadem, *διάδημα*, or crown¹¹⁵ is clearly a symbol of multiform royal power and authority. The wearing of several diadems in antiquity indicated sovereignty over many nations (1 Macc 11,13). In our context, the diadems symbolize the beast's false claims of sovereign, universal authority in opposition to the true "King of kings and Lord of lords", who also wears "many diadems" (19,12.16). The mention of diadems in addition to horns appears somewhat redundant since both can be construed as symbols of power. More than that, the plural form of diadem is very strange because a king could wear only one diadem; otherwise he would be considered a usurper¹¹⁶.

Among the descriptions of the beast, two numbers are characteristic: seven and ten¹¹⁷ (i.e., seven heads and ten diadems). Seven is the parody number of God and the Lamb and ten is the number of the Devil (cfr. 2, 10), which explains great physical power (i.e., ten horns) and great political power (i.e., ten diadems). But here the notable element is the disorder between the seven heads and the ten diadems. How then do the ten diadems suit the seven heads? This disproportion among the ten and the seven is intentional and emphasises, on the one hand, the arrogant ostentation of power and, on the other, disorder and chaos¹¹⁸. And, further, this ferocious figure alerts the readers and faithful to the threats that the beast poses.

¹¹⁵ C. HAURET, «Eve transfigurée. De la Genèse à l'Apocalypse», in *Revue d'Histoire Philosophie Religieuses* 59 (1979), 330; L. L. THOMPSON, *Revelation*, 138.

¹¹⁶ G. BIGUZZI, «Il potere della bestia e il demoniaco nell'Apocalisse», in *Parola spirito e vita* 51 (2005), 199.

¹¹⁷ G. BIGUZZI, *L'Apocalisse e i suoi enigmi*, 138-139.

¹¹⁸ G. BIGUZZI, «Il potere della bestia e il demoniaco nell'Apocalisse», 198.

The description of the beast is continued with the reference to the “blasphemous names”, *ὀνόμα[τα] βλασφημίας*, upon its heads. The phrase “blasphemous names” also occurs in 17,3, where the great harlot is described as sitting on a red beast, which is covered with blasphemous names and which also has seven heads and ten horns. The “blasphemies” written on the beast’s heads represent his blasphemous claims to earthly, divine kingship, in feeble imitation of Christ’s true kingship¹¹⁹.

The beast was like a leopard, with paws like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion (v. 2a)¹²⁰. We see an allusion to Dan 7,3-8. In Dan 7,3-8 the lion, bear, leopard, and “terrifying” beast represent four successive world empires, but here John has blended into one image various characteristics of these four beasts and the result is a monstrous creature that defies the imagination¹²¹. So the combination of four beasts into one highlights the extreme fierceness of this beast.

In 13,1-2 we can find a creative reworking of Dan 7. The description of the “beast coming up from the sea” is based on Dan 7,2-3. The “seven heads” can be a composite of the heads of the four beasts in Daniel¹²² because other features of the Danielic beasts are also applied to the beast in v. 2. In addition, the “ten diadems” on the “ten horns” are a reference to Daniel’s fourth beast, whose “ten horns” are interpreted as “ten kings” (Dan 7,7-20.24). Likewise, the “blasphemous names” are connected with the blaspheming figure of Dan 7,8-12 who is also associated with the fourth kingdom (cfr.

¹¹⁹ G. R. BEASLEY-MURRAY, *Revelation*, 199. Contrast 13,1 with 17,3, 13,7-13 with 1,5 and 17,14 with 9,12-16.

¹²⁰ The terms, “leopard” and “bear”, occur in the New Testament only in the present text. For “lions” in Revelation see also 4,7; 5,5; 9,8.17; 10,3.

¹²¹ J. L. D’ ARAGON, *The Apocalypse*, Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ 1968², 483.

¹²² E. W. HENGSTENBERG, *The Revelation of St. John* (vol. 2), 20; J. ERNST, *Die eschatologischen Gegenspieler in den Schriften des Neuen Testaments*, Pustet, Regensburg 1967, 132; H. KRAFT, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 175.

Rev 13,5-6). Part of the textual tradition (syr Σ)¹²³ in Rev 13,1 adds that the beast rising from the sea had “teeth”, which reflects scribal interpretation further identifying the beast with Daniel’s fourth kingdom. The dragon’s transferral of authority to the beast is also included as part of the creative reworking of Daniel 7,1-7, since authorization phraseology is also found there (cfr. Dan 7,4.6). It is true that certain aspects of the beast’s description could partially derive from allusion to ancient Near Eastern mythology¹²⁴; the depiction of the sea beast is primarily drawn from Daniel 7.

3.1.2 The Commissioning of the First Beast by the Dragon (Rev 13,2b)

The dragon has handed over to the first beast his own power, throne, and his immense authority. The synonyms “power, throne, and authority”, two of them followed by “his” (αὐτοῦ), emphasizes the direct transferral of first beast’s authority. This transfer of power constitutes a brief “enthronisation” scene¹²⁵, in which it is revealed that the first beast is an agent of the dragon. The dragon confers on the beast his own power, rule and great authority, although these are ultimately derived from God himself.

The throne of the dragon calls to mind the throne of Satan mentioned in 2,13, metaphorically located in Pergamum. The throne of the beast is again mentioned in 16,10, where the fifth angel pours out his bowl on the throne of the beast, causing its kingdom to be darkness.

¹²³ H. C. HOSKIER, *Concerning the Text of the Apocalypse* (vol. 2), Quaritch, London 1929, 333.

¹²⁴ Many understand the “seven heads” as a reference to an ancient Near Eastern sea monster myth from before the time of Daniel (Leviathan with seven heads; cfr. Job 40-41; Ps 74,13-14; 89,10; Isa 27,1; 51,9; *Odes of Solomon* 22,5).

¹²⁵ J. ROLOFF, *Revelation*, 136-137.

3.1.3 The Healed wound of the First Beast (Rev 13,3a)

John now sees one of the heads of the first beast depicted “as slain”¹²⁶. The phrase “as slain”, *ὡς ἐσφαγμένοι*, is an intended parody of the Lamb in 5,6, where the almost identical *ἐστηκὸς ὡς ἐσφαγμένοι* is to be translated as “standing as slain”. In both occurrences a real death or defeat is portrayed. The occurrence of *ὡς* throughout Revelation is part of John’s visionary style in introducing something that he has seen¹²⁷ (4,6; 8,8; 9,7; 15,2; 19,6). It is John’s attempt to give an approximate description in earthly terms of what he has seen in a heavenly vision.

By the defeat of the beast, the author intends more likely the victory over the Devil at the cross than some punishment of an evil historical figure. Despite defeat, the Devil and his forces continue to exist. “One of the heads” of the beast appeared “slain unto death”, but “his death wound was healed”. The beast’s recovery is mentioned again in 13,12 and emphasized in 13,14, which enforces the parallelism with the Lamb in 5,6 by alluding to the beast’s recovery as a resurrection: *καὶ ἔζησεν*, “and he lived”, the same phrase employed to describe Jesus’ resurrection in 2,8.

But there is a difference between the Lamb’s recovery and that of the beast. The Lamb really did conquer the defeat of death by resurrection, but the beast’s continued existence is not a reversal of his actual defeat. The Devil’s defeat entailed his loss of authority to accuse the faithful and condemn them to spiritual perdition (cfr. 12,7-12). Though he and the beasts

¹²⁶ God must be the unmentioned agent of the beast’s “wound”, *ἡ πληγὴ*, since everywhere else in Revelation *πληγὴ* is a punishment inflicted by God (9,18.20; 11,6; 13,3.12.14; 15,1.6.8; 16,9.21; 18,4.8; 21,9; 22,18 and the cognate verb in 8,12). cfr. G. K. BEALE, *The Book of Revelation*, 687. Rev 13,14 will add that it was a sword (*τῆς μαχαίρης*) that struck the beast’s head, recalling Isa 27,1: “In that day the Lord with his hard and great and strong sword (*τὴν μάχαιραν*) will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent” (cfr. Job 40,19). Elsewhere in Revelation a “sword” often signifies Jesus’ judgement of his enemies in the present (1,16; 2,12.16) and in the future (19,15.21), though the word in these instances is *ῥομφαία*, not *μάχαιρα* as in 13,14. Similarly, Jesus is also the one who exercises the sword that strikes the beast in 13,14.

¹²⁷ R. BAUCKHAM, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 432.

are repeatedly mentioned as having “authority”¹²⁸ in chapter 13, they have no authority over the faithful and no authority but what God gives them.

Indeed, there are so many parallels between the description of the beast in Rev 13 and that of Christ elsewhere in Revelation¹²⁹.

Both Christ and the beast

- 1) Have swords
- 2) Have followers who have their names written on their foreheads (13,16;14,1)
- 3) Have horns (5,6; 13,1.11)
- 4) Are slain (5,6; 13,3.8)
- 5) Rise to new life and are given new authority
- 6) Have authority over “every tribe, tongue, people, and nation” (5,9; 7,9; 13,7; 17,12.15)
- 7) Receive universal worship (cfr. 5,8-14; 13,4.8).

These parallels show that the beast is set up as the supreme enemy of Christ-Lamb and his followers. The only figure who fits the description of the beast is the Devil himself, as he repeatedly works through his chosen agents throughout history. Therefore, whenever any major opponent of God reaches his demise, it appears as if the beast has been defeated,

¹²⁸ Nevertheless, the dragon and the beast deceptively cover up the fact that their authority has been removed. Rev 12,10-12 has shown that, after the dragon is defeated, he is permitted “a little time” still to express his anger over the defeat, but it will avail nothing toward reversing the situation. Rev 17,8 likewise notes that the beast’s apparent “rising” from death is not ultimately so that he should be destroyed: «the beast that you saw was and is not and is about to ascend from abyss and goes to destruction». The dragon is thus so convincing in hiding his defeat as apparent victory that «the whole earth marvelled after the beast». This universal expression does not refer to all people without exception. Instead, it refers to all those who are not protected by God’s seal (7,1-4).

¹²⁹ P. S. MINEAR, *I Saw a New Earth: An Introduction to the Visions of the Apocalypse*, Corpus, Washington, DC 1969, 252-256; R. BAUCKHAM, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 434.

yet he will arise again in some other form, until the end of history. Such revivals make it appear as if Christ's defeat of the Devil was not very decisive. But such revivals are under the ultimate hand of God, who "gives the authority".

3.1.4 The Reactions of the People to the Dragon and the First Beast (Rev 13,3b-4)

The influence of the first beast upon the whole inhabited earth is explicitly mentioned in 13,3b-4 and the affirmations in the following verses intensify it: "and it was given power over every race, people, language and nation" (13,7b), and "all people of the earth will worship it" (13,8). And all the people of the world are given a brief but significant speaking part¹³⁰ in v. 4.

The loyalty of the whole people now expresses itself in the worship¹³¹ of both the dragon and the beast. And they follow the beast (13,3c) and ask, "Who is like the beast? Who can fight against it?" This rhetorical question is an expression of both impotence and despair¹³². This expression of the beast's incomparability echoes a similar literary form in Old Testament hymns (cfr. Ps 18,31; Isa 44,7; Mic 7,18). But in those contexts the question, "who is like you?", refers to God; for only about him can such an interrogation rightly be made. Clearly, therefore, the question in relation to the beast must be a parody of Judaic expressions of praise (cfr. Exod 15,11). The parody is ironic. To worship Satan, rather than the true and eternal Lord (Rev 7,14-17; 22,8-9), is a vain exercise, for the rule of the devil and his agents is about to end (12,12).

¹³⁰ Since biblical writers tend to avoid indirect speech, this use of direct discourse is the author's way of revealing the attitude of all who worship the first beast. cfr. R. ALTER, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, Basic Books, New York, NY 1981, 63-87. The literary device of attributing a single statement to a large group of people is often found in the Old Testament (Gen 11,3-4; Ru 1,19; 1 Sam, 4,6-9; 1 Macc 1,11).

¹³¹ The worship of the first beast, or its image, is mentioned here and several more times from this point on in Revelation (13,8.12.15; 14,9.11; 16,2; 20,4), though nothing is explicitly stated about the mode of this worship.

¹³² D. E. AUNE, *Revelation* 6-16, 742.

The expression of incomparability on the lips of the beast's worshipers is the epitome of blasphemy. It brings to greater expression the Danielic idea of the proud king who attempts to magnify himself above God in the end time (Dan 8,11.25; 11,36-37).

3.1.5 God's Empowerment of the First Beast (Rev 13,5)

In v. 5, the first beast is given permission to act as an antagonist of God: it is given the ability to speak (v. 5a) both "haughty and blasphemous words"¹³³. The two motifs of hubris and blasphemy against God are mentioned in this verse and these two motifs are combined here to claim divine honours. Thus the beast's speech refers to his hubris in exalting himself above God and in demanding worship above everything else (cfr. 13,3b-4; Dan 7,25; 8,10-11; 11,36) and his activity of deception. The deceptive influence has been hinted at in v. 4b (i.e., "the whole earth was amazed at the beast") and is developed throughout the remainder of chapter 13. His speech is, moreover, blasphemous. Calling the speech "blasphemy" enhances the idea of deception, since blasphemy involves slandering or defaming the name of the true God¹³⁴.

And again it was allowed to exercise authority for "forty-two months"¹³⁵ (v. 5b), that is, three and a half years. With this phrase John would like to say that the dragon (12,6.14) and the first beast (13,5) act for a time span which is half of seven. Thus he says that though the dragon and beast act for a while it is

¹³³ This phrase is a clear allusion to Dan 7,8.20 where the little horn is said to have «a mouth speaking great things». The phrase, «give mouth», is a Semitic idiom meaning, «give someone something to say» (e.g., Luke 21,15). cfr. D. E. AUNE, *Revelation* 6-16, 742.

¹³⁴ W. BAUER - W. F. ARNDT - F. W. DANKER, «Βλασφημία» in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 143.

¹³⁵ The phrase «forty-two months» carries a collective allusion to Dan 7,25; 8,14; and 9,27. Other occurrences of this phrase are 12,6 (i.e., 1260 days) and 12,14 (i.e., a time, and times, and half a time). The plural «times» indicates the dual form, B. J. LE FROIS, *The Woman Clothed with the Sun* (Ap. 12), 186; A. KASSING, *Die Kirche und Maria*, 53.

really of a halved time and an act that is lacking with respect to the efficacious and perfect act of God and of the Lamb¹³⁶.

Including v. 5, the singular aorist passive verb ἐδόθη occurs four times in the identical phrase καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ, “and it was given” (i.e., vv. 5; 7[bis]); in each instance the passive voice of the verb can be construed as a passive of divine activity, as a circumlocution for the direct mention of God as the subject of the action of the verb. John emphasises here the ultimate sovereignty and control of God over events that occur in the world.

3.1.6 The Cruel Deeds of the Beast (Rev 13,6-7b)

The outcome of the beast’s haughty and defamatory activities is described here. The expression ἤνοιξεν τὸ στόμα αὐτοῦ, “it opened its mouth”, is used elsewhere in the New Testament to introduce an extended discourse (Matt 5,2; Acts 8,35); and this may suggest here that the blasphemies of the beast against God were to be sustained¹³⁷. The blasphemous aspects of these speeches lies less in the direct slander of God and more in the pretension of trying to occupy God’s place and seize his sovereign power. Now we will see in detail the cruel deeds of the beast against God (v. 6) and against his people (vv. 6c.7).

3.1.6.1 Against God (Rev 13,6a.b)

The first beast as the enemy of both God and his faithful followers concentrates its full capacity to blaspheme God. That “he blasphemes God’s name” implies a speaking out against God through self-deification. Also included in the blasphemy are accusations or actions against followers of the Lamb, who have God’s name written on them (3,12; 14,1; 22,4; cfr. 7,3).

The phrase that “it began to utter blasphemies against God” is an allusion to Dan 7,25a. The verb βλασφημεῖν, to blaspheme, is used four times in Revelation, twice with “God”

¹³⁶ G. BIGUZZI, *L’Apocalisse e i suoi enigmi*, 53.

¹³⁷ R. H. MOUNCE, *The Book of Revelation*, 250.

as the object (16,11,21) and twice with the “name” of God as the object (13,6; 16,19), while in the rest of the New Testament it is frequently used intransitively (Matt 9,3; 26,65; Mark 2,7; Acts 26,11; 1 Tim 1,20). The “name” of God is the epitome of his being and sovereign power¹³⁸ (cfr. 2,3,13). Blaspheming God or the name of God suggests a violation of the third commandment (Exod 20,7), a violation for which there was a capital penalty (Lev 24,16).

3.1.6.2 Against God’s People (Rev 13,6c.7)

In 13,6 the faithful on earth are the visible targets of the beast’s persecution (cfr. 11,1-2), and they are persecuted because their loyalty to their heavenly citizenship demands disobedience to their earthly citizenship¹³⁹. Here the first beast is allowed to persecute the people of God (13,7), just as the dragon who empowers it did (12,17).

The authority of the beast, for the moment, is universal. It extends over “every tribe and people and tongue and nation”, *πᾶσαν φυλὴν καὶ λαὸν καὶ γλῶσσαν καὶ ἔθνος*. This fourfold formula for humanity in v. 7 refers universally to all the unredeemed people throughout the created earth¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ J. ROLOFF, *Revelation*, 157-158.

¹³⁹ The accusative phrase *τοὺς ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ σκηνοῦντας* in v. 6c, «[that], those dwelling in heaven», is used in apposition to *τὴν σκηνὴν αὐτοῦ* «his dwelling place», and appears to be an interpretive gloss to remove the contradiction between *τὴν σκηνὴν αὐτοῦ* and 21,3, which states that «the dwelling of God is with people». Rev 21,3 is the only other place in Revelation where the noun *σκηνή*, «dwelling place», and the verb *σκηνώω*, «to dwell», occur together as in the present context. The equation of the faithful with the heavenly dwelling is virtually the same identification made in 11,1-2, where true faithful living on earth were equated with the invisible, indestructible sanctuary of God (cfr. 12,6,14). Part of the textual tradition of 13,6 interprets well «those dwelling in heaven» as «his chosen ones, those who dwell in heaven...». Thus, blaspheming God’s dwelling is metaphorically interpreted as referring to slandering the people of God, i.e., slander against them is slander against God. H. C. HOSKIER, *Concerning the Text of the Apocalypse* (vol. 2), 342. cfr. G. K. BEALE, *The Book of Revelation*, 697. G. B. CAIRD, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine*, 167.

¹⁴⁰ L. MORRIS, *The Revelation of St. John*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI 1987, 169.

and has the same all-inclusive scope in 5,9 and 7,9, where it is used of redeemed humanity throughout the universe. The universal geographical and temporal meaning is confirmed by the second part of v. 8, which says that these unbelieving multitudes were ordained not to have eternal life from before the creation of the whole world. From the four quarters of the world, and indeed from all the inhabitants of the earth, the forces of Satan expect to be worshipped¹⁴¹.

3.1.7 Those who Worship the First Beast (Rev 13,8)

By the personal appearance and the active propaganda of the second beast (vv. 12b-17), the first beast becomes the object of worship. Exactly like the dragon, the first beast receives the worship of the whole earth¹⁴². The worship is given because of the first beast's absolute authority¹⁴³. The authority by which the first beast overcomes the faithful and wins universal worship comes from the same source from which the Son of Man will receive his triumph over the beast, his authority, and his cosmic adoration. Therefore, John's use of taunt¹⁴⁴ or literary sport is perhaps drawn from the juxtaposition of the authorization clauses in Dan 7,6 and 14. The beast's authority and worship is then but an ironic taunting prelude to the coming victory of the Son of Man.

¹⁴¹ The sudden switch from the aorist in v. 7a, ἐδόθη, to the future indicative, προσκυνήσουσιν, here suggests that this part of the vision, the worship of the first beast by all the inhabitants of the earth, lies in the future. The phrase «the inhabitants of the earth» occurs nine times in Revelation, but only here are all the inhabitants of the earth mentioned. cfr. D. E. AUNE, *Revelation* 6-16, 746.

¹⁴² The expression «all the earth's inhabitants» refers negatively to unbelievers who are subject to divine judgement, because they oppress the people of God and practice idolatry (cfr. 11,10). cfr. S. S. SMALLEY, *The Revelation to John*, 342.

¹⁴³ It is to be noted that it is the dragon who gave, ἔδωκεν, his authority, ἐξουσία, to the beast. The verb δίδωμι, «give», is found elsewhere with ἐξουσία, «authority», and a form of αὐτος, «he» (1 Macc 1,13; 10,6; Sir 17,2; 30,11; 45,17; Matt 10,1; Mark 6,7; Luke 9,1; John 1,12; 5,27; 17,2). However, the use of the passive φη δίδωμι with ἐξουσία is unique to Rev 6,8; 9,3; 13,5.7.

¹⁴⁴ G. K. BEALE, *The Book of Revelation*, 700.

“Everyone whose name was not written in the book of life (of the Lamb destined to be slaughtered) since the creation of the world” (v. 8b): the syntax of this passage is ambiguous, and there are two quite different ways of understanding the meaning of this text. At first glance, it seems more natural, given the existing word order of the text, to connect the phrase ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου, “since the creation of the world”, with ἐσφαγμένου, “slain”, and to translate the passage so: “whose name has not been written in the book of life the Lamb, slaughtered from the foundation of the world”¹⁴⁵. It is also grammatically possible to link the prepositional phrase ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου το γέγραπται, “written”, as it must be understood in the parallel passage in 17,8, and therefore to translate the passage “whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slaughtered”¹⁴⁶. This interpretation is preferable since it is logically and theologically impossible to make sense of the statement that the Lamb “was slaughtered *before* the foundation of the world”. There is a closer parallel in 1 Pet 1,19-20, which refers to “the precious blood of Christ, like a blameless and spotless lamb, known already before the world

¹⁴⁵ G. B. CAIRD, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine*, 168; R. H. MOUNCE, *The Book of Revelation*, 256; J. P. M. SWEET, *Revelation*, 212; W. J. HARRINGTON, *Revelation*, 139. The formula ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου, «before the beginning of the world», occurs four times in the New Testament outside Revelation (Matt 25,34; Luke 11,50; Heb 4,3; 9,26), twice in Revelation (here and in 17,8), and once in the Apostolic Fathers (BARNABAS, *Epistulae Barnabas*, 5.5, where God says to the Lord «from the foundation of the world», ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου, «Let us make man in our image and likeness»). Καταβολή can mean «beginning» or «foundation» and, more specifically, «creation» (cfr. 1 *Clement* 57,1; JOSEPHUS, *Antiquitates*, 2.409, 417; *Epistle of Aristeeas* 129). In the New Testament the formula is used (1) of the relationship between the Father and the Son before creation (John 17,24), (2) of the election of God’s people from the outset of God’s creative activity (Matt 25,34; Rev 17,8), (3) of events occurring since the beginning of history (Luke 11,50), (4) of the creation of the universe (Heb 4,3), and (5) of the mission of Christ foreordained before the creation of the world (1 Pet 1,20; Rev 13,8).

¹⁴⁶ B. WEIß, *Johannes - Apokalypse*, J. C. Hinrichs’sche Buchhandlung, Leipzig 1891, 194.

was made". While it is possible to think of Christ as *destined* to die for the sins of the world, it is quite another thing to say that he was *slain* before the creation of the world.

The followers of the Lamb can have assurance of ultimate triumph with the Lamb because their names "have been written in the Lamb's book of life" (v. 8b). The phrase "book of life", βιβλίω τῆς ζωῆς, appears five other times in Revelation (3,5; 17,8; 20,12.15; 21,27). In each case, as here, it is a metaphor for faithful followers of the Lamb whose salvation has been determined: their names have been entered into the book of life before history began (cfr. 21,27), i.e., "from the foundation of the world" (13,8 and 17,8).

The genitive τῆς ζωῆς, "of life", denotes the nature or purpose of the book¹⁴⁷. The book symbolizes the security in God's eternal city, and the genitive clarifies what kind of security is provided. The faithful followers of the Lamb are given the protection of eternal life. This book stands in contrast to the "books" that record the sins of the ungodly (20,12-13).

3.1.8 The Exhortation and Call to Endurance (Rev 13,9-10)

Verses 9 and 10 have an altogether different literary character¹⁴⁸ when compared with the vision narrated in vv. 1-8, because they serve as commentary on the meaning of the vision. These two verses describe the response that believers are to have to the situation of deception and persecution depicted in vv. 1-8.

Verse 9 gives a proclamation using the third person imperative, i.e., εἰ τις ἔχει οὐς ἀκουάτω, if anyone¹⁴⁹ has an

¹⁴⁷ G. K. BEALE, *The Book of Revelation*, 702.

¹⁴⁸ According to M. V. LEE, «A Call to Martyrdom: Function as Method and Message in Revelation», in *Novum Testamentum* 40 (1998), 191, «The sentences are even more striking since John steps out of his normal mode of narrating the visions to exhort the hearers directly».

¹⁴⁹ The emphasis on τις repeated thrice calls on John's audience to take personal responsibility. A. K. W. SIEW, *The War between the two beasts and the two witnesses*, T & T Clark, London 2005, 174.

ear, let him hear¹⁵⁰. This formula calls attention to the allusion to Jer 15,2 that follows and suggests that vv. 1-8 should be understood in the light of v. 10a, “If anyone is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes”; i.e., it indicates how faithful should face the threat of the first beast. Again, the allusion to Jer 15,2 in v. 10a is followed in v. 10b, “If any one slays with the sword, with the sword must he be slain”, by an explanatory phrase that indicates how the allusion to Jer 15,2 must be understood. This address to the reader has functional parallels in 13,18; 14,12, and 17,9, as well as at the conclusion of each of the proclamations to the seven churches (2,7.11.17.29; 3,6.13.22). But in our context it is used to introduce rather than conclude a unit of text. Because the proclamation formula is used in an oracular context in each of the seven proclamations, its association with this unit of text suggests that it too is oracular in character¹⁵¹. The oracular character of v. 10ab is supported by the fact that Jer 15,2 is in the form of a question-and-answer schema that concludes with an oracle introduced with the stereotypical phrase “thus says the Lord”¹⁵².

The exhortation “he who has an ear” at the conclusion of each of the seven letters either immediately precedes or follows reference to “the one who conquers”, τὸν νικῶντι. There this combination was intended to encourage understanding of perseverance in the midst of worldly defeat as spiritual victory. The same idea is conveyed here by the exhortation in v. 9 together with the encouragement to persevere in v. 10, as confirmed by noting that every use in Revelation of “faith”, πίστις, or of being “faithful”, πιστός, of humans on earth speaks

¹⁵⁰ G. MUSSIES, *The Morphology of Koine Greek as used in the Apocalypse of St. John: A Study in Bilingualism*, 322-323.

¹⁵¹ D. E. AUNE, *Revelation 6-16*, 730-731.

¹⁵² B.O. LONG, «Two Question and Answer Schemata in the Prophets», in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 90 (1971), 129-139. John alludes selectively to these Jeremian texts since he does not want to include either pestilence or famine in the scenario of that which the faithful must face in the very near future. These texts in Jeremiah indicate that those whose lot is death or the sword or famine or captivity will have to endure those fates. In Jeremiah, such punishments are the consequences of the sins of the people, whereas in Revelation, captivity and sword are the fated consequences of those who have faith and endurance.

of enduring faith in the face of persecution (1,5; 2,10.13.19; 14,12; 17,14)¹⁵³.

The day of the persecution is at hand: the followers must suffer captivity, exile or death; in calmly facing and undergoing this final tribulation they are to manifest their endurance and faithfulness¹⁵⁴.

3.2 The Emergence of 'Another Beast' from the Earth (Rev 13,11-18)

This new section, vv. 11-17, illustrates John's vision of another beast that emerges from the earth. This section presents the same situations as that of vv. 1-8¹⁵⁵. Similar phraseology begins and ends the pericope¹⁵⁶. The clause, "And I saw a beast rising out of the sea", in 13,11 parallels that of 13,1: "Then I saw another beast which rose out of the earth". The exhortatory conclusion in 13,10, beginning with the words ῥοδέ ἐστιν are matched by a parallel catchphrase with the same expression

¹⁵³ In the phrase ἡ ὑπομονὴ καὶ ἡ πίστις τῶν ἀγίων, the use of the article with both substantives may function to place the emphasis on each of them individually. cfr. D. E. AUNE, *Revelation* 6-16, 751.

¹⁵⁴ According to P. BARNETT, «Polemical Parallelism: Some Further Reflections on the Apocalypse», in *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 35 (1980), 112, «The most urgent challenge by the writer of the Apocalypse to his readers is that men worship God the creator and judge and the redeemer-Lamb, not the pseudo-and pretentious counterpart, the Roman Emperor, by means of the Imperial Cult which had spread rapidly throughout the dozens of cities of Roman Asia».

¹⁵⁵ To a certain extent, 13,1-10 and 13,11-18 appear to be parallel in composition: first a detailed and lengthy presentation of the first and second beasts, then, in conclusion, an exhortation; by means of that exhortation the narrative is interrupted. cfr. J. LAMBRECHT, «Rev 13,9-10 and Exhortation in the Apocalypse», in A. DENAUX (ed.), *New Testament Textual Criticism and Exegesis*, University Press, Leuven 2002, 335.

¹⁵⁶ According to A. ENROTH, «The Hearing Formula in the Book of Revelation», in *New Testament Studies* 36 (1990), 605, «John has constructed these images [the two beasts] symmetrically so that both resemble each other».

ῥΩδέ...έστιν in 13,18. As in 13,1, this vision also begins with the image of a beast, i.e., another beast, ἄλλο θηρίον¹⁵⁷.

3.2.1 The Description of 'Another Beast' (Rev 13,11)

John presents here the emergence of the second beast "from the earth", ἐκ τῆς γῆς. In this section, the earth is referred to three times in the context of worship (v. 12b; v. 14a; 14b). All these three occurrences speak simply of "earth" and not of the "whole earth", ὅλη ἡ γῆ. The adjective ὅλος, which denotes universal references, is noticeably absent here. Unlike in 13,3c, where the expression ὅλη ἡ γῆ is equivalent to the οἰκουμένη, the unique geographical term that John qualifies repeatedly with the adjective ὅλος (3,10; 12,9; 16,14). Thus we know that the presence and place of activity of the second beast is limited to a region, denoted by the expression ἡ γῆ, which distinguishes itself from the "whole earth" of 13,3-8 in which the first beast is worshiped¹⁵⁸.

The earth where the place of activity of the second beast is facilitated is evidently a region of multiethnic reign. The "earth" or "from which comes the second beast" has been identified as (a) Palestine¹⁵⁹ or (b) Anatolia¹⁶⁰. The interpretation

¹⁵⁷ The adjective ἄλλος, «another», is used here to signal a new scene (cfr. 7,2; 8,3; 10,1; 18,1; 20,1). cfr. D. E. AUNE, *Revelation 6-16*, 755. This second beast is referred to as a θηρίον, «beast», only here in Revelation. Throughout the remainder of this pericope (vv. 11-18), this beast is referred to only by a series of eight third person singular verbs (13,11[bis].12b[bis].13[bis].14.16) and two occurrences of the pronoun αὐτός (13,14.15). This figure is elsewhere referred to as the «false prophet» (16,13; 19,20; 20,10), which clearly conveys the role the author assigns to it.

¹⁵⁸ G. BIGUZZI, *L'Apocalisse e i suoi enigmi*, 53.

¹⁵⁹ B. MURMELSTEIN, «Das zweite Tier in der Offenbarung Johannis», in *Theologische Studien und Kritiken* 101 (1929), 452-454.457.

¹⁶⁰ W. M. RAMSAY, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia and their Place in the Plan of the Apocalypse*, Hodder and Stoughton, London 1904; J. WEIß, *Die Offenbarung Johannis. Ein Beitrag zur Literatur und Religionsgeschichte*, Göttingen 1904, 17; R. H. CHARLES, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John* (ICC, vol. 1), 357; P. TOUILLEUX, *L'Apocalypse et les cultes de Domitien et de Cybele*, Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, Paris 1935, 81; C. SPICQ, *L'épître aux Hébreux* 1, Lecoffre J. Gabalda, Paris 1952, 136-138; W. BARCLAY, «Great Themes of the New Testament V: Revelation XIII», in *The Expository Times* 70 (1959), 293; S. R. F. PRICE, *Rituals and Power. The*

of the 'earth' of v. 11 as Anatolia has its benefits. First, the fact that according to 4,1 the visions in which John is protagonist in Rev 4-22 (and therefore also of the two beasts) is in continuity with the Christophany of 1,9, which is situated in Patmos and not in Palestine. Second, the fact that John was involved in first person in the destinies of at least seven Churches of Asia Minor and that it was for them that he wrote his book goes well. Third, John is interested in the seven Churches of Asia Minor, and concretely in their inhabitants (e.g., Antipas in 2,13; Jezebel in 2,20; the Nicolaitans in 2,6.15, etc) as well as in their edifices and institutions (e.g., the throne of Satan in 2,13). But he does not refer concretely to historical places in Palestine: his references to Jerusalem, its temple, its altar, courtyard, Mount Zion, etc have a purely symbolic function.

The second beast has two horns like a lamb, but it speaks like a dragon (v. 11b). The fact that they are only two in contrast to the ten of the first beast apparently indicates that the second is subordinate to the first¹⁶¹. Horns are used as symbols of power and authority in the Old Testament, sometimes of powerful nations (Zech 1,18-21), other times of the power exercised by a particular nation (Jer 48,25), or of kings (Ezek 29,21). The author is intentionally contrasting the Lamb with the dragon, just as he contrasted the lion with the Lamb in 5,5-6. The statement that the lamb-like beast "spoke like a dragon" undoubtedly means that the second beast acted as the agent of the first beast.

3.2.2 The Cruel Deeds of 'Another Beast' (Rev 13,12-17)

The second beast is now explicitly said to be aligned with the first beast. Thus it reads: "It exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence" (v. 12a). It functions as his

Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1984; M. RIST - L. H. HOUGH, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, Abingdon, Nashville, TN 1989, 464; S. FRIESEN, *Twice Neokoros. Ephesus, Asia and the Cult of the Flavian Imperial Family*, Brill, Leiden 1993.

¹⁶¹ D. E. AUNE, *Revelation 6-16*, 757. The second beast has «two horns like a lamb» is an allusion to the ram with two horns in Dan 8,3, which symbolises the kings of Media and Persia, opponents of the people of God.

fully accredited representative. The phrase ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ, literally “in his presence”, really means “by his authority, on his behalf”¹⁶² or even “at his commissioning”¹⁶³. Ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ is a Semitic idiom, and used also in 13,14, where the second beast performs miracles “by the authority of the beast” (13,14), a passage alluded to later in 19,20, where it is said that the false prophet performed miracles “on his authority”, i.e., the authority of the beast. This expression appears to have been formulated by the author in antithesis to the way in which this improper preposition is normally used in Revelation, that is, with reference to the presence of God¹⁶⁴.

Let us analyse now the various activities of the second beast.

3.2.2.1 It Fosters the Worship of the First Beast (Rev 13,12b-13)

By using the authority of the first beast, the second beast compels people of the earth to worship the first one¹⁶⁵. The phrase “the earth and its inhabitants”, τὴν γῆν καὶ τοὺς ἐν αὐτῇ κατοικοῦντας (v. 12b), is found only here in Revelation. The earth and its inhabitants are compelled to worship the one “whose mortal wound was healed” (v. 12c). This adjectival phrase refers back to v. 3, where it is said that one of the heads of the first beast “seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed”. Thus we see here a link between

¹⁶² J. H. THAYER, «Ἐνώπιον», in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 220; F. W. DANKER, «Ἐνώπιον», in *A Greek- English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 342; A. K. W. SIEW, *The War between the two beasts and the two witnesses*, T & T Clark, London 2005, 176..

¹⁶³ H. KRÄMER, «Ἐνώπιον», in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1, 462.

¹⁶⁴ E.g., «before God» 3,2; 8,2, «before the throne of God» 1,4; 4,5, «before the one seated on the throne» 4,10.

¹⁶⁵ John accurately distinguishes two idolatries, that of idols and that of the Beast. According to G. BIGUZZI, «Ephesus, Its Artemision, Its Temple to the Flavian Emperors, and Idolatry in Revelation», in *Novum Testamentum* 40 (1998), 289, «The idolatry of the Beast polarizes John’s interest and consequent condemnation much more than the traditional idolatry».

the visions of the second beast (vv. 11-18) with that of the first beast¹⁶⁶ (vv. 1-10).

In order to convince and impress people, the second beast performs surprising miracles. The idiom *ποιεῖν σημεῖα*, “perform¹⁶⁷ miracles”, occurs four times in Revelation (i.e., 13,13.14; 16,14; 19,20). The miracles of the second beast are described by an ironic echo of the acts of Moses, whose prophetic authority was validated by “great signs” (e.g., Exod 4,17.30; 10,2; 11,10). The miracles worked by this beast are referred to again in 19,20.

The motif of fire falling from heaven to earth as divine judgement is found in 20,9, where the fire falls from heaven and destroys the huge army that has surrounded Jerusalem. The beast’s casting fire from heaven in the presence of people recalls the prophetic demonstration of Elijah (1 Kgs 18,38-39; 2 Kgs 1,10-14). This motif occurs frequently in the Old Testament (Gen 19,24; Job 1,16; Ps 11,6), in early Jewish literature (*Sibylline Oracles* 2.196-200), and in early Christian literature (1 *Clement* 11,1).

The deceptive¹⁶⁸ nature of the second beast becomes clearer through all the above texts and it will become more intensive in the following verse.

3.2.2.2 It Deceives People (Rev 13,14)

The second beast “deceives those dwelling on the earth on account of the signs that were given to him to do so” (v. 14a). The term *πλανᾶώ* “deceive”, in this context is an alternate

¹⁶⁶ J. WEIß, *Die Offenbarung Johanns*, 33-34.

¹⁶⁷ A series of *ποιεω* verbs defines the deeds of the second beast. Eight times the verb *ποιεω* is used in reference to the second beast (13,12[bis].13[bis].14[bis].15.16) compared to twice in the case of the first beast (13,5.7). It appears that the emphasis lies in the second beast’s active engagement vis-à-vis the first beast, the world populace, and those who oppose his designs. cfr. A. K. W. SIEW, *The War between the two beasts and the two witnesses*, 179.

¹⁶⁸ John does not say that the «great signs» are cheating; instead they are instrument of cheating. cfr. S. J. SCHERRER, «Signs and Wonders in the Imperial Cult: A New Look at a Roman Religious Institution in the Light of Rev 13,13-15», in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 103 (1984), 600.

way of saying “he made the earth and those who dwell on it worship the first beast” (v. 12). The phrase “the deceiver of the whole world” has already been used of the first beast (12,9), and an equivalent phrase is now used of the second beast. True prophets receive their inspiration and commissions as they stand “before the presence of the Lord” (11,4). Likewise, the false prophet receives his inspiration and commission as he acts “in the presence of the beast”¹⁶⁹.

The deception causes “those who dwell on earth” to agree to his command “to make an image¹⁷⁰ to the beast”. This concluding command of v. 14b anticipates the explicit reference to Daniel 3,4 in v. 15. In Daniel 3,4, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, set up a golden image and ordered that all peoples, nations, and languages worship the image on pain of death. While nothing in Daniel suggests that the golden image represented the king, Hippolytus¹⁷¹ suggested that Nebuchadnezzar made this golden image of himself so that he might be worshipped by everyone as God.

The concluding description of the second beast (v. 14c) as he “who was wounded by the sword and yet lived” is a relative clause used to identify the *θηρίον* with the event narrated cryptically in v. 3a and repeated in v. 12 with additional details: i.e., the wound was inflicted by a sword. Thus we see here a link between the first vision and the second.

3.2.2.3 It Animates the Image of the First Beast (Rev 13,15)

The second beast was permitted to give life to the image of the first beast. This reflects the world of ancient magic in which the animation of images of the gods was an important means for securing oracles¹⁷². The purpose of giving life to the

¹⁶⁹ M. KIDDLE, *The Revelation of St. John*, 254-255.

¹⁷⁰ The second beast orders the setting up of an «image» of the first beast. Elsewhere, the worship of the first beast, his «image», and his «mark» are inseparable (14,9.11; 15,2; 16,2; 19,20; 20,4). The «image» of something is not a mere copy but partakes in its reality and in fact constitutes its reality. cfr. G. KITTEL, «*εἰκόν*», in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 2, 389.

¹⁷¹ HIPPOLITUS, *In Danielem 3.4.*

¹⁷² R. MACMULLEN, *Paganism in the Roman Empire*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT 1981, 59-60. The popular view in the Hellenistic and

image is that it may be able to speak. Scherrer¹⁷³ has argued that “special effects equipment” was used to produce speaking and moving statues as well as simulate thunder and lightning in the imperial cult.

Those who did not worship the image of the beast were executed. The subject of the aorist subjunctive ποιήση, “he might cause”, is ambiguous. Since it is parallel to λαλήση, “he might speak”, in v. 15b, the subject of which is ἡ εἰκών, “the image”, it is logical to understand ἡ εἰκών as the subject of ποιήση so that it is the speaking image who causes those who refuse it worship to be executed. It is possible, however, that the logical subject of ποιήση is the second beast, acting on behalf of the first beast, who orders the executions. The execution of those who resist appears to be a doublet of v. 7, in which it is said that the first beast made war on the faithful followers of the Lamb and conquered them.

3.2.2.4 It Compels Everyone to be Marked (Rev 13,16-17)

The second beast causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave (v. 16a) to be marked. The term for all, πάντας, is comprehensive. Then the words “both small and great¹⁷⁴, both rich and poor, both free and slave”¹⁷⁵ describe in various ways the social polarities that make up the “πάντας”. These antithetical terms constitute a figure of speech used to express the notion of totality¹⁷⁶.

Roman world was that the gods inhabited their statues.

¹⁷³ S. J. SCHERRER, «Signs and Wonders in the Imperial Cult: A New Look at a Roman Religious Institution in the Light of Revelation 13,13-15», in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 103 (1984), 601-610.

¹⁷⁴ The expression «small and great», τοὺς μικροὺς καὶ τοὺς μεγάλους, occurs four times elsewhere in Revelation (11,18; 19,5,18; 20,12). This phrase as an idiom connoting social inclusivity occurs frequently in the Old Testament (Gen 19,11; Deut 1,17; 1 Kgs 22,31; Job 3,19; Jer 6,13) as well as in the New Testament (Acts 8,10; 26,22; Heb 8,11). In all its occurrences it means the totality of people of all ages or all stations in life.

¹⁷⁵ R. H. MOUNCE, *The Book of Revelation*, 261 writes: «the coupling of opposites (i.e., small, great; rich, poor; free, bond) is a rhetorical way of stressing the totality of human society».

¹⁷⁶ The rhetorical term is *divisio* or *merismus*, i.e., dividing a whole into its parts, cfr. P. BOCCACCIO, «I termini contrari come espressione della totalità

People of all the walks of life are forced to be “marked”, *χάραγμα*, on the right hand or the forehead¹⁷⁷ (v. 16b). Concerning the meaning of the “mark” there are at least four major possibilities:

- 1) As a reference to Jewish tefillin or phylacteries¹⁷⁸, *φυλακτήριον*
- 2) As a reference to the tattooing of slaves, soldiers, or the devotees of a particular deity¹⁷⁹
- 3) As a reference to Roman coins that bore the portraits and names of Roman emperors¹⁸⁰ used to buy and sell commodities¹⁸¹
- 4) As a reference to imperial seals on business contracts¹⁸².

in ebraico», in *Biblica* 33 (1952), 173-190; A. M. HONEYMAN, «Merismus in Biblical Hebrew», in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 71 (1952), 11-18.

¹⁷⁷ According to G. BIGUZZI, «Il potere della bestia e il demoniaco nell'Apocalisse», 204, «In their own identity (symbolised by the forehead) and in their action (symbolised by the right hand) they adhere to the beast and give them worship».

¹⁷⁸ R. H. CHARLES, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of St. John* (ICC, vol. 1), 362-363; C. SCHNEIDER, «Μετώπον», in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 4, 635-637; J. MASSYNGBERDE FORD, *Revelation*, 225. Jewish tefillin are leather boxes or amulets containing Scripture passages and are worn on the hand and forehead (Matt 23,5; JOSEPHUS, *Antiquitates*, 4.213) and wearing of tefillin could be a model for the mark of the beast.

¹⁷⁹ J. YSEBAERT, *Greek Baptismal Terminology: Its Origins and Early Development*, Dekker, Nijmegen 1962, 285; U. WILCKENS, «Χάραγμα», in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 9, 416.

¹⁸⁰ J. KRAYBILL, *Imperial Cult and Commerce in John's Apocalypse*, Sheffield Academic, Sheffield 1996, 138-139.

¹⁸¹ G. B. CAIRD, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine*, 173; E. STAUFFER, *Christus und die Caesaren: Historische Skizzen*, Wittig, Hamburg 1960, 126-179; H. KRAFT, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 182-183; A. YARBRO COLLINS, «The Political Perspective of the Revelation to John», in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 96 (1977), 253-254.

¹⁸² G. A. DEISSMANN, *Light from the Ancient East*, 341-345.

None of these explanations is entirely satisfactory by itself. It is therefore preferable to interpret the mark of the beast as an entirely apocalyptic and eschatological symbol¹⁸³.

The term *χάραγμα* occurs seven times in Revelation, always in reference to the mark indicating loyalty to the beast (13,16.17; 14,9.11; 16,2; 19,20; 20,4) and stands as a parody of the “seal”, *σφραγίς*, of God¹⁸⁴. Three times this mark is referred to as located on either the forehead or the right hand (13,16; 14,9; 20,4). The faithful of the Lamb, on the other hand, are spoken of as having the “seal” of God on their foreheads (7,4; 9,4). The “mark on the forehead”, which is “the name of the beast” and “the number of his name” (so v. 17), is the opposite of the “seal” in 7,3-8, which is the divine “name written on the foreheads” of the faithful (cfr. 14,1).

Since the seal on the faithful is invisible, so also is the “mark” on the unbeliever. That the two are parallel in being spiritual in nature and are intended to be compared is evident from the immediately following mention of the names of God and Christ “written on the foreheads” of the faithful followers of the Lamb (14,1). Those who have believed in Christ have been identified with him and are protected by the power of his name against ultimate deception. His name is none other than his very presence with them¹⁸⁵ (as 22,4 makes explicit). Their refusal to identify with the beast will result in suffering and even death, but they will have the ultimate reward of eternal life (so 20,4). Those not trusting in Christ are identified with the beast, are under the Devil’s power, and are unable to avoid deception by the beast. While identification with the beast gives them temporary prosperity in this life, they will ultimately be punished with eternal death (cfr. 14,9-11).

¹⁸³ G. K. BEALE, *The Book of Revelation*, 716-717.

¹⁸⁴ R. H. MOUNCE, *The Book of Revelation*, 262; E. SCHÜSSLER-FIORENZA, *Revelation*, 86; W. J. HARRINGTON, *Revelation*, 143; F. J. MURPHY, *Fallen is Babylon*, Trinity Press International, Harrisburg, PA 1998, 311-312.

¹⁸⁵ G. K. BEALE, *The Book of Revelation*, 716.

That the mark of the name is figurative and not literal is again evident from the “blasphemous names”, *ὀνόμα[τα] βλασφημίας*, (13,1) on the head of the beast, which figuratively connote false claims to earthly divine kingship. Likewise, the point of saying that the beast’s worshippers have his name written on their heads is to emphasize the fact that they pay homage to his blasphemous claims to divine kingship. Just as the seal and the divine name on believers connote God’s ownership and spiritual protection of them, so the mark and name signify those who belong to the Devil and will undergo perdition¹⁸⁶.

Those not submitting to receiving the mark are unable to “buy or sell” (v. 17a). This is a reference to 2,9 and 6,5-6, where it is said that economic measures are directed against the faithful. The inability “to buy and sell” apparently refers to the interdiction of basic and essential economic activity. Whether this passage refers to a real or imagined situation has been the subject of debate. Ramsay¹⁸⁷ understood this passage to refer to an otherwise unknown formal or informal economic boycott against the faithful.

3.2.3 The Numerical Mark of the Beast: 666 (Rev 13,18)

John presents here the number of the beast, which is 666, *ἑξακόσιοι ἑξήκοντα ἕξ*. Then he requests his readers to understand and calculate the arithmetic numbers that he employs very consciously in his writings. He does not give a solution to this number 666; instead he invites his readers to

¹⁸⁶ According to A. F. JOHNSON, *Revelation*, 532, «The *charagma* is not a literal impress seal, certificate, or similar mark of identification, but it is John’s way of symbolically describing authentic ownership and loyalty».

¹⁸⁷ W. M. RAMSAY, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia and their Place in the Plan of the Apocalypse*, 105-108; A. YARBRO COLLINS, «What the Spirit Says to the Churches: Preaching the Apocalypse», in *Quarterly Review* 4 (1984), 82 writes: «a Christian who refused to honour the emperor in a religious way would have been limited in economic and political options».

exercise their wisdom, σοφία, and understanding, νοῦς¹⁸⁸. The call for wisdom in v. 18 summons John's readers to exercise insight and discernment in deciphering the number of the beast, 666. The number 666, the "provoking mystery"¹⁸⁹, has three different interpretations¹⁹⁰.

The first and more ancient interpretation anterior to Irenaeus is that of Gematria¹⁹¹. The Gematria interpretation presupposes in all its probability the imperative ψηφισάτω. The verb ψηφίζω¹⁹² derives from the ψήφος, "polished pebble" and signifies 'calculate with small pebbles', but here it means 'calculate with letter', since the calculation here concerns a name.

¹⁸⁸ A. K. W. SIEW, *The War between the two beasts and the two witnesses*, 179, «It appears that this call for wisdom is not purely an intellectual exercise out of curiosity in solving a riddle or a cryptic symbol but John's exhortatory directive is intended to be practical, for only those who can figure out the number of the beast can make the choice of rejecting the same».

¹⁸⁹ P. PRIGENT, *L'Apocalypse de Saint Jean*, 327. According to D. BRADY, *The Contribution of British Writers between 1560 and 1830 to the Interpretation of Revelation 13,16-18*, Mohr-Siebeck, Tübingen 1983, 291, «The number 666 is a veiled way of indicating the actual power depicted in the Apocalypse under the symbolism of the beast. This fact must also weigh against those theories which apparently understood the call for wisdom in reckoning the number of the beast as a call for mathematical ingenuity».

¹⁹⁰ G. BIGUZZI, *L'Apocalisse e i suoi enigmi*, 147.

¹⁹¹ Gematria as an exegetical method was based on the mysterious significance accorded to numbers in sacred or traditional texts. All or parts of a given word in a traditional text are converted into a significant number, or a particular number found in a traditional text is converted into its significant alphabetical equivalent, which explains the hidden or encoded meaning of the number, cfr. D. E. AUNE, *Revelation 6-16*, 771. According to O. RÜHLE, «ἀριθμέω, ἀριθμός», in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1, 462, «In Gematria a good deal depends on correct guessing. Hence it is well adapted for riddles and the most important riddle of this kind is posed by Rev 13,18 with the number 666».

¹⁹² The verb ψάω signifies «to polish» and the Latin equivalent of ψήφος is *calculus* derives from *calx* and from which comes «to calculate», cfr. O. RÜHLE, «ἀριθμέω, ἀριθμός», in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1, 461; G. BIGUZZI, *L'Apocalisse e i suoi enigmi*, 147. Ψηφίζω occurs only here and in Luke 14,28 in the New Testament.

The second interpretation is introduced by Irenaeus¹⁹³, who reports the three names with which his predecessors and contemporary scholars used to interpret the numerical symbol 666: a) *ευανθας*, b. *λατεινος*, and c) *τειταιν*¹⁹⁴. Irenaeus reflects that 666 contains three times 6, i.e., once for unit, once for half of a score and once for century and then attributes to 666 the value and vigour of the number of recapitulation, i.e., 666 recapitulates and reassumes iniquity, wickedness, rebellion against God, falsity of idolatry, apostasy, and so on¹⁹⁵. Irenaeus then tried to find numbers from the Bible that match 666 and those who come after him followed the same method¹⁹⁶.

The arithmetic interpretation of 666, beginning by A. G. van den Bergh van Eysinga as a doubly triangle¹⁹⁷ number, is the third and latest interpretation. This interpretation is related

¹⁹³ IRENAEUS, *Adversus haereses*, 5,28-30.

¹⁹⁴ H. ALFORD, *The Greek Testament* IV, Deighton, Cambridge 1866, 683; F. H. COLSON, «*Ευαντηρασ*», in *The Journal of Theological Studies* 7 (1916), 100-101. For the numerous names identified by ancient, medieval, and modern commentators see M. STUART, *Commentary on the Apocalypse* (vol. 2), Andover, New York, NY 1845, 452-459; P. SCHAFF, *History of the Apostolic Church* (vol. I), T & T Clark, Edinburgh 1854, 61-66; H. A. SANDERS, «The Number of the Beast in Revelation», in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 37 (1918), 95-99; W. BARCLAY, *Great Themes of the New Testament*, 295-296; M. RISSI, *Time and History: A Study on the Revelation*, 76; J. ERNST, *Die eschatologischen Gegenspieler in den Schriften des Neuen Testaments*, 141-145; J. MASSYNGBERDE FORD, *Revelation*, 215-217; R. H. MOUNCE, *The Book of Revelation*, 264.

¹⁹⁵ G. BIGUZZI, *L'Apocalisse e i suoi enigmi*, 143.

¹⁹⁶ Especially BEDA, *Explanatio Apocalypsis* PL 93, 150C, and RUPERT OF DEUTZ, *Commentaria in Apocalypsim*, PL 169, 1085A.

¹⁹⁷ Triangular numbers are those that are the sum of a consecutive series of numerals beginning with 1. Thus, 666 is a triangular number of 36 (i.e., the sum of the numerals 1 through 36 is 666), while 36 is itself the triangular number of 8 (i.e., the sum of the numerals 1 through 8 is 36). A triangular number is understood to have the same symbolic significance as the last numeral used to calculate it). G. A. VAN DEN BERGH VAN EYSINGA, «Die in der Apokalypse bekämpfte Gnosis», in *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 13 (1912), 293-306 has argued that the mention of the eighth king in Rev 17,11 emphasises the importance of the number 8. Those who support the triangular number view: E. LOHMEYER, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 115-116; R. BAUCKHAM, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies in the*

ideally in continuity with the speculations of Pythagorean numerologists and Gnostics. The arithmetic interpretation somehow explains John's remark regarding the number of the beast, but does not explain his view about the name of the beast. This interpretation does not even consider what John has said about the name of the beast (13,17[bis]; 14,11; 15,2) and above all "the number of its name" (13,17; 15,2). The weakness of this triangle view is that it is tautological: the number of the beast (i.e., 666) is converted into another number (i.e., 36) that represents the beast. Why should such a simplistic procedure require the wisdom and insight of the reader as 13,18a suggests?¹⁹⁸ And again, this view only reveals that the person whose number is 666 is identical with the eighth king of 17,11, but it does not indicate the identity of that king¹⁹⁹.

The three names proposed by the predecessors of Irenaeus underwent different changes, and there arose various proposals that maintained the anti-Roman traits and the Gematria method and that arrived at the following names: *αντεμος*, *αρνουμε* and *γενσερικος*²⁰⁰. The only further addition

Book of Revelation, 391-394; E. LUPIERI, *L'Apocalisse di Giovanni*, Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, Milano 1999, 218-219.

¹⁹⁸ M. OBERWEIS, «Die Bedeutung der neutestamentlichen "Rätselzahlen" 666 (Apok 13,18) und 153 (Jn 21,11)», in *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 77 (1986), 227.

¹⁹⁹ L. J. L. PEERBOLTE, *The Antecedents of Antichrist: A Traditio-Historical Study of the Earliest Christian Views on Eschatological Opponents*, Brill, Leiden 1995, 151.

²⁰⁰ Those who followed and reworked on the three names: *ευανθας*: HIPPOLYTUS, *Demonstratio de Christo et Antichristo* 50,11. *τεταυ*: HIPPOLYTUS, *Demonstratio de Christo et Antichristo* 50,10; RUPERT OF DEUTZ, *Commentaria in Apocalypsin*, PL 169, 1084C. *λατεινος*: HIPPOLYTUS, *Demonstratio de Christo et Antichristo* 50,17; ANDREW of CAESAREA (*Commentarius in Apocalypsin*, PG 106, 340D) and ARETA of CAESAREA (*Commentarius in Apocalypsin*, PG 106, 681B). *αντεμος*: WALAFRIDO STRABONE («*qui Christo contrarius dicitur*», *Sequitur Glossa ordinaria Apocalypsis Joannis*, PL 114, 734B); BRUNO («*inde enim Antichristus vocatur*», *Expositio in Apocalypsin*, PL 165, 677A). *αρνουμε*: HIPPOLYTUS, *De consummatione mundi* 28,20; ANDREW of CAESAREA (*Commentarius in Apocalypsin*, PG 106, 340D). *γενσερικος*: VITTORINO (*posterior e postrema*). *αντεμος*: signifies *contrarius*, i.e., unfit or opposing (Christ). *arnoume*: signifies *nego, negator*, and the Antichrist is one

made by the commentators after Irenaeus is that Greek must be the language by which the names are to be proposed.

In the epoch of confessional controversies, Catholics proposed Luther as the beast and, on the other side, Protestants depicted the Papacy as the beast.

Based on the interpretative keys of contemporary history and anti-Roman attitudes, many interpretations in the last century find in 666 some Roman empires. For example J. B. Bossuet proposed DICLUX as Augustus Diocletian; Grotius has proposed *ουλπιος*; F. Spitta²⁰¹ has proposed *γαιος καισαρ*; A. Deißmann has proposed *καισαρ θεος*; H. Kraft has proposed *μ νερουα*; L. van Hartingsveld has proposed QEYSAR DWMYTYANUS and J. Schmidt has proposed CLAUDIUS as the point of arrival of a chain of transformations beginning from DCLXVI. Subsequently four interpreters (C. F. A. Fritzsche; F. Benary; H. Hitzig and E. Reuß), each one independently from the next, has proposed QSR NRW and which is the most amplified interpretation today²⁰². Those who support this view

who negates Christ; then DICLUX, name in Latin language for nonsense (WALAFRIDO STRABONE, *Sequitur Glossa ordinaria Apocalypsis Joannis*, PL 114,734C; BRUNO, *Expositio in Apocalypsim*, PL 165, 677C-D. But RUPERT of DEUTZ finds difficulty in giving such a significance (*Commentaria in Apocalypsim*, PL 169, 1084D). The one who proposes DICLUX in modern time and gives a modification as CLAUDIUS is J. SCHMIDT, «Die Rätselzahl 666 in Offb 13:18. Ein Lösungsversuch auf der Basis lateinischer Gematrie», in *Novum Testamentum* 46 (2002), 35-54.

²⁰¹ cfr. E. B. ALLO, *Saint Jean: L'Apocalypse*, 212.

²⁰² M. STUART, *Commentary on the Apocalypse* (vol. 2), 452-459; W. BOUSSET, *Die Offenbarung Johannis*, 106.373; R. H. CHARLES, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of St. John* (ICC, vol. 1), 367; J. J. COLLINS, *The Sibylline Oracles of Egyptian Judaism*, Scholars Press, Missoula, MT 1974, 80-87; A. YARBRO COLLINS, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation*, 176-183; L. KREITZER, «Hadrian and the Nero Redivivus Myth», in *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 79 (1988), 92-115; M. BODINGER, «Le mythe de Néron de l'Apocalypse de saint Jean au Talmud de Babylone», in *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 206 (1989), 21-40; C. H. GIBLIN, *The Book of Revelation: the open book of prophecy*, 135; R. BAUCKHAM, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 384-452; F. J. MURPHY, *Fallen is Babylon*, 303-306; H. J. KLAUCK, «Do they Never Come Back? Nero Redivivus and the Apocalypse of John», in *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 63 (2001), 683-698.

transliterate the Greek form of Nero's name (Nerōn Kaisar) into Hebrew (קסר נרין = קסר נרין) and calculate it as 666²⁰³.

Though quite attractive, there are several problems with identifying 666 with Nero's name.

1) The Nero identification assumes a knowledge of the Hebrew language and its system of Gematria in John's audience and thus faces difficulty because of the native Greek readers²⁰⁴.

2) Choosing the name "Caesar Nero" is too convenient for the Nero view, since there were many possible titles and names for Nero.

3) In transliterating a foreign name into Hebrew there is a considerable scope in putting in or leaving out or varying vowel letters, and there are three possible alternative equivalents for the S²⁰⁵.

4) John is not calling for intellectual, mathematical competence in his exhortation that his readers "have a mind to calculate", but for moral discernment to avoid evil²⁰⁶.

²⁰³ The numerical value of Nero is thus: *nun* = 50, *resh* = 200, *waw* = 6, *nun* = 50, *qoph* = 100, *samech* = 60, *resh* = 200.

²⁰⁴ Robert Mounce believes that the identification of 666 to Nero is most improbable: «what is not generally stressed is that this solution asks us to calculate a Hebrew transliteration of the Greek form of a Latin name, and that with a defective spelling. A shift to Hebrew letters is no indication that the riddle is to be solved by transposing it into another language», R. H. MOUNCE, *The Book of Revelation*, 264-265.

²⁰⁵ A. FARRER, *A Rebirth of Images: The Making of St. John's Apocalypse*, Beacon Press, Boston 1963, 257.

²⁰⁶ According to S. S. SMALLEY, *The Revelation to John*, 351, «It is hard to imagine that the symbolism in Rev 13,18 should need a complicated numerical system for its elucidation, for John was a prophet-seer, and not a mathematician. It is not adequately explained how identification of Nero with the beast could fulfil the seer's primary requirement that the beast is a parody of Christ. In what way is Nero the consummate opponent of Christ? How does Nero share the power, authority, and throne of the dragon (13,2) when, in fact, he is a deposed ruler? In what way does he rule over every tribe, nation, people, and language (13,7), if he no longer represents the Roman Empire? In what ways do all the inhabitants of the earth worship Nero (13,4.8)?». P. S. Minear is forthright: «in no sense would knowledge

All the numbers have figurative significance and never involve any kind of literal Gematria calculation²⁰⁷. This is supported from the immediately following vision of 144,000 followers of the Lamb with the names of Christ and God “written on their foreheads” (14,1). The placement of this verse shows that a contrast is intended between the beast’s name and the Lord’s name. If the latter symbolizes a purely spiritual reality, which it does, then so does the former. This is true also of the beast’s number, since it is synonymous with his name.

If a Hebrew or Greek Gematria system of literal calculation were being used exceptionally here, then John would have alerted his readers. Indeed when he wants to bring his reader’s attention to a Hebrew or Greek name elsewhere, he clearly prefaces the name with “in Hebrew” or “in Greek”²⁰⁸ (as in 9,11 and 16,16). It is unlikely that John is cryptically identifying an emperor to avoid persecution in case his work falls into the hands of Roman officials. He is already in exile and not afraid of further suffering. Neither is he trying to protect his readers from persecution, since he is preparing them to be faithful witnesses, even to the point of death.

Even if John expects his contemporary readers to utilize the Gematria method to decode the number, it will not yield the desired results because, many authors have observed, we do not know which letters of the alphabet are presumed here, how the calculation is to be done, and above all how many letters there are for the composition of the name. Thus the riddle remains unnecessarily open to an indefinite number with possible solutions²⁰⁹. There are 27 letters in Greek with

that 666 = Nero have enhanced the wisdom of his readers or enabled them to penetrate the fraudulent claims of the Dragon, the sea-beast, or the earth beast», P. S. MINEAR, *I Saw a New Earth*, 258.

²⁰⁷ E.g., 24 elders, 7 seals, the 144,000, three and a half years, 2 witnesses, 7 heads, 10 horns.

²⁰⁸ H. HAILEY, *Revelation*, 298.

²⁰⁹ A. LOISY, *L’Apocalypse de Jean*, Émile Nourry Éditeur, Paris 1923, 258-259; J. BONSIRVEN, *L’Apocalypse de Saint Jean*, Beauchesne, Paris 1951, 235; J. BEHM, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 78; O. RÜHLE, «Ἀριθμέω ἀριθμός», in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1, 462-464.

numerical values²¹⁰. And the name hidden under 666 with six letters, for example the teitan of Irenaeus, will have six unknown possibilities, and each one of those would have to be elevated to a 27-fold possibility. It is also true that to be able to reach certitude on the hidden name in 13,18 would mean to be able to reach certitude also on the global interpretation of Revelation, and especially on the prime target of John. In other words, what actually is the real intention of John? But that certitude is irremediably closed. There are so many proposals because it is easy to turn a name into a number but hard to deduce the right name from a number²¹¹.

It is true that 666 can give up a few of its mystery aspects if it is compared and connected with other numbers in Revelation, because fortunately the rest of the numerical symbolism of John is in a good measure under our control. Recalling Irenaeus, Prigent notes that his interpretation of six as a number of recapitulation is not very much convincing but that the principle is interesting²¹².

Attempts to interpret 666 based on the symbolism of seven: in Revelation the number seven carries the idea of completeness²¹³. The number seven, the number of the perfect act of God²¹⁴, occurs²¹⁵ quite often as an opposing number to 666²¹⁶. Remaining three times below seven, the number

²¹⁰ D. PIERACCIONI, *Morfologia storica della lingua greca*, D' Anna, Messina – Firenze 1975³, §171, with the number 2 and §172.

²¹¹ G. B. CAIRD, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine*, 174.

²¹² P. PRIGENT, *L'Apocalypse de Saint Jean*, 329. Those who support him are: G. R. BEASLEY-MURRAY, *Revelation*, 220; L. MORRIS, *The Revelation of St. John*, 169.

²¹³ R. H. MOUNCE, *The Book of Revelation*, 250.

²¹⁴ G. BIGUZZI, *I numeri nell'Apocalisse di Giovanni e il loro linguaggio*, 149.

²¹⁵ In Revelation, number seven, *ἑπτὰ*, occurs 54 times.

²¹⁶ E. M. BORING, *Revelation*, 162 would make it clear: «the number 666 has a generic significance that made it particularly appropriate for John's purpose. John shares the broad apocalyptic tradition in which *seven* is the complete number, and has used it as such throughout. The seventh seal, trumpet, and bowl are always the last that represents the coming of God and his kingdom. But six is often the penultimate number, the number of lack and incompleteness. It is also the number of judgement. As the kingdom of God comes in the seventh and last of each series, the judgement of God

666 would signify an utter lack of perfection²¹⁷. As a second proposal, other authors²¹⁸ arrive at the same conclusion, putting the 666 in relation with the number eight and even in a better way with 888, which is the numerical value of Jesus' name in Greek, i.e., IHOUΣ.

Of the two proposals, the former has to face the fact that John attributes seven also to the dragon, i.e., seven heads and seven diadems (12,3) and to the beast, i.e., seven heads (13,1; 17,3.7.9). And again, properly on the seven heads of the beast, John sketches all in order to say that the beast is vulnerable (13,3), or to assist the reader to geographically place the grand prostitute (17,9), or to say that the seven heads are symbols of political power, or to say that one of those kings is the beast itself who goes to perdition (17,11). Thus according to Kraft²¹⁹, "the imperfection has its vertex in the number seven". And even when we compare 666 and the number eight, the numerical symbol of Christ, the difficulty lies in the fact that in Revelation, the number eight is applied once for the beast too (17,11) and never in any way as the number of Christ.

Since the numbers six, seven and eight have their own limitations, let us consider the number 666 in relation to the number 12. The first appearance of a number in Revelation occurs at 1,4 referring the "seven" churches. While

comes in the sixth seal, trumpet, and bowl (6,12-17; 9,13-21; 16,12-16) and John himself and his community live in the time of the sixth emperor, the time of idolatry and eschatological plagues (17,10). Thus 666 is the intensive symbolic expression of incompleteness, idolatry, judgement, and non-fulfilment».

²¹⁷ E. B. ALLO, *Saint Jean: L'Apocalypse*, 194; P. PRIGENT, *L'Apocalypse de Saint Jean*, 330; P. S. MINEAR, *I Saw a New Earth*, 258; J. P. M. SWEET, *Revelation*, 218; M. ADINOLFI, *Apocalisse: Testo, simboli e visioni*, 31; L. R. FARMER, *Revelation*, Chalice Press, St. Louis, MO 2005, 99.

²¹⁸ cfr. *The Sibylline Oracles* 1,324-331; cfr. R. HALVER, *Der Mythos im letzten Buch der Bibel. Eine Untersuchung der Bildersprache der Johannes Apokalypse*, Hamburg-Bergstedt 1964, 40; G. R. BEASLEY-MURRAY, *Revelation*, 221.

²¹⁹ H. KRAFT, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 183. See also, Le Frois, *The Woman Clothed with the Sun* (Ap. 12), 124, «the number 7 is used in Revelation for Satan, who tries to imitate God, while the number 12 and its multiples are used exclusively for those who side with God».

commenting on 1,4, Brütsch affirms that the numbers seven and 12 generally characterize the fullness of divine work, while the “broken” digit, like the three and a half (i.e., half of seven) and six (i.e., half of 12), leave in themselves a glimpse of imperfection²²⁰, inconsistency and the wretched finality of the demoniac affairs²²¹. But we have already seen that the number seven is used also to denote imperfection. To this we may add the fact that in Revelation the law of the imperfect numbers, when they lack one unity, can be disregarded²²². On the other hand, it is attested in five texts (11,2.3; 12,6.14; 13,5) that the law of the halved (i.e., divided into two) imperfect numbers, even if for the single number “three and a half”, which is half of seven.

Thus the number six, which is half of 12, foreseen by Brütsch, is not only without contra-indications but re-enters into the Johannine mode of constructing numerical symbolism. It is true that in Greek, the 666 is not the placing together of three sixes as the Arabic number system²²³ but of 600 (ἑξακόσιοι), of 60 (ἑξήκοντα), and of 6 (ἕξ). However, it is also always a multiple of the six and the sum of its multiples. When the reader read in the assembly of the Church of Asia Minor (1,3) the invitation to count the number of the beast, the ears of the hearers would have been hit three times by the *hex* (ἕξ) and hence by the whistling with which began the number of the hundred, the number of the ten and finally the single six²²⁴.

²²⁰ C. H. TALBERT, *The Apocalypse*, 58; B. M. METZGER, *Breaking the Code*, 76.

²²¹ CH. BRÜTSCH, *La Charté de l'Apocalypse*, Labor et Fides, Genève 1966⁵, 26.232.

²²² G. BIGUZZI, *L'Apocalisse e i suoi enigmi*, 150.

²²³ Against this idea; W. E. BEET, «The number of the Beast», in *The Expositor* 21 (1921), 25; E. B. ALLO, *Saint Jean: L'Apocalypse*, 194; W. J. HARRINGTON, *Revelation*, 144; G. K. BEALE, *Revelation*, 718-728.

²²⁴ On signs of the presence of a rhetorical figure cfr. BLASS, § 489,7. On the repetition of the same syllable for the three words, cfr. R. BERARDI, in *Dizionario dei termini della critica letteraria*, Le Monnier, Firenze 1969, 15.34; On the sonorousness of the repletion of ἕξ, cfr. R. BAUCKHAM, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 394.

The number 666 is then above all a figure that thoroughly plays upon the number six, the miserable half of the number 12, which is the number of the people of God. Consequently, it says that the beast has nothing to do with the people of God and that, vice versa, the Church of Asia and all the disciples of the Lamb do not have anything to do with the beast²²⁵. Revelation invites its readers to opt for the part of the just: he must keep to the side of the 12 Apostles of the Lamb, of the 144,000 sealed, and must be well aware that he makes his pilgrimage towards the New Jerusalem.

3.3 The Two Beasts: Parallel and Contrasting Characters

Rev 13 presents the two beasts very skilfully. The first part of Rev 13 (vv. 1-8) speaks of the first beast that emerges from the sea and the second part of Rev 13 (vv. 12-18) speaks of the second one that emerges from the earth. Since the second beast is completely subservient to the first, all the activities of the second are performed in the service of the first²²⁶. The second beast associates and executes very soon what the former beast has already begun (13,12). Therefore, the first beast also dominates vv. 12-18.

The two beasts do not emerge from the sea and from the earth as we would have expected, but they emerge quite surprisingly. The first beast comes from the sea (*θηρίον ἀναβαίνον*, v. 1) like a ship and not with the marine profundity of a cetacea. The parallelism between emerging from the sea (v. 1) and emerging from the earth (v. 11) presumably does not signify that the emergence is from the viscera of the earth. On

²²⁵ The numbers in Revelation speak not only of the past or the future, but also of the deceptions of the present which, brave but decisive, come from the world and seek to substitute themselves for God, and seek to snatch the people towards adoration, which solely belongs to God and break the fidelity of the disciples of the Lamb. cfr. G. BIGUZZI, *L'Apocalisse e i suoi enigmi*, 152.

²²⁶ These two agents act in distinctive, but complementary, ways in the dragon's war against the woman's children. cfr. D. L. BARR, *Tales of the End: A Narrative Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, Polebridge Press, California 1998.

the other side, the event of the second beast has something of a tautological nature in emerging from the earth, ἄλλο θηρίον ἀναβαλῖνον, (v. 11) in order to act on the same earth (v. 12).

These two negative powers become irresistible and overwhelming. The negativity of the beasts is rendered acute by the fact that John portrays them as polycephalic and compound monsters: the first beast has seven heads as the dragon (12,3) and is like a leopard, with paws like a bear and a mouth like a lion (v. 2). The second beast has horns like a lamb and makes noise like a dragon (v. 11). The first beast feels itself as the centre of the universe and exercises not only its political domain over each people and nation (v. 7), but also invites the inhabitants of the whole world to worship it (vv. 3-4.8). It pronounces blasphemy against the name of God and his heavenly court (v. 6). At the same time the second beast does not seek anything for itself but does everything for the benefit of the first beast: it induces all people to the worship of the first beast (v. 12), makes a statue in honour of the first beast (v. 14) and animates it to life so that it can speak and put to death all those who refuse to worship it (v. 15). Finally it compels everyone to be marked and makes it illegal for anyone to buy or sell anything unless he is marked with the name of the beast or with the number of the beast (vv. 16-17). The first beast allows the second beast to perform miracles like calling down fire from heaven to the earth and making the statue speak. Thus they serve as fitting propagandists.

Those who follow the beasts worship them. So we read two accounts of worship (i.e., vv. 3b-4.8 and vv. 12b-13). The confrontation of the two worships say that the worship of vv. 3b-4 develops itself in a diffused atmosphere by the support of the dragon and thus it is a free and spontaneous worship. But the second worship is quite induced (v. 12b). So it is forced and oppressive²²⁷ (vv. 15-17). The compelled worship willed by the second beast is offered to a cult statue, which is also

²²⁷ Rev 13,15-17: «and to have anyone who refused to worship the statue of the beast put to death, ...and made it illegal for anyone to buy or sell

constructed by strict command and persuasion (v. 14b). This worship, however, is iconic (the first one is un-iconic) and the necessity of a cult statue seems to be owed to the absence of the first beast in the region in which the second beast is active. These two beasts collaborate for the battle of the great day of God (16,13) and then they are defeated and precipitated in the pond of fire and sulphur (19,20), but never do they meet together during the time of worship. The cult statue removes the distance between the beast and its worshippers²²⁸.

The two acts of worship – that of beast and that of statue of the beast – are distinguishable not only by their modality and atmosphere, but also by their geographical setting, i.e., universality. The first worship is universal (denoted by the expression ὅλη ἡ γῆ) and the second is limited to a region (denoted by the expression ἡ γῆ); that is, it is limited to the earth, where the second beast is active, and seen in the statue, which is willed by the first beast and constructed by the second beast. The universality of the first worship is geographic and that of the second more of sociological²²⁹ (v. 16).

In conclusion, the “earth” of vv. 12.14a, in which the terrestrial beast organizes its cult, is probably a region²³⁰, which distinguishes itself from the “whole earth” of vv. 3-8, in which the sea beast is adored.

This important deduction of geographic type has at least two confirmations in the text:

- 1) The fact that in Rev 16, the two worships are punished by distinct plagues.

anything unless he had been marked with the name of the beast or with the number of its name».

²²⁸ D. A. DESILVA, «The “Image of the Beast” and the Christians in Asia Minor: Escalation of Sectarian Tension in Revelation 13», in *Trinity Journal* 12 (1991), 204-205.

²²⁹ Rev 13,16: «it compelled everyone – small and great alike, rich and poor, slave and citizen – to be branded on the right hand or on the forehead...».

²³⁰ R. H. CHARLES, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of St. John* (ICC, vol. 1), 357.

- 2) The succession of “sea and earth” in vv. 1.11 and not, vice versa, of “earth and sea”²³¹.

So far, we have been examining the characteristics of the two beasts and their ambiances of activities. Now we are going to find out their identities. It is to be noted that their identification is linked with the identification of the earth where they have been situated. There has been debate since the earliest Fathers about the identification of the two beasts in chapter 13.

There are two main trends of interpretations:

- a) Eschatological interpretation
- b) Historico-ecclesiastical interpretation

For the identification of the two beasts, the first warning to take into account is the precious synchronism of 17,10. By saying that the sixth monarch “is” (i.e., present, *ὁ εἷς ἔστιν*), the author of Revelation does not seem in any way to wish to transfer the reader of the 16th –18th centuries in order to say anything about the Papacy²³² or about Luther or the Protestant

²³¹ G. BIGUZZI, *L'Apocalisse e i suoi enigmi*, 57. The unusual succession of sea-earth in vv. 1.11 has a surprise premise in Rev 10. The powerful angel who had given John the small scroll, in fact, put his right foot in the sea and his left foot on the land (10,2b-c). In the biblical formula of cosmic universality «earth» precedes and «sea» follows. In the same Revelation John put always «earth» and then «sea» (7,1.2.3; 12,12), with the only exception of the episode of the powerful angel (10.2.5.8), where for three times John put first «sea» and then «earth» (In v. 6 the earth is significantly mentioned before the sea because it is a cosmic formula.). This signifies above all that for Rev 10 and Rev 13 he has willed to create a new formula, different from that which otherwise was spontaneous to him, and in that formula the sea is more important than the earth. Since in Rev 10 the singular succession «sea-earth» for the placement of the foot of the angel and the same succession of the places from which come the two beasts of Rev 13, it is not impossible that «sea-earth» indicates the geographical-political ambience against which John would have to turn the messages of the scroll which he must take and swallow. In other words, John must have turned his prophecy either against the sea (i.e., the sea beast) or against earth (i.e., the terrestrial beast).

²³² C. M. ZORN, *Die Offenbarung St. Johannis*, Johannes Herrmann, Zwickau 1910, 195-199; R. C. H. LENSKI, *The Interpretation of St. John's*

Innovators, as was often thought at the time of the Reformation. At the same time, the Historico-ecclesiastical interpretations²³³ exclude the eschatological ones²³⁴. As 17,10 confirms, the two beasts are inserted into the politico-religious geography of John.

According to the interpretations of contemporary history, the first beast is identified with Domitian and the second is *sapientia carnis*²³⁵, or magicians and mystifiers like Apollonius of Tiana²³⁶, the heathen priesthood of imperial cult²³⁷, or Simon Magus²³⁸. This type of interpretation, which is predominant today, develops along two different lines based on two different identifications: for some the earth is Palestine while for others the earth is Asia Minor.

Revelation, Warburg, Columbus, OH 1943, 388.394.413.

²³³ Some scholars saw an individual Antichrist to come at the last stage of world history (*Didache*, 16; JUSTINE, *Dialogus cum Tryphone Judaeo*, 32; IRENEUS, *Contra Haereses* 5.25-30. This view is supported by the logical understanding of the Antichrist as a personal counterpart to the personal Christ. But others from the time of the New Testament itself have seen the Antichrist as an evil spirit repeatedly inspiring false teaching throughout the history (1 John 2,18.22; 4,3; 2 John 7; TERTULLIAN, *Adversus Marcionem*, 5,16.

²³⁴ From that of Hippolytus (the first half of 3rd century) to that of F. de Ribera (1591), to that of Th. Zahn (1924, 1926), J. Sickenger (1929), or W. Foerster (1938). For example, for Hippolytus and for de Ribera the first beast was the Antichrist and the second beast was his high priest or his forerunner who is a notorious preacher. cfr. HIPPOLYTUS, *Demonstratio de Christo et Antichristo* 48-50; F. DE RIBERA, *In Sacram Beati Ioannis Apostoli et Euangelistae Apocalypsim Commentarii*, Ex Officina Iuantarum, Lyon 1593, 258-259.

²³⁵ L. De ALCAZAR, *Vestigatio arcani sensus in Apocalypsi.: Adiectum quoque opusculum de sacris ponderibus ac mensuris*, Sumptibus Antonij Pillehotte, Lyon 1618, 518 paragraph B.

²³⁶ H. GROTIUS, *Commentatio ad loca quaedam N. Testamenti quae de antichristo agunt, aut agere putantur, expendenda eruditius*, Apud Ioh. & Cornelium Blaeu, Amsterdam 1640, 40.

²³⁷ R. H. CHARLES, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of St. John* (ICC, vol. 1), 333.

²³⁸ A. LOISY, *L'Apocalypse de Jean*, 254.

Those who support that the land from which the beast comes is Palestine are B. Murrelstein²³⁹ and J. Massyngberde Ford²⁴⁰. For B. Murrelstein the second beast is Herod the great, because it used to speak the language of the emperor of Rome or the dragon (i.e., “and it spoke like a dragon” v. 11), and because he offended the Jewish sensibility by placing the Roman eagle (i.e., the *εἰκών* of v. 14) upon the gates of the temple and reproduced the image on the coins (i.e., the *χάραγμα* vv. 16-17). But, according to J. Massyngberde Ford, the first beast is Vespasian, and the second, Flavius Joseph.

For the others, the land is instead Anatolia in Asia Minor. For P. Touilleux²⁴¹ and for C. Spicq²⁴² the second beast should be the priests of Cibebe, mother of gods, who show their loyalty to Rome by giving worship to the reigning emperor. Many identify the false prophet with this or that of the promoters of the imperial cult in Asia²⁴³.

²³⁹ B. MURRELSTEIN, *Das zweite Tier in der Offenbarung Johannis*, 452-454.457 Also see C. TRESMONTANT, *Enquête sur l'Apocalypse: Auteur, datation, signification*, Éditions F. -X. de Guibert, Paris 1994, 329.

²⁴⁰ J. MASSYNGBERDE FORD, *Revelation*, 227-230.

²⁴¹ P. TOUILLEUX, *L'Apocalypse et les cultes de Domitien et de Cybele*, 114.

²⁴² C. SPICQ, *L'épître aux Hébreux 1*, 136-138.

²⁴³ For example: 1) The *partito filoromano*. cfr. J. WEIß, *Die Offenbarung Johannis*, 17, 2) Plini the young, sent by Traiano in Ponto and Bythinia as extraordinary proconsul. cfr. A. VANNI, «La data di redazione della “Apocalisse” di S. Giovanni e le “bestie” del capitolo 13», 126-144.183-219, 3) The local priesthood of the imperial cult. cfr. R. H. CHARLES, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of St. John* (ICC, vol. 1), 333; R. H. MOUNCE, *The Book of Revelation*, 259; C. H. TALBERT, *The Apocalypse*, 55, and 4) The *Koinon* of Asia. cfr. W. M. RAMSAY, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia and their Place in the Plan of the Apocalypse*, 105-108; J. DEININGER, *Die Provinziallandtage der römischen Kaiserzeit von Augustus bis zum Ende des dritten Jahrhunderts Nach Christus*, C. H. Beck, München 1965, 16-19.36-60. The *Koinon* of Asia is the assembly of the representatives of the various Asian cities who assembled once in a year and organised rites, feasts, plays and planned the construction of new imperial temples. cfr. D. E. AUNE, *Revelation 6-16*, 779. According to G. BIGUZZI, *Apocalisse*, Paoline, Milano 2005, 268, «La Bestia che sale dalla terra è con ogni probabilità l'organismo promotore del culto del sovrano nell'Asia proconsolare, il *commune Asiae*».

The beast from the sea has often been taken to stand for the Roman governor of Asia, i.e., the proconsul who was the emperor's representative in the province. The governor's arrival from Rome by ship for his annual visit makes it possible to say that he arose from the sea²⁴⁴. On the one hand, that visit would have been welcomed by Asian elites as an opportunity to renew their allegiance with Rome and to seek favour for themselves, for their cities, and for the province. According to John, only chaos and evil came ashore on the waves of the western sea, and the advent of the emperor's representative spelled trouble.

3.4 The Relationship between Rev 13 and Rev 14,1-5

We have seen in Rev 13 the two beasts with their activity which is at once seductive, coercive and persecuting. The power they exercise is real and fear inspiring. Though the beast is presented seemingly victorious in Rev 13, the lasting triumph belongs to the Lamb and that is evident in 14,1-5. Since the Lamb provides security and salvation to the 144,000 who follow him, they could withstand the cruel deeds of the beast.

While 14,1-5 presents the Lamb and his followers, Rev 13 presents all that are against the Lamb and his followers²⁴⁵.

²⁴⁴ C. ROWLAND, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity*, Crossroad, New York, NY 1982, 431-432; J. RHYMER, *The End of Time*, St. Paul Publications, Guernsey CI 1992, 111. According to B. FORTE, *Apocalisse*, Edizioni San Paolo, Milano 2000, 99, the sea beast is the «simbolo del potere politico corrotto con probabile riferimento storico all'Impero romano». According to J. LAMBRECHT, «Rev 13,9-10 and Exhortation in the Apocalypse», 332, «The first beast symbolizes the Roman Empire». According to G. BIGUZZI, *Apocalisse*, 268, «La Bestia che sale dal mare è l'imperatore, signore del *mare Nostrum* che si fa adorare dall'ecumene mediterranea»; E. WALHOUT, *Revelation Down to Earth*, W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI 2000, 173.

²⁴⁵ It is interesting to note the comparison between Lamb and the beast: just as the Lamb received the sealed scroll from the one seated upon the throne (5,7), and thereby received power and authority (5,12), so the beast from the sea receives authority from the dragon (13,2). Just as the Lamb is the ruler over people from all tribes, languages, and nations purchased through his blood (5,9), so the beast from the sea rules over tribes, peoples, languages,

The whole chapter 13 illustrates well the devilish nature and the malicious deeds of the beasts that stand against and at times parody the Lamb²⁴⁶. In 13,3, it is specified that one of the heads of the beast “seemed to have a mortal wound”. It so happens that the words used, *ὡς ἐσφαγμένον*, are exactly the same ones that were used in 5,6 to present the Lamb as slain. When it is noted that this mortal wound has been healed, it will be entirely certain that the beast is intentionally presented as a diabolical imitation of Christ who died and rose again. The antithetical parallelism between the Lamb and the beast is perhaps even further emphasized: like the Lamb who redeems mankind (5,9), the beast also exerts his power over them (13,7). And, the antithetical parallelism becomes even more apparent when John notes in 13,8 that only those whose names are written in the book of the slain Lamb will find the strength to refuse to worship the beast. As the Lamb, the beast also has two horns (“two horns like a lamb”, *κέρατα δύο ὅμοια ἀρνίου*, 13,11) and this serves as a “parody to the Lamb-Christ”²⁴⁷. While 14,1-5 presents the 144,000 faithful followers of the Lamb as the people of God,

and nations (13,7). Just as the heavenly cherubim offer their homage to the Lamb (5,12), so the inhabitants of the earth fall prostrate before the beast, pay him homage, and offer him a song of praise (13,4). Just as the sign of recognition of the Lamb is the marks of his slaughter (5,6), so the beast also bears a mortal wound that has been healed (13,3).

²⁴⁶ When we look into Rev 14 as a whole, we see several themes and motifs link with what precedes and follows. First, the introduction in 13,11-18 of the worship of the beast and the possibility of being marked with the name or number of the beast on the right hand or the forehead is countered in 14,1-5 by the 144,000 who have the names of God and the Lamb written on their foreheads. Second, those who worship the beast and receive its mark in 13,11-18 are condemned in 14,9-11 to eternal torment, a consequence not mentioned in 13,11-18. Third, the call for endurance in 14,12 is similar in form to the call in 13,10 and is similar in content to 12,17, with the reference to keeping the commandments of God and maintaining the testimony of Jesus. Fourth, the beatitude in 14,13 appears to be addressed to those who die for their faith, a possibility mentioned in 13,15.

²⁴⁷ G. BIGUZZI, *Apocalisse*, 258.

Rev 13 illustrates the numerical symbol 666 as the symbol of imperfection and all that is against God and his kingdom.

It is true that both the followers of the Lamb and the followers of the beasts have a mark upon their foreheads. But the content of these marks and their effects upon each of them are different. The mark of the Lamb protects his followers and it serves as a sign of the Lamb's own possession. But the mark of the beast stands as a sign of destruction²⁴⁸. It is clear in 13,16-17 that those who do not have the mark of the beast face severe socio-economic sanctions. Those who have the mark of the beast are not only identified as beast worshippers, but also become the objects of the irreversible wrath of God (14,9,11). This implies, by contrast, that those who have "the seal of God" are God worshippers and will be the objects of his steadfast love. The sealing would have the effect of assuring the People of God of his special concern and plan for them. Even when facing persecution and martyrdom at the hand of the beast, they can be certain that no plague will touch them but that they will be in his presence forever.

All that chapter 13 contains prepares the background to understand and appreciate our pericope better. The cloudy devilish scenario gives way to the bright vision on Lamb and his 144,000 faithful followers.

Conclusion

In this third part we have studied Rev 13 in its details to understand the parallel and contrasting characteristics of the two beasts. In Rev 13, the two beasts are given distinct identities and roles, though their careers are seen to intertwine in a remarkable way. They are both agents of the dragon. At

²⁴⁸ The idolaters of the two idolatries were made to undergo the medicinal and punitive scourging for their conversion, while faithful servant of God (7,3), and the followers of the Lamb (14,4b) are preserved from them because they are virgins from all kinds of idolatries (14,4a). cfr. G. BIGUZZI, *I settenari nella struttura dell'Apocalisse*, 210.

the same time, we saw differences in their operations. The first beast acts mainly through the agency of the second beast as the latter exercises the authority of the former. The second beast actively secures the world's submission to the first beast, both politically and religiously. Again, the second beast enforces a total monopoly of the global economy in which none can participate unless one receives the mark of the first beast. The presentation given by John in vivid terms is that no area of community life is untouched by the beasts; in fact their lordship is total and absolute over all aspects of life.

After having seen the activities of the beasts, we tried to decode the numerical symbol 666, taking into account the different interpretations it has undergone throughout centuries. The codification of 666 helps us to reach the identification of the beast. After the verification of different approaches and suggestions, we reached our conclusion that it stands for everything antithetical to the perfect number of the people of God, 144,000. Then we have found out that the activities of the second beast are situated in the geographical background of Asia Minor.

Thus, the third part helped us to understand the challenges undergone by the followers of the Lamb in their following after him.

Conclusion

In chapter two we have analysed both the supporting and the contrasting texts to 14,1-5 in three parts. While the supporting texts have helped us to understand the 144,000 faithful followers of the Lamb deeper, the contrasting text has helped us to figure out the enemies of the faithful followers of the Lamb, i.e., the beast and its supporters. The followers of the Lamb thus must beware of all those stand opposite to the allies of the Lamb.

As the parallel text to 14,1-5, in the first part, we have analysed 7,1-8. Through the angelic visions and the audition, we understand from this text that the angels as the mission-bearers of the living God are assigned the significant task of putting a seal on the foreheads of the servants of God. The Lamb's followers receive this seal because they are his redeemed ones and because they accompany him wherever he goes. And then the number of the sealed is heard in an audition that they are "a hundred and forty-four thousand". These "hundred and forty-four thousand" consists of the 12 tribes of Israel.

Subsequently, as the first section of the second part, we studied in detail the reference to the "woman with a crown of 12 stars" as a text that includes 12. The numerous scholarly debates in the history of exegesis centre on the question of whether the "woman with a crown of 12 stars" symbolises Mary, the Mother of God, or the People of God of both the Old Testament and the New Testament. On the basis of strong textual support, we assume that the "woman with a crown of 12 stars" symbolises the People of God.

In the second section of the second part, we studied the measurement and the peculiarities of the New Jerusalem. In the description of the New Jerusalem we noted that the numerical symbol 12 is used in its multiplicity. We have seen that John made use of the numerical symbol 12 – 12 tribes, 12 Apostles, 12 as the basic number of the space and time of the New Jerusalem – to speak of the one people of God for whom is prepared the New Jerusalem. Thus 12 becomes the measurement of time and space in the New Jerusalem.

The above two parts clarify the identity and the characteristics of the 144,000. Through these two parts we have come across the relationship between 7,1-8; 12,1; 21,12.14.21; 22,1 and 14,1-5. They provide clear examples of how John

cleverly makes use of the powerful numerical symbol 12 to present the people of God. These references explain who the 144,000 are and how they relate to the Lamb. Thus, it is clear that 12 is the number of the people of God of both the past generation, which is indicated by the 12 tribes of Israel and of the present generation, which is indicated by the 12 disciples of the Lamb and of the future generation, which is indicated by the space and time of the New Jerusalem.

In the third part, we analysed Rev 13, the contrasting text to 14,1-5, and sought to identify the opponents of the Lamb and specify their malicious deeds. We then analysed the two beasts, i.e., the first beast from the sea and another beast from the earth. The first beast considers itself the centre of the universe and exercises not only its political lordship over everything and everybody, but also invites everybody to worship it and to pronounce blasphemies against God. At the same time, since the second beast is completely subservient to the first beast, it does everything for the benefit of the latter: it induces all people to the worship of the latter, makes a statue in honour of the latter and animates it to life so that it can speak and put to death all those who refuse to worship it. As the opponents of the Lamb and their supporters, these two beasts make every effort to harm the growth of the faithful and the continuous witness of their life. Their power is so strong that it affects all the normal walks of life of the faithful. Finally, it compels everyone to be marked and makes it illegal for anyone to buy or sell anything unless one is marked with the number of the beast: 666. This treacherous number is sometimes considered to refer to some historical figure, but we have reached the conclusion that it does not point to any precise historical figure. Rather, it represents any evil act or power that stands against the Lamb. The number 666 is above all a

figure that thoroughly plays upon the number 6, the miserable half of number 12, which is the number of the people of God.

Thus the first and second parts throw light on the figure of the Lamb and its followers, while the third part denigrates them. Without the minimum of hesitation, one who reads Revelation must consequently opt for the part of the just: he must keep to the side of the 12 Apostles of the Lamb, of the 144,000 with the seal of the living God, and must be fully aware that the country towards which he makes his pilgrimage is the New Jerusalem. These three parts complement the study that we have already been making from chapter one onwards, i.e., to figure out the identity and the functions of the Lamb and the 144,000. They lend greater clarity to the picture.

CHAPTER THREE

THE LAMB AND HIS FAITHFUL FOLLOWERS

Introduction

In this chapter we will go into detail the two points of interest of our research, namely the Lamb and his faithful followers. In order to accomplish this aim we will divide this chapter into two parts. The first part of this chapter will analyse all of the occurrences of the Lamb-figure in the book of Revelation. These Lamb occurrences in Revelation are regrouped in eleven groups, taking into account their contexts. The multifaceted characteristics of the Lamb figure will help us to comprehend well the Christological figure, Christ-the Lamb.

After having studied the Lamb figure, in the second part of this chapter we will consider the relationship between the Church, as the faithful followers of the Lamb, and the Lamb. Here we will consider mainly how the Church relates to the Lamb as the witnessing community. This second part has three sections. The first section will show how the Church is portrayed in Revelation. In order to get a comprehensive view of the Church in Revelation, we shall examine nine important terms that are used in Revelation to illustrate the Church. The second section will examine what role the Lamb plays in the concrete life of the Church. Here we will look into the efficient presence and deeds of the Risen Lord among the seven Churches. The third section focuses more on the concept of witnessing. What are the salient features of witness in the particular context of Revelation? How does the Church, as the faithful followers of the Lamb, live a life of witnessing?

These two parts will help us to gather a comprehensive understanding of both the Lamb and his faithful followers, i.e., the Church. Thus this chapter complements the understanding of Rev 14,1-5, the concrete pericope of our research.

1. Christ the Lamb in the Book of Revelation

Introduction

We will examine here the role and function of the Lamb, ἀρνίον as a major Christological image¹ employed in the book of Revelation. The Lamb symbol controls and interprets Revelation's other major themes². Of the thirty New Testament occurrences of the word ἀρνίον twenty-nine are in Revelation (only in 13,11 does the term not refer to Jesus; rather it refers there to the beast from the Land). The only other New Testament occurrence of the term is in John 21,15, where the plural form τὰ ἀρνία is a metaphor referring to the Christian community. These 28 occurrences can be classified into eleven groups, taking into consideration their contexts:

- 1) The Presentation of the Lamb (5,6-14)
- 2) The Lamb as the Revealer (6,1-17)
- 3) The Lamb as the Saviour and Shepherd of the great multitude (7,9-8,1)
- 4) The blood of the Lamb (12,7-12)
- 5) The book of life of the Lamb (13,8)
- 6) The Lamb and the 144,000 faithful followers (14,1-5)

¹ According to T. STRAMARE, «Apocalisse», 459, «Escluso il quarto vangelo, l'Apocalisse è fra gli scritti del N.T. quello che presenta la cristologia più sviluppata». The Lamb symbol is the most pervasive means of transmitting the Christological message of the book of Revelation. cfr. A. LÄPPLE, «Das Geheimnis des Lammes: Das Christbild der Offenbarung des Johannes», in *Bibel und Kirche* 39 (1984), 53-58; S. LAWS, *In the Light of the Lamb*, 24.

² G. B. CAIRD, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine*, 75; M. E. BORING, *Revelation*, 110-111; W. J. HARRINGTON, *Revelation*, 86-88; C. ROLAND, *Revelation*, Epworth Press, London 1993, 74-80; C. F. SLEEPER, *The Victorious Christ: A Study of the Book of Revelation*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY 1996, 65-66.

- 7) The Lamb as the Judge (14,10)
- 8) The Lamb as the Redeemer (15,3-4)
- 9) The Lamb as the Lord of lords and the King of kings (17,14)
- 10) The Lamb as the Bridegroom of the eschatological Wedding (19,7-9)
- 11) Jerusalem, the bride of the Lamb (21,9-22,5)

The very personality and presence of the Lamb-Christ is clearly presented in all these contexts. The singular references can be well understood when we analyse them in their contexts. So we will follow this method, which analyses each reference in its particular context.

The exegeses of the following groups will demonstrate that the Lamb functions as a deliverer, a concerned Pastor and a role model to help the followers of the Lamb to endure the things that will happen soon (1,3; 22,6-7).

1.1 The Presentation of the Lamb (5,6-14)

The first Lamb reference in Revelation is seen in this presentation scene, and altogether there are four Lamb references in this section (i.e., 5,6.8.12.13). In this presentation scene, Beasley-Murray³ notes a progression in praise from the four creatures and the 24 elders (vv. 8-10); to myriads of angels (vv. 11-12) and, lastly, to the entire creation (vv. 13-14). According to Krodel⁴, the Lamb is exalted here to God's throne over the universe, the new domain of the Lamb.

Following the description of the serene magnificence of the throne room of God and the worship perpetually offered

³ G. R. BEASLEY-MURRAY, *Revelation*, 110. At the same time, Scholars apparently disagree whether the whole scenario has to be interpreted 1) as an *Enthronement*, 2) as a *Commission* in a Heavenly Court or 3) as an *Investiture*. cfr. M. R. HOFFMANN, *The Destroyer and the Lamb*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 2005, 135. For a good survey see D. E. AUNE, *Revelation 1-5* (Word Biblical Commentary 52A), Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, TN 1997, 332-338.

⁴ A. KRODEL, *Revelation*, 149-150.

to God by heavenly beings (4,1-11), John's attention is drawn to a scroll with seven seals in the right hand of God (5,1). A search ensues for someone worthy to open the scroll's seals and inaugurate God's plan for the world (v. 2), but no one is found worthy in all creation (v. 3). One of the 24 elders introduces the Lamb as worthy⁵ by saying, "The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open⁶, ἀνοίξει, the scroll and its seven seals" (v. 5). This Lamb is characterized with seven horns and with seven eyes⁷. The Lamb, as one who is qualified, comes and takes the scroll from the one who sits on the throne, and in response, magnificent

⁵ The Lamb is seen as worthy of worship (Rev 5) in a sense parallel to that of God (Rev 4): cfr. W. C. VAN UNNIK, «'Worthy is the Lamb'. The Background of Apoc 5», in P. BONNARD etc (ed.), *Mélanges bibliques en hommage au R.P. Béda Rigaux*, Duculot, Gembloux 1970, 445-461; K. -P. JÖRNS, *Das hymnische Evangelium. Untersuchungen zu Aufbau, Funktion und Herkunft der hymnischen Stücke in der Johannesoffenbarung*, Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, Gütersloh 1971, 56-73; D. GUTHRIE, «The Christology of Revelation», in J. B. GREEN – M. TURNER (eds.), *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI 1994, 401. The Greek adjective ἄξιος, which is rendered «worthy», refers to that which is «deserving». cfr. W. FOERSTER, «ἄξιος», in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1, 379; F. W. DANKER, «ἄξιος», in *A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 93. In this context, it denotes both the ability and the authorization to execute the divine plans of salvation and of kingship. cfr. E. TIEDTKE, «ἄξιος», in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 3, 349; R. STEFANOVIĆ, *The Background and Meaning of the Sealed Book of Revelation 5*, The Andrews University Press, Berrien Springs, MI 1996, 180-181.

⁶ John's use of ἀνοίξει (aorist active infinitive tense of ἀνοίγω, «to open»), which is an infinitive of result, reinforces the notion that only Christ had the virtue and authority to consummate God's eschatological plan. cfr. F. W. DANKER, «ἄξιος», in *A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 84; J. A. BROOKS - C. L. WINBERY, *Syntax of New Testament Greek*, University Press of America, Lanham, Maryland 1979, 135.

⁷ The seven horns would symbolize complete power, usually royal power (Num 23,22; Deut 33,17; Ps 18,2; Dan 7,7.20; 1 Enoch 90,12-13; Rev 12,3; 13,1.11; 17,3.7.12.16), and the seven eyes represent the Lamb's complete omniscience (1,4; cfr. Zech 3,8-10; 4,10).

outbursts of worship – two acts of praising⁸ – resound from the 24 elders, the four living creatures, and the whole universe.

The first act of praise (vv. 9-10) is described as “New Song”⁹, ὡδὴν καινὴν. This song describes the reasons why the Lamb is worthy to open the scroll: “for you were slain¹⁰ and redeemed [persons] to God from every tribe, tongue, people and race with your blood” (v. 9). The worthiness of the Lamb to receive worship stems from his great act of redemption and sacrifice (v. 9)¹¹. It is Christ’s sacrifice that exalts him to the status of God’s eschatological agent¹². Rev 5,10 follows with the same ideas that follow the reference to Christ’s sacrifice in 1,5: “and you made them a kingdom and priests to our God and they will reign on the earth” (5,10); “And he made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father” (1,6). Christ’s sacrifice creates the kingdom of God wherein every person would be a priest with direct access to God, a promise explicitly fulfilled

⁸ John’s ultimate Christological intent in recording the hymns was to underscore the establishment of the Lamb in His authority as the Redeemer and Ruler. According to J. MASSYNGBAERDE FORD, «The Christological Function of the Hymns in the Apocalypse of John», in *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 36 (1998), 211: «all the major events in the Apocalypse are accompanied by heavenly hymns».

⁹ On *Καινός* as something new in nature, different from the usual, impressive, qualitatively better than the old, superior in value or attraction: R. H. HARRISVILLE, «The Concept of Newness in the New Testament», in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 74 (1955), 74; R. H. MOUNCE, *The Book of Revelation*, 147-148 n. 22; J. BEHM, «*Καινός*», in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 3, 447; S. S. SMALLEY, *The Revelation to John*, 136.

¹⁰ The verb *σφάζειν* refers to the violent death of the Lamb and probably alludes to the slaughtering of the Paschal Lamb an image used early in the Christian tradition to interpret Christ’s death. cfr. O. MICHEL, «*σφάζω*», in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 7, 925-935.

¹¹ The Lamb qualified for worship by his great act of redemption and sacrifice. cfr. E. SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA, «Redemption as Liberation: Apoc 1:5f. and 5.9f.», in *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 36 (1974), 229.

¹² It is only the Lamb who is capable of opening the book of visions (5,9), which shows a Christology containing a revelatory element, and only he can open the seals, which points to a Christology of full sovereignty. cfr. D. R. CARNegie, «Worthy is the Lamb: The Hymns in Revelation», in H. H. ROWDEN (ed.), *Christ the Lord*, Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester 1982, 243-256.

in 21,22-25¹³. Revelation describes in these references an intimate and close fellowship between God the Almighty and the community of the faithful. This possibility would provide them with spiritual assurance, comfort and encouragement.

The hymn in 5,9-10 parallels a similar one to God Almighty in 4,11. Both begin with the word ἄξιός ἐστι. While the hymn in 4,11 celebrates the worthiness of the Creator, the one in 5,9-10 celebrates the worthiness of the Redeemer-Lamb. The New Song in 5,9-10 that ushers in a new era also parallels the new name (2,17; 3,12), the New Jerusalem (3,12; 21,2), the other New Song (14,3), the new heaven and new earth (21,1) and God's proclamation to make all things new¹⁴ (21,5). New things connote salvation and restoration in Revelation. Those who sing New Songs, receive names and inhabit the New Jerusalem and will experience a new quality of life free from death, illness and grief in the new age (20,1-22,5).

The Christology and Soteriology of this hymn (vv. 9b-10) are remarkably high. The Lamb is honoured for his divine person (v. 7), and for his work of redemption on behalf of humanity: its cost ("you were slaughtered"), its scope (a universal ransom) and its outcome (believers become "a royal house and priests for our God"). The saving nature of Christ's work stems from the unique character of his divine-human person¹⁵.

The second act of praise to the Lamb begins with ἄξιόν ἐστίν (vv. 11-12). Here, the Lamb receives seven attributes, symbolic of his perfection. The first four predicates (i.e., power, riches, wisdom and strength) are qualities that the Lamb possesses and relate directly to his praiseworthiness. Among these, "power" and "strength" are synonymous. This attribute is frequently used in the Old Testament to help delineate the nature of God's kingship (Exod 15,13; 1 Chr 16,27-28; Ps

¹³ G. E. LADD, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 92; J. P. M. SWEET, *Revelation*, 129.

¹⁴ P. E. HUGHES, *The Book of Revelation*, 82.

¹⁵ S. S. SMALLEY, *The Revelation to John*, 136.

62,11) and occasionally as the characteristic of a king (1 Sam 2,10). Elsewhere in Revelation, “power” is used four more times of God (4,11; 7,12; 11,17; 19,1), but never of the Lamb; and “strength” is used only of God (7,12). “Wisdom” appears in one other hymnic setting of Revelation as a prerogative of God (7,12). The final three (i.e., honour, glory and blessing) constitute the nature of praise offered to the Lamb by angels and humans as an appropriate expression¹⁶. “Honour”¹⁷ denotes the “worth” ascribed to a person, and the respect accorded especially to someone of exalted status. “Honour” is therefore the prerogative of gods, as of kings, and indeed of God himself (cfr. Isa 29,13). The term is used elsewhere in the Revelation of God twice (4,11; 7,12), and once of both God and the Lamb (5,13). “Glory” occurs elsewhere in Revelation as an ascription to God (4,11; 7,12; 19,1), and it is used of God and the Lamb together (5,13). The attributes “honour” and “glory” are often paired in the New Testament and early Christian literature (I Tim 1,17; Rev 21,26; Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus*, 61,1-2). ‘Blessing’ occurs three times in Revelation as a predicate of the Lamb (here), or of God (5,13; 7,12).

The third song of praise (5,13) brings the praise to a fitting conclusion in three ways. First, we note the increasing numbers from the four creatures and 24 elders (vv. 9-10), to the angelic host (vv. 11-12), to all creation (v. 13). Secondly¹⁸, v. 13 refers to all creation and thus actualises the reference to every tribe, language, people and race in v. 9. Thirdly, the third hymn is a fitting conclusion because it praises both God and the Lamb together for the first time in Revelation. Three of the eternal prerogatives ascribed to the Godhead in the present hymn (‘blessing’, ‘reverence’ and ‘glory’) are repeated from v. 12, but in a different order. To the collection is added *κράτος* (‘might’).

¹⁶ R. H. CHARLES, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John* (ICC, vol. 1), 149; G. R. BEASLEY-MURRAY, *Revelation*, 128.

¹⁷ J. SCHNEIDER, «τιμή, τιμάω», in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 8, 169; S. AALEN, «Glory, Honour», in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 2, 44-48.

¹⁸ G. E. LADD, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 93.

This word is used in the LXX to denote human strength (Deut 8,17; Job 21,23), but more usually with reference to the power of God (Job 12,16, where the term is linked to *ισχύς*). In the New Testament, the term *κράτος* ('might') as applied to God and Christ seems to denote more particularly the outer aspect of the divine strength¹⁹. This universal and cosmic praise is offered eternally both to God and to the Lamb. Until now the worship taking place in the throne room in Rev 4-5 has been ascribed either to God (4,8,11) or to his Christ (5,9-10,12). The unique relationship between the Father and the Son has been explicit throughout. Now it is clear that they are joined together explicitly as objects of Christian worship; and this is a further important indication of John's high Christology in Revelation²⁰. The Lamb of the throne-vision is no longer simply an image of the Jewish Messiah; he has become evidently the divine and sovereign Christ of Christian Theology²¹.

The vision ends in Rev 5,14 with the worship of the four creatures and the 24 elders²². The 'Amen' of the four creatures and the worship of the 24 elders establishes an *inclusio* with 4,4-8: the vision of the heavenly court in Rev 4-5 begins and ends with the four creatures and 24 elders worshipping²³. This *inclusio* attests to the unity of 4,1-5,14. Rev 4,1-5,14 actually gives a focus to the book of Revelation. These chapters form

¹⁹ W. MICHAELIS, «κράτος», in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 3, 905-910.

²⁰ On the centrality of Christ in Revelation, E. F. Scott writes: «The figure of Christ is not accidental, but absolutely central. Everything turns on the significance of Christ for the Divine plan, on the Church he has founded and his future coming as its deliverer. If the belief in Christ were eliminated from the book, there would be left not a purely Jewish Apocalypse, but a jumble of meaningless fragments», cfr. E. F. SCOTT, *The Book of Revelation*, SCM, London 1940, 108.

²¹ J. R. MICHAELS, *Revelation*, 98.

²² The 4 creatures and the 24 elders symbolize all manner of living beings. cfr. G. R. BEASLEY-MURRAY, *Revelation*, 117 n. 4; P. E. HUGHES, *The Book of Revelation*, 73-76.

²³ R. H. MOUNCE, *The Book of Revelation*, 150; L. MORRIS, *The Revelation of St. John*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI 1987, 102.

the theological centre of the book of Revelation by asserting that for God the Almighty creation and redemption involve one beneficent process. The Lamb is the symbol of God's love for humanity and conveys that the decisive victory had already been won in heaven (5,9-12), a victory that has future consequences on earth (5,9-10.13). Worship then begins in heaven with the four creatures and 24 elders and continues until the entire creation joins it. In 5,6-14, the Christ-Lamb participates in divine honours with God by receiving prayers (5,8), praise (5,12) and standing at the height of the cosmos as God's co-regent (5,13). Rev 5,13 is the first explicit statement where Christ receives honours alongside God²⁴. This shared reign is most evident at the end of Revelation, where not only God sits on the celestial thrones, but also the Lamb occupies that place of honour (22,1.3). As occupant of the throne that belonged to God alone, the Lamb is worthy of the praise that was God's alone²⁵. Since throughout Revelation, God is the one defined by Christ, the one who shares even his throne with Christ, then the figures and especially the voices of God and Christ tend to fade into each other²⁶.

This presentation scene focuses on the Lamb's acceptance of the sealed scroll from the hand of the one seated on the throne. The hymns of 5,9-14 celebrate the worthiness of the Lamb whose death has provided salvation for people of every nation.

²⁴ Seven times the Lamb is coupled with a reference to God in Revelation (5,13; 6,16; 7,10; 14,4; 21,22; 22,1; 22,3). The sevenfold reference to the Lamb and God is significant: it symbolizes the Lamb's perfect reign with God.

²⁵ cfr. J. L. RESSEGUIE, *Revelation Unsealed*, 132. The relationship between God the Father and Christ is illustrated again by R. BAUCKHAM, «The Worship of Jesus in Apocalyptic Christianity», in *New Testament Studies* 27 (1981), 322-341; D. GUTHRIE, «The Christology of Revelation», 398; C. TUCKETT, *Christology of the New Testament*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2001, 183.

²⁶ cfr. M. E. BORING, «Narrative Christology in the Apocalypse», in *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 54 (1992), 707. It is clear that the close identification between God Almighty and the Lamb is a consistent dimension of the Theology of Revelation. cfr. R. H. CHARLES, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John* (ICC, vol. 1), 151.

1.2 The Lamb as the Revealer (6,1-17)

Rev 6,1-17 and 7,9-8,1 both fall within the seven seals sequence²⁷ (6,1-8,1), but since they comprise distinctive types of visions, we will address them separately under two headings (i.e., 6,1-17 with the title “The Lamb as the Revealer” and 7,9-8,1 as “The Lamb as the Saviour and Shepherd of the great multitude”). However, we will consider the seven seals in this section as a unit and will analyse the Lamb references of this section (6,1.16) in more detail.

The opening of the seals²⁸ constitutes the Lamb’s only action in 6,1-17; for he alone is qualified to do so (5,5.9). Rev 6,1a reads: “Now I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals”. The Lamb is explicitly mentioned only here as the subject of the verb ἤνοιξεν, which occurs 6 more times with the subject τὸ ἀρνίον assumed (6,3.5.7.9.12; 8,1). The act of the sequential opening of each of the seven seals (6,1.3.5.7.9.12; 8,1) symbolizes the gradual unfolding of the contents of the scroll in the visions accompanying each opening. Since the Lamb is the chief Messianic figure of the opening of the seals, the opening of the seals takes on more importance.

The opening of the seals (σφραγίδας) of “the scroll written within and on the back” (5,1) by the Lamb symbolizes the unveiling and realizing of God’s plan for history²⁹. Christ, the Lamb, is depicted as worthy to open these seals at the beginning of the visionary section, where he receives the power from the one sitting on the throne. As the Lamb opened the first four seals, and one of the four living creatures commands “come”, four horses and riders³⁰ are released (6,1-8). These seals follow

²⁷ D. E. AUNE, *Revelation* 1-5, 389.

²⁸ Christ-the Lamb is the absolute protagonist of this literary section. cfr. G. BIGUZZI, *Apocalisse*, 163.

²⁹ G. B. CAIRD, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine*, 72.

³⁰ The motif of four riders is loosely based on Zech 1,11-17, while the motif of four horses of different colours (white, red, black, and pale) is just as loosely based on the various coloured horses drawing chariots in Zech 6,1-8. cfr. D. E. AUNE, *Revelation* 1-5, 393. Among the first four seals, the function of the first rider on the white horse is highly discussed, as to

a similar pattern in imagery and presentation. The next three

whether it is a negative or a positive symbol. 1) Positive interpretations: For an interpretation of the first horse as positive, see G. BIGUZZI, *I settenari nella struttura dell'Apocalisse*, 121-130. Biguzzi emphasizes the positive character of the first rider: white colour, the crown, the verb «to conquer» and the parallel 19,11 where there to identify the first rider as Christ. cfr. J. HERZER, «Die erste apokalyptische Reiter und der Könige. Ein Beitrag zur Christologie der Johannesapokalypse», in *New Testament Studies* 45 (1999), 230-249. a) Christ, the Messiah, or the Divine Warrior. Since the rider on the white horse in 19,11-16 is called "the Word of God" and represents the Messiah, interpreters beginning with Irenaeus (*Adversus haereses*, 4,21.3) have understood the rider in 6,2 as Christ. Some examples for the supporters of this view are: G. E. LADD, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 96-100; J. SCHMID, *Studien zur Geschichte des griechischen Apokalypse-Texts I*, Karl Zink, München 1955, 60; M. BACHMANN, «Der erste apokalyptischen Reiter und die Anlage des letzten Buches der Bible», in *Biblica* 67 (1986), 240-275; Z. C. HODGES, «The First Horseman of the Apocalypse», in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 119 (1962), 324-334; J. P. HEIL, «The Fifth Seal (Rev 6,9-11) as a Key to the Book of Revelation», in *Biblica* 74 (1993), 223. The appearance of the white horse in 19,11-16 might suggest that the rider here in 6,2, like the rider there, is the Messiah. Despite the verbal similarity between 6,2 and 19,12, however, the two riders have actually very little in common: though both have white mounts, the rider in 6,2 carries a bow and wears a crown (στέφανος) of victory, while the rider in 19,11-16 has a sharp two edged sword in his mouth and wears many diadems (διαδήματα), symbols of sovereignty. cfr. H. B. SWETE, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, 86. The setting of 6,2 is that of conquest and victory, while in 19,11-16 the context is one of righteous retribution. cfr. S. S. SMALLEY, *The Revelation to John*, 149. The first rider should not be identified with the Messiah of 19,11-16 since it is obviously the Lamb himself who is opening the seals, and it is therefore unlikely that the Lamb is also the rider summoned by the breaking of the first seal. cfr. R. H. MOUNCE, *The Book of Revelation*, 153. Further, the Messiah is not expected to appear before the Messianic woes are complete. cfr. R. H. CHARLES, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John* (ICC, vol. 1), 164. b) The victorious progress of the Gospel. Since there appear to be insuperable obstacles in identifying Christ as the first rider, a number of interpreters have suggested that the conquering activity of the rider can represent the triumph of the Gospel. cfr. J. WEISS, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes: Ein Beitrag zur Literatur und Religionsgeschichte*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1904, 60-62; E. B. ALLO, *Saint Jean: L'Apocalypse*, 87-88; R. STEFANOVIC, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, Andrew University Press, Berrien Springs, MI 2002, 54. 2) Negative interpretations. a) Military conquest; J. ROLOFF, *Revelation*, 80-81 or, more specifically, a Parthian invasion. cfr. O. BÖCHER, *Die Johannesapokalypse*, 47-56; B. METZGER, *Breaking the Code*, 58, or Rome. cfr. F. SPITTA, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, Waisenhaus, Halle 1889, 260.

horses are given destructive powers, but they do not stand for divine judgement.

One could divide the first four seals into groups of one (positive) and three (negative). Both the evil-doers as well as the faithful bear the burden of plagues. They portray some typical features of the present days – ambiguity of history marred by violence, injustice and death³¹. These horses and riders, though described sequentially are to be considered as appearing simultaneously. The repeated use of the passive ἐδόθη³² emphasizes (vv. 4[bis].8) the author's conviction that God is the only true sovereign power (cfr. v. 10). Therefore, the sufferings unleashed by the riders do not cause disappointment for the followers of the Lamb. They are aware of the greater power of God that will overcome the forces of evil.

In brief, we can conclude the following from the above four sealing. The Christ-Lamb has come and has inaugurated

Those who find a reference to the threat to Rome from Parthia, in this verse, point especially to the fact that the crowned conqueror holds a bow. The bow was not a Roman, but a Parthian, weapon; and the Parthians were the only mounted archers, in the first century AD, who typically rode white horses. cfr. S. S. SMALLEY, *The Revelation to John*, 150. The first horse symbolizes the negative effects of war (e.g., the deaths of loved ones/ both civilian and military; the destruction of public and private property; the disruption of everyday life). The white horse brings the message that war brings pain and suffering. cfr. E. SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, 62-65. b) The Antichrist. cfr. M. RISSI, «The Rider on the White Horse: A Study of Rev 6,1-8», in *Interpretation* 18 (1964), 415-416. But according to Poirier, this figure is not to be identified with the Antichrist. J. C. POIRIER, «The First Rider: A response to Michael Bachmann», in *New Testament Studies* 45 (1999), 261. c) The sun god Mithras. cfr. H. GUNKEL, *Zum religionsgeschichtlichen Verständnis des Neuen Testaments*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen, 1903, 53-54 n. 6. ³¹ Most likely the reference here is not to concrete events of the time, but to metaphors, which are valid in every age. On the paralysing force of injustice invading history, symbolized particularly in the third seal, cfr. U. VANNI, «Il terzo "sigillo" dell'Apocalisse (Ap 6,5-6): simbolo dell'ingiustizia sociale?», in *Gregorianum* 58 (1978), 691-719.

³² The verb ἐδόθη is used five times in vv. 1-8, referring to a divine commission or divine enablement bestowed on all the riders with the exception of the third (vv. 5-6). cfr. D. E. AUNE, *Revelation* 6-16, 395.

the *eschaton* by opening the seals. This is a prophetic act because the scroll contains the will of God for humanity. Only the Lamb is worthy to open the scroll, that is, the Lamb functions as a Revealer (cfr. 1,1.5.19). By opening the scroll, the Lamb sets into motion the divine plan.

The pattern shifts in the fifth seal. Here the address of those who are martyred “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true” (v. 10) introduces a heavenly liturgical scene in the description of the seals, i.e., a cry for vindication of the faithful who have been slain. Their death symbolizes their confrontation of the antagonistic powers, as explicit in the reference “slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne”. The text directs the attention of the reader to those who have offered their lives for Christ. This retrospective view of their lives, faithful to Christ, also states their powerlessness in the face of the opposing and persecuting powers and the need for the manifestation of the might of God. It is articulated in their outcry for vindication of their death (6,9-11)³³. Instead of promising an immediate intervention of God’s eschatological judgement, the souls are asked to rest “a little longer” until their number should be complete³⁴. The intervention of God represents not

³³ J. P. HEIL, «The Fifth Seal (Rev 6,9-11)», 220-243 argues that the pericope in 6,9-11 effects a major transition in the narration of Revelation, and that it can be seen as a key to understanding the whole book. His analysis helps to organize the narrative material in Revelation from the perspective of martyrdom, but it is questionable whether the entire vision of John hangs on the call for vindication of those “who had been slain”. Revelation does not say that all members of the Church were slain, and those who are slain form only a small section. Though martyrdom has an important function in the narrative, it should not be made the central axis of the visions in Revelation, as it is only subordinate to the motifs of the intervention of God in history and the community’s faithfulness to God and Christ. But according to M. G. REDDISH, «Martyr Christology», 86, «The theme of martyrdom is not just an incidental part of the book of Revelation, but is the primary motif of John’s writings. Revelation is a book written for and about martyrs».

³⁴ In 1 Enoch 47,4; 4 Ezra 4,33.35-37 and 2 Baruch 23,4-5 we see very similar statements. 1 Enoch 47,4 states that the angels are joyful because the number of the righteous has been reached and no more righteous ones will suffer unjustly. 4 Ezra 4,33.35-37 asks when will the new age come and how long will the souls of the righteous remain in their chambers. Jeremiel

only his faithfulness to the promise of redemption and justice, but also vindicates the role of the faithful in God's plan. It is also a divine assurance to them in times of tribulation, which is fundamental to John's vision.

In the sixth seal (vv. 12-17)³⁵, John shifts to an earthly scene and presents cosmic upheavals and cataclysms that threaten humanity. These apocalyptic events³⁶ describe God's response to the dominion of the forces of evil. It is not to be taken as his intervention as the final judgement, but an expression of his on-going dynamic presence amidst the ambiguity of the days of man. The sixth seal presents the power of God and of Christ in the ambiguity of the days of man. The positive note of God's engagement in history and his protection of all those who accept his sovereignty define the great day of "the wrath of the Lamb"³⁷.

replies, «When the number of those like yourselves is completed». 2 Baruch 23,4-5 states that God determined before time how many persons would be born and how many would die. «No creature will live again unless the number that has been appointed is completed». cfr. J. H. CHARLESWORTH (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (vol. 1), 6-7, 520.616-617. In all three contexts, John is primarily concerned with the question of theodicy and how long the unjust will go on unpunished.

³⁵ These verses can be divided into two separate parts. The first scene (vv. 12-14) – eschatological woes – includes an earthquake, a solar eclipse, a lunar eclipse (v. 12), a falling star (v. 13a) and a receding sky (v. 14a). Every mountain and island is dislodged (v. 14b). In the second scene (vv. 15-17), the kings, the upper class, the generals, the rich, the strong, every slave and freedman have hidden themselves (v. 15) because they have recognized the eschatological signs (vv. 12-14) and attempt to avoid the wrath of the Lamb. cfr. T. B. SLATER, *Christ and Community: A Socio-Historical Study of the Christology of Revelation*, 179; J. L. MANGINA, *Revelation* (Brazos Theological Commentary), Brazos Press, Grand Rapids, MI, 2010, 106.

³⁶ In cosmic upheavals, the Old Testament alludes to the historical end of sinful nations (Isa 34,4; Joel 2,30-31; Hab 3,6-11), and the New Testament figuratively presents the end-times (Mark 13,25; Acts 2,20).

³⁷ The expression, 'the wrath of the Lamb' is a *hapax legomenon* in Revelation. John presents the wrath (ὀργή) as a characteristic feature of the Lamb. Wrath is «an essential and inalienable trait in the biblical view of God» (Ezek 7; Zeph 2,2-3; Jer 46,10). cfr. G. STÄHLIN, «ὀργή», in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 5, 423. Wrath is not to be taken as a divine attribute, but as an expression of his confrontation with every form of

The significance of the wrath in the sixth seal comes to light in the background of the fifth seal, which describes a cry for vengeance by those who were slain for the word of God and for their witness³⁸. The term ἐκδικέω means “to avenge” or “to punish”, along with “to contest at law” in the forensic sense³⁹. Vengeance is a legitimate exercise of forces as well as an enactment of justice in the Old Testament⁴⁰. As punishment, it is never for the satisfaction of a personal desire for it. It is generally employed in situations where normal means for the establishment of justice are not present or normal legal institutions are powerless. Vengeance as “punishing, justified retribution” is the prerogative of the highest authority and so in the Old Testament it belongs only to God⁴¹. As it denotes the conclusive enactment of justice and the pronouncement of judgement, in eschatological context, it depicts the in-breaking of God’s kingly rule, the annihilation of opposition to God and the vindication of all those who were denied justice.

Vengeance in Revelation, according to Musvosvi⁴², is to be placed in the setting of persecution and suffering. The

evil. «The wrath is not an attitude of God, but a condition of men». cfr. A. T. HANSON, *The Wrath of the Lamb*, SPCK, London, 1957, 180.

³⁸ W. KLASSEN, «Vengeance in the Apocalypse», in *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 28 (1966), 303.

³⁹ G. SCHRENK, «ἐκδικέω», in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 2, 442-443.

⁴⁰ H. G. L. PEELS, *The Vengeance of God. The Meaning of the Root NQM and the Function of the NQM-Texts in the Context of Divine Revelation in the Old Testament*, Brill, Leiden 1995, 265 writes: «The word (נקם) is determined by the notion of legitimate, righteous, even necessary enactment of justice by a legitimate authority». Even in Revelation vengeance does not belong to the faithful, but only to God. The faithful conquers the beast, not directly participating in the battle against it, but being faithful to the Lamb. He speaks of five areas of application for vengeance: juridical, retributive, liberating, emotional and rancorous.

⁴¹ Of the 78 occurrences of the נקם in the Old Testament, 51 instances have YHWH as the actor or as delegating the power to act. cfr. G. E. MENDENHALL, *The Tenth Generation. The Origins of the Biblical Tradition*, The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore-London, 72.82.

⁴² J. N. MUSVOSVI, *Vengeance in the Apocalypse*, Andrews University Press, Berrien Springs, MI 1993, 149-76. He continues in p. 278: «the appeals

souls of the persecuted present before God a legal plea for judgement and justice. Their cry, “How long before you will judge and avenge our blood?”, presents their case before God, the Judge, and asks for a speedy redress of their sufferings. This understanding of vengeance is the basis of the wrath of God on the great day. The wrath of God is tied to a public display of God’s justice and a redress of the faithful⁴³.

Thus John associates the wrath of God with judgement and retribution. The destroyers of the earth are punished (11,18), as well as the worshippers of the beast (14,10). God’s wrath is a manifestation of his justice for his elect who are persecuted. Wrath in Revelation, therefore, is not a negative feature opposite to the principle of love, but the final establishment of justice in respect to the faithful who have persevered in the face of persecution in their witness to Christ⁴⁴. Conspicuously, God’s wrath is not manifested in the annihilation of the people themselves, but of evil and its expressions in the world. The cosmic cataclysms in the sixth seal symbolize the destruction of these evil systems.

The great day in Revelation manifests the judgement, not merely of God in Old Testament terms, but also of the Lamb⁴⁵. The combined role of God and the Lamb in the eschatological judgement is expressed in the cry of the people: “The great day of *their* wrath has come”. In Revelation, *ὀργή* is generally attributed to God, who turns against the evil nations opposed to him. Christ executes the wrath of God in accordance with the power he has on a par with God (19,15). He shares God’s

of the souls are a legal plea for the heavenly judge, who is Holy and True, to retry their cases and to render a verdict that will vindicate them and demonstrate the integrity of God as Lord and Protector of the covenant community that has unjustly suffered».

⁴³ H. G. L. PEELS, *The Vengeance of God*, 312.

⁴⁴ H. G. L. PEELS, *The Vengeance of God*, 312 rightly concludes the discussion on vengeance writing that, «The last book of the Bible is not a “fall-back into Judaism” but a powerful conclusion of the preaching of the Old Testament and New Testament».

⁴⁵ For «the day of the Lord», see 1 Cor 5,5; 1 Thess 5,2.

sovereignty, and so participates in the divine vengeance for the sake of the faithful who have offered their lives for their witness. John presents this in 6,16, where the avenging wrath is first attributed to the Lamb (*ὁργὴ τοῦ ἀρνίου*) and then to God and the Lamb.

The day of the wrath of God and the Lamb represents divine presence against the multi-faceted evil in history. Divine retribution and punishment are metaphors for God's intervention against evil for the sake of his elect. The power of God is to be taken, not as a force against people, but rather against the manifestations of evil. The cosmic upheavals show the overturning of these evil systems. What is emphasized here is not the intensity of the punishment, but the fact and certainty of God's intervention against the forces of evil.

The seventh seal (8,1), instead of being a definitive show of God's power, ends in an apparent silence as it just mentions "half an hour silence"⁴⁶ in heaven" (8,1). It could refer

⁴⁶ The significance of «half an hour silence» is much disputed among commentators. M. Rissi considers the silence as the return of the primeaval silence at the end, before the arrival of the new world. cfr. M. RISSI, *Time and History: A Study on the Revelation*, John Knox Press, Richmond, VA 1966, 10-11. But it should be noted that there is a big gap between this reference to silence and the new creation in chapters 21-22. Some see here a suspension of God's judgement. cfr. H. ULFGARD, *Feast and Future. Revelation 7,9-17 and the Feast of Tabernacle*, Almqvist and Wiksell, Stockholm 1989, 33 or «Reaktion auf das bisher geschaut und gehörte» cfr. H. GIESEN, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, Pustet, Regensburg 1997, 204. Charles sees a link between 8,1 and 8,3-4 (v. 2 is according to him as interpolation) and links with the rabbinical traditions about the angels praising God at night and being silent by day so that God could hear the prayers of Israel. cfr. R. H. CHARLES, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John* (ICC, vol. 1), 223-224. Bauckham takes up an analysis of silence in heaven based on the position of Charles, and writes: «probably it is better to think of liturgical time, such as the context of worship in the heavenly temple suggests. It is plausible to suppose the offering of incense in the morning ritual in the temple of Jerusalem took about half an hour. Revelation 8,1 refers to the heavenly equivalent». R. BAUCKHAM, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies in the Book of Revelation*, 83. In the heavenly drama, he sees a parallel to the events on the earth. Here we take two points from Bauckham's discussion – the «interlocking with the following verses» and the element of

to the unexpectedness as well as an eager expectation of God's eschatological judgement, which will begin to manifest itself in the septenaries later on.

Revelation shows concern for the community in its initial presentation of the Lamb. Only the Lamb is worthy to open the scroll that contains God's eschatological plans. By opening the scroll, the Lamb inaugurates the events that will lead to the ultimate salvation and victory of the People of God (5,9-10; cfr. 7,9-10; 19,5-10). Although 'the seals cycle' functions as a revelatory action, it will bring about a soteriological result for the faithful. Indeed, the Lamb is worthy because he has died a sacrificial death that becomes for the suffering community a means of identification with their Lord. One purpose of the Lamb imagery would then be to encourage Christians to remain true to their faith.

The above overview of the seals shows that "the great day of the wrath of God and the Lamb" is placed in the context of:

- 1) The victorious power of Christ in the world (first seal)
- 2) The ambiguity of the days of man (second and fourth seals)
- 3) The active participation of the followers of the Lamb in the divine activity which is expressed in their witness unto death (fifth seal)

The key to understanding "the great day of their wrath" in the sixth seal should be sought in the divine intervention

liturgy for understanding «silence». Interlocking in this section supports the progression in the septenaries that coincides with the progression in history and the manifestation of God's plan. What is important to note here is John's emphasis on the seventh element in the septenaries, which describes the realization of God's judgement and salvation. The silence is certainly not "content-less" but "pregnant" with positive content. The liturgical element in 8,1 is not merely "the heavenly equivalent". In the perspective of the liturgical community, listening to the Word of God and discerning it in their life, the half an hour silence depicts the moment of interiorization of the marvel of divine plan gradually unveiling itself.

against evil in the days of man, guiding history to its conclusion (seventh seal).

1.3 The Lamb as the Saviour and Shepherd of the Great Multitude (7,9-8,1)

The section 7,9-8,1 concludes the opening of the seven seals, which is begun in 6,1. Here, the Lamb is explicitly mentioned four times (7,9.10.14, and 17). The Lamb opens the seventh seal in 8,1. Again, 7,9-8,1 provides an example of the reversal of expectations. Instead of the Lamb's blood staining the robes, it cleans them. Instead of death leading to defeat, it leads to victory and salvation. The great multitude (7,9), "stood in front of the throne, and before the Lamb". This exact phraseology occurs only here in Revelation; but note the combination of 'throne' as a circumlocution for God, and 'Lamb' in verse 10. They stand before God and the Lamb and wear white garments⁴⁷ and receive palm branches, both representative of their salvific victory (cfr. 1 Macc 13,51; 2 Macc 10,7).

Rev 7,14 alludes to the fact that the followers of the Lamb who undergo suffering from the evil powers identify with their Lord in his passion. John encourages them to remain faithful by stating that these victors of v. 14 presently stand before God in the heavenly court. With an arresting and dramatic rebirth of images, John claims that the faithful "have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb". This hymn (v. 14) communicates another important point that states their genuine devotion to God as the protector of the community from worldly pressures (v. 14a). Conversely, it connotes that the original recipients had genuine worldly woes (v. 14b).

⁴⁷ White garments in Revelation symbolize purity, and thereby worthiness for admittance to eternal life (cfr. 3,4-5; 4,4; 6,11; 7,13-14). The colour white is associated in Revelation with the exalted Son of Man, whose head and hair appears to be intensely white (1,14), and with God, who sits in judgement on a large white throne (20,11). In Judaeo-Christian thought, white is also the characteristic colour of robes worn by supernatural figures, including the Godhead (Dan 7,9; 2 Macc 11,8; 1 Enoch 14,20).

These persons expect their sovereign God to intervene soon and bring solace soon (1,3; 22,7-12). Moreover, the victors are assured that their troubles in this age will be reversed in the next and that they will not suffer from the evil powers. The worshipping and joyful multitude consists of those who are purified by the blood of the Lamb (v. 14) and can therefore be victorious over suffering and evil.

The exact phrase, “the blood of the Lamb”, appears elsewhere in Revelation only at 12,11, although the blood of Christ or the Lamb is mentioned less precisely at 1,5; 5,9; 19,13. In the New Testament generally, the expressions ‘blood of Jesus’ (Heb 10,19) and ‘blood of Christ’ (Eph 2,13), and even ‘blood of Christ, like that of a Lamb’ (1 Pet 1,19), denote the atoning death of Jesus Christ. This language stems from the Jewish cultic practice of sacrifice, as a means of receiving forgiveness of sins (Lev 4,5); and it incorporates the belief that blood is the seat of *life* (Lev 17,11). In the Old Testament sacrificial blood not only removes sin but also purifies the penitent (Exod 29,10-21). The scene presented in 7,13-14 encompasses the entire company of the redeemed, from all times and all places, including those who have died for their faith⁴⁸.

The great multitude again receives the assurance that “he who sits upon the throne” will *shelter*, σκηνώσει, them with his presence (7,15). It signifies the presence of a God who walks with his people. This Exodus terminology (cfr. Exod 33,7-11; Num 9,15-17) illustrates the divine presence through the form of a tent accompanied the people of God during their Exodus experience⁴⁹. Staying at the tent of the Lord to enjoy his presence and his goodness is a great desire of biblical spirituality (cfr. Ps 15; Isa 63,3-6). This desire is fulfilled for those who washed their own vestments in the blood of the

⁴⁸ R. H. CHARLES, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John* (ICC, vol. 1), 214; G. R. BEASLEY-MURRAY, *Revelation*, 145.

⁴⁹ E. BOSETTI, «L’Agnello Pastore in 1 Pietro e Apocalisse», in E. BOSETTI - A. COLACRAI (eds.), *Apokalypsis. Percorsi nell’Apocalisse di Giovanni*, Cittadella Editrice, Assisi 2005, 300.

Lamb⁵⁰ (v. 14c). And in fact, they are before the throne of God and serve him at his temple throughout day and night.

In 7,17 we read: “For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water”. Here we see two important verbs: *to shepherd* and *to lead*, ποιμανεῖ αὐτοὺς καὶ ὁδηγήσει αὐτούς. This verse reflects the use of a common ancient pastoral metaphor in which the relationship between leader and those under him is compared to a shepherd and his flock⁵¹. In the Old Testament, God as the shepherd of Israel is an ancient metaphor (Gen 48,15; 49,24), which continued to be used with some frequency (Ps 23,1,3; 68,7-10; Isa 40,11; Jer 50,19). In the New Testament, God is referred to as a shepherd only in a single parable of Jesus narrated both in Matt 18,12-14, and Luke 15,4-7. In the Apostolic Fathers it is seen only in Ignatius of Antioch⁵². The verb ποιμαίνω is used four times in Revelation (2,27; 7,17; 12,5; 19,15); in 7,17 it means “to shepherd” or “to guide or help” or “of great caring”, while in 2,27; 12,5; 19,15 it means “to rule”⁵³. There is a close relationship between this passage and 14,1-5, where the Lamb is described as standing on Mount Zion, and the 144,000 are said to “follow the Lamb wherever he leads” (v. 4), which appears to integrate both discipleship and shepherd/sheep imagery. The conception of Christians as the flock of God who are shepherded by Church leaders occurs with some frequency in early Christian literature⁵⁴.

⁵⁰ The phrase “the blood of the Lamb” occurs elsewhere in Revelation only in 12,11 and this phrase is a metonymy for the death of Christ. cfr. D. E. AUNE, *Revelation* 6-16, 475.

⁵¹ D. E. AUNE, *Revelation* 6-16, 477.

⁵² IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH, *Epistula ad Romanos*, 9,1.

⁵³ J. P. LOUW – E. A. NIDA, «ποιμαίνω», in *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains*, vol. 1, § 36.2; § 37,57; § 44.33.

⁵⁴ CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA, *Protrepticus*, 16,1; 44,3; J. JEREMIAS, «ποιμαίνω», in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 6, 500-502. This metaphor occupies a significant place in John 10,1-16, a fact that has been used to argue for a close relationship between John and Revelation. cfr. O. BÖCHER, «Johanneisches in der Apokalypse des Johannes», in *New Testament Studies* 27 (1981), 312. The Fourth Gospel uses the noun ποιμήν of Jesus, and Revelation uses the verb ποιμαίνειν. The Johannine metaphors is

The shepherding ministry of the Lamb includes leading his own to “springs of living water” (7,17b)⁵⁵. This image of “living water”⁵⁶ occurs also in 21,6; 22,1.17. The phrase ὕδωρ ζῶν, literally “living water”, means “flowing water”, i.e., a spring or river rather than water standing in a cistern. In the early Church, ὕδωρ ζῶν, is used with various nuances as a metaphor for prophetic inspiration⁵⁷, baptism⁵⁸, Christ⁵⁹, the teaching of Christ⁶⁰, and the Holy Spirit⁶¹.

The rendering of ὀδηγήσει, ‘he will lead’, suggests the pivotal role of the Lamb in this action. On the basis of his passion and exaltation Jesus goes at the head of the faithful in

again closer to the use of the metaphor in other New Testament passages such as Heb 13,20, where the exalted Jesus is called «the great shepherd of the sheep» and 1 Pet 2,25, where he is called «the shepherd and overseer of your souls».

⁵⁵ This portrays the gentler aspect of the person of Christ and gains special significance because it parallels the claims of Jesus himself to be the Good Shepherd (John 10). The occurrence of Shepherd imagery in the Fourth Gospel forms an important part of the presentation of Christ in that Gospel, not only because of the “I am” saying about the Good Shepherd in John 10, but also because the risen Christ uses shepherd imagery in his communication with the recalcitrant Peter (John 21). In Rev 7,17 the Lamb is predicted as the shepherd who will lead his people to springs of living water. There seems to be a parallel with the living water mentioned in John 7,38, although here the main point is the shepherd’s concern for the flock, a thought more closely paralleled in John 10. It is important to set this gentler image of Christ alongside the wrath of the Lamb (Rev 6,16). This aspect is also in agreement with the picture of God wiping away the tears of his people in the New Jerusalem (Rev 21,4). Another striking similarity between the Christology of the Fourth Gospel and that of Revelation is in their distinctive use of Lamb imagery. It is only in these two books of the whole New Testament that “the Lamb” or “the Lamb of God” actually serves as a title for Jesus. cfr. D. GUTHRIE, «The Christology of Revelation», 404.

⁵⁶ According to J. W. TAEGER, *Johannesapokalypse und johanneischer Kreis: Versuch einer traditionsgeschichtlichen Ortsbestimmung am Paradigma der Lebenswasser-Thematik*, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin 1989, 29, «“living water” is perhaps the most striking common metaphor that Revelation shares with John (4,14; 6,35; 7,17-18)».

⁵⁷ IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH, *Epistula ad Romanos*, 7,2.

⁵⁸ JUSTINE MARTYR, *Dialogus cum Tryphone*, 14,1.

⁵⁹ JUSTINE MARTYR, *Dialogus cum Tryphone*, 69,6.

⁶⁰ CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA, *Stromata*, 7,16.

⁶¹ DIDYMUS, *De Trinitate*, 2,22.

order to lead them to life-giving waters. Fresh water springs in a dry land quench the thirst of a shepherd and his flock; and, in the same way, the spiritual longings of humanity are satisfied by the eternal presence of God⁶².

Again in 7,17, the phrase “the springs of water” receives a signifying addition: “of the life”. This expression is actually similar to that of Jer 2,13 that designates YHWH⁶³. In reality, it is God who is the spring of living water towards which the Lamb leads his followers: “to the thirsty I will give from the fountain of the water of life” (21,6). John is shown river of “water of life” flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb (22,1). And an open invitation is given to everyone who “is thirsty, and who desires take the water of life without price” (22,17). Revelation thus presents the Lamb-Shepherd as guide to the “spring of life” that is God. And then “God will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (6,17c; cfr. Isa 25,8). With the image of “God will wipe away every tear from their eyes”, John manifestly conveys here God’s intimate and caring bond with his folk.

Finally, 7,9-17 is a prolepsis of the fuller account in 21,1-8, the vision of the New Heaven and the New Earth. In both visions, God dwells with his people (7,15; 21,3[bis]); and wipes the tears from their eyes (7,17; 21,6). It is important to note that God does in 21,6 what the Messiah-Lamb did in 7,17, another example of Christ acting as God’s divine agent⁶⁴. The Lamb-Shepherd shares a role often reserved for God. The one who was the means of salvation now functions as a mode of protection and sustenance.

1.4 The Blood of the Lamb (12,7-12)

Rev 12,7-12 depicts a narration of the defeat of the devil and his angels by the archangel, Michael⁶⁵, and his angels

⁶² R. H. MOUNCE, *The Book of Revelation*, 167.

⁶³ E. BOSETTI, «L’Agnello Pastore in 1 Pietro e Apocalisse», 301.

⁶⁴ D. GUTHRIE, «The Christology of Revelation», 402.

⁶⁵ In many second Temple traditions, Michael served as the patron angel of Israel (e.g., Dan 10,13,21; 1 Enoch 20,5; 1 QM 13,10; *Testament of Moses* 10,1-

in heavenly combat. Michael and his angels defeat Satan and his angels and cast them from heaven to earth (vv. 8-9). According to Beale⁶⁶ it is the victory won through the blood of Christ which must be the basis, not only for the saints' earthly victory, but also for Michael's triumph in heaven. Verse 11 summarizes the purpose of the whole chapter and especially of vv. 7-12. According to Ladd, "The single intent... is to assure those who meet satanic evil on earth that it is really a defeated power, however contrary it might seem to human experience"⁶⁷. The vision concludes with a hymn celebrating the victory in heaven but lamenting the eschatological woes to come on earth (vv. 10-12).

We focus our attention on the hymn in vv. 10-12, where the Lamb reference occurs in v. 11. In v. 10 we read that John "heard a great voice in heaven". This audition clearly interprets the vision John has seen in vv. 7-9. Again, verse 10 celebrates Michael's victory but attributes it not to Michael but to Christ and his followers. Verse 11 states that Michael and his angels "have conquered", *ἐνίκησαν*, the devil by "the blood of the Lamb" and by "the word of their witness". It is noteworthy that *νικᾶω*⁶⁸ is the key term in vv. 10-12, the promises in the messages (2,7.11.17.26; 3,5.12.21) as well as Christ's victory over sin, death and evil (5,50). Christian hope is strengthened by the fact that the faithful have conquered (*ἐνίκησαν*) Satan by "the blood of the Lamb and the word of their witness" (12,11). The aorist transitive verb *ἐνίκησαν* refers to their active and successful engagement against evil⁶⁹.

2. cfr. L. GINZBERG, *The Legends of the Jews* (vol. 7), The Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, PA 1967, 312.

⁶⁶ G. K. BEALE, *The Book of Revelation*, 663.

⁶⁷ G. E. LADD, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 127.

⁶⁸ The verb *νικᾶν*, to conquer, be victorious, occurs seventeen times in Revelation; when Christ is the subject of this verb (5,5), it means that he conquered *through death*, and it means precisely the same thing when it is used eleven times of Christians, explicitly in 12,11 and implicitly in the other references (2,7.11.17.26; 3,5.12.21[bis]). cfr. A. T. HANSON, *The Wrath of the Lamb*, 165.

⁶⁹ *ἐνίκησαν* points to the Lamb as completely triumphant, and the aorist tense may well indicate a once-and-for-all victory. L. MORRIS, *The Revelation*

Moreover, “through the blood of the Lamb” and “through the word of their witness” are confirmation statements which convey that Christ’s actions accurately and faithfully represented God’s plan for humanity and that those who lived in faithful accord with Christ would receive their reward⁷⁰. The message here is that armaments did not defeat and expel Satan from heaven but the “blood of Christ” and the “witness of the saints”. John parallels “Christian witnessing” and “Christ’s sacrificial death” and then adds that Christians were willing to die for their religious beliefs. Rev 12,10-11 warns the faithful to persevere in the faith in the midst of the coming trials.

Again, Christ’s death becomes the model for Christian behaviour and also the key to understanding Christian suffering. These images communicate that their faithfulness unto death has already defeated Satan and his forces in heaven, and calls upon those who yet live on earth to remain faithful if they also wish to defeat Satan on earth. This battle in heaven is a prelude to the scenes in 19,11-21 and 20,7-10, where Satan will be defeated and cast down twice⁷¹.

1.5 The Book of Life of the Lamb (13,8)

Rev 13,8 is an integral part of 13,1-10, the vision of the first of the two beasts. The beast in 13,8 ascends from the sea and, with its mortal wound, is the antitype of the Lamb who has been slain and conquers by sacrifice and suffering (5,6).

We read in v. 8: “and everyone who lives on the earth, whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in *the book of life of the Lamb* who has been slain, will worship him”. This verse contains an important Christological

of St. John, 96.

⁷⁰ T. B. SLATER, *Christ and Community: A Socio-Historical Study of the Christology of Revelation*, 186.

⁷¹ R. BAUCKHAM, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 75-76; A. KRODEL, *Revelation*, 242.

element: the Lamb as the recorder of those to be saved⁷². Rev 13,8 and 21,27 are two of the few accounts that state that the Messiah is the custodian of the heavenly records.

Many⁷³ have recognized that 17,8 parallels 13,8. Both 13,8 and 17,8 use the same wording, with the exception that only 13,8 refers to the Lamb. This Lamb reference in 13,8 relates directly to the fact that it is the Lamb who has pre-recorded the names in the book of life. Similarly, 3,5; 20,12,15 and 21,27 also mention the phrase “the book of life”. While 20,12 and 20,15 refer to “the book of life” in contrast to “the books” for those who meet eternal damnation. Both 13,8 and 21,27 refer to “the Lamb’s book of life”.

Many scholars find this passage is deterministic by its reference to “the names not in the book of life from the beginning of creation”. Sweet⁷⁴ argues that this passage implies that the Lamb’s atoning death has its place in God’s plan from the beginning, in contrast with the death of “the beast that was slain” in v. 3. Charles⁷⁵ notes convincingly that according to the *Assumption of Moses* 1,14 Moses was ordained by God to be the mediator of God’s covenant “from the foundation of the world”. He argues that early Christianity gave a similar role to Christ (cfr. 1 Pet 1,19-20).

Although many deterministic statements have as their primary goal the unwavering assertion of the sovereignty of God, the central concern in 13,8 is to assure the faithful of their

⁷² For the New Testament use of the ‘book of life’ figure, meaning those who belong to God in Christ (Phil 4,3; Rev 17,8; 20,12,15; 21,27). The idea of a book of the living as a divine register of the faithful is widespread in ancient Israelites and Jewish literature (Exod 32,32-33; Ps 69,28; 1 QM 12,1-2); and it is also appears in the New Testament (Luke 10,20). cfr. S. S. SMALLEY, *The Revelation to John*, 85.

⁷³ R. H. CHARLES, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John* (ICC, vol. 1), 353; G. E. LADD, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 181.

⁷⁴ J. P. M. SWEET, *Revelation*, 212.

⁷⁵ R. H. CHARLES, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John* (ICC, vol. 1), 354.

ultimate salvation. While this includes an underlying belief in God's sovereignty, its primary purpose is to comfort those suffering from oppression.

The phrase 'book of life' appears five other times in Revelation (3,5; 17,8; 20,12.15; 21,27) and it conveys a soteriological meaning for one's name to be included in that record. In each case, as here, it is a metaphor for the faithful whose salvation has been determined: their names have been entered into the book of life. The genitive 'of life' (τῆς ζωῆς) denotes the nature or purpose of the book. Again, this genitive clarifies what kind of security is provided for the faithful⁷⁶. The faithful are given the protection of eternal *life*. Because the book of life is unreservedly ascribed to Christ, the salvation of all is represented as depending on the one redemptive act of Christ⁷⁷.

1.6 The Lamb and the 144,000 (14,1-5)

In this passage, John sees the Lamb and the 144,000 faithful followers on Mount Zion. The followers of the Lamb "had his name and his father's name written upon their foreheads" (v. 1). A loud, unidentified sound comes from heaven and the saints sing a New Song that only the 144,000 know, for they are those "who have been redeemed from the earth" (v. 3). They are virgins who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were redeemed from humanity as first-fruits to God and to the Lamb (v. 4). Their veracity is unimpeachable (v. 5). Altogether, the Lamb reference occurs here three times, i.e., 14,1.4[bis]. Since we have analysed rather thoroughly this pericope in chapter one, we shall move to the next pericope.

1.7 The Lamb as Judge (14,10)

Rev 14,10, the only Lamb reference in this section, emphasizes on the torment to be suffered eternally by the followers of the beast: "And he also shall drink the wine of God's wrath, poured unmixed into the cup of his anger, and

⁷⁶ G. K. BEALE, *The Book of Revelation*, 702.

⁷⁷ E. W. HENGSTENBERG, *The Revelation of St. John* (vol. 2), 43.

he shall be tormented with fire and sulphur⁷⁸ in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb”.

According to Beasley-Murray⁷⁹ ‘the holy angels’ in 14,10 could be a periphrasis for God Almighty. If this were the case, both God and the Lamb would view the punishment of the oppressors of God and the Lamb’s elect. However, according to Mounce⁸⁰, 14,10 could mean exactly what it says, that the holy angels and the Lamb view the punishment of the damned. Beale⁸¹ would suggest that the angels are not merely present when the judgement occurs but also take part in the execution of it, though their presence may only be intended to call attention to the Lamb. The Christ-Lamb, in either case, will witness the punishment of those who oppressed him and his followers. The message to the faithful is that those who suffered in public would view the eternal suffering of their oppressors; similarly, the evil powers who opposed the Lamb would see him and recognize his messianic status⁸².

The situation in which the unrighteous are judged in the presence of the righteous is a familiar picture in the literature of the Second Temple Judaism (1 Enoch 27,2-3; 4 Ezra 7,36). But there seems to be no parallel in Jewish or early Christian eschatological scenes for the notion that the wicked are punished in the presence of God’s ‘holy angels and of the Lamb’⁸³. It appears that the angels participate in the work of

⁷⁸ The combination of «fire and sulphur» in 14,10b as a means of torment occurs in three other times in Revelation (19,20; 20,10; 21,8), three times in the fixed expression «the lake of fire and sulphur» (19,20; 20,10; 21,8), and twice more in the expression «fire, smoke, and sulphur» (9,17.18).

⁷⁹ G. R. BEASLEY-MURRAY, *Revelation*, 226.

⁸⁰ R. H. MOUNCE, *The Book of Revelation*, 275-276.

⁸¹ G. K. BEALE, *The Book of Revelation*, 760.

⁸² J. ELLUL, *Apocalypse*, Seabury, New York, NY 1977, 176.

⁸³ D. E. AUNE, *Revelation 6-16*, 835. The phrase «and before the Lamb» is very probably a gloss added to the text since the Lamb is in effect subordinated to the angels. cfr. F. SPITTA, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 149; U. B MÜLLER, *Messias und Menschensohn in jüdischen Apokalypsen und in der Offenbarung des Johannes*, Gerd Mohn, Gütersloh 1972, 166.

judgement. The expression 'holy angels' is used in Revelation only here.

At the previous appearance in this scene, the Lamb was standing with the redeemed on Mount Zion (14,1). Hendriksen⁸⁴ believes that now the Lamb not only presides at an eschatological act of judgement against the unfaithful, but also acquiesces in what must be understood as a never-ending chastisement. However, it should not be presupposed that the Lamb reacts to such a situation with ease, since it does not accord with the salvific purposes of God in his Messiah (Isa 35,4; Luke 15,4-32; John 3,16-17; 10,11-16). In any case, escape from the clutches of the beast must remain a constant possibility (19,2.7-8; 22,14-15).

1.8 The Lamb as the Redeemer (15,3-4)

This section falls within the vision of the angels with the last plagues (15,1-8). In this section, the Lamb reference is on 15,3 where John narrates two songs: the song of Moses and that of the Lamb⁸⁵, an example of which is found in 5,9-12. This song celebrates God's eschatological exodus of his people. More than that, the song here is about the much greater deliverance accomplished through the Lamb's work, so that it is called Lamb's song as well as Moses'. The saints declare the righteous and redemptive activity of the Lord, starting from

⁸⁴ W. HENDRIKSEN, *More than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation*, Baker Press, Grand Rapids, MI 1962, 154.

⁸⁵ According to Aune, the phrase, «and the song of the Lamb», is problematic. If it is parallel to «the song of Moses», it should perhaps mean «the song *by* the Lamb» (subjective genitive), though nowhere else do we learn of a song sung *by* the Lamb. It is more likely, therefore, that this phrase means «the song *about* the Lamb» (objective genitive), an example of which is found in Rev 5,9-12. cfr. D. E. AUNE, *Revelation 6-16*, 873. According to Satake, It is not two distinct songs but only one because the *καί* is used here as exegetical, «that is», «even». cfr. A. SATAKE, *Die Gemeindeordnung in der Johannesapokalypse*, Neukirchener Verlag, Neukirchen – Vluyn 1966, 94. I. T. BECKWITH, *The Apocalypse of John*, 678 also has the same view.

the time of the covenant with Moses, and culminating in the death and exaltation of the Lamb⁸⁶.

Just as Israel praised God by the sea after he delivered them from Pharaoh, so the People of God praise God for defeating the beast on their behalf. Like God's people of the old covenant, so God's new covenant people praise him by singing "the song of Moses"⁸⁷. Their song is a hymn of deliverance and praise of God's attributes like the song in Exod 15,1-18. Both songs are sung along the seashore. Both Moses and the Lamb function as deliverers of a faithful community. However, unlike Exod 15, which celebrates the deliverance of a single nation, the event in 15,3-4 celebrates the deliverance of a racially and culturally mixed faithful community (7,9-10).

The song is the same as the "New Song" of 5,9-10 and 14,3, where the singers likewise hold harps while lauding the Lamb for his work of redemption (5,8; 14,2). That the song in 15,3-4 is also a "New Song" is evident because the saints sing not only the old "song of Moses" but also the "song of the Lamb", which has hitherto not been sung⁸⁸. Therefore, the song is sung in praise not only to God but also to the Lamb, since 5,9 also lauds the Lamb for his redemptive work.

1.9 The Lamb as the Lord of lords and the King of Kings (17,14)

Rev 17,14 falls within the large section of 17,1-19,10⁸⁹ and in this single verse the Lamb reference occurs twice and this

⁸⁶ S. S. SMALLEY, *The Revelation to John*, 386.

⁸⁷ It is not immediately clear how to construe the genitive in 'the song of Moses'. However, it can scarcely be objective ('a song *to* or *about* Moses'), since what follows is clearly addressed to God. It makes sense, therefore, to understand the genitive as subjective: this is a 'song *by* Moses'. cfr. S. S. SMALLEY, *The Revelation to John*, 386. Moses is frequently referred to as the servant of God (Exod 14,31). The Old Testament contains two songs by Moses (Exod 15,1-18; Deut 31,30-32,43, and Ps 90 includes a 'prayer of Moses').

⁸⁸ H. KRAFT, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 201.

⁸⁹ D. E. AUNE, *Revelation 17-22*, 915.

verse answers the concluding question of 13,4, “who is able to make war with him [the beast]?” John sees a vision ‘of the great prostitute’ (v. 1). The references to adultery and intoxication are metaphors for the prostitute’s sinfulness (v. 2) and for the oppression of the faithful (v. 6). The prostitute receives the name ‘Babylon the Great’. The Babylon “will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful” (17,14).

This attack of ten kings against the Lamb has several parallels in Revelation (16,12-16; 19,19; 20,8-9). The opponents here are the ten kings and their armies, while in 16,12, they are called “the kings of the east”, and in 16,14 “the kings of the whole world”. In 20,7-10, the enemy is alternatively described as “the nations in the four quarters of the earth” (v. 8) and “the hosts of Gog and Magog” (v. 9) led by the devil, the beast, and the false prophet (v. 10). The ten kings collectively “have one purpose”. This common purpose is expressed in the clause “they give their power and authority to the beast”. They do not merely reign with the beast but also submit to his authority (v. 13). The purpose of the strong coalition of v. 13 is to “make war on the Lamb”. But “the Lamb will conquer them”.

The Lamb could conquer the enemies because he is Lord of lords and King of kings⁹⁰ (17,14b). These two titles are attributed to the Lamb here, while the same two titles occur in reverse order in 19,16, where they are used of the heavenly rider on the white horse. In 1 Tim 6,15, a similar double title, “Kings of kings and Lord of lords”, is applied to God. This double title first appears in early Jewish literature in 1 Enoch 9,4, where it is applied to God.

As the Lamb has conquered the enemies, so too his followers may remain faithful even in tribulations. 17,14 provides instructions to the faithful on how they should behave during the coming crisis that John envisioned. They can

⁹⁰ The basis (ῥῆτι) for the Lamb’s victory is that “he is Lord of lords and King of kings”. cfr. G. K. BEALE, *The Book of Revelation*, 881.

fight against the evil because they are “called, and faithful and chosen”. Among these three adjectives, the first two appear only here in Revelation. Elsewhere in the New Testament, however, ‘called’ and ‘elect’ are regularly used to designate believers (Rom, 1,6; 1 Cor 1,24); and always the emphasis is on the grace and initiative of God⁹¹. The third epithet, ‘faithful’, is ascribed in Revelation to Christ who died on the cross (1,5), to his steadfast witness Antipas (2,13), to the trustworthy nature of the prophetic testimony (21,5), and (as here) to the need for the saints of God to keep faith with him (2,10).

According to Moffatt⁹², the success of the faithful in their war against evil forces rests not only on their divine election and allegiance to the Lamb but also on their corresponding loyalty to him (2,13.19; 13,10; 14,12). Michaels⁹³ points out that the conditions for the participation of the saints in the Lamb’s victory (being called, chosen and faithful) become increasingly specific: first, ‘called’ (19,9); then, not only called but also chosen (Matt 22,14); and finally, not only chosen but also called to be faithful (2,10). John’s audience itself is being encouraged to remain steadfast in right belief and behaviour, so as to overcome (16,15).

1.10 The Lamb as the Bridegroom of the Eschatological Wedding (19,7-9)

Rev 19,7-9 falls within the vision of the Lamb’s wedding banquet (19,5-10). The “faithful followers of the Lamb” is the bride here. The Lamb reference as relationship between the Lamb with the faithful occurs twice here (19,7,9). This is an example of the intimate relationship between Christ and community in the book of Revelation⁹⁴.

⁹¹ P. PRIGENT, *L’Apocalypse de Saint Jean*, 495.

⁹² J. MOFFATT, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, Hodder and Stoughton, London 1910, 454.

⁹³ J. R. MICHAELS, *Revelation*, 199.

⁹⁴ According to J. MASSYNGBAERDE FORD, «The Christological Function of the Hymns in the Apocalypse of John», 228, «the nuptials symbolize the New Covenant union of God and the faithful».

“For the wedding day of the Lamb has arrived, and his wife has prepared herself” (19,7b). The reason for rejoicing and giving God the glory is introduced with this ὅτι clause, which constitutes an announcement of the impending wedding, while v. 9 mentions the wedding supper and the invitations to the wedding. The phrase “the wedding of the Lamb”⁹⁵, occurs here in v. 7 and in v. 9. The theme of Christ’s wedding banquet is introduced here abruptly; but it prepares the way for its reappearance in 21,2. The image of the “wife” occurs in 19,7 and 21,9 and the related metaphor of the “bride” is used of the New Jerusalem in 21,2.9. It is important to observe that the notion of “the wife” of the Lamb is mentioned enigmatically but not further described.

“Then he said to me, Write, ‘How fortunate are those who have been invited to the wedding feast of the Lamb’” (19,9a). This is the fourth of seven beatitudes in Revelation (cfr. 1,3; 14,13; 16,15; 20,6; 22,7,14). The identity of the speaker is not immediately apparent, though we learn from v. 10 that

⁹⁵ The phrase, ‘the marriage day of the Lamb’: The covenant imagery derives from two Old Testament ideas. First, some later prophets conceived Israel as a woman betrothed to YHWH, whose people were therefore summoned to offer him unconditional loyalty (Isa 54,6; Ezek 16,7; Hos 2,14-23). Unbelief and apostasy, on the part of God’s people, were accordingly condemned as harlotry (Ezek 6,9; Hos 21,1-7). Second, the notion in Judaism of marriage as a joyful festival becomes in Isaiah (Isa 61,10b; 62,5) a picture of the messianic time of salvation. Jesus uses this image to describe the effect of his own ministry (Mark 2,19-20), and the fellowship in God’s kingdom, which he inaugurated (Matt 22,1-14). Post-Easter Christianity blended both of these traditions, and interpreted the parousia of Christ at the end as a time of marital joy, when the bridegroom will be united with the Church, the bride who awaits him (2 Cor 11,2; Eph 5,22-33). In Rev 19,7-8 John goes a step further. He not only portrays the perfection of believers through the imagery of the Lamb’s wedding feast; he also develops this by means of an effective contrast, which stems from the negative aspect of the first traditional motif (Israel’s wanton unfaithfulness). On the one hand is the city of systematic evil, which seduces the world with ostentation and deceives it with idolatry (14,8; 17,1-6; 18,2-10); on the other is the community of the faithful redeemed, properly clothed in fine linen and waiting obediently to be united with her exalted Lord (3,20; 21,2). cfr. S. S. SMALLEY, *The Revelation to John*, 482.

it is probably the angel with the bowl of 17,1, who acts as a narrator throughout that chapter⁹⁶.

“Those who have been invited to the Lamb’s wedding supper” is metaphorical interpretative restatement of the marriage picture in vv. 7-8. The term “supper”, *δελπνον*,⁹⁷ occurs only here and in v. 17 in Revelation, where it refers to very different things; the wedding banquet of the Lamb (v. 9) is consciously formulated in antithesis to the destruction of the enemies of God who are devoured by wild animals (v. 17). The “supper” intensifies the idea of intimate communion expressed in the marriage metaphors, since suppers were the occasion of close table fellowship. The picture of Christ dining with his people has the same idea in 3,20. The state of blessedness is the reward of enjoying such communion with God. The metaphor of the wedding banquet is based on the social convention of inviting friends and relatives to a wedding feast (Matt 22,1-10).

Verse 9 presents a different perspective on the wedding metaphor from vv. 7-8. In v. 7, the bride is the Church *corporate*, about to be married to the Lamb, while in v. 9 *individual* Christians are portrayed as guests at the marriage banquet itself. In this instance, since the bride mentioned in 19,7 represents faithful Christians, the bride and those invited in 19, 9 must be identical. Both pictures portray the intimate communion of Christ with the faithful. The same change of focus on the community as a whole and the members of the community has been seen in chapter 12 with the woman and her seed⁹⁸.

The metaphor of Christ as the bridegroom and the People of God as the bride was quite widespread in early Christianity.

⁹⁶ W. BOUSSET, *Die Offenbarung Johannis*, 428; E. LOHMEYER, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 154.

⁹⁷ D. S. RUSSELL, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic 200 BC-100 AD*, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, PA 1964, 124; S. S. SMALLEY, «Banquet», in *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, vol. 1, 172. It is often claimed that the motif of the Messianic banquet is a common theme in apocalyptic literature (4 Ezra 9,47; 1 Enoch 62,14; *Acts of Thomas* 4-5).

⁹⁸ M. KIDDLE, *The Revelation of St. John*, 381-382.

The metaphor of the Church as a chaste virgin betrothed to Christ as husband occurs in 2 Cor 11,2. This metaphor is developed further in Eph 5,25-32, where the archetype for the appropriate relationship between husbands and wives is the self-sacrificing love Christ has for the Church. By his death he could then cleanse her so that eventually he could “present” her as a pure bride to himself at his return. Mark 2,20 appears to equate the figure of the bridegroom with Christ. The bridegroom as an allegory for Christ also occurs in the parable of the ten virgins in Matt 25,1-13. In subsequent early Christian literature, the metaphor of Christ as bridegroom and the Church as bride occurs frequently⁹⁹.

The words of assurance in 19,9 conclude with an angelic witness to the faithfulness of God: “these are the true words of God” is a formal affirmation of the truth of vv. 7-9a. Verse 9 thus functions much like 21,5b (“and he says, ‘Write, for these words are faithful and true’”), which confirms the truth of the marriage metaphors repeated from 19,7-8 in 21,2. There also the wedding clothing is interpreted as intimate communion with God (21,2-3) with the added idea of protection (21,4).

1.11 Jerusalem, the Bride of the Lamb (21,9-22,5)

This last vision of Revelation describes the New Jerusalem in all its splendour¹⁰⁰ and this vision contains the Lamb image seven times (21,9.14.22.23.27; 22,1.3). The Lamb plays a key role here in securing and maintaining the spiritual and physical welfare of Jerusalem, the bride of the Lamb.

⁹⁹ TERTULLIAN, *Adversus Marcionem*, 5,18; METHODIUS, *Symposion*, 7,7; AUGUSTINE, *Sermons* 40,6.

¹⁰⁰ Here we see the description of the New Jerusalem as the crowning finale of the Johannine writings. According to A. YARBRO COLLINS, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation*, 19: the New Jerusalem section is not an “appendix”, but «der krönende Abschluß». cfr. D. GEORGI, «Die Visionen vom himmlischen Jerusalem in Apk 21 und 22», in G. LÜHRMANN – G. STRECKER (ed.), *Kirche. Festschrift G. Bornkamm*, Mohr-Siebeck, Tübingen 1980, 351; O’HEAR N & O’HEAR A, *Picturing the Apocalypse*, University Press, Oxford, 2015, 213.

One of the seven angels, who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues, invites John to the great scene, “Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb” (21,9). Just as Babylon symbolizes the socio-economic and religious culture arrayed in antagonism to God, so the bride, portrayed as New Jerusalem, represents the People of God, which stands on God’s side¹⁰¹.

“The wall of the city has 12 foundation stones, and upon them are the names of the 12 apostles of the Lamb” (21,14). The phrase “The names of the 12 apostles of the Lamb” is striking, because, the term “Lamb” is used in a unique way here. It is a *historical* reference¹⁰² to an aspect of the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, comparable only to the relatively frequent references to the death of the Lamb (5,6.9.12; 7,14; 12,11; 13,8). The 12 gates of the city have the names of the 12 tribes of Israel on them, and the 12 foundation stones bear the names of the 12 apostles. They highlight the continuity and discontinuity present in the dynamic relationship between the old and the new order in the New Jerusalem.

Rev 21,22.23 and 22,1.3 present the Lamb as God Almighty’s vice regent. These four passages relate Christ to the life of the community in the New Jerusalem. They also disclose the Lamb’s concern for the well-being of the community, a link between Christ and community.

In presenting Jerusalem, 21,22 describes Jerusalem as the new city that has no temple. This statement is quite surprising

¹⁰¹ R. J. MCKELVEY, *The New Temple: The Church in the New Testament*, 169. The bride is the People of God prepared by and for God: cfr. J. FEKKES, «“His Bride has Prepared Herself”: Revelation 12-21 and Isaian Nuptial Imagery», in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 109 (1990), 283-287. To construe 21,9ff as a vision of a future literal city, as J. A. SEISS, *The Apocalypse*, 495-496 did, is to miss its fundamental symbolic nature, which is signalled not only by the parallel of 17,1-3 and 21,9-10 but also by numerous indications of symbolism throughout 21,1-22,5; J. THEKKEMURY, *Unveiling the Apocalypse*, 411.

¹⁰² D. E. AUNE, *Revelation 17-22*, 1157.

in contrast to the Jewish expectations¹⁰³ of the New Jerusalem with the temple as its essential part. The temple pictures in four detailed chapters of Ezekiel's prophecy (Ezek 40-43) are summarized and interpreted here by this brief phrase¹⁰⁴. The expectation of a non-literal temple is, for the most part, a break with Judaism, which consistently affirmed the hope of a final, material temple structure on a scale greater than any before¹⁰⁵. This replacement was inaugurated with Christ's first coming, when he referred to his own resurrection as the rebuilding of the temple (Mark 14,58; John 2,19-22).

The New Jerusalem has no heavenly luminaries either (v. 23) because God and the Lamb provide its illumination¹⁰⁶ (cfr. John 1,4-5; 8,12; 9,5). The relationship between God and his people in the new City is presented in the symbol of continuous light. From now onwards, the Lamb is the lamp in the new city and the glory of God its light, rendering external sources of light redundant.

God's glory as the only light of the new city is the fulfilment of the eschatological hope¹⁰⁷ in the new creation. In Isa 60,19-20, we read: "The sun shall be no more your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you by night; but the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. Your sun shall no more go down, nor your moon withdraw itself; for the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your days of mourning shall be ended". John takes the essentials of the Isaian oracle over Zion, emphasising

¹⁰³ For a comparative study of the New Jerusalem imagery in Revelation and the Jewish literature, see R. A. BRIGGS, *Jewish Temple Imagery in the book of Revelation*, Peter Lang, New York, NY 1999, 103-108. 1 Enoch 90,28-29; *Jubilees* 1,17-29; *The Sibylline Oracles* 3,286-294.

¹⁰⁴ T. F. GLASSON, *The Revelation of John*, 120.

¹⁰⁵ O. MICHEL, «ναός», in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 4, 889; T. HOLTZ, *Die Christologie der Apokalypse des Johannes*, 195-196.

¹⁰⁶ W. J. HARRINGTON, *Revelation*, 260-263; G. B. CAIRD, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine*, 278-279; R. H. MOUNCE, *The Book of Revelation*, 383-384.

¹⁰⁷ Light as the fulfilment of eschatological hope appears in 2 Baruch 48,50: «in that world to which there is no end, you shall receive great light».

God as the light of the new city, an expression of his eternal absolute reign over his people¹⁰⁸. A contrasting situation is portrayed with regard to Babylon, which discarded the light and in which “the light of a lamp shines no more” (18,23). But in the New Jerusalem, God is its only light and so the only power over humanity.

The eschatological day is characterized also by the presence of Christ. From the above Isaian text *ὁ θεὸς δόξα σου* is replaced by *ὁ λύχνος αὐτῆς τὸ ἀρνίον*¹⁰⁹. This redaction deserves our closer attention. Evidently, here John places Christ on a par with God who is the light of the city. But this incisive association, “its lamp is the Lamb”, conveys more than this. “Light” and “Lamp” are intimately connected, but are not identical. A lamp is associated with light, but it is also a carrier of light. In this sense, Christ brings God’s glory to humanity¹¹⁰. It is through Christ that God makes himself present among the people in history. Christ-the Lamb, who shed his blood for redeeming humanity and brought them life, is the lamp of the city. In the above expression the author highlights Christ’s active role in transforming human history. At the beginning of the vision (Rev 4-5), the Lamb with his messianic power opens the sealed book and brings the light to history. When John says that the Lamb is the lamp of the city and there is no more night, he announces that Christ has overcome all the powers of darkness with the glory that he has from God (cfr. John 17,22).

¹⁰⁸ G. K. BEALE, *The Book of Revelation*, 1093.

¹⁰⁹ D. E. AUNE, *Revelation 17-22*, 1170, sees here an allusion to a messianic text Ps 132,17: «there I will make a horn to sprout for David; I have prepared a lamp for my anointed».

¹¹⁰ On Christ as the one who brings God’s glory to people, see U. VANNI, «Linguaggio, simboli ed esperienza mistica nel libro dell’Apocalisse. I-II», in *Gregorianum* 79 (1998), 484 notes 28 and 30. See also the interpretation of *φωστήρ* in the active sense and its identification with Christ in U. VANNI, «La dimension christologique de la Jérusalem nouvelle», in *Revue d’histoire et de philosophie religieuses* 79 (1999), 123, «Le “porteur de lumière” c’est le Christ-agneau. La gloire de Dieu qu’il a communiquée à la cité-épouse est envisagée comme une lumière qui enveloppe la cité et qui procède entièrement de Lui».

The author here emphasizes the Christological dimension of salvation¹¹¹.

The light shines on the new city, that is, the people (21,23). The parallel sentence in 22,5 states again that it shines on his servants (ἐπ' αὐτούς).

Rev 21,27 states that “only those whose names that have been written in the Lamb’s book of life” shall enter the New Jerusalem. The phrase “book of life” appears five times outside 21,27 (3,5; 13,8; 17,8; 20,12.15).

The apex of the Johannine eschatological vision is the throne of God and the Lamb at the centre of the city (22,1-2). The river of the “water of life” flows from the throne of God and the Lamb (22,1). The river flowing from the throne is an allusion to Ezekiel’s vision of the miraculous temple river that flows east from the restored temple and is symbol of extraordinary fecundity (Ezek 47,1-12). The river of the “water of life” with its provenance from the throne signifies the eschatological gift of salvation in its fullness, experienced as a communion of life between God, Christ and humanity¹¹². It is an important motif in Revelation: 2,7.10; 3,5; 7,17; 11,11; 13,8; 16,3; 17,8; 20,12.15; 21,6.27; 22,1.2.14.17.19. The “tree of life”, full access to which is now restored, brings the vision of salvation history to completion. While the “water of life” emphasizes the transcendence of life, the “tree of life” growing on either side of the river highlights the immanence of the life offered to humanity. The transcendent life of the power

¹¹¹ Throughout the Revelation, the term *ναός* refers to the heavenly temple of the present (14,15.17; 15,5-6.8; 16,1.17), or of the consummation (3,12; 11,19; 21,22), or both (7,15); while the same word at 11,1-2 describes the people of God in their heavenly as well as earthly existence. Once again, the material and the spiritual are conjoined in John’s theology. The presence of the Father mediated by the Son, glimpsed in time, becomes fully and finally available in eternity to those in Christ who dwell in the holy city-temple, the New Jerusalem. cfr. G. K. BEALE, *The Book of Revelation*, 1091.

¹¹² L. GOPPELT, «ὕδωρ», in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 8, 326 sees *ζωή* as “existence in fellowship with God”.

of Christ's resurrection now becomes immanent in the days of man.

God and the Lamb together share the throne. By sharing the throne of God, the Lamb also shares the sovereignty of God. This is the second of three instances in Revelation in which the sharing of a single throne by God and the Lamb is mentioned (3,21; 22,1.3). While the proleptic scene in 7,17 implies that the Lamb is seated on the throne, there is no clear reference in Revelation to the Lamb actually being seated upon a throne or enthroned (with the exception of 3,21) until this point in the narrative¹¹³.

In summary, the New Jerusalem will be the eschatological home for God, the Lamb and the faithful. The New Jerusalem will establish an intimate, familial relationship among God, the Lamb and his followers. God and the Lamb, in turn, will provide the highest quality of life possible and the servants of God will worship them¹¹⁴. The New Jerusalem will be a community full of joy and without illness, founded by God and the Lamb.

The New Jerusalem is the finale of John's vision, the fulfilment of the gradual permeation of the risen Christ in the days of man. The coming of the nations to this city is to be seen within the context of the victorious power of God and of the Lamb in history that brings everyone to acknowledge the divine sovereignty. The gates of the New Jerusalem are open to everyone who accepts Christ. The life and the light for the people are God and his Christ, who overcome every evil and negativity, and every finitude and suffering. In the realization of eschatological salvation, presented as the continuous day, the boundaries of temporality, as well as of spatiality disappear. There is no division of day and night, and of heaven and earth. The ceaseless day symbolizes God's Day, his presence and the full splendour of Christ's resurrection.

¹¹³ D. E. AUNE, *Revelation 17-22*, 1177.

¹¹⁴ R. H. MOUNCE, *The Book of Revelation*, 386-388.

Conclusion

We have been considering so far the identity and important functions of the most comprehensive Christological image in Revelation, the Lamb. The living presence and active interactions of Christ are depicted through the vivid symbol of the Lamb. The Lamb is, in fact, the revelation of *how* God works in history. The Lamb is the “window” through which God is revealed. It would highlight the importance of the claim in 1,1 that the Apocalypse is a revelation of Jesus Christ.

Throughout Revelation, Christ stands near to the People of God. More intimate is their relationship with their Messiah, the Lamb. The Lamb redeems for God persons from every tribe, linguistic group, nationality, and ethnic group through his sacrificial death (5,9). The Lamb protects the community and defeats its enemies. The community will no longer suffer from the natural elements but will find eternal sustenance under the Lamb’s pastoral care (7,16-17). He seals the elect, protects them from the eschatological woes (14,1-5; cfr. 7,1-8) and watches the eternal punishment of those who have persecuted the faithful (14,10), thereby assuring the earthly community of its security. He bestows honours upon those who have suffered the most for their religious convictions (14,1-5; 17,14).

The Lamb provides protection, leadership, nourishment, and solace and he promises deliverance (7,9-17; 13,8; 21,9-22,5) to his faithful followers. He liberates his people from sin, suffering and death. The Lamb protects the community and leads it to life-giving springs where God wipes away the tears of the oppressed. It would convey to the community that God takes an interest in their woes and will attend to their sorrows personally (7,13-17; 21,1-8). This community understands itself to have a close, endearing fellowship with the Lamb. This will happen because the Lamb will deliver his people from evil powers through his blood (12,10-12; 15,1-4). The wedding of the Lamb and his followers reinforces the

closeness of the faithful community to God and to the Lamb (19,1-9; 21,9-13). So throughout Revelation, the Lamb stands as the efficient Shepherd of the faithful, and the faithful followers as his trustworthy followers.

2. The Church as the Witness to the Lamb

Introduction

John's depiction of 'the followers of the Lamb' described in 14,1-5 can be understood in terms of their relationship to the Lamb. As their shepherd, Christ the Lamb prepares them to walk the way of God and guides their way towards God. Throughout Revelation, Christ stands near the People of God. John's portraits of the people of God show them as close companions of the Lamb. Not only is it the explicit purpose of the author "to show to his servants what must soon take place" (1,1), but it is also implicit throughout the entire book of Revelation that John is vitally concerned that the People of God will remain faithful to their Lord. The intimate relationship of the faithful to the Lamb helps them to live and overcome every sort of difficulties. The faithful followers of the Lamb always keep the Lamb as their model figure and guide towards the path to God the Father. It is from the Lamb that the faithful learn the path of discipleship. Thus, the life of the faithful is a life of witnessing to the Lamb. The life of witnessing is painful, but the intimate love between the Lamb and the faithful make it affordable.

This second part of the third chapter, entitled "The Church as the Witness to the Lamb", is divided into three parts. The first part deals with the portrayal of the Church in the book of Revelation. Here we will examine various terms and images with which the concept of Church is presented in the book of Revelation. The second part considers the relationship between Christ the Lamb and the Church. We will give special attention to the seven Churches. How Christ is involved in the day-to-day life of these local Churches is treated here. The third part deals with the Church as the Community of those who witness the Lamb. This part has again three sub-divisions.

The first sub-division is entitled as the Witness of the Faithful. Here we deal with the witness in seven messages, the slain witnesses, and the two witnesses. The remaining three sub-divisions treat three salient features of witness. We intend to find out here the various nuances of witness, taking into account particular contexts. Now we shall consider the first division of this section, i.e., the portrayal of the Church in the book of Revelation.

2.1 The Portrayal of the Church in the Book of Revelation

Introduction

Throughout Revelation, the concept of the Church is well portrayed. The book of Revelation contains materials to be passed on to the Church, where it is to be read, heard, and obeyed (1,1-3). On those who read, hear, and obey the contents of his Revelation, John pronounces his benediction (1,3). The task of the Church in relationship to the Revelation of John is to hear and, most significantly, obey its contents. Repeatedly, the Church is called upon to hear and respond positively, to the contents of the Revelation (cfr. 2,7.11.17.29; 3,6.13.22; 13,9.18). The Church as the communion of the faithful followers of the Lamb is illustrated with the help of many images. The key images are *Ἐκκλησία οἱ δοῦλοι οἱ ἅγιοι βασιλείᾳ λαός ἀδελφοί σπέρμα*, and *νύμφη*. We will go through all these images that are used to refer and demonstrate the Church as the People of God and shall see here how the author portrays the Church in the book of Revelation.

2.1.1 *ἐκκλησία* (Church)

Among the 114 occurrences of *ἐκκλησία* "Church", in the New Testament, 20 occurrences are in Revelation (1,4.11.20[bis]; 2,1.7.8.11.12.17.18.23.29; 3,1.6.7.13.14.22; 22,16). All these 20 occurrences indicate a community of believers which has grown, exists and meets in a particular place¹¹⁵. Until 22,16

¹¹⁵ L. COENEN, «Ekklēsia», in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 1, 304. G. K. BEALE, *The Book of Revelation*, 186, «These "seven Churches" refer to seven historical Churches in Asia».

all the references of *ἐκκλησία* occur in the messages of chapter two and three or in the vision of the seven lampstands that precedes them in chapter one (vv. 4.11.20 always of the seven *ἐκκλησίαι* in Asia). Each of these messages is addressed to the angel of the *ἐκκλησία* in a given place (2,1.8.12.18; 3,1.7.14). The identical concluding statement in each message makes what has been said with reference to the particular local Church binding for all other *ἐκκλησίαι*. This is also true of the reference to the Churches at the end of the book (22,16). The only difference is that here, the exalted Jesus is speaking to the Churches, whereas there it is the Spirit.

According to Paul S. Minear¹¹⁶, “Ecclesia” may be viewed, “from the standpoint of personal, communal response to God’s action through Christ, a response which is empowered by the Holy Spirit”. In Revelation, the particular type of response which John stresses may be typified by the command of Jesus to the Church at Smyrna “be faithful unto death” (2,10). Most of the metaphorical language that is used in the description of the Church as a responding community revolves about the concepts of “faithfulness”, “endurance”, and “witness”.

The book of Revelation confers strength of faith and confidence to the contemporary Church¹¹⁷. In the visions of John the Church not only appears under various figures, but a spiritual picture of the Church emerges which eminently serves that purpose. For the oppressed believers, it must already have meant a great deal to be reminded of their dignity: Christ has made them “kings and priests” (1,6; cfr. 5,10; 20,6; 22,5); those redeemed and sanctified by Christ (cfr. 1,5b) inherit these titles of honour of the old people of God¹¹⁸ (cfr. Exod 19,6).

2.1.2 οἱ δούλοι (The Servants)

In Revelation *δούλος* is used 14 times, 3 times literally (6,15; 13,16; 19,18) and 11 times metaphorically. These

¹¹⁶ S. P. MINEAR, «Church», in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. I, 609.

¹¹⁷ R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Church in the New Testament*, 113.

¹¹⁸ J. B. BAUER, «Könige und Priester, ein heiliges Volk (Ex 19,6)», in *Biblische Zeitschrift* (1958), 286.

metaphorical uses of *δοῦλος* refer to Moses (15,3), to John himself (1,1), to prophets (10,7; 11,18), but most frequently to Christians in general¹¹⁹ (1,1; 2,10; 7,3; 19,2; 22,3). Elsewhere in the New Testament the term “servants of Christ” is used of Christians in most of the time (1 Cor 7,22; Gal 1,10; Eph 6,6; Col, 4,12).

John quite frequently uses *δοῦλος*, “servant”, in its plural form in Revelation to refer to the Church (e.g., 1,1; 2,20; 7,3; 10,7; 19,2; 19,5; 22,3; 22,6). In 19,2 the word is used in such a way that it is a virtual equivalent of *μάρτυς* in the expression, “the blood of his servants”, *τὸ αἷμα τῶν δούλων αὐτοῦ*. It is of great significance that the early Church thought of themselves as slaves of God¹²⁰. The primary reason for the use of this metaphor is the significance of total and unswerving allegiance to the Master, whose demands upon the believing individual are explicit, and whose property they are. Jesus speaks of *δοῦλοι* when he wishes to emphasise the unconditional nature of human responsibility to God. Prominent in the theological use of the word group in the New Testament is the idea that Christians belong to Jesus as his *δοῦλοι*, and that their lives are thus offered to him as the risen and exalted Lord. The basic emphasis here is one of obedience. John refers to himself as “his servant John” (1,1) while with the same breath he refers to the Church with the same noun.

2.1.3 οἱ ἅγιοι (The Holy Ones)

One of the most common words in Revelation which is used to designate the Church is *οἱ ἅγιοι*, “the holy ones”. The term “holy ones” is derived from Jewish tradition, where it can refer to both the people of God and angels¹²¹. This term occurs 12 times elsewhere in Revelation (e.g., 8,3,4; 11,18;

¹¹⁹ A. WEISER, «δοῦλος», in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1, 352; I. T. BECKWITH, *The Apocalypse of John*, 419.

¹²⁰ K. H. RENGSTORF, «δοῦλος», in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 2, 274.

¹²¹ D. E. AUNE, *Revelation* 1-5, 359.

13,7,10; 14,12; 16,6; 17,6; 18,20,24; 19,8; 20,9) and frequently in early Christian literature¹²².

John primarily applies this term to Jesus in 3,7, i.e., “O Lord, holy and true”, and to God himself in 4,8, i.e., “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!”. By using the same phrase in 6,10, John virtually equates Jesus with God with respect to those attributes¹²³. Properly, the quality of ἅγιος belongs to God, with all other applications of the term in a derivative sense. It is in this sense that the adjective is applied to both personal and material objects, by virtue of the relationship which they maintain towards God¹²⁴.

Οἱ ἅγιοι occurs in the plural as a substantive: persons who belong to God, and as such constitute a religious entity – ‘God’s people’. In rendering οἱ ἅγιοι, it is important to avoid an expression which means ‘sanctified’, because the focus is not upon a particular state of holiness, but upon a special relationship with God. Those who are spoken of as οἱ ἅγιοι may also be admonished to become sanctified. In a number of respects, οἱ ἅγιοι is similar in meaning to λαός ‘people of God’¹²⁵ (11,12).

The term ἅγιος not only maintains its force of emphasis upon the imputed holiness which believers derive from God, but also speaks of the holiness implied by their own moral actions¹²⁶. Rev 13,10 and 14,12, for example, speak of the ὑπομονη, (“patience”) of the saints in the face of affliction. The phrase “the blood of the saints” (16,6; 17,6; 18,24) equates them

¹²² IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH, *Epistula ad Smyrnaeos*, 1,2; JUSTINE MARTYR, *Dialogus cum Tryphone*, 139,4

¹²³ O. PROCKSCH, «ἅγιος», in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1, 102; F. W. DANKER, «ἅγιος», in *A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 11.

¹²⁴ Jerusalem can therefore be referred to as τὴν πόλιν τὴν ἁγίαν (11,2; 21,2,10; 22,19).

¹²⁵ J. P. LOUW – E. A. NIDA, «οἱ ἅγιοι», in *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains*, vol. 1, § 11.27.

¹²⁶ O. PROCKSCH, «ἅγιος», in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1, 108.

with those who have been faithful to the point of death. Rev 19,8 speaks of the righteous deeds of the saints, which are symbolically represented by John as the linen garments of the bride. Because of their relationship with God, their prayers are effective (5,8; 8,3-4), and they are eventually rewarded (11,18). As loyal adherents to the cause of Jesus, they are besieged by the forces of evil (13,7; 20,9), and consequently rejoice when those forces, which are symbolized by Babylon, fall. Attributively, those who take part in the first resurrection are “blessed and holy” (20,6). In 22,11, where John speaks of the present period just before the end, he makes this statement: “Let the one who is unrighteous continue to practice unrighteousness, and let the one who is righteous continue to practice righteousness, and the one who is holy, ὁ ἅγιος, let him keep himself holy, ἁγιασθήτω”¹²⁷.

2.1.4 βασιλεία (Kingdom)

The noun βασιλεία, which is variously translated throughout the New Testament as “kingship”, “royal power”, “royal rule”, or “kingdom”¹²⁸, is found 10 times in Revelation, while the verb βασιλεύω occurs seven times. Just as the adjective ἅγιος was primarily applied to Jesus and God, so believers are said to constitute a “kingdom” in virtue of the fact that they shall share domination with Christ in his reign. John speaks of God as “King of the nations” (15,3), and of Jesus as the “King of kings and the Lord of lords” (17,14; 19,16).

The idea of sharing sovereignty with Jesus is found in 20,4,6, where believers are said to reign a thousand years with Christ. Rev 22,5 speaks of the faithful as reigning “for all eternity”. Throughout the whole of the New Testament, it is only in 1,6 and 5,10 that the People of God are explicitly identified with α βασιλεία¹²⁹.

¹²⁷ F. W. DANKER, «ἅγιος», in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 11.

¹²⁸ F. W. DANKER, «βασιλεία», in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 168-169.

¹²⁹ According to K. L. SCHMIDT, «Βασιλεία», in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1, 590, «As the New Testament witness is plain and

Discussing the usage of the term βασιλεία, George E. Ladd¹³⁰ concludes that: "...the people are so designated not because they are the subjects of God's reign but because they will share Christ's reign". This concept of sharing dominion with Christ is further underlined by the fact that the idea of "ruling nations with the rod of iron" is ascribed to individual believers "who are in the process of conquering and in the process of keeping" Jesus' works unto the end (2,26-27), as well as to Jesus himself (12,5).

This leads us quite naturally into another aspect of our subject, the relationship between the Church considered as a corporate unit and the individual believers who make it up. When sovereignty is described as having been given to the Church (1,6; 5,10), it is significant that the aorist tense is used, stating the fact of the event or action involved¹³¹. When this authority to rule is spoken of in relation to individuals, however, it is also worthy of note that the progressive present is used. In 3,21, for example, we find that "I [Jesus] will allow the one who is in the process of conquering, ὁ νικῶν, to sit with me on my throne". Similarly in 2,26-27 it is said that "he who is in the process of conquering, ὁ νικῶν, and is in the process of keeping, ὁ τηρῶν, my works until the end, I will give him power, ἐξουσίαν, over the nations". The upshot of this is that only the Church considered corporately can be designated as "eternally secure", while the individual believers who make

unequivocal in relation to the αὐτοβασιλεία of Christ, it is understandably reserved in its linking of the βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ with Christian believers. The only relevant verse in this connection is Rev 1,6: Christ ἐποίησεν ἡμᾶς βασιλείαν. It hardly need be proved, however, that in this verse Christians may be understood as βασιλεία only in a derivative sense, i.e., as linked with Christ».

¹³⁰ G. E. LADD, *Jesus and the Kingdom: The Eschatology of Biblical Realism*, Harper and Row, New York, NY 1964, 259. Explaining 5,10 ("They shall reign on earth"), Ladd says, «"kingdom" is synonymous with "kings" not with the people over whom God rules».

¹³¹ D. E. AUNE, «St. John's Portrait of the Church in the Apocalypse», in *The Evangelical Quarterly* 38 (1966), 136.

up the Church maintain their position only as they remain faithful to their original commitment.

John calls himself a participant, *συγκοινωνός*, in the affliction and kingdom and patience in Jesus (1,9). Crucial for our consideration here are the concepts of “affliction”, *θλίψεις*, and “patience”, *ὑπομονή*, which are linked to participation in the kingdom. This is grammatically¹³² apparent by the fact that a single article occurs before the three nouns, which are connected by *καί*. It is therefore quite apparent that participation in the kingdom is not possible apart from the ability to endure suffering for the cause of Jesus and his gospel.

2.1.5 *λαός* (People)

The term *λαός*¹³³, “people”, serves as a description of the Church. This word stresses the initiative of God and occurs two times in this connection in Revelation (18,4; 21,3). Rev 18,4 seems to have been drawn from Isa 48,20 and 52,11, where Isaiah warns Israel against the sin of Babylon. John applies this Old Testament context to the New People of God. Rev 21,3 is then a composite quotation from several Old Testament passages (Lev 26,11¹³⁴; Jer 38,33 and Ezek 37,27) and *λαός* having been changed from its singular to the plural. Swete¹³⁵ would clarify this change: “John has substituted *λαοί* for *λαός* – the many peoples of redeemed humanity for the single elect nation, the world for Israel”. This use of the *λαοί*, refers to the consummation that the kingdom of the world becomes the kingdom of God (11,5), and an outcome of the Revelation’s emphasis on the fact that the eschatological people are from

¹³² A. T. ROBERTSON, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, Broadman Press, Nashville, TN 1934, 785-786.

¹³³ H. STRATHMANN, «*λαός*», in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 4, 55; H. FRANKEMÖLLE, «*λαός*», in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 2, 341.

¹³⁴ M. RISSI, *The Future of the World: An Exegetical Study of Revelation* 19,11-22,15, 57, sees this as the passage alluded to in Rev 21,3. J. RUITEN Van, «The Intertextual Relationship between Isaiah 65,17-20 and Revelation 21,1-5b», in *Estudios bíblicos* 51 (1993), 473-510 supports Rissi.

¹³⁵ H. B. SWETE, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, 278.

“every tribe and tongue and people and nation”¹³⁶ (5,9; 7,9; 11,9). This new people, then, is made up of the elect of many peoples.

The term *λαός* itself is intimately connected with God’s initiative in selecting a people of his Own. It is therefore of great significance that the term *λαός* was transferred from an ethnic people to a spiritual people of God¹³⁷. More than anything else, John’s use of the Old Testament language with regard to the new People of God reveals the fact that fulfilment belongs to the very warp and woof of the existence of the Church.

2.1.6 *ἀδελφοί* (Brothers)

This term primarily views the Church in terms of the relationship of individuals to one another. In the New Testament *ἀδελφός* and *ἀδελφή* denote either “physical brotherhood” in the strict sense or more generally the “spiritual brotherhood”. In a more general sense *ἀδελφός* in the New Testament denotes “fellow-Christians” or “Christian brothers”, who confess the faith and are doomed to persecution and death¹³⁸ (1,9; 6,11; 12,10).

The Church as conceived of brotherhood, *ἀδελφοί*, is expressed a number of times (6,11; 12,10; 19,10) in Revelation. The use of the term “brotherhood”, with reference to the new community is analogous to the use of the term “people” in that just as the concept of an ethnic people of God was fragmented under the impact of the New Covenant, so old family ties were shattered by the ties of the new spiritual community¹³⁹.

¹³⁶ According to C. SPICQ, «*λαός*», in *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, vol. 2, 371, «The Christian community inherits this title, «*λαός*», which from that point means the assembly of those who believe in Christ, made up of people from every race and every tongue».

¹³⁷ H. STRATHMANN, «*λαός*», in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 4, 56.

¹³⁸ VON SODEN, «*ἀδελφός*», in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1, 144-145; J. BEUTLER, «*ἀδελφός*», in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1, 30.

¹³⁹ D. E. AUNE, «St. John’s Portrait of the Church in the Apocalypse», 142.

The term is therefore used ethically, and indicates that the closest bonds which men can have are those which are forged in connection with their belief in Jesus Christ. This idea is brought out in force by Jesus when he says, "Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother" (Mark 3,35). All those virtues, which characterize the concept of human brotherhood are lifted out of their physical significance and given their highest application when applied by John to relationships within the Church.

2.1.7 σπέρμα (Offspring)

This significant metaphor for the Church is found in 12, 17: "The dragon was angry with the woman, and went off to make war on the rest of her *offspring*, σπέρμα, on those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus". Since the word for "offspring" here is σπέρμα, John is making an apparent reference to the Protevangelium of Genesis 3,15¹⁴⁰, as well as to the repetitions of the Abrahamic promise (Gen 12,1; 17,15). John describes the σπέρμα as "those who keep the commandments of God", and "those who bear testimony to Jesus" (12,17). The expression τὸ σπέρμα αὐτῆς symbolizes individual Christians, the spiritual children of the woman¹⁴¹.

2.1.8 νύμφη and/ or γυνή (Bride)

The Church as "bride" of Christ is an effective image of the Church in the book of Revelation¹⁴². Rev 19,7-8 describes the anticipated union of Christ and his Church: "let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride¹⁴³ has made herself ready; it was

¹⁴⁰ J. WEISS, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes: Ein Beitrag zur Literatur und Religionsgeschichte*, 138.

¹⁴¹ H. GOLLINGER, *Das "Grosse Zeichen" von Apokalypse 12*, 179.

¹⁴² C. CHAVASSE, *The Bride of Christ*, The Religious Book Club, London 1939, 93. According to T. STRAMARE, «Apocalisse», 462, «Mentre Israele nell'Antica Alleanza era la sposa di Jahvè (Jer 2,2-3), nella Nuova Alleanza la sposa dell'Agnello è la Chiesa».

¹⁴³ The term «Bride» is seen in the Greek Text of Rev 19,7 as «γυνή», and in Rev 22,7 as «νύμφη».

granted her to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure, for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints". Suffice it to say here that the marital figure of the bride is to be identified with the Church, since in 19,8 her garments are described as the righteous deeds of the saints. The metaphor itself combines the ideas of subjection on the part of the Church to her husband Jesus (ἀνὴρ used of Jesus, 21,2), and the intimate fellowship which they share.

Again, in Revelation the image of the Messianic bridal community is found extensively in the final chapters, which depict the ultimate consummation (19,7,9; 21,2,9; 22,17). The equation of the bride of the Lamb (21,9) with the Jerusalem which comes down from heaven (21,10) is based on 21,2, which, borrowing from Isa 61,10, says of the heavenly city of God that it is "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband"¹⁴⁴. Final fulfilment, certainly of salvation, joy, hope and longing, are all expressed in what is said here about the Lamb's wife.

The metaphor of Christ as the bridegroom and the people of God as the bride was quite widespread in early Christianity (2 Cor 11,2; Eph 5,25-32). In subsequent early Christian literature, the metaphor of Christ as bridegroom and the Church as bride occurs frequently¹⁴⁵.

2.1.9 πιστοί (Faithful ones)

The term πιστοί, "faithful ones", is applied to the believing community in only one passage of Revelation (17,14), where the use of the word "faithful" serves as a completion of the concepts "called" and "chosen". Primarily the word πιστός is applied to Jesus, as the "faithful witness" (1,5), "the faithful and true witness" (3,14), and "the faithful and true one" (19,11). The principal reason for applying this adjective to Jesus lies in

¹⁴⁴ J. JEREMIAS, «ἀνάμνησις», in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 4, 1105.

¹⁴⁵ *Didache* 11,11; TERTULLIAN, *Adversus Marcionem*, 5,4; 5,18; *De Monogamia*, 7; CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA, *Stromata*, 3,6; AUGUSTINE, *Sermons*, 40,6.

connection with his faithfulness unto death in which he sets the pattern for his followers. This idea is further borne out by the description of Antipas, one of the specific martyrs that John had in mind: “Antipas, my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you” (2,13). It is already observable that in John’s thought, the words “faithful” and “witness” are very intimately correlated.

Another word, which is very closely related theologically to πιστός is the verb νικάω “to conquer”. The frequency of its occurrence throughout Revelation affords another glimpse into the specific purpose for its composition. The verb is always used in the present tense when the subject is a saint who has not yet completed his course (2,7.11.17.26; 3,5.12.21; 21,7) νικῶν > νικῶντι verb participle present active dative masculine singular). When these believers are viewed from the perspective of having been faithful to the end, then the aorist tense is always used (12,11/ ἐνίκησαν verb indicative aorist active 3rd person plural). John views the victory of Jesus as having two foci: the first is that which he won by his faithfulness in his earthly life and death and resurrection, and which is always found in the aorist tense (3,21/ ἐνίκησα verb indicative aorist active 1st person singular; 5,5/ ἐνίκησεν verb indicative aorist active 3rd person singular), while the second refers to the consummation of all things when Jesus will be the ultimate cosmic victor, and this emphasis is found in the future tense (17,14/ νικήσει verb indicative future active 3rd person singular).

Two other metaphors which are used to stress God’s action in the life of man are κλητός “called”, and ἐκλεκτός “chosen”, both of which occur only once in Revelation in 17,14, and which are important for their connection with the people of God in the Old Testament. Throughout Israel’s history as a nation, they were profoundly aware of the fact that they were the chosen People of God (Deut 7,7; Isa 44,1; Ezek 20,5). A new Testament passage which is apparently crucial for the understanding of κλητός and ἐκλεκτός, is Matt 22,14, where they

are differentiated¹⁴⁶: “For many are called but few are chosen”. Both terms indicate God’s initiative in selecting for himself a people. But this fact does not necessarily guarantee that every individual within that group will remain faithful to the end.

Conclusion

We have been analysing the portrayal of the Church in Revelation. In order to get a clear account we have analysed all the major images that are used in Revelation to illustrate the Church. Along with the classic term *ἐκκλησία*, we have considered images such as *Ἐκκλησία*, *οἱ δούλοι*, *οἱ ἅγιοι*, *βασιλεία*, *λαός*, *ἀδελφοί*, *σπέρμα*, and *νύμφη*. All these images and metaphors show the intimate relationship between Christ and the Church. Christ speaks as the Lord of the Churches, the one who instructs, commends, censures and promises in order to communicate to the Churches what they must do in order to enter the New Jerusalem.

2.2 Christ and the Church

At the very beginning of the book of Revelation we see the intimate relationship between Christ and the Church. In the “messages to the seven Churches”¹⁴⁷ Christ is presented as the ‘one like a son of man’ (1,13). The ‘one like a son of man’ stands among the ‘seven golden lampstands’ introduced in v. 12 and explained in v. 20. These lampstands represent the seven Churches to whom Christ has instructed John to write (vv. 9-11). Christ’s standing in the midst of the lampstands symbolizes his involvement in and concern for the seven

¹⁴⁶ K. L. SCHMIDT, «καλέω», in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 3, 496.

¹⁴⁷ The number seven is not accidental. As a symbol of completeness it stands for all communities in this Asian region with its many cities and their varying situations. All Christians there must listen to what the Spirit is saying to the seven Churches. cfr. J. LAMBRECHT, «The People of God», 383.

Churches. The lampstands themselves symbolize the bond between Christ and community¹⁴⁸.

Each message begins with Christological expressions, portraying a “flashback” to the Christological titles, as in chapter one¹⁴⁹. This means that the speaker refers to “a single person the Messiah” in chapter one and chapters two-three¹⁵⁰. Moreover, chapter one (vv. 4.11.20) is referring to the seven Churches that are described as the addressees in chapters two-three. In this sense, chapter one and chapters two-three establish an integral relation.

Christ is the Messiah described in human likeness (v. 13) who authorizes John to write the seven messages and gathers, protects and leads the faithful at the *eschaton* (3,12.21; 14,14-16). The titles of six of the seven messages explicitly refer back to 1,1-20, where Christ’s authority has been established as Lord of these Churches (vv. 1-3.5.7.11.17b-20). He judges these Churches (2,5.12.14.16.18-19.22-24; 3,1.17). Secondly, he gathers together the Churches through his exhortations to hear the Spirit (2,7.17; 3,13.22), through his promises to the conquerors (2,7, 10-11.17; 3,12.21) and through his harvesting the saints in the end-time (14,14-16).

The reader can identify from each of the seven messages that Christ is the sender. Christ comments in each message with authority upon the quality of Christian behaviour in each

¹⁴⁸ J. F. WALVOORD, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 44. According to K. STOCK, *L’Ultima Parola è di Dio*, 54, «The “golden lampstand” situates at the temple always in front of the majesty of the Most High. Thus the Church must always be oriented towards and live in the presence of Christ». The “lampstands” as a symbol for the Church appear seven times in the Revelation: four times in the inaugural vision of the Revelation, where “one like a son of man” stands among the seven golden lampstands which are identified as the seven Churches (1,12.13.20); twice in the message to the Church of Ephesus which is threatened with the removal of its lampstand (2,1.5); and once in the vision of the two witnesses, who are identified as the two lampstands (11,4).

¹⁴⁹ 2,1 and 1,16; 2,8 and 1,17; 2,12 and 1,16; 2,18 and 1,14; 3,1 and 1,4.20; 3,14 and 1,5 are paralleled, respectively.

¹⁵⁰ P. S. MINEAR, *I Saw a New Earth*, 43-44.

community (2,2-4.6.9.13-15.19-20; 3,1b.4.8.10.15.17); that is, the purpose of the messages individually and collectively is the improvement of the internal spiritual life of the Christian community in order to maintain the bond between Christ and community¹⁵¹.

The messages communicate to each Church what it must do in order that the union between Christ and community might be maintained (cfr. 2,5). Moreover, Christ speaks through the messages as the Lord of the cosmos to whom the Christians give homage and divine honours. The messages assume the Lordship of Christ, the 'one like a son of man', to give directions and to judge these communities.

Christ has the ultimate power and authority over his Churches (2,5b). He maintains a close contact with his Churches (2,1b) and is actively present among them (2,1c). He is the one who knows exactly both the strength and weakness of his Church¹⁵². The Church is very close to his heart and he does not permit anyone to lead her astray (cfr. 2,19). He speaks to the Churches in very personal terms (2,20; ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ). Christ does not stand away from his Church but he is very much involved in her life. He has the penetrating power to see everything that is happening to his Church (2,23b) and makes his judgement on each Church (2,2-4.13-15.19-23; 3,1c.15-17) as he finds them and demands a conversion from their imperfect condition (2,5.16.21-22; 3,3.19). His word is irresistible and effective and therefore it has to be responded to (2,12b). It has also the sense of irresistible force that can destroy what is evil in the Church (19,15). His sword of mouth is the only weapon that he uses to confront his Churches and the nations of the world (2,16).

¹⁵¹ According to Yarbrow Collins, the content of the messages speaks to the context, while the number of the messages symbolizes their universal appeal (On the significance of seven in Revelation, 1.12.20; 5,1.6; 8,2; 15,1). cfr. A. YARBROW COLLINS, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation*, 13-19. The messages are at once specific messages to individual congregations and also communications to all Christians wherever they may be.

¹⁵² K. STOCK, *L'Ultima Parola è di Dio*, 17.

Christ does not want his Church to take a compromising stand between good and evil. He cannot tolerate a life of hypocrisy. He does not accept an attitude of self-complacency, which seems to condemn others and does not take into account one's own proper situation. He recognizes the positive elements in the Churches and he is also well aware of the negative elements creeping into them. Christ wants to purify his Church so that she may be able to collaborate with him to continue the redemptive action he has already accomplished by his death and resurrection.

Christ personally confronts the Churches with his powerful words. He makes them understand their situation in a more objective way; he judges them and motivates¹⁵³ them for a change in the situation in which he finds them and encourages them with his promises and puts them in contact with the Spirit and conveys the message to the universal Church.

Christ is the protagonist in the conversion of the Churches. It is not the Church who takes initiative to publicly confess her sins; on the contrary, it is Christ's sharp and authoritative criticism of the present situation of the Church and his judgement that challenges the Church to conversion. The act of conversion on the part of the Church is a complete and absolute "Yes" to the imperatives of the risen Christ. The process of conversion begins at the decisive moment in which the Church accepts the imperatives of Christ that transform her. Conversion is an unconditional opening to the plan of God that is being realized by Christ¹⁵⁴.

John writes to the Churches from his own historical and cultural background and his perception of the Churches is based on the circumstances of his time. He is aware of the

¹⁵³ According to A. FEUILLET, *L'Apocalypse: État de la question*, 41, «Christ comes to the Churches to inspect them and to issue words of warning and notes of encouragement».

¹⁵⁴ U. VANNI, «*Divenire nello Spirito*». *L'Apocalisse guida di spiritualità*, Edizioni ADP, Roma 2000, 96-97.

suffering that his own brothers undergo on account of their faith (1,9). He is convinced that if the Church holds fast to “the word of God” and to “the testimony of Jesus”, she will have to face more suffering, even death (2,10). John’s message is meant to strengthen the community in faith and help them discern the evil designs of those who are opposed to the values of Christ. The message to the Churches helps the faithful to evaluate their actual situation from a divine point. It challenges them to make a choice for Christ, presenting before them the final victory of Christ over the hostile forces.

The risen Christ’s presence and activity among the Churches is central in the message to the Churches. And his awareness of her situation is emphasized at the beginning of each message. His proclamations reveal that he is the true judge of all the Churches and ruler of the entire universe (2,26-27; 3,21).

Jesus is described in terms of his passion and death, his resurrection (i.e., first-born from the dead. cfr. 1,5) and his exaltation (i.e., ruler of earthly kings. cfr. 1,5). He is described as the faithful and true witness because of his unfailing faithfulness to God. The victory over evil that Jesus has won on the cross (3,21) is leading the people to the universal worship of God and the Lamb (5,6-14). He is called “faithful and true” (19,11) in the concluding section of the second part because he has fulfilled the redemptive purpose of God by his own sacrificial death. In the present world the Church is called to take the role of Christ as a faithful witness, so that the redemptive work of Christ can be continued.

The risen Christ, presented as a warrior, appears with his Messianic power as one who makes war against the evil present in the world (6,1-2) and he comes to judge and to definitively defeat the forces hostile to God (19,11-16). The crucified and risen Christ (5,6) commits himself within the space and time of history to establish the project of God (cfr. 19,11-16). The victory of Christ is realized progressively in history and is won

by his death and resurrection. The event of “martyr-death is repeatedly called Christ’s victory, his conquest”. It functions as a call to Christians to conquer/die. The story of Christ who conquered/ died, is a guarantee for the Church’s victory in the world, if she is ready to give faithful witness¹⁵⁵. The power of the risen Christ is a sign of hope and optimism for the faithful who bear the testimony of Jesus and keep the word of God. Therefore, the Church can continue to hope and to fight even under the weight of the suffering. The Church joins Christ in this fight after being purified and strengthened by the same Christ.

John uses the symbol of blood to refer to the violent death of Jesus on the cross. Jesus’ death on the cross is the definite expression of the power and love of God. The community of faithful understands the death of Jesus as an act of redemptive love (1,5b). John understands the death of Jesus not as victimization, but the definite manifestation of God’s rule in history (11,15). Therefore, he is the answer to all the questions and prayers of all the victims of the world (6,9-11). The victory of the Church is to be seen as a co-victory, that is, a participation in the victory of Christ. The Church is therefore called “to offer their lives not as meaningless victimization but as *martyria* to the reality of God’s rule, to its nature, and as its instrument”¹⁵⁶. For that the Church has to establish a renewed and intimate contact with the risen Christ through a process of conversion and purification (2-3).

Christ invites the Church to conquer the evil forces with his power of resurrection by participating in his life and destiny (3,21; 7,13-17; 12,10-12; 15,2-3). John presents Christ’s presence in the world as effective and forceful (1,10-16) and he invites us to listen to what the Spirit says to the Churches.

¹⁵⁵ M. E. BORING, «Narrative Christology in the Apocalypse», 715. The repeated use of the present participle ὁ νικῶν for the Church’s response in the present life corresponds to the once-for-all aorist ἐνίκησα in 3,21 and 5,5 of Christ.

¹⁵⁶ M. E. BORING, «The Theology of Revelation: “The Lord Our God the Almighty Reigns”», in *Interpretation* 40 (1986), 267.

2.3 The Church as the Community of those who Witness the Lamb

Introduction

The Book of Revelation presents the faithful followers as witnesses of the Lamb. Indeed faithful witness is what binds the characters of the book of Revelation together: from Jesus the faithful witness (1,5,9; 3,14; 21,20) to John (1,2,9; 21,18), to the mediating angel (22,16), to Antipas (2,13) and all the other saints who remain faithful to the end (12,11; 17,6; 19,10) especially the prophets (11,3,7; 19,10). This link is especially apparent in the final chapter, where the mediating angel (22,16), the author (22,18), and Jesus himself (22,20) all testify to “these things”. Witness in Revelation thus connects the work of the Lamb with the faithful response of the readers. Jesus’ work of witness is continued by his followers who are not only called his witnesses (17,6; cfr. 2,13) but are also said to hold “the witness of Jesus” (12,17; 19,10). For example, the 144,000 faithful followers of the Lamb “follow the Lamb wherever he goes” (14,4) and stand victorious with the Lamb on Mount Zion. This suggests that the faithful are those who “follow” the Lamb in his faithful witness.

In this section we will consider different nuances of the witness of the faithful and its various implications in relation to the Church as the community of the faithful followers of the Lamb.

2.3.1 The Witness of the Faithful

As Jesus, the leader and shepherd of the faithful, bore witness, so the Church, as his faithful followers, is also to act in the same capacity (2,13; 6,9; 11,7; 12,11,17; 17,6; 20,4). The words of J. R. van Pelt¹⁵⁷ will be useful here: “The idea of witness as related to Christ and his gospel plays an essential and highly important part in the New Testament writings and in the Christian faith and life universally. Not only in

¹⁵⁷ J. R. VAN PELT, «Witness», in *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, vol. 2, 830.

the primitive preaching, but also in all effectual preaching throughout the history of the Church, the gospel is conceived not as a speculative system, but as a witness to Jesus Christ as being himself God's witness to the world".

For a better understanding of the witness of the faithful, we will analyse now the 'witness' in 'the seven messages', in 'the slain witnesses' (6,9-11), and finally in 'the two witnesses' (11).

2.3.1.1 The "Witness" in Seven Messages

The first occurrence of 'witness'¹⁵⁸ is seen in the messages to the seven Churches (1,2; 1,5; 2,13; 3,14).

The verb *μαρτυρεῖν* "to witness" occurs in 1,2a and in 22,16.18.20. In other early Christian texts, cognates of *μαρτ-* are used for the proclamation of the Gospel (Acts 18,5; Eph 4,17). Four times the phrase "the word of God" and "the testimony by Jesus" are closely associated (1,2.9; 6,9; 20,4). John's use of this phrase suggests that he considers himself a prophet in the tradition of the Old Testament prophets who received the word of God (Hos 1,1; Joel 1,1; Jer 1,2). It is possible that the *καί* joining "the word of God" and "the witness of Jesus Christ" is epexegetical¹⁵⁹; i.e., "the word of God" is further defined by the phrase "the witness of Jesus Christ". In 1,5a the term witness is found as a Christological title (i.e., Jesus Christ the faithful witness) along with two other Christological titles (i.e., the firstborn from the dead and the ruler of the kings of the earth. cfr. 1,5b.c). An expanded version of the Christological designation "faithful witness" is found in 3,14 in the form "the faithful and true witness". The term "witness" is a Christological title only in 1,5a and in 3,14¹⁶⁰. The term occurs just three times elsewhere in Revelation, always in connection

¹⁵⁸ The Greek word that we translate by witness is *martys*. There are three words of the same derivation: to witness- *martyrein*; the act of witnessing- *martyria*; the testimony (in an adjective sense) - *martyrion*. cfr. S. DE DIÉTRICH, «You are my Witness: A Study of the Church's Witness», in *Interpretation* 8 (1954), 273.

¹⁵⁹ D. E. AUNE, *Revelation* 1-5, 19.

¹⁶⁰ D. E. AUNE, *Revelation* 1-5, 37.

with those who die for their faith (2,13; 11,3; 17,6). In the gospel of John, it is the historical Jesus who is the subject of the verb *μαρτυρεῖν*; i.e., he testifies to the truth that he has received from God (John 3,32; 4,44; 5,31; 7,7). In Revelation, it is the exalted Jesus who guarantees the truth of the revelation transmitted through John¹⁶¹.

The phrase “my faithful witness” is applied to Antipas in 2,13 (cfr. 3,14). It appropriately picks up Ps 89,37 and Isa 55,4, which both refer to David, the Messianic model, as a witness¹⁶². Jesus the Messiah was obediently faithful to his Father’s will and salvific plan, throughout his ministry and in his passion; he is now and for all time the supreme witness, whose death and exaltation brings life to all faithful and whose testimony authenticates the revelation given to John.

In his messages to the seven Churches, John makes elaborate use of the metaphor “the seven golden lampstands” (1,12.13.20[bis]; 2,1)¹⁶³, which he explicitly identifies with the seven Churches (1,20). The fact that Jesus himself walks in the midst of the lampstands (2,1) means that he is first of all present in those communities, then that he knows their difficult situation, and finally that they as Churches are corporate witness to one Lord.

John is not addressing the seven messages to “an abstract Church” but to concrete Churches and this is known by the fact that the author uses the specific names of the Churches¹⁶⁴. Therefore, the Church, which John adopts as the audience is not the one that rests safely in the heaven but one which “lives in particular vexations and in jeopardy of her relationship to Christ through the temptations offered by the religious world

¹⁶¹ D. E. AUNE, *Revelation 1-5*, 255.

¹⁶² S. S. SMALLEY, *The Revelation to John*, 34.

¹⁶³ According to D. E. AUNE, «St. John’s Portrait of the Church in the Apocalypse», 143, «His use of the word “lampstand” emphasizes the local Church in its capacity as a witnessing community, while the adjective “golden” speaks of the purity of their faith and witness».

¹⁶⁴ W. J. HARRINGTON, *Revelation*, 56.

that tries to undermine the life and teaching of the Church from within (2-3)"¹⁶⁵. Accordingly, without the seven messages, "the valuable point of contact with our present human experience" in the book of Revelation would be lost¹⁶⁶.

Each message contains exhortations to steadfastness or a better moral conduct (2,5: "...repent, and do the works you did at first"), to conversion¹⁶⁷ after immorality and idolatry (2,21). All messages also admonish the readers to listen carefully: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the Churches" This appeal is either preceded or followed by a promise. But the condition is clear: the believers must be victorious; they must "conquer" (2,7.11.17.26-29; 3,5-6.12-13.21-22). The promise is formulated by means of a variety of images, which will refer to salvation and eternal life, to deliverance from the second death (2,11), or to an abiding stay in the New Jerusalem, which comes down from God (3,12). The one who guarantees both promise and punishment is the risen Christ. At the beginning of each message he introduces himself by means of qualifications which each time are different. But all qualifications come from the solemn presentation of the one who is like the Son of Man at the occurrence of the vision (1,12-20).

In Revelation, Christ serves as the archetype¹⁶⁸ for the faithful who must maintain the same witness that Jesus witnessed. John encourages the faithful to hold to the testimony of Jesus. As Christ had conquered suffering and death, so they too would conquer and share his victory over the forces of evil. As their Lord had witnessed faithfully even unto death, they also must bear unflinching testimony. The witnessing power

¹⁶⁵ M. RISSI, *The Future of the World: An Exegetical Study of Revelation* 19,11-22,15, 15.

¹⁶⁶ G. GOLDSWORTHY, *The Gospel in Revelation*, Paternoster, Carlisle UK 1984, 77.

¹⁶⁷ The verb μετανοέω occurs in 2,5.16.21.22; 3,3.19.

¹⁶⁸ A. A. TRITES, «Witness», in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 3, 1047; M. C. TENNEY, *Interpreting Revelation*, W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI 1985², 117.

of the Church will depend to a great extent on her being the Church—namely, a community where God is at work, where a new quality of life is manifesting itself, where the fruits of the Spirit are shown in words and deeds (cfr. Gal 5,22-24).

2.3.1.2 The Slain Witnesses (6,9-11)

The next reference to witness occurs in 6,9-11 with the opening of the fifth seal and the description of the prayers of the souls in heaven. John sees an altar in heaven, at the bottom of which lie the souls of those who have been slain “for the word of God and the witness which they held” (6,9). They simply ‘hold’ the witness of Jesus, and for it they die. Obviously, with the use of the exegetical *καί*, the word of God which they kept is defined by the witness they witnessed. However, their “witness” is not further specified in this passage; it could refer to the “witness” of Jesus that they had received and preserved¹⁶⁹, or to the “witness” they themselves bore to Jesus¹⁷⁰.

The cry which the souls of the slain witnesses raise in 6,10 is not to be dismissed merely as a vindictive appeal for vengeance¹⁷¹. Most commentators agree that this lamentation is not “for personal revenge but for the vindication of the right

¹⁶⁹ Even though *τὴν μαρτυρίαν* is used here in 6,9 without the genitive *Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ*, some exegetes argue that *τὴν μαρτυρίαν ἣν εἶχον* refers to the “witness” of Jesus, received and retained by these who were slain like Jesus. cfr. I. T. BECKWITH, *The Apocalypse of John*, 526; AUNE, *Revelation* 6-16, 406.

¹⁷⁰ Beale argues that *τὴν μαρτυρίαν ἣν εἶχον* is a reference to the witness borne to Jesus. cfr. G. K. BEALE, *The Book of Revelation*, 390.

¹⁷¹ Various attempts to justify the prayer of the slain witnesses have been made: cfr. G. B. CAIRD, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine*, 85; G. R. BEASLEY-MURRAY, *Revelation*, 134, who notes that the cry of the slain witnesses is not strange since it is steeped in Jewish thought; G. K. BEALE, *The Book of Revelation*, 392, who comments, «God is being asked to demonstrate his holiness and standard of truth by bringing wrong doers to justice». L. MORRIS, *The Revelation of St. John*, 109, who comments, «the cry is intelligible only on the understanding that the supreme power in the world is God’s power, and that he exercises it in a moral way».

and truth of the cause for which they gave their lives, which is Christ's cause"¹⁷².

Accordingly, the purpose of this lamentation is to confirm that "God will accomplish his plan for history, and to make manifest on earth the lordship of Jesus Christ, which has already been proclaimed in heaven"¹⁷³ (5,9-10). In response to the prayer of divine vindication, John notes that each slain witness is given a white robe, which is a symbol of blessedness, victory, justification and purity (6,11; 7,13-14; 22,14)¹⁷⁴. According to Sweet¹⁷⁵, the final response to this lamentation is given in the total defeat of the great harlot-Babylon, the beast, the false prophet and Satan who delude the nations, and in the coming of the New Creation and the New Jerusalem. The question of the martyrs is answered; they must rest a little longer until the appointed number of those who must suffer as martyrs has been fulfilled.

2.3.1.3 The Two Witnesses (11,1-13)

John speaks not only of the witness of Jesus, who is given the title *ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστός*, but also of the experiences of several individuals who in his Revelation are designated as witness(es) of Jesus. So in addition to John, who referred to himself as a "witness" (1,2.9), Antipas who is classified as a "faithful witness" of Jesus (2,13), and those slain witnesses (6,9-11), we have the reference to those who are designated the "two witnesses" (11,1-14). The two witnesses (11,1-13) is a typological narrative of the Church's vocation and its destiny. It illustrates the Church's crucial role in the world. As an

¹⁷² E. SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, 64; J. P. M. SWEET, *Revelation*, 141; W. J. HARRINGTON, *Revelation*, 94; R. W. WALL, *Revelation*, Hendrickson, Peabody, MA 1991, 111.

¹⁷³ J. ROLOFF, *Revelation*, 90.

¹⁷⁴ The white robe is further identified as "a garment of resurrection or glorified body". cfr. R. H. CHARLES, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John* (ICC, vol. 1), 176, 184-188; G. B. CAIRD, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine*, 86.

¹⁷⁵ J. P. M. SWEET, *Revelation*, 141.

image of the Church the two witnesses represent the faithful, enduring witness of the Church in the world¹⁷⁶.

The identity of the two witnesses is so disputed that there is a myriad of interpretations. Various approaches, from historical reading to allegorical explanations, are employed to shed light on this. A much wider tendency among scholars is to see in these witnesses figures from the Old¹⁷⁷ or New Testament. The patristic authors preferred to look to the Old Testament and generally considered these witnesses as Enoch and Elijah¹⁷⁸. Behind such conclusions was the Jewish expectation of the return of these figures. Many exegetes¹⁷⁹ followed a similar course of picking up a particular Old Testament or New Testament allusion and thus arriving at a corresponding picture of these witnesses. Instead of identifying particular Old Testament or New Testament figures with these witnesses, many turn to other interpretations: "The word of God and the testimony of Jesus"¹⁸⁰, "The collective power and preaching of

¹⁷⁶ H. GIESEN, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 260; G. K. BEALE, *The Book of Revelation*, 573; M. E. BORING, *Revelation*, 142, 146. According to D. E. AUNE, *Revelation 6-16*, 603, «It is relatively clear that they represent the witness of the People of God in a godless world and that they, like their Lord, will ultimately triumph over suffering and death».

¹⁷⁷ The text's many allusions and motifs from the Old Testament make the identification of these figures complicate: "Two olive trees" in Rev 11,4 follows the imagery from Zech 4,3-14, where they stand for Joshua the priest and Zerubbabel the king, anointed by the Spirit to accomplish God's purpose of rebuilding the temple. Rev 11, 5-6a alludes to Elijah's miracles (1 Kgs 17,1; Sir 48,3) and Moses tradition (Exod 7,14-18). The rising of the witnesses probably alludes to 2 Kgs 2,11 and Ezek 37,10).

¹⁷⁸ TERTULLIAN, *De Anima* 50; CYPRIAN, *De Montibus Sina et Sion* 5; IRENAEUS, *Adversus haereses*, 5,5,1.

¹⁷⁹ Linking to prophetic powers mentioned in the text, many consider them Moses and Elijah. H. B. SWETE, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, 134; D. K. K. Wong, «The Two Witnesses», 344-354. M. OBERWEIS, «Das Martyrium der Zebedaiden in Mk 10,35-40 (Mt 20,20-23) und Offb 11,3-13», in *New Testament Studies* 44 (1998), 74-92, sees in them John and James, the sons of Zebedee.

¹⁸⁰ K. A. STRAND, «The Two Witnesses of Rev 11,3-12», in *Andrew University Seminary Studies* 19 (1981), 127-135.

the Church"¹⁸¹, "The true spiritual value of the Israelite religion preserved intact in Christianity"¹⁸², or "Christians"¹⁸³. To D. E. Holwerda¹⁸⁴ they refer to "John's own as well as the Church's mission in the world". To Bauckham and Michaels¹⁸⁵, they represent the Church in its faithful witness to the world. And further, they represent the corporate witness of the Church to Israel¹⁸⁶. According to Beale and Prigent¹⁸⁷: "they represent the whole community of faith, whose primary function is to be a prophetic witness", the very image of the prophetic mission of Christians. To some, they represent the witnessing Church (cfr. 1,8,22; 2,32) as a whole during the period of tribulation¹⁸⁸.

Obviously, the account in 11,1-13 is a highly stylised, symbolic representation. None of the candidates, of the possible ones proposed, can verify all the features of the two witnesses. Precisely here lies the significance of the text: it can be actualised in the life of the Church and in the history of the world in innumerable ways. Among others, wherever the

¹⁸¹ J. S. CONSIDINE, «The Two Witnesses: Apoc. 11,3-13», in *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 8 (1946), 386.

¹⁸² A. FEUILLET, «Essai d'interprétation du chapitre 11 de l'Apocalypse», in *New Testament Studies* 4 (1957-1958), 183-200.

¹⁸³ A FEUILLET, «Interpretation of Chapter XI of the Apocalypse», in A FEUILLET (ed.) *Johannine Studies*, Alba House, Staten Island, New York, NY1966, 241; J. M. COURT, *Myth and History in the Book of Revelation*, SPCK, London 1979, 82.

¹⁸⁴ D. E. HOLWERDA, «The Church and the Little Scroll (Rev 10,11)», in *Calvin Theological Journal* 34 (1999), 156.

¹⁸⁵ R. BAUCKHAM, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 84; J. R. MICHAELS, *Interpreting the book of Revelation*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI 1992, 135.

¹⁸⁶ H. B. SWETE, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, 134.

¹⁸⁷ G. K. BEALE, *The Book of Revelation*, 573; P. PRIGENT, *L'Apocalypse de Saint Jean*, 350.

¹⁸⁸ F. J. MURPHY, *Fallen is Babylon*, Trinity Press International, Harrisburg, PA 1998, 260; S. J. KISTEMAKER, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, Baker Academia, Grand Rapids, MI 2001, 329; For a detailed study about the identity of the two witnesses, See further U. VANNI, «L'Apocalisse», in B. PRETE – G. GIBERTI – U. VANNI – G. TOSATTO (eds.), *Il messaggio della salvezza* 8, Elle Di Ci, Torino-Leumann, 1984, 429-430; P. B.-S. MIN, *I Due Testimoni di Apocalisse 11,1-13. Storia-interpretazione-teologia*, Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, Roma 1991, 112-152.

protection and defence of the defenceless (measuring of 11,1-2) and denunciation of and confrontation with the forces of oppression and dehumanisation take place, even at the risk of one's life (11,7), it is one of the innumerable ways in which this prophetic commission to John, symbolically presented in the two witnesses, is actualised in the here and now. The two witnesses symbolize the whole people of God and their suffering that they must undergo to be faithful to both God and the Lamb¹⁸⁹.

Why does John mention *two* witnesses? Similar testimony by two persons affirms its veracity in the Old Testament (Num 35,30; Deut 17,6). The links with the real Christians are underlined by means of the two lampstands, echoing the seven lampstands of the inaugural vision which stood for the Churches (1,20): two instead of seven, not because only part of the Church is in view, but it is the Church as witness with the implication of legal testimony¹⁹⁰. It is to be noted that John does not differentiate between these two witnesses. They are presented together, one in their reception of mission and one in their tragic destiny and glorification. In spite of being two, they are one entity and their witness is reliable.

The unity of the two witnesses suggests a corporate entity as one group¹⁹¹. Do they represent a particular section of Christians¹⁹², who, for example, fully conform to the prophetic mission of the Church?¹⁹³ Every Christian is called to participate in the witness of Jesus. The whole community receives the mandate for prophesying and witnessing. The mission and

¹⁸⁹ G. BIGUZZI, *Apocalisse*, 223.

¹⁹⁰ R. BAUCKHAM, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 85.

¹⁹¹ R. A. BRIGGS, *Jewish Temple Imagery in the book of Revelation*, 66, note 78.

¹⁹² M. KIDDLE, *The Revelation of St. John*, 183, for example, identifies the witnesses with the faithful portion of the Church that is martyred. G. B. CAIRD, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine*, 134 supports Kiddle.

¹⁹³ N. BROX, *Zeuge und Märtyrer. Untersuchungen zur frühchristlichen Zeugnis-Terminologie*, Kösel, München 1961, 102, considers *μάρτυρες* as a special group, not identified with *ἄγιοι*.

fate of the two witnesses is a model for everyone called to be kings and priests (cfr. 1,6; 5,10; 22,5). Probably the kingly and priestly dimension of the witnessing community is intended in the reference to two olive trees and two lampstands (11,4). These witnesses stand for, not a special group of Christians, but all those who witness to God and Christ¹⁹⁴.

The interesting elements in the description of these figures are their names and functions. They are οἱ δύο μάρτυρες in v. 3, and their function is προφητεῦσουσιν, but the next time the terms are reversed: their function is μαρτυρία (v. 7) and they are οἱ δύο προφῆται (v. 10). It shows the identity in μαρτυρέω and προφητεύω with regard to the characterization of these figures. And again, The two witnesses carry on the commission to prophesy given to John: δεῖ σε ἄλλιν προφητεῦσαι...(10,11). The δεῖ implies unavoidable necessity of prophesying and the ἄλλιν a renewal of the mission¹⁹⁵. We can call their function “a prophetic witness”, which is their only activity. This pericope presents prophetic witnessing as the fundamental mission of the Church.

These two are not called μάρτυρες because they are killed. Their death is only a consequence of their witnessing. An attitude repeatedly demanded of Christians is faithfulness to the witness of Christ, who laid down his life for his witness. In a later section, where the Lamb conquers the beast, those who are with the Lamb are called ἐκλεκτοὶ καὶ πιστοὶ (17,14). This phrase portrays the elected who are also faithful as Christ’s followers. It underlies certain essential characteristics of Christian life. It is a witness and a fight against evil, and in this struggle the power of the sacrificial death of Jesus accompanies them. The victory of the faithful is attributed to

¹⁹⁴ Many understand the two witnesses in a corporate sense and that they represent the Church’s witness: cfr. R. J. MCKELVEY, *The New Temple: The Church in the New Testament*, 159; J. M. NÜTZEL, «Zum Schicksal der eschatologischen Propheten», in *Biblische Zeitschrift* 20 (1976), 68; J. L. RESSEGUIE, *Revelation Unsealed*, 147-148; A. SATAKE, *Die Gemeindeordnung in der Johannesapokalypse*, 129-131; S. PATTEMORE, *The People of God in the Apocalypse. Discourse, Structure, and Exegesis*, 161.

¹⁹⁵ D. E. AUNE, *Revelation* 6-16, 610.

διὰ τὸ αἷμα τοῦ ἀρνίου καὶ διὰ τὸν λόγον τῆς μαρτυρίας. Only the death of Jesus is mentioned here. The faithful participate in it by their proclamation of witness. But their fidelity to Christ is absolute, which is expressed in the last part of the same verse: “for they loved not their lives even unto death”. Here martyrdom is only a proof of their absolute fidelity, and not the form of the witnessing. Revelation presents, not martyrdom, but faithfulness to witness as an essential feature of following Jesus.

However, John does not rule out a possibility of death as a result of witness. To follow the Lamb is to be his witness, and all who follow the Lamb are necessarily witnesses. Fidelity to this mission can lead to sufferings and even to death (6,9; 20,4). These aspects are more evident in the use of *προφήται* in the pericope. John presents two witnesses as two prophets (11,10), and that witnessing and prophesying are not different functions¹⁹⁶. Both of them invite conflicts and so their consequences are also similar. John presents prophets in the context of *αἷμα*, an evocative metaphor for sufferings and violent death (16,6; 18,24). Thus the fate of the prophets is not different from that in the older traditions. The mission of the two witnesses is to prophesy (11,3.6), which is described as a “torment” to the people, signifying the ensuring conflicts that culminate in the death of the witnesses and the dishonour of their bodies. In the paradigmatic presentation of witnessing in chapter 11, the witnesses are killed on account of their fidelity to their prophetic witness to Christ.

The Christological elements in the narration of the two witnesses are very suggestive. Though it is not mentioned that the witnesses died for Christ, it can be inferred from *ὅπου καὶ ὁ κύριος αὐτῶν ἐσταυρώθη* (11,8). The violent death of the witnesses, which is prophetic in nature, is a participation in Jesus’ own death. So they are worthy to be raised with him

¹⁹⁶ A. M. SCHWEMER, «Prophet, Zeuge und Märtyrer. Zur Entstehung des Märtyrerbegriffs im frühesten Christentum», in *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 97 (2000), 339.

and to share in his glory. The mention of *τρῆς ἡμέρας καὶ ἡμῖν* before their ascension (v. 11) could be a purposeful allusion to the three days before Jesus' resurrection. In a similar association with the destiny of Jesus, three and a half years' prophetic mission approximates also the three years' public mission of Jesus. If so, the narrative of the two witnesses is patterned after the mission and destiny of Jesus Christ.

The location of the martyrdom of the witnesses, *ὅπου καὶ ὁ κύριος αὐτῶν ἐσταυρώθη* (11,8), is notable for several reasons. It is the first time that Jesus has been accorded the title *κύριος*¹⁹⁷, and it is the only explicit reference to the crucifixion in the entire book. Both the *καί* and the possessive pronoun *αὐτῶν* draw attention to the fact that the death of the witnesses, the people of God, is patterned on the death of Christ their Lord. The death and the resurrection of the two witnesses are identified with the death and resurrection of Jesus.

The very fact that they serve God as witnesses would indicate that they are fulfilling the primary task of the Church. Moreover, the witness of the witnesses is not limited to their words, but also includes the great influential witness of their deaths. Just as Christ is "the faithful *witness*" (1,5) and "the faithful and true *witness*" (3,14), the Church also is called to be a faithful witness. Similarly, as Christ's witness was demonstrated by his words and ministry so the members of the Church are called to witness by their words and even with their lives (6,9; 11,7; 12,11; 12,17; 20,4).

We have been considering the theme of 'witness' in the context of the Church. It is the primary duty of the faithful

¹⁹⁷ Of the 23 occurrences of *κύριος* in Revelation, 14 refer to God. One is John's address to the elder in 7,4. The remaining eight references are to Christ and reflect his death (11,8; 14,13), his victory and rule (7,14[bis]; 19,16[bis]), his coming (22,20), and his grace (22,21), each reference conveying a strong implicature of the close relationship between Christ and his followers. cfr. S. PATTEMORE, *The People of God in the Apocalypse. Discourse, Structure, and Exegesis*, 164.

followers to live a life of witness, the way of life promulgated by the Lamb, the true and faithful witness of God.

Now, we shall go through the salient features of 'witness'.

2.3.2 Witness means to Face Suffering and Death

The Lamb's faithful followers when they are following both his words and deeds are sure of facing suffering and death. The faithful are driven by their accusers before the authorities and there must serve as faithful witnesses to the purpose revealed in Christ, 'the Word of God' (2,9; 3,8; 19,13). For the sake of the revelation given by God and the witness borne by Jesus, John himself had suffered separation from his Christian friends and banishment to the island of Patmos (1,9). He was their 'brother' and 'companion' with them 'in the tribulation and kingdom and patience which are in Jesus' (1,9). Suffering and death make the followers stay firm and continue the footsteps of the Lamb, and thus, true to the path of witness.

The followers of the Lamb are introduced in 6,9 as "the souls of those *slain* for the Word of God and for the witness they had". These "souls" are "under the altar" crying out to God to "judge" and "avenge our *blood* from the dwellers on the earth". They were each given a white robe and told to "rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren should be complete, who were to be *killed* as they themselves had been" (vv. 9-11). Here the words such as 'slain', 'blood' and 'killed' point explicitly to violent death¹⁹⁸. Like the Lamb, these individuals have been slain, and at the same time as the Lion of Judah "conquered" (5,5), they too await their time of victory and vindication.

However, it is to be noted that victory is achieved in the same way as that Jesus conquered: not by might and power but by obedience and faithfulness even unto death. It is evident in the book of Revelation that, although the beast conquers the saints (11,7; 13,7), the beast's triumph is temporary. In the final

¹⁹⁸ J. R. MICHAELS, *Interpreting the book of Revelation*, 134.

analysis, good does triumph over evil (15,2). For those who remain faithful and conquer, a place is promised in the new promised land, the New Jerusalem: “He who conquers shall have this heritage, and I will be his God and he shall be my son” (21,7).

Even though there are suffering and death in the life of the faithful on account of their following after the Lamb, there is a message of hope in their life¹⁹⁹. Just as Jesus achieved victory by death on the cross, so also his faithful followers achieve victory through their obedience and faithfulness even unto death²⁰⁰. Victory or conquering, “νικάω”, is a theme repeated 17 times in Revelation. Eight times it occurs in Christ’s injections to the seven Churches to remain steadfast in the face of adversity, persecution and death (e.g., 2,7.11.17.26; 3,5.12.21[bis]). In the message to the Laodicea Church, Jesus’ conquest is directly related to a summons to the faithful to overcome: “He who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne” (3,21). The theme of conquest by a martyr’s death is alluded to in 2,10; but nowhere is it stated as succinctly as in 12,11: “And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death”.

Again, John hears the addressing of the exalted Christ to the seven Churches that he announces wonderful promises to the conquerors in each of them. They are promised the privilege of ‘eating of the tree of life’ (2,7), of not being ‘hurt by the second death’ (2,11), of eating of ‘the hidden manna’ (2,17). If they remain faithful to the end, they are to reign with Christ and to receive ‘the morning star’ (2,29), which is Christ himself

¹⁹⁹ According to T. STRAMARE, «Apocalisse», 455, «Nella descrizione della sorte futura e definitiva, l’Apocalisse è per i fedeli un messaggio di speranza e di gioia». According to A. YARBRO COLLINS, «The Political Perspective of the Revelation to John», 254, «The model of Christ who suffered, died and rose from the dead makes suffering and death tolerable, gives them value, and allows hope which transcends death».

²⁰⁰ J. L. RESSEGUIE, *Revelation Unsealed*, 134.

(22,16). The conquerors ‘shall be clad...in white garments... for they are worthy’; since they have confessed Christ before men, Christ will confess them before his Father and the angels in heaven (3,4-6). And again, they will become ‘pillars’ in the temple of God, and God’s name will be inscribed upon them (3,12). These divine promises are held out by way of encouragement to those who conquer in the same way that Christ conquered (3,21). Their task was to ‘hold fast’ (2,25; 3,11), despite the attacks of the beast whose mouth was uttering blasphemies against God and his people (13,5-6).

2.3.3 Witness that Leads Others to Repentance

The very impact of the life of the faithful witnesses of the Church is that it helps and leads others to repentance. That means, they announce the one true God and his coming judgement on evil (14,7) to the idolatrous world (9,20-21). Therefore, once their repentance is seen, all who see this will repent.

The command to repent is explicit in five of the seven messages to the Churches: the message to Ephesus (2,4-7); the message to Pergamum (2,14-16); the message to Thyatira (2,20-23); the message to Sardis (3,1-4); and the message to Laodicea (3,14-20). In its paraenetic function, the “hearing formula”²⁰¹ calls the attention of each Church in its witness as a “lampstand” to hear the voice of the Spirit and so underscores the words of encouragement, comfort, rebuke, warning, and promise which are intended to elicit a response of repentance from the Churches that received the Revelation of John.

²⁰¹ This hearing formula, ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις, indicating one of the tasks of the Asian Churches, occurs eight times in the Revelation (2,7.11.17.29; 3,6.13.22; 13,9). In its paraenetic function, the “hearing formula” calls the audience of Revelation to listen and pay attention. In all seven messages, the “hearing formula” underscores the words of encouragement, comfort, rebuke, warning and promise. cfr. A. ENROTH, «The Hearing Formula in the Book of Revelation», in *New Testament Studies* 36 (1990), 602; D. E. AUNE, *Revelation* 1-5, 150; J. ROLOFF, *Revelation*, 46.

The call to repentance in the messages is usually preceded by references to something that the writer of the messages “has against” the Church in question (2,4.14.20). For the Church of Ephesus²⁰², it is *the loss of first love* (2,4); for the Church of Pergamum²⁰³, it is *compromise with those who hold the teachings of Balaam and the Nikolaitans* (2,14-15); for the Church of Thyatira²⁰⁴, it is *the tolerance of Jezebel who through her teaching led some into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols* (2,20); for the Church of Sardis²⁰⁵, it is *the*

²⁰² That the Church of Ephesus is called upon to remember the heights from which it had fallen implies the threatening aspect of its downward trend and the need for an immediate return to its previous state. cfr. J. ROLOFF, *Revelation*, 45. Repentance, then, is to mark a turning point for the Ephesian Church in its life as a Church; provoked by recollection, repentance leads to renewal of abandoned tasks. For the Ephesian Church, repentance means a return to its “first love” – its “first tasks” which it abandoned.

²⁰³ The exhortation to repent in the message to the Church of Pergamum is preceded by a statement of the need that compels its repentance. The Church of Pergamum is condemned for compromising with those who hold the teachings of Balaam and Nikolaitans. The call to repentance is explicitly stated in the message to the Church of Pergamum: *μετανόησον οὖν* (2,16). Failure to repent would invite an immediate visitation of Christ, which would be marked by the destruction of the unrepentant individuals within the Church.

²⁰⁴ The situation that calls for repentance in the Church of Thyatira is that of tolerance of and even participation in the teachings and activities of “the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess” (2,20-23). According to T. STRAMARE, *Matteo divorzista?*, 48, «A proposito di Iezabel, la sua opera di seduzione viene definita nella lettera alla chiesa di Tiatiria come “fornicare e mangiare carni immolate agli idoli” (*πορνεῦσαι καὶ φαγεῖν εἰδωλόθυτα*). Non è necessario pensare a due azioni distinte (fornicare e mangiare), potendo la particella *καί* equivalere grammaticalmente a “cioè”. Nel v. 21 l’attività di Iezabel è qualificata solo come *πορνέα*». According to D. E. AUNE, *Revelation* 1-5, 203, «“Jezebel” was a patroness of one of the house churches in Thyatira who came into conflict with others through her attempt to accommodate Christian practices to the surrounding culture, especially by justifying the eating of meat offered to idols. Jezebel and her associates have been given time to repent, but with no positive results (2,21). Lack of repentance, failure to discontinue the activities of Jezebel, would result in punishment that would be marked by intense suffering and even death (2,22-23)».

²⁰⁵ The Church of Sardis is called to repentance because its deeds are not found to be satisfactory in the sight of God (3,2b). Its false reputation for being “alive”, when it is actually “dead”, introduces its need for repentance

failure to produce deeds that are perfect in the sight of God (3,2); and for the Church of Laodicea²⁰⁶ it is being lukewarm in its tasks (3,15). To reveal not only the necessity but the character of repentance, complementary imperatives are employed by John. The Church of Ephesus is to remember and return to its previous state, thus living up to and recapturing earlier moral and spiritual standards (2,5); the Church of Sardis is to wake up from its slumber, strengthen what remains, and remember and obey what it heard previously (3,2-3); and the Church of Laodicea is to become earnest (3,19). In all of these exhortations there is a challenge to change the behaviour that is in keeping with the faithful witness of Jesus, to live up to what the Church is called upon to be and do.

With the Churches that are rebuked and commanded to repent in the seven messages still on the mind of John, further attention is given to the motif of repentance in the visionary section of Revelation. As was the case with the five Churches that are called to repentance, an explicit command in the visionary section is given to “the inhabitants of the earth” to repent (14,6-7). The call to repentance is implied in some of the narratives of judgement, which are meant to serve as warnings (9,20-21; 16,9). Now we shall focus our attention more to the narration of the earthquake in the two witnesses.

and indicates the character of its unsatisfactory performance which calls for repentance (3,1b). Repentance for this Church begins with waking up from its “deadness” and sustaining the little measure of life that is left. Repentance also implies remembering and giving obedience to what the Church once received and heard, though it has been forgotten and disobeyed.

²⁰⁶ The deeds of the Laodicean Church that call for repentance are addressed in several rebukes. The Church is neither cold nor hot but lukewarm (3,15-16), an indication of its ineffectiveness as a Church. cfr. D. E. AUNE, *Revelation 1-5*, 260. The call to repentance commences with a series of admonitions: to turn to Christ for all that the Church is lacking (3,18) and also to accept his loving rebukes and discipline (3,19a). These admonitions conclude with an explicit command to be earnest and repent (3,19b). The repentance of Laodiceans then would imply turning away from lukewarmness with zeal and earnestness in the performance of the tasks expected of them as Church.

The narration of the earthquake in the two witnesses in 11,13 certainly means that all the survivors genuinely repent and acknowledge the one true God²⁰⁷. According to 11,13, a great earthquake destroys a tenth of the city, killing 7,000 of the 70,000 inhabitants. Although one-tenth is killed, nine-tenths are spared the effects of the earthquake, and respond with terror and praise to the God of heaven²⁰⁸. John records that “the rest were terrified and gave glory”²⁰⁹ to the God of heaven, which is the response opposite to that of the unrepentant²¹⁰.

The symbolic arithmetic of 11,13 highlights the universal and positive result of the witness of the witnesses. Here, not the faithful minority, but the faithless majority are secure, so that they may come to repentance and faith. In this way, John indicates the novelty of the witness of the two witnesses over against the Old Testament prophets whom he has used as their precedents. The two witnesses will bring about the conversion of all except the seven thousand, who are judged. The great number of persons who repent (11,13) demonstrates the remarkable effectiveness of the Church’s witness.

²⁰⁷ There is debate on whether this amounts to conversion or not. For the opinion that it does: R. BAUCKHAM, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies in the Book of Revelation*, 278; D. E. AUNE, *Revelation 6-16*, 628-629; P. PRIGENT, *L’Apocalypse de Saint Jean*, 171; J. ROLOFF, *Revelation*, 134; G. B. CAIRD, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine*, 140. For the opinion to the contrary, G. K. BEALE, *The Book of Revelation*, 607; H. GIESEN, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 258-259.

²⁰⁸ This remnant of nine-tenth is a surprising reversal of Old Testament judgements in which nine-tenths are destroyed and only one-tenth or 7,000 are spared (Isa 6,13; Amos 5,3; 1 Kgs 19,18). In Revelation, the exact opposite happens: the faithless majority of nine-tenths is spared so that they may repent and come to faith. cfr. C. H. GIBLIN, «Revelation 11,1-13: Its Form, Function, and Contextual Integration», in *New Testament Studies* 30 (1984), 445.

²⁰⁹ According to G. R. BEASLEY-MURRAY, *Revelation*, 180: «That is Jewish terminology for saying that they repented».

²¹⁰ For example, as the fourth angel pours his bowl on the sun and scorches the earth in 16,9, the unrepentant «cursed the name of God, who had authority over these plagues, and they did not repent and give him glory». On the one hand, a response of cursing and refusal to give glory to God represents obstinate uncooperation; on the other, a response of terror and praise to God signifies repentance and conversion.

2.3.4 Witness means to Stand against the Beasts

The faithful followers are called to live a life against all the powers of the evil culminated in the figure of the beast. When the followers of the Lamb are faithful to their calling to bear witness to the truth against the beast, they will provoke a conflict with the beast so critical as to be a struggle to the death²¹¹. There can be no compromise between the truth of God and the idolatrous lie of the beast. Therefore the alternative becomes either to worship the beast or to face suffering²¹². The call to conquer allows no middle ground where the followers may hope to avoid death by compromising with the beast. Not every faithful witness will actually be put to death, but all faithful witness requires the endurance and the faithfulness (13,10) that will accept martyrdom if it comes²¹³.

John depicts the world, which rejects the witness of the faithful, unrepentant in its final adherence to the beast, necessarily subject to final judgement. For the audience of John, the prophecy is a call not to be identified with the beast or with Babylon, but to bear courageously and faithfully the witness of Jesus to the point of death²¹⁴. In this way they fulfil their calling to be God's special people for the salvation of all the peoples.

²¹¹ R. BAUCKHAM, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 93.

²¹² According to R. BAUCKHAM, «The Worship of Jesus in Apocalyptic Christianity», 329, «The Apocalypse divides mankind into the worshippers of the dragon and the beast...and those who will worship God in the heavenly Jerusalem».

²¹³ Within John's horizons, *martyr* is not a technical term for those unfortunate individuals who happen to be killed. Rather, it identifies the very nature and existence of the Church. cfr. J. R. MICHAELS, *Interpreting the book of Revelation*, 136.

²¹⁴ According to M. G. REDDISH, «Martyr Christology in the Apocalypse», 90, «The intent of John's writing was to encourage the Christians of his day to be faithful witnesses, and if necessary, to prove their faithfulness by enduring death».

Conclusion

One can readily see how important the idea of witness is to John by looking at the superscription in the light of the contents of the book. The book of Revelation is written to help the faithful to see that their suffering is part of the eternal purpose declared by God and attested by Jesus Christ (1,2). This revelation comes from the eternal God 'who is and was and is coming' (1,1.4). It also comes 'from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings on earth' (1,5), who epitomizes the whole purpose of God in his life, death and resurrection. It is communicated to others by those whom Christ has made kings and priests through the shedding of his blood (1,5-6). These folk are called to share 'the ordeal and the sovereignty and the endurance' (1,9), to reign in the midst of their martyrdom even as Christ reigned from the cross.

The faithful followers are called to bear witness to the Lamb. In order to bear witness properly, it demands their endurance, faithfulness, and witness. The natural outcome of all these three is the offering of their lives to God through suffering and death, so that their witness is not merely about Jesus, but participates in the very nature of his witness.

Conclusion

We have been examining two central characters of our research, i.e., the Lamb and his faithful followers.

Throughout Revelation, we saw the Lamb as the most comprehensive Christological image. This is clear from all those Lamb references of Revelation. In order to understand the exact function of the Lamb in each reference, we have classified them and analysed them in their particular context. It is in and through the Lamb figure that God revealed himself in history and it is only the Lamb who is worthy to carry out the mission of God the Father.

From all those Lamb references of Revelation, it is crystal clear that their very presence and actions are intended and oriented towards the followers of the Lamb, i.e., Church.

As the intimate followers of the Lamb, they are cared for and led by the Lamb himself. They are the redeemed people from every tribe, language and nationality. They are well cared for so intimately by the Lamb, and this closeness extends to God the Father. As the Shepherd, Christ the Lamb protects, nourishes and guides the Church towards its path to New Jerusalem. The terms such as *Ἐκκλησία, οἱ δοῦλοι, οἱ ἅγιοι, βασιλεία, λαός, ἀδελφοί, σπέρμα, νύμφη* and *πιστοί* manifest and make clear the intimate relationship between Christ and the Church. The Church that is depicted in Revelation was invited to witness the Lamb, even unto death, with faithfulness and endurance.

The book of Revelation stresses the importance of witnessing. The Lamb-Christ is the faithful witness and he is the role model and inspiration to faithful followers to lead a life of witnessing. The very life and death of Christ is a concrete example of his life of witnessing. Christ then has made the faithful kings and priests through the shedding of his blood (1,5-6). The life and call of the faithful followers is an invitation to follow closely the faithful witness, i.e., the Lamb. Through all walks of life, the followers are continuing the same life of witnessing of the Lamb. They do follow him as his true disciples and follow after him wherever he goes.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

The book of Revelation rallies two groups of people, i.e., those who are standing for the Lamb and those who are standing against the Lamb. In the camp of the Lamb, Revelation places God the Almighty, the author himself, Antipas, the one who conquers, the four living creatures, the twenty four elders, myriads of heavenly hosts, those slain for the word of God and witness, Michael and his angels, the angels of the trumpets and the bowls together with other angels, the innumerable crowd, the two witnesses, and the People of God, which are symbolised by the 144,000 followers of the Lamb, the woman with crown of twelve stars, and the New Jerusalem. On the other hand, in the camp of the beast are placed, the dragon and his angels, the second beast, Sodom, Egypt, Gog and Magog, Babylon, Jezebel (2,20), Nicolaitans (2,6.15), the Jews (2,9; 3,9), the kings of the earth (6,15), the inhabitants of the world who worship the beast (13,12), merchants (18,3.11.15.23), and sailors and seafarers (18,17). Besides the common epithets that the author uses for those in both camps, there are also exclusive epithets reserved for one or other. For example, while *ἅγιος κύριος δόξα κράτος τιμή ἄξιος* are the preserve of those in the camp of the Lamb, the *βλασφημ-* cognates and *πορνη-* cognates are used exclusively for those in the camp of the beast.

John is presenting these two groups before the concrete situation of Asia Minor. The Christians of Asia Minor are about to face a time of severe testing, and John as a faithful leader of the community, as both brother (*ὁ ἀδελφός ὑμῶν*, cfr. 1,9) and prisoner of his fellow Christians, he seeks to prepare them for it. Through these two contrasting groups, John provides his community with two clear-cut spheres of choice and activity filled with consequences. Then, he poses the great challenge before them that depends on where they stand with the Lamb or with the beast.

He directs his campaign at both the enemy within and the enemy without. As the enemy within, the Church was subjected to the temptations to idolatry, self-preservation and pursuit of temporal security as was the rest of the world. And especially problems that bother the Church, i.e., compromise, idolatry, fornication, complacency and self-deception are all related to religious fidelity. In Pergamum the poisonous teaching of the Nicolaitans (2,14-15) is spreading. In Thyatira the prophetess Jezebel finds a number of followers (2,20-23). In Ephesus the love, which the believers had at first is abandoned (2,4), and in Laodicea the believers are miserably lukewarm (3,15). John writes to the Church of Smyrna that the believers will be tested and have tribulation, and that they must be “faithful unto death” (2,10). Many Christians must repent and come back to a better life (2,5.16; 2,21; 3,3.19). Apparently, eating food sacrificed to idols, probably also immorality (2,14.20-22), and the temptations of riches (3,17) are real dangers. Apart from these internal enemies, they have external foes so they must be given reassurance (2,10); this helps to account for the sevenfold use of *μακάριος* (1,3; 14,13; 16,15; 19,9; 20,6; 22,7.14). They need to be reminded that God is still on the throne (5,7), and he is not only *ισχυρός* (18,8), but *παντοκράτωρ*. The conflict does not separate them from their Lord, for he is leading them and it is essentially his battle. The demoniac forces will indeed ‘make war on the Lamb’, but he will conquer them; as ‘Lord of lords and King of kings’ his victory is assured, and they are in vital contact with him who are ‘called and chosen and faithful’ (17,14).

It is the Christ-Lamb who gives power and protection for the faithful to stand against the evil allies of the beast. Even at the face of hurdles and sufferings, the followers of the Lamb are invited to follow him faithfully. To be faithful to him is to do his commandments (14,12) and this is implied in the recurring phrase “I know your works” (2,2.5.19.23.26; 3,1.8.15). Throughout the Revelation the faithful are described by two distinct phrases. They are those who “keep the commandments of God” (12,17), and who “hold the testimony

of Jesus" (1,6; 6,9; 19,10; 20,4). Keeping the commandments of God is identical with "keeping the works of Christ" (2,26), or "keeping his word" (3,8.10). It is important for John that Jesus is the Christ of God, the Lord's anointed, in and through whom God establishes final reign. It is important to see that not only does Jesus represent the definitive act of God, but the act of God in Jesus is extended into the lives of the faithful in the Church. John reminds faithful that Jesus Christ is acquainted with everything regarding the situation in the Churches. He knows the deeds of the faithful, their steadfastness but also their unfaithfulness (2,2-4; 3,15-17). As the "Living One" he is in charge of death (1,18), so that it is a blessed event to die "in" him (14,13). His blood shed in the past is effective in the present (12,11). He is present in and to the Churches (1,13; 2,1; 3,20), where he loves (1,5b; 3,9.19), hates (2,6), knows (2,2.23), rebukes, disciplines, gives time to repent (2,4.21; 3,19), provides opportunities for service and mission (3,8.18), and bestows grace (22,21).

The vision of Revelation does not free the followers of the Lamb from the real world of economic and political pressures, but rather it prepares them through a major paradigm shift in worldview for real engagement with that world. The powers of evil were real and were embodied in all the spheres of the socio-political situations of Greco-Roman world. John invites his readers to resist those powers of domination with an active and courageous "resistance" (*ὑπομονή*) in their specific social and economic circumstances. Then it is clear that the faithful witness to which John calls his readers is with moral and social obligations. Thus the message of Revelation touches the expanse of how believers are to understand life itself and how they are to live in an idolatrous and compromising society. Just as Jesus conquered through his faithful witness, so John expected the believers to conquer through their faithful witness. John saw the answer to idolatry and all kinds of evil powers prevailed in his time is not complacent submission or assimilation, nor violent resistance. Rather, it is an active resistance motivated and modified by the non-

violent resistance of Jesus—a resistance that is symbolized in the Revelation by the figure of the Lamb. In the following after the Lamb, the Lamb himself is their model and guide.

John is aware that the social situation of the community is critical because they are being suffocated in a society of wealth idolatry and immorality. He is convinced that every compromise with the evil powers is utterly sinful. In the final analysis his main message is that of the voice from heaven: «Come out of her [= Babylon], my people, so that you do not take part in her sins, and so that you do not share in her plagues» (18,4). Seeing the gravity of situation, he encourages his fellow believers to come away from the powers of evil and to stay with the Lamb because he leads them to final victory.

The assurance and the final victory of the Lamb and his followers is seen in 21,5-8. There, three times the Almighty God himself validates the absolute victory that is announced.

- 1) He affirms that he is making all things new.
- 2) He stresses that his words are trustworthy and true.
- 3) He proclaims, “It is done!” and it refers to his sovereign, authoritative identity: he is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end (1,8).

He reassures the free gift of living water and of the inheritance for the conqueror. At the very peak of this discourse, God promises divine sonship to each faithful follower: «I will be his God and he will be my son» (21,7). This refers to God’s special protection and care. And, in Christ, God’s son, his followers become sons and daughters of God. Such an attractive, triumphant view of the eschatological future must bring encouragement to those who still suffer on earth.

Although the character and subtlety of the world’s opposition to the faithful followers who have responded and is responding to the claims of the Kingdom of God upon their life may change from time to time and country to country, the basic antithesis remains constant. The message of the book of

Revelation, therefore, is no less relevant today than it was the day it was written. Focussing on the current historic realities, the book of Revelation stands as a guide and correcting force to the present day realities, which are raising challenges to the followers of the Lamb. For the readers the book of Revelation serves as a Call to Big Choice The abiding significance of the book of Revelation is its new vision for a world that is not shackled by power, status, economic oppression, the allurements of the earthly city, racial pride, and all other forms of self-aggrandizement and idolatries, which seek to displace God as ruler of this world.

The book of Revelation delivers a valid message of hope to the present-day Christians who experience oppression and suffering for the sake of the gospel, like the Churches of Asia Minor. This message is one of trust in the Lord and patient endurance in the midst of afflictions. Although the Church is aware that suffering and persecution are part of its mission, it must practice love of enemies and teach its members to work for the common good of the present society. The image of the New Jerusalem descending from heaven to a renewed earth encourages Christian to work for peace and justice, knowing that their efforts help develop the order the creator imprinted on the world and humanity and prepare the final transformation of human society. Their efforts anticipate the New City. The image of a heavenly Jerusalem in a renewed earth, with which the book of Revelation closes, is not a symbol of the present world's destruction but a hopeful sign of its transformation and fulfilment. This symbol points to the abiding presence of God among his people and testifies to the faith of the early Christians that God is the author of their history. In other words, Christian experience is not a parenthesis between the first and second coming, but a response to Christ's call to active following of him in the present.

Such convictions are not confined to first-century Christians. For example, the fathers of the Second Vatican

Council were likewise convinced that the hope of a new world compels Christians to work for progress here and now:

«Far from diminishing our concern to develop this earth, the expectancy of a new earth should spur us on, for it is here that the body of the new human family grows, foreshadowing in some way the age which is to come. That is why, although we must be careful to distinguish earthly progress clearly from the increase of the kingdom of Christ, such progress is of vital concern to the kingdom of God, insofar as it can contribute to the better ordering of human society»¹.

¹ SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* 39 (7 December 1965), n. 39.

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THE LAMB AND HIS FOLLOWERS

The lamb and the one hundred and forty-four thousand stand upon Mount Zion. They are not only on Mount Zion as something of an assurance of the future but they have an anthem of redemption. And that anthem of redemption resounds everywhere like the roar of a mighty waterfall against the background of mighty thunder.

“I saw the lamb standing on Mount Zion” that is John’s way of saying that this is divine assurance given that God will ultimately accomplish the purposes that he intends to accomplish through the Lamb of God. The lamb will offer himself an atoning sacrifice for sinners and be the means by which we who are sinners may be delivered from our sin and established before God with a righteousness that is acceptable to him.

God’s ultimate justice will triumph, the wicked will be judged, and the faithful followers will be rewarded. Today is a day of grace; but what is true of the tribulation is also true today, namely, that God will ultimately judge all men. Today, however, the invitation is still open to those who follow Christ, the lamb, and who thereby can avail themselves of the grace of God.



Vaipil John, a priest from the Syro-Malankara Catholic Diocese of Mavelikara, was born on 5 May 1967 in Parakootom, Pathanamthitta, Kerala, India. He had his seminary formation from St. Aloysius Minor Seminary, Trivandrum, St. Mary’s Malankara Major Seminary, Trivandrum, St. Joseph’s Pontifical Seminary, Mangalapuzha. He was ordained on 18 December 1992. He had his LSS from Biblicum, Rome and received his STD in Biblical Theology, from Pontifical Urbanianum, Rome.