Ritual functions of the Book of Revelation

Contents

CHAPTER 1

1 CHOOSING THE APOCALYPSE OF JOHN

1.1 A PERSONAL CONFESSION

For as long as I can remember, I have been fascinated by the end of the world. And, more specifically, the Book of Revelation's role in it. It might be because I grew up in a time when the world was supposed to end quite a few times, and I continue to live in a time where the end of the world is such a regular news feature as to almost not be a feature. Yet one only has to take a cursory glance at results when searching for "end of the world" or "apocalypse" on the internet to know that it is a subject that is very much alive and under constant discussion. There have been quite a few times in my short time on this earth when fear ran rampant and end-of-the-world provisions had to be made (e.g. Robinson 2016, 2009; Thompson 2014; Ridley 2012; Bible 2011; Radford 2009; Lobaido 2002; Armageddon Online 2016; Heaven Awaits 2016; Mail & Guardian 2007; Rational Wiki 2016; Wikipedia 2016f, 2016h, 2016i, 2016j). One of the biggest of these endings being as recent as 2012, with the Mayan Calendar's prediction of the end of the world (a date which was later thought to be misinterpreted and moved to 2015, see e.g. Frye 2014b; Roach 2011; NASA 2012; Wikipedia 2016a).

It might also be because the Book of Revelation was mostly a book used to scare us, to discourage us from anything and everything – from something like being naughty to being too accepting of new technology. I still vividly remember how afraid I was of the "mark of the Beast", of it sneaking onto me somehow through some new technology like "smart cards". The Apocalypse of John was a book kept on the top shelf – not to be taken lightly, and only to be brought out when the direst of circumstances were suspected to be on the horizon.

This fascination became my passion at the end of 1999, watching the horror movie *End of Days* in the cinema while on holiday with the family. I suddenly realised how much these end-of-the-world stories say about where we are as human beings, and about what we believe to be true and possible regarding ourselves, good and evil, etc. It was also in this movie that the "performance" aspect of the genre first hit me, both through my own experience of watching and participating in this epic drama; but also through the effect it had on people, on a society in the throes of possible expiration when the last minute of 1999 passed. People flocked to the cinemas, some even watching it more than once (the film grossed $66,889,043 in the United States and about $212 million worldwide; Box Office Mojo 2016). There was an almost visceral need to see what we feared most being played out. It facilitated a vicarious experience of a terrifying situation, allowing the viewer to experience every aspect of what might happen vicariously through the characters and the actions on the screen, followed by the rush of having "survived" the ordeal. It was an emptying of sorts, a catharsis – being confronted with everything you are afraid of and suspect might be happening and living through it with the characters on-screen. It appealed to our (secret) morbid fascination with death, our attraction to the forbidden, and perhaps even a desire to work out our aggression in a safe environment. It made those things once kept inside, or only talked about softly, very tangible. And there was a sort of peace in that experience, in that emptying. The feared situation had not changed (at least not for about a month after), but the level of emotion had. I was hooked.

Since then, of course, the number of movies and series on this subject matter has increased dramatically. In fact, it seems that the more pessimistic society becomes, the more negative the future predicted for the world is, the more copious the amounts of performance art/entertainment produced

on the subject becomes. One very interesting development, perhaps a reflection of our society's post-industrial, postmodern, and post-religious frame of mind, has been the newfound popularity of the "zombie apocalypse". In this genre, the end of the world has very little to do with good and evil, with the work of God and/or the Devil. The world ends because the earth gets rid of its biggest parasite and threat by changing people into dead and mindless beings (through some mysterious virus) whose only reason for further existence is to infect and kill those still unaffected (e.g. Griffiths 2016; Naik 2016; Lauer 2015; Frye 2014a; Adams 2013; Dell'Amore 2013; Khan 2011; Sloth & Wong 2007; Hermann 2016; Wikipedia 2016j). The earth thus cleanses itself of the undeserving human race. In one of the most popular TV series on this subject – *The Walking Dead* (Bohannon 2016) – this genre's focus on humankind as the earth's biggest problem has been brought more and more into focus with every season. In the last few seasons, it is no longer zombies that need to be feared most, but other people who still remain uninfected and what they become in order to survive (Miller 2016:8-13, 2013). Apart from this specific sub-genre, most end-of-the-world horror still contains supernatural elements (e.g. McNamara 2016; Arora 2015; Burns 2015; Rao 2014; Rhodes 2008, 100 Prophecies 2016; End Times Prophecy 2016; Jehovah's Witnesses 2015, 2012; Signs of the End Times 2016; Tetlow 2016; The Mark of the Beast 2016a, 2016b). So many of those supernatural elements – elements that have now become an integral part of pop culture, whether directly or indirectly (Wikipedia 2016d, 2016e, 2016g) – still stem from the Apocalypse of John. The world keeps redressing and repeating the events depicted in the Book of Revelation, and millions of people worldwide can't get enough of these performances. In fact, they watch them over and over, together and alone. They cannot stop because it enlivens their deepest fears in all their gory glory, allowing them to experience all of them (to revel in them) from a safe distance. And, once purged, to continue on with their daily

existence. The inherent need for participation in what we fear most has not changed. I would argue that it has only become stronger. Yet the Church still keeps the Apocalypse on the top shelf. And has never really considered it as something that needs to be experienced through performance and participation. Especially if a positive outcome is what is desired.

It is this irony that led me back to the Book of Revelation for this study. In our hands we have one of the most powerful stories that addresses the human condition – our existential angst; our fantasies regarding reward and punishment; our fascination with, and loathing of, violence and destruction; our questions regarding the place of God/good and the Devil/evil in all of these things; etc. A story that has been used continuously in the entertainment industry throughout its history because of its popularity and the monetary success it guarantees. Yes, the entertainment industry. The performing arts. Yet we as the Church do not recognise the Apocalypse's power as performative text.

1.2 ALL THE APOCALYPSE: A STAGE

This is reflected in our study of the Book of Revelation – when studying past and present work on the Apocalypse, it seems that we as exegetes have become so engrossed with studying the different aspects of Revelation – whether it be textual, symbolic, historical – that we have lost sight of the stage/bigger picture it aims to present (more on this in Chapter 2). And, in most cases, even when we as biblical scholars and exegetes do acknowledge the key performative aspect of the Apocalypse, it is not necessarily explored in any further detail. Despite the ever increasing host of studies devoted to cognitive research in literary studies, to my knowledge little attention has been paid to the specific role played by the affective processes foregrounded by neuroscientific researchers like Antonio Damasio and Joseph LeDoux. While literary cognitivists have indeed discussed emotional aspects of literary

response, this dimension has largely been treated as a component of a larger cognitive response, rather than a modality of embodiment demanding its own proper development.

It is for this reason that I decided to attempt to take back the stage that the Book of Revelation presents us with by making use of a liturgical/functional method of analysis. Such a liturgical/functional reading of the text cannot succeed if it is not linked up with "affective reading" – a sub-division of Rhetorical Criticism that aims to substantiate that the emotional and embodied impact of the reading of texts shouldn't be ignored or underestimated.

> "Affective reading" is a bidirectional term that refers to both reception and composition. In terms of reception, affective reading points to the impinging sensation that the process or activity of reading enacts in synthesis with a reading body. This receptive affection is produced through the composition of language programmed to execute discrete or "coded" affects in the embodied materiality of the reader, to effect an "affective reading" through the bodily matters of the reader, or to compose the body as a reading machine (Bianco 2007:4-5).

It is the power of a body to possess capacities to "impinge" upon bodies and to be impinged upon itself (Spinoza 2014:49). Literary/exegetical studies and theory has recently experienced a challenge from critics interested in applying the insights of cognitive science research for the purposes of rethinking the process of reading. As I understand it, this research has successfully mounted a strong objection to the dominance of formalist and semiotic models that abstract from the site of reading as an embodied exercise. By convincingly establishing the rootedness of metaphoric cognition in more basic embodied capacities of the human being, works such as Turner's *Reading Minds* and *The Literary Mind*, and Lakoff and Johnson's recent *Philosophy in*

the Flesh have foregrounded the massive limitations of the hermeneutic imperative that has long oriented exegetical studies. In various ways, these and related studies have highlighted the necessity for closer attention to the cognitive work involved in reading, suggesting that such attention has the valuable effect of dissolving many of the purported *aporias* endemic to language on the formalist paradigm and, indeed, of rejuvenating exegetical studies through a much-needed encounter with recent work in science.

In my thesis, I begin to explore the function of affective processes in reading in a way that does not follow the cognitivist tendency (both in the new field of literary cognitivism and in psychology more generally) to assimilate affect into cognition. The crucial operation of such an exploration, at least as I now understand it, is the frustration or short-circuiting of the normal process through which the cognition of metaphoric language bubbles up out of more basic embodied processes (e.g. those involved in the emotional centers of the brain, the limbic system, and the hypothalamus). This short-circuiting, I argue, suspends the reader's capacity to cognize metaphors on the basis of their embodied core (what Lakoff and Johnson have recently called "primary metaphors"). This suspension, in turn, gives rise to an affective response that makes achieving the ideal reading effect possible – proper "understanding", by way of the affective process. The affective process incites an affective response/bodily reaction in the reader that constrains a literally excessive (virtual) text by "adapting" it to, or "actualizing" it in, terms of the embodied, affective processes of each of its concrete readers. Speeches and texts compete for the attention, emotions, aesthetic pleasure and, sometimes, approval of their addressees.

2 THE AIM OF THIS RESEARCH ON REVELATION

With this thesis I aim to identify determining variables of these cognitive and affective processes in reading the Book of Revelation. Rhetoric and aesthetic

theory postulate that utterances/texts engender affective and aesthetic effects which depend on their particular elaborations (tropes, rhetorical figures), as well as on the semantics, syntax, phonetics, and prosody of speech and/or writing.

With this liturgical/functional reading the focus thus shifts back onto the text as a performance, as a drama to be participated in. The drama, the conflict/conflicting ideas, and the emotional and embodied effect of the events played out on the people participating in the performance of the text become the focus of analysis. Practically speaking, this implies a focus on, or highlighting of, a selection of words and phrases in the Book of Revelation that are repeatedly vocalised. In this repetitive vocalisation, constructive sensory/embodied experience is accentuated. This implies that, in the performance ("acting out") of Revelation's experiential/liturgical scenes, these words and phrases play an essential part in the narrative's emotive and evocative impact. This focus on liturgical/functional and affective reading, more specifically the performance of it and our participation therein, enlivens the conflict between opposed ideas and opposite poles once again. We are viscerally engaged in the battle between hopelessness and hope. The drama described in the Apocalypse of John becomes more than just an old text, taken off the shelf only sometimes, and then mostly to scare people with.

Making this choice for a method that focuses on the performative (i.e. oral) nature of the text might seem like a devaluation of the importance of the study of the Apocalypse as literary work. However, as the study of orality (more specifically its implications for our understanding of biblical documents) has developed, it has become clear that most biblical scholars continue to examine the New Testament documents using presuppositions that apply more to nineteenth and twentieth century literary/print culture than to the culture in which those documents were originally produced (Harvey 2002:99). When keeping in mind studies done on the shift from oral culture

to manuscript culture (e.g. De Vries 2015; Miller 2012; Hearon 2004; Achtemeier 1990; Botha 1990; Dewey 1989; Boomershine 1987; Kelber 1985; and Ong 1982, 1967), two observations are important to keep in mind (Harvey 2002:101):

1) The transition from primary orality to primarily literacy is gradual and proceeds through a number of stages.
2) Orality continues its influence long after the introduction of the alphabet and writing.

With these observations in mind, it seems logical to conclude that the New Testament documents were composed during a period of dynamic interaction between orality and literacy. Perhaps most helpful is Vernon Robbins' phrase "rhetorical culture", which he uses to refer to "environments where oral and written speech interact closely with one another" (Robbins 1991:145). If, therefore, first-century culture was a rhetorical culture, a mixture of orality and literacy was present. The culture was no longer a primarily oral culture; yet it was not a fully literate culture either. It was a "culture in which, even after the development of writing, the pristine oral-aural modes of knowledge storage and retrieval still dominate" (Ong 1977:214). Reading was commonly done aloud, and dictation was the primary means of composition (Harvey 2002:103). Keeping this interconnectedness of oral and written dimensions in mind encourages us to look at the biblical texts in relation to their oral-aural contexts and consider how these oral-aural texts functioned in the ancient world (Hearon 2004:96). This study is an attempt at adopting first-century presuppositions, at recapturing the ancient paradigm of orality, with the hope that it might lead us to different conclusions when we consider certain difficulties raised by nineteenth and twentieth-century scholarship. But then not as an attempt to supplant the valuable work already done on the literary aspects of the Apocalypse, merely as an attempt to complement this

work with a study more specifically focused on the orality of the Book of Revelation.

The aim of my work is to allow the Apocalypse to become an embodied and lived experience once again. To identify and start exploring a method of exegesis of the text which allows us to, once again, physically participate in the Book of Revelation's presentation of our deepest and darkest thoughts and feelings, while still having the safety that distance provides. In my doing so, I aim to present a new multimethodic model integrating rhetoric, psycholinguistic, and neuroscientific research with which our exegesis, study, and use of the Apocalypse of John might be enriched. I am convinced that such a renewed emphasis of the "performance aspect" of the Apocalypse can result in a more comprehensive and "communal" (over and against "individual") understanding. By studying the affect of the text – even though the affect and effects thereof can only be "possibles" and "probables" in the context of this thesis – the focus of our study of Revelation is shifted to, for example, how the overturning of titles leads to the upsetting of experience, and how the experience of victory results in worship, excitement, hope, and the activation of values etc. Through this free participation, in this complete re-enactment, an emptying/purge is made possible. And it is because of this process of emptying through participation that hope and hopelessness are no longer perceived as schematic opposites, but as necessary phases that believers need to move through in the bigger movement toward peace and a feeling of security.

3 WHAT THIS STUDY IS NOT

Although this study focuses on a hitherto mostly neglected aspect of exegesis where the Book of Revelation is concerned, this by no means implies a devaluation of the extensive and varied work that has been done on the Apocalypse since studies of the text began. In fact, this thesis'

method aims to merely add on a "new" dimension to the already existing "canon" of exegetical work – it builds on the foundation laid by this "canon". Without cognisance and recognition of the masses of work that have gone before, this study would have no basis to build upon and no context within which to work and reference from. In fact, if the effort is not made to make a complete as possible study of the work of those exegetes that have gone before, this thesis risks becoming nothing more than eisegesis – in other words, transplanting current contexts too quickly and one-sidedly back into the context of the ancient text, as if the first century New Testament texts might have been written directly to any modern day community, irrespective of its current cultural or geographical context. Such an anachronistic approach to the biblical text becomes an irresponsible hermeneutical manipulation, which merely misuses the text to give authority to the interpreter's preconceived ideologies, viewpoints, preferences, and decisions regarding theological and ethical matters in relation to his/her context. Such a one-sided analysis of the interpreter's context, often with an anxious desire for support of a particular theological viewpoint or presupposition and without taking cognisance of the literary context, easily leads to textual manipulation. Bauckham (1989:18) warned against just such "manipulating the text to support our preconceived attitudes and projects". This approach to biblical interpretation might also easily lead to intuition, to which McKim (1985:86-87) alerted. He drew attention to the fact that an intuitive, a-historical approach assumes that there is a direct congruency between the situation of the Bible text and the situation of the current reader. Engelbrecht (1989:382) has put this in perspective, by saying that the process of contextualization is complex, and that theologians sometimes contextualize by taking only some, or a few, aspects of the cultural situation into account. One might supplement, or summarize, these common dangers of text

manipulation and context transplantation, with three "common pitfalls in application" to which Blomberg (2010:242) has drawn attention:

- Neglect of any context.
- Interpreting the passage in light of the rest of the New Testament book in which it appears, while failing to take into account the full historical and literary contexts.
- Correctly interpreting the passage in light of its literary and historical contexts but bringing its principles to bear on modern circumstances in which they do not apply.

To conclude, in the words of Hanson & Hanson (1989:2): "Applying the scriptures to the needs of the world is manifestly then a complex, delicate, exacting discipline, not at all a matter of drawing simple, obvious conclusions from a plain and easily comprehensible text".

Currently, there is again a growing awareness in New Testament scholarship of the text in its ancient context, since the rise of the synchronic approaches. Henry (1974:215) stated, for instance, that "we must champion the indispensable importance of historical and philological exegesis in identifying the content of the scripturally-given revelation, and must acknowledge that authorial cognitive intention is ultimately definitive for textual meaning". Virkler (1981:88-89), in turn, pointed to a series of steps that might be used in proper historical-cultural and contextual exegesis. If the ancient context should be taken seriously, then a whole range of aspects listed by Virkler should be attended to, in order to do justice to the context, or life setting, in which the biblical text became a written text. Fantin (2006:195) talks of "grounding the text in reality", and states that "understanding the historical, cultural, social, and other contexts of the first-century world provides an important tool for the exegete to use alongside other tools to better understand the NT". Beginning at the point of "criticism and the death of Scripture", Morgan and Barton guide their readers through

the stages of the "history of religions and the history of traditions", as well as the "literary study of the Bible", to finally arrive at "the life of Scripture". They conclude: "however powerful the author's act of creation, the text lies impotent until it comes into contact with a human reader" (Morgan & Barton 1991:269).

In this thesis my goal is not to focus on only one of the exegetical dimensions (synchronic or diachronic), but to emphasize the importance of a holistic approach to biblical interpretation. Such an approach, which attempts to do justice to both the diachronic and synchronic dimensions in the exegetical process, highlights the different aspects of the text in both its historical and literary context, and reflects more controlled and responsible biblical interpretation. The feminist theologian, Elizabeth Schlüssler-Fiorenza (1989:11), has put the relation between the different dimensions of interpretation in balance, by proposing that

> a focus on the ideological scripts of a Biblical text and its
> interpretations does not replace historical text-oriented readings
> but presupposes them. As literary and historical critical exegesis
> attends to the text in its historical contexts, so rhetorical criticism
> seeks to make conscious how the text "works" in its complex
> historical as well as contemporary cultural, social, religious or
> theological contexts.

In his recent *Handbook of New Testament Exegesis*, Craig Blomberg (2010) also presents a journey that starts at "textual criticism", then moves through the "historical-cultural" and "literary" contexts, towards the formulation of "theology", and ending in "application".

I am very aware of the fact that one is constantly confronted with two contexts and the one text. This tension is largely based on the confession that the ancient biblical text has something to say for current situations as well – for this time and space. None of these processes can really be put

first, neither the relation ancient context–text, nor text–modern context (its reader included), although – from a biblical analytical perspective – this particular order seems to be logical. But attempts should be made to facilitate a constant interaction between both the analytical and functional dimensions of biblical interpretation. Especially since the relations in the latter (i.e. text, modern context, reader) raise the issue of the so-called "hermeneutical circle", which "involves a constant dialogue among the elements: the interpreter's historical situation, the interpreter's world-and-life view, Scripture itself, and theology". And "the better one's understanding of an historical context, the better the question to Scripture will be posed and Scripture's message for this situation come to be known" (McKim 1985:89). According to Schmidt (1987:14), this "hermeneutical circle" is, in the end, nothing other than one aspect of another implicit hermeneutical circle: "...the course of history to Scripture and back from Scripture to history".

Thus, although the goal of my praxis-oriented approach is to determine the role and function of the ancient message for its modern recipients in terms of a liturgical/functional or affective reading, this cannot be done accurately without maintaining the balance between the historical context of the text and the current contexts of modern societies. In order to relate the message of the biblical text to both contexts, the ancient text needs to be properly analysed and interpreted in order to responsibly build the hermeneutical bridge between the two contexts, thus cautiously bridging the time-space division.

Driven by my passion to exegete and to interpret the New Testament and its cognate texts, inspired by the challenges of changing contexts, I endeavour to build on the history and legacy of my predecessors (cf. Steyn 2013:180-195). I regard it as my task and responsibility to do justice to biblical interpretation, because "the New Testament texts occupy a very

special position within the Christian Church" (Tuckett 1987:5). "The New Testament, when critically studied, not only reveals the processes which lie behind Christian doctrine, but also makes its impact on the reader as the Word of God" (Rogerson, Rowland, & Lindars 1988:396). So, again, although this study focuses on a specific research gap where the exegesis and use of the Book of Revelation is concerned, it does not do so to the exclusion of all the work that has gone before. In fact, in order to attempt to ensure that such a balance as mentioned above is maintained, as thorough a study of all the most important scholarly approaches to the Apocalypse as this format allows (Chapter 2) will be combinded with a textual/exegetical study of the liturgical texts in the Book of Revelation in their original context (Chapter 3). This will form the basis upon which my liturgical/functional reading of the text builds.

When done in this manner, I am of the opinion that studying the Book of Revelation as a liturgical/performative text can be very valuable, as it can add even more depth to our understanding of the Book of Revelation. But such liturgical/ritual analysis' and audience/reader-response study's value does not end with extracting what purpose it had for its first participants. As has been indicated above, and will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4 of this thesis, the ritual of search and revelation is one still actively made use of in today's context. And, though hope is thought to be on the decline, it is still something that people search for. The claim of this thesis is that these and other characteristics of our modern society make the liturgical/performative study of the Apocalypse very valuable when trying to identify the book's relevance for today.

4   THE GOALS OF THIS STUDY

In order to achieve the goals as set out above, this thesis will progress as follows: In Chapter 2 as comprehensive a study as this format allows will be

made of work done on the Apocalypse of John. This will ensure that my study is firmly grounded and, therefore, also more balanced when I proceed from the work that has been, and is being, done to identifying and exploring the "new" possibilities that a liturgical/functional reading may offer. The chapter ends with a more detailed definition and description of the method to be used when analysing the text of the Apocalypse moving forward in the thesis. This is followed in Chapter 3 by a study of the Book of Revelation as liturgical/performative text in its original context, according to the method as set out at the end of Chapter 2. This liturgical functional analysis will make use of specific texts – Revelation 1; 5; 7; 11; 14; 15; 19; 21-22 – in order to demonstrate practically what such an analysis entails. These sample texts are by no means meant to be seen as an exhaustive study of all the possible liturgical functional texts/elements to be found in Revelation. But they are substantive enough to enable a clear picture of what is meant with a ritual/liturgical functional reading of the Book of Revelation. Further possibilities in terms of Revelation's use in ritual/liturgy are then simply touched upon, for their detailed study could certainly form the basis of another thesis.

In Chapter 4, to bridge the gap between the ancient context and our context, and to complete our research method and picture for this study, an investigation is made into the human being as reader/responder. This implies venturing into recent studies done regarding our functioning, thinking, and processes as human beings, from antiquity up to today. This chapter focuses on how we experience performance/ritual, and what the implications of this might be for our study of Revelation. We have to study both the exterior and interior worlds of the human being, as well as their interaction, to be able to make full use of reader-response criticism and understand its interaction with the liturgical/performative use of a text (i.e. the critical-functional reading done in Chapter 3). We need to make ourselves more aware of how

performance/ritual functions, and what the meanings of symbolic language and actions today are. The work done in Chapter 3 is then brought back into the conversation by suggesting a multi-disciplinary/multifaceted approach when considering the possible significance of the Apocalypse as ritual text for today. Liturgy, ritual, and experience are studied through the lenses of various disciplines and angles. Through this study the phenomenon of the creation of meaning through experience is highlighted. All of the above then leads to the design of a functional model for understanding and performing ritual.

Chapter 5 focuses on critically describing and understanding today's context. This is done in order to:

1) Understand the audience for whom Revelation as liturgical/performative text needs to be meaningful.
2) Develop an understanding of why a liturgical/performative/ritual text could still be relevant.
3) Start describing what the Apocalypse as ritual text's possible relevance for today's context could be.

Chapter 6 refocuses us to the *why* of this study – what meaning could (and should) the Apocalypse of John as liturgical/performative text have for today's world? In our modern continuing search for revelation (i.e. ritual), what role could the Book of Revelation play? Especially when considering that fragile thing called "hope"? In all of this it is my supposition that, by paying more attention to the insights of ritual studies and affective reading, and giving due weight to the power of ritual – a power that taps into the deeper symbolic levels of culture – we might even find that it is not only the meaning of the text that is recreated by the performance; the person enacting the text is recreated as well.

Chapter 7 is dedicated to (preliminary) conclusions looking back upon the work done throughout the thesis, and further possibilities for extending and elaborating upon the work started with in this thesis.

CHAPTER 2

1 PERSPECTIVES ON THE APOCALYPSE OF JOHN

1.1 A BOOK WITH SEVEN SEALS

After having done a reasonably extensive study of the Book of Revelation over the past few years, a few ideas regarding the Apocalypse have become clear (based on the work of scholars like e.g. Hagner 2012; Barr 2010; Aune 2006b, 2005; Jones & Maier 2002; Court 2000; Jones & Sumney 1999; Knight 1999; Pippin 1999; Sumney 1999; Royalty 1998; Schüssler Fiorenza 1998; Aune 1997; Moore 1995; Bauckham 1993b; Prévost 1993; Wainwright 1993; Schüssler Fiorenza 1991; Guthrie 1987; Pilch 1978; and Farrer 1949): The Book of Revelation is both one of the most popular and most frightening books in the canon, and most anyone approaching the Book of Revelation is likely to be aware of the difficulties of this book. It is a book that both fascinates and repels. Wherever the Book of Revelation shows up, trouble is not far behind – it is a menace to public safety. Many good and faithful preachers rank preaching on apocalyptic texts alongside handling serpents; they have heard that people do it, but they have no desire to come anywhere near them. Its vivid poetical images have captured the imagination of its admirers, and awakened hostility in its detractors. It is couched in obscure language, filled with strange visions, fantastic imagery, amazing events, and intriguing numbers without any clear meaning. Along with its poetry, its subject matter is a big reason for its appeal - it deals with cruelty and disloyalty, with courage and faithfulness. It speaks of the last days, the promise of rewards and punishments, and the hope of a new heaven and a new earth. The human imagination has always been controlled by certain basic images in which humankind's own nature, its relation to its fellows, and its dependence upon divine power find expression. This means that the

Apocalypse has offered fertile earth for cultivating tales to feed the imagination and to motivate the behaviours and goals of those historical characters inhabiting both the mainstream and more marginalised traditions. But the individual did not create these tales, the individual absorbs them from the society into which he/she is born – partly through the suggestion of outward acts and the significance of words, partly by some hidden means of appropriation. In such a cultural situation, the same text means different things to different people.

This has meant that, in the history of Christian interpretation, few biblical books can claim such unique and complex fortunes as the Apocalypse of John. Even where its meaning is obscure it commands attention, and its very mysteriousness is a source of attraction. Revelation continues to fascinate because this text lends itself most especially to *eisegesis*, and thus potentially to misinterpretation. No book of the New Testament has been as much abused and misunderstood as the Book of Revelation. Yet its cryptic language and symbols have fascinated readers from the beginning, often mesmerising them and luring them to crash on the rocks of allegory and speculative interpretation. In several respects, the Apocalypse of John is an anomaly – an extraordinarily complex literary composition of immense learning, containing meticulous literary artistry, creative imagination, political critique, and theology. Revelation's vivid imagery means it has probably suffered from more of a "caricaturing" than any other New Testament document. It is exactly its cryptic language and symbols that have made it the one book in the New Testament that is much abused and most misunderstood. Much of the disdain expressed over apocalyptic texts results from their misuse and abuse, leading most people to adopt the view that it is too difficult to have much relevance for our modern times.

The literary genre of Revelation, that of the apocalypse, has also been in no small measure responsible for this polarized reaction. Yet apocalyptic

thought and texts appear throughout Scripture. The prominence and influence of apocalyptic thought even led Käsemann (1969:102, 137) to declare that "apocalyptic was the mother of all Christian theology". The sequence of literary forms in Revelation's present state conforms to no known ancient literary conventions. This implies that, since the author rarely provides signals anticipating what he will do next, the readers either had no way of anticipating what would occur next, or were (in fact) as surprised as modern readers by new turns in the narrative. The continual question remains of what we are to make of this strange and surprising Apocalypse with which the canon of Scripture comes to its conclusion. The book cries out to be "decoded" in order to arrive at its secret message, its "deeper" meaning. But how can something so encrypted rightly be called an "apocalypse/revelation" (i.e. an unveiling)? What does the Book of Revelation really reveal?

It would seem that, as a literary form written in the last decade of the first century C.E., the Apocalypse is a somewhat outmoded and inappropriate theological vehicle, though it was still apparently a viable literary form within Judaism. By placing apocalyptic traditions within a prophetic framework (Rv 1-3; 22:10-20), and by juxtaposing apocalyptic with prophetic elements throughout the entire composition, the author appears to have attempted to give a new lease on life to apocalyptic traditions, because it struggled to retain its vitality and impact in mainstream Christianity. This was mainly due to its indissoluble association with nationalistic myths connected with the royal ideology of ancient Israel. This is even more true for today – the strange, even bizarre, world of apocalypses and apocalypticism seems light-years away from the world that most of us inhabit. For this reason, many preachers avoid apocalyptic texts – not only because they experience difficulty in interpreting them, but also because they prefer not to counter or correct what others have said about them. Yet, when we choose to remain

silent on such texts, we give full interpretative authority and freedom to those who will speak.

All of the above means that Revelation, among the major works of early Christianity included in the New Testament, remains the Cinderella for many Christians – rarely fully appreciated. A book with seven seals, seldom read and relegated to a curiosity in the Bible, to the margins of the Christian canon and mainline theology. One of the reasons for the all-too-common misunderstanding and misuse of Revelation is the failure to appreciate its special literary genre. Many interpreters, with the best of intentions, approach the book as though it were written in straightforward prose and end up with flatly literal interpretations. But the Book of Revelation is not only seen as strange and difficult. Sometimes it is also deemed theologically offensive – power and coercion are seemingly the ultimate values of its universe, which are hardly the usual Christian virtues. This causes some to judge the work as one advocating an immoral worldview, and to condemn especially its images of violence against, for example, women. The polyvalent symbolism of apocalypse has proven to be a double-edged blade, with the Revelation of John in particular (sometimes correlated with Daniel) frequently being commandeered by sectarian movements that have perverted its message in support of destructive and pathological behaviour. What makes the situation even more complicated is the fact that "we do not know how the earliest audience of the Apocalypse interpreted it – for they left us no records – though we can make some inferences by looking at other similar writings" (Aune 1997:lxxix; Barr 2010:632). For this reason, it has received only a fraction of the amount of scholarly attention that has been lavished on the Gospels and the major Pauline letters, even when taking into account that there has been a dramatic increase in publications on the Apocalypse in the last two decades, with a corresponding diversity of approaches.

As stated in Chapter 1, the aim of this chapter is to explore – in as much depth as this format allows – all past and present studies of the Apocalypse. To explore all the major approaches to the Book of Revelation, as well as the scholars who promulgate them. This is done in order to ensure that a solid and detailed theoretical basis is established before continuing on to possible "new" methods.

1.2 A SHORT HISTORY OF INTERPRETATION

In the early church the Apocalypse of John was variously received (Wainwright 1993:21; Guthrie 1987:12). We do know that, by the time of Justin Martyr, there was widespread interest in it. Justin Martyr himself adopted a chiliastic view, considering that it taught a literal millennial kingdom (*Dial.* 81). A similar view was advocated a little later by Irenaeus (*Haer.* V. 3, 30). Another chiliast was Hippolytus (in his tract *Antichr.* 24ff.), who thought that the millennium would start in 500 C.E. It was Victorinus (*Commentary*) who was the first to appeal to the *Nero redivivus* myth for an understanding of the Beast. He was also the first to use the recapitulation theory for an understanding of the different series within the Book of Revelation (Court 1979:5). But the second century was a time of intense prophetic activity that produced a variety of millenarian movements. This makes it hard to decide whether the Apocalypse was stimulating the prophetic movements, or if these new prophets were shaping the Apocalypse to their own vision (Barr 2010:632; Aune 1997:lviii-lx).

Others took a different view, protesting that the Apocalypse was written in "mystical and symbolic language" not meant to be taken materialistically (e.g. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.11-13). This approach was developed mainly by Origen (*Princ. IV.I-III.*), who was opposed to the literalism which was so characteristic of Jewish apocalyptic. For him the key to this book was to treat it as conveying spiritual truths. Just as in his general approach to the

interpretation of scripture, Origen considered the allegorical meaning to be more important than the literal. A similar approach is found in Methodius of Olympus (*Symp*. viii.4ff.). Now, while this view can be traced back to the second century, it came to the fore in the early fourth century with the triumph of Christianity (Wainwright 1993:33-39). One writer who exerted great influence on those who came after him was the Donatist Tyconius (*Reg*.; cf. Swete 1906:cxcvii), who regarded the Beast as representing the Catholic hierarchy and the Donatists as the true church. He completely ignored the historical circumstances of the original readers, and concentrated on the spiritual meaning. This view was most fully articulated by Augustine, although from an orthodox point of view (Jones & Sumney 1999:6-7), and became the common view for nearly a thousand years. Although Augustine wrote no commentary on the Apocalypse, he drew on it when writing his *Civ.* (cf. 20, 7ff; cf. the discussion on Augustine by Bonner 1969:554; and Meier 1981:129-171). Augustine understood the Apocalypse symbolically, teaching that it referred to the present experience of God's rule in the world, for God's rule appears anytime men and women are converted to the Christian faith. Augustine also understood the New Jerusalem to be an experience that descends from heaven whenever grace is experienced, not a physical place. From Augustine to the fifteenth century the spiritualising method was dominant, although there were a few who followed the more literal interpretation. Men like Andreas of Caesarea (*Patrologia Graeca* 106.215–458, 1387–1394) and Primasius of Hadrumetum (see Adams 1985) both pursue a spiritualising line similar to that of Tyconius, although without his Donatist emphases. While the details shifted, and interest in the Apocalypse waxed and waned, this symbolic view characterized most medieval interpreters.

In the social upheavals of the waning of the Middle Ages – characterized by the crusades, divisions in the church, conflicts between the Pope and the

emperor, and natural disasters like the Black Death – a new view of the Apocalypse emerged. The impetus behind this new view was a remarkable man by the name of Joachim of Fiore (*Expositio in Apocalypsim; Liber Concordiae Novi ac Veteris Testamenti*; Wainwright 1993:49-53; Court 1979: 7), who accepted Augustine's view that the rule of God already exists in the world, but made a radical shift that resulted in the rebirth of millennial expectation. At the heart of his teaching is the claim that there are three ages to the world: The Age of the Father (seen in the Old Testament), the Age of the Son (seen in the New Testament and the church), and the Age of the Spirit (just dawning in his own time). This lent support to the monastic ideal, for the Spirit was believed to favour contemplation. Joachim saw many contemporary historical events reflected in the Apocalypse (e.g. for him the Antichrist was the worldliness of the present church), but Joachim's followers soon arrived at the conclusion that the Antichrist was the Pope. This view was later to find favour among the reformers.

During the fourteenth century another view emerged, advocated by Nicholas of Lyra (Swete 1906:ccix), who regarded the Apocalypse as portraying the whole sweep of church history from the foundation to the end of time in seven periods. It was in the fifth period that he saw many contemporary events, while the sixth period was seen as that of the Antichrist. Efforts to delineate this new age led interpreters to probe the Apocalypse for "signs of the times" (Jones & Sumney 1999:5), imagining that historical events were somehow predicted in the Apocalypse. The purpose of Revelation is thus taken by many as providing detailed prophecy of what is to come, a virtual blueprint of the end times, available through a decoding of the text (Hagner 2012:745; Wainwright 1993:53-56). This view – that a new age was dawning, that its signs could be traced by correlating historical events with scenes in the Apocalypse, and that this new age included the overthrow of Rome – proved very useful to those who would

reform the church. This meant that each new disaster – natural or political – was seen as the harbinger of the final days. Beginning in the fourteenth century already, as mentioned above, this new way of interpreting the Apocalypse eventually became the established Protestant view, even though the most influential expositors of the reformation period bypassed this book altogether. Luther regarded the book as a dumb prophecy, Calvin never commented on it, and Zwingli could make no sense of it (Kovacs & Rowland 2004:19-23; Wainwright 1993:11; and Guthrie 1987:11). Where reference was made to it, the idea of the Pope as Antichrist seemed the most obvious conclusion. A Jesuit interpreter, Ribeira (*Commentarius in sacram b. Ioannis Apoc*), returned to the expositions of the early fathers for his understanding of the book. He regarded everything following the sixth seal as referring to the end-time, a strictly eschatological interpretation. Another Jesuit, Alcasar (*Vestigatio arcani sensus in Apoc*), saw the main part of the book as dealing with the conflict in the church with Judaism and with Paganism. Hence the book does not go beyond the time of Constantine in its predictions. This writer may be regarded as a precursor of attempts to produce an interpretation of the book which treats it as a whole, for many modern interpreters have followed similar principles of interpretation (cf. Ramsay 1904 [2004]; and Giet 1957).

The impression is often given that a critical approach to the Bible began in the eighteenth century (Wainwright 1993:108). That impression is slightly misleading, as interpreters were already looking at the Apocalypse critically from the second century onwards (as shown above). It is just that the eighteenth century is noteworthy as being a time when scholars began to discuss these issues in greater detail, and to challenge the authority of the Scriptures with greater liberty than they had done before. When we reach this period of the development of historical criticism, we note certain other influences entering into the process of interpretation. Studies of Jewish

apocalyptic literature show many similarities between this literature and our Apocalypse (Kovacs & Rowland 2004:2-4). Thus, the book began to be set against the background of this literary genre, which meant that many of the earlier approaches were seen to be unsatisfactory. It was assumed that the readers of the Apocalypse of John would have the same approach as the readers of the widely circulating Jewish apocalypses. One of the foremost exponents of this view was Charles (1920). More recent scholarship has pointed out many differences between our Apocalypse and those of the Jewish writers, and this has necessitated a reassessment of Charles' position (see e.g. Rowland 1982:191ff.; Ellul 1977:9ff.; and Kallas 1967:69-80). Whereas comparison with Jewish apocalypses has yielded many useful insights, and the Apocalypse certainly contains numerous echoes of the Jewish Scriptures, it rarely gives an exact repetition of its visions. It is different from its antecedents, and the differences are striking (Wainwright 1993:15). This led to, for example, Ellul (1977:30) regarding the transmutation of the genre as so extensive that he did not hold that this book can be interpreted as "an instance of apocalypse". In this connection it must be admitted that this book lacks the resort to pseudonymity almost invariably found in the Jewish works, that it does not review past history, and that its message is predominantly optimistic. In view of this, we must recognise the uniqueness of John's Apocalypse. According to Ellul (1977:24) it is essentially concerned with the present in its impact upon its readers. Some scholars adopted the view that most of this book is concerned only with the future, and has nothing to do either with the original readers or with the intervening history of the church (cf. Walvoord 1983; Ryrie 1966; and Pentecost 1965). This switch away from any form of historicising interpretation had some influence on the development of such movements as "dispensationalism" – the idea that God's activity in the world is divided into seven distinct dispensations, with the Apocalypse seen as an outline of the

events of the final dispensation. Thus, by closely observing world events, one could deduce when the end will come. A second innovation was the idea that Christians would be removed from the world before the final age of evil. This idea, soon to be known as "the Rapture", initially emerged from sectarian groups in England but soon spread to the United States, where it has flourished (Hagner 2012:747).

"Criticism" is an umbrella term that covers a variety of activities that involve the analysis and evaluation of biblical books (Wainwright 1993:107). Most characteristic of the historical-critical method has been the concentration on sources (Guthrie 1987:18). Textual criticism of the Apocalypse is a skilled discipline that examines the evidence of manuscripts in the original languages, early versions in other languages, and allusions to the Bible in writers of the first few centuries (Wainwright 1993:107). It is considered that, in order to discover what an author wants to say, some examination of the sources used by him/her is imperative. If we can establish how a writer has utilised the material available to him/her, we can more readily discover what was in his/her mind (Kovacs & Rowland 2004:25; Kümmel 1996). The theory is undoubtedly reasonable, and so historically-minded interpreters of Revelation have assiduously sought a range of historical contexts which might provide the information necessary to interpret this book in terms of the author, his/her sources and his/her original audience in the first century Mediterranean world (Malina & Pilch 2000:vii; Wainwright 1993:12, 119-122). But the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were cluttered with so many different theories about possible sources as to undermine the possibility of establishing certainty, so great has been the diversity (for a survey of the theories current in the nineteenth century, cf. see Meier 1981:448ff.; and Moffatt 1921:483ff.). It is now, for instance, questioned whether there was a persecution of the Christians by Domitian towards the end of the first century C.E. (Witherington 2003:5;

Knight 1999:9; Esler 1994:145-146; Wainwright 1993:131; and Yarbro Collins 1984a:84-110); or whether it is appropriate to refer the New Testament Apocalypse to a crisis situation at all (Kovacs & Rowland 2004:26; DeSilva 1992:301; Thompson 1990:197).

For others it has become *the* book of the New Testament, full of information about the present and the future, providing detailed applications to contemporary persons and events. Throughout history, relevance-seeking Bible readers have looked for contemporary social signs of the times that might be made to make fit the scenes of Revelation, thus demonstrating what is soon to happen in our own historical period. "The Beast" symbolises such contemporary personalities as the Pope in Rome, Hitler, Stalin, and (more recently) the leaders of Islam who are against the West. Movements such as communism, humanism, and/or feminism are viewed as "the plagues" of the end of time. Such ethnocentric and anachronistic readings of the New Testament are quite common in our society, and result from the fact that readers (most often) use scenarios rooted in their contemporary social experience to envision what they read in the New Testament. The Apocalypse is regularly subjected to this type of predetermined approach, and it is especially in times of crisis that it flourishes (Hagner 2012:746). Too often we simply do not bother to acquire some of the reservoir of experiences on which the author of Revelation naturally expected his hearer/reader to draw. This has as direct effect that, for better or worse, we then read ourselves and our world back into the document in ways we do not even suspect. Awareness of such re-contextualisation is critically important for students of the Book of Revelation. Otherwise – with reader and writer coming from mutually alien social systems – non-understanding or, at best, misunderstanding, will be the rule (Malina & Pilch 2000:22). The Apocalypse was not written to satisfy human curiosity about end-time matters – only in the most general sense is information or chronology the concern of the

author (Hagner 2012:746). Indeed, if anything, the whole of the New Testament is reluctant to disclose details about the end – see, as examples, Mark 13:32 and Matthew 24:36. Clearly, the contents and purpose of the Apocalypse can benefit from further review, given this continuing research.

1.3 THE MODERN SCHOLARLY OPINION

Academics of all persuasions and confessions debate, contest, defend, attack, measure, explain, analyse, poke, and prod the textual incarnation of John's apocalyptic imagination (Maier 2002:7). These scholars find Revelation difficult to summarise. In fact, a cornucopia of conflicting and often mutually exclusive opinions awaits anyone wishing to sample the results of the scholarly investigation of Revelation. There are as many readings of Revelation as there are readers. These scholarly opinions reflect the state of academic biblical study in general, in which competing exegetical methods result in differing interpretations. A century ago there was an exegetical harmony concerning Revelation, orchestrated by the leading historical-critical exegetes of the day (Maier 2002:10). Today's interpretive voices offer a polyphony reflecting a post-industrial culture in epistemological crisis (more on that in Chapter 5). The range of Apocalypse interpretations arises from John's composition of an "open work", which yields itself to a variety of interpretations (Maier 2002:11).

Keeping all of the above in mind, it can be said that scholars generally agree that the book should be understood in the context of the first century and the cultural ambience of its first readers (Hagner 2012:747; Aune 1997:xlviii-lxx; Schüssler Fiorenza 1981:15). Almost everyone also recognizes mythic elements in the Apocalypse – for example the dragon, land and sea beasts, threatened births, wicked kings, and avenging knights. The question then becomes what to make of such themes? (Barr 2010:635) Is the Apocalypse to be understood as a myth? A story not about the past or

the future, but about the present, about what life is truly like? Many modern commentators argue that Revelation contains allusions to, or echoes of, one or more biblical texts. In proposing such allusions or echoes, however, the central issue (in addition to the question of whether or not the perceived allusions are actually present) is whether or not identifying them and exploring their original meaning actually sheds light on the interpretation of the passage (Aune 2012:169).

Though the Apocalypse does raise important issues that theology seeks to deal with – issues of eschatology, ecclesiology, and Christology – it also raises many other themes, such as the meaning of God's sovereignty, the nature of evil, and the role of humans in establishing God's rule in the world (cf. Aune 1997:lxxii-lxxc). In each of these cases the Apocalypse does not so much teach a doctrine as tell the story in a way that implies certain conclusions. Yet, however much theology may wish to explain and resolve these issues, John never does (Barr 2010:648). Nor are the major issues entirely clear, for most scholars agree that the Apocalypse contains divergent material and that this material is not completely integrated (Aune 1997: cxviii-cxxxiv; Barr 2010:642). The problem of the literary analysis of Revelation, despite many proposals, remains a matter on which there is no general consensus among scholars. In this case, there are several obvious reasons for this disagreement (Aune 1997: xc-cv):

1) While there are a number of linguistic features that might point to aspects of structure in the text, they may be construed in a variety of ways.

2) Tightly organized sections of material are juxtaposed with what appear to be more loosely construed sections, that are usually regarded as digressions.

3) The literary structure of Revelation is more intricate than that of nearly every other ancient apocalypse.

This structural complexity suggests that Revelation was not written over a period of a few days, weeks, or even months; but rather was the product of years of apocalyptic-prophetic proclamation, writing, and reflection. This included the appropriation and adaptation of a variety of types and forms of earlier traditional material, both written and oral.

Though the Apocalypse was most probably written in the province of Roman Asia, it is permeated with the motifs and literary conventions of Palestinian Jewish apocalyptic (Aune 2006b:29, 1997: lxxv-lxxvi; Beale 1999). This investigation supports the suggestion that the author was not only an immigrant from Palestine, perhaps in the wake of the second Jewish revolt, but that he was a card-carrying Jewish apocalyptist (Aune 1997:lvi). Since a close analysis of the Apocalypse of John betrays an intimate knowledge of many apocalyptic sources and traditions, it appears likely that the author read, and perhaps even owned, a modest library of Palestinian apocalyptic literature. Whether he began his career as a Christian apocalyptist, or as a Jewish apocalyptist who only later became a follower of Jesus of Nazareth, can never be known with certainty (Aune 1997:cxxi-cxxii). At any rate, no other Christian author ever attempted to produce an apocalypse so generically similar to the generally recognized corpus of Palestinian Jewish apocalypses as the Apocalypse of John (Aune 2006b:29). This claim – that the book is more Jewish than Christian – can carry with it the implication that the Apocalypse cannot contribute much to our understanding of early Christian life and theology (Schüssler Fiorenza 1981:16). Yet such an assessment reflects the theological bias of exegetes more than it contributes to our understanding of the work (Schüssler Fiorenza 1998:1), since scholars disagree in their evaluation of "apocalyptic literature" as well as in their evaluation of apocalyptic theology (Aune 1997: lxxvii-xc).

But, as Aune (2005:244) himself says: "Despite the ways in which the biblical apocalypses have been abused at various times throughout Christian history…Revelation has important positive theological contributions to make to the modern church". Another way of looking at it is the following: Although this book is about the future, it presents not a more detailed prediction of future events, but a more basic and significant message concerning the sovereignty of God and the consummation of God's plan of salvation (Hagner 2012:746). The end of the last book of the New Testament deliberately corresponds to the opening book of the Bible. Like book-ends, Genesis and Revelation enclose the library containing the story of salvation history. Thus the Apocalypse shows eschatology corresponds to protology, as fulfilment does to promise (Hagner 2012:746). It is for this reason that the present study is continued.

2 REVELATION: WORKING WITH THE TEXT

2.1 APOCALYPTICISM

Biblical scholarship claims to have moved past popular readings of Revelation, now understanding the eschatological teaching of the book in its historical context of Jewish apocalypticism (Knight 1999:11; Collins 1998; Schüssler Fiorenza 1998:1; Hellholm 1989). This same scholarship is much divided, however, where the evaluation of such apocalypticism is concerned (Collins 1984), specifically the definition of apocalypticism and of the apocalyptic genres remains a thorny problem (Knight 1999:11-15; Schüssler Fiorenza 1998:1, 12; Aune 1997: lxxvii-xc). Historical-critical scholarship seems very uneasy about the book (Schüssler Fiorenza 1981:15), since its theology is seen as suspect and its bizarre images elude any logical-rational reduction. Generally, a distinction is made between (Knight 1999:11; Schüssler Fiorenza 1998:2):

- The phenomenon of apocalypticism.

- The literary genre of apocalypse.

- The sociology of apocalypticism and the *Sitz im Leben* of apocalypses.

This distinction between form and content, apocalyptic language and eschatological essence, and between Jewish tradition and Christian theological perspective is prevalent in the exegetical discussions of apocalyptic in general, and the Book of Revelation in particular.

2.2 UNDERSTANDING CONTEXT

Another important point to make is that, in general, the New Testament was written in what anthropologists call a "high-context" society (Malina & Pilch 2000:19). People in "high-context" societies presume a broadly shared, well-understood/"high" knowledge of the content of anything referred to in conversation or in writing. This implies that writers in high-context societies usually produce sketchy and impressionistic documents that leave much to the hearer/reader's imagination. They also often encode information in widely known symbolic or stereotypical statements, in this way requiring the reader to fill in large gaps in the "unwritten" portion of the document (i.e. what is between the lines). They are able to do this, since all readers know the social context and therefore understand the references in question (Malina & Pilch 2000:19).

By contrast, "low-context" societies are those that assume "low" knowledge of the context of any communication (Malina & Pilch 2000:20). They thus produce highly specific and detailed documents that leave little for the reader to fill in/supplement. The implication is that readers from such societies do not share a unified social context, and therefore expect writers to give the necessary background when referring to something.

2.3 EFFECTIVE READING

A moment's reflection will make it clear why modern industrial societies are low context, whereas ancient agrarian ones – even with their "specialists" – were high context (Malina & Pilch 2000:20): Life today has complexified into a thousand spheres of experience that the general public does not necessarily have in common, in other words small worlds of experience in every corner of our society that the rest of us know nothing about. This is sharply different from antiquity, where change was slow and the vast majority of the population had a common experience. People had almost all experiences in common and unusual episodes were far less discrepant. Thus ancient writers could count on their rather specific circle of readers to fill in the gaps from the behaviours into which all were socialised.

The obvious problem this creates for reading Revelation today is that low-context readers frequently mistake this writing for a low-context document, erroneously assuming that the author has provided all of the contextual information needed to understand it (Malina & Pilch 2000:21). Because this is so, understanding the range of meanings that were plausible to a first century Mediterranean in-group reader of Revelation requires the contemporary reader to first seek access to the social system(s) available to the author's original audience (Malina & Pilch 2000:22). The fundamental point, then, is a simple one: if we wish to learn John's meanings, we must learn the social system that his language encodes, even if it includes understandings that are very different from our own.

2.3.1 Hermeneutical and rhetorical practice

Insofar as the exegetical practice of commentary seeks to facilitate not only the understanding of Revelation and its historical contexts, but also its multivalent meanings by interacting with the text from a particular socio-theological location, it engages not just in hermeneutical but also in

rhetorical practice (Knight 1999:26-27; Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:2). Rhetorical analysis asserts that, in the act of interpretation, one does not just understand and comprehend texts and symbols (hermeneutics), but one also produces new meanings by interacting with them. A rhetorical situation is characterised by *exigency* and *urgency* (Schüssler Fiorenza 1998:192). Now, an exigency which cannot be modified through the rhetorical act is not rhetorical, which implies that the controlling exigency of the situation specifies the mode of the discourse to be chosen and the change to be effected. There is indeed a crisis in Revelation, but the crisis lies in the author's rhetoric and not in the nature of the situation addressed (Knight 1999:27). In other words, any rhetorical discourse obtains its rhetorical character from both the exigency AND the urgency of the situation that generates it. By reworking apocalyptic traditions, John calls his churches to action and threatens the security of their existence (Knight 1999:27). This means that the rhetorical situation is not only marked by urgency but also constituted by two types of constraints – those which affect the audience's decision, and those which are limitations imposed on the author (Knight 1999:27-28; Bitzer 1974).

2.3.2 The traditional dichotomy

In earlier times most scholarly writers on the Apocalypse were clergy or leaders of reform movements, and they were eager to show that the book spoke to the issues of their own times (Wainwright 1993:157). But from the nineteenth century onwards, the bulk of critical work has been done in universities and colleges. The danger of this situation is that it may make biblical study seem irrelevant to the general concerns of the world (Wainwright 1993:158). They are known as contemporary historical critics because they explain the Apocalypse not in terms of the detailed events of several centuries, but in terms of the concerns and immediate expectations

of people at the time when it was written (Wainwright 1993:125). In their methods of interpretation and the detailed points they make, they are indebted to trends of scholarship that often acquire a life of their own. Historical-critical commentaries, whether scholarly or popular, generally have two main parts (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:1, see e.g. Wettstein 1752 as a prime example):

1) An introduction.

2) A detailed interpretation of the text and its historical contexts.

Issues of theological interpretation and proclamation are usually relegated to the margins (Schüssler Fiorenza 1998:36-37). If addressed at all, theological issues appear in the form of an *excursion* on theological themes and motifs. This excursion either interrupts the historical commentary on the text, or else emerges in discreet references to (or subtle correlations with) present-day questions and situations (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:1). This scientific form of the exegetical commentary restrains rhetorical argument and obscures the power relations that constitute it by asserting that a given interpretation of the text represents an objective scientific reading that is able to comprehend the definitive meaning intended by the author (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:1). Rhetorical argument is restricted to showing how competing interpretations have misread the text (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:1). According to this (traditional?) division of labour, scientific exegesis has the task of elaborating on what the text of Revelation meant (Wainwright 1993:125), whereas practical theology and proclamation must articulate what it means today.

2.4 ACCURATE UNDERSTANDING

Yet, by recreating and understanding the first meaning of Revelation, historical interpretations of Revelation run the risk of "shutting up" the message of the text and turning it into an artefact of the past (Schüssler

Fiorenza 1998:46, 1991:1). Theologians and preachers then, in turn, must seek to "liberate" the text from its historical "captivity" and "rescue" the message of Revelation for today. This can be done either by:

1) Updating and actualising aspects of Revelation.

2) Translating and rendering its mythic images into contemporary frameworks of meaning.

3) Selecting those passages that still speak to us and illuminate our own questions today.

4) Reducing its world of vision to theological or ethical principles and themes.

5) Correlating the text's discursive situation with present-day rhetorical contexts and problems.

3 SUMMARISING REPRESENTATIVE STUDIES ON THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Even though Revelation might not have received the same amount of academic attention that, for example, the Gospels or Paul has, it would still be impossible to do a *comprehensive* study of all the research done on Revelation in the course of this one thesis. Therefore, I have chosen to focus on a few key scholars and their extensive work on Revelation as *representative* of the main threads where the study of Revelation through the ages is concerned. In order to do this as effectively and succinctly as possible, I have chosen to make use of four scholars' work on Revelation as a way of focusing this study. Their work thus creates the framework for each approach I engage with, but is reinforced and/or expanded upon with other scholars who follow that same line/approach.

Why these specific scholars? Being a female scholar myself, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's pioneering work has always been a personal inspiration

to me. She has provided models, methods, and metaphors for biblical interpretations and a reconstruction of early Christianity in which women and other marginalised groups share the centre and are restored to human subjectivity. Her life and her writing has been characterised by courage in the face of patriarchal structures in both church and academy, contributing to the feminist redefinition of theological and biblical interpretation within both the academy and the church. Richard Bauckham was a natural choice for me, as it was his work on Revelation that formed the foundation of my first academic encounter with the Apocalypse. This encounter transformed the Book of Revelation from something strange (oftentimes scary), used to instil fear and garner obedience, into something shown to be one of the masterpieces of early Christian literature with much to say to the church today. Bauckham is perhaps best known for his studies of the Book of Revelation – an enterprise sustained throughout his academic career – to understand both the form and the message of the Apocalypse in its literary and historical contexts. He is a thoughtful theologian who displays the craft of both exegete and theologian. In contrast to Bauckham, Malina and Pilch's work on Revelation is included here exactly because of its revolutionary nature and the new paradigm it presents for Biblical Studies. As founding members of "The Context Group" (The Context Group 2015; Wikipedia 2016b), their focus has always been on merging historical exegesis and the social sciences in order to interpret the Bible in its social and cultural contexts. The Context Group thus promotes research into the Bible using social-scientific methods such as anthropology and sociology. At the root of their social-scientific method is the belief that biblical scholars have taken western cultural assumptions for granted when interpreting the Bible, an ancient document produced in a much different culture. According to these scholars, the interpreter must learn the cultural assumptions and values behind the text in order to understand it correctly, an assumption they put to

use in their study of the Book of Revelation. The work that Heil did in *The Book of Revelation: Worship for Life in the Spirit of Prophecy* (2014) presents one of the latest proposals for understanding the structure and the worship theme of the Book of Revelation. With the structure he identifies he aims to provide a visual guide to the oral presentation of the text as it was heard by its original audience in a context of liturgical worship (see e.g. Barr 1986:243-256; Seal 2011:38-51; Skaggs & Doyle 2011:19-37; and Lee & Scott 2009). In doing so, Heil (2014:1) demonstrates a new unifying theme by which Revelation functions as a liturgical prophecy to exhort and enable its implied audience to witness against idolatrous worship and for true worship in accord with the eternal life now available as a result of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This book presents a new (and much-needed) analysis of the worship theme in the Book of Revelation, and is one of the first studies to fully engage with the liturgical essence of Revelation.

With these scholars' work as representative basis, and the scholars I add who support each of these approaches, the range of techniques used for the study of the Apocalypse are sufficiently represented that an evaluation can be made as to possible gaps in the scholarly approach.

3.1 FORM AND MESSAGE – THE TRADITIONAL SCHOOL

3.1.1 Principal things

3.1.1.1 Understanding form and message

This approach to the study of the Book of Revelation focuses on the single sustained enterprise of understanding both the form and the message of the Apocalypse in its literary and historical contexts (Knight 1999:28-29; Bauckham 1993a:xii, 1993b:x; Wainwright 1993:125; Pilch 1978:44). These literary and historical questions are considered to be inseparable from the Apocalypse's theological message. This approach has (at least) four major

facets (Du Rand 2007; DeSilva 2004; Beale 1999; Bauckham 1993a, 1993b; Guthrie 1987; Farrer 1949):

1) Close attention to the literary composition of the work – since Revelation has been composed with such meticulous attention to the detail of language and structure, scarcely a word could have been chosen without deliberate reflection on its relationship to the work as an integrated and interconnected whole. But such literary reflection on Revelation should be done on the book's own terms, for neither modern literary criticism, nor the techniques of contemporary Jewish exegesis and apocalyptic writing can quite capture the author's literary genius in its totality.

2) A focus on Revelation's use of Old Testament Scriptures is an essential key to its understanding – the pattern of (almost) continuous allusion to the Old Testament throughout the book is not a haphazard coincidence, it is a pattern of disciplined and deliberate allusion to specific Old Testament texts. This makes the book one designed to be read in constant intertextual relationship with the Old Testament. John was writing what he understood to be a work of prophetic scripture – the climax of prophetic revelation – which, therefore, had to gather up the prophetic meaning of the Old Testament Scriptures and disclose the way in which it was being fulfilled in these last days. By alluding to the Old Testament context(s), they become part of the meaning the Apocalypse wants to convey. By focusing on this key, obscure passages become clear, and passages that are regularly misunderstood can now be correctly understood by identifying their Old Testament allusions and reconstructing them in terms of Jewish exegetical practice.

3) Revelation is an apocalypse whose primary literary context is the tradition of Jewish and Christian apocalypses. It is heavily indebted to this apocalyptic tradition in both form and content. Drawing on the results

of the major advances made by first-hand study of Jewish and Christian apocalypses – other than Revelation – a flood of new light can be thrown on Revelation. In fact, it is precisely with this method that it becomes possible to show how often John uses common apocalyptic traditions in slightly creative ways, developing the conventions of the literary genre for his own purposes.

4) If Revelation's meaning is *intertextual* (in relation to the Old Testament), it is also *contextual* (in relation to its contemporary world). This, of course, has implications: On the one hand justice cannot be done to the Apocalypse by an interpretive approach which treats it as a self-contained aesthetic object. This would deprive the work of it's true character as a prophetic critique of the political idolatry and economic oppression intrinsic to Roman power in the late first century. On the other hand, Revelation should not be reduced – by the simplistic application of sociological theory – to a sociologically determined function.

3.1.1.2 Revelation as the climax of prophecy

This school of thought (Du Rand 2007:17; DeSilva 2004:887; Bauckham 1993b:xvi; Pilch 1978:45-63) argues that John understood his prophecy to be the climax of the tradition of Old Testament prophecy because, in the revelation made to him by Jesus Christ, the secret of the divine purpose for the final coming of the Kingdom of God was disclosed. The prophets had predicted the conversion of all nations to the worship of the true God, and obscurely foreseen the oppression of God's people by pagan powers in the last days. John's prophecy reveals that the former is to be the result of the latter, and that the key to both is the task of faithful witness in the face of all opposition. This cumulative case is built up by a whole series of subtle but key allusions to the Old Testament (Paulien 2001:113-129). But, since these

allusions have not often been appreciated, a part of John's central message has largely gone unrecognised.

3.1.1.3 First hearing and closer study

Revelation was evidently designed to convey its message (to some significant degree) on first hearing (cf. Rv 1:3). But it was also designed to progressively yield fuller meaning via closer acquaintance and study (Knight 1999:144; Prévost 1993:vii; Bauckham 1993b:1). This means that the essential structure of the book must have been intended to be perceptible to oral performance. But there are also aspects of the message which might not have impacted as strongly in the initial oral performance of the text. This created a repository of meaning within the text, which could certainly not be exhausted at first acquaintance, remaining to be progressively tapped by attentive re-reading and study. However, this does not imply that Revelation is a sealed book (cf. Rv 22:10) – the meaning concealed in the text by literary techniques is no different from the message that lies on the surface of the book, it only serves to reinforce it.

3.1.2 A structural analysis of Revelation

3.1.2.1 Structure as roadmap

There have been many divergent attempts at discerning the structure of Revelation by identifying its major divisions (e.g. DeSilva 2004:891; McKelvey 2001:89-94; Schüssler Fiorenza 1998:159-180; Lambrecht 1980:77-104; Mazzaferri 1989:330-374; and Guthrie 1987:20-21). The difficulty that has been experienced in these attempts results partly from the fact, as Barr (1984:43) puts it, that "whereas our concern is to divide the book, John's concern was to bind it together". But, though John has taken considerable care to integrate the various parts of his work into one literary whole, he has also indicated a clear structure of the kind that is necessary

for hearers/readers to find their way through his vision (Du Rand 2007; Bauckham 1993b:3; Knight 1999). This structure is intimately connected with the meaning his work conveys, signalled by linguistic markers.

Revelation has a prologue (Rv 1:1-8) and an epilogue (Rv 22:6-21), with the whole of the book between recounted as a single visionary experience which took place on the island Patmos on the Lord's Day (Rv 1:9). There are a few major transitions within the whole vision:

1) At Revelation 1:9-10 begins John's inaugural vision of the risen Christ who gives the seven messages to the churches. In Revelation 4:1-2a John is taken up into heaven for a kind of "second beginning" of his visionary experience – an inaugural vision of heaven – from which develops the whole sequence of judgements down to the end of chapter 16.

2) In Revelation 17:1-3 and 21:10 corresponding phrases have been noticed that belong to a broader parallelism between these two texts. The two sections are thematic parallels, since they deal respectively with the two cities that John portrays as women. Together these two sections form the climax towards which the whole book has aimed – the destruction of Babylon and her replacement by the New Jerusalem.

3) Between these two sections (Rv 17:1-19:10 and 21:9-22:9) comes a section which must be understood as a single unit describing the transition from one to the other, as it describes the events which intervene between the fall of Babylon and the descent of the New Jerusalem. John has so skilfully placed this vision of the *parousia* that it does not appear to be merely continuous with the preceding narrative, but rather as a climax toward which the whole of what precedes has pointed.

4) Revelation 6-16 is the most structurally complex part of the book, and precisely for this reason John has made his structural markers prominent and emphatic in this section. It is therefore important to base our

understanding of the structure on these emphatic markers. Most obvious of these are the series of three sevens – the seven seal-openings, the seven trumpets, and the seven bowls. The seven thunders of Revelation 10:3-4 are a cancelled series of judgements which therefore do not become a structural feature of the book.

5) The author of the book makes use of a formula in Revelation 4:5; 8:5; 11:19 and 16:18-21 – an allusion to the Sinai theophany – to serve as an anchor for the judgements of chapters 6-16 in the initial vision of God's rule in heaven in Revelation 4. It also creates a particular kind of relationship between the three series of seven judgements, indicating that it is the same final judgement that is reached in the seventh of each of the three series. With each of the first two sevenths we attain a preliminary glimpse of the final judgement, which the following series then approaches again, but from a closer range. The expansions of the formula thus correspond to the intensification of the judgements of each series. Important to note is that the three series of seven judgements are distinguished from the seven messages to the seven churches by this same structural marker: The churches are not numbered in sequence, only named, implying that it is not important that the hearer/reader be made aware of the numerical progression. In the case of the three series of judgements, however, this is important, because these are sequences progressing towards the final judgements in the seventh of each series. Another difference between the seven messages (as a group) and the three series of seven judgements is that, whereas in all three series of seven judgements there is a 4 + 3 structure (much more pronounced in the first two series), the series of seven messages to the church has a 3 + 4 structure.

6) Most attempts at discerning the structure of Revelation have found it particularly difficult to see how chapters 12-14 fit into the overall structure. According to Bauckham (1993b:15), it seems we must accept that the abrupt transition is intentional. John has made it abrupt precisely in order to create the impression of a fresh start. This fresh start is required because the narrative of the woman and the dragon begins chronologically earlier than any previous part of his visionary narrative. It recalls the enmity between the serpent (Gn 3:15), and portrays the people of God (Israel) as mother of the Messiah. This story of conflict between the dragon and the woman leads into an account of the contemporary conflict between the people of God (the church) and the enemies of God. Chapter 15 serves as the point of convergence between the story of the dragon's threat to the pregnant woman (Rv 12) and that of the Lamb receiving the scroll in order to open it (Rv 5). Both narratives reach a provisional conclusion in the sequence of the seven bowels, made clear by the fact that the seven bowels refer to the forces of opposition to God in terms which have been introduced in chapters 12-14. This makes chapters 12-14's main function one of dealing more fully with a subject that was adumbrated in the first two series – the people of God in their conflict with the forces opposed to God.

3.1.2.2 Repetition and cross-referencing

A remarkable feature of the composition of Revelation is the way in which many phrases occur two or three times in the book, often in widely separated passages and usually in slightly varying forms (Du Rand 2007:43; Bauckham 1993b:22; Guthrie 1987:21-22). These repetitions create a complex network of textual cross-reference which helps to create and expand the meaning of any one passage, by giving it specific relationships to many

other passages (Mealy 1992:5). Here it is interesting to note that the author seems to have taken deliberate care to avoid the obviousness of precise repetition, while at the same time still creating phrases which closely allude to each other (Du Rand 2007:43; Bauckham 1993b:22).

One way of understanding John's literary technique of repeating phrases is to relate it to the Jewish exegetical technique of *gezera sawa*, which John (like many of his Jewish contemporaries) used to interpret the Old Testament Scriptures (Bauckham 1993b:296-326). This technique depended on observing verbal coincidences between scriptural texts, meaning that texts containing the same words or phrases could be used to interpret each other. The *gezera sawa* phenomenon, of course, needs to be distinguished from cases of repetition which serve as structural markers. In order for structural markers to be effective in oral performances, precise verbal repetition needed to be employed. Such precise verbal repetition is virtually limited to structural markers (Du Rand 2007:43; Bauckham 1993b:23).

3.1.2.3 Overlooked compositions and their meaning

There are other examples of numerical compositions in Revelation, compositions which do not have the same structural significance (Bauckham 1993b:29). This implies that they would probably not have been noticed by hearers of the book (or even the majority of careful readers).

- One of these, which has actually been frequently noticed, is the seven beatitudes (Rv 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6 and 22:7, 14). Though it is unlikely that it's accidental, they have no significance for the struc- ture of the book. Each beatitude belongs in its place in the book for reasons unconnected to the fact that it is one of seven. But anyone who takes the trouble to count them finds that the number of beati- tudes is the number symbolic of completeness, giving the beatitudes greater meaning. Together, they spell out the adequate response to

John's prophecy and the fullness of divine blessing that attends that re-
sponse, a kind of summary of Revelation's message (Bauckham
1993b:30).

- The most significant numbers in Revelation are seven, four, three, and
  twelve (and, in some cases, multiples of these) (Prévost 1993:29-41;
  Bauckham 1993b:30): Seven is the number of completeness, as noted
  above. Four is the number of "the world" (Bauckham 1993b:31) – the
  earth has four corners and the created world can be categorised into
  four divisions. Three seems to be a significant number without a con-
  sistent symbolic significance (Bauckham 1993b:32). It is also worth
  noticing that, whereas significant terms for God, Christ, and the Spirit
  all seem to occur a symbolically significant number of times, such a
  pattern appears to be applied to the powers of evil as well (Bauckham
  1993b:36). In fact, it seems that the numbers seven and twelve are
  deliberately avoided, for example the two lists of the types of sinners
  excluded from eschatological salvation (Rv 21:8 and 22:15) comprise
  eight and six respectively. It seems that only when parodying the di-
  vine are the significant numbers three (Rv 16:13) and seven (Rv 12:3;
  13:1 and 17:3, 9-11) attributed to the powers of evil. Twelve is the
  number of the people of God (Rv 7:4-8; 12:1; 14:1 and 21:12, 14),
  squared for completeness and multiplied by a thousand to suggest vast
  numbers (Rv 7:4-8; 14:1 and 21:17). So obviously important is the
  number twelve in the account of the New Jerusalem that the number
  can be found twelve times in Revelation 21:9-22:5 (Bauckham
  1993b:36).

Whether John was original in his technique of numerical composition we do
not yet know (Bauckham 1993b:37) – evidence of the technique in other
apocalyptic writings has not yet been found and may be difficult to find. This
is because the non-canonical apocalypses have, in most cases, not been

preserved in their original languages, and have been transmitted with far less concern to preserve their precise textual form unchanged.

3.1.3 The importance of Revelation as apocalypse

3.1.3.1 The Apocalypse of John and extra-canonical apocalypses

The relationship between the Apocalypse of John and the extra-canonical Jewish apocalypses has been variously understood:

1) At one extreme there are those who see Revelation as a typical Jewish apocalypse (Bultmann 1955:175).

2) At the other extreme are those who distinguish sharply between prophecy and apocalyptic, and minimise Revelation's resemblances to the Jewish apocalypses in order to classify it as a Christian prophecy in continuity with Old Testament prophecy (Kovacs & Rowland 2004:2-4; Schüssler Fiorenza 1998:133-156).

This discussion has often not sufficiently recognised the diversity of Jewish apocalypses, both in themes and literary forms (Prévost 1993:43-57; Bauckham 1993b:38). It also hasn't sufficiently distinguished the various dimensions of Revelation's possible relationship to these diverse Jewish apocalypses. John's distinctiveness may be comparable to that of one Jewish apocalypse in relation to others, or it may be due to his deliberately Christian prophetic consciousness and message (Kovacs & Rowland 2004:4-5; Bauckham 1993b:39). We should probably reckon with both types of distinctiveness.

One aspect of Revelation's relationship to the Jewish apocalypses which has not really been explored enough is Revelation's use of specific items of apocalyptic tradition which also appear in Jewish apocalypses, and sometimes also in later Christian apocalypses (Kovacs & Rowland 2004: 2-6; Bauckham 1993b:39). The traditions in question usually turn out to be attested to in a variety of works, Jewish and Christian, in such a way that a

chain of literary dependence is very difficult to reconstruct. It seems more plausible to think of these traditions as known in Jewish and Christian circles whose study produced apocalyptic literature, in other words independently of their use in particular apocalypses.

3.1.3.2 A repertoire in continuous use

This is not the same as saying that we can rule out completely the possibility of borrowing between Jewish and Christian traditions during the Christian centuries (Bauckham 1993b:45). It is rather saying that the phenomenon of material from earlier texts being constantly re-used led to the formation of a repertoire of traditional ideas and images which was in continuous use (Berger 1976:14-15). It is exactly because the apocalyptic tradition in Judaism and Christianity was a continuous and relatively conservative tradition over the course of many centuries that the study of much later texts is relevant to the study of early Jewish and Christian apocalypse (Bauckham 1993b:48).

Studies of the apocalyptic traditions in Revelation confirm that the author's use of such tradition is not to be explained as a dependence on Jewish apocalypses, as he probably knew them as traditions which circulated in some form (oral or written) independently of the apocalypses and other works in which we now have access to them. This confirms other indications that the writers of apocalypses – Jewish and Christian – customarily incorporated pre-existing items/blocks of traditional material into their work (Stone 1990:21-22).

Now, if such traditions circulated independently of the literary works in which we now know them, the question then arises as to the sociological context in which the transmission of such traditions could have occurred? It was, most likely, in a circle of Christian prophets of the seven churches and their area – of which John was an eminent member, perhaps in some sense

even a leader – that such traditions circulated (DeSilva 2004:893-896; Bauckham 1993b:84).

3.1.3.2.1 A case in point: parousia parables

Parousia parables were widely used and familiar in the primitive church. They were collected and associated with each other from a very early stage – owing both to their extensive use and amenable subject matter (Bauckham 1993b:103). But they suffered from de-parabolisation – either as simile or as metaphorical exhortation – with the imagery of the parables being absorbed into ordinary Christian discourse. This meant that they could be used independently from their parabolic context. Strangely enough this independent usage seemed to have co-existed with the continued popularity of the parables as stories (Bauckham 1993b:104).

This meant that such traditions might have been reproduced very conservatively, or they might have been adapted in highly creative ways to the author's own purposes, as is usually the case in the Apocalypse of John (Bauckham 1993b:84). An example of this could be the way in which the author of the Apocalypse has integrated the understanding of eschatological delay – the main point of the eschatological tradition – into the way he has used the whole series of seven seal-openings to deal with this theme (Bauckham 1993b:55). John has also made use of the tradition about the completion of the number of the martyrs, integrating it into the sequence of seven seal-openings. He does this in order to raise (for the first time) a major theme of his prophecy – that the remaining interval before the coming of God's kingdom is the period in which God's faithful people must bear witness to the point of suffering and death. So it's not just that there is an arbitrary decreed quota of martyrs to be accomplished (Bauckham 1993b:56), it is in order for the witness of the martyrs to play a key role in God's purpose of establishing his universal kingdom.

3.1.4 Significant theological developments in Revelation

3.1.4.1 A developing Christology – the worship of Jesus

In the development of Christology in the primitive church, the emergence of the worship of Jesus is a significant phenomenon (Schnelle 2009:754-759; Gilbertson 2003:50; Prévost 1993:3-11; Bauckham 1993b:118). In the exclusive monotheism of the Jewish religious tradition, as distinct from some other kinds of monotheism, it was worship which was the real test of monotheistic faith in religious practices. In the worldviews of the early centuries C.E., the gap between God and humanity might be peopled by all kinds of intermediary beings. Jewish monotheism, however, could not tolerate a mere spectrum between God and humanity (Bauckham 1993b:118). Somewhere a firm line had to be drawn between God and creatures, and in religious practice it was worship which signalled the distinction between God and every creature. And, since the early church remained – or at least professed to remain – faithful to Jewish monotheism, the acknowledgement of Jesus as "worthy of worship" is a remarkable development (Prévost 1993:4; Bauckham 1993b:119).

Of course, it may be argued that early Christianity developed from a kind of Judaism which was not as strictly monotheistic as later rabbinic Judaism. Or, again, it might be held that the worship of Jesus emerged in Gentile Christianity and was influenced by Hellenistic syncretism (Bauckham 1993b:119; Guthrie 1987:38-39). But the worship of Jesus in early Christianity could not be easily rejected, since it was a natural response to his role in the Christian religion. Nor can it be unreflectively permitted, since it raised the relationship of Christology to monotheism in its acutest form (Prévost 1993:3-11; Bauckham 1993b:148; Guthrie 1987:53-55).

That the highest Christology, including the direct ascription of the title "God" to Jesus, seems to have occurred earliest in the context of worship has

often been noticed (Segal 1977:215); sometimes with the implication that it should be taken less seriously. On the contrary, if it is in worship that monotheism is tested in religious practice, the devotional attitude towards Jesus in worship is the critical test of Christology. It had the effect, probably more clearly than any other Christological theme available in their world of ideas, of placing Jesus on the divine side of the line which monotheism must draw between God and creatures (Witherington 2003:27-32; Bauckham 1993b:149; Guthrie 1987:55).

A third question is to what extent the Christology of this book can have any relevance to the modern existential debate? If the main thrust of New Testament Christianity is the present and its challenge to decision, the exaggerated stress on the future in this book would seem at once to render it irrelevant (Guthrie 1987:62). But it is impossible to excise the present from the Apocalypse. In fact, it presents a remarkable blend of present and future – Christ addressed his messages to churches which exist in the present, although in all of these challenges promises are made which relate to the future. It may, in fact, be claimed that this book, with its objective presentation of Christ, offers a strong corrective to the almost totally subjective Christology of much existential theology (Guthrie 1987:63). The enthroned Christ is far removed from a purely subjective experience of Christ. In this regard we need to enquire what the connection between the Christology and eschatology, as presented in this book, is. That there is a vision of the kingdom of God which is glorious but future is undeniable. The New Jerusalem shines ahead as the hope for mankind. But this hope is a very different kind of hope from the expectation of the coming messianic kingdom nourished among the Jews (both from the Hebrew Bible and from the apocalypses). And the reason for that difference is the character of the Messiah who is presented (Guthrie 1987:63). Conqueror he may be, but his conquest is through an act of redemption, not through a military blow which

would reduce the enemy to total weakness. Whatever is done, is done by the slain Lamb. The Lamb's redemptive work lies in the past, not the future, and its completed character removes all doubt about the final outcome. This offers a powerful challenge to those whose Christology begins with a human figure, and devalues the divine nature (Guthrie 1987:64). It presents as a mystery the supremacy of Christ over the events of history, but it comes to grips with the important aspect of consummation. A Christology which does not include some vision of a New Jerusalem in which God and the Lamb are supreme, with all enemies defeated, must be regarded as inferior to that which constitutes the message of Revelation (Guthrie 1987:64).

3.1.4.2 The Spirit of prophecy

3.1.4.2.1 The role of the Spirit

In early Christian literature the phrase "in the Spirit" frequently denotes temporary experiences of the Spirit's power in prophetic speech or revelation (e.g. Mt 22:43; Lk 1:7; 2:27; Ac 19:21; 1 Cor 12:3; *Martyrdom of Paul* 1; cf. also prayer in the Spirit [Eph 6:18; Jdg 20]; and worship in the Spirit [Jn 4:23-24]), without specifying any particular mode of the Spirit's operation (Kovacs & Rowland 2004:5-6; Knight 1999:165-166; Bauckham 1993b:151). John's use of this phrase is consistent both with his own and with early Christian usage, and is probably to be taken as both phenomenological and theological (Court 1994:118-121; Bauckham 1993b:152) – thus denoting both the visionary experience as such, and the Spirit's authorship of it.

Now, such language might suggest a kind of bodily possession more readily associated with those pagan prophets of antiquity who became the wholly passive mouthpieces of the god. But this was certainly not John's experience – though the visionary experience necessitates a suspension of normal consciousness, he remains a free agent throughout his visions (Kovacs & Rowland 2004:12; Witherington 2003:13; Bauckham 1993b:152).

John was "in the Spirit" in the sense that his normal sensory experience was replaced by visions and auditions given him by the Spirit. Also, his visions were clearly not intended to be realistic (Witherington 2003:35-39; Bauckham 1993b:153) – they are symbolic representations of happenings in the present and future, heavenly and earthly.

3.1.4.2.2 Precedents for visionary experiences

In order to grasp John's understanding of the Spirit as the agent of visionary experience, we must first enquire into the precedents set by Jewish literature (Bauckham 1993b:154; Prévost 1993:13). This precedent is made particularly relevant by his extensive use of Old Testament language and imagery, and his writing within the genre of Jewish apocalyptic vision. The idea of the Spirit of God as the agent of visionary experience is occasional in the Old Testament (Nm 24:2; cf. vv. 4, 16-17), though probably also implied in general references to ecstatic prophecy (Nm 11:24-29; 1 Sm 10:6, 10). More important is the prominence of the Spirit in Ezekiel's experiences of visionary rapture (Ezk 3:12, 14, 8:3; 11:1, 24, 37:1; 43:5; cf. also Elijah in 1 Ki 18:12 and 2 Ki 2:16), and the specification of dreams and visions as the manifestation of the eschatological outpouring of the Spirit in Joel 2:28.

In later Jewish literature, the Spirit inspires prophetic speech (e.g. 1 *Enoch* 91:1; *Jub* 25:14; 31:12; Pseudo-Philo, *LAB* 18:11; 32:14 and 4 *Ezra* 14:22) more commonly than visions (*Sir* 48:24). But the apocalyptists do occasionally mention the Spirit as the agent of visionary transportation (2 *Bar* 6:3; Hebrew *ApEl*), and possibly once as the agent of translation into heaven (1 *Enoch* 70:2).

These are ideas that recur in Revelation 4:2; 17:3 and 21:10, but John's usage is seen to be conventional terminology for visionary transportation (i.e. stereotyped and unremarkable), though his stress on the Spirit's agency in his visionary experience is a little stronger than appears to have been

normal in the Jewish apocalyptists (Schnelle 2009:759-760; Bauckham 1993b:158). John is also much less interested in describing his visionary experiences psychologically, for his purpose was not so much to describe how he received the revelation as to communicate the revelation to his readers. Out of his visionary experience John has produced a work which enables the reader to receive its message, transposed into a literary medium, and orientate the church's life towards the *parousia*. In doing so, John reveals the meaning of living towards the coming of Christ, rather than "sharing" the experience second-hand (Witherington 2003:49; Prévost 1993:15; Bauckham 1993b:159).

3.1.4.2.3 Understanding "prophecy" in the Apocalypse

In post-biblical Judaism, as is well known, the Spirit is especially the Spirit of prophecy who speaks through the prophets (Hill 1967:227-228). In Revelation the Spirit is also almost exclusively the Spirit of prophecy (Bauckham 1993b:160). But this observation is not especially helpful without an understanding of the meaning of "prophecy" in Revelation, which is a rather broader connotation than might at first be thought (Prévost 1993:13-15). The Spirit of prophecy speaks through the Christian prophets (Bauckham 1993b:160):

1) Bringing the word of the exalted Christ to his people on earth.
2) Endorsing on earth the words of heavenly revelations.
3) Directing the prayers of the churches to their heavenly Lord.

These are the special functions of the Christian prophets, whom Revelation distinguishes as a special group within the churches (Rv 11:18; 16:6; 18:20, 24 and 22:9).

So the Spirit of prophecy is envisaged as having life-giving and life-changing effects (Schnelle 2009:759-760; Bauckham 1993b:161), for the Spirit brings to the churches the powerful word of Christ – rebuking,

encouraging, promising and threatening; touching and drawing on the hearts, minds, and consciences of its hearers; and directing the lives and prayers of the Christian communities towards the coming of Christ.

3.1.4.2.4 Prophecy: an individual or communal function?

Is Spirit-inspired prophecy a function which the Apocalypse confined to the Christian prophets? Or is there a sense in which the church as a whole has a prophetic vocation (Schnelle 2009:765-768; Aune 1983:206-208; 1997: lxxv-lxxvi)? The relationship between prophecy and the phrase "the witness of Jesus" – which is very frequent in the book – weighs the scale toward the latter possibility. In this expression, the phrase always means "the witness Jesus bore" (Bauckham 1993b:161). Thus, when Revelation 19:10 says that "the witness of Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy", this must mean that the witness Jesus bore is the content of Spirit-inspired prophecy. Therefore, it is also the content of John's own prophecy – the apocalypse itself (Rv 1:2). This word of God, which John's prophecy communicates, is attested to (primarily) by Jesus himself (Rv 22:20), as well as the angel who communicates it to John (Rv 22:16), and by John (Rv 1:2). This word of God is also what Jesus bore witness to in his earthly life (Rv 1:5), and what his followers can now bear witness to in the world. In Revelation, witness is verbal (see especially Rv 11:7 and 12:11). It is also linked with obedience to God's commandments (Rv 12:17; cf. 14:12) and its consequence(s) in the circumstances (i.e. martyrdom) envisioned in Revelation (Rv 2:13; 6:9; 17:6 and 20:4).

The characterisation of the Christian community as "those who bear the witness of Jesus" seems, therefore, to attribute a prophetic role to the whole church. The ministry of Christ by the Spirit in the churches (Rv 2:1) is directed towards their effectiveness as those who bear his witness in the world (Rv 11:3-4). The messages of the Spirit, speaking through the

Christian prophets in the churches, are intended to give the churches themselves "power to prophesy" (Rv 11:3).

3.1.4.2.5 The Spirit's eschatological role

In all of this the Spirit's role is eschatological, as it is from the victory of Christ through his death and resurrection that this eschatological activity of the Spirit in the world derives (Rv 5:6). So it is towards the fulfilment of this victory in the eschatological future that the Spirit's activity, in and through the church, is directed. But the role of the Spirit in the Apocalypse is not simply that of predicting the events of the end (Schnelle 2009:768-771; Du Rand 2007:27-35; Bauckham 1993b:166). The purpose of John's prophecy was to enable the Christians of the seven churches to bear the witness of Jesus, and this could only be done by directing their sight and their lives toward the coming of the Lord (Schnelle 2009:752-754; Du Rand 2007:24-29, 45-47; Bauckham 1993a:7; Guthrie 1987:64). Thus the prophecy was given not so much to enable them to foresee the future, as to enable them to see their present from the perspective of the future (DeSilva 2004:885, 889, 905-906; Schüssler Fiorenza 1998:46-51).

The church, which prays for the Lord's coming in Revelation 22:17, is therefore the *eschatological* church, or the church which will be at the *parousia* (Bauckham 1993b:167-168). In this prayer it is led by the voice of the Spirit, speaking through the prophets. The function of the Spirit is to direct the churches towards their eschatological reality. Hearers of this prayer and prophecy are then invited to join their own voices to that of the Spirit and the Bride (the New Jerusalem). As they join their own voices to that of the Spirit, the eschatological church is becoming present reality, so preparing the Bride for the arrival of the Bridegroom.

This prayer for the *parousia* is thus at the heart of Christian living. According to the Apocalypse Christian life must be lived under the Spirit's

direction towards the eschatological future, out of which the Lord is coming. People who join in this prayer are directing their lives, in faith, towards that promise. This means that the invitation to the thirsty is also a call towards the eschatological future (Swete 1906:310), for there is no taking the water of life without a turning towards the eschatological future. There can be no question that Revelation 22:17c really does mean that the water of life (the life of new creation) is available to people in the present. It is the life of new creation coming to people from the future. Thus entry into the New Jerusalem is not a possibility with which people's past provides them – it is only through their taste of that city's water that they are beginning to live out of the new possibilities of the future, which the pure promise of God opens before them.

3.1.4.2.6 *The story of the witnesses: the story of the future of the church*

The story of the witnesses (Rv 11:3-13) is to be read neither as a simple prediction (history written in advance), nor as an allegory (history/future history written in code symbols). Rather, it is a story through which the churches are to perceive their vocation and destiny imaginatively, through the perspective granted to them by the Spirit (DeSilva 2004:922; Du Rand 2007:370-382; Bauckham 1993b:169-170). It is not so much a story that predicts the future as a story that creates the future – it provides a paradigm for faithful prophetic witness in its portrayal of the power of the true prophet's message, his rejection, martyrdom, and his hope of eschatological vindication issued both in judgement and (more prominently) in salvation for the world which rejected and triumphed over him (Rv 11:13). The story thus functions as a call to the churches to fulfil this pattern in their own witness. It functions as a summons and a promise which are inseparable; a dramatized version of the Lord's word to the church at Smyrna: "Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Rv 2:10).

The role of the Spirit in directing Christian life towards the *parousia*, and the role of the Spirit in inspiring those who bear the witness of Jesus, come together in this story that crystallizes one of the major messages of the prophecy. Bearing the witness of Jesus is a matter of sharing "in Jesus the persecution and the kingdom and the patient endurance" (Rv 1:9) which leads to suffering, rejection, and death. But, viewed "in the Spirit" and from the perspective of the *parousia*, it is the way to life (Rv 11:11 alludes to Ezekiel's vision of resurrection in Ezk 37:10; cf. also *TAbr* A 18:11). Faithful bearing of the witness of Jesus depends on an outlook formed by the hope of the *parousia*, in the light of which martyrdom is then called the martyr's victory (Rv 12:11; 15:2).

3.1.4.2.7 The story of the witnesses: the story of Jesus

A further dimension to the story of the witnesses is that it clearly follows not only precedents from Old Testament history, but also rather more closely the history of Jesus, who shared the fate of the prophets before him (Bauckham 1993b:171). The story of the witnesses is rooted in the specific historicity of Jesus' crucifixion, and is intended to take root in the lives of those who bear the witness of Jesus in the streets of the cities of Asia. Thus, despite appearances, John's prophetic imagination does not really carry him away from the world of concrete human existence; or at least does so only to bring him back with new Spirit-given perception. This pivotal role that the history of Jesus plays in the Apocalypse only reinforces the eschatological outlook of the book (Du Rand 2007:24-26, 45-47; Bauckham 1993a:20, 1993b:171-173). The corollary of eschatological hope in the Apocalypse is not the meaninglessness of present existence. No, the present takes its meaning from the redemption already accomplished (Rv 1:5-6; 5:9). This accomplished redemption guarantees the future hope, defines its content (Rv

1:18), and also provides the model for positively living towards the *parousia* in the meantime.

The followers of the Lamb must follow his way through death to life (cf. Rv 14:4). In doing so they may know that it is the way through death to life primarily because it was so for him. It is clear that the value of this identification as part of the Spirit's message to the churches is that it enables them to characterise situations of conflict in their true perspective. It enables them to distinguish appearances from underlying reality, to see through the apparent success of the hostile world and the apparent failure of faithful witness.

3.1.5 The Apocalypse of John and apocalyptic writings in general

3.1.5.1 Were all apocalypses created equal?

Studies of the Apocalypse have often been impeded, or even forestalled completely, by too hasty acquiescence in the assumption that they are of a piece with the imagery of apocalyptic writings in general (Du Rand 2007:20-27; DeSilva 2004:887-889; Gilbertson 2003:72-79; Prévost 1993:43; Bauckham 1993b:174). This assumption tends to carry with it such unexamined judgements as that apocalyptists always related visionary experiences full of "grotesque" or "bizarre" imagery, and that this was either a mannered literary convention, or an elaborate "code-language" designed to dress up or conceal the message. This resulted in varied judgements as to the visual effectiveness of the imagery.

Though it is correct to recognise that John's images need to be understood within the context of the tradition of apocalyptic writings, such recognition does not in-and-of-itself take us very far (Bauckham 1993b:175). Apocalyptic literature is a more diverse collection of material than is commonly recognised by commentators on the Apocalypse and, though symbolic visions are common within it, they are not consistently prominent,

and they vary considerably in character (Prévost 1993:43-44). This means that sources of imagery and genres of visions need to be studied and distinguished, for from unimaginative allegories (in which the figures are merely conventional or quite arbitrary) to richly evocative symbols which defy any straightforward deciphering can be found. Even the most cursory comparative study will reveal that John selects certain apocalyptic genres and not others, revivifies forms which are almost unexampled since Old Testament prophecy, and creates and uses images in ways which one suspects to be entirely fresh (Du Rand 2007:20-27; DeSilva 2004:887-889; Bauckham 1993b:175; Prévost 1993:44-45). By comparison with many examples of ancient apocalyptic literature, most readers must have been impressed by the vitality and profusion of John's images.

3.1.5.2 Differences in vision

An obvious difference between the Apocalypse and most of the other apocalyptic works is the sheer quantity of the visionary matter (Bauckham 1993a:9), as most of the book recounts what John "saw". These visions are so recounted as to incorporate much in the way of hymns, speeches, authorial comments, and allusive references to Old Testament scripture (Bauckham 1993b:176). In Jewish apocalyptic, visual images were by no means the only – or even always the primary – vehicle of revelation. Narrative prophecy, for example, held an important place, but John has comparatively little of this (the only extended passages are Rv 11:4-13; 20:7-10; cf. also 18:9-19). And, while the apocalyptists sometimes predict the plagues of the last days (e.g. *ApAbr* 30:2-8), only John recounts visions of these plagues.

Also, the symbolic visions of the apocalyptists are frequently the kind of allegory that requires interpretation. The apocalyptic seer is characteristically puzzled or disturbed by his vision until the interpreting angel explains it (e.g.

Dn 7:15-16; 4 Ezr 10:27-40). Such an explanation may be as long and quite as important as the vision itself, with the genre resembling that of an allegorical dream (Gn 40-41; Dn 2, 1 *QGenApoc* 19), or the prophetic parable (Ezk 17). John uses this sparingly (only in Rv 7:13-14; 17:6-18; cf. 1:20) – his images are usually meant to carry their own significance, given the context of mental associations which he shared with his readers (Du Rand 2007:20-27; DeSilva 2004:887-889; Bauckham 1993b:176). They are commonly symbols which transcend allegorical significance.

3.1.5.3 Apocalypse as code language

The shallow interpretation of the Apocalypse as mere code-language might be a fair judgement on some Jewish apocalyptic allegories, but it is a misunderstanding of John's intention which cannot survive serious comparative study of the apocalyptic visions. John's visions were directed by a desire not to mystify either the Christian or the imperial authorities, but to promote spiritual insight (Prévost 1993:57; Bauckham 1993a:8). A desire to manifest that "most important characteristic of symbols, namely their power to direct our thinking and our orientation towards life" (Fawcett 1970:32).

3.1.5.4 Comparing Revelation with 2 Baruch and 4 Ezra

The richness of John's visual imagination is all the more striking when the Apocalypse is compared with the two great Jewish apocalypses of the same period – 2 *Baruch* and 4 *Ezra* (Prévost 1993:51-57; Bauckham 1993b:177). These suggest that the visual imagination of the apocalyptic tradition was on the decline by the end of the first century C.E., and that discouragements – rather than visions – predominated as the means of revelation. After the first century, both Jewish and Christian apocalyptists moved in a different direction, concentrating attention on e.g. narrations of journeys through the seven heavens. If an apocalypse did contain a number of visions, then the

imagery does not normally overflow from one vision to another (Bauckham 1993b:177).

In such a context it seems best to eschew that the uniqueness of the Apocalypse's imaginative quality is all John's own. Also that, as an integrated sequence of visionary material, architecturally planned, it creates a world of images kaleidoscopically presented (Bauckham 1993b:177).

3.1.6 Exploring the imagery of the Apocalypse

3.1.6.1 Reconstructing resonance

A study of the images of the Apocalypse can usefully proceed only through the reconstruction of their resonances in the historical context. Whatever truth there may be in the idea that they embody archetypal images in the Jungian sense (Dudley 1967:38), their full significance is not appreciable apart from the range of associations they were capable of evoking in the seven churches of Asia in the late first century C.E. (DeSilva 2004:887, 889-891; Prévost 1993:26-27; Bauckham 1993b:179). John deals in symbols rather than explanations (Prévost 1993:25; Bauckham 1993b:184) – the images of the Apocalypse are in many cases a form of sharply perceived metaphor. Their purpose is to sharpen the readers' perception of the object in view; enabling them, in a peculiarly vivid way, to share the visionary's perception of it (Prévost 1993:26; Bauckham 1993a:18; Guthrie 1987:28-33).

John was concerned, in common with contemporary Jewish apocalypses, about the victory of God over the forces of evil as they manifested themselves in his contemporary world (Prévost 1993:41). The oppressive power of Rome, the imperial cult, and the corrupt civilisation of Rome (Du Rand 2007:34-36; DeSilva 2004:916-919; Bauckham 1993a:8) are all portrayed in a series of vivid images as enemies who fall before the

conquering Lamb and his people (DeSilva 2004:912-916; Bauckham 1993b:185).

3.1.6.2 Historical events and their cosmic significance

John's visions, however, are not historical narrative, but vehicles for the cosmic significance of historical events. It is for this reason that they often resemble the images of myth, while still retaining the historical reference that genuine myth lacks (Gilbertson 2003:56-57; Bauckham 1993b:186). Early Jewish apocalyptic has been characterised as a movement of "re-mythologizing the long-since de-mythologised religion" (Koch 1972:27) of Old Testament Israel. The imagery of ancient myths, which had been suppressed or historicized beyond recognition, were revived in these apocalyptic visions – not as pure myth, but as a means of pointing to the theological significance of history, and especially of representing the end of history (Bauckham 1993b:186).

For the readers of the Apocalypse some symbols would not only have scriptural associations, they would also have various pagan mythical associations (Bauckham 1993b:195). In attempting to trace these associations it is important to keep as close to the local forms of cult and myth in the area of the seven churches of Asia as the evidence allows, an area where indigenous religious traditions were strong and often distinctive (Hemer 1986). Revelation's images are flexible, theologically significant, and not intended to be pieced together into a single literal picture of what will happen at the end (Bauckham 1993a:19, 1993b:209).

3.1.6.3 The messianic holy war

In Jewish eschatological expectation the theme of the holy war plays a prominent role (Yarbro Collins 1977; Heard 1986; Brownlee 1983). The future will bring the final victory of the divine Warrior over his people's and

his own enemies. But the tradition of an eschatological or messianic holy war can be divided into two forms (Bauckham 1993b:210):

1) One in which the victory is won by God alone, or by God and his heavenly armies. This has a kind of precedent in the Old Testament holy war traditions – examples thereof being the Exodus (Ex 14:13-14); the deliverance of Jerusalem from the armies of Sennacherib (2 Ki 19:32-35; Is 37:33-26; cf. Ezk 39:2-4, Zch 14:12); the great victory in the reign of Jehoshaphat (2 Chr 20:15-17, 22-24; cf. Ezk 38:21; Hg 2:22; Zch 14:13); and 1 *Enoch* 56 embodies this kind of victory in which the divine Warrior requires no assistance.

2) One in which God's people play an active role in physical warfare against their enemies.

In apocalyptic proper the first tradition predominates. In both Daniel and the *Testament of Moses* the conflict becomes a dualistic one between the supernatural forces of both good and evil, with God's earthly people playing no military role. Though the victory of the Messiah over the pagan oppressors of Israel is still prominent in the later apocalypses of 2 *Baruch*, 4 *Ezra* and the *Parables of Enoch*, the idea of victory by judicial sentence takes precedence over military language (e.g. 2 *Bar* 40:1; 1 *Enoch* 62:2-3; and especially 4 *Ezra* 12:31-33; 13:9-11 and 37-38).

In most cases where the idea of a military Messiah occurs in early post-biblical Jewish literature, his army is not mentioned, even if it may be implied (cf. *PsSol* 17:22-24; 2 *Bar* 72:6; *SibOr* 3:654, 689; and 5:418-419). This is surprising, since the dominant Old Testament tradition of the holy war – in which God's people certainly fight, though the heavenly armies may fight with them and the victory is undoubtedly due to God – is prominent in the Maccabean literature and must have served as inspiration for the Jewish resistance movements against Rome in the first and second century C.E.

Here it is important (and interesting) to remember that most of the ancient Jewish apocalypses have been preserved only by Christians who, in the early centuries, largely repudiated apocalyptic militancy (Bauckham 1993b:211). The one work which does give us detailed evidence of ideas about an eschatological holy war in which Israelite armies will fight, is The War Scroll from Qumran (1 QM), which was not preserved by Christians.

3.1.6.4 Human participation in the Book of Revelation

Bauckham (1993b:212) wants to draw attention to the emphasis on human participation in the eschatological holy war as the Book of Revelation presents it. Holy war imagery permeates the book (Giblin 1991), though it is usually only the war against the forces of evil as waged by God and Christ that most scholars draw attention to. Bauckham (1993b:212) believes the more distinctive feature, by comparison with other extant apocalypses of the period, is the participation of Christians in the war. John shows a detailed knowledge of a kind of military messianism which must have been common in some Jewish circles of his time, and which makes Bauckham (1993b:213) suggest that it should be viewed as a "Christian War Scroll". In its present form, at least, it is a "rule" in the context of a description of the eschatological war, providing instructions on the conduct during the war.

It is orientated to human participation in the war, providing its readers with religious encouragement (as well as practical military rules and plans) as they prepare to engage in the war (Bauckham 1993b:213). The Book of Revelation is an apocalypse in form, but it also has a formal peculiarity in that it combines the genres of apocalypse and letter (see especially Rv 1:4-5). As a letter, directly addressed to a group of churches, it incorporates (as introduction to the apocalypse proper) seven individual messages from Christ to the seven churches, which give the whole work a more explicit exhortatory function (Du Rand 2007:18; DeSilva 2004:886; Bauckham

1993a:14) than is usual in apocalypses (at the end of each of the seven messages the promises to "the one who conquers" [Rv 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12 and 21] link these messages with the vision of the New Jerusalem which ends the Apocalypse [cf. Rv 21:7]). The letters thus function as invitation to the hearers/readers to participate in the eschatological war, which is described in the central part of the book where the vocabulary of "conquest" is frequent, in order to gain their place in the New Jerusalem (Bauckham 1993b:213).

The visions of God's conflict with the forces of evil do not represent events of struggle in which the hearers/readers are to be mere spectators. They represent a struggle for which, as the seven messages reveal, many of the readers may be unprepared (or which they may be inclined to evade) but in which they are called to participate. The main weight of this case rests with three passages – Revelation 5:5-6; 7:2-14 and 14:1-5 – where the author makes lavish use of holy war language, while transferring its meaning to non-military means of triumph over evil.

3.1.6.5 A holy war fought by way of faithful witness

So, where a Jewish apocalypse nearly contemporary with Revelation – 4 *Ezra* – carefully repudiates all trace of apocalyptic militarism, human participation in the eschatological war is not rejected in Revelation. On the contrary, human participation is emphasised and depicted in terms drawn from traditions of holy war, which are then carefully reinterpreted in terms of faithful witness to the point of death (Du Rand 2007:45-53; DeSilva 2004:921-923; Bauckham 1993b:233). Thus the distinctive feature of Revelation seems not to be its repudiation of apocalyptic militarism, but its lavish use of militaristic language in a non-militaristic sense. In the eschatological destruction of evil in Revelation there is no place for real armed violence, but there is ample space for the imagery of armed violence.

John is not interested in simply repudiating apocalyptic militancy, since he shares much of its general outlook (Du Rand 2007:22-25; Bauckham 1993a:15, 156, 1993b:233):

1) A strong critique of Roman power as antithetical to the rule of God.

2) A perception of religio-political issues within an eschatological and dualistic framework, in which God and his people are in conflict with the satanic power and destined (in the end) to triumph.

3) A conviction of the need for God's people to engage in the conflict with evil through active resistance to the religio-political claims of Rome and pagan society (Yarbro Collins 1977:252-4, 256).

In order to do this, John reinterprets apocalyptic militancy in a Christian sense, taking up its reading of the Old Testament prophecy into a specifically Christian reading of the Old Testament. In this the author aims to show that the decisive battle in God's eschatological holy war against all evil – including the power of Rome – has already been won by the faithful witness and sacrificial death of Jesus (Bauckham 1993b:234). Christians are called to participate in his war and his victory by the same means as he employed. But this is not "passive resistance" – for John it is as active as any physical warfare (Du Rand 2007:45-53; DeSilva 2004:921-923; Bauckham 1993b:234). His use of holy war imagery conveys this need for active engagement in the Lamb's war.

3.1.6.6 Recognising the conflict's cosmic proportions

Part of the aim of the book is to alert the readers to the fact that what is going on around them in the social and political life of their own cities is part of a conflict of cosmic proportions (Du Rand 2007:45-53; DeSilva 2004:912-914; Bauckham 1993a:159). In the eschatological war of good and evil (i.e. the conflict for sovereignty between God and the devil) they are called to take a firm stand and, by faithful witness to the truth, to play their part in

resisting the pagan state and society. In this, the active metaphor of warfare serves the purpose better than the language of passive resistance. John's apocalyptic imagery achieves a "symbolic transformation of the world". It changes his readers' perception of the situation in which they live and enables them to behave differently in response to it (Du Rand 2007:45-53; DeSilva 2004:921-923; Bauckham 1993b:235). The issue highlighted is: "When the beast puts the martyrs to death, who is the real victor?"

3.1.6.7 The importance of perspective

The answer, in Revelation, depends on whether one sees the matter from an earthly or a heavenly perspective. From the earthly perspective it is obvious that the beast has defeated the martyrs (Rv 11:7; 13:7). From a heavenly perspective (so the Apocalypse reveals) things look quite different – from this perspective the martyrs are the real victors (Rv 5:6; 19:11-21). This enables John to present a different perception of the current situation, which his readers might otherwise be inclined to share with their non-Christian neighbours (Du Rand 2007:45-53; DeSilva 2004:912-923; Bauckham 1993a:160, 1993b:235).

In this John had as examples Jewish traditions – both historiographical and apocalyptic – that also gave martyrdom as a form of active resistance a place in the holy war: 2 *Maccabees*, 4 *Maccabees*, Daniel, and the *Testament of Moses*. He has taken up these possibilities available to him from the Jewish traditions and developed them because it was the only understanding of messianic war consistent with his Christian faith in the crucified Messiah (Bauckham 1993a:163). The martyrs conquer, not by their suffering and death as such, but by their faithful witness to the point of death (cf. Rv 12:11).

3.1.7 The Apocalypse's significance/impact

3.1.7.1 Criticism aimed at action

The Book of Revelation is one of the fiercest attacks on Rome, *and* one of the most effective pieces of literature from the period of the early Empire (DeSilva 2004:916-919; Bauckham 1993b:338-339). It's thorough-going criticism of the whole system of Roman power includes an important element of economic critique. It is this condemnation of Rome's economic exploitation of her empire that is the most unusual aspect of the opposition to Rome in Revelation (by comparison with other Jewish and Christian apocalyptic attacks on Rome). The key to this critique's structure is found in the parallelism between the major sections, Revelation 17:1-19:10 and 21:9-22:9, which describe the two contrasting cities: the harlot Babylon and the New Jerusalem, the bride of the Lamb. The harlot Babylon must fall in order to make way for the arrival of the New Jerusalem.

John's critique of Rome therefore did more than voice the protest of groups exploited, oppressed, and persecuted by Rome. It also required those who could share in her profits to side with her victims and become victims themselves (Knight 1999:155; Bauckham 1993b:378). Those who, from the perspective of the earth and the sea, were Rome's victims; John saw from the perspective of heaven to be the real victors (Knight 1999:156; Bauckham 1993b:378). Hence his account of the fall of Babylon climaxes not in the laments of the kings, the merchants, and the mariners, but in the joyful praises of the servants in heaven (Rv 19:1-8).

3.1.7.2 The conversion of the nations

Whether Revelation envisages the conversion of the nations of the world to the worship of the one true God is a question on which commentators disagree (Bauckham 1993b:238). A major part of the explanation for the misunderstandings and confusion of interpreters of Revelation, especially on

this issue, lies in the persistent failure to appreciate the precision and subtlety of John's Old Testament allusions. For the question of the conversion of the nations – not only whether it will take place but also how it will take place – is at the centre of the prophetic message of Revelation (DeSilva 2004:920-921; Bauckham 1993b:238-239).

In fact, Revelation is full of universalistic language referring to the whole world and its inhabitants, a pattern indicating that (Bauckham 1993b:336):

1) The Lamb, by his sacrifice, will win the allegiance of the nations which are now impressed by the bogus sacrifice of the beast.

2) The nations which now worship the beast will be won, through the witness of the martyrs, to the worship of God.

3) The nations which now serve Babylon will become, through the witness of the martyrs, God's peoples with whom he will be present in the New Jerusalem.

This is John's central prophetic conviction about the coming of God's kingdom on earth. The sacrificial death of the Lamb and the prophetic witness of his followers are God's strategy for winning all the nations of the world from the dominion of the beast to his own kingdom (DeSilva 2004:920-921; Bauckham 1993a:161, 1993b:337).

3.2 THE CRITICAL METHOD - A HERMENEUTIC OF SUSPICION AND REMEMBRANCE

3.2.1 Biblical texts and scholarly discourse

If the Bible has become a classic of Western culture because of its normativity, then the responsibility of the biblical scholar cannot be restricted to giving readers clear access to the original intentions of the biblical writers. It must also include the elucidation of the ethical consequences and political functions of biblical texts and scholarly discourses in their historical and

contemporary socio-political contexts (Gilbertson 2003:45-46; Wainwright 1993:189, 200-201, 228; Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:4).

Schüssler Fiorenza (1998:3) argues that, for the author of Revelation, the sharp distinction between "history and eschatology" is not a given – since the resurrection and enthronisation of Christ marks the beginning of the eschatological end time, all Christian time and history is "end time". This implies that the generative centre of Revelation is not in the course of history, but in the experience of the Christian community in the Christologically qualified end time. Yet any attempt to delineate the particular Christian perspective of Revelation should not be misunderstood – such a delineation as something "new" seeks to both affirm its continuity with Jewish apocalypse, while maintaining its own distinctive perspective (Schüssler Fiorenza 1998:3). Distinctiveness does not exclude affinity and continuity – in other words "new" means only that the characteristic elements of apocalyptic language and perspective have achieved a special constellation (or configuration) within early Christian apocalyptic (Gilbertson 2003:60; Schüssler Fiorenza 1998:3). A "newness" that cannot be grasped by constructing a cross-cultural apocalyptic grid or type, nor by distilling the eschatological "essence" from apocalyptic language and expression.

But the study of Revelation is not only about learning how to examine the rhetorical aims of this biblical text, it is also about the rhetorical interests emerging in the history of interpretation or in contemporary scholarship (widely accepted to be pioneered by Vernon Robbins' two works in 1996). What does a reading of Revelation do to someone who submits to its world of vision? This requires that we revive a responsible theo-ethical and rhetorical-political criticism that recognises both the ideological distortions and the socio-political locations of canonical writings and those of their scholarly interpretations (Gilbertson 2003:61; Schüssler Fiorenza 2001:1-19, 1991:4).

3.2.1.1 Biblical scholarship as rhetorical/communicative practice

Since the socio-historical location of ancient rhetoric is the public of the Greek city-state (polis), the rhetorical understanding of text and interpretation situates biblical scholarship in such a way that its public character and political responsibility become an integral part of our literary readings and historical reconstructions of the biblical world (Gilbertson 2003:57-61; Schüssler Fiorenza 1998:68). Biblical scholarship as a rhetorical or communicative practice seeks to display how biblical texts and their contemporary interpretations are political and religious discursive practices (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:2).

This understanding of rhetoric as a communicative practice that involves interests, values, and visions must be carefully distinguished from the popular use of the expression. Rhetoric is often misunderstood as a mere stylistic ornament, a technical device, a linguistic manipulation, or as a discourse utilising irrational and/or emotional devices that are contrary to critical thinking and reasoning. We seek to utilise rhetorical analysis as a means to analyse how biblical texts and interpretations participate in creating or sustaining oppressive or liberating theo-ethical values and socio-political practices (Schüssler Fiorenza 2001:1-19, 1991:3), not just as one more way of literary and structural analysis. In distinction from formalist or structuralist literary criticism, a critical rhetoric insists that context is as important as the text (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:3) – what we see depends on where we stand. Thus a critical understanding of biblical interpretation as rhetorical, discursive practice seeks to replace an objectivist and depoliticised practice of interpretation with a practice of rhetorical enquiry that engages in the formation of a critical-historical and religious consciousness (Schüssler Fiorenza 2001:1-19, 1991:3).

3.2.1.2 Rhetorical reconceptualization

The reconceptualization of Biblical Studies in rhetorical terms provides a research framework not only for integrating historical, archaeological, sociological, literary, and theological approaches as perspectival readings of Revelation. It also creates opportunity for raising socio-political and theo-ethical questions as constitutive questions for the interpretative process (Schüssler Fiorenza 2001:1-19, 1991:3). Rhetorical interpretation does not assume that the text of Revelation is a window to historical reality, providing evidence as a historical source. It sees it as a perspectival discourse constructing its own worlds and symbolic universes (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:3).

This rhetorical understanding of discourse – as creating a world of multiform meanings and a pluralism of symbolic universes – raises the question of power. This means that the distinction between hermeneutics and rhetoric has far-reaching consequences for the theo-ethical practice of proclamation. Biblical texts such as Revelation affect not only the perceptions, values, and imagination of Christians, but also those of Western cultures and societies on the whole (Gilbertson 2003:61; Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:4).

3.2.1.3 "Social location" and strategies for reading Revelation

The social location of the interpretive community in the margins of mainline Christianity/democratic society has produced three very different strategies for reading Revelation:

1) The first interpretive strategy seeks to identify contemporary events and situations, adopting a "correspondence-in-terms" approach that seeks to establish parallels and one-to-one relationships between the text of Revelation and that of Christians of the twenty-first century (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:7). It "understands" Revelation's symbolic

language as divinely coded language, and claims that it has found the only way to transcribe it into referential propositional language.

2) The very same Book of Revelation has also inspired the utopian hopes of revolutionary movements and political struggles for justice, both in the past and in the present (e.g. Richard 1995:3; and Boesak 1987:38). These interpretations do not seek to redress the present experience of exploitation and suffering by projecting victory for Christians and doom for the world. They rather seek to understand the oppressive powers of the present in the light of the past, and the future in the light of God's liberating action. In this way, the interpretation seeks to motivate the reader to engage in resistance and struggle for change. It is thus about establishing a correspondence in relationship between Revelation in its context, and themselves in their own historical situation.

3) The interpretation of Revelation is much more controverted in feminist-critical readings, a controversy that seems to revolve around different understandings of grammatical gender and androcentric symbolic language (e.g. Jack 2001; Pippin 1999; and Schüssler Fiorenza 1991). Feminist criticism has itself developed two reading strategies based on two different understandings of the power of language: one assumes linguistic-symbolic determinism (Pippin 1999:117); the other understands androcentric language as a conventional tool to create and negotiate meaning in specific contexts (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:12).

3.2.2 Revelation as poetry

Schüssler Fiorenza's (1991:5) reading of Revelation positions itself within the horizon of both academic biblical studies and of liberation and feminist theological discourses, in order to produce a critical feminist-political interpretation and theo-ethical assessment. It does not focus on the

androcentric linguistic medium, but on the practice of reading. It does not assume linguistic determinism, but understands language as a convention/tool that enables readers to negotiate and create meanings in specific contexts and situations. It, therefore, consciously asserts the interpreter's agency, subjecthood, contextuality, particularity, stance, and perspective when reading. Conversely, it rejects sexist assumptions such as centricity, exclusivity, isolation, and subjectification (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:13).

In order to break through the reading glasses/grid register of the totalising sex/gender system, interpreters must adopt methods and approaches that undermine the androcentric reality construction of the text (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:14). When studied in this way, the delineation of the cultural context and the critique that provides the framework of the poem and interconnects its language with the people and events of a certain time become more important than the explanation of certain terms (Schüssler Fiorenza 1981:21). And, if language is not a straitjacket into which our thoughts must be forced, but rather a medium that is affected by social conditions, then translation and interpretation becomes a site of struggle for change (Schüssler Fiorenza 2001:1-19, 1991:14).

3.2.2.1 Poetry and pragmatism

A pragmatic rhetorical understanding – one that does not understand genre as a pre-existing pattern inherent in a text, but as a scholarly construction for classification purposes – does not need to determine the genre of Revelation as either an apocalypse, an open letter (Aune 1997:lxxii-lxxv), or as an early Christian prophetic work (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:26). Its readings can explore all these literary forms as rhetorical strategies of the author, which enhances rather than diminishes our reading.

The central faith-experience of early Christian apocalyptic theology can be expressed in a twofold way (Schüssler Fiorenza 1998:4):

1) Early Christian writers emphasize the future aspect of eschatological salvation in order to balance the experience of "realised eschatology".
2) Early Christian writers stress the present reality of eschatological salvation, over and against a future-oriented eschatology.

However, both early Christian theological emphases share the same apocalyptic faith-experience – an already-made-present eschatological salvation in this world and time in the resurrection and enthronisation of Jesus Christ. Therefore, these two emphases should not be played out against each other, but must be understood as different orientations to their common Christological life-centre and social-political "rhetorical situations" (Schutz 1967:163-171, 241-248).

3.2.2.2 Repetition or interpretation?

But such a hermeneutical interpretation would be misconstrued, however, if it were understood as the repetition of Revelation's "first meaning" (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:117). Revelation's first meaning does not present an unequivocal transcript of what the text means for today, rendering it effective for our own time. It must be understood as a rhetorical practice that seeks to present a coherent interpretation of Revelation. By re-contextualising biblical interpretation within present day discursive practices, such a theo-ethical rhetoric seeks to enable and compel readers to reflect on their own practices of reading. It also seeks to make connections between the socio-political locations and religious-ideological assumptions that colour a theological reading of a canonical book such as Revelation (Wainwright 1993:223-230; Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:118). Such a praxis-orientated model of reading does not attempt to provide clear-cut answers, but rather interpretive lenses that invite us to comprehend the interactions between our

own readings and the socio-political and religious locations that shape these readings.

3.2.3 Revelation as apocalyptic literature

Although Revelation's classification as apocalyptic literature is correct, such a classification should be understood not so much as a theological evaluation but as a literary circumscription (Gilbertson 2003:72-79; Schüssler Fiorenza 1981:16, 1991:24). Jewish apocalyptic literature speaks about the past, present, and future in mythological language and images (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:25). Thus, in apocalyptic literature, world empires have become beasts, nations are symbolised by birds, and serpents start to speak – thus surrealistic, fantastic literature (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:26). At the same time, apocalyptic authors describe the future in terms of the knowledge available to them. They speak about heavenly or demonic realities, not available to common human experience and knowledge, in human language derived from the mythology, traditions, and scientific knowledge of their time (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:26).

Therefore, apocalyptic literature could be compared with the future-oriented genre of science fiction (Schüssler Fiorenza 1981:16-17) – constructing the future out of the experience and fears of the people in the present. Revelation's classification as apocalyptic literature, therefore, signals that its images and visions should not be understood in terms of historical description, nor future prediction.

3.2.3.1 Apocalypse and science-fiction

Now, although scientific exegesis claims to be objective and disinterested, it is nevertheless also practiced from within a community of interpretation, dedicated to rational, scientific, and value-detached inquiry. This silences reflection on the political interests and functions of biblical scholarship, denies the ideological character of its reading, and masks its historical-social

location and interests (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:15). But, as does all science fiction, so apocalyptic literature in general (and Revelation in particular) seeks to make sense of the world and present time in terms of the future or the transcendent (Schüssler Fiorenza 1981:17). At the same time this future is pictured with the help of knowledge and language gleaned from the past and the present. This implies that it has to be studied as a historical source-text that provides a window to its own time and community (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:16).

However, Revelation is not written for the sake of entertainment, esoteric knowledge, or future predictions. Revelation is written for the sake of prophetic interpretation and motivation (Du Rand 2007:18-19; DeSilva 2004:887; Schüssler Fiorenza 1981:17). As a Christian prophet, the author constructs a symbolic universe and "plausibility structure" in order to make sense of the experiences of Christians (Du Rand 2007:25-26, 45-53; Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:29). Christians who believe that the ultimate sources of political power are God and Christ (DeSilva 2004:914-916; Schüssler Fiorenza 1998:4), but experience daily poverty, persecution, and execution. Christians who are powerless in terms of the political powers of the time. It is for this reason that the author expresses his vision in socio-economic language and political-mythological imagery. In creating this mythological symbolisation the author does not freely create his metaphors and language, but derives them from Jewish and Greco-Roman literature and tradition (Du Rand 2007:18-26; DeSilva 2004:906-908; Schüssler Fiorenza 1981:18).

3.2.4 The role of the historical-critical method in this approach

The historical-critical method has proved most fruitful in delineating Revelation's historical-social setting, as well as elaborating on its context within the history of cultures and religions (Wainwright 1993:107-158;

Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:17). Such an approach uses the text of Revelation as a (admittedly very clouded) window, both to the actual situation of the author and his communities as well as to the historical reality of Asia Minor at the end of the first century C.E. But, in working with these associations and allusions to very divergent mythic and religious-political traditions, the author appeals to the imagination of a people steeped in Jewish and Hellenistic culture and religion. By taking these traditional images and mythological symbols out of their original context and placing them into a new literary composition and mythological symbolisation, the author achieves literary-symbolic power. The author provides a vision of an alternative world and power, in order to strengthen Christians in their "consistent resistance" to the oppressive power of the Roman Empire (Schnelle 2009:751-754; DeSilva 2004:905-906, 918-919; Schüssler Fiorenza 1998:4, 6). Therefore, interpreters must not overlook the apocalyptic-literary character of the book (Du Rand 2007:18-25; DeSilva 2004:886-889; Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:17). If one wants to experience its full emotional and symbolic power, Revelation must be heard and contemplated as a symphony of images and symbols (Paul 2001:131-147; Schüssler Fiorenza 1981:18, 1991:31).

3.2.4.1 The risk involved in a historical-critical approach

Literary and historical analyses can deepen one's experience, but such analyses do not "explain" the book (Schüssler Fiorenza 1981:18) – an analysis of Revelation's sources and traditions helps to elucidate the possible meanings of its images, but their meaning can only really be derived from their present position within the overall framework and narrative flow of the book. Thus, historical-critical exegesis is in danger of either reducing the symbolic language of the book to code, or of depoliticising the particular historical-rhetorical situation of Revelation in such a way that it refers to

timeless truths, universal principles, and scientific interpretations that obfuscate its socio-political location and interests.

This means that the strength of Revelation's language and images lies not in theological argumentation or historical information, but in their evocative power inviting imaginative participation (Schüssler Fiorenza 2001:1-19, 1981:18). The symbolisation and narrative movement elicit emotions and convictions that cannot be fully conceptualised, for the phrasing of the images and metaphors in propositional, logical, and factual language robs them of their power of persuasion (Schüssler Fiorenza 2001:1-19, 1991:32).

3.2.5 The power of persuasion

3.2.5.1 Revelation's evocative power

It is exactly because of Revelation's evocative power that the book has inspired Western cultural imagination, profoundly influencing art and literature more than any other book of the Christian Canon (Wainwright 1993:189-201). The mytho-poetic language of Revelation is akin to poetry and drama – since it was written to be read aloud as a liturgical poem and heard in worship gatherings (Schüssler Fiorenza 1981:19). Therefore, any adequate exploration and comprehension of Revelation has to experience the evocative power and "musicality" of the book's language (Farrer 1949:8). The fact that so many great works of art have attempted to pictorialize the dazzling succession of images indicates that the mythic symbols of the book function as tensive symbols and not as literary codes; prompting not only visual art but also works of music, drama, and film.

This appreciation, however, tends to exclude historical readings, insofar as it objectifies and universalises the text by abstracting it from socio-political situations and interests – reducing mythological symbolisation to historical facts, timeless principles, or ontological archetypes (Wainwright

1993:189-201; Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:18). The meaning of the poem is also lost when its cultural-societal context is lost (Wainwright 1993:189-201; Schüssler Fiorenza 1981:22), that is to say when the evocative power of its images, in a certain situation based on an experience shared with the audience, is overlooked. Revelation's "poetic" visions are set within the overall framework of an apocalyptic myth, with the expression "mythological symbolisation" defining it as a cohesive body of images and symbols constituting an apocalyptic myth that has its meaning in itself (Du Rand 2007:19-25; DeSilva 2004:889; Schüssler Fiorenza 1981:22).

Literary interpretations of Revelation's mytho-poetic language therefore object to the understanding of Revelation as a system of signs in need of decoding, symbols that can be equated with historical events, or of images forecasting historical incidents and events (Du Rand 2007:27-34; Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:19). They argue that the meaning of Revelation cannot be derived from its sources and traditions or individual text segments. Interpreters must take into account the literary conventions of the time and judge each statement/segment within the overall literary configuration of the book. In this way, the interpreter recognises that each act of reading is a creative performance that recreates the meaning of a text in ever new ways.

3.2.5.2 Revelation's prismatic composition

The dramatic composition of Revelation is well-planned and executed (Du Rand 2007:14; Schüssler Fiorenza 1998:5). The apocalyptic tension between the now of the community and the eschatological future – between the "already" and the "not yet" of the end time – is expressed in the literary-structural tension between the forward movement of the narrative, cyclic repetitions, and hymnic proclamations. This dramatic narrative can be envisioned as a conic spiral, moving from the present to the eschatological future. Revelation's language is not referential but polyvalent, it does not

appeal to logic but to the emotions – interpreters must acknowledge the ambiguity, openness, and indeterminacy of Revelation's literary vision and symbolic narrative (Wainwright 1993:226-227; Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:19).

As a mytho-poetic work, Revelation is not like a window to the world, but is more like an onion with layers and layers of meaning. It is worth observing that Revelation has some quite intricate features that are not obvious on the first hearing of the text – this intricacy of the Apocalypse becomes evident only on further and repeated study (Knight 1999:144). To destroy these layers of meaning by reducing them, through referential correlation, to only one definite meaning amounts to a serious misreading of the book (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:19). This intricacy suggests that the text was not designed to be read merely once, but that John's intention was for it to be read on a number of occasions so that its full impact could register in the minds of the audience (Knight 1999:144). And so the "tension" remains – the mythological symbolisation of Revelation can be broken down into its component symbols on the one hand, but the individual images and metaphors can only be understood within the overall literary composition and structure of the book on the other. Therefore, Revelation can only be fully understood when analysed as a literary composition (Du Rand 2007:41-57; Schüssler Fiorenza 1981:22).

One could liken Revelation's symbolic narrative function to a prism refracting rich meaning in different and multiple ways (Du Rand 2007:14; Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:19). Revelation is thus not encyclopaedic but dramatic in character, due to the author's literary techniques and compositional skills that integrate the various traditions and symbols into the literary movement of the work (Du Rand 2007:45-47; Schüssler Fiorenza 1981:23). So, rather than decoding either the images and symbols of Revelation into logical, inferential, propositional language; one needs to trace how an image or symbol works within the overall composition of Revelation's

mythological symbolisation (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:20; Guthrie 1987:28-33).

3.2.5.3 Exploring power by way of rhetorical analysis

Rhetorical analysis seeks to explore the persuasive power of Revelation's symbolic language within the book's overall structure, as well as within the rhetorical situation that is inscribed into the text and rooted in a particular socio-historical matrix (Schüssler Fiorenza 2001:1-19, 1991:20, 1998:187; DeSilva 1998:79-110). Thus this interpretation of Revelation seeks to develop a rhetorical reading strategy that can integrate historical, literary, and theological analysis (Schüssler Fiorenza 2001:1-19, 1998:6, 1991:118; DeSilva 1998:79-110). It seeks to make sense of the text in terms of the book's overall literary configuration, symbolic universe, as well as its power of persuasion in its original and present-day situation (Schüssler Fiorenza 2001:1-19, 1991:20; DeSilva 2004:906-908, 1998:79-110).

This method stresses the importance of the speech context and socio-historical matrix for understanding the persuasive force of an argument (Schüssler Fiorenza 2001:1-19, 1991:21). The method pays renewed attention to how arguments are constructed, how power is inscribed in biblical texts, and to how interpretative discourse affects the social formation of which it is a part. So it's about tracing the power-relations inscribed in the text, as well as their functions in a particular rhetorical situation and socio-historical location (Farmer 1997:97; Rowland 1993:135-136; Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:21). It's about a textualised author, audience, and social location; which are not identical to the actual participants and rhetorical practice of Revelation.

Issues that are engaged by rhetoric pertain to social and political matters that are debatable (Schüssler Fiorenza 2001:1-19, 1991:22). Here traditional views, cultural conventions, and established customs are decisive

in articulating persuasive arguments. But rhetorical discourse is not simply a question of technique and trope – it engages substantive theo-ethical matters of power (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:22), making it inseparable from the socio-political realities of its production (DeSilva 2004:906-908, 1998:79-110; Schüssler Fiorenza 1998:6). It seeks to trace Revelation's ideological practices and persuasive goals and to identify the literary means by which they are achieved (DeSilva 2004:906-908, 1998:79-110; Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:22). It concerns itself not only with reconstructing Revelation's rhetorical world of vision, but also with the rhetorical and socio-political situations in which this imagery can be understood to have developed as an active and fitting response (DeSilva 2004:906-908, 1998:79-110; Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:118).

3.2.6 A rhetorical analysis of the Book of Revelation

3.2.6.1 Image clusters and symbol associations

A rhetorical analysis seeks to identify generic tenors that help us to understand the Book of Revelation (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:23). A primary means of achieving this unified composition is in the author's use of a common stock of symbols and images (image clusters and symbol associations that re-enforce each other – like a musical motif – and connect the individual visions with each other), distributed over the whole work (Du Rand 2007: 42-43; DeSilva 2004:891; Knight 1999:158-160; Schüssler Fiorenza 1981:23, 1991:33). Further techniques of literary integration (Du Rand 2007: 42-43; Knight 1999:143-148; Schüssler Fiorenza 1981:23) are:

- Pre-announcements (e.g. the promise to the victor at the end of the messages to the seven churches is developed in Rv 21f.).
- Cross-references (e.g. Christological characteristics of the inaugural vision are repeated in Rv 2f.; 14:14ff., and 19:11ff.).

- Contrasts (e.g. the great Babylon in Rv 17 and the New Jerusalem of Rv 12 and 21).

Another primary means for achieving an interwoven texture and unified composition is the author's use of numbers and numerical patterns (Du Rand 2007: 42-44; Knight 1999:148-149; Schüssler Fiorenza 1981:23). This numerical interweaving of visions has the effect of combining a cyclic form of repetition with continuous forward movement, which characterises Revelation as end-oriented rather than cyclic or encyclopaedic (Du Rand 2007: 28-29; Knight 1999:155; Schüssler Fiorenza 1981:24, 1991:33). All of this while still maintaining structurally that the eschatological future gives meaning to the present situation and struggle (Du Rand 2007: 45-47; DeSilva 2004:885, 905-908; Knight 1999:156; Schüssler Fiorenza 1981:24).

3.2.6.2 Intercalation and interlocking

Also very important to the understanding of Revelation are the literary techniques of intercalation and interlocking (Du Rand 2007:42-43; Schüssler Fiorenza 1981:24, 1991:34). This is because these make diagramming of the successive sections and development of Revelation almost impossible. The method of intercalation represents the greatest obstacle to our Western minds, because we are trained to divide a text into sections that follow each other in a logical-linear fashion (Barr 2001:101-112; Schüssler Fiorenza 1998:184). The author of Revelation, however, does not separate the narrative into clear-cut segments or logical sequences, but seeks to join the individual visions and cycles together by interweaving them with each other (Barr 2001:101-112; Knight 1999:144; Schüssler Fiorenza 1981:25, 1998:188). A study concentrating on the joints that interlink the different cycles of visions with each other would thus seem to be the most fruitful (Schüssler Fiorenza 1981:25).

Now, as has already been stated, Revelation is not cyclic – its narrative moves forward. Yet this forward movement of the narrative is not linear-logical nor linear-temporal. The narrative can best be envisioned as a conic spiral moving from the present to the eschatological future (Du Rand 2007: 28-29; Barr 2001:101-112; Schüssler Fiorenza 1981:26). However, the forward movement of the narrative is not a flight into a utopian future, but is anchored in the present of the communities (Du Rand 2007:34-35; Knight 1999:24; Schüssler Fiorenza 1981:26). Revelation's narrative is not static but dynamic, its development of symbol and thought not chronological but topical (Du Rand 2007:44-47; Schüssler Fiorenza 1981:27). It could, in fact, be likened to that of a dramatic motion picture whose individual scenes portray the persons or actions from a different perspective every time, while at the same time adding some new insight to the whole (Barr 2001:101-112; Schüssler Fiorenza 1981:27). John does not develop such a dynamic composition for art's sake, but for the sake of prophetic motivation and interpretation. The symbolic universe/symbolic vision seeks to give theological meaning to the experiences of Christians at the end of the first century (Knight 1999:24-28; Schüssler Fiorenza 1981:27, 1998:183).

3.2.6.3 The importance of Revelation's chapters 1-3

The textual, as well as the actual, rhetorical situation of Revelation's world of vision is found especially inscribed in chapters 1 to 3 of the book (DeSilva 2008:90-114; Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:119; Aune 1990:182-204; Kirby 1988:197-207). Any reading of the Apocalypse must carefully consider the letters to the churches, for the letters set the matrix in which the text should be read (Du Rand 2007:18; DeSilva 2004:886; Knight 1999:27; Bauckham 1993a:14). The series of seven prophetic messages, in the form of imperial edicts, roughly follow the classic rhetorical arrangement. Each begins with a poem addressing the recipients and introducing the sender, followed by a

narration or statement of facts, which is then followed by the preposition or statement of major points. Each message ends with an epilogue consisting of a warning and a promise to those who conquer (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:119).

The rhetorical perspective and interest of the author govern the depiction of the socio-theological location (DeSilva 2004:905-908; Knight 1999:26-27; Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:119) – the common location is defined as tribulation, empire and as endurance. Although they live in the Roman Empire, they are representatives of God's empire and power here on earth through the redemption of Christ. John *encourages* his readers to see themselves in conflict with society as part of his distinctive vision of the world that he communicates to the churches (DeSilva 2004:898-905; Knight 1999:26). The Apocalypse *creates* the notion of conflict through its choice of genre, where conflict and world-negation are prominent themes, and also through the language and imagery as the different visions unfold (Knight 1999:26-27). The exigency of the inscribed rhetorical situation is determined by the tension between their common experience of tribulation and their common empire status – a tension which calls for consistent resistance or endurance (Schnelle 2009:761-765; Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:119).

3.2.6.4 Revelation's theological motifs and symbols

The major theological motifs of Revelation are those of power and justice (Maier 2002:x; Schüssler Fiorenza 1981:27), and the central theological symbol is the throne. The warning of judgement is a rhetorical device that encourages people to live out John's vision of ethics, thus heavily foregrounding ethics in Revelation (Schnelle 2009:761-765; DeSilva 2004:898-905; Knight 1999:152). This implies that Revelation is a deeply political-theological book (Gilbertson 2003:61-69; Maier 2002:x-xiii; Thompson 1990:122-125, 174-175; Schüssler Fiorenza 1981:28). Christians

have been liberated and appointed to be the representatives and agents of God's power and empire on earth (Knight 1999:152). For this reason, they are locked in a struggle with Babylon/Rome, whose imperial powers are the agents of the demonic and destructive powers of Satan (Knight 1999:152; Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:119). The "dwellers of the earth" have each submitted in turn to the imperial world power, which corrupts and devastates the land. As the designated heirs of God's power on earth, Christians are bound to run into conflict with this world-destroying totalitarian empire and its allies (Schnelle 2009:761-765; Knight 1999:152; Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:119). Some have already suffered at the hands of this anti-divine and totalitarian enemy power. So, like the author, Christians of the end of the first century suffered a deep tension between their faith and their experience (Schnelle 2009:761-765; DeSilva 2004:898-905; Schüssler Fiorenza 1981:28). Their everyday experiences ran counter to their belief in God's power and undermined their hope in God's empire, glory, and life-giving power (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:124). This, in turn, provoked difficult theological questions like, for example: "Who is in control of this human world we live in?", and "If God and Christ have the real power in the world, why do their loyal believers have to suffer?" (Du Rand 2007:14-15; Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:119)

Revelation's outcries for judgement and justice, however, rise up not only on behalf of Christians, but also on behalf of the whole earth (Moltmann 1993; Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:120). The final establishment of God's and Christ's empire here on earth brings total salvation, not only for Christians, but also for all those who are now oppressed and slaughtered by the present political powers. God's judgement means liberation and salvation for the whole earth and all of humanity (Knight 1999:160; Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:121). The newness of this eschatological earth is thus constituted by

the absence of evil and oppression – it is envisioned as an alternative to the present world of suffering, exploitation, and death.

Revelation's central theological query is: "To whom does the earth belong? Who is the ruler of this world?" (Du Rand 2007:14; Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:120) And Christian belief in Jesus Christ as the Lord of the world, by definition, had to run into conflict with the proclamation of the Roman civil religion ("Caesar is Lord"). The Christian cult was seen as troublesome, antisocial, and as endangering the socio-political fabric of the empire (Schnelle 2009:761-765; DeSilva 2004:898-905; Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:127). It was this experience of oppression and imprisonment that led the author to underscore the political implications of Christian theology (Schnelle 2009:761-765; DeSilva 2004:898-905, 916-919; Schüssler Fiorenza 1981:30), giving great prominence to the ethics of Christian commitment (Knight 1999:161; Schüssler Fiorenza 1981:31). For this ethical-political interest prohibits Christians from projecting "evil" only onto others while holding themselves exempt from it (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:130).

3.2.6.5 Motivation and meaning

By positing a politically transcendent and eschatological "other world" as the horizon of this world, Revelation's dualism challenges the notion that injustice and oppression are at the centre of the universe (DaSilva 2004:912-916; Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:120). God's empire on earth cannot be thought of as co-existing with any dehumanising power that destroys the earth (DaSilva 2004:916-919; Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:121). The injunctions, beatitudes, warnings, and promises which run through the book like a string, have the function of motivating the audience. Meanwhile, the symbolic universe of visions gives meaning to their present experience of oppression and persecution (Schüssler Fiorenza 1981:31).

It is important to keep in mind that Revelation's political-mythological language does not spiritualise human exploitation, oppression, and persecution, but fully unmasks it as against God's intention (DeSilva 2004:919-920; Schüssler Fiorenza 1981:31, 1991:122). God's dynamic power for life manifests itself in the midst of death, spiralling in ever-widening circles toward the integrity of an undivided world (DaSilva 2004:912-916; Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:122). Such a liberationist reading of Revelation's rhetoric subordinates the book's depiction of cosmic destruction and holy war to its desire for justice. It puts in the foreground those rhetorical features of the text that aim at moving the audience to practical engagement in this struggle for God's qualitatively new world of salvation, which is free from oppression (Du Rand 2007:45-53; DeSilva 2004:921-923; Knight 1999:156; Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:122).

3.2.6.6 Liturgy as an appeal to cultic imagination

The heavenly liturgy and celestial hymnody of Revelation serve rhetorically to elaborate on God's power and empire – they do not have liturgical, but political-theological functions (Knight 1999:159-160; Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:122). Since Roman political power was ratified in cultic terms, the symbolic universe of Revelation must appropriate cultic-religious symbols in order to draw its audience away from the magnificent symbols and cultic drama of the imperial cult (DeSilva 2004:898-905, 916-921; Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:122, 1998:6).

Yet such an appeal to cultic imagination was difficult, since Christians had no cultic institutions (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:123). For this reason, the author had to derive his cultic language and symbolism not only from the traditional temple cult of Israel, but also from the cultic celebrations which were popular in Asia Minor. In this way, the author attempted to construct a symbolic alternative to the splendour of the imperial cult, seeking to appeal

to especially Jews and Jewish Christians with its evocative language (DeSilva 2004:898-905, 916-921; Knight 1999:27-28; Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:123). He was also seeking to motivate the audience to pay obeisance solely to God, even if such a decision could threaten their livelihood and well-being (DeSilva 2004:898-908, 916-921; Knight 1999:28; Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:124).

3.2.6.7 The importance of the interpreter's stance

Revelation's outcry for justice can only be fully understood by those who hunger and thirst for justice (Schüssler Fiorenza 1998:7-9). Although one's view and interpretation depends on how one perceives a particular situation and/or crisis, it also depends on the social location and conscious stance from where one looks at such a situation (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:128). This means that the same actual historical situation can be experienced and interpreted quite differently, depending on the analysis and stance taken by the interpreter (Schüssler Fiorenza 1998:183). Although the social relations between the province of Asia and Rome were fairly stable, and life in the cities was generally flourishing, one needs to keep in mind that such an assessment represents the perspective of the powerful and the wealthy (DeSilva 2004:898-905, 916-921; Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:127). And if Revelation stresses the economic exploitation and oppression perpetrated by Babylon/Rome's imperialist power, then it expresses an assessment of life in Asia Minor that was not necessarily shared by all Christians.

But the symbolic world of Revelation is not only a theo-ethical model of its own socio-political world, it is also a theo-ethical model for the socio-political and religious life of its readers (Gilbertson 2003:69-72; Knight 1999:160-161; Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:129). The symbolic rhetoric of Revelation seeks to deepen the loyalty and commitment of its audience by stressing that Christ is alive. In this way it engenders staying power – by

promising that the audience will share in the power and the glory of God if they resist the powers of death which now determine their lives (DeSilva 2004:885, 906-908; Knight 1999:156; Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:129).

3.2.7 Revelation's relevance today

3.2.7.1 Oppression and cries for liberation

As in John's time, so too today the blood of those murdered unjustly – the victims of contemporary oppressive political powers and regimes – cries out for justice and liberation (Richard 1995:3; Boesak 1987:38; Schüssler Fiorenza 1981:11). But we will not be able to perceive their vision unless we also share the theological analysis of those who experience our culture, society, and/or church as destructive. Oppressive political-societal-religious powers and the life-giving empire of God cannot co-exist (Richard 1995:3; Boesak 1987:38; Schüssler Fiorenza 1981:32). John's attempts to formulate the reality and meaning of eschatological salvation in universal and political symbols again gains greater significance at a time when those who share the author's experience of oppression and exploitation attempt to formulate their own theology of liberation and to stake their life on it (Richard 1995:3; Boesak 1987:38; Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:128). Although Revelation's world of vision is articulated in cultic language, such language serves to symbolise the struggle between divine and imperial power, seeking to move its audience to action (DeSilva 2004:885, 906-908; Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:129). This move towards action is not about an intellectual response, but about emotional reactions and religious commitment. Revelation thus provides this vision of an alternative world in order to motivate the audience and strengthen their resistance in the face of Babylon/Rome's overwhelming threat to destroy their life and livelihood. This makes them theo-ethical in nature.

Thus Revelation engages in a radical ethical dualism that places before the audience an "either-or" decision: either one succumbs to the oppressive world power of Babylon/Rome and its religious legitimisation, or one engages in the struggle for God's qualitatively new *cosmopolis* that is free from all oppression and evil (Schnelle 2009:752-754; Richard 1995:3; Boesak 1987:38; Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:130). Revelation's narrative symbolisation represents one response among other competing voices, since persuasive argument becomes necessary in a situation where different possibilities for action exist (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:132).

Only when a rhetorical situation similar to that addressed by Revelation exists, can Revelation's world of vision be understood as a "fitting" theo-ethical response (Richard 1995:3; Boesak 1987:38; Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:139). Where such a situation does not persist, the rhetorical power of John's vision does not engender resistance, but rather evokes resentment or projects evil onto others (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:139).

3.2.7.2 Redemption = liberation

In conclusion, Revelation 1:5-6 quotes a traditional baptismal formula which stresses that, by his blood, Christ has freed the baptised from their sins and installed them to kingship, making them priests for God. In Revelation 5:9-10's "new song" this anthropological understanding of redemption and salvation is modified by expressing it in theological, socio-political language (Schüssler Fiorenza 1998:76). The author no longer speaks of redemption from personal sins, but of the ransom of slaves from the whole world. As such, they are the anti-kingdom to the Roman Empire. By underlining this eschatological aspect of salvation, the author emphasises the imperative that must follow the indicative of Christian existence – only those who, like Christ, were faithful witnesses and have been victorious in their struggle with the Roman Empire will have a part in the eschatological kingship and priesthood.

This is because final salvation is only possible when God and Christ have assumed the power and kingship on a new earth, in a new world, where death no longer exists (Rv 21:4).

So, to pretend that redemption and salvation are already accomplished in baptism would therefore be an illusion. According to Revelation, fully realised redemption and salvation presupposes not only the liberating and dignifying of individual persons, but also the creating of a new world. It seeks to persuade and motivate by constructing a "symbolic universe" that invites imaginative participation (Schnelle 2009:751-754, 761-768; Du Rand 2007:24-25, 34-35, 45-47; DeSilva 2004:905-908, 912-923; Schüssler Fiorenza 1998:187). The strength of Revelation's persuasion for action is to be found in the "evocative" power of its symbols as well as its hortatory, imaginative, and emotional language and dramatic movement. They provide the vision of an "alternative world" in order to encourage Christians and to enhance their staying power (Schnelle 2009:751-754, 761-768; Du Rand 2007:24-25, 34-35, 45-47; DeSilva 2004:905-908, 912-923; Schüssler Fiorenza 1998:188).

3.3 A NEW PARADIGM - MERGING HISTORICAL EXEGESIS AND THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

3.3.1 A brief introduction to sky journeys

The authors of some ancient documents from the circum-Mediterranean world report making trips to the sky (Couliano 2001). While John, the author of Revelation, did that at least once (Rv 4:1-2), Paul likely did it more than once (2 Cor 12:1, though Smith 1981:425-429 believes Paul is talking about Jesus and not himself). Enoch is perhaps the most sky-travelled of ancient authors (see 1 and 2 *Enoch*). In the case of John and Paul, the authors personally made the trip. In the latter case, an author ascribed the trip to an ancient personage around whom such a tradition easily grew (Gn 5:21-24).

This seems to be the basis for scholars' divided opinion on the subject of sky journeys. Some believe the reports are fictions, especially when written about ancient personages (e.g., the *Life of Adam and Eve*, the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, and the *Testament of Levi*). Merkur (1989) and some contributors to the Collins and Fishbane collection (1995) would fall into this category, though they admit that there may be some basis in human experience for constructing the fiction. One reason for believing the reports are fictions is that apocalypses seem to allude literarily to previous apocalypses. Rowland (1982:226) represents the other perspective: "It seems, therefore, a reasonable hypothesis that these visions in these apocalypses are in fact what they purport to be: the description of visions of visionaries who believed that it was possible for them to pierce the vault of heaven and be shown the most intimate secrets of God and his world". What human experience would underlie sky journeys? Collins and Fishbane (1995:x) compare these to near death experiences and say "religious beliefs about flight of the soul have some foothold in human experience, however enigmatic that experience may be". Actually, the near death experience has been and continues to be researched in the social sciences, but such research is often ignored by biblical scholars (witness Collins & Fishbane 1995).

Merkur (1989:122) insists that "all instances of otherworldly journeys, correspond to message dreams. They portray visual images as real perceptions of ordinarily invisible beings and scenes of the heavens, paradise, hell, and distant locations on earth". He does not indicate from where he drew the category "message dreams". But, because he thinks these are dreams, he uses Freudian psychoanalysis to interpret reports of visions and sky journeys in the apocalypses and concludes: "It is, I submit, untenable that ancient authors, writing fictions, could have invented a psychological syndrome that anticipated superego theory so very well. The

theoretic coherence of their visionary practice is a testament to its reality"
Merkur (1989:122). But Merkur (1989) wrote before Pilch (1997), who
argued that modern western psychiatry and psychology are inappropriate
tools for analysing ancient Mediterranean documents (Pilch 1997:112). The
proper tool is cross-cultural psychology, a relatively recent development. The
International Association of Cross-Cultural Psychology (IACCP) was organized
in 1972 formalizing a movement that began in the 1960's. In further work on
this subject, Pilch (2007:71) draws on insights from cultural anthropology (a
science that compares cultures), and neuroscience (a discipline that deals
with the one thing that all human beings have had in common for millennia:
the human body) to examine the notion of a sky journey, the journey or trip
itself, and the destination of the journey.

The shamanic soul flight (or soul journey) can be defined as an alternate
state of consciousness (ASC). Pilch (2007:71) now uses "alternate" instead
of "altered", for "altered" implies a static, foundational state thought
unacceptable to social scientists. Some aspect of the experient – soul, spirit,
or perceptual capacities – is thought to travel to, or be projected to, another
place, generally "a spirit world" (Winkelman 1999:411). The adjective
"shamanic" is critical. Anthropologists recognize that. while human beings in
general are capable of ASC's, it is the shamans alone who primarily travel to
the sky (Walsh 1990:141). Because Pilch primarily investigates biblical and
related traditions, he has replaced the word "shaman" with "holy man/holy
woman" (Pilch 2004a:16; see also Brown 2000:154; and Kehoe 2000:53-
54); because he agrees with those anthropologists who believe that the word
shaman properly describes this figure among the Siberian Tungus and should
be limited to that discussion.

Winkelman's (1999:411) definition also highlights a still unresolved
discussion about the nature of the sky journey experience: exactly who or
what travels? He claims that it is a dimension or aspect of the human

person: soul, spirit, or perceptual capacity. The still unresolved anthropological (ontological?) question is: are these journeys truly *exosomatic*? Or are they simply mind-created imagery? (see Walsh 1990:155-156) The majority of biblical interpreters seem to accept them as imaginary.

> I am not inclined to read the ascent apocalypses as reflecting the author's experience in any but the most indirect way, as any author's experience is reflected in his writing. My reasons have to do primarily with the highly literary nature of these works and the way in which ascents are integrally related to the narratives of which they form a part (Himmelfarb 1995:133).

Likewise, Smith (1981:411) affirmed that "imaginative" [persons] actually believed they experienced the journeys about which they read and wrote. In contrast, Rowland (1982:230) represents those scholars who believe these visionaries did indeed, on occasion, dissolve the boundaries between consensual reality and alternate reality and reach the realm of God, or the spirit world (see also Stutley 2003:29, who uses the phrase "dissolve the boundaries of the mundane world"). His view would fit Winkelman's (1999:411) definition that some element of the human person makes an actual journey. The clearest example occurs in the *Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah*: Though his companions "did not think that the holy Isaiah had been taken up" (*Mart. Ascen. Isa.* 6:14), the angel (spirit guide) who took Isaiah on his journey through the sky says "you have to return into this body" (*Mart. Ascen. Isa.* 7:5; see also 8:11). Thus, this author-visionary claims his journey was what contemporary anthropological science calls an "out of body experience" (OOBE). Indeed, anthropologists and psychiatrists note that, while shamanic sky journeys are induced and directed, many contemporary (and ancient) personages have had similar but spontaneous

and entirely unsought experiences, namely: out of body experiences (OOBE), near death experiences (NDE), and lucid dreaming (see Walsh 1990:140).

In his classic cross-cultural study of the out-of-the-body-experience, which he identified as the core element of the shamanic soul flight or sky journey, Shiels (1978) concluded that the experience is nearly universal (see also Winkelman 1999:411). He had examined beliefs in such experiences in nearly 70 non-Western cultures. The similarities were scientifically notable, despite cultural differences. Further research by cognitive neuroscientists (D'Aquili & Newberg 1999) explained that the universality is rooted in an integrated psychophysiological and archetypal structure. The human organism has been capable of (they use the phrase "hardwired for") this experience for millennia. A follow-up study, which was presented at the annual meeting of the American Psychiatric Association in 1980, contributed further insight. Twemlow, Gabbard and Jones (1982:450) defined the OOBE as "an experience where you felt that your mind or awareness was separated from your physical body". What is distinctive about this experience is a "sense of the location of the total sense of self at some place other than in the physical body". The researchers also noted that their results do not support the notion "that religious conditioning, preoccupation with esoteric belief system, or pre-existing psychopathology explains the OOBE". This would confirm Smith's (1981: 416-417) claim that the root of the notion of "ascents" is "not in the expectations of the End, or the apocalyptic tradition, but rather in some immediate experience in the Christian life". Anthropologists think that it was the spontaneous experiences of ASC's and journey states that inspired holy men/women to learn how to induce them at will.

Studies of near death or clinical death experiences have given anthropologists a clue to the stages of a journey. The first stage of an NDE is a profound sense of peace and wellbeing. This is followed by the shock or

surprise of finding oneself outside the body, apparently capable of hearing and seeing everything that is taking place, including the view of one's own body lying unconscious. The next stage is a sense of moving through a tunnel that is often dark. At the end one sees brilliant light or a luminous figure. In NDE's, the dying person merges with this light phenomenon in ecstatic love. The third and final stage is the realization that death would be premature and the dying person must return to consensual reality (Walsh 1990:150).

The stages Walsh identified are similar to the stages identified for ASC experiences in general (see Pilch 2004a: 71-74; 2002: 695-697). In stage one, the person sees geometric patterns: dots, zigzags that look like lightning strikes, lines or sticks that may or may not be parallel, crossed, vertical, horizontal, etc. One also sees light and bright colours that flicker, pulsate, or blend. These experiences reflect the neurological events taking place with the person's body (especially the brain). In stage two, the visionary seeks to impose meaning on these patterns and light. Visionaries in hunter-gatherer cultures may see animals. Other visionaries impose personal, religious, emotional, or other significance, for example bright light (white) in the biblical tradition is associated with God and the realm of God. Yahweh's glory is always described as bright light (Is 60:1; 62:1; Lk 2:9; etc.). Stage three is the deepest part of the trance. Often the visionary travels through a tunnel, a vortex, a narrow passage way, a vagina, or something similar and arrives in a place of light, even subdued light. Sometimes this world seems bizarre (e.g. Dn 7). And it is in this stage that journeys or metamorphoses can occur. When the vision is ended, the visionary gives these usual experiences a "rational" interpretation. Since NDE's are in the realm of ASC experiences, it should not be surprising that their stages are similar. On the other hand, in the NDE a person has little to

no control over the event. In contrast, sky journeys are often directed by the visionary.

Finally, the third experience that is similar to sky journeys is dream travel and lucid dreams. Walsh (1990:151) notes that this type of cosmic traveling is something "we have all experienced". Winkelman (1999:393) identifies ASC's as "perhaps a universal of human societies". With specific reference to sky journeys, he notes that it is generally available to moderns (Winkelman 1999: 412, referring especially to the research and experience of Harner 1990). Some native cultures and their holy persons regard dream experiences and travels as "no less real or valuable than waking ones" (Walsh 1990:151). Lucid dreaming is a similar strategy which allows the dreamer to direct the dream much like a holy person directs the sky journey. This technique has been most developed in Tibetan dream yoga.

In conclusion, these three experiences: OOBEs, NDEs, and lucid dreaming seem to have occurred spontaneously through the course of human existence. Walsh (1990:152) suggests that they may have provided the basis for the belief that elements of the human person might also be able to travel. Eventually, holy people of given cultures developed techniques for sky travel and outfitted them with an explanatory ideology that fit well within the worldview of the culture.

3.3.1.1 The trip

Walsh (1990:142) points out that the sky journey involves three phases: a preparation and purification; the inducement of an ASC; and the actual journey. Purification is especially important when the purpose of the ASC is to visit the spirit world (Pilch 2007:75). Human intruders into that world want to make themselves as worthy as possible of entering into that realm and interacting with its inhabitants. Native Americans generally burn sweet grass or something similar in order to smudge (purify) themselves in

preparation for the ASC. There is no doubt that that smell also contributes to inducing the alternate state. If Isaiah's call vision took place in the Temple (Is 6:4), the "smoke" that filled that house may have been smoke from burnt offerings and incense, either of which could serve as a physical, neurological trigger for an ASC. Elements of the preparation for an ASC include isolation or withdrawal from society (see Lk 9:28), fasting (Mt 4:1; Lk 4:2), prayer (Lk 9:28), sexual abstinence, sleep deprivation and/or sight deprivation at night, and the like (Pilch 2007:75-76). Merkur (1989:126-127) also identified ritual mourning as an induction technique. Lamentation, prayer, fasting, weeping in solitude, and wearing sackcloth and ashes seem to have been elements in a full complement of ascetic practices that related to ritual mourning (see e.g., Dn 9:3-4, 20-22; 10:2-5). Merkur (1989:126-127) further hypothesized that the induction technique of mourning actually stimulated some of the experience. Lamentation and weeping induced uncontrollable distress. Fasting, darkness and sleep deprivation provided agitation or arousal of the spirit. Moreover, prayers and lamentations gave a religious character to the ASC (Merkur 1989:128-129). While this hypothetical interpretation is somewhat plausible, Winkelman (1999:398-402) offers a better explanation of the physiology of a wide array of ASC induction procedures that helps one to appreciate how the human experience takes place, and why the human experience is so universal throughout time from pre-history to the present. Thus, as one example, fasting or nutritional deficits affect serotonin synthesis in the human body and produce emotional disturbances, hallucinations, alterations in cognitive and emotional functioning, and occasionally symptoms that are often interpreted as possession (e.g. convulsions, see Mk 9:14-29).

The second stage of the sky journey is to induce an ASC, if the preparatory elements of the ritual have not yet initiated it. Experiments indicate that those who seek to induce and control an ASC often begin to slip

into it during the preparation (relaxation, deep breathing, meditation, repeating a mantra, and the like). Since the continuity of consciousness is an illusion (Rossi 1986:111, quoting the hypnotherapist Milton Erickson), scholars recognize that human beings slip in and out of more than thirty-four different levels of consciousness throughout the day (Crapanzano 2001:632). Indeed, even during fourth sky journey ASC, the traveller might slip out of that experience for a while and then return to continue the journey. In an induced ASC, the visionary is in charge, capable of directing the experience by "checking" to see which of the conditions might be failing (Pilch 2007:76). Typical ASC inducing methods include rattling, drumming, singing, chanting, dancing, hunger, thirst, sleep loss, sensory deprivation, and many more (Winkelman 1999:397). From a neurological perspective, these are strategies for overstimulating the senses which induces an ASC "from the bottom up" or, in technical terms, an ASC that begins in the autonomic nervous system and moves to the brain (see Pilch 2004a:174-175). Meditation, on the other hand, is a technique that induces an ASC "from the top down", that is, it begins in the brain and eventually entrains the entire nervous system (This is a plausible explanation of the activities of mystics like Joseph of Cupertino [1602-1662], who often travelled seven or eight feet off the ground to kiss the statue of the holy infant on the altar. One day he reportedly carried another friar with him as he floated around the room. Something similar is reported of St. Teresa [1515-1582] who sometimes had nuns sit on her to keep her from floating.). While many sky journeys in ancient literature involve some sort of technique on the part of the visionary, others come at God's initiative (Himmelfarb 1995:131). Presumably, if God can initiate such an experience, the human person is capable of it.

The third part is the actual journey. There is great diversity in the ethnographic record of reported journeys. Walsh (1990:143) thinks that perhaps this is because "no one can rightly explain how the journey is

made". As noted above, some claim that only a part of the holy person travels (soul or spirit), while others say that the holy one makes the journey in person. The journeys take place in a number of ways (Walsh 1990:148). The visionary may be transformed into a bird and go soaring aloft, or a bird can transport the visionary. In some traditions, the eagle is recognized as the father of the first sky traveller (Stutley 2003:73), hence it serves all subsequent sky travellers as the vehicle *par excellence* (see the suggestive references in Ex 19:4; Is 40:31; and Ob 4). At times, the instrument used for overstimulating the senses (e.g. the drum) acts as the vehicle by which the visionary makes the journey to the sky (Stutley 2003:72). At other times, the visionary climbs the world axis that runs through the three worlds: upper, middle, and lower (Pilch 2007:77). Sometimes the axis is the world tree (not to be confused with the tree in the garden of Eden, see Pilch 2004b). On other occasions, the visionary ascends a mountain (Rv 21:10), or a rainbow, or a ladder (see Gn 28:10 and the ladder that sky servants used both for visiting the earth and returning to the sky). Sky travellers also use a variety of "roads" to reach their destination (Stutley 2003:15). This is quite evident on some "maps", drawn by shamans and published by Joseph Campbell (see Campbell 1983:94-95, 158, 167). Curiously, the maps never agree. Felicitas Goodman published a map of the lower world drawn by one of her workshop participants in Vienna (Goodman & Nauwald 2003:76). This trained cartographer was excited about his visit to the lower world in an ASC and planned to map all of alternate reality. Unfortunately, he didn't retain contact with Goodman, and never returned for subsequent workshops or research sessions.

3.3.1.2 The destination

As already indicated, sky travellers journey to the upper, middle, or lower world. This concept of the cosmos seems rooted in the way of thinking of

Paleo-lithic hunters and gatherers (Stutley 2003:45). Still, these zones or planes of the cosmos are given different interpretations among cultures. The Chukchi (NE Russia) cosmos has five, seven, or nine worlds, each one above the other. Among the Ainu (indigenous people of the Japanese archipelago), good spirits live on seventeen levels above the earth, while bad ones inhabit nine or seven levels under the earth (Stutley 2003:49, 59). Perhaps this helps understand the varying number of "heavens" visited by biblical and extra-biblical personalities (see Elliott 2000:654, especially note 281). Rather than attempting to map the terrain traversed, it would seem more appropriate and useful to explore what is transpiring in the visit (Pilch 2007:78). Is the visionary learning new information of value to fellow human beings? Does the visionary receive gifts (information, healing, a new life direction, etc.) for fellow human beings?

These three worlds are located in the mythical tree of life which stands in the centre of the universe (Pilch 2004c: 178). Indeed, it contains the universe. Just as the interpretation of these worlds differs among cultures, so too does their interpretation of the inhabitants of each of these worlds. In general, however, the lower world (roots of the tree) is the abode of the dead and/or "helping" spirits. The middle world (tree trunk) contains the spirit or essence of all things. It is the "real world" behind the visible world. It is actually a mirror image of the world in which human beings reside during their lifetime. The upper world (branches of the tree) contains everything that exists inside and outside our galaxy. Holy men/women in each culture are especially known for their ability to journey to these worlds in an ASC. Ezekiel (Ezk 3:14-15) and John (Rv 4:1-2) are two holy men in the biblical tradition who visited one or another of these worlds.

The equivalent of the lower world in the biblical tradition is *Sheol*, the abode of the dead (see Pilch 2004c). It is not the place of punishment which emerged in later Second Temple Judaism (see 1 *Enoch* 54:1-2; i.e. New

Testament *Gehenna*). The opening to this world, according to Talmudic tradition (*^cErub*. 19a) was located in the *Valley of Hinnom*. It is not a place that a person might want to visit. The equivalent of the upper world in the biblical tradition is the sky (see Pilch 2004b). Unfortunately, the word is too often translated as "heaven" which carries with it centuries of evolved theological understanding. Presently, heaven is the human state of bliss or happiness rooted in the vision and enjoyment of God, technically called the "beatific vision" (Pilch 2007:79). In the biblical world, the sky was simply the abode of God, the realm of the spirits, and the abode of righteous believers. One would certainly want to visit this world to gain information, or visit with one's ancestors, and most certainly with God and the spirits.

The equivalent of the middle world in the biblical tradition is the earth, "the entirety of material existence" (Janzen 1992:245). As Pilch (2004d) has explained elsewhere, however, anthropologists call this earth "consensual reality". Parallel to it exists alternate reality which is what the middle world on the cosmic tree of life represents. This middle world is the "real world" behind our visible world, our consensual reality. In the biblical tradition, the concept of navel or centre of the earth helps us to learn where the middle world is. For the ancients built the earthly residence of their God at the navel, above which was an opening to the sky, the abode of God (Pilch 1999:148). If one knew where the navel was, one could travel to the sky, "break the barrier" as it were, and visit with the spirit realm. In early Israelite tradition, the centre may have been Bethel, where Jacob saw the ladder and spirits ascending and descending (Gn 28:17). Another early Israelite tradition saw the centre at Babylon, where the tower allowed God to come to earth through the hole in the sky to visit Babylon. Earlier in the Babylonian tradition, Nippur was the centre. It was in this vicinity that Ezekiel experienced God in ASC's. Thus, holy men and women – like the Patriarch Jacob and the Prophet Ezekiel – could find the tree of life and gain

insight from the middle world on that tree, the "real world", that could then be applied to life on earth where human beings lived.

Thus, each journey is different, because each of these worlds is different. Entrance to the lower world might be through a cave, a hollow tree stump, a water hole, a tube or tunnel, or something similar (see e.g. *^cErub*. 19a). The novice traveller often must undergo tests or challenges, but the experienced holy person is familiar with the road and the terrain and encounters no such problems (Pilch 2007:80). Trips to the upper world, the abode of the spirits including God, are particularly ecstatic. Here teachers and guides can be found, and information and/or gifts of import to human beings are obtained by the sky traveller (Pilch 2007:80). The journey to the upper world is often facilitated by the holy person travelling to a raised area like a mountain, tree top, or cliff. From here the holy person can more easily ascend to the sky. At some point in the journey to the upper or lower world, the traveller must pierce the "membrane" which separates the worlds (Walsh 1990:147). Others describe the challenge as dissolving the boundaries between the worlds (Stutley 2003:29, 36-37). In the biblical tradition, this would be equivalent to knowing where the hole in the sky is located. The neurological explanation for this dimension of the ASC experience is that the induction technique that the holy person is using (some form of sensory over stimulation) expands normal consciousness so that the ego unites with the rest of the cosmos and heightens sensitivity of all the senses (Pilch 2007:80). This expanded consciousness is what "dissolves" the boundary between the worlds. Among the associated experiences, especially noteworthy is the slowing down or abolition of the sense of time. Most people know this flexible experience of time from dreams in which elements of past and present mingle without distinction. In trance, however, the future is usually inaccessible (see Goodman & Nauwald 2003:68-69; Stutley 2003:29). Everything is experienced simultaneously. This is why the

visionary seeks to sort out the experience and interpret it in a way that makes sense to self and to others.

3.3.1.3 What to take away

The cross-cultural model for analysing sky journeys (the term includes journeys' destinations other than the sky as well), fleshed out with insights about alternate states of consciousness in general, promises to be a useful tool for interpreting such reports in ancient literature (Pilch 2011:1-13; Pilch 2007:81). The model was designed inductively from scholars' review of ethnographic literature. Its hermeneutical value can be tested by applying it to the interpretation of journeys reported in biblical and extra-biblical literature.

3.3.2 Revelation as sky journey: a social-scientific commentary

With this approach, scholars attempt to provide the reader with a fresh insight into the social system lore shared by the author of the Book of Revelation and his original first-century Mediterranean audience (Malina & Pilch 2000:22; Malina 1995). In this way, these scholars attempt to facilitate a reading that is consonant with the initial cultural context(s) of the writing. This means that theirs is not a commentary, it is rather a simplified social-scientific commentary (Malina & Pilch 2000:23). They seek to track the author of Revelation on his "sky journeys" (Pilch 2011:216-230; Malina & Pilch 2000:vii; Malina 1995), and by doing so be able to understand what it was he saw in the sky and subsequently interpret the way he did. This makes them come down on the side of historically minded interpreters, although they make it clear that the absence of the "sky dimension" of life in other historically orientated works often reveals an extremely academic perspective that lends itself to anachronistic concerns (Malina & Pilch 2000:vii).

Their primary interest for writing a social-science commentary on the Book of Revelation is to enable modern readers to interpret the book in a way that would be fair to its author and original audience (Pilch 2011:216-230; Malina & Pilch 2000:1).

3.3.2.1 Plotting the importance of the sky in antiquity

As these scholars see it, following in a tradition of interpretation over forty years old, the inhabitants of the sky formed an integral part of the social environment of the period of the first century Mediterranean world (MacMullen 1971:105). The huge amount of astronomical and astrological (there was, as yet, no distinction between the two) documents from the Greco-Roman period makes it quite obvious that, for the contemporaries of Jesus, Paul, and the author of Revelation, sky and land constituted a single environmental unit/social arena (Pilch 2011:216-230; Malina & Pilch 2000:vii; Malina 1995).

So Malina and Pilch (2000:vii) aim to take the author at his word – if he says he went into the sky, they believe that in his estimation he went into the sky. He was certainly not writing pious, polemic fiction from an office somewhere. The questions then are (Pilch 2011:216-230; Malina & Pilch 2000:vii; Malina 1995): "How did people in antiquity go into the sky? What did they expect to see there? How did they learn to read the sky? What was the social function of sky reading (astronomy/astrology)?" Furthermore, the author presents himself as John, an astral seer who professes faith in the resurrected Jesus (Pilch 2011:216-230; Malina & Pilch 2000:viii; Malina 1995). But his work further indicates he belonged to the house of Israel (Pilch 2011:216-230; Malina & Pilch 2000:viii). So how does his Israelite background and his faith in Jesus undergird his understanding of his sky experiences, sky readings, and sky visions?

3.3.3 A closer look at John the author

The author identifies himself as "I, John, your brother..." (Rv 1:9). Yet, in the opening of the book, the author is identified in the third person as one to whom God "interpreted it (a revelation of Jesus Messiah) by sending his angel to his servant John" (Rv 1:1). Since the narrator prefaced the work with a superscription (Rv 1:1-2), and perhaps inserted a beatitude (Rv 1:3) before the opening of John's letters to his brothers (Rv 1:9) in seven Asian churches (Rv 1:4), Malina and Pilch (2000:1) consider this narrator a compiler who collected the various visions of John and put them in their present sequence. Who was the author, then?

For the compiler, at least, John was a prophet (Pilch 2011:216-230; Malina & Pilch 2000:1; Malina 1995), for he refers to his compilation as a "book of prophecy" (Rv 1:3; 22:7 and 10). What sort of prophet was John? A cursory reading of this book makes it rather obvious that, from beginning (Rv 1:13) to end (Rv 21:1-22:5), nearly all that the prophet observes in his visions is somehow related to the sky and occurs with entities in the sky (Pilch 2011:216-230; Malina & Pilch 2000:2; Malina 1995). In first century perspectives, these celestial entities were not only angelic beings but also stars, who were considered to be personal, living beings (Scott 1991:55, 57; Taub 1993:135–146). If John interacted with celestial beings of various sorts while in the realm of the stars, his prophecy is perhaps best described as a "celestial" or "astral" prophecy (Pilch 2011:216-230; Malina & Pilch 2000:2; Malina 1995).

3.3.4 Apocalypse in its original social context

With the first words of the superscription, the compiler categorises John's collected visions as an "apocalypse of Jesus Messiah". In the last centuries B.C.E. the verb form of apocalypse was commonly used to mean "to make known something secret; to reveal secrets" (Smith 1983:12). The social

context of the original usage of the word was interpersonal communication, in other words the revealing of secrets of human beings (Malina & Pilch 2000:2). About the same time that the word began to be used in the interpersonal sense, Babylonian astronomical/astrological knowledge spread throughout the Mediterranean world. This spread was largely mediated through eastern Mediterranean coastal ethnic groups. Due to this new knowledge, the period saw the rise of the local production of astronomical and astrological lore (Pilch 2011:216-230; Malina & Pilch 2000:3; Malina 1995). And so, rooted in the new knowledge, secrets about deities could now be made known.

It would seem that the newly appropriated Babylonian lore greatly stimulated awareness that the deities had very important secrets readily knowable to the person who could read the sky (Pilch 2011:216-230; Malina & Pilch 2000:3; Malina 1995). Those who were adept read the sky to explain either what had happened in the past, or what would happen soon. To acquire this knowledge, and thereby learn about the behaviour of celestial beings and the impact of this behaviour on earth dwellers below, enabled those who knew what went on in the sky to make this information known to others.

3.3.4.1 The house of Israel and sky lore

Like other Mediterranean peoples of the period, people of the house of Israel used the newfound lore to learn about their God's activities (e.g. the prophets Ezekiel, Zechariah, and Daniel; as well as the authors of the *Testament of Shem*, *The Books of Enoch*, and *The Testament of Solomon*). However, while there were many deities for the Israelites, the presumption was that their deity was the supreme deity ruling their ancestral land (e.g. Philo in *Special Laws* I:13-20).

Now, much about this God could be known both from tradition and from reading the sky (Pilch 2011:216-230; Malina & Pilch 2000:4; Malina 1995). Thus the Hellenistic age witnessed the emergence of specifically Israelite revelations rooted in sky readings. Of course, the secrets revealed by God might, in human terms, be answers to particular questions. Yet these words were never individualistic, personal questions – rather it was common in the period to read the sky to find out information about past celestial and social conditions that had led to present social conditions; as well as to find out answers concerning what the sky holds in store for both kingdoms as a whole, as well as specific regions (Pilch 2011:216-230; Malina & Pilch 2000:4; Malina 1995).

3.3.4.2 John and altered states of consciousness

John, the author of this "book of prophecy", reports altered states of consciousness (ASC) – along with perceptions of alternate reality – as he journeys to the sky (Rv 4:2), studies the sky (Rv 12:1 ff.), or is transported to some nameless wilderness (Rv 17:3), and an unnamed high mountain (Rv 21:10). How are we to assess John's statements?

In social-scientific terms, John's reports and his designation of the outcomes of his experiences as "prophecy", indicate that he was gifted with ASC experiences (Pilch 2011:216-230; Malina & Pilch 2000:5; Malina 1995). These ASC experiences are found among 90% of the world's population today, where they are considered normal and natural (even if not available to all individuals). ASC experiences occur in non-ordinary psychic states in which duly endowed individuals interact with unseen personages (celestial and terrestrial) for the benefit of their fellows (Malina & Pilch 2000:5). In other words, persons' adept at ASC experiences undergo those experiences for the advantage of others, who are always under the influence of unseen personages but usually only interact with other human persons. ASC

experiences befall persons who feel themselves endowed with powers to see and hear events in the realm normally not perceptible by humans (Pilch 2011:216-230; Malina & Pilch 2000:5; Malina 1995).

To describe these events as contact with the "transcendent" or the "supernatural" would be wholly gratuitous and ethnocentric (Malina & Pilch 2000:5; Krippner 1972:1-5; Tart 1980:249). For the ancients the realm of God and God's angels, of stars and planets, of spirits and demons and of genies were all part of the total environment in which humans lived. By reflecting upon the social-scientific understanding of ASC, the interpreter of the Book of Revelation will be able to attend to the Mediterranean culture's consensus reality (Pilch 1993:233) and make fresh, culturally plausible interpretations of the experiences and the events reported in the book (Malina & Pilch 2000:5). Especially if we combine this with the recollection that "objectivity" is simply socially tutored subjectivity, we might be more empathetic with persons of other cultures who report perceptions that we find incredible because they may be socially dysfunctional for us (Pilch 2011:1-13; Malina & Pilch 2000:6).

3.3.4.3 Trance states and cultural significance

Goodman (1990:17) observes that it is difficult to teach individuals how to fall into trance states, but that trance experiences are generally empty unless filled with culturally significant and expected scenarios. What this means is that, if John's experiences are so rich in imagery and action, it is only because he was culturally prepared to have such experiences. Hence any interpretation of John requires the interpreter to delve into the available accounts of Israel's tradition that report events that took place in an alternate dimension of reality, and that involved people or beings who straddled the two dimensions (Pilch 2011:15-106; Malina & Pilch 2000:6). Ezekiel, Daniel and 1 *Enoch* are excellent examples of such available stories.

3.3.4.4 Conditions common to trance journeys

Goodman (1990:179-181) also lists four requisite conditions common to these "trance journeys":

1) The traveller needs to know how to find the crack between the earth/ordinary reality and the sky on the horizon/alternate reality.
2) The human body is an intruder in that alternate reality – by bodily posture the seer must tune the physical self to the alternate reality to be able to properly perceive it.
3) The seer needs the readily learnable proper "angle of vision".
4) The event perceived in the experience of the alternate reality is sketched very hazily, hence it must be recognised by means of the general cultural story (as well as any specific story) to appreciate a particular experience.

3.3.4.5 Correlating shaman and seer/prophet

Townsend (1999:431-432) presents a typology of the characteristics of the contemporary expert in ASC experiences – the shaman. Malina & Pilch (2000:6) list these characteristics, exchange the word shaman with seer, and then correlate these features with the evidence in John's revelation:

- Direct contact/communication with unseen personages. The personages John deals with are largely celestial entities (stars, constellations, comets, angels, spirit, and winds interpreted as cosmic beings). The only forces of nature mentioned are those caused by sky beings (thunder, lightning, voices, earthquakes, hail etc.). Also, John is repeatedly assisted by one or more special helping sky servants for assistance and protection (see e.g. Rv 19:10 and 22:9).
- Control of/power over the spirits. In all his experiences, John is never controlled by any of the personages he experiences.

- Control of the ASC, the vehicle through which the seer contacts the unseen world. While in his ASC "in the Spirit", John is conscious of what is going on around him and aware of the day and social situation.

- A "this worldly" focus on the material world. John's experiences are left in an open, unsealed book for the benefit of fellow Jesus-group members.

- Sky journeys/"soul flights", whereby the seer travels in and through the spirit world, while both feet are still firmly planted on the ground. John does the same. Like other seers, John has a sky servant to help in his journey.

- In the encounter with spirits, the shaman can interact with them without fear of being possessing by them. John reports no fear for himself while he is addressed by a range of cosmic entities.

- Memory – the seer remembers at least some aspects of the ASC. John's set of visions are an indication of this feature.

- Healing is a major focus of the seer's activity. This feature is not present in John's revelation.

Considering a cross-cultural data set, Townsend (1999:431-432) notes that the first five criteria are central in every case. John evidences seven of the eight criteria (Malina & Pilch 2000:7). The reason for the healing/exorcist ability being absent is probably because John the prophet is not concerned with individual persons (Pilch 2011:216-230; Malina & Pilch 2000:7). The focus of the Apocalypse is a collectivity, specifically Jesus-groups within Israel (or even all Israel). So, although there are indeed spirits causing problems in the lives of human beings, these are not possessing spirits. They are non-visible cosmic beings impacting on large segments of populations. Given the cosmic dimensions of the problem, the solution is equally cosmic – information about the celestial world (Pilch 2011:216-230; Malina & Pilch 2000:7; Malina 1995).

3.3.4.6 Achieving altered states of consciousness

The call to become an ASC virtuoso or a prophet like John is not spelled out in their work, as it was common knowledge in the first-century Mediterranean world (Pilch 2011:216-230; Malina & Pilch 2000:8; Malina 1995). It was not the spirits that decide who will become a shaman, nor was it the individual; it is God who endows Jesus-group prophets with their abilities (see e.g. 1 Cor 12:6, 10-11). Most calls thus come unbidden, but the person must respond or serious problems can result (Townsend 1999:445-446). The usual sequence of becoming an ASC virtuoso, adapted from Hitchcock (1976:169), is:

1) Contact with the spirit (i.e. possession/adoption). In Jesus-group perspective "the manifestation of the Spirit" (1 Cor 12:7).
2) Identification of the possessing/adopting spirit. In Jesus-groups one must "test the spirits" (1 Cor 12:3).
3) Acquisition of necessary ritual skills. Not specified for Jesus-group members.
4) Tutelage by both a spirit and a real-life teacher.
5) Growing familiarity with the possessing/adopting spirit.
6) Ongoing ASC experiences.

The Book of Revelation gives clear indications of the last three features (Pilch 2011:216-230; Malina & Pilch 2000:8) – John surely was at home with both the traditions of Israel's sacred writings, as well as being well-tutored in the denizens of the sky and the appurtenances of the celestial vault. In sum, he knew very well the non-visible personages in the environment, as well as the functional astrology/astronomy of the day. His reported interactions with the sky servants likewise points to his growing familiarity with them, while the book as a whole reports ongoing ASC's. What is distinctive of John as prophet is that he read the sky as a Jesus-group prophet, in the traditions of

Israel, in combination with the Hellenistic sky lore (astronomy) of the period (Pilch 2011:216-230; Malina & Pilch 2000:8).

3.3.5 The Apocalypse of John: structurally speaking

3.3.5.1 Piecing together Revelation

The Book of Revelation is a composite work, put together in its present form from several pre-existing pieces (Malina & Pilch 2000:8): The first three verses stand as superscription – perhaps originally at the end of a document – and provide a statement of contents. After this superscription, the document contains a letter. The body of the letter begins with verses 9-10, which usher in a description of John's first vision in verses 11-19.

In this vision John is given communications in edict form directed to the angels or sky servants in charge of seven Jesus-groups located in cities of the Roman province of Asia (Pilch 2011:216-230; Malina & Pilch 2000:9). At the beginning of each edict, the edict giver provides a self-description that authorises the edict that follows – Revelation 2:1 relates back to 1:12-13 and 16; Revelation 2:8 is a reference from 1:18; Revelation 2:12 goes back to 1:16; Revelation 2:18 relates back to 1:14-15; Revelation 3:1 refers to 1:4; Revelation 3:7 goes back to 1:2 and 18; and Revelation 3:14 refers to Jesus the witness in 1:2 and 5. Just as the openings of each of the edicts looks back to the cosmic personage of the opening vision, so too the promises given to "those who overcome" in each of the edicts refer to realities that only emerge at the very end of the present book – Revelation 2:7 refers to 22:2; Revelation 2:11 refers to 20:14; Revelation 2:17 perhaps refers to 22:4; Revelation 2:26-27 refers to 22:16; Revelation 3:5 refers to 20:15; Revelation 3:12 refers to 21:2; and Revelation 3:21 refers to 20:11.

3.3.5.2 A sandwich composition

What these backward and forward references in the seven edicts indicate is that the original version, first set down in letter form, consisted of the first vision of the book and the version of the final accounting before God's throne (Malina & Pilch 2000:10). Into this letter framework a number of other vision descriptions were inserted (Malina & Pilch 2000:10):

1) A description of how God controls the universe and how God has recently dealt with Israel (Rv 4-11).

2) A description of the cosmos before the biblical flood, explaining the present condition of humankind (Rv 12-16)

3) The abiding nature of this condition is verified in the third insert (Rv 17:1-20:10), which tells of humankind's first city after the biblical flood – Babel/Babylon

4) The final insert, coming after the letter's concluding segment, balances the story of Babel/Babylon with a description of the celestial vision of humankind's final city – the Jerusalem that comes from the sky (Rv 21:1-22:5).

Hence, in composing the final work as it is presented now, the opening vision has been split to serve as a bracket (or sandwich) for the whole composition, filled in with originally independent reports of visions by the prophet (Malina & Pilch 2000:10).

3.3.5.3 Situating these visions

According to indications in the Book of Revelation, the prophet experienced the vision of the cosmic son of Man, who gave edicts to the angels of seven Asian Jesus-groups, while he was on the island Patmos, off the coast of Ephesus.

But, according to Malina and Pilch (2000:11), there is no reason to believe that all the other visions in the work happened at the same time and

place: The first insert (Rv 4-11), dealing with the land of Israel during the period prior to the destruction of Jerusalem ("where their Lord was crucified" Rv 11:8), surely dates before 70 C.E. The final vision of the New Jerusalem descending from the opening in the vault of the sky would take place near that opening (i.e. in the land of Israel). The visions of the antediluvian situation of humankind and of the first city (Rv 12:1-20:10) might take place at any time and any place in the eastern Mediterranean, since these visions explain the major events of the past that account for social conditions as the prophet experienced them.

While most modern scholars favour Rome for their historical reference, Malina and Pilch (2000:12) see no clear, unambiguous, or direct references in the work to Rome or to Roman emperors. It is true that Rome is identified with Babylon in a number of Israelite writings from the period, for example 4 *Ezra*, the *Apocalypse of Baruch* and *Sibylline Oracles* 5. It is also referenced to in 1 Peter 5:13, but the reference is viewed solely as a reference to Rome as a place of exile, without any hostile or pejorative overtones (Malina & Pilch 2000:12). In Israelite tradition, however, the first city of humankind – Babel/Babylon – suffers a very different fortune and could serve very well as a prototype of any and all ancient cities (Malina & Pilch 2000:12).

It seems that the final composition of the work in its present form took place sometime after the destruction of Jerusalem (Malina & Pilch 2000:12), among persons who saw no signs of rebuilding. This would account for the compiler's insistence that the book contains "what must soon take place" (Rv 1:1; 22:6), implying that the work is not a simple and unified piece. By implication then it does not offer a sequential or linear vision of how events have unfolded (or must unfold) as history moves to some fated conclusion. Rather, it is a composite collection of visions (with sights and sounds) given by God to the Jesus-group prophet John, concerning Jesus the Messiah, and

interpreted by God's sky servants (Pilch 2011:216-230; Malina & Pilch 2000:10).

3.3.6 The different dimensions of prophecy

As is well known, prophets were frequent in Jesus Messiah groups (Malina & Pilch 2000:10), whether they be:

- Generic references to prophets (Gl 1:15-16; 1 Cor 12:10; Rm 12:6; Mt 7:15; 24:11; Ac 2:15-21).
- Individuals described as being prophets or playing a prophetic role are characterised as having an ASC experience (Mk 1:9-11; Lk 3:21-22; Mt 3:13-37; Jn 1:32-34; Ac 1:1-10; 7:55-56; 9:1-19; 10:9-17, 19-20; 11:4-18, 28-29; 12:6-11; 16:9-10; 18:9-10; 21:10-11; 22:3-21; 26:9-20; Gl 1:15-16; and Rv 1:3, 10).

In first-century Israel, and in the Jesus tradition, there were prophets who offered solutions to social problems (Malina & Pilch 2000:10). Jesus-group prophets were understood to be inspired by the same Spirit as the earlier prophets of Israel, and thus had the special task of studying the writings of their earlier ancestor prophets for their testimony to the Messiah (1 Pt 1:10). Unlike "the Twelve" – the original witnesses to Jesus who were apostles without successors – prophets continued to be active well into the second century, as works like the *Shepherd of Hermas* and the *Didache* show (Malina & Pilch 2000:11). Thus the authoritative Scriptures of Israel were now seen as referring to Jesus, Israel's Messiah and resurrected Lord (Malina & Pilch 2000:11). And Revelation, specifically, offers information about the exalted Jesus – now a cosmic personage – and about his importance for Jesus-group members; enabling them to live in peace without being deceived.

3.3.7 The number game in Revelation

3.3.7.1 Ancient astronomy: ancient mathematics

In antiquity, concern with numbers was characteristic of astronomy (Malina & Pilch 2000:13). The study of astronomy was called "mathematics", and astronomers/astrologers were often called "mathematicians". Since John the prophet envisions alternate reality in the sky during his ASC's, it should come as no surprise to find a curious array of numbers and mathematical shapes used in the work. In fact, numbers figure prominently in what the author has to say, and stand for qualities not just quantities. Also, all the numbers have their roots in cosmological considerations (Malina & Pilch 2000:14). The characteristics of numbers were assessed in terms of concrete experience, with their basic characteristics due to the concretely verifiable number of various significant celestial phenomena, the signs of the zodiac and their respective shapes, movements, and quantity.

- There is the philosophically perfect number 10, deduced abstractly from the sum of 1, 2, 3 and 4 (Malina & Pilch 2000:14).
- By the time of Revelation, the number 7 was a prominent number, ultimately rooted in the planets (Menninger 1969:182).
- The number four, in turn, gets its significance from the four corners of the earth; as well as the directions of the sky from which the four major earth winds come (e.g. in Rv 7:1, cf. Mt 24:31 and Mk 13:27).
- John's predilection for the number 3 (e.g. Rv 8:12) is probably connected with the number 4 as a third of 12, as well as with the division of the whole cosmos into three: the sky of fixed stars, the sky of the planets and the fixed earth (Malina & Pilch 2000:17).

- The number 12 is the zodiacal number. In ancient Israel, the number of the constitutive tribes of the tribal federation was limited to 12, according to Malina and Pilch (2000:17), undoubtedly due to some relationship with the zodiac.

- By the first century, triangles were quite prominent in astrological/astronomical calculations. The fated number 666 is such a triangle number, of which it seems the number 8 (the *ogdoad*) lies at the bottom of. Eight stands for the highest of all spheres, the supreme point on the other side of the vault of the starry sky and the proper realm of the deity (Malina & Pilch 2000:17).

3.3.7.2 The significance of measured intervals

"Mathematicians" of the Hellenistic period were greatly taken by the uncanny way numbers worked, with mounting interests in the significance of change over "measured" periodic intervals (Pilch 2011:216-230; Malina & Pilch 2000:17). The fact that every current time division or unit was governed by the influence of a planet, influenced the period's understanding of the cosmic meaning of the creation. Cosmic, ultimate meaning always deals with one's relationship with those who control one's existence in some ultimate way (Pilch 2011:216-230; Malina & Pilch 2000:18). These celestial bodies did (and do). The author of Revelation has this same perspective when he speaks of the four sky servants tied at the Euphrates and ready "for the hour, the day, the month and the year" (Rv 9:15).

Further, belief in the celestial influence on the days of the week is also evidenced by John's references to his experience "on the Lord's day" (Rv 1:10). It thus seems that the time at which certain events take place is significant, which makes interest in the present and the forthcoming important and understandable. Yet it is also important to see that, for the author of Revelation, any calculation of the future is of questionable value, if

not entirely out of the question (Pilch 2011:216-230; Malina & Pilch 2000:18). This has as effect that the author of Revelation is not really offering any calculations of value for determining the future. His calculations are more ballpark figures, largely borrowed from the astral prophet Daniel, and then re-applied.

3.3.8 Revelation's influence

3.3.8.1 The mystery of prophecy

For Malina and Pilch (2000:12) it is very important to remember that the democratisation of the New Testament writings only took place with the Reformation. This means that, in antiquity, writings containing revelations from God were not meant for just anybody, nor even for any "Christian". Such divine revelations were meant only for kings, priests, and prophets. All others received mediated versions of such divine information. In other words, in antiquity, no one was expected to understand John's Book of Revelation except the limited audience to which it was directed. Here they direct attention to the fact that John's letter is directed to his "brothers" (Rv 1:9) in the seven Asian churches. Thus he is sharing this information with his brother prophets, presumably the persons in these churches who were able to interpret angelic communication (Pilch 2011:216-230; Malina & Pilch 2000:13).

As one might expect with divine revelation, John's audience consisted of his fellow Jesus-group prophets, and perhaps other Jesus-group members of Israelite origin who knew Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah and 1 *Enoch*. These fellow Jesus-group prophets and/or members were the people who would appreciate what John was up to (Pilch 2011:216-230; Malina & Pilch 2000:13), since they were also initiated into the prophetic role and the ASC's that characterised such prophets. So, in antiquity, ordinary persons would not have been able to understand this book, just as they would not have

been able to understand the interpretations of the sky by other Mediterranean celestial interpreters (whether they be Latin, Greek, or Semitic).

3.3.8.2 The book's central message

In sum, John is an astral prophet, well at home in the use of numbers in his perceptions of alternate reality, as might be expected of any "mathematician" of the period (Pilch 2011:216-230; Malina & Pilch 2000:19; Malina 1995). Yet his conviction is not unlike that of the author of 1 *Enoch* (as stated in 92:3): "Let not your spirit be troubled because of the bad times, for the great Holy One has determined a day for all things". The book's message centres around endurance in the face of the deceit and allure of civilisations, as well as continued allegiance to God and his Messiah, as the only reasonable response to the situation for those pledging allegiance to God and his Messiah (Pilch 2011:216-230; Malina & Pilch 2000:68).

3.4 STRUCTURE AS VISUAL GUIDE

3.4.1 Worship for life in the Spirit of prophecy

One recent major work by John Paul Heil (2014) – *The Book of Revelation: Worship for Life in the Spirit of Prophecy* – does present a new proposal for the structure and the worship theme of the book. It presents a new chiastic structure that attempts to account for all textual data (Heil 2014:1), in contrast to most previous proposals, which have been based on selectivity and manipulation of the textual data (DeSilva 2008:343-371). With this structure he aims to provide a visual guide to the oral presentation of the text as it was heard by its original audience in a context of liturgical worship (see e.g. Barr 1986:243-256; Seal 2011:38-51; Skaggs & Doyle 2011:19-37; and Lee & Scott 2009). He focuses on a new chiastic structure, because ancient documents that were performed orally frequently exhibit chiastic

structures (Heil 2014:9). These chiastic patterns serve to organise the content to be heard, not only aiding the memory of the one delivering the text, but also making it easier for the implied audience to follow, comprehend, and remember the content. In doing so, Heil (2014:1) demonstrates a new unifying theme by which Revelation functions as a liturgical prophecy to exhort and enable its implied audience to witness against idolatrous worship and for true worship in accord with the eternal life now available as a result of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The sub-title of his book – Worship for Life in the Spirit of Prophecy – sums up this unifying main theme of worship (Heil 2014:2).

This theme is seen as of such important because the social and cultural context of the implied audience (the seven churches) includes the idolatrous worship of pagan gods and emperors, a major problem addressed throughout Revelation (Heil 2014:10). A prologue (Rv 1:1-20) and epilogue (Rv 22:6-21) form a literary inclusion that frames the Book of Revelation, giving preliminary indications that its main theme, function, and purpose is to exhort and enable the audience to "worship for (eternal) life in the Spirit of prophecy" God and the Lamb (Heil 2014:12-14) *as opposed to/against* idolatrous worship. The prophecy in question is thus a prophecy that calls for witnessing to the word of God and the witness of Jesus Christ regarding true and false worship (Heil 2014:14).

This is made especially visible in John's address to the seven churches (Rv 2:1-3:22) – in a chiastic pattern with the theme of both encouraging the churches who encounter the deadly threat of idolatrous worship to withstand it, while exhorting them to repent of any associations with it so that they may participate in the worship and eternal life of heaven (Heil 2014:65). The risen and exalted Jesus issues a promise suggestive of sharing in his eternal life to each of the seven churches, in return for their repenting and overcoming the deadly threat of idolatrous worship (Heil 2014:66). They are

promised to eat from the tree of eternal life (Rv 2:7), to be given the crown of eternal life (Rv 2:10-11), to be given a white stone upon which is written a "new" name (Rv 2:17), to be given the morning star (Rv 2:28), to be permanently inscribed in the scroll of eternal life (Rv 3:5), to possess a permanent place in the heavenly temple (Rv 3:12), and to sit in eternal fellowship with Jesus on his heavenly throne (Rv 3:21). As those encouraged to participate in the true, universal, and heavenly worship of God and the Lamb for eternal life in the Spirit of prophecy, the audience are to be among all the peoples with whom God promises to dwell and be with as their God (Heil 2014:304). The exalted Jesus promised that he will write upon the one who conquers idolatrous worship the name of his God and the name of the city of his God, of the "new Jerusalem that is descending out of heaven from my God" (Rv 3:12). This progresses to the heavenly city of pure gold that "does not have need" of the light of sun or moon, for the glory of God illumines it (Rv 21:23), and to the worshipers in the city who "do not have need" of a lamp or sunlight, for the Lord God will illumine over them and, as worshipers, in the heavenly city of eternal life, who will reign for the ages of the ages (Rv 22:5). Thus, with the Spirit of prophetic witness against the eternal death of idolatrous worship, the audience are to worship God and the Lamb for the eternal life available for all in the city of heavenly worship (Heil 2014:321).

3.4.2 Worship: a new analysis

It is clear that this book presents a new (and much-needed) analysis of the worship theme in the Book of Revelation. The worship that Revelation exhorts and enables is in the divine Spirit of prophetic witness against all forms of idolatrous worship in favour of a heavenly and universal worship (Heil 2014:336). Revelation exhorts and enables a true worship of both the Lord God and the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lamb, which is heavenly, universal,

and eternal (Heil 2014:337). Revelation (also) exhorts and enables a prophetic witness against false worship that leads to the second, eternal death (Rv 2:11; 20:6, 14; and 21:8), and for true worship that leads to the heavenly and eternal life. The audience form part of the "bride", those blessed to have been called to the heavenly supper of the wedding feast of the Lamb (Rv 19:9), the Jesus who promised to dine with anyone in the audience who hears his sound and opens the door (Rv 3:20). In the Eucharistic supper (term as used by the author, though admittedly an anachronistic description of the ritual meal of thanksgiving practiced in the early church) to which Revelation orients them, the audience anticipate eating from the tree of *the* eternal life (Rv 2:7; 22:2, 14, 19) and drinking the water of *the* eternal life in the heavenly city (Rv 7:17; 21:6; 22:1, 17) for a share in the eternal life of the Lord God and Lord Jesus who are living for the ages of the ages (Rv 1:18; 4:9-10; 10:6; and 15:7).

In sum, Heil (2014:337) argues that the Book of Revelation exhorts and enables a worship for life in the Spirit of prophecy. Also that the audience may begin this worship in the Eucharistic supper into which Revelation leads them (Heil 2014:338) by inviting them to respond to the promise of Jesus, "Yes, I am coming soon", with "Amen! Come Lord Jesus!" (Rv 22:20). They thereby affirm and welcome the coming of the Lord Jesus, the exalted Lamb, to the Eucharistic supper that anticipates his final coming and the divine grace, the gift of eternal life, of the Lord Jesus that is intended to be the destiny of all – "The grace of the Lord Jesus with all!" (Rv 22:21).

3.4.3 Critical engagement

This study is one of the first to fully engage with the liturgical essence of Revelation; with the ritual performance of the text and what the desired audience response was to taking part in this hearing and performing of the text (especially the Eucharist). In this way it is ground-breaking. Yet the

study does not address what the implications of this liturgical reading – this understanding of Revelation as a ritual/performative text – might be for today's reader. Especially when considering that, in our times, the context into which the Apocalypse now has to speak has become so complicated. Though today's context will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5, a few points are worth mentioning here as illustrative of the issues faced when attempting to find Revelation's relevancy:

1) In modern society the problem is no longer a worship of false idols, but rather of no worship at all. Contemporary Western – as well as the emerging global – culture betrays pervasive pluralism (and even frag-mentation) in its values and orientations. In fact, disorientation, hope-lessness, and a profound sense of the ultimate meaninglessness of life and reality prevail among a large proportion of the population in devel-oped countries (Stoeger 2000:65; Schwöbel 2000:107).

2) This means that today's priorities and questions have changed. Instead of asking in whom should we place our faith and hope, it has rather be-come a question of whether "hope" is still something that can be sought. Because of all the dynamics now at play (as will be discussed in Chapter 5), nihilism is in the ascendant in the postmodern West; and hope is on the way out (Soskice 2000:79).

3) Yet, interestingly, this apparent chaos and the seeming pointlessness of life today still put forward questions which, in turn, prompt search and revelation – processes which are in and of themselves a form of ritual (Shorter 1996:i). Our religious capacity is thus still active.

4) To complicate matters further – attempting to find ways of employing the results from Heil's study in active faith communities and/or amongst individual believers today can be very problematic. Heil's study is based upon the assumption that eschatology is an indispensa-

ble part of the Christian metanarrative. This was true for the Apocalypse's first participants, and may still be the case for some Christians, BUT not for all Christians. Some Christians argue for a realised (ethical) eschatology as metanarrative, offering an open-ended future in which emphasis is placed on today's ethical decisions as making a difference to the unfolding of tomorrow's world (Maier 2002:5). This implies that they do not see the final consummation of creation as the basis for hope. Hope, on the contrary, lies in the creation of a humane world in terms of experimental living – a history lured toward a happy ending realized through careful politics.

With these ideas in mind it seems that, even though Hail (2014) is one of the first to give the liturgical/performative aspect and affective reading of Revelation its rightful place when studying the text, his study leads us to answers which are not relevant for most of today's questions.

4 INTO THE BREACH

4.1 LOOKING BACK

4.1.1 The character of the Apocalypse

This reading of the range of approaches to studying the Book of Revelation has made one thing very clear – most of the scholars working on the Apocalypse do touch on the idea of the importance of understanding the text's function. Revelation 1:3 states in the introductory *macarism*: "Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy…". Is the character of Revelation thus essentially dramatic, as a literary form meant to be read aloud, indeed to be performed as a combination of liturgical and theatrical experiences? (Court 1994:16) Despite its heavy visual symbolism, the Apocalypse depends, for its initial effect, on an aural response (Knight 1999:143). The fact that the Apocalypse is an instance of secondary orality,

in which a reader "sounds again" the words written on the page (Rv 1:3) is widely accepted (Aune 1997:liv, 2012:174). The orality of the Apocalypse means we should expect the text to have relatively clear divisions that are clear to the ear and do not need minute textual details to disclose them (Knight 1999:143). It is often stated that, at the very heart of Revelation are the hymnic and doxological passages that pervade the book (e.g. Rv 1:4-8, 12-19; 4:1-11; 5:9-14; 11:15-18; 15:2-4; and 19:1-8) (Hagner 2012:747). R.H. Charles (1920:xiv) put it this way: "Though our author has for his theme the inevitable conflict and antagonism of good and evil, of God and the powers of darkness, yet his book is emphatically a Book of Songs".

4.1.2 The implications of understanding the Apocalypse as performance

But, in understanding the Apocalypse as an oral performance, the meaning can now not simply be in its words. To talk exclusively of the author's intention (even if collectively expressed of the author's community) would be regarded as unforgivable one-sided in terms of the modern approach to a literary text (Court 1994:17). There is need to leave room for all that happens to a text after it leaves the author's hands. Even in the historical context in which the text was first produced there is room to consider the earliest stages of audience interaction with the text. Umberto Eco (1984:49) borrows from aesthetic theory (as defined in the seminal work of Adorno 1970) the phrase "open work" to describe the way art yields varieties of interpretation. While at a physical level a work of art is traditionally complete unto itself and closed, at the same time it constitutes "an *open* product on account of its susceptibility to countless different interpretations which do not impinge on its unadulterable specificity. Hence every work of art is both an *interpretation* and a *performance* of it, because in every reception the work takes on a fresh perspective". When applied to biblical texts, Eco's

observations challenge exegetical methods that seek a text's single objectively true meaning. It urges "performers" of texts to pay attention to how they bring themselves to interpretation – attention to one's "existential credentials" demands that interpreters come to terms with their own political interests and cultural background(s) and how these are implicit in any exegesis. As Fernando Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert (1995) insist, exegesis and interpretation are always from a particular place. Attending to the exegetical performances of a text means noticing how one comes to one's interpretive judgements concerning a text (Maier 2002:11). It involves observing the processes and influences that enable one to "make sense" of a work that yields a range of meanings.

As was first mentioned above, the meaning has to be in the experience it provided to the audience, for Revelation only makes sense if there are hearers/readers to supply a sensibility to John's sounds and visions of the end of the world (Maier 2002:11). An experience in which one hears the voice of John and, more significantly, the voice of Jesus (e.g. "I John…" in Rv 1:9; and "I Jesus…" in Rv 22:16). Viewed this way, the purpose of the Apocalypse is not just to communicate information – it intends to make Jesus present to the assembly (Barr 2010:636). Such a crisis of interpretation enters two judgements – one on the text and its possible meanings, the other on oneself and community (Maier 2002:12). However, if theology is defined as the systematic reflection on, and explanation of, religious experience, we then should not speak of the theology of the Apocalypse, for *it is a portrayal of experience* not a reflection on it (Barr 2010:648). Revelation unveils reality in contrast to appearances (Hagner 2012:747) – it provides true understanding of the present, and therefore also the future. Things are not the way they seem to present perception.

4.1.3 What remains

Even with this commonly accepted understanding – that the performance of a text has the power to recreate its meaning – none of these scholars really venture further into the reader-response arena. This has meant that little attention has been given to experience/ritual as foundation of Revelation's communication; to the persuasive intent and effect of the text; or – more specifically – to liturgy as the context within which the Apocalypse functioned and still functions. There seems to be a disconnect between what the performance of Revelation intended to create in its initial participants (i.e. what it meant to those who first heard it), and what this same performance might mean for audiences today. In fact, the question might have to be rephrased into: Can the Apocalypse as liturgical/performative text still have a meaningful impact on people living today? What kind of meaningful reader-response can the performance of Revelation still cause in such a radically changed context?

4.2 MOVING FORWARD

It is in order to address this kind of question, and because of the failure of New Testament scholarship on the Book of Revelation to (thus far) really offer in-depth ideas/resources for this type of existential and theological questioning regarding living and coping as believers in today's context from their study of the Apocalypse, that I propose a liturgical/functional reading of the Book of Revelation. As has already been mentioned in Chapter 1, this suggested liturgical/functional reading links up with affective reading. Integrating affective reading – specifically its focus on the power of emotional valence and the deliberate move from cognitive to affective processes (Altmann, Bohm, Lubrich, Menninghaus & Jacobs 2012:1) – into my liturgical/functional reading of the Apocalypse provides the method with clarity of purpose/focus and depth. It also helps distinguish this "new"

method as a unique method within the bigger reader-response criticism arena.

In Chapter 3, I will make use of liturgical contextualisation on specific pericopes/scenes from the Apocalypse in order to identify all possible affects and their impact. Rhetoric and aesthetic theory postulate that utterances/texts engender affective and aesthetic effects which depend on their particular elaborations (tropes, rhetorical figures), as well as on the semantics, syntax, phonetics, and prosody of speech and/or writing. Up to this point, these effects have rarely been explored in studies of the Apocalypse. It is more usual to assume that meaning is a function of the utterance, and to equate it with the information given (the message) or the attitude expressed. That is, the components of an utterance are considered either in relation to each other, to a state of affairs in the outside world, or to the state of mind of the speaker-author. In any and all of these variations, meaning is located (presumed to be imbedded) in the utterance, and the apprehension of meaning is an act of extraction. In short, there is little sense of process and even less of the reader's actualizing participation in that process, for most methods of analysis operate at so high a level of abstraction that the basic data of the meaning experience is slighted and/or obscured (Fish 1970:129). With this proposed liturgical/functional reading the focus shifts back onto the text as a performance, as a drama to be participated in. Practically speaking, this implies a focus on, or highlighting of, a selection of words and phrases in the Book of Revelation that are repeatedly vocalised. This liturgical functional analysis will make use of specific texts – Revelation 1; 5; 7; 11; 14; 15; 19; 21-22 – in order to demonstrate practically what such an analysis entails. These sample texts are by no means meant to be seen as an exhaustive study of all the possible liturgical functional elements to be found in Revelation. But they are substantive enough to enable a clear picture of what is meant with a

ritual/liturgical functional reading of the Book of Revelation. Further possibilities in terms of Revelation's use in ritual/liturgy are then simply touched upon, for their detailed study could certainly form the basis of another thesis. In this repetitive vocalisation, constructive sensory/embodied experience is accentuated. This implies that, in the performance ("acting out") of Revelation's experiential/liturgical scenes, these words and phrases play an essential part in the narrative's affective/emotive and evocative impact. In this way, it is hoped that the drama described in the Apocalypse of John will become more than just an old text, taken off the shelf only sometimes, and then mostly to scare people with.

The aim of my work is to allow the Apocalypse to become an embodied and lived experience once again. To explore a method of exegesis – the liturgical/ritual functional method – which allows us to, once again, physically participate in the Book of Revelation's. To reveal the array of rhetorical strategies in the Apocalypse directly aimed at recruiting the reader to be an active collaborator in the construction of arguments in literary criticism (Lewin & Perpignan 2012:751). I am convinced that such a renewed emphasis of the "performance aspect" of the Apocalypse can result in an even more comprehensive and "communal" (over and against "individual") understanding. One aspect of affective literacy involves the immediate somatic ways we touch, sense, perceive, vocalize, or perform a text with our eyes, hands, mouths, and bodies. Another aspect involves the emotive, non-cognitive, paralinguistic things we do with, or to, texts during the act of reading – for example, holding a book close like a charm for comfort or protection, or touching or kissing reverentially a page in a prayer book. A third aspect of affective literacy is the range of emotional, spiritual, somatic responses readers have to a text, such as crying, laughing, becoming angry, or becoming aroused (Amsler 2001:83). "Affective literacy/reading" seeks out the life principle, messy and complex, threading through reading

activities and gestures toward bodily economies of reading and transacting texts. As a potentially unruly practice, affective literacy challenges the assumption that reading is unilateral consumption and a text is a discrete object (Amsler 2001:84). It is the experience of an utterance/text that is its meaning (Fish 1970:131). In this respect, affective literacy foregrounds the hinge of reading which opens and closes a gap between reader and text, between the skin of the page and the reading body, between understanding and response, repetition and difference. Therefore, affective reading produces textuality and reading responses in the fluid space between material language, comprehension, and imagination, between writing and the reader's reading body (Amsler 2001:94). Affective reading, then, is marked as a trace on the skin, in and out of time and on/in the book (Amsler 2001:97).

In the field of affective reading, the comprehension of stories requires the reader to imagine the cognitive and affective states of the characters (Altmann *et al* 2012:1). The content of many stories is unpleasant, as they often deal with conflict, disturbance or crisis. Nevertheless, unpleasant stories can be liked and enjoyed. In fact, growing evidence suggests that reading has the capacity to modify personality traits (Djikic, Oatley, Zoeterman & Peterson 2009), and is associated with better performance on scales of empathy and social abilities (Mar, Oatley, Hirsh, Delapaz & Peterson 2006). Apparently, the conflicts implicated in the negative stories evoke more attributions of goals and thoughts to the characters, as opposed to the neutral, everyday stories. Such attributions and inferences are essential for understanding the character and the story at large. And with increasingly negative emotional valence, reading stories also engaged the bilateral left inferior frontal gyrus and additional subcortical structures commonly involved in emotion processing, namely the bilateral dorsal striatum (caudate body), left mediodorsal thalamus, and left amygdala (Altmann *et al* 2012:6-7).

Given the extensive use of stories in our daily life, their capacity to provide simulations of the social world (Mar & Oatley 2008), and to evoke even emotional reactions as complex as liking unpleasant contents, we should attempt to improve our understanding of the underlying mechanisms, and of how these processes might relate to learning and development (Altmann *et al* 2012:7-8).

This means that the text of the Apocalypse is no longer seen as just an object, a thing-in-itself; but rather as an event, as something that happens to, and with the participation of, the reader (Fish 1970:125). It is this event, this happening – all of it and not anything that could be said about it or any information one might take away from it – that can, I would argue, provide a new perspective on the impact and meaning of the text. Essentially, what the method does is slow down the reading experience so that "events" one does not notice in normal time, but which do occur, are brought before our analytical attentions (Fish 1970:128) – as if a stop-motion camera were recording our linguistic experiences and presenting them to us for viewing. Of course, the value of such a procedure is predicated on the idea of meaning as an "event"; as something that is happening between the words and in the reader's mind, something not visible to the naked eye, but which can be made visible/palpable by the regular introduction of a "searching" question (What does this *do*?).

But what about the "reader"? When I talk about the responses of "the reader", aren't I really only talking about myself? Making myself into a surrogate for all the millions of readers who are not me at all? Yes, and no. Yes, in the sense that in no two of us are the responding mechanisms exactly alike. No, if one argues that, because of the uniqueness of the individual, generalization about response is impossible. It is here that the method can accommodate the insights of modern linguistics, especially the idea of "linguistic competence" – a spatial model in the sense that it would reflect a

system of pre-existing rules making any actual linguistic experience possible. If the speakers of a language (i.e. the writer and readers of a text) share a system of rules that each of them has somehow internalized, understanding will, in some sense, be uniform. It will proceed in terms of the system of rules the writer and readers (i.e. all speakers) share and, insofar as these rules are establishing boundaries within which utterances are labelled "normal", "deviant", "impossible" etc., they will also be constraints on the range and direction of response. They will make response, to some extent, predictable and normative. When keeping in mind the fact that the society in which the Book of Revelation was written was indeed a high-context society, with almost all ideas and systems of rules being shared, the answer becomes even more of a "no" and less of a concern. Where our present-day "low-context" society is concerned – a type of society that heightens the danger of myself as the reader becoming the surrogate for all readers – I can project my responses into those of "the" reader as long as they have been modified by the constraints placed on me by the assumptions and operations of this method: (1) The conscious attempt to become "the informed reader" by making my mind the repository of the (potential) responses a given text might call out (this will be done in Chapters 4-6); and (2) the attendant suppressing, in so far as it is possible, of what is personal and idiosyncratic in my response. Each of us, if we are sufficiently responsible and self-conscious can, in the course of employing this method, become "the informed reader" and therefore be a more reliable reporter of his experience. A method of analysis that yields a (structured) description of response has built into it operational criteria. The question is not how good is it, but how does it work; and both question and answer are framed in terms of local conditions, which include local notions of literary value.

My interest in the following chapter is to identify the means of persuasion used in Revelation's literary argument – whether it be through

claiming relevance by assigning positive value to the subject under study, helping to form a consensus by tapping into shared social values, or by proposing mutual action to realize shared values, which can take the form of recommendations or promising benefits (Lewin & Perpignan 2012:757-762). Whatever is persuasive and illuminating about this analysis (and it is by no means exhaustive) is the result of my substituting one question – "What does this text *mean*?", with another (more operational) question – "What does this text *do*?" The answer to this question involves an analysis of the developing responses of the reader in relation to the words as they succeed one another in time. The analysis must be of the developing responses to distinguish it from the atomism of much stylistic criticism (Fish 1970:126-127). A reader's response to the fifth word in a line or sentence is to a large extent the product of his responses to words one, two, three, and four. The category of response includes any and all of the activities provoked by a string of words: the projection of syntactical and/or lexical probabilities; their subsequent occurrence or non-occurrence; attitudes towards persons, things, or ideas referred to; the reversal or questioning of those attitudes; etc. But, when inferring the reader's response, all that has happened (in the reader's mind) at previous moments, and influences and pressures pre-dating the actual reading experience must be taken into account. The basis of the method is a consideration of the temporal flow of the reading experience, and it is assumed that the reader responds in terms of that flow and not to the whole utterance. That is, in an utterance of any length, there is a point at which the reader has taken in only the first word, and then the second, and then the third, and so on, and the report of what happens to the reader is always a report of what has happened to that point.

CHAPTER 3

1 REVELATION AND RITUAL

Keeping everything done in Chapter 2 in mind, it has become clear that a liturgical/functional reading of Revelation will take us into (as yet) more unfamiliar territory where the Book of Revelation is concerned. This is not meant as a statement regarding the value of the bulk of work done on the Apocalypse. Indeed, as was stated in Chapter 1, this "new" dimension in the study of the Book of Revelation is only made possible because of, and can only add on to, all of the exegetical work that has gone before. The *gamut* of these studies done on the Apocalypse – focusing on the historic, textual, literary, socio-cultural, and symbolic components of the book (as summarised in Chapter 2) – thus serve as the essential foundation onto which this study builds. This is to ensure that this study does not veer off course and into dangerous exegetical (eisegetical?) waters.

I say this, because I have deliberately adopted a liturgical/functional reading – a technique normally associated more with Practical Theology – in order to enhance our reading of the Book of Revelation. In my opinion, this should not be so, especially where the Apocalypse is concerned. By maintaining this "traditional" division in terms of the liturgical/functional method, we as New Testament scholarship are neglecting a method which could add even more depth and practical value to the exegetical process by drawing our attention to the text's possible functional and performative uses within the community of faith – then and now. This functioning and impact of the text on the community hearing and/or reading it – firstly its original audience and then, from those inferences, also its current audiences – is actually a part-and-parcel dimension of Reader-response Criticism. Though this approach is, admittedly, not a "traditional" method within the discipline

of New Testament studies (even within the broader Reader-response Criticism arena), my contention is that this does not make the method less relevant or meaningful. When adding on the ever-increasing focus on the importance of inter-disciplinary work, this could make the work done in this thesis valuable to New Testament studies moving forward. But, again, not valuable in the sense of replacing or negating the scholarship that has gone before. Valuable in the sense of adding on another layer of exegetical depth to the valuable and detailed work that has already been done.

As was demonstrated in Chapter 2, in much earlier times most "scholarly" writers on the Apocalypse were clergy or leaders of reform movements. They were eager to show that the book spoke to the issues of their own times. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, however, the bulk of critical work done shifted to universities and colleges. A possible danger of this movement of the primary study of the text into the academic institution, and by inference away from the faith movement, is that it may make earnest biblical study seem irrelevant to the general concerns of the faith community and the world. With the method I make use of in this study, my aim is to help the faith community feel more included in the study of the Book of Revelation once again. I will attempt to add onto the strong exegetical and academic foundations, laid by the academic community, a more practical exegetical dimension which brings the Apocalypse as New Testament text back into the life of the community of faith it belongs to and should be performed in. By using existing scholarship on the Book of Revelation as this method's foundation, I hope to ensure that the performance of the text suggested for the faith communities of today is an exegetically responsible one.

It is the hypothesis of this study that in the Book of Revelation we have an indispensable resource for helping first-world Christians conceive of their place in the contemporary world, and meditate on the role the church is to

play in a modern, secular society. This is so because, from start to finish, the Book of Revelation is a call to Christian discipleship. While historically it has fuelled end-time speculation, it has also been a resource for critical appraisal of the state, the relationship of Christians to political culture, and the place of Christian witness in society (Maier 2002:x). John's Apocalypse is not a nostalgic trip down memory lane, it is a form of *anamnesis* or recollection (Maier 2002:19). Insofar as the medium of communication in antiquity was predominantly oral, and even written texts were recited orally to communities of people, it will be necessary for New Testament interpretation to shift and expand its focus from written texts in themselves, to (oral) communication as interactive and the context(s) in which it happened (Horsley 2011:126). Just as writing was embedded in wider oral communication, so particular texts, orally performed and/or written, were embedded in wider cultural tradition(s) and collective social memory, which thus become all the more important for our interpretation. Furthermore, insofar as oral and/or written texts (like the "oral traditions" behind them) were used in repeated recitation and application in communities and their contexts, interpretation would be appropriately focused on their cultivation and not their mere transmission. In recalling/performing the narrative, the past is made physically present. For John, the death of Jesus is, of course, a past historical event, but its reality is present and its effects are to be felt now. The author admonishes his audience to live into a present story – most evident in John's repeated modulations in terms of tense (e.g. Rv 1:5 "λύσαντι"[1] to Rv 7:14 "ἔπλυναν"; Rv 12:13 "ἐβλήθη" versus Rv 12:15 "ἔβαλεν"; and Rv 14:3 "ἠγορασμένοι" vs Rv 14:4 "ἠγοράσθησαν"; for an in-

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[1] All Greek text is quoted from Holmes, M. W. *The Greek New Testament: SBL Edition*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2011-2013.

depth and detailed study of this aspect of the Book of Revelation, please refer to Mathewson 2010). This wedding of tenses turns the Apocalypse into a subversive piece of memory-work – the Apocalypse deploys memory to re-create the present through recollection. *Anamnesis* invests the present with renewed significance, for the present now carries the past.

"Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the Churches" (ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις). This expression is repeated in all seven of the letters to John's churches in Asia Minor (Rv 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). It is seldom studied, because it is assumed to be a catchphrase associated with these coded secret messages. But the reverse is the case, as Anne-Mart Enroth (1990:598-608) demonstrates:

> The Hearing Formula is an invitation and an encouragement to hear. It underlines what should be heard and how it should be heard, and what follows from hearing aright…It is openly directed towards the communities mentioned in the letters, who in fact represent the whole church…The Hearing Formula is positive, for it does not contain the idea of judgement or of hardening. On the contrary, it underlines the promise and possibility of salvation.

It is the hypothesis of this research that every aspect of the Book of Revelation which describes the church – i.e. worship and witness, being Christ-centred, coping with fierce opposition, showing a spiritual effectiveness, and working out one's ministry in terms of priesthood and prophecy – is capable of a direct translation into the situation of today's church in the modern world. Revelation still offers significant and positive ideas for those with ears to hear. It cannot be dismissed as an outdated, self-conscious irrelevance.

What follows in the rest of Chapter 3 will be an exploration of the possible liturgical/ritual function of the Apocalypse in its original context. To be able to do this, it will be necessary to understand special communications as interactive and contextual, a far more complex undertaking than considering the meaning of written texts as artefacts, as we have been trained to do (Horsley 2011:144). Adequate appreciation and interpretation would require not just a sense of the rhetorical tone and rhythm of the respective speeches, but a sense of the hearers' life circumstances, their historical situation and the cultural tradition in which they hear and respond to the speeches. In order to hear and interpret New Testament texts, it is necessary to discern the contours of the text, to determine the historical context of the community of the responsive/interactive hearers, and to know as much as possible the cultural tradition out of which the voiced texts resonate with the hearers (Horsley 2011:145).

1.1 IMAGINATIVE PARTICIPATION RESULTS IN TRANSFORMING ACTUALITY

It is interesting to note that many works in the field of social sciences and literary criticism are concerned with apocalyptic ideas, without giving special attention to the Bible. In these writings, the words "apocalypse" and "millennium" have acquired a general meaning that is only loosely connected with the thought of the Book of Revelation. Yet the use of these terms in a general sense is evidence of the Apocalypse's impact. Its words and symbols have entered into everyday vocabulary to give expression to human hopes and fears, and human aspirations and tragedies. In an age of upheaval and transformation, they evoke a vibrant response in the minds of men and women.

The Apocalypse appeals to people who believe themselves to be in a crisis. Even when their fears are unjustified, they may experience real

distress. Few men and women, if any, are free from the fear of war, persecution, injustice, or personal tragedy. Many of them feel themselves to be threatened, even when their lives outwardly appear to be untroubled. In this frame of mind, they turn to the Apocalypse. All of these factors that attract people to the book today were present when it was written (see e.g. Hagner 2012:747-748, 760-775; Schnelle 2009:751-772; Du Rand 2007:72-101; Brown 2009:802-809; Barr 2004:632-639; DeSilva 2004:893-905). The church was either suffering persecution, or living in fear of it. Conflict was a real danger, whether with the Roman Empire or the Jewish synagogues. Some of the congregations that John addressed were torn by ecclesiastical controversy. Poverty, slavery, and class distinction caused social unrest. The world had a full quota of natural disasters – famines, earthquakes, and volcanic eruptions. People believed themselves to be in a situation of crisis. These conditions were present in the first century, and have been present ever since (as will be demonstrated in Chapter 5).

With this functional liturgical reading, it is about rediscovering the Book of Revelation's importance for the Christian community. In a sense it is about claiming it back from its assimilation (disappearance?) into Western culture. It is about finding those ideas and elements within the text of the Apocalypse that can be made use of *in the community of faith*'s communal expression, so as to affect both conscious and sub-conscious change. Here it is important to recognise that this change is not brought about by being able to answer life's difficult questions; for, in practice, formal theological ideas are not used in a deductive manner. Realistically, individuals hold opinions, beliefs, and values that are partial, fragmentary, and changing. These opinions and beliefs are constantly interfusing with the activities, rites, and manifold endeavours of life. So it is rather about recognising that we, as people, hunger and thirst for significant doings. And that, through participation in these significant doings – i.e. rituals or "rites of intensification" – our

understanding of, our perspective on, and our emotions regarding life's difficulties are changed. This change happens almost spontaneously, because of the conscious and sub-conscious interaction that participation in ritual brings into being.

It will be demonstrated that participation in ritual has the power to unravel the ultimate problems and paradoxes of our existence – not by providing all the intellectual answers we desire – but through participation in periods (rituals) where action and awareness merge. In the elements of ritual, and our participation therein, we experience the high and explicit sanctification of life's most primary concepts. The immediate and lasting effect of this being an embodied/lived experience of the preservation of the world's wholeness in the face of fragmenting and dissolving forces. Through participation, hope can be fused into our sub-conscious, from where it is able to affect our conscious daily living in a much more powerful way than merely thinking about it can ever achieve.

Such a modern hermeneutic theory thus insists that the meaning of a work is primarily what it means to the reader. Here it is important to remember that a pluralism of method can turn into an ideological pluralism in which there are no objectively correct answers, only a range of subjective responses. To prevent this, the contributions of the author and of his/her situation to what is said – and the ways in which this handles, and is handled by, the continuity of traditions – must still retain some significance, if not decisive control, in questions of meaning. Revelation's vision of an alternative world derives power from the actual contrast with the socio-political realities that gave it birth (Court 1994:19). For literary tensions and theological dialectic to be understood fully, historical questions must remain part of the interpreter's task.

1.2 DEFINING THE PROCESS OF A LITURGICAL READING

Once again, the line of thought expressed above is only the start to a "new" way of reading the Book of Revelation and the possible impact it might have on our understanding and use of the text. In order to demonstrate what a ritual/liturgical functional reading of Revelation looks like, a few key chapters of the Apocalypse will be analysed according to this method. Because it is only the beginning of this specific exploration, it might seem a bit short. But this is simply because fully exploring each of the different elements that will thereafter be mentioned and shortly discussed to flesh out the idea of this method even further would be a lifetime's worth of study and work. In terms of this aspect it is also important to remember that, in all the elements identified within the text and our study of the way the text is used, the focus is specifically on the ritual functional and performative possibilities of the text. In these functional, bodily, and performative possibilities lie hidden ways in which both conscious and sub-conscious change can be brought about. Thus, this liturgical functional reading is all about finding ways to employ the text to change the way we see ourselves and look at/understand the world, and our faith, on an embodied level. The book sheds a great deal of light not only on the condition of the church in the first century C.E., but on the continuing state of the church in our modern age (Guthrie 1987:67). While there are features which must be regarded as relevant only for the original readers, the underlying principles have an abiding significance. Our task will be to present an overall impression of what can be deduced from the book as a whole in terms of encouragement and warning for the modern church.

As will become clear in the next chapter, the possibilities opened up when following this approach are rather unconventional, but also very exciting. This approach focuses on participants' experience of ritual as

rewarding, thereby directly reinforcing their faith in the cosmic and moral orders on all levels of the brain. This process brings with it its own intrinsic reward, because the ritual – and the cosmic and moral orders it reinforces – affords the community of faith with so many new ways in which to engage with their faith. Further study of these possibilities – especially where it comes to the Book of Revelation – can only add immense value to the church today and the ways in which it practices its faith. This is because such a study can possibly, once again, place embodied hope in all its richness and depth at the centre of our existence and faith experience as individuals and communities.

Thus, this chapter will be dedicated to exploring the possibilities opened up by studying hope with the help of the liturgical functional method. The kind of reading we do, essentially, to function in the world, day-to-day. This study will be focused on possible ways in which the text of Revelation could be used in this ritual functional way to re-create and/or strengthen hope in today's faith communities. The hypothesis is that, by way of a liturgical functional reading of the Book of Revelation, it can belong once again to the community of faith, from whom it was estranged. As will be seen in Chapter 4, by giving the book and its contents back in this way, it becomes possible for Revelation to be a book that gives meaning to life when people can't find meaning on their own. A book, and rituals, that allow people to – consciously *and* sub-consciously – experience the good in the seemingly horrible, especially when it comes to their misfortune.

2 THE WAGER OF TRANSCENDENCE

When this task is undertaken it will become clear that the Christian story – especially as described in the hymnic/ritual material of the Apocalypse – does afford a route beyond the impasse; an exit from the labyrinth of postmodern despair; an environment in which an ecology of hope can

flourish. The Christian story does so precisely by virtue of its own peculiar "wager of transcendence". This is the only book in the New Testament which is detailed and specific concerning the winding up of the present age, although hints may be found elsewhere. This fact is clearly of immense importance in determining the relevance of the Christian faith for the present. No concept is satisfactory which excludes the future. There must be some notion about the winding up of history. The suggestion that the Christian faith can turn the present world into a coming Utopia which will continue for ever is not supported by this book. In fact, the approach of Revelation to the present order is essentially pessimistic – all it is fit for is to pass away. Heaven and earth must give way to a new heaven and earth. The existing Jerusalem must give way to a New Jerusalem. Everything must become new (Rv 21:5). Such an uncompromising message sounds a death knell for a purely social gospel, although to recognise this is not to deny the social importance of the gospel in the present age.

The message of Revelation is something far more important than any delineation of the sequence of events that lead to the end (Jones & Sumney 1999:109). It is the message that, whatever those events are, we can be certain that God will be victorious, and that we can be with God if we remain faithful. The point here is that the tragic dimensions of human life cannot, and will not, be resolved within the boundaries of either history or nature. The replacement of the existing order with one which is new and superior cannot be accomplished without a resolution of the present combat situation. If this story is to have a comic rather than a tragic ending, Christian faith recognises that it will only be through the contrivance of the God of the resurrection – the God who is able to bring life out of death and being out of non-being – that all is resolved well and everything finally works together for good (Bauckham and Hart 1999:68). This book, with its strange poetic language, shows the powerful forces of evil ultimately brought to nothing.

There is never any doubt about the outcome – the Lamb is in control throughout. The supreme message of this book is one of hope and encouragement.

2.1 THE RESURRECTION AS PARADIGM

This Christian faith is evoked and sustained/nurtured by a rich stock of images and through an appeal to hope beyond the limits of the historical and the natural, in terms of which it becomes possible to imagine the unimaginable (Bauckham & Hart 1999:69). In this respect the resurrection of Jesus is the paradigm case for Christian hope, and its essential dynamic is mirrored in many other scriptural accounts and features of Christian experience – especially those of the Book of Revelation.

It should be made clear that the primary horizon of this hope is in the future, for the new creation has not yet occurred. But this does not render Christian hope empty of present significance. Genuine hope has the capacity to transfigure our perception and experience of the present, thus transforming our ways of being in the world. It is a vital part of a Christian perspective on this world to identify within it scattered acts of re-creative anticipation of God's promised future (Bauckham & Hart 1999:70). The same Spirit who raised Jesus from death calls into being life, health, faith, and hope where there is otherwise no capacity for these and no accounting for them. In such happenings the power of the future-made-present is manifest, and the lustre of the new creation shines provocatively from behind the heavy clouds of history.

2.2 RESURRECTION, RITUAL, AND REVELATION

If the crucifixion-resurrection of Jesus is to be the paradigm for the Christian's eschatological expectation, then in some sense we must suppose ourselves as people of hope to be located on Easter Sunday (Bauckham &

Hart 1999:71). This day is bounded on the one side by all the horror of history symbolically concluded in the events of Good Friday, and on the other by the open future of God who raises the dead to life on the dawn of Easter Sunday. One way of assisting, ritually/practically, with this constant positioning as faith community is by looking at the Apocalypse – specifically regarding the resurrection – from a liturgical functional point of view.

The liturgical act/rite of beginning a ritual event, or bringing it to an end, is not insignificant (Davies 2002:142); with the liturgical act/rite then being the process that consummates that event of intensified embodiment. The use of words and action to begin an event or bring it to its conclusion is an end in itself. It is not explained; no rational reflection is given. These rites are simply practised. Yet, as will be more fully discussed in the next chapter, when rituals begin and end participants view themselves as having gained a benefit – most importantly on a sub-conscious level – which then effects change on a conscious level.

3 STUDYING REVELATION

3.1 THE MODERN SCHOLARLY OPINION

In the twentieth century, Biblical scholars turned to methods practiced in other fields of research and used them to interpret both the Old and the New Testaments (Wainwright 1993:150). The social sciences of psychology, sociology, and anthropology spread across the Biblical academic world. Along with students of other disciplines, Biblical scholars looked to these sciences for help; and, at the same time, scholars in those fields devoted attention to the Bible.

With its visions and strange images, the Apocalypse is an attractive subject for psychologists. Jung (1954:121, 129-132, 142, 154) examined it in terms of his own theory of a collective unconscious. Yarbro Collins offers

another psychological explanation of the Apocalypse. She argues that it can be understood as "part of the process of containing aggressive feelings" (Yarbro Collins 1984a:156). Early Christians desired vengeance against the Romans, and even felt hostile to Christians with whom they disagreed. The Apocalypse deals with these feelings by transferring the aggression to another subject – Christ becomes the aggressor on the Christians' behalf, and makes war on the heretics (Rv 2:16; 22-23). Another way in which the book restrains aggression is by internalising it and making demands of abstinence in relation to money and sex (Yarbro Collins 1984a:156-157). Yarbro Collins (1984a:152-153) compares the psychological effect of the Apocalypse with those of Greek tragedy – both have the power of effecting *catharsis* (purging). In Aristotle's opinion, tragedy purges the emotions of fear and pity and, according to Yarbro Collins, the Apocalypse has a similar effect on the emotions of fear and resentment. It does not totally eliminate these emotions, but removes their "painful or disquieting elements". Barr (1986:49-50), however, understands *catharsis* not primarily in terms of emotional relief, but in terms of giving people a new understanding of the world, in which they see themselves as "actors in charge of their own destiny".

Attempts have been made to look at the Apocalypse in the light of sociology and social history as well as psychology. Sociologists and social historians often concentrate on apocalyptic thought in general, rather than on the Apocalypse itself (see e.g. Cohn 1970:281-286; Barkun 1974:89-90; and Hanson 1979:432-444). Other writers have given a sociological account of the Apocalypse itself, arguing that it was the product of a situation in which there were acute tensions between the rich and the poor, or between the strong and the weak (see e.g. Yarbro Collins 1983:746; 1984:132-134; and Schüssler Fiorenza 1998:24). Thompson (1990:191-197) considers the Apocalypse from the viewpoint of the sociology of knowledge, and stresses

the diversity of people whom it attracts – its appeal is not confined to the persecuted and the oppressed, but extends to people who are discontented with the existing order of society.

Closely linked with sociology is the discipline of anthropology. One of its best-known representatives – Claude Lévi-Strauss – argues that myth is a means of overcoming contradictions. Gager (1975:49-57) has applied his theory to the Apocalypse, claiming that the Apocalypse functions in the same way as myth. It is a book produced by an oppressed community that seemed to have no hope of justice under the regime of Rome. The goal of the Apocalypse is to "transcend the time between a real present and a mythical future". It performs this function by the use of symbols that overcome the contradiction between the hope of life in God's kingdom, and the present reality of persecution. The apocalypse, in Gager's opinion, contains two kinds of symbols: The first kind are symbols of victory and hope (the throne, the Lamb, the elders, the book of life, the new heaven and earth, and the New Jerusalem). The second are symbols of oppression and despair (the beasts, the plagues, Babylon, and Satan). The Apocalypse makes a contrast between these two groups of symbols, and its message is a form of therapy – by giving people an experience of a blissful future, it fortifies them to endure persecution in the present.

This diversity of interpretations is even more remarkable than the diversity of its interpreters. For twenty centuries, men and women have attempted to probe the book's mystery. They have emerged with a bewildering assortment of answers. So numerous and conflicting are its interpretations that many people despair of making sense of it. A tempting solution to the problem would be to seize on one particular account and dismiss all others as worthless. Such a procedure fails to do justice to the seriousness of interpreters. It also neglects the essential character of the book, which is written in such a way as to be capable of a variety of

meanings. Their disagreement does not mean that they have squandered their energies and labour. No, their very failure to achieve unanimity is instructive. The divided voice of scholarship testifies to the book's ambiguity, and is evidence that the Apocalypse resists attempts to find agreed answers to the questions that are asked.

3.2 REVELATION AS APOCALYPSE

In the descriptions and discussions that follow the focus is on the genre of apocalypse, on apocalyptic literature in its broadest definition (Aune 2011:237-258; Yarbro Collins 1979:61-121), except where mention is made of specific texts or type of apocalypse. Thus, unless stated otherwise, when using "apocalypse", "apocalyptic writers", "apocalyptic literature", "apocalyptic thought" and "apocalypticist" is meant to be understood as general terms.

3.2.1 Some of the characteristics of the apocalyptic genre

Apocalyptic literature seeks to create a sense of crisis among its readers; for, being a people of faith means daring to be identifiably different, which often results at least in opposition and often in persecution and oppression (Jones & Sumney 1999:26). Allowing cultural norms to shape or to prevail in the community of faith would mean ignoring the gospel and losing the identity of the church. This feeling of oppression, of being held back and kept unfulfilled, draws the group together for mutual support and consolation. It also motivates the members to accept the radical claim laid upon them by the God of apocalyptic thought (Jones & Sumney 1999:26). The community of faith could interpret this danger and oppression as a sign of God's disfavour. Yet, while apocalyptic thought makes ample room for God's judgement, the troubles that beset the community of faith do not result from that (Jones & Sumney 1999:27). Rather, in the midst of its distress, the

community remains beloved by God. Even when evil runs rampant in the surrounding society and the influences of that society bear down on the faith community, God keeps a watchful and caring eye on them (see e.g. the "Isaiah Apocalypse" in Is 24:1-27:13; Dn 3; Mt 24:22; and Rv 8-11). Without doubt, the community lives in hard times, but they are not bereft of the presence and care of God. This assurance of the presence and care of God flows from the conviction that there is more to life than meets the eye – that "this is not all there is", that there is power, goodness, and justice beyond and above that seen and experienced in the world. This belief reflects not a naïve and romanticised notion that everything will work out for the best in the end, but an unshakable certainty that nothing can rival the ultimate sovereignty of God, whose plans and intentions transcend the limits of human experience and even human imagination (Jones & Sumney 1999:29).

In apocalyptic thought, when the bastions of goodness seem to have crumbled beyond recognition or repair, God remains sovereign and thus "a cosmic renewal occurs, or a golden age arrives, or the earth is transformed into a paradise" (Cook 1995:28). Neither the worst that bad people can do, nor the best that good people can do limits what can happen; only God has that power and potential (Jones & Sumney 1999:31). This conviction that God can and will unveil power, goodness, and justice as yet unseen must find some way from the heart and soul to the hands and feet. No one can truly embrace that conviction and do nothing – if it is felt, it must be lived (Jones & Sumney 1999:32). What we believe about God should influence, form, and shape what we do and think. In fact, it has been said that "it is existentially impossible to believe in God's coming triumph and to claim [God's] Holy Spirit without a lifestyle that conforms to that faith" (Beker 1982:110). It is on precisely this type of assumption that the author of the Book of Revelation has chosen to reveal to his audience the bigger/cosmic picture behind their everyday experiences – through an embodied experience

of the true magnitude of God's actions and plans, the author wishes to encourage and strengthen the Christian communities of his day to stand fast against all possible opposition.

3.2.2 Apocalypse and ethics

Only very few scholars of the apocalyptic genre have argued that apocalyptic literature has no concern for ethics, because it has separated the kingdom of God from earthly realities (Jones & Sumney 1999:21). As this view has it apocalyptic, rather than being socially responsible, becomes preoccupied with the damnation of the oppressor or with blessings in another realm. Though this is a common perception about apocalyptic thought among non-specialists, most scholars reject this interpretation, and many assert that ethics is central to apocalyptic (Jones & Sumney 1999:21). The expectation of judgement found in all apocalyptic implies that ethics is central even when it is not explicitly discussed.

One of the primary reasons authors wrote apocalyptic texts was to encourage faithfulness to God and loyalty to the Law of God, even if it leads to death. All apocalypses are hortatory – discourses that encourage ethical living and that specify what that means are common in apocalyptic texts (see e.g. Dn 1-6 and 2 Esd). Another indicator of the importance of ethics in this way of thinking is the way life in the messianic future is described – it is in accordance with God's Law and an expression of God's covenant with them, and thus were a blessing. Given the emphasis on judgement found in apocalyptic thought, it is not surprising that individual accountability is important (Jones & Sumney 1999:22).

Some interpreters argue that the apocalyptic outlook leads to a "passive ethic" – an ethic which encourages people simply to submit to persecution. Though some apocalyptic works – e.g. *The Assumption of Moses* – do recommend "quietism", this seems to be against the general trend.

- The War Scroll (1QM) offers us a specific example of this way of think-ing, as its author expects the community to be active participants in the end time battle.
- The Damascus Scroll (CD) has a clear concern for social justice (espe-cially chapter 1).
- *Enoch* also encourages social justice through its attention to issues in-volving money, the courts, and the poor.

So apocalyptic does not entirely abandon the world to evil. The people of God are expected to act justly and to work for a more just world, even though the forces against them are overwhelming (Jones & Sumney 1999:22). Most apocalyptic writings are seeking ways to make sense of their belief in a good, powerful, and just God given their experience of the world as a place ruled by evil. They do this mainly by asserting that God will act soon in ways that decisively vindicate God's nature as they understand it. At the same time, they also want to encourage their readers to remain faithful to God in very difficult circumstances (Jones & Sumney 1999:23).

This reflects the heart of apocalyptic thought/belief (Käsemann 1969:108-111): Belief that God shows no partiality calls for our impartiality. Belief that the power of God finds its fullest expression in love calls for fewer acts of domination and many more acts of compassion. Belief that God hears the cries of the oppressed and promises release calls for our acts of justice and liberation. Belief that God sends the gospel because of our need and not because of our merit calls for nothing less than a reordering of human relationships. We must take care not to confuse this clarion call to respond to God with having the responsibility of completing God's work (Jones & Sumney 1999:33). God will accomplish what God sets out to accomplish. Although God may bless humanity with an understanding of the divine will and purposes, fidelity to God means attempting to participate in what God is doing, not doing God's work in God's stead. In Revelation, for example,

neither the seer nor the faith community creates the new heaven and earth envisioned in chapter 21. However, God holds both the seer and the community accountable for preparation in that new heaven and earth. At any given point in time the faithful can and will lack the ability to thwart injustice, oppression, and hatred. We can, however, believe in, be shaped by, and work for God's vision of justice, liberation, and love. Being people of faith means being accountable to that vision, accepting it as valid and true, and making it the yardstick by which we measure our attitudes and actions (Keck 1996:1-13).

We must take care to avoid literalism at this point – apocalyptic thought does not compel us to believe that God moves history toward some single, ultimate, once-and-for-all, catastrophic, and cataclysmic denouement (Jones & Sumney 1999:34). Whether or not "The End" is near, there remains an ultimate reality, an end, to which apocalyptic thought holds us accountable. In the context of this discussion, asking the right questions means holding ourselves accountable to God's will and purposes as we understand them, measuring ourselves not by societal standards of success but by fidelity to the God revealed to us (see e.g. Mk 13:37; Rv 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22).

This brings us to the theological centre of Christian apocalyptic thought – the life and ministry of Jesus the crucified, resurrected, and enthroned Christ (Jones & Sumney 1999:34). We see this clearly in the vision of the throne room narrated in Revelation 5. In this vision, a heavenly elder assures the seer that only "the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David" (ὁ λέων ὁ ἐκ τῆς φυλῆς Ἰούδα, ἡ ῥίζα Δαυίδ Rv 5:5) can open the scroll in the hand of God. Then the seer beholds in the throne room "a Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered" (ἀρνίον ἑστηκὸς ὡς ἐσφαγμένον Rv 5:5). When this Lamb takes the scroll form the hand of God, the heavenly beings twice sing praises that describe the Lamb as worthy because it was slaughtered (Ἄξιος εἶ in Rv

5:9, and Ἄξιόν ἐστιν τὸ ἀρνίον in Rv 5:12). The Lamb was slain and crucified, but the fact that the Lamb now stands in heaven makes it obvious that he was resurrected as well, and the rest of the book makes it equally clear that God entrusts the control of history to this Lamb (e.g. ὅτι τὸ ἀρνίον τὸ ἀνὰ μέσον τοῦ θρόνου ποιμανεῖ αὐτούς Rv 7:17; and τοῦ θρόνου τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἀρνίου Rv 22:1 and 3). The Jesus of Revelation is crucified, resurrected, and enthroned. The Jesus of Christian apocalyptic thought is crucified because crucifixion indicates that evil is as powerful as it is pervasive. Christian apocalyptic thought thus forces us to see, even on the heavenly Lamb of God, the marks of slaughter – this reminds us of the cost and nature of our salvation. "Resurrection cannot be celebrated if no one is dead." (Craddock 1986:275).

Thus this genre within the Christian faith does not allow us to escape suffering – it clings to God by a thread called hope in the midst of, and despite, suffering. That thread expands and becomes a lifeline because this crucified Jesus is also resurrected. God, who is not limited to what we have yet seen and experienced, has an answer for the very worst humanity can do (Buttrick 1988:65). We dare to face oppression and rejection because the triumph of God revealed in Jesus shatters any defeat humans can muster. The enthroned Jesus completes the picture, for authority abides in the Lamb. The details of that glory may not be as clear to us as are those of the world around us, but that does not diminish our confidence that glory will come. Whereas we often attempt to reduce Jesus to a single, dominant characteristic (e.g. love) or a single purpose (e.g. salvation), apocalyptic thought considers him a symbol of the fullness and depth of the mystery of God (ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος, καὶ ὁ ζῶν — καὶ ἐγενόμην νεκρὸς καὶ ἰδοὺ ζῶν εἰμι εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων — καὶ ἔχω τὰς κλεῖς τοῦ θανάτου καὶ τοῦ ᾅδου Rv 1:17). When we call Jesus "Lord" (κύριος), we declare that he rules in our

lives and that his call to us and imperatives for us mean more than those of the would-be lords that beckon us, and that he demands and deserves our allegiance. We cannot accept the blessings of his ministry but reject his call to discipleship (Jones & Sumney 1999:37). Because he is Lord, he established the ends and purposes to which God holds us accountable.

3.2.3 Apocalypse as awakening

Apocalyptic literature regularly features startling and unsettling images for the sake of awakening/revealing. These startling images alert us to two certainties (Jones & Sumney 1999:38): The awesome powers of evil will fall before the even more impressive power of God; and the faithful play no part in this victory. Whether or not we like this symbolism, it challenges us to have confidence in the ability of God to defeat evil and to identify our task as remaining faithful in the face of evil. Apocalyptic literature risks making us uncomfortable by depicting a startlingly powerful God, who does for us what we cannot do for ourselves, a God who inspires both awestruck devotion and trembling obedience (cf. Yarbro Collins 1996:16; and Rowland 1998:506). The writers of apocalyptic literature insist that the conflict between the ways and rule of God and those that oppose God's ways and dominion has reached a level of intensity that God will not ignore, forcing a collision between the world that is and a world the writer imagines or anticipates (Jones & Sumney 1999:39). In some places, apocalyptic writing provides an exaggerated picture of a heinously wicked world, in other places it attempts to inspire and comfort the hearers with an idealistic picture of what the world will become. In both cases, the apocalyptic writer insists that the hearer make a decision as to where and in whom they will place their faith, challenging the faithful to look beyond the historical possibilities and decide to base their hopes and actions on the world of the vision. Although individuals must make this decision for themselves, apocalyptic thought focuses on the community more

than on the individual (Jones & Sumney 1999:40) – we hear the gospel, encounter resistance to the gospel, and struggle to remain faithful to the gospel in the context of life in community.

Christian apocalyptic literature aims to nurture the church, console the church, chastise the church, and hold the church accountable. It challenges the church as a whole to comfort and encourage the faithful to resist the ways and influence of the opponents of God, and to bear witness to the promises and presence of God that transcend historical circumstances. Although each of us as individuals stand accountable to God, we are neither faithful nor apostate alone. Similarly, the writer of apocalyptic literature views the evils faced by the faithful as systemic as well as personal – that is part of the reason for the emphasis on community. Apocalyptic thought calls individuals *and* communities to a decision, it places the emphasis on bearing witness to what God has revealed and not on proving the veracity of that witness.

3.2.4 The drama of apocalypse

The persuasive power behind apocalyptic literature lies not in an appeal to scriptural exegesis or rational deduction, but rather in the authority of the seer and the revelation received (Murphy 1996:3). The apocalyptic writer does not attempt to convince hearers that he/she is right as much as the writer seeks to include the hearer in the unfolding drama of what God is doing in the world. Since human beings can do nothing to hasten or delay the activity of God, the focus is on response. People can either prepare for and, as far as they are able, participate in God's revealed intent, or ignore the message revealed. Bluntly stated, people can have faith or refuse to have faith. The opening verses of Revelation illustrate this aspect of apocalyptic literature well (Rv 1:1-3) – the seer has the task of bearing witness and the hearers have the task of responding. As the visions of

Revelation unfold, the seer describes, envisions, reports, recounts, and narrates; and, in doing so, encourages, exhorts, warns, and advises; but does not prove. Apocalyptic literature thus challenges us to respond to that which lies beyond proof, to believe what we have yet to understand clearly, to play with an image until it holds us within its grasp and awakens us to unseen presence and possibility, to encounter a mystery so deep that it demands that we be more than we've ever been and gives us hope beyond any we've ever had (Brueggemann 1998:195-212). The message of the apocalyptic writer, like nearly every blessing of faith, is too important for proof – it must be accepted, welcomed, and lived.

In apocalyptic thought, evil cannot be ignored (Jones & Sumney 1999:42). The injury inflicted on God's creation and the oppression experienced by those faithful to God defy explanation or comprehension, yet the apocalyptic writer is consumed not with evil, but with God. Although the apocalyptic writer takes sin and its consequences seriously, he/she regularly breaks forth in praise of God because the writer lives with the absolute conviction that something indeed will be done – God will prevail. Such songs of praise frequently find their way into the narrative. No matter how heinous the events described, worship of God continuous. In the face of the worst that humanity does, and regardless of what humanity does, the worship of God continuous. When evil seems invulnerable and when evil lies in ruins, worship of God continuous. Apocalyptic thought always offers praise to God, for worship lies at the heart of who believers are (Jones & Sumney 1999:42-43).

Since we cannot defeat evil, we must depend on God. God deserves worship. Even at our best, we leave something to be desired and we need God. God deserves worship. Ultimately only God is, only God matters, only God lays legitimate claim on our lives, and only God deserves our allegiance and devotion. The apocalyptic writer will not let us forget that, regardless of

what is or will be, the faithful have reason to praise God. The apocalyptic preacher will offer that praise whether we do or not.

3.2.5 The nature of God in apocalypse

The topic of the nature of God is not a common one in apocalyptic writings, but some characteristics of God stand out as very important for this way of thinking (Jones & Sumney 1999:15-19).

3.2.5.1 Transcendence

All apocalyptic writers agree that God is personal, powerful, and holy. But there is a debate among scholars over whether apocalyptic thought reflects a view of God that sees God as increasingly transcendent, and so less immanent. Some see the rise of angelology as just such a sign of God no longer being accessible, for in some apocalyptic writings angels seem to be the link between God and the world, in others angels even appear as mediators between God and people who pray. There are still some writings – e.g. Daniel, 1 *Enoch*, 2 Esdras – where the characters have direct access to God in prayer, and God acts directly among humans. Furthermore, a developed angelology does not necessarily mean that God is thought to be distant – the War Scroll (1QM) has an extensively developed angelology, but it also has God "in our midst" in the final battle. What all of these apocalyptic writers do agree on is that God must be separated from the evil in the world, because God's holiness is inviolable. Thus, while God may be in direct contact with the world, God does not come into contact with the world, God does not come into contact with evil. What we find, then, is that apocalyptic works do not all agree on this matter, but those who think God is accessible only through intermediaries are a distinct minority.

3.2.5.2 Sovereignty

Belief in the sovereignty of God is essential for apocalyptic, as one of the main points of apocalyptic writings is to assure the readers that, in spite of evidence to the contrary, God is sovereign. We see this in the confidence these writers have that the plan of God is moving forward, and it is further demonstrated in the extensive *ex eventu* prophecy found in some apocalyptic writings. These elements of apocalyptic discourse, elements that are evidence for a historical determinism, show that these writers believe that history (at least in its main outline and final outcome) has been ordained and arranged by God. The certainty of God's victory is central to apocalyptic thought, found especially clearly in Daniel 4:17, 25-26, 34; and 7-12. This point is important in apocalyptic writings because the writers and readers seem to be living in a world that is ruled by evil and in which God is not sovereign. In fact, most apocalyptic thinkers are convinced that the world is not currently ruled by God. Yet this current domination of the world by evil is temporary – even though the world is presently ruled by the forces of evil, the true sovereign of the entire cosmos will soon act. The God who is the ultimate King will reclaim what rightfully belongs to God and will punish the usurpers and reward those who have been faithful to God. Without such a belief in the sovereignty of God, apocalyptic – indeed, all Christian faith – cannot exist.

3.2.5.3 Justice

Apocalypticists also believe that God is just. Belief in the justice of God is another primary motivation for apocalyptic thought; for the fact that the world is ruled by evil and that the righteous are those who suffer most are problems only if one believes God is just. So apocalyptic seeks ways to show that God's justice will be exercised and will be the final word – an idea manifested in the development of the ideas of judgement after death and of

the resurrection. Judgement is a central characteristic of apocalyptic thought, and at the heart of all apocalyptic speculation about judgement is the conviction that God will not let God's people be destroyed by their enemies. Thus judgement is necessarily related to their belief in the justice of God because, for justice to reign, evil must be punished and good must be rewarded (see e.g. 1 *En*. 102:1; 103:1-104:8). So, in the face of persecution, the ethical faiths of Judaism and Christianity opted for the belief that God's righteousness is exercised in a realm beyond this earthly life; with judgement being based on morality. In Judaism this meant faithfulness to the Law. In Christianity it meant adhering to Christian morality as understood in a particular community, and not denying that faith in persecution. It was exactly this belief in the justice of God that led to the belief in the resurrection of the dead within Judaism. But it was the events associated with the Maccabean revolt that finally resulted in a fairly widespread belief in the resurrection of at least some of the dead; for such terrible events (e.g. 4 *Maccabees* 7), of course, push the question of the justice of God to the forefront. So belief in a resurrection that included judgement grew out of the injustices experienced by communities that held firmly to their belief in a sovereign and just God. One would think that judgement based on morality requires that apocalypticists be legalists, but that is far from the case. Only a few apocalyptic writings (e.g. 3 *Bar*.) assert that judgement is based solely on one's desserts. Most acknowledge that people are found righteous in judgement only through God's grace and mercy as being necessarily cooperative but equally necessary (see e.g. 1QM 11; and 2 Esd). Thus, when apocalypticists think of judgement, fear is not their first thought. They certainly do not lose sight of the accountability judgement brings to them, but they trust God to fulfil his purposes and nature by bringing them into the place God has prepared for God's people. The idea of God being just in judgement makes modern people nervous. We

are more ready to focus our attention on God's love and mercy, thinking that these are the opposite of justice. But the alternative to God's being just is that God is unfair – that God plays favourites or is capricious. This unhappy alternative would mean we could never trust God. Furthermore, the justice of God is the basis for all Christian calls for justice in the world. Since Christian ethics is based on the character of God, we have no basis for working for justice unless we believe in the unshakable justice of God. So apocalyptic brings us back to a characteristic of God with which we are less than comfortable, but which is essential to who God is and to what makes God a God we can trust and a God who is worthy of worship.

3.3 REVELATION AND LITURGY/WORSHIP

The Apocalypse's hymns and descriptions of heaven are evidence of its author's interest in worship, and scholars have speculated about the book's relationship to liturgy (Wainwright 1993:147). These speculations are of interest for the investigation of the situation in which the book was written. But they also have a bearing on the question of genre. Dupuis (1984: 20-22, 63-66, 71-78, 255, 409-426), for example, argued that it was an initiation document for a Phrygian cult of sun worship. Biblical scholars have paid little attention to Dupuis' theory, but twentieth-century theosophists have claimed that the Apocalypse represented a rite of initiation into secret knowledge (see e.g. Pryse 1910:1, 9, 33-35, 48-50, 62, 66-67, 70-73; and Steiner 1958:34, 38).

Indeed, interest in the book's relationship to worship revived in the twentieth century, although there was division of opinion about the nature of that relationship. Many scholars claimed that the book was influenced by liturgical practices, though they hesitated to say that it was as a religious rite. Touilleux (1935:184) argued that it attempted to deter Christians from accepting the Phrygian cult of Cybele and Attis. Instead of the ram of the

Cybele cult, it depicts Christ as the triumphant Lamb, and instead of the mother-goddess Cybele, it presents the church as both mother and bride (Rv 12:1-2; 19:7-8). In place of the initiation rite, it concentrates on the participation of Christians in the blood of the Lamb and their marriage to the Lamb, and it replaces the great processions of the Cybele cult with visions of the celestial liturgy before God's throne. In a vastly different theory from Touilleux's, Stauffer (1955:166-191) argued that the outline of the Apocalypse reflected the ritual of the imperial games of Ephesus. It is a protest against enforcement of the imperial cult, portraying a festival of messianic games in contrast to the imperial games. It's opening chapter presents the Son of Man as both emperor and high priest, and the letters to the seven churches replace the decrees with which the games begin. The four horses reflect the four teams that competed in the chariot races, and the visions of disaster recall the fights in which gladiators took part. An obvious weakness of Stauffer's theory is that the Apocalypse offers no clear clue to the analogy with games. In the Pauline Epistles, metaphors connect the life of discipleship with wrestling, boxing, and racing, but no such images appear in the Apocalypse (Wainwright 1993:148).

Dupuis, Touilleux, and Stauffer explained the Apocalypse by relating it to pagan rituals. Farrer (1949:94-95, 177-184), however, stressed its debt to Jewish worship. The Apocalypse, he said, follows the pattern of the Jewish liturgical year. Its visions recall particular festivals. The seven lampstands symbolise the Feast of Dedication, the Lamb is a symbol of the Passover, and the trumpets suggest a New Year Festival. The lampstands, the elders, the sacrificial lamb, and the offering of incense are all features of temple or synagogue worship (Rv 1:12; 4:4; 5:6; 8:3). Though Farrer's explanation aroused lively discussion, it won little support. And, in a later book, Farrer (1964) ceased to uphold it in any detail. Another suggestion is that the Christians, at an early date, adapted a synagogue liturgy for use in Christian

worship. It has been proposed that Revelation 4 and 5 can be reconstructed in the form of a liturgy as follows (Mowry 1952:75-84): Invitation, *Trisagion*, praise to God as Creator, prostration by the congregation, reading of Scripture, prayer with praise to Christ as the slain Lamb, ending with the doxology and choral "Amen". This is suggestive, but involves treating the elders as representatives of the congregation. Nevertheless, it is possible to see a symbolic pattern of acceptable worship in the heavenly scene without supposing that it was derived from synagogue sources.

Another writer, Macdonald (1934:112ff.), distinguishes between some of the hymns as being Christian (Rv 5:9-14; 12:10-12; 19:1ff.; and 19:5-8) and some as derived from the Greek-speaking synagogue (Rv 4:11; 7:12; 11:15-18; and 15:3ff). A modification of the same view is advocated by Martin (1964:45). It has, however, been strongly argued that the linguistic evidence on which these theories are based is insufficient to establish dependence on Hellenistic sources (Deichgräber 1967:52; cf. also Cullmann 1953:21; and Dibelius 1936:247).

While these scholars connect the liturgical emphasis of the Apocalypse with paganism or Judaism, others argue for its dependence on Christian patterns of worship. One theory is that such traces of earlier material can be detected from a study of the doxologies, the acclamations of worthiness, the *Trisagion* in Revelation 4:8, and examples of hymnic material which is not in agreement with its context (O'Rourke 1968:399-409). But O'Rourke's contentions have been challenged on the grounds that the parallels he brings forward are inconclusive. Various other theories have supposed that the hymnic material in this book goes back to an existing liturgical sequence. These theories have taken different forms. Shepherd (1960:77-97) claims that it follows the order of the paschal liturgy, reaching its climax in the Eucharist, which is reflected in the allusion to the marriage of the Lamb. Some appeal to Eucharistic practice, seeing in the hymns the influence either

of Johannine Passover Eucharistic usage (Prigent 1964:39-79; Stanley 1958:182-183), or of a liturgy localised in Asia Minor (Läuchli 1960:359-378). The former theory rests on an appeal to 1 *Clement* and the *Didache*, but it is strongly disputed whether this evidence has anything to do with the liturgy (Van Unnik 1951:204-208). The latter theory is somewhat speculative and appeals to mid-second century practice, which is not convincing. Goulder (1981:342-367) suggests that the book was constructed according to the pattern of readings appointed in the Christian lectionary. His theory, admittedly speculative, assumes that during their weekly Saturday evening worship the churches used readings from the Old Testament in a sequence beginning with Easter, which Goulder identifies with "the Lord's day" (Rv 1:10). John, according to this theory, experienced his visions during these services and, after seeing them repeatedly for several years, he recorded them in the Apocalypse. Equally unproven is the view that the details of worship in Revelation are connected with the Sunday Eucharist pattern described by Justin Martyr (Cabaniss 1953:78-80).

Although theories about liturgy are largely conjectural, the visions of heavenly worship, and the inclusion of hymns in the text, suggests a liturgical setting, and the book was probably meant to be read aloud at worship (Wainwright 1993:149; Barr 1984:45, 1986:243-256). But it cannot be proved that the Apocalypse was related to the paschal liturgy, planned for lectionary use, based on the Jewish calendar, or designed in opposition to pagan cults. Neither can it be proved that it was planned as an initiation rite. There may be some truth behind these theories, but there is no clear evidence to support them. They are matters for speculation. It may be questioned to what extent the hymns reflect fragments of existing worship or are to be regarded as in some sense patterns for such worship. Yet, even if we should conclude that the hymns must be regarded as heavenly liturgies having no connection with the historical procedures of the contemporary

church, we may still find some relevance in these hymns as indications of worship patterns worth following.

3.4 THE APOCALYPSE: AN "OPEN BOOK"

The writer of the Apocalypse clearly had an intention, which was to effect change in the audience and readers – to strengthen their faith and to keep them loyal in times of persecution. Yet the visions are sufficiently ambiguous to leave themselves open for further interpretation. John may have understood them to refer both to specific events that he expected to happen in his own time, and to events of a less definite nature in an undetermined future. Because of this open-ended quality, his visions are capable of many interpretations. It is this openness of the book that makes it relevant for every generation. Underlying the book's lack of clarity is a challenge. Since there are many possible fulfilments of the various prophecies, the Apocalypse invites us to consider which individuals or institutions function as the Beast for us and claim from us the devotion and allegiance that is, fittingly, only given to God. This consideration is meant to be understood and used for self-examination, not in a purely polemical way, for that would be destructive.

The possibility of more than one meaning challenges us to consider whether an ideal state of affairs can be realised now, or must await us in the future. If it is even in a small measure present now, it is evidence of God's grace in action. If it can be a reality in the future, the promise is nurture for hope. In the setting of worship, the mysteriousness of the Apocalypse is entirely appropriate. The book evokes a sense of the transcendence of God. The strangeness of its symbols conveys the notion of a realm that is beyond human understanding. In poetical power, it exceeds all other New Testament writings. For centuries its pictures of heaven have provided material for praise and adoration. This is because the Apocalypse affirms God's sovereignty and the ultimate fulfilment of God's purpose. In this way it offers

strong support to individuals in maintaining their faith. It is a book for the Christian, the church, and the world. To those who share its faith, though they may not hold it in precisely the same form as its author, it gives assurance of the victory of God and the triumph of the Lamb.

In making use of the social sciences, scholars have endeavoured to show how the Apocalypse and apocalyptic ideas bring about change in people during times of tension. They have not made a judgement on the accuracy of the book's prophecies or the correctness of its theological beliefs. Instead, they have shown its effectiveness in helping men and women deal with crisis. It does not follow, however, that the psychological, sociological, or anthropological interpretations are the only correct ones. The Apocalypse can be effective in ways described by the social sciences, while at the same time having theological significance. The two approaches do not necessarily exclude each other. In fact, the exposition of the theological relevance of the Apocalypse can provide an important additional dimension when interpreting the text.

3.5 RETURNING TO THE FIRST CENTURY

In antiquity, all religious life was fundamentally determined by ritually ordered cultic worship, which was thus a central element in the formation of every symbolic universe and the meaning of life itself (Schnelle 2009:751). It is important to see the Book of Revelation in this particular historical context of the believing community which created it, because Christianity and its documents and doctrines relate to specific moments of history (Court 2000:7). According to Ettiene Charpentier (1982:105) "the Book of Revelation, the Apocalypse, is a book of fire and blood in the image of our world". This view suggests a sense of realism and of urgent relevance, just as people have found that experience of wartime or of catastrophe sends them back to these words of prophecy. In such circumstances the most

important question is how one should read the book. There are three main things to consider (Court 1994:23):

- We must be aware of the situation in which the book came into being – in a small Christian group, politically vulnerable and persecuted for its faith.
- It must be read imaginatively in a way that is responsive to the writer's images and use of symbolism – this means enjoying the sound of the words themselves and relating the verbal pictures to the reader's memory.
- Perhaps, most importantly, we must recognise the author's theological priorities – the relationships of this world to the world to come, of the church to the crucified and risen Lord, and of the Son to the Father who is the world's creator.

All these are vital connections in the structure of the Apocalypse. But it is also important to see the book as a visionary interpretation of the church and its future. Here we need to give full weight to the ideas and images contained in its visions. The complementarity of different approaches – historical, literary, and psychological – is vital for a modern understanding (Court 1994:18-21). We do not need to take Revelation literally, but we should take it seriously, for it shows a relationship between pain, martyrdom, and Christian belief. And it clearly depicts a continuity between past, present, and future for the church and the individual believer, from which the disillusioned churches of today can learn (Court 2000:7). The Book of Revelation focuses on exhortation, which stresses the importance of standing firm in faith and love, and enduring tribulation (Court 2000:10). This exhortation is reinforced by eschatological threats and promises. The Christian Apocalypse consoles those who glimpse what hell can be, and encourages those who would build a New Jerusalem (Court 1994:11). On this basis, the Revelation of John develops an impressive sacral architecture

– by presenting a heavenly reality within the framework of an apocalyptic vision of history, it provides a new interpretation for earthly events and experiences. The author develops a theology in visionary pictures of the cultic reality in heaven and on earth, aiming to strengthen the threatened identity of his churches, and to orient it by this new symbolic universe. At the same time, this cultic thought world grants participation in the event itself (Scnelle 2009:751).

It has often been argued that the hymnic material in this book was composed by the author himself, in which case the question of the liturgy remains open. The accounts of heavenly worship may have been suggested by forms of worship currently in use, but the evidence does not require this (Guthrie 1987:88). The problem arises as to why the writer should have transferred the worship to a heavenly scene if the suggestions have come from an earthly counterpart. It is profitable to enquire what function the heavenly worship scenes serve in the purpose of the whole book before we conclude that the passages have been influenced by contemporary worship. If the passages concerned are a vital key to the appreciation of the Apocalypse as a whole, which seems undeniable (Guthrie 1987:88), we should not wrest them from their context without taking into account their essentially eschatological purpose. The liturgical passages are not an end in themselves, but lead up to the great crescendo in Revelation 21 and 22.

Worship must certainly be based on a high view of God. In Revelation he is presented as so exalted that he can be alluded to as the one on the throne without even being named (ἐπὶ τὸν θρόνον καθήμενος Rv 4:2; τῷ καθημένῳ ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ Rv 7:10). He is adored as holy and almighty (Ἅγιος ἅγιος ἅγιος κύριος, ὁ θεός, ὁ παντοκράτωρ Rv 4:8; ὅτι μόνος ὅσιος; ὅτι πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ἥξουσιν καὶ προσκυνήσουσιν ἐνώπιόν σου Rv 15:4). He is seen as Creator, and thus perceived as glorious and powerful in his creation (Ἄξιος εἶ, ὁ κύριος καὶ ὁ θεὸς

ἡμῶν, λαβεῖν τὴν δόξαν καὶ τὴν τιμὴν καὶ τὴν δύναμιν Rv 4:11). He is associated with the Lamb as the worthiest object of worship (Τῷ καθημένῳ ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ καὶ τῷ ἀρνίῳ Rv 5:13; ὁ γὰρ κύριος, ὁ θεός, ὁ παντοκράτωρ, ναὸς αὐτῆς ἐστιν, καὶ τὸ ἀρνίον Rv 21:22). In his presence the four living creatures and the elders fall down in dignified adoration. His power is unquestioned, and his reign has begun (Εὐχαριστοῦμέν σοι, κύριε, ὁ θεός, ὁ παντοκράτωρ, ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν, ὅτι εἴληφας τὴν δύναμίν σου τὴν μεγάλην καὶ ἐβασίλευσας Rv 11:17). His ways are just and true (Μεγάλα καὶ θαυμαστὰ τὰ ἔργα σου, κύριε, ὁ θεός, ὁ παντοκράτωρ· δίκαιαι καὶ ἀληθιναὶ αἱ ὁδοί σου, ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν αἰώνων Rv 15:3-4; ὅτι ἀληθιναὶ καὶ δίκαιαι αἱ κρίσεις αὐτοῦ Rv 19:2). Through his Son, God is the redeemer of mankind (ὅτι ἐσφάγης καὶ ἠγόρασας τῷ θεῷ ἐν τῷ αἵματί σου Rv 5:9).

It is significant that these worship passages are completely devoid of introspection on the part of the worshippers. Exclusive attention is given to the character and acts of God, which so dominate the scene that worship is spontaneous. The relevance of this fact for modern worship is not far to seek (Guthrie 1987:89) – spontaneity in worship is one of the outstanding features of modern progressive Christianity. In a remarkable way the body of Christ is learning to pour out praise to the One who is worthy to receive it. This is a healthier approach than to spend time bemoaning the weakness and impotence of the church. The God who is worshipped in Revelation is a glorious God whose strength and power are seen when he acts on behalf of his people.

4 A LITURGICAL FUNCTIONAL READING OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

In the following section, I will now turn my attention to specific texts in the Apocalypse that serve as examples of the efficacy and impact of my proposed liturgical/functional reading of the text. Making use of the proposed liturgical/functional method (detailed in Chapter 2) practically implies reading the text as a performance being participated in, focusing on the affective responses this performance intends to have on those bodily participating in it. The analysis of each of these sample texts – in line with the liturgical/functional method as defined in Chapter 2 – aims to answer the question "What does this text *do*?"

In answering this question, it is important to keep in mind that a biblical symbol is a collectivity, i.e. referring to several ideas at once (Chilton 1987:33). Biblical symbolism, like poetry, is evocative language, used when discursive, specific language is insufficient. The Bible uses evocative imagery to call up to our minds various associations which have been established by the Bible's own literary art. Farrer (1949:19f.) pointed out a distinction we must always keep in mind – the difference between *sense* and *referent*. While the *sense* of a symbol remains the same, it can have numerous *referents*.

> St. John's images do not mean anything you like; their sense can
> be determined. But they still have an astonishing multiplicity of
> reference. Otherwise, why write in images rather than in cold
> factual prose? It has been said that the purpose of scientific
> statement is the elimination of ambiguity, and the purpose of
> symbol the inclusion of it. We write in symbol when we wish our
> words to present, rather than analyse or prove, their subject matter
> (not every subject-matter; some can be more directly presented

without symbol). Symbol endeavours, as it were, *to be that of which it speaks*, and imitates reality by the multiplicity of its significance. Exact statement isolates a single aspect of fact: a theologian, for example, endeavours to isolate the relation in which the atoning death of Christ stands to the idea of forensic justice. But we who believe that the atoning death took place, must see in it a fact related to everything human or divine, with as many significance as there are things to which it can be variously related. The mere physical appearance of that death, to one who stood by then, would by no means express what the Christian thinks it, in itself, to be; it took many years for the cross to gather round itself the force of a symbol in its own right. St. John writes "a Lamb standing as slaughtered", and significance of indefinite scope and variety awake in the scripture reading mind. There is a current and exceedingly stupid doctrine that symbol evokes emotion, and exact prose states reality. Nothing could be further from the truth: exact prose abstracts from reality, symbol presents it. And for that very reason, symbols have some of the many-sidedness of wild nature.

As Barrington (1931:84f.) says:

Many people "interpret" the Revelation…as if each detail of each vision had a

definable meaning which could be explained in so many words. These commentators are rationalizers, deficient in the mystical sense. Symbolism is a way of suggesting the truth about those great spiritual realities which exclude exact definition or complete systematization; that is why it is so much employed in worship…The symbol is much richer in meaning than any

meaning we can draw from it. The same is true of the parables and symbolic teaching of Jesus. The same is true of the sacraments and

symbolic acts of the church, or even of society. Many logical systems can be made up to explain the "meaning" of shaking hands or making the sign of the cross; but because of their simplicity and universality these actions mean more than words can explain. Performed traditional texts resonate with the hearers by referencing the cultural tradition and evoking meaning that is inherent. The evocation is often metonymic, as a part evokes a whole cultural pattern or complex memory (Horsley 2011:147). Certain special texts in performance (e.g. the Book of Revelation, according to this thesis) do not simply evoke meaning but do work on or among the group of hearers in the context – evoking renewed religious-ethical commitment, renewing group identity, or inspiring and giving expression to collective mourning and religious devotion. This happens through especially "affective" referencing of traditional memories, patterns, and expressive forms. The goal of the method of interpretation proposed by this thesis is thus to discern, appreciate, and understand not the meaning of the text in itself, but the work done among the community of hearers by the text in performance.

4.1 REVELATION 1

Many are the faces of Christ in Christian art through the centuries and in different parts of the world. Even in a single time and place there may be contrasting features. John comes face-to-face with Christ after hearing a "voice as loud as a trumpet fanfare" (φωνὴν μεγάλην ὡς σάλπιγγος, Rv 1:10). Upon turning, he is confronted by "seven golden lampstands" (ἑπτὰ λυχνίας χρυσᾶς, Rv 1:12). In the midst of these he begins to see someone "like the Son of Man" (ὅμοιον υἱὸν ἀνθρώπου, Rv 1:13) – clothed in a long robe with a golden sash (ἐνδεδυμένον ποδήρη καὶ περιεζωσμένον πρὸς τοῖς μαστοῖς ζώνην χρυσᾶν, Rv 1:13), his head and hair "as white as wool, as snow" (λευκαὶ ὡς

ἔριον λευκόν, ὡς χιών, Rv 1:14), eyes "aflame like fire" (φλὸξ πυρός, Rv 1:14), his feet "like fine copper glowing in the furnace" (ὅμοιοι χαλκολιβάνῳ, ὡς ἐν καμίνῳ πεπυρωμένης, Rv 1:15), a voice as "loud as a multitude of waves" (ὡς φωνὴ ὑδάτων πολλῶν, Rv 1:15), seven stars in his right hand (ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ χειρὶ αὐτοῦ ἀστέρας ἑπτά, Rv 1:16), a sharp double-edged blade coming forth from his mouth (ῥομφαία δίστομος ὀξεῖα ἐκπορευομένη, Rv 1:16), and a countenance "shining as bright and powerful as the sun" (ὁ ἥλιος φαίνει ἐν τῇ δυνάμει αὐτοῦ, Rv 1:16). This is the face of Christ that the audience is introduced to in John's first vision. It is an imposing introduction, enhanced rather than complicated by the highly symbolic language (Du Rand 2007:136-141, Stefanovic 2002:94-107; Aune 1997:60-116; Chilton 1987:39-40, 49-50, 67-76):

- The *trumpet*, traditionally associated with the declaration of war (e.g. Jdg 3:27), or the arrival of the king (e.g. 2 Sm 15:10), now a sound characteristic of apocalyptic declarations of the arrival of the end.

- The *seven golden lampstands*, once a reminder of the tabernacle and the temple (Ex 25:31-40), now a reminder of God's presence (Zch 4:2, 10) *in the midst of* his church – the fact that there are seven lamps is seen as an indicator of the seven churches to which the book is initially addressed (Rv 1:20), but can also be understood as the number associated symbolically with perfect order.

- Christ as the *Son of Man* immediately brings the vision of Daniel 7, a vision of a messianic liberator coming forth from the heavens, into the minds of the congregation (an understanding also attested to in 1 *En*. 31-71).

- The *long robe* a garment typical of the high priest and/or the aristocracy (e.g. Ex 28:4), the *golden sash around his breast* (unlike the

workman's girdle around the loins) a reminder of the fact that his work is done.

- The "ancient of days" (or "he that lives forever") is described as one with clothes *as white as snow* and a head and hair *as white as wool* in Daniel 7:9 – using these same words as descriptors for Christ accentuate his knowledge, wisdom, and majesty.

- Eyes *aflame like fire* that light up/pierce through all darkness, symbolizing Christ's spiritual insight (Dn 10:6).

- His feet *like fine copper*, a metal used for military purposes, polished to a fine gleam to symbolize Christ's might and steadfastness. This idea is accentuated by the fact that his feet are *glowing as if in a furnace*, since a furnace is associated with the process of purification and purity/strength (Dn 10:6 and Ezk 1:4).

- His voice *as loud as a multitude of waves* also hints at Daniel 10:6 and Ezekiel 1:24 and 43:2, bringing to mind the mental picture of a thundering waterfall or breaking waves, and with it the idea of power and might.

- Christ holding *the seven stars in his right hand* is an indication of his protection of, and control over, them. The stars are thought to represent the seven congregations (Rv 1:20). This image, along with the first of Christ as standing in the midst of the seven lampstands, serves as a soothing reminder that God is ever-present in his church.

- The *sharp double-edged blade coming forth from his mouth* is an image reminiscent of Isaiah 11:4 and 49:2 and indicates both Christ's competence to judge, and the efficiency of his judgement. It is an image of great power and glory.

- Christ's *countenance shining as bright as the sun* immediately brings to mind Moses returning from Mount Sinai (Ex 34:29-35), and Jesus during his time on the mountain of transfiguration (Mt 17:2).

Confronted by such magnificence, there is almost no other reaction possible than the one of John – overwhelming awe, i.e. "falling at his feet as if dead" (ἔπεσα πρὸς τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ ὡς νεκρός, Rv 1:17); intended to evoke in every reader a similar reaction, while at the same time providing them with the assurance of the comfort and encouragement of the risen Christ (Μὴ φοβοῦ, Rv 1:17).

At the outset of this vision, the resurrected Christ is "one like the Son of Man" fulfilling God's covenant promise to ancient Israel: "I will also walk among you and be your God and you will be My people" (Lv 26:12). Through the symbolic walk among the lampstands, Christ signifies his presence and ministry to the churches. This concluding portion makes clear that in the resurrected and exalted Jesus Christ, the very God of the covenant has come down, and he is with his New Testament people. He is their only hope as the end draws near. We know that the heavenly Son of Man was an important image of Christ for the early Christians. The gospels refer to the Son of Man in three different ways: He has power on earth, he has the authority to forgive sins (Mk 2:10), and he is Lord of the Sabbath (Mk 2:28).

But he is also the one who is destined to suffer rejection, betrayal, and to be condemned to death (Mk 8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34). It is the Son of Man, prophesied at a time of trial, who is "seated at the right hand of the Power, and 'coming with the clouds of heaven'" (ὄψεσθε τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐκ δεξιῶν καθήμενον τῆς δυνάμεως καὶ ἐρχόμενον μετὰ τῶν νεφελῶν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ Mk 14:62). The early Christians were familiar with the picture in Daniel 7:13-14, and they saw this prophecy fulfilled in Jesus who had shared their earthly conditions and sufferings, and was vindicated through his resurrection after a cruel death. The resurrected and exalted Christ is none other than the God of the covenant. In him, the covenant promises given to ancient Israel have found their fulfilment. To the churches facing persecution and tribulation,

Jesus introduces himself by reminding them of his own suffering, death, and resurrection. The relationship of suffering to triumph, demonstrated in Jesus, was a source of great encouragement to Christians experiencing hardship. That fact that he refers to his own death and resurrection (ἐγενόμην νεκρὸς καὶ ἰδοὺ ζῶν) is in direct line with the importance placed on that dual event in the rest of the New Testament. We are faced with one who has had a part in history (ἐγενόμην νεκρὸς "I was dead" - Rv 1:18) and who is nevertheless now exalted (ζῶν εἰμι εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων "I am alive for evermore" Rv 1:18). The importance of the resurrection is seen in the fact that Christ now has the keys of Death and Hades (ἔχω τὰς κλεῖς τοῦ θανάτου καὶ τοῦ ᾅδου Rv 1:18). Thus he has vanquished man's last enemy, although the consummation of this victory is not seen until the very end of the book when Death and Hades are cast into the lake of fire – the second death (καὶ ὁ θάνατος καὶ ὁ ᾅδης ἐβλήθησαν εἰς τὴν λίμνην τοῦ πυρός. οὗτος ὁ θάνατος ὁ δεύτερός ἐστιν, ἡ λίμνη τοῦ πυρός Rv 20:14).

The imagery of the seven lampstands, the seven stars, Christ's eyes ablaze like flames, and his countenance shining bright as the sun used here (all images to do with light) is suggestive for another reason – if the Christian church is seen as the medium through which light is brought to the world, in accordance with the teaching of Jesus (Ὑμεῖς ἐστε τὸ φῶς τοῦ κόσμου Mt 5:14), these light symbols are highly relevant. That command to shine as lights has never been revoked and must be regarded as a major objective for the communities of Christ, made all the more relevant by increasing moral darkness around them. It is significant that the claim of Jesus in one of John's "I am" statements to be the "light of the world" (Ἐγώ εἰμι τὸ φῶς τοῦ κόσμου Jn 8:12) is thus developed in this vision of Christ, alight in various ways and in the midst of his churches – this implies that the light the

churches are commanded to shine to the nations is not a light they must produce themselves, it is light they need merely reflect from Christ in their midst. In the final victory of the Christ, God has provided them with most everything they need to be who he asks of them to be. We noted that the lampstands are described as golden, and this again has symbolic significance. This reference to the most precious metal adds a sense of tremendous value to this representation of the churches. The seven stars seen in the right hand of Christ are also a representation of the church, and present a further and somewhat different aspect from that implied in the lampstands. It is most likely that the language is indebted to Daniel 12:3 – "And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever". Here the main significance lies not so much in the interpretation of the symbol as in the fact that the stars are grasped securely in the hand of Christ. Not only is Christ in the midst of his people, he is also their supporter. Here is an assurance that Christ has not left his church to their own devices, but has undertaken to protect and strengthen them.

At the outset of the book the focus thus falls on the immense importance of the churches. Not only is the book addressed to specific churches (Ὃ βλέπεις γράψον εἰς βιβλίον καὶ πέμψον ταῖς ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαις, εἰς Ἔφεσον καὶ εἰς Σμύρναν καὶ εἰς Πέργαμον καὶ εἰς Θυάτειρα καὶ εἰς Σάρδεις καὶ εἰς Φιλαδέλφειαν καὶ εἰς Λαοδίκειαν Rv 1:11), but its main thrust is intended to show God's estimate of his people. This conception of the security of God's people is a key theme throughout the book. The cosmic drama which is unfolding is secondary. The basis of the message is that Christ is the victor and, because of his victory, also the protector of his people. At no time is the reader allowed to forget this. There is no question, even in the direct messages to the individual churches, of the earthly communities themselves

being left to battle with the forces of darkness on their own. While the churches are in the hand of Christ no harm can come to them. This vision/affirmation of the glorious figure of Christ is for their benefit. In Revelation there is a close connection between the churches and the heavenly vision – when the individual churches are addressed in the letters, particular features of the Son of Man are directly called to mind (e.g. *τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ ῥομφαία δίστομος ὀξεῖα ἐκπορευομένη* Rv 1:16 in Rv 2:12's *ὁ ἔχων τὴν ῥομφαίαν τὴν δίστομον τὴν ὀξεῖαν*). Most of them borrow from the initial vision, but a few further details are added. Christ has the seven spirits (*ὁ ἔχων τὰ ἑπτὰ πνεύματα τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοὺς ἑπτὰ ἀστέρας* Rv 3:1). He is holy and true and has the key of David (*ὁ ἅγιος, ὁ ἀληθινός, ὁ ἔχων τὴν κλεῖν Δαυίδ* Rv 3:7). He is described as "the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation" (*ὁ Ἀμήν, ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινός* Rv 3:14). The seven spirits are introduced in Revelation 1:4 (*τῶν ἑπτὰ πνευμάτων ἃ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου*). The characteristic of holiness is seen in the purifying fire (*ἐν καμίνῳ πεπυρωμένης* Rv 1:15). The key of David is introduced because of the reference to the synagogue of Satan in Revelation 3:9 (*τῆς συναγωγῆς τοῦ Σατανᾶ*). And the faithful witness is from Revelation 1:5 (*ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστός*). But the "*ἀμήν*" and "*ἄρχων*" are innovations; the first reminding us of the use of "*ἀμήν*" in the doxological affirmations of Jesus in Revelation 1:6-7 (*αὐτῷ ἡ δόξα καὶ τὸ κράτος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων· ἀμήν*), The "*ἄρχων*" recalls Paul's use of it in another profound Christological setting – Colossians 1:18 (*καὶ αὐτός ... ὅς ἐστιν ἀρχή, πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν, ἵνα γένηται ἐν πᾶσιν αὐτὸς πρωτεύων*). But *ἄρχων* has also already been used of Christ in Revelation 1:5, in the sense of the ruler of the kings on earth (*ὁ ἄρχων τῶν βασιλέων τῆς γῆς*).

This building up of the impressions of the immense dignity and significance of Jesus Christ is clearly intended to underline the importance of the sustaining and strengthening power of this vision of Christ "the Son of Man" in glory. It is for this reason that the centrepiece is Christ as the faithful witness – Christ is the true witness who experienced death in obedience to God. The descriptions are both encouraging and awe-inspiring for the beleaguered Christian individuals and their communities.

4.2 REVELATION 5

Chapter 5 prepares for the first round of major action in Revelation, which begins in chapter 6 (Du Rand 2007:245-262, Stefanovic 2002:195-212; Aune 1997:319-376; Chilton 1987:165-180). In Revelation chapters 1-3 John has described the initial epiphany of Christ, and has addressed individually each of the seven churches to which he is writing. Revelation chapters 4 and 5 describe heaven, and the various things John sees there. In Revelation 4 John receives an invitation to come into heaven and get his first glimpse of the throne of God and the worship that surrounds it. This chapter is powerfully theocentric. This emphasis in Revelation chapter 4 allows John to give chapter 5 a more Christological focus, without losing sight of God.

After John has described the worship of God in chapter 4, he says in Revelation 5:1 that he saw a scroll in the hand of God – a "scroll that had written on the inside and the outside and was sealed with seven seals" (βιβλίον γεγραμμένον ἔσωθεν καὶ ὄπισθεν, κατεσφραγισμένον σφραγῖσιν ἑπτά). In Revelation 5:2 an angel sends out a proclamation asking "who is worthy to open the scroll" (Τίς ἄξιος ἀνοῖξαι τὸ βιβλίον καὶ λῦσαι τὰς σφραγῖδας αὐτοῦ), but no one is found "in heaven, on earth, or under the earth" (καὶ οὐδεὶς ἐδύνατο ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ οὐδὲ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς οὐδὲ ὑποκάτω τῆς γῆς, Rv 5:3). This exhausts the cosmological possibilities for people of the ancient world, who nearly all

thought that the cosmos was layered. So all of creation is searched to find someone who is worthy to open or even read the scroll. When no one is found, John begins to weep (καὶ ἐγὼ ἔκλαιον πολὺ, Rv 5:4). This seems curious, since John only became aware of the scroll shortly before. Given this reaction, it must contain something he wants to know desperately. Most likely, he understands that it contains the destiny of the world and the people in it. This is just the information that John and his readers need to know as they try and endure. If this scroll is similar to that found in 1 *Enoch* 93, it is largely a book of doom and woe for the world. Though this may sound ironic to us, it is good news for those suffering because it means their persecutors are being punished and will no longer be able to inflict pain on them. So John is anxious to know about this future and the fate that awaits the faithful and the wicked. It may be important to note that the one that the angel is seeking is not someone who is able to open the seals and read the scroll, but someone "who is worthy" to do so (ἄξιος, Rv 5:4) – i.e. someone who is appropriate to the task, someone who has the characteristics required to reveal and proclaim what the scroll contains, which is no less than God's will and judgement.

In Revelation 5:5 one of the elders, one of the classes of beings around the throne of God, comforts John by telling him that someone has been found to open the scroll. The language used to introduce this character is messianic – he is the "Lion of Judah" (ὁ λέων ὁ ἐκ τῆς φυλῆς Ἰούδα) and the "Root of David" (ἡ ῥίζα Δαυίδ). In this way, John reveals that the hope for the Messiah is fulfilled in this being, this Christ. This is the one who has conquered, and is therefore worthy to open the scroll and its seals. The language of conquering has already appeared in Revelation several times (e.g. τῷ νικῶντι Rv 2:7, ὁ νικῶν Rv 2:11, τῷ νικῶντι Rv 2:17, ὁ νικῶν Rv2:26; ὁ νικῶν Rv 3:5, ὁ νικῶν Rv 3:12, ὁ νικῶν Rv 3:21), as one of the ways John

speaks of remaining faithful until the end. In the letters to the churches in Revelation 2 and 3, those who conquer are promised life with God and blessings from God. Now, the one who is worthy to open the scroll is seen as the one who sets the paradigm for the faithfulness of the conquerors who follow him. The conquering this messianic figure accomplishes may even be more specific. When the Christ, who is found worthy, is seen he appears not as a lion but as a lamb. Christ is the "Lamb standing, as though it had been slain" (ἀρνίον ἑστηκὸς ὡς ἐσφαγμένον Rv 5:6). He bears the marks of his suffering and death. It is in his death that his victory is achieved.

Some would argue that, since the emphasis of conquering is on faithfulness, the death of Jesus makes him the conqueror. Others assert this must be reference to the resurrection of Christ, because this figure is portrayed as victorious. It seems best not to separate these two parts of the single event of the death and resurrection of Christ, as each gives meaning to the other – they are not understandable if separated to any significant extent. Christ is seen as conqueror because he was faithful even unto death, and then he was raised by God. The Lamb of God is clearly an image of sacrifice, reminiscent of the lamb which is sacrificed at the Jewish Passover (Ex 12). In later years each Jewish family sacrificed a lamb at the temple. So Paul could recall this in describing the death of Jesus as a Passover sacrifice (καὶ γὰρ τὸ πάσχα ἡμῶν ἐτύθη Χριστός 1 Cor 5:7). And, according to John's Gospel, John the Baptist draws attention to Jesus as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" ("Ἴδε ὁ ἀμνὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ὁ αἴρων τὴν ἁμαρτίαν τοῦ κόσμου Jn 1:29). But this idea of sacrifice does not work purely in terms of Jewish practice, because the Passover lamb was not intended to atone for sins. Perhaps we need to refer to the suffering Servant in Isaiah 53:7, 12 described as "a lamb that is led to the slaughter", who "bore the sins of many". The great paradox is that the victim (the Lamb) functions as the

leader (the Lion and the Shepherd) in Revelation 5:5-6. There may be a precedent for this in the Jewish apocalyptic book of 1 *Enoch*, where David is represented as a lamb who becomes the ram and leader of the flock (1 *En*. 89:46). In the next chapter one of the sheep sprouts a great horn, and he becomes the victorious bellwether of God's flock, as does the messianic figure in the *Testament of Joseph* 19:8.

Since the main theme of this book is the ultimate victory of God and Christ over the forces of darkness, we might have thought the Lion figure would have been more appropriate. But the Lion title occurs nowhere else in the book. It's appearance in Revelation 5:5 is a fleeting one, the idea of ferocity swiftly replaced by the gentleness associated with the figure of the Lamb. This suggests that the divine conquest will not be achieved by a display of might, as in the case of the lion-lamb in the Testament of Joseph, but by suffering and sacrifice. But let us not forget that the power of John's statement lies in the paradoxical combination of strength and weakness. The many appearances of the Lamb in this book dispel any suggestion that the slain Lamb is anything but strong, well able to effect his conquering purposes. Both the death and resurrection play a role in the description of him found in the following verses.

When John sees him, this one who is worthy is standing between the throne of God and the four living creatures (τῶν τεσσάρων ζῴων, Rv 5:6) and among the elders (τῶν πρεσβυτέρων, Rv 5:6). These beings and the Lamb's location among them are significant. The living beings are cherubim of some sort, their presence and description here probably go back to Ezekiel's vision of the four creatures who carry the throne of God (Ezk 1:4-14); but in John's revelation their purpose is to praise God, particularly to lead the heavenly worship by proclaiming God's holiness. With all of their eyes, they probably also represent God's omniscience. The twenty-four elders are somewhat more difficult to identify, and interpreters have suggested several

possibilities: Some assert that they represent the ranks of priests in Israel. Others think this image draws on the Roman custom of having presiding officials, including the emperor, surrounded by lesser officials when holding court. This would help make the contrast between emperor worship and worship of the one God even more stark. The image and number may also be related to the twenty-four judges of Babylonian astrology. If they are related to this background, they may symbolise cosmic order and governance. The most common understanding of these elders is that they represent the whole people of God by combining the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles. This understanding may be supported by their possession of bowls full of the prayers of the saints (τὰ τέσσαρα ζῷα καὶ οἱ εἴκοσι τέσσαρες πρεσβύτεροι ἔπεσαν ἐνώπιον τοῦ ἀρνίου, ἔχοντες ἕκαστος κιθάραν καὶ φιάλας χρυσᾶς γεμούσας θυμιαμάτων, αἵ εἰσιν αἱ προσευχαὶ τῶν ἁγίων, Rv 5:8). The main activity in which they are engaged in Revelation chapters 4 and 5 is worship. Throughout chapter 4 this is directed to God "without ceasing" (καὶ ἀνάπαυσιν οὐκ ἔχουσιν ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτὸς λέγοντες· Ἅγιος ἅγιος ἅγιος κύριος, ὁ θεός, ὁ παντοκράτωρ, ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος, Rv 4:8), and in chapter 5 it expands to include the Lamb (καὶ ᾄδουσιν ᾠδὴν καινὴν λέγοντες· Ἄξιος εἶ λαβεῖν τὸ βιβλίον καὶ ἀνοῖξαι τὰς σφραγῖδας αὐτοῦ, ὅτι ἐσφάγης καὶ ἠγόρασας τῷ θεῷ ἐν τῷ αἵματί σου ἐκ πάσης φυλῆς καὶ γλώσσης καὶ λαοῦ καὶ ἔθνους, 10 καὶ ἐποίησας αὐτοὺς τῷ θεῷ ἡμῶν βασιλείαν καὶ ἱερεῖς, καὶ βασιλεύουσιν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, Rv 5:9).

Revelation 5:8 tells us that these elders offer incense from golden bowls. That this incense represents the prayers of the saints is important because this image gives John's readers reason to take courage and to be hopeful: their prayers have risen into the direct presence of God. The messianic figure of Revelation 5:4 is identified in verse 6 as a Lamb who had been slaughtered, but who lives and "has seven horns and seven eyes, which

are the seven spirits of God" (ἔχων κέρατα ἑπτὰ καὶ ὀφθαλμοὺς ἑπτά, οἵ εἰσιν τὰ ἑπτὰ πνεύματα τοῦ θεοῦ). This picture purposefully contains completely incongruous images. The Lamb is to be understood as a sacrificial Lamb because it has been killed. But, even though it has been killed, it lives. In addition, it has seven horns and seven eyes. Horns were a sign of power and the number seven represents completeness or perfection. So we have a Lamb that has been killed, and yet possesses perfect, complete power. This powerful, yet slain, Lamb also possesses the seven spirits of God. The seven eyes probably indicate that the Lamb sees and knows all, and perhaps that he is all-wise. This juxtaposition of the symbols of power and weakness is a reminder that the persecution the readers are enduring is not the last word. In fact, God's power is seen even more clearly when viewed in conjunction with the weakness of the Lamb. This Lamb, which was so weak that it was killed, has the full power of God – perhaps explaining how this Lamb can also be the Lion. These oppositions in the description of the Lamb indicate that things are not as they appear on earth – there is a larger reality that is the lasting and dominating reality. This slain, powerful Lamb is found among the elders. If the elders represent the whole people of God (as most interpreters think), then the Lamb is found among the people of God. This is another bit of encouragement for those suffering persecution – the risen, powerful Christ is with them in their suffering.

When the Lamb takes the scroll from the hand of God, the living creatures and the elders fall down to worship the Lamb. In the context of Revelation, this worship indicates that the Lamb is accorded the status of divinity. However, there is a very clear distinction between the Lamb and the one seated on the throne, and the Lamb is clearly subordinate. This subordination is seen not only in the position of the Lamb (i.e. not on the throne), but also in the doxological hymn that follows. John identifies the material in Revelation 5:9-10 as "a new song" that the living creatures and

the elders sing to the Lamb. The newness of the song indicates that something new has happened for which a new expression of praise is to be sung. This intimates that Christ's death and resurrection initiated something new, and established Christ as the one who is worthy to reveal and dispatch God's future. This text thus anchors the salvific work of Christ in an eschatological context. The hymn asserts that the Lamb is worthy to take the scroll and open it because he was slain and purchased a people for God with his blood. So it is the sacrifice of the Lamb for all people that makes him worthy. This hymn may imply that the death and resurrection of Jesus were necessary parts of the eschatological scheme, so that God's plan can move ahead once that action has been accomplished. John's assertion that the blood of the Lamb bought a people for God probably draws on the use of this same word in the manumission of slaves, who were often symbolically bought by a god "for freedom". Here, these people are purchased for God. In this transaction, the Lamb makes from those of many nations and peoples a single kingdom and priesthood for God. Thus, they are brought together and given a common and esteemed identity, and positions of honour and access to God. The last line of the hymn promises a reality that must have been unimaginable for the original recipients of this book – "they will reign on earth" (καὶ ἐποίησας αὐτοὺς τῷ θεῷ ἡμῶν βασιλείαν καὶ ἱερεῖς, καὶ βασιλεύουσιν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, Rv 5:10). This promise asserts that there will be a complete reversal of fortunes, it will be a world where the righteous rule. Given the hopeless state of the world described in most of Revelation – and apocalyptic literature more broadly – it seems most likely that the earth they will reign on will be the "new earth" spoken of later in the book, because the present earth is too corrupt to be redeemed.

Following this hymn, a chorus of tens of thousands of angels join the living creatures and the elders who proclaim "the Lamb that was

slaughtered" worthy of great powers and blessings (Καὶ εἶδον, καὶ ἤκουσα φωνὴν ἀγγέλων πολλῶν κύκλῳ τοῦ θρόνου καὶ τῶν ζῴων καὶ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων, καὶ ἦν ὁ ἀριθμὸς αὐτῶν μυριάδες μυριάδων καὶ χιλιάδες χιλιάδων, λέγοντες φωνῇ μεγάλῃ· Ἄξιόν ἐστιν τὸ ἀρνίον τὸ ἐσφαγμένον λαβεῖν τὴν δύναμιν καὶ πλοῦτον καὶ σοφίαν καὶ ἰσχὺν καὶ τιμὴν καὶ δόξαν καὶ εὐλογίαν, Rv 5:11-12). Then the chorus expands even more to include all creatures in all realms (καὶ πᾶν κτίσμα ὃ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς καὶ ὑποκάτω τῆς γῆς καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς θαλάσσης, καὶ τὰ ἐν αὐτοῖς πάντα, ἤκουσα λέγοντας· Τῷ καθημένῳ ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ καὶ τῷ ἀρνίῳ ἡ εὐλογία καὶ ἡ τιμὴ καὶ ἡ δόξα καὶ τὸ κράτος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων, Rv 5:13) ascribing blessing, honour, and glory to the one on the throne and the Lamb. As answer to, and confirmation of, this song of praise, the living creatures say "Ἀμήν", and the elders "fall down and worship" (οἱ πρεσβύτεροι ἔπεσαν καὶ προσεκύνησαν, Rv 5:14). This acclamation by such a large company may intentionally call to mind (and surpass) the acclamations of the emperor by many peoples on various occasions. If so, this passage again reflects the conflict John sees between the rule of God and the rule of Caesar. A chorus that includes all created beings can only represent the ultimate victory of God when all beings everywhere recognise God as God. Thus, we have an advance glimpse of the glory of "The End". Interestingly, John has brought the one on the throne back into the picture as these doxologies come to a close. In this way, he is trying to maintain monotheism, while at the same time honouring Christ as the revelation of God to humanity. The imagery he made use of helped him express the closeness of Christ to God, even as he maintained their distinctive identities and positions.

Revelation 4-5 thus serve as a necessary and strengthening element in the flow of Revelation, for these chapters offer assurance that the battle in which John's readers are engaged will be won by God. In fact, chapter 5

makes it clear that the Lamb has already achieved the victory, for himself and for all peoples. Thus, their commitment to God is appropriate because the victory of God is assured. As Eugene Boring (1989:112) points out, the doxologies in Revelation 4-5 take us from creation to consummation. They show that the God who brought creation into being will reclaim it in the end. These doxologies thus celebrate as a reality the victory of God that the readers do not yet experience. Through these hymns they are given the assurance that no other outcome is possible. In these doxologies the reader hears whispers of the God who seems to be absent and silent. In this worship the readers find at least a few moments of sanctuary from the world that often seems too much. With this assurance they can face the tribulations in store for them and the whole world, which the following chapters of the Book of Revelation describe. And, of course, these difficulties lead to a fuller description of the victory of God and their participation in it. The main theme of the book is thus seen to be encouragement and salvation rather than judgement.

4.3 REVELATION 7

For Christians the church in the world is not, and cannot be, immune to the world's problems – if the world suffers, the church suffers (Du Rand 2007:295-321, Stefanovic 2002:253-273; Aune 1998a:424-479; Chilton 1987:201-224). Christian communities may find themselves driven into a kind of ghetto by the world's persecution, but this does not justify "escapism" and other-worldly retreat. The book has a universal perspective and a sense of worldwide mission and interaction with the world. In Revelation 5:5 we saw how the Lamb of God was found worthy to open the sealed document. As the seals are opened, the four horsemen appear, symbols of death and destruction, warfare, famine, and pestilence. The cities of Asia Minor suffered severely in the first century from such destructive

forces, and also from major earthquakes (the sixth seal – σεισμὸς μέγας ἐγένετο, Rv 6:12). The Christians suffered with their communities. In addition, they suffered as they were singled out, treated as scapegoats, and persecuted (e.g. Emperor Nero selecting the Christians and blaming them for the fire in Rome). These are the souls beneath the altar "slaughtered for the word of God and for the testimony they had given" (ὑποκάτω τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου τὰς ψυχὰς τῶν ἐσφαγμένων διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ διὰ τὴν μαρτυρίαν ἣν εἶχον, Rv 6:9). Not surprisingly, they cry out with the urgency of those who have suffered enough, who feel that the world cannot endure much more, and who themselves are waiting for their new birth, "crying with loud voices" (ἔκραξαν φωνῇ μεγάλῃ, Rv 6:10).

God's punishment of evildoers, traditionally conceived in Old Testament terms as the day of God's wrath, comes from the four corners of the earth and will affect all creation progressively. In no way are the Christians spared from earthquake and plague, for "who is able to stand?" (τίς δύναται σταθῆναι, Rv 6:17). But they are sealed by God (Μὴ ἀδικήσητε τὴν γῆν μήτε τὴν θάλασσαν μήτε τὰ δένδρα, ἄχρι σφραγίσωμεν τοὺς δούλους τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν ἐπὶ τῶν μετώπων αὐτῶν, Rv 7:3) so that they may witness effectively. Remember that the seals on the document are the guarantees of the witnesses; so the seal on the forehead is a guarantee of witness. And the number of those sealed – 144 000 (ἑκατὸν τεσσεράκοντα τέσσαρες χιλιάδες, Rv 7:4) – is not the maximum number of the elect – like Israel in the Old Testament it is a representative sign to the nations (Is 49:6), a symbolic number in relation to the infinite possibilities of universal mission. Adela Yarbro Collins (1977) has written about the significance of holy war traditions in Revelation. The present scenario is one of passive resistance rather than the violent revolution

attempted by the Zealots, but it is important to notice that the role of the elect – those who are sealed to be the "firstfruits" – is not entirely passive.

> The elect are not purely passive because the deaths suffered by members of the community are thought to play a role in bringing about the turning point, the eschatological battle…The faithful are to suffer persecution and death in the present. They expect a violent resolution of the conflict in which heavenly forces will defeat their adversaries. Their contribution to this outcome may be made in the form of a martyr's death, which hastens the end, because a fixed number of martyrs must die before the eschatological battle (Yarbro Collins 1977:255-256).

4.4 REVELATION 11

The two witnesses in Revelation 11 are symbols of the mission of the church in these difficult days (Du Rand 2007:352-383, Stefanovic 2002:335-355; Aune 1998a:575-646; Chilton 1987:271-293). The critical period of activity of the two witnesses is the same duration as the trampling of the holy city – 42 months or 1260 days or 3,5 years – which is the duration of crisis in the traditional calculations of time in apocalyptic vision (see Dn 7:25). But it is also the timespan of the Jewish War and the siege of Jerusalem, the dramatic sequel to Nero's persecution. As a result of the experience of the church in Nero's day, and in the following years, the ideas contained in the word "μάρτυς" must include the readiness to die for one's faith. Witness means facing up to death. It is not only evidence that one possesses and hangs on to it; it is also something that a believer is prepared to communicate to others in the spirit of prophecy, and it is something for which one is ready to give up all, in the surrender of life itself. "μαρτυρίαν" is a prophetic activity, consistent with the tradition of Old Testament prophecy.

The Christian experience of hardship and rejection is strictly comparable with Elijah's. Those who rejoice at the death of the witnesses do so "because these two prophets had been a torment to the inhabitants of the earth" (ὅτι οὗτοι οἱ δύο προφῆται ἐβασάνισαν τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, Rv 11:10). The reasons and reactions are the same as those which greeted the prophetic troublers of Israel (see e.g. 1 Ki 18:17).

The prophetic activity is authoritative, powerful in a way that compares with that of Moses and Elijah – "fire coming out of their mouths to devour their enemies" (πῦρ ἐκπορεύεται ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτῶν καὶ κατεσθίει τοὺς ἐχθροὺς αὐτῶν Rv 11:5); "authority to shut down the heavens and cause no rain to fall" (ἔχουσιν τὴν ἐξουσίαν κλεῖσαι τὸν οὐρανόν, ἵνα μὴ ὑετὸς βρέχῃ, Rv11:6); "authority to turn the water into blood" (ἐξουσίαν ἔχουσιν ἐπὶ τῶν ὑδάτων στρέφειν αὐτὰ εἰς αἷμα, Rv11:6), as well as "to smite the earth with very plague, as often as they want" (πατάξαι τὴν γῆν ἐν πάσῃ πληγῇ ὁσάκις ἐὰν θελήσωσιν, Rv11:6). They wear sackcloth as symbolic of the fact that their preaching is a preaching of repentance (περιβεβλημένοι σάκκους, Rv 11:3) is a symbol to encourage penitence. The witnesses are also identified with the esoteric imagery of Zechariah 4:1-14 – this means that they see things God's way. They share his universal perspective as "eyes of the Lord which range through the whole earth", and are anointed agents of God's purpose, being described as "two lampstands" (δύο λυχνίαι, Rv 11:4) and "two olive trees" (δύο ἐλαῖαι, Rv 11:4).

For the Seer, Christian witness follows the path of Christ from suffering to glory. In their deaths the witnesses/martyrs are symbolically associated with Christ's crucifixion when they are described as being "overwhelmed and killed by the beast from the abyss" (τὸ θηρίον τὸ ἀναβαῖνον ἐκ τῆς ἀβύσσου

ποιήσει μετ' αὐτῶν πόλεμον καὶ νικήσει αὐτοὺς καὶ ἀποκτενεῖ αὐτούς, Rv 11:7),
their "bodies lying on the street of the city, spiritually called Sodom and
Egypt, where Jesus was also crucified" (τὸ πτῶμα αὐτῶν ἐπὶ τῆς πλατείας τῆς
πόλεως τῆς μεγάλης, ἥτις καλεῖται πνευματικῶς Σόδομα καὶ Αἴγυπτος, ὅπου καὶ ὁ
κύριος αὐτῶν ἐσταυρώθη, Rv 11:8). Like Christ, they also have their Easter
Day, with "the Spirit of God entering them after three-and-a-half days and
resurrecting them" (μετὰ τὰς τρεῖς ἡμέρας καὶ ἥμισυ πνεῦμα ζωῆς ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ
εἰσῆλθεν ἐν αὐτοῖς, καὶ ἔστησαν ἐπὶ τοὺς πόδας αὐτῶν, Rv 11:11). But it does not
stop with their resurrection – they also ascend into heaven after "a great
voice tells them to 'come up'" (ἤκουσαν φωνῆς μεγάλης ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ λεγούσης
αὐτοῖς· Ἀνάβατε ὧδε, καὶ ἀνέβησαν εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν ἐν τῇ νεφέλῃ, Rv 11:12). God's
kingdom is universal, but works through human agencies and
representatives such as these. These prophetic figures present the gospel to
the world and offer the occasion for repentance, speaking with God-given
authority and accompanied by actions which are a powerful symbol and
testimony. As such, they serve as a reminder and an acknowledgement of
the grave consequences being a witness to Christ can have. But there can
also be no greater encouragement to endure than the witnesses' eventual
triumph, their transfiguration in front of their enemies.

4.5 REVELATION 14

The first half of Revelation concludes with the end of chapter 11, where the
kingdom of God is established and the day of judgement has come. But,
instead of ending there, John begins a new set of visions, visions that cover
the same period of time as the previous larger cycle but provide a different
viewpoint on some things to encourage faithfulness among his readers. The
new start in Revelation 12 begins with a "great sign" (Καὶ σημεῖον μέγα, Rv

12:1), and chapter 14 concludes the first cycle of visions in this second major section of visions (Du Rand 2007:436-460, Stefanovic 2002:435-465; Aune 1998a:781-848; Chilton 1987:353-377). While the details of the visions in Revelation 12-13 are sometimes obscure and difficult, it seems clear by the end of chapter 13 that the primary evil being characterised is the emperor cult. Revelation 13 concludes by speaking of the emperor cult as the Beast whose number is 666, a number that is further identified as a "human number" (γὰρ ἀνθρώπου ἐστίν, Rv 13:18). Calling it a "human number" means that it represents someone's name (Watt 1989:369-392; Yarbro Collins 1984b:1221-87). Using numerology, the identity of this person is intended to be fairly easy for John's readers to discern. Most critical interpreters agree that the person referred to with this number is Nero. But even that name is symbolic, representing the emperor, because Nero was probably already dead when Revelation was written. So it is the emperor and the emperor cult that are identified as the enemy of the people of God at the end of Revelation 13.

Revelation 14 begins with a break in the action that has been constant and violent since the beginning of chapter 12. Such breaks are common in Revelation. Revelation 14:1-5 provides a glimpse into heaven and of the Lamb on Mount Zion. With the Lamb are 144 000 "who have written on their foreheads the name of the Father of the Lamb" (ἔχουσαι τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ καὶ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ γεγραμμένον ἐπὶ τῶν μετώπων αὐτῶν, Rv 14:1). This seal indicates that they have been faithful to God (see Ezk 9) and that they now belong to God as God's own possession. Their identity as God's own is reinforced by John's saying that "they have been bought (redeemed) from among humanity to be God's and the Lamb's" (οὗτοι ἠγοράσθησαν ἀπὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων, Rv 14:4). The number 144 000 is symbolic (Yarbro Collins 1984b:1221-87) – it is derived from two complete numbers, 12 and 10, thus

it symbolises the complete number of this group. These 144 000 are the antithesis of those who have the mark of the beast, since they are described as "all people" (ποιεῖ πάντας, Rv 13:16), who are "given a mark on their right hand or forehead" (ἵνα δῶσιν αὐτοῖς χάραγμα ἐπὶ τῆς χειρὸς αὐτῶν τῆς δεξιᾶς ἢ ἐπὶ τὸ μέτωπον αὐτῶν, Rv 13:17). If you did not have the "mark of the name or the number of the beast" (ἔχων τὸ χάραγμα, τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ θηρίου ἢ τὸν ἀριθμὸν τοῦ ὀνόματος αὐτοῦ, Rv13:17), you were "unable to buy or to sell" (μή τις δύνηται ἀγοράσαι ἢ πωλῆσαι εἰ, Rv13:17). In contrast, John identifies the 144 000 as the "firstfruits" (ἀπαρχὴ, Rv 14:4) for God and the Lamb, those who follow the Lamb wherever he goes (οἱ ἀκολουθοῦντες τῷ ἀρνίῳ ὅπου ἂν ὑπάγῃ, Rv 14:4). These characteristics probably indicate that the 144 000 are martyrs, because they are willing to follow the Lamb even to death and are the first sample of the whole people of God, who are now being encouraged to remain faithful as they see the position that previous martyrs occupy.

As the "firstfruits" they are also a pledge that the rest of the harvest will be successful. Having 144 000 in this group implies that the full number of martyrs must be completed before the end comes, and it implies that these faithful ones will be victorious (Yarbro Collins 1984b:1221-87). Those in this group are also said to have not "defiled themselves with women" (οὗτοί εἰσιν οἳ μετὰ γυναικῶν οὐκ ἐμολύνθησαν, Rv 14:4), "virgins" (παρθένοι, Rv 14:4). They were also those "without guile" (καὶ ἐν τῷ στόματι αὐτῶν οὐχ εὑρέθη ψεῦδος, Rv 14:5), and therefore "blameless" (ἄμωμοί εἰσιν, Rv 14:5). The sexual purity mentioned here is most probably meant metaphorically, as adultery is nearly always symbolic in Revelation – it stands for idolatry. John probably took this metaphor from the prophets of the Hebrew Bible, who often used it to speak of Israel's going after other gods. If this metaphorical interpretation is correct, then the contrast between these faithful 144 000 and those sealed

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with the mark of the beast is yet more emphatic. Furthermore, it may be that the lie that is not found in their mouths is that of denying their faith in the face of persecution. These 144 000 are probably also the ones who are singing the "new song" before God. Though John does not reveal the content of this song, we should probably view it as a song of praise and victory similar to those seen elsewhere in Revelation, perhaps even drawing on the songs of victory the Israelites sang on the other side of the sea after God saved them from the Egyptians (Ex 15:1-21).

The vision of the joyous, victorious martyrs worshipping before God leads to a vision of a sequence of angels, each of whom proclaim the arrival of the judgement of God (Rv 14:6ff). This message of the arrival of God's judgement is called "gospel" (εὐαγγέλιον) in Revelation 14:6, for the long-awaited expression of the justice of God is "good news" for John and his readers. God's justice is essential if we are going to be able to trust God. God must do what is right and just because God must remain faithful to God's own character. The "good news" of the justice of God includes judgement in which God punishes evil and rewards righteousness. This first message of "good news" may also allow for repentance, since the hearers are called to "fear God and give him glory" (Φοβήθητε τὸν θεὸν καὶ δότε αὐτῷ δόξαν, Rv 14:7). The second angel proclaims "fallen, fallen is the great Babylon (i.e. Rome)" (Ἔπεσεν, ἔπεσεν Βαβυλὼν ἡ μεγάλη, Rv 14:8), which will be described in more detail later in Revelation chapters 17-18. The third angel specifies the criteria for judgement: "anyone who pays homage to the beast or its image, and receive its mark" (Εἴ τις προσκυνεῖ τὸ θηρίον καὶ τὴν εἰκόνα αὐτοῦ, καὶ λαμβάνει χάραγμα ἐπὶ τοῦ μετώπου αὐτοῦ ἢ ἐπὶ τὴν χεῖρα αὐτοῦ, Rv 14:9); i.e. anyone participating in the emperor cult and, perhaps, in other aspects of the pagan culture that John thinks are inappropriate for people who profess faith in God. This angel also describes the punishment of those who engage

in the condemned activities – they shall "drink of the undiluted fury of God from the cup of his wrath" (αὐτὸς πίεται ἐκ τοῦ οἴνου τοῦ θυμοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ κεκερασμένου ἀκράτου ἐν τῷ ποτηρίῳ τῆς ὀργῆς αὐτοῦ, Rv 14:10), "tormented in fire and brimstone" (βασανισθήσεται ἐν πυρὶ καὶ θείῳ, Rv 14:10), with the "smoke of their torment going on forever" (καὶ ὁ καπνὸς τοῦ βασανισμοῦ αὐτῶν εἰς αἰῶνας αἰώνων, Rv 14:11), "having no respite, day or night" (οὐκ ἔχουσιν ἀνάπαυσιν ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτός, Rv 14:10).

The point of this is not only to see the Christians' enemies suffer, but also to call the readers to faithfulness when they see what happens to those without faith. This point is made explicitly in the immediately following sentence: "Here is a call for the endurance of the saints" (Ὧδε ἡ ὑπομονὴ τῶν ἁγίων ἐστίν, Rv 14:12). Why this announcement of judgement and description of the punishment of the wicked can encourage faithfulness is further explained in Revelation 14:13, where a voice from heaven declares: "Blessed are the dead who from now on die in the Lord" (Μακάριοι οἱ νεκροὶ οἱ ἐν κυρίῳ ἀποθνήσκοντες ἀπ' ἄρτι), to which the Spirit adds: "They will rest from their labours, for their deeds follow them" (ἵνα ἀναπαήσονται ἐκ τῶν κόπων αὐτῶν). This, then, is the other side of the judgement – the blessing of the faithful. The faithful may lose their lives, but the gracious Lamb of God will bless them eternally. Their deeds of faith in an evil world will follow them to the throne room of heaven where, at last, they will find rest. This blessed state of the persevering faithful stands in stark contrast with the earlier declaration that "there is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and its image and for anyone who receives the mark of its name" (Rv 14:11). Believing this promise changes the world from a place tied to our limits to a place touched by the limitless potential of God. Girded by such confidence in

God, the reader can answer the call to "hold fast to the faith of Jesus" (οἱ τηροῦντες τὰς ἐντολὰς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ, Rv 14:12).

Revelation 14:14-20 contains another description of God's judgement on the wicked. In Revelation 14:14 John sees "one who is 'like the Son of Man' seated on a cloud with a golden crown on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand" (νεφέλη λευκή, καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν νεφέλην καθήμενον ὅμοιον υἱὸν ἀνθρώπου, ἔχων ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτοῦ στέφανον χρυσοῦν καὶ ἐν τῇ χειρὶ αὐτοῦ δρέπανον ὀξύ, Rv 14:14). "Son of Man" is the title Jesus usually uses for himself in the Synoptic Gospels. Coming from Daniel 7, this description of a heavenly figure seems related to eschatological expectations, but remains vague. While it is possible that "one like the Son of Man" designates Christ as the one on the cloud, Revelation 14:15 mentions "another angel" (ἄλλος ἄγγελος), and so seems to identify the "one like a son of man" as an angel. More evidence against identifying this figure with Christ is that yet "another angel comes forth from the temple in heaven" in Revelation 14:17 (Καὶ ἄλλος ἄγγελος ἐξῆλθεν ἐκ τοῦ ναοῦ τοῦ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ) with a sharp sickle and performs the same task as the one on the cloud (ἐθερίσθη ἡ γῆ / "reaping the earth", Rv 14:16; and τρύγησον τοὺς βότρυας τῆς ἀμπέλου τῆς γῆς / "gathering the bunches of the earth", Rv 14:18) a second time. The image of reaping with a sickle to signify God's judgement comes from Joel 3:11-16 (especially v. 13), where Joel summons to the valley of decision the nations that surround and trouble Israel. There they are to be reaped and tread on in the winepress, which overflows with their wickedness. John expands this image to worldwide proportions, a move nearly made by Joel, who spoke of the sun and moon being darkened and the stars retreating at the judgement of God. John's expansion of this image has God's judgement exercised on the whole world, rather than having God's judgement of a part of the world produce cosmic

repercussions. Since this imagery of reaping is associated with condemnatory judgement in Joel, the two reapings in Revelation 14:14-20 probably both refer to a reaping of the wicked, even though it seems repetitious. Perhaps the first reaping is an initial judgement of God, similar to those in the first halve of the book, which were intended – in part – to lead to repentance, followed by the final judgement.

After the reapings are completed, what these beings have reaped is put into the "winepress of the wrath of God" (ἔβαλεν εἰς τὴν ληνὸν τοῦ θυμοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ τὸν μέγαν, Rv 14:19). In addition to drawing on Joel 3, John may also be echoing Isaiah 63:1-6, where God as warrior returns from crushing Edom (a symbol of the enemies of God's people) under his feet in the winepress. Thus the imagery is not new, nor is the idea that God's wrath has a part in judgement (see also e.g. Is 1:23-24; Ps 110:5-6; Lk 3:7; and Eph 5:4-6). However, God's wrath should not be understood as unbridled anger that outstrips what is appropriate. Rather, God's wrath is the just, fair reaction of a righteous God who has seen creation abused and God's own people injured. In the portion of John's vision narrated in Revelation 13, evil has gotten almost out of hand. John describes evil as a Beast with "a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words" (ἐδόθη αὐτῷ στόμα λαλοῦν μεγάλα καὶ βλασφημίας, Rv 13:5), who "makes war with and overcomes the saints" (ἐδόθη αὐτῷ ποιῆσαι πόλεμον μετὰ τῶν ἁγίων καὶ νικῆσαι αὐτούς, Rv 13:7) and exercises authority over "every tribe and tongue and nation" (ἐδόθη αὐτῷ ἐξουσία ἐπὶ πᾶσαν φυλὴν καὶ λαὸν καὶ γλῶσσαν καὶ ἔθνος, Rv 13:7). In such situations, is there anything wrong with longing for the justice of God or with envisioning God's defending the violated and punishing the violator? John certainly did not consider it wrong – the images in Revelation represent his conviction that God will not keep silent indefinitely, and his confidence that at some point God will act and render just judgement. What God's wrath

delivers is just punishment, the actions that must be meted out if God is to be a God of justice, power, and love.

Such judgement is not optional and it is not cruelty – without judgement, which includes both condemnation and blessing, God cannot remain God, cannot remain true to God's self. Without just judgement, God cannot be trusted or worshiped. Thus, this punishment of the wicked is a divine necessity for which we, with John, should be grateful. Still, the description of this judgement is gruesome, with "blood flowing as deep as a horse's bridle for two hundred miles" (ἐξῆλθεν αἷμα ἐκ τῆς ληνοῦ ἄχρι τῶν χαλινῶν τῶν ἵππων ἀπὸ σταδίων χιλίων ἑξακοσίων, Rv 14:20). This terrible sight intends to show the magnitude of the wickedness God is punishing, and the thoroughness of God's justice at the end.

The horrific impression of this passage may well have been experienced differently by John's original readers, who knew the pain of persecution. Their oppression called for a powerful response from God that proclaimed God understood the depths of their suffering and would not allow such injustice to be the final word. It is important to notice here that this battle against the wicked at judgement is carried out by God alone. The saints will not be loosed to do vengeance with injustice. This makes it a word about the justice and power of God. This is also a word about the love God has for God's people: God will enter into judgement to make things just for them. So the purpose of this judgement is to make things fair for the righteous and the wicked, and to allow God to remain the God who is worthy of praise and worship.

Revelation 14 is a good example of the cyclical nature of the visions of Revelation. Once the judgement has been accomplished at the end of this chapter, a new series of actions begins – another portent, "seven angels with the final seven plagues" (ἄλλο σημεῖον ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ μέγα καὶ θαυμαστόν,

ἀγγέλους ἑπτὰ ἔχοντας πληγὰς ἑπτὰ τὰς ἐσχάτας, Rv 15:1) and "seven golden bowls" (ἑπτὰ φιάλας χρυσᾶς, Rv 15:7). These bowls expand the compressed actions seen in Revelation 14, and will lead to the final descriptions of God's judgement and the establishment of the kingdom of God. One emphasis of the cycle composed of Revelation 12-14 is endurance of persecution. In Revelation 13:10 and 14:12 John writes that these visions are a call to "endurance" (ὑπομονὴ). These are the only two uses of this word in Revelation after the letters to the seven churches (Rv 2-3). So these initial proclamations of the second last vision cycle of Revelation (Rv 12-21) make explicit that the point of John's visions of God's judgement and of the blessed end of the faithful is to encourage the readers to maintain their faith in the midst of persecution. They are able to do this because they know that God to whom they are being faithful can and will act in accordance with the character of God – with love, power, and justice.

4.6 REVELATION 15

The vision of Revelation 15 (Du Rand 2007:461-472, Stefanovic 2002:475-480, 499-502; Aune 1998a:849-904; Chilton 1987:379-388) takes us back into the audience chamber/sanctuary of heaven (Rv 15:2-8) – it is both the palace of God and the temple for his worshippers. Among the furnishings of the throne room, which we have seen before in Revelation 4:6 as "a sea of glass like crystal" (ὡς θάλασσα ὑαλίνη ὁμοία κρυστάλλῳ), the focus of attention is on "a sea of glass mingled with fire" (ὡς θάλασσαν ὑαλίνην μεμιγμένην πυρί, Rv 15:2). Its origins are probably in the "sea" of cast bronze in Solomon's temple (1 Ki 7:23), a symbol of the cosmos (the ocean of chaos transformed by God in creation mythology). Now the cosmos reflects a fiery red, whether it be the fire of the judgement which is coming, or the colour of bloodshed in the sacrifice of Christ's martyrs who now worship in the presence of God. For

the congregation has increased beyond the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders – it now comprises the 144 000 servants of God who were selected and sealed (Rv 7:4-8) and have now been resurrected from the earth (Rv 14:1-5), to sing God's praise.

The song of praise is ascribed first to Moses (τὴν ᾠδὴν Μωϋσέως), and it is striking how much of the chapter's symbolism recalls the Exodus: the plagues of Egypt (Ex 7-11); the way through the Red Sea (Ex 14); the song which Moses and the Israelites sing (Ex 15); the tent of meeting and the cloud of smoke which prevents entry (Ex 40:35; cf. the smoke in Is 6:4). The conquerors celebrate their victory just as the Israelites celebrated their crossing of the sea – the crossing of the Red Sea stands for the martyrdom of the victors and their crossing over into God's presence through death. And yet the song of praise is also ascribed to the Lamb, because those victories were only achieved through Christ and his sacrifice. The words of the song are a skilful amalgam of Old Testament quotations which sums up the Old Testament vision of God as the King to whom all nations come (Mi 4:1-3). This could be regarded by Israel in a rather nationalistic way (e.g. Is 49:22-23; 60:10-16), but in Revelation the martyrs express a confidence in universal salvation, of which they are the "firstfruits".

The rest of the chapter reminds the reader of two essentially complementary aspects: The God of justice for Israel and the world is the God of wrath who executes his judgement with righteous anger and authorises the plagues with power. Again the comparison is with Moses and the plagues on Egypt. This is no doctrine of God as a petty tyrant, but rather of God as ultimately in control of all creation. As Caird (1966:197) wrote: "The proof of God's ultimate sovereignty is that he can use even the powers of evil to be the means of their own destruction".

4.7 REVELATION 19

Everybody knows of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse, the riders on white, red, black, and pale horses (Rv 6:2-8). It is likely that the first rider, the warlike figure on the white horse, represents the conquering power of one of the new religious movements/mystery religions. The cult of Mithras spread from Persia throughout the Roman Empire and it was associated with the armed forces of Parthia and the Roman legions, spreading rapidly wherever those armies went. These four riders represent major threats to the first-century Mediterranean world: death and destruction from warfare, famine, and pestilence. While everybody knows the symbol of the four horsemen, comparatively few are aware of the much more powerful figure – the bloodstained rider of Revelation 19 (Du Rand 2007:533-549, Stefanovic 2002:539-559; Aune 1998b:1012-1068; Chilton 1987:467-492). In this section the harvester image of Revelation 14 is replaced by the more aggressive warrior imagery. We have already seen how John achieves a dramatic effect by contrast and paradox in the figure of the Lamb of God. This rider is another image of Christ, as the "garment dipped in blood" (ἱμάτιον βεβαμμένον αἵματι, Rv 19:13), his "name the Word of God" (τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ὁ Λόγος τοῦ Θεοῦ, Rv 19:13), and the acclamation "Faithful and True" (πιστὸς καλούμενος καὶ ἀληθινός, Rv 19:11, recalling Rv 3:14), all make clear. Other features such as "eyes aflame like fire" (ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτοῦ φλὸξ πυρός, Rv 19:12) and "from his mouth…a sharp sword" (ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ ἐκπορεύεται ῥομφαία ὀξεῖα, Rv 19:15), recall the vision of the heavenly Son of Man in Revelation 1.

The purpose of the coming is to judge and to make war – there are no mitigating features, no saving possibilities. The accompanying armies of heaven, dressed in pure white linen and also riding white horses (τὰ

στρατεύματα τὰ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ ἠκολούθει αὐτῷ ἐφ' ἵπποις λευκοῖς, ἐνδεδυμένοι βύσσινον λευκὸν καθαρόν, Rv 19:14), are those who have conquered with Christ (Rv 7:14) and follow the leadership of the Lamb (Rv 14:1-7). This vision is set in deliberate contrast to that of the first rider – the way of Christ is declared superior to the way of Mithras and the mystery cults, and more powerful than the might of the Roman legions. On Christ's head are "many diadems" (ἐπὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτοῦ διαδήματα πολλά, Rv 19:12), in contrast to the limited number of crowned heads among the adverse powers of the Beast and the Dragon. The title of Christ's victory is inscribed "on his blood-soaked garment and on his thigh (where his sword of judgement would normally hang)" (ἔχει ἐπὶ τὸ ἱμάτιον καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν μηρὸν αὐτοῦ ὄνομα γεγραμμένον, Rv 19:16) – "King of kings and Lord of lords" (Βασιλεὺς βασιλέων καὶ κύριος κυρίων, Rv 19:16). We have reached a Revelation of Christ at the end of history. His saving work is done.

What is most surprising is the means used to destroy those who oppose the Lamb. This representation is paradoxical – the final clash is expressed in military terms, but there is no real battle. He brings with him the armies of heaven which, as has been mentioned before, are clad not in armour or military gear, but in fine linen as for a wedding. The nations simply collapse under the devastating sword of the warrior-king; a weapon which is nothing more than a commanding word. He acts only against those who are not numbered among his people. Christ has the last word at the consummation. In all these visual representations the figure of the exalted Christ is supreme. There is never any question concerning the issue. Victory is certain and is directly attributed to Christ himself – he performs precisely the function of God. The final denouncement of evil is majestically related: it's personification in the Dragon and in the gaudily attired harlot, Babylon, contrasts vividly with the description of the bride and of the New Jerusalem.

One other feature of the context of Revelation 19 deserves more attention than it is usually given – the "wedding of the Lamb" is announced in Revelation 19:7 (ὁ γάμος τοῦ ἀρνίου), along with "the supper of the marriage of the Lamb" in 19:9 (τὸ δεῖπνον τοῦ γάμου τοῦ ἀρνίου); but it does not take place until "the holy New Jerusalem comes down from God in heaven, prepared as a bride for her groom" in Revelation 21:2 (τὴν πόλιν τὴν ἁγίαν Ἰερουσαλὴμ καινὴν εἶδον καταβαίνουσαν ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ, ἡτοιμασμένην ὡς νύμφην κεκοσμημένην τῷ ἀνδρὶ αὐτῆς). The climax of the book is in Revelation 21 and 22, for which the worship scenes have progressively prepared us (Thompson 1969:330-350). The New Jerusalem visions are highly relevant for the church on earth, for they paint a picture of the future. They bring hope to the struggling earthly communities. They present a glorious consummation. The church has previously been described as a bride ready and suitably dressed for the marriage supper of the Lamb. Whatever the weaknesses reflected in the opening letters, a time dawns when the church is arrayed in "fine linen, pure and bright" (ἐδόθη αὐτῇ ἵνα περιβάληται βύσσινον λαμπρὸν καθαρόν, Rv 19:8). After the coming of the warrior King, as the Lamb is now pictured, the New Jerusalem descends. God declares that everything is being made new. This theme of a wedding celebration absorbs the Old Testament idea of a great feast at the end of time symbolising God's kingdom (e.g. Is 25:6). The same connection is made in some of the Royal Psalms in the Psalter, especially Psalm 45 (the Royal Wedding Psalm), where the joy of the celebration and the beauty of the royal bride are depicted, and the bridegroom is introduced:

> You are the most handsome of men…Gird your sword on your thigh,
> o mighty one, in your glory and majesty. In your majesty ride on

victoriously for the cause of truth and to defend the right; let your

right hand teach you dread deeds. (Ps 45: 2-4)

Here is a prototype of Revelation's imagery – the wedding of the warrior-king who rides in triumph. If this wedding is announced in Revelation 19, and solemnised in Revelation 21, it could mean that the intervening chapter 20 is concerned with who will and who will not receive wedding invitations.

4.8 REVELATION 21-22

How relevant is the New Jerusalem for the modern Christian? The vision has often been dismissed as "pie-in-the-sky", intended to distract the readers from thinking about their present problems. But this is not how the Book of Revelation portrays it (Du Rand 2007:578-634, Stefanovic 2002:573-613; Aune 1998b:1108-1241; Chilton 1987:535-611). Here it is a natural consummation of God's plan of salvation. The city image is significant, for it symbolises redeemed man in community (Guthrie 1987:90).

It is no ordinary city – its cube like dimensions are clearly symbolic, especially when remembering that the central feature of Old Testament worship is a cube, the Holy of holies. But, whereas only one man was eligible once a year to enter there, now the whole community is placed within the cube. The eschatological significance is unavoidable. At the last, in spite of the problems arising from the conflict with evil, God's plans work out triumphantly in the perfection of his people. All the details of the New Jerusalem (Rv 21:11-14) are intended to point to that perfection: "radiance like a precious stone" (ὁ φωστὴρ αὐτῆς ὅμοιος λίθῳ τιμιωτάτῳ, ὡς λίθῳ ἰάσπιδι κρυσταλλίζοντι), the "great high wall and twelve gates with twelve angels at the gates" (τεῖχος μέγα καὶ ὑψηλόν, ἔχουσα πυλῶνας δώδεκα, καὶ ἐπὶ τοῖς πυλῶσιν ἀγγέλους δώδεκα), the "pure gold of the city like pure glass" (ἡ πόλις χρυσίον καθαρὸν ὅμοιον ὑάλῳ καθαρῷ), with "golden streets as transparent as glass" (ἡ

πλατεῖα τῆς πόλεως χρυσίον καθαρὸν ὡς ὕαλος διαυγής) with "the glory of God enlightening with the lamp that is the Lamb" (δόξα τοῦ θεοῦ ἐφώτισεν αὐτήν, καὶ ὁ λύχνος αὐτῆς τὸ ἀρνίον) and "the river of life, bright as crystal" (ποταμὸν ὕδατος ζωῆς λαμπρὸν ὡς κρύσταλλον) pouring forth from the throne of God and the Lamb. Sorrow and death are banished for ever. Those who work evil are excluded. Nothing remains to mar the bliss of the people of God.

No greater comfort could be given to Christians today, so often faced with intense challenge, than a vision of the New Jerusalem. There is no more triumphant book than this in the New Testament – here the modern church can, as could Revelation's first audience, find fresh courage. The book leaves the reader with the impression that, however powerful the forces of evil appear to be, the reality is very different. Even the Dragon can be subdued by a single angel with a single chain, apparently without struggle. The last two chapters (Rv 21-22) offer a serene picture of a new type of community existence, which comes as some relief after the fierce conflicts in the earlier part of the book.

The New Jerusalem is clearly intended to contrast with the old, and yet it goes considerably beyond it in its scope – it is no longer restricted to Jewish concepts (Lohse 1960:101), it stands for a universal community devoted to the worship of God. We have already seen that this is the perfect representation of the church. But why is it expressed in terms of a city? This is surprising in view of the fact that mankind began, according to Genesis, in a garden. Cities were made by man. Yet, by virtue of this very fact cities represent humankind in community. The supreme example of humanity in community must be the church of Christ purified from all her blemishes. Faced with this astonishing vision we may well ask what relevance it has for us today? In answer to that question we may point to our pressing need for some concept of man living in perfect harmony and in ideal surroundings. We

need some assurance that redeemed humanity is of such a character that not only is harmonious social existence possible, but that the men and women are actually destined for it in the purpose of God.

On the level of action, there is literary closure (Barr 2001:110-111) – the war is over, the letter is finished, the audience is invited to join in the worship, along with "the Spirit and the bride who say 'come'" (τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ ἡ νύμφη λέγουσιν· Ἔρχου, Rv 22:17), and the Jesus anticipated in the letters now says "Yes, I am coming quickly" (Ναί· ἔρχομαι ταχύ, Rv 22:20). Furthermore, the story of the war provides a culminating end. Not only does this take us back to the beginning of the story (the end is the beginning); not only does it resolve the whole story of creation (the end is in the end); it also inaugurates a new story, for something seems about to happen as the last words are spoken (the end is a new beginning). "Those that thirst have been invited to 'come' and drink of the water of life" (ὁ διψῶν ἐρχέσθω, ὁ θέλων λαβέτω ὕδωρ ζωῆς δωρεάν, Rv 22:17), and Jesus is also invited to "come" (ἔρχου, κύριε Ἰησοῦ, Rv 19:20). What will happen in this meeting? We do not know, for the story stops. But it stops on a very anticipatory note (Barr 2001:111). We are led to think that the audience of the story is about to partake of some ritual experience, some "drinking" of the water of life. Whether this ritual act is the Eucharist (Barr 1986:243-256, and 1998:171-180) or not, it is clear that the ending of Revelation extends outward toward a new action.

The story leads to a new story. That the ending to the story should prove to be complex should not surprise the careful reader, for the book has trained us from the beginning to be wary of endings – the end has been repeatedly offered, only to be withdrawn (Barr 2001:112). Nor is it obscure that the ending is extended into an act of worship. As the angelic word reminds John at the end: worship God. The struggle between worshipping

God and worshipping the beast has been crucial to the whole story (see e.g. Rv 14:7; 19:10; 20:9 along with Rv 4:10; 5:14; 7:11; 11:16; 19:4; in contrast to Rv 13:4, 8-15; 14:9-10; 19:20). From its opening incomplete sentence, through repeated intimations of closure, to the final resolution of the plot in the ending of the war and the new creation, to the final scenic dialogue that invites the implied reader to partake of a new experience, John's Apocalypse refuses to let the reader rest (Barr 2001:112). We wait for an end that never comes. And why should it? John would have the reader engaged in the end, to endure and to conquer, so why should he provide an ending that would let us abandon our posts?

The Apocalypse allows us, indeed requires us, to re-experience the work, both as story and as continuing experience (Barr 2001:112). Faced with this ending, the reader must reconsider the story's meaning, must reread the story. Revelation 19:1-10 issued a twofold challenge to the Christians of the seven Churches of Asia (Ruiz 2001:70) – First, they were called upon to discern the appropriate object of their worship. Second, they were challenged to consider just what activities constituted authentic worship. The Apocalypse employs the language of liturgical hymnody in an active way to map out an alternative world view for Christians in the seven churches (Ruiz 2001:84).

By celebrating the victory of divine justice and the onset of God's eschatological reign, Revelation 19 vigorously contested the competing claims of Babylon and the Beast, claims that were powerfully validated in the everyday commerce of the Roman province of Asia. Faced with these competing claims of the Beast and the Lamb, of Babylon and Jerusalem, the Christians of the seven churches were called upon to discern the appropriate recipient of their reverence. They were also challenged to consider just what activities, cultic or otherwise, constituted authentic worship. This mediation of meaning through ritual worked to shape a strategy of resistance (Ruiz

2001:84). In their heroic witness to the power of the sovereign that the Apocalypse's heavenly choirs identify as "our God", such resistance promised Christians of the seven churches the sort of share in the slaughtered Lamb's paradoxical victory that would gain them admission to the chorus of those who sing praise around God's throne.

It is by the righteousness of their deeds (τὸ γὰρ βύσσινον τὰ δικαιώματα τῶν ἁγίων ἐστίν, Rv 19:8), and not by the perfection of their prayers, that the faithful stand with Christ the Lamb to receive admission into the eschatological beatitude of the New Jerusalem. It is no accident that the only humans who participate in the Apocalypse's heavenly worship are those who "come out of great tribulations" (Οὗτοί εἰσιν οἱ ἐρχόμενοι ἐκ τῆς θλίψεως τῆς μεγάλης, Rv 7:14) and who "have overcome/defeated the Beast, his image, his number and his name" (τοὺς νικῶντας ἐκ τοῦ θηρίου καὶ ἐκ τῆς εἰκόνος αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐκ τοῦ ἀριθμοῦ τοῦ ὀνόματος αὐτοῦ, Rv 15:2-3). It is in this sense that the Apocalypse continues to inspire a vision of hope for many readers. The book of Revelation is helping to create a new historical and liberating language (Richard 1995:78-105).

5 IDENTIFYING FURTHER RITUAL POSSIBILITIES WITHIN REVELATION

As seen in the liturgical functional analysis above, this might be a very promising start, but it still is only a start to the exploration of the use of this method on the Book of Revelation as a whole. The implication being that the further possibilities identified and mentioned cannot be discussed in too much detail – that is work for a lifetime. That being said, when looking at the Apocalypse's eschatological imagery (as laid out above) from a liturgical functional point of view, there are quite a few elements that do not only have

significance in the hearing of them, but that can be used in physical ritual or performative ways to strengthen the liturgical functional performance of, and participation in, the message of Revelation. In this way, the text as performance comes full circle.

5.1 THE MESSAGES TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES

In Revelation 2 and 3 we find the seven messages to the seven churches (Du Rand 2007:145-219, Stefanovic 2002:73-86, 109-155; Aune 1997:117-265; Chilton 1987:535-611). In order to understand the significance of the messages to the various churches, it is important to understand the context in which they were written. Firstly, a number of problems were coming at the churches from outside, disturbing and troubling the Christians of John's day in Asia Minor:

- They faced pagan opposition and accusations because they did not participate in social activities; as they e.g. avoided celebrations that were characterized by immoral practices and the eating of food dedicated to pagan gods. They were accused of atheism for worshiping only their God, for whoever did not worship the emperor was considered an atheist by the Romans. They were also charged with cannibalism in relation to the Lord's Supper where they were thought to be eating human flesh and drinking their blood. Stories were also circulated that they were sacrificing children at their services. As a result, the Christians were gradually losing their legal status in society.

- A second problem that the churches faced was persecution. A serious threat to the church was the development of the imperial cult of worship to the emperor. Revelation 2:13 reports the death of a person in Pergamum, named Antipas, who suffered martyrdom by Roman authorities for his faith. The persecution also threatened the churches in Smyrna (Rv 2:10) and Philadelphia (Rv 3:10). The book of

Revelation indicates that John expected an intensification of persecution, and with it the prospect that a number of the weaker and less devoted among the church's members would fall away. These factors created an insecure situation in the churches. The believers were filled with fear about what the future might bring.

- Finally, the churches were suffering due to conflicts with the Jews. Christianity began as an offshoot of Judaism. The book of Acts depicts a shift in the early church from continuity in the relationship toward separation between the two religions. The separation was hastened by the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 C.E. After the war in 70 C.E., because of their refusal to join the Jews in the war with the Romans, Christians were not welcome in the synagogue. Right after the destruction of Jerusalem, the Jews added an eighteenth benediction to the seventeen which were recited in closing the synagogue services. It really was not a benediction, but rather a curse against Christ and Christians. The Christians, evidently, were refusing to recite the eighteenth benediction, and thus were eventually expelled from the synagogue. Toward the end of the first century, the relationship between the Christians and Jews was characterized by antagonism and hostility. The Christians were banished from the synagogue and lost the legal status that they enjoyed as a sub-division of the Jewish faith – i.e. were recognized by Roman authorities as a *religio licita* (a legal religion) with the privileges of worshiping on the Sabbath, and being exempted from emperor worship. Revelation itself refers twice to the hostility of Jews toward the Christians in the Roman province of Asia Minor (Rev. 2:9; and Rv 3:9). Their opposition to the gospel and their persecution of the Christians made them the servants of Satan.

Problems of an internal nature also troubled the churches in Asia Minor. As the seven messages indicate, the Christians in those churches were seriously divided on certain issues. For some of the churches, while the majority of members were faithful, some individuals, including church leaders, were not faithful and opposed John. In other churches – such as Thyatira, Sardis, and Philadelphia – the majority of believers were in apostasy. In Sardis, just "a few names" had "not defiled their garments" (Rv 3:4). The church in Philadelphia was left with but "little strength" (Rv 3:8). The whole church in Laodicea appeared to be in apostasy, and nothing good was found in it.

The basic issues that the Christians in Asia were wrestling with involved the food offered to idols and sexual immorality (cf. Rv 2:14-15, 20). These were the very two things which the Council of Jerusalem instructed all the Christians to spurn (Ac 15:20). These two issues threatened the unity of the churches in Asia because they were related to the popular demands of the society in Asia. Christians in the Roman empire were a part of the society in which they lived and, as such, were expected to participate in all civic obligations. All citizens were expected, first of all, to participate in the religious festivals in pagan temples. Those who refused to participate suffered ridicule and the hardships of social isolation and economic sanctions. The Christians in Asia faced at least two problems with regard to their involvement in the pagan religious festivals. The first problem was related to that of eating food offered to idols. Participants at the pagan festivals would usually feast on food that consisted mainly of meat that had been offered to the local patron god. The festivals often ended with drunkenness and immoral activities. The second problem with regard to the pagan religious festivals was cultic prostitution. Temple prostitution was a part of many ancient, pagan religions. Sexual intercourse with the temple prostitutes was for the fertility of the land and the prosperity of society. Anyone who wanted economic, political, or social status in society had to meet these religious

demands. Involvement in the pagan religious festivals called for a compromise to Christian belief and values. The churches in Asia were divided on the issue of participation. Some Christians responded to the demand with a decisive "no". Some groups, for the sake of influence on the society and in the interest of business and commercial prosperity, advocated a compromise. These opponents of John are referred to by different names: In Ephesus they were known as Nicolaitans (Rv 2:6); in Pergamum as Baalamites (Rv 2:14); and in Thyatira as the followers of a prominent and influential woman in the church named Jezebel (Rv 2:20). All three groups opposed John and advocated a compromise, thus causing many in the churches in Asia to commit fornication and eat the things sacrificed to idols (Rv 2:14, 20). They most likely recognized that pagan social life was an open field for the operations of Satan, and that those who entered it did so at their peril. However, they believed that it was their Christian duty to participate as fully as possible in the pagan society around them, to identify themselves with the common life of their city.

They could find theological justification for their reasoning in the writings of Paul, who required subjection to the governing authorities (cf. Rm 13:1-8; 1 Tm 2:1-4). Paul also made clear that feasting at the pagan festivals was not to be an issue for Christians; idols were nothing (cf. 1 Cor 8; Rm 14). John had to take a stand on the issue of food offered to idols. In seeming contrast to Paul, he argued against any compromise. Idols might be nothing, but to participate in the pagan religious festivals meant to compromise the Christian faith and honour Satan himself. In light of the soon coming of Christ, Christians ought to be on the right side. For the sake of being faithful to Christ and the gospel, they must, if necessary, withdraw themselves from the world and sacrifice their social or business prosperity.

The primary purpose of John's writing Revelation, therefore, was to

help the first-century Christians in the Roman province of Asia Minor with their condition and problems. Confronted with the growing hostility of Rome, as well as the invading heresy and increasing apostasy within the church, the Christians in Asia were concerned about their own identity and existence. What would the future bring to the church? The Book of Revelation was intended to provide the answer.

5.1.1 Introducing the seven messages

After Christ's reassuring words – "Stop being afraid! I am the first and the last, and the living One, and I was dead and behold, I am living for ever and ever, and I have the keys of Death and Hades" (Rv 1:17-18) – the exalted Christ commissioned John to write out the things revealed to him and pass it on to the churches (Rv 1:19-20; cf. Rv 1:11). It thus appears that the seven messages were not intended to be sent "separately" to the churches. They were composed as one letter and, as such, were sent with the rest of the book of Revelation to all seven churches together (cf. Rv 1:11). A message directed to "an individual church was apparently also intended for the other six churches" (see especially Rv 2:23). The churches to which these seven messages were addressed are listed in a certain geographical order. The cities in which these seven churches were established (cf. Rv 1:11) were located on main, interconnecting Roman roads at intervals of about thirty to forty miles, thus forming a circuit. A person visiting these cities would travel in a semicircle, beginning with Ephesus (closest to Patmos), and moving in a clockwise direction north to Smyrna and Pergamum, and then southeast to Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and, finally, Laodicea. It is possible that the messages to the churches was carried along this route.

It appears that the order of the seven churches also reflects the position of lamps of a seven-branched lamp stand. Each lamp on one side of the lamp stand corresponds to its parallel on the opposite side. It seems that the

seven messages function exactly in such a way. The first and last messages, to Ephesus and Laodicea, are clearly parallel; both churches are in great danger of lovelessness and legalism. The second and sixth, to Smyrna and Philadelphia, commend the churches for faithfulness; they do not receive a rebuke, and both are opposed by those "who call themselves Jews" (Rv 2:9; and Rv 3:9). The third and fifth messages, to Pergamum and Sardis, are parallel in apostasy; there is little good to be said about them. The fourth message, to the middle church of the series, Thyatira, is clearly different. It is a divided church; and this message is the longest of all. In parallel structures such as this one, an understanding of one side of the parallel helps us to understand the other side.

5.1.2 The format of the seven messages

Each message has a common six-fold format, with only minor differences from the other messages. By comparing the similar elements in all of the messages, one may gain fuller insight into the meaning of their contents.

1) Each of the messages opens with the address: "To the messenger
2) of the church in..." Every church is known by its name. Christ addresses the churches individually.
3) The message to each of the churches begins with the phrase "thus says", which parallels the "thus says the Lord" in Old Testament prophetic oracles. Here, Christ is clearly the speaker. When he speaks, the church is to listen and obey. "Thus says" is followed by a brief description of Jesus Christ as the sender of the message. Christ identifies himself in terms of some of his characteristics from the great vision of the "One like a son of Man" walking "in the midst of the seven lampstands" (cf. Rv 2:1) in Revelation 1:9-20. The characteristics used were relevant and particularly suited to the situation of each of the local churches and specific problem(s) each faced.

4) The description is followed by Jesus' appraisal of the church. This section begins with the formula: "I know". Five of the seven churches Jesus addresses with the words "I know your works", while the messages to Smyrna and Pergamum have "I know your affliction" and "I know where you dwell", respectively. This difference is due to the peculiar circumstances of these two churches. Christ first analyses the spiritual condition of each of the churches. He claims an intimate and full knowledge of them. His "penetrating eyes" reveal "the true situation of each church, sometimes reversing the church's own estimation of itself". He knows each church individually, because he walks in the midst of them. If the churches want to know how to live and change, they need to listen to what Christ says to them. First, Christ commends a church with words of praise for its good qualities, with the exception of Sardis and Laodicea, where there is little to be praised. Following are words of criticism concerned with the deficiency of the church. Smyrna and Philadelphia are exempted here; they have nothing to be blamed for. They are not even asked to repent. The appraisal is followed by words of counsel. After analysing the spiritual condition of each church, Christ advises it to change its condition. The church is either called to repent and to change its ways, or it is encouraged to remain firm in faithfulness and obedience.

5) Each church is urged to hear what the Spirit says to the churches. "The one who has an ear, let him hear" echoes the words with which Christ concludes his sayings in the gospels (e.g. Mk 4:9, 23; Lk 8:8; 14:35; and Mt 11:15; 13:9, 43). The phrase suggests a wider audience than a single church. Christ speaks through the Holy Spirit (cf. Jn 16:13). What Christ says to those seven local congregations in the first century is what the Holy Spirit says to the universal church and individual Christians everywhere and in every time.

6) Each message concludes with a word of promise to the overcomer.

Christians are called to a life of victory and loyalty to Christ.

Two different proposals are suggested for the structural pattern of the seven messages of Revelation 2-3. On one hand, Shea (1983:71-84) proposes that the form of the messages follows the covenant formulary. The ancient covenant treaty consisted of five standard elements: (1) preamble, (2) prologue, (3) stipulations or demands, (4) blessings and curses, and (5) witnesses. In applying these elements to the contents of each of the seven messages to the churches, Shea observes their presence in each case: (1) the preamble introduces Christ with the phrase "Thus says the One who..." and a subsequent title; (2) the prologue speaks of past relations in such terms as "I know your works"; (3) the stipulations are introduced with the imperative of "repent" followed by other instructions; (4) the blessing consists of a statement of reward such as "To the One who overcomes", while threats of curses occur irregularly; and (5) the Spirit functions as the witness to whom the churches are to listen. Shea thus concludes that the seven messages function as the covenant renewal statements to each of the seven churches.

On the other hand, Aune (1990:182-204; 1997:126-129) reflects some other authors by suggesting the influence of the royal and imperial edicts on the format of the seven messages: (1) the *praescriptio* (introduction); (2) the central section; and (3) the conclusion. Aune holds that the seven messages follow this threefold structure: (1) an introduction; (2) a central section introduced by "I know"; and (3) a double conclusion containing a call for vigilance and a victory saying. He further argues that the "thus says" formula, which was the primary feature of royal and imperial decrees promulgated by Roman magistrates and emperors after Persian kings, classifies the seven messages as edicts (which were formal and public) rather than letters (which were informal and private). In using the

royal/imperial edict form, John presents the exalted Christ as a king addressing his subjects, in contrast to the Roman emperor, who is but a pale and diabolical imitation of God. In his role as the eternal sovereign and king of kings, Jesus is presented as issuing solemn and authoritative edicts befitting his status.

These two proposals should not be regarded as mutually exclusive but rather correlative and complementary. They serve as an example for how the Book of Revelation as a whole reflects a wide spectrum of background motifs. While the covenant formulary idea points to the covenant aspect and character of the first main division of Revelation, the royal/imperial edict view shows how the form of the seven messages of Revelation 2-3 communicated effectively to the first-century Christians in the Asia Minor setting.

5.1.3 Possible ritual/performative moments in the messages

The message to the church in Ephesus is a strong appeal to all Christians who are backsliding in ardent love for the gospel. They are urged to examine their past lives and to bring to mind what it was like when they were in love with Christ, and how in those early days of their devotion to Christ they responded enthusiastically with "works" of love in their relation to other members of the believing community as well as those outside that community. Christ's message to this church suggests that the best place to start renewing that relationship is to bear in mind the first-love experience. Like the prodigal son (Lk 15:11-24), we will never be satisfied until we return to the first-love experience with Christ, doing "the first works" that initially characterized that relationship. That is to say, we must make Christ our religion. Throughout history, Christians have often found themselves strained between love on one side and obedience on the other. In emphasizing the love aspect of the gospel so strongly, obedience to the requirements of the

gospel can easily be disregarded. Focusing on duty and the preserving of sound doctrine (and often exposing heresy and fighting against it), Christians very often lose love for each other. Upholding doctrine and church order without focusing on Christ is useless, and religion not based on the gospel has no value; it is rather a lifeless, dead religion. Genuine religion is Christ-centred; based on both vertical and horizontal relationships characterised by love for Christ, on the one hand, and love for each other, on the other.

The message to the church in Smyrna still applies to Christians suffering under the pressure of life or the pressure of antagonism and injustice. It is for those who may be afraid because they fear the suffering to come. Jesus' counsel for them is: "Stop fearing! I am in control. There is nothing in life or in death, in time or eternity, nobody and nothing, that can separate you from my love" (cf. Rm 8:38-39).

The situation of the Christians in Pergamum clearly shows that it is perfectly possible to be a follower of Christ under horrendous circumstances. Christians are invited to live lives of a "faithful witness" where life has set them. If they are in "Pergamum", where Satan's influences and power are the strongest, then there they must live and demonstrate that they are the followers of Christ who himself was "the faithful witness".

The experience of a minority of the believers in the church of Thyatira proves that love and faith manifested in Christian service and perseverance can be experienced even in churches where the majority have chosen to follow a way of compromise to the world's standards and conformation to a non-Christian lifestyle. Christian service and perseverance are the result of the working and transforming influence of the Holy Spirit upon the heart, and they are not conditioned by favourable circumstances.

The message to the church in Sardis, like the message to the church in Ephesus, is a strong appeal to all who feel half-hearted and divided in their devotion to God. They may not feel the same enthusiasm which they had

when they first received and heard the gospel, and they may find it difficult to continue serving God. Jesus' appeal to all who have an ear, to let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches, shows that what happened to the Christians in Sardis can happen to every Christian, regardless of place and time. A church can have a great name and reputation and brilliant works, and yet be spiritually lifeless and lethargic. The fact that it was faithful to the Lord at some time in the past does not mean that it will remain faithful. The only way to reclaim the wholehearted and original enthusiasm and devotion to Christ is to bear in mind and keep afresh past experience and apply it to the present. Then follows the radical decision and action expressed by the exhortation which sounds like a command: "Repent!" In the life of every Christian who is backsliding from ardent love for Christ, there must be a decisive moment when a firm, radical decision allows for a new beginning. Such a decision puts God in the place in life where he truly belongs.

Even though God's people in Philadelphia have little strength, he graciously sets before them a door of opportunities. The enemy of God and his people can try to shut that door, but Jesus possesses the key to the heavenly storehouse. When he opens a door, nobody is able to shut it. He *is* in control. God's people, although weak, need to hold what they have, that spark of their faithfulness, trusting God and allowing him to work in them and through them. In such a way, no one will be able to take their crown from them.

The message to the church in Laodicea is directed to all who put their trust in their material and temporal prosperity-those in a condition of self-sufficiency who believe that their material prosperity is a given favour from God. When Christians today, like the church in Laodicea, look lukewarm and feel half-hearted in their relationship with Christ, the best solution is to take the advice offered by Jesus: "I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in fire that you may be rich, and white garments that you may clothe yourself,

so that the shame of your nakedness may not be exposed, and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see" (Rv 3:18). What the Laodiceans need above all is eye salve to clearly discern their real spiritual condition. The fact that they are free from apostasy or heresy, that no serious sin is found among them, and that they have a very positive opinion of themselves is not a guarantee of their relationship with Christ. Jesus longs to become the focus of all the church's attention-the centre of the church's life, worship, activities, and behaviour. Even though the church as a whole is in a condition of self-sufficiency and half-hearted service to God, the call for repentance is directed to each member. Jesus is waiting for individuals to respond. This is what will bring revival and reformation to the lukewarm and half-hearted church of Laodicea.

Now, though we may be centuries, continents, and revolutions removed from those congregations; the different problems addressed within each church are problems that still run rampant in the world (and therefore in the church) today. By making use of the pattern of confession, absolution, worship, and blessing that we find in the message to each of these churches, these messages can become an integral part of the way that congregations today understand themselves and participate in each other's lives. The messages can also impact the life of the community the believers find themselves in, and then not because of intellectual conversation and thought, but because of their symbolic participation.

This could be achieved by modifying and applying the messages to the different churches – the positives God identifies in each, the negatives he warns them of, what repentance is required, and the promise associated with the church's repentance and endurance – to become the totality of liturgy and ritual for specific services. The different elements of each letter then become varied performative moments within the service, the ritual of which

leads to identification on an instinctual/affective level, thus making embodied change possible.

5.2 PRAYERS, SUPPLICATIONS AND SONGS

The variety of prayers to be found in the Apocalypse open up a world of possibilities where performative action is concerned:

- There is the golden thread of the constant prayers and songs of celebration of the identity, the majesty, and the power of God found throughout the book – e.g. Revelation 4:8 and 11; 5:9-10, 12-13; 7:10 and 12; 11:15-18; 14:1-3; 15:3-4; 16:5, 15; and 19:1-7.

- For those times when the chaos of the world seems overwhelming – whether it be through actual persecution and martyrdom, or because of the effects of living in a sinful and broken world in which the "Dragon" has influence – there are supplications with which to voice the anguish, frustration, and impatience experienced (e.g. Rv 6:10-11; 16:15; and 22:17 and 20).

- There are also examples of the blessings that await those who suffer in the name of Christ, which could serve as a balm when experiencing the cruelty of the world – e.g. Revelation 12:10-12; 14:7 and 13.

- Then there are also those statements which deal with the darkness of the world; with sinners questioning themselves, and with the eventual fall and total humiliation/destruction of all who stand against God (e.g. Rv 6:16-17; 14: 8; and 18:2-7, 9-10, 16-24). In the communal voicing of these curses, our primal need for the expression of destructive thoughts and the ideal of the vindication of our enemies can also be ritually expressed (and therefore addressed).

In terms of the way in which these prayers, supplications, and songs can become a part of our ritual and symbolic actions, the possibilities are legion: e.g. they can become a more regular part of the liturgy in statements that

the leader makes; or dialogue between the leader and congregation; or as supplications from the congregation; or they can be transposed into songs that become a more prominent part of the liturgical repertoire. Whatever form they may take on, the goal will always be that, by playing and performing these new actualities, they are sub-consciously and consciously brought into existence.

Thus, if accepted subjectively as well as metaphorically, these rituals and images have the capacity to shape us by revealing new dimensions of imaginable being. A metamorphosis of imagery occurs, which extends beyond the dimensions of the reasoned intellect alone. In this performative ritual experience, the totality of a person can be transformed because previously hidden (sub-conscious) elements are now revealed.

5.3 RITUAL ACTIONS/GESTURES

The Book of Revelation is filled with ritual actions/gestures and symbols that can be used when partaking in performative actions to enrich and deepen the experience of the participants. A few examples:

- Incense as symbol of both prayer and God's glory, power and blessing (Rv 8:3-4; and 5:8-10);
- The seal/anointing and marking of those who believe, as promise and protection (Rv 7:2-3; and 22:4);
- The sacrifice/blood of the Lamb and the martyrs (Rv 7:14; and 12:11);
- The washing of robes and the importance of new and white/pure robes (Rv 7:13-14; and 22:14);
- The crowning/reward of the faithful (Rv 2:10; 3:11; 4:4; 20:4; 21:3-7; and 22:1-5);
- The importance of the eating of the scroll, the word of prophecy (Rv 10:9-11); and
- The different harvests – grain and grapes (Rv 14:14-20).

The symbolic images, used when speaking of God in Revelation, are of great importance – if faith communities were to incorporate more of this imagery into their ritual gatherings, thus also incorporating more of the senses in the performative action of the community, the possibility of conscious and sub-conscious change becomes even stronger and more likely. For, when continually confronted with the power and glory of the different elements of the symbolic descriptions of God, the faithful cannot be but ever-more secure, rooted in the power and majesty of the God they worship. Of course, the reverse of this – the Apocalypse's description of the refusal of those who are unfaithful to repent, even when punished and suffering (Rv 8-9; 16:21) – serve both as warning for those who do not obey and as source of vindication for those who do, as well as reinforcing God's majesty, power and victory.

6 CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this chapter the following has been made clear: By using a ritual/liturgical functional reading of the Apocalypse of John we finally give the "hearing"/performance of the book the weighted consideration it deserves. As a result, the rhetorical power and gripping affective majesty of the Apocalypse is brought to the fore. But this cannot be done effectively without consideration of the effect that the performance of the text intended to have on its hearers and/or participants; for a performance without an audience is meaningless. And it is in these ritual acts and their effect on the first audience – identified by using a liturgical functional analysis – that Revelation's significance for today's faith community can be found.

The success of the transformation of thought and action brought about by the performance(s) of the Book of Revelation in its first audiences cannot be doubted. For here we are, centuries later, not only still studying the Apocalypse, but with a culture shaped and informed by this book. A book written for a small group on the fringe of ancient society in Asia Minor, trying

their utmost to survive in dire circumstances. But how can the simple performance/re-living of this text change how people think and feel in the present? So much has happened since the writing of the book. So much has changed. Or has it?

The following chapter is dedicated to studying both the exterior and interior worlds of our functioning, thinking, and processes as human beings. We have to do this to be able to make full use of reader-response criticism and understand its interaction with the liturgical/performative use of a text (i.e. the critical-functional reading done in this chapter).

CHAPTER 4

1 HOW WE HAVE ENDED UP HERE

Up to this point in the dissertation, the study has been focused on the Book of Revelation's immediate/original context and audience. In Chapter 2 a study of most of the major movements and methods in the academic study of the Apocalypse was done. A possible "new"/extra dimension to the study of Revelation – a liturgical/functional reading – was also identified and discussed. It is the contention of this thesis that this study can add onto what has been/is being done in our work on Revelation. In Chapter 3 the liturgical/functional method, described at the end of Chapter 2, was used to analyse the Book of Revelation. Thus, in Chapter 3 the focus was, first-and-foremost, on the first century context and readers of the Apocalypse. And then a more specific focus on the affective impact that the book, specifically the performance of the text, was meant to have on those participating in the liturgy. Quite a few promising affects were identified and discussed in as much detail as was needed to be able to form a clear idea of the impact that the practical application of the proposed liturgical/functional method could have on our exegesis, and/or understanding, of the Apocalypse. In order to ensure a responsible process, the chapter focused on identifying some of Revelation's liturgical/functional moments and their affective impact on its first century audience in Asia Minor. Some suggestions as to how this affective impact could translate to today's faith communities were hinted at, but were not the main aim of the chapter. In what follows, the focus will shift to the present-day context. Chapter 4 evaluates our modern understanding and use of liturgy/ritual in order to: Understand the significance of liturgy/ritual in today's context, if it has any. Explore whether an affective link can be made between the Apocalypse's impact in its immediate context

and the context it is read/performed in today. Can participation in the text, the performance, that is the Book of Revelation still *do* something in our current context?

1.1 EXISTENCE AND AWARENESS

Our harried existence – an existence of trying to manage an overload of information – has led to the appeal of lowest common denominators and utilitarian all-purpose currencies that generalise shared experience at a very reduced and impoverished level of reality (Fernandez 1986:160). In the separated cells of our modern organic forms of solidarity, individual reality looms very large, and the study of strategy tends to be the study of "the manipulative ploys of individuals" (Bailey 1969). In an increasingly complex world, with the place the media now assumes in our lives, we rely not on people but networks to interpret our traditions; thus directly mediating both myth and meaning (Shorter 1996:7). This makes returning to the whole seem somehow beyond our reach, as something that pertains to societies characterised by mechanical forms of solidarity, strong feelings of consanguinity and affinity, and the real possibility of mystical participation (Fernandez 1986:181).

Yet, if we attempt to live with conscious awareness of who we are conditional behaviour, the origins of purpose, motivation and transformation, along with unclaimed images of the sacred have to be faced. This implies that the volatile chaos of today becomes unbearable without asking questions about "How come?" and "What for?" And answers inevitably and naturally involve us with ritual processes and revelation experienced concurrently with life development (Shorter 1996:ix). Individually then, ritual takes root in a sense of aloneness so bewildering and hazardous that one will sacrifice a previous identity in order to make contact with something more, with a strength elsewhere (Shorter 1996:21). There are those that think that

analytic reason alone is sufficient to temper the ambitions of separated men and women, so that they may subordinate themselves to such common interests. Rappaport (1979:236-237) argues that the "ultimate corrective operation inheres in systems as wholes", with the ultimate strategy then being that of returning to the whole. Such retrieval and construction is the ultimate and recurrent strategy of the human experience (Fernandez 1986:184). It is a precarious quest that, nevertheless, leads ultimately to an inner awakening and change (Shorter 1996:25).

1.2 EXPERIENCING TENSION

In this – our experience – there is a state of tension: For all of us, the urge to ritualize behaviour is seldom either ordinary or comfortable. Ritual conduct seems to be rooted in a deeply felt need to communicate across a gap (Shorter 1996:20). But we do not live in a "high context" society anymore. This implies inadequacies in our literal language, which cause us to turn to metaphoric predication, particularly in times of stress when literal routines break down and we are constrained by false/moribund categories. We do this because then we suddenly become aware of a wider classification of things that has (up to now) been only implicit and embedded in our experience (Fernandez 1986:178). The overall effect of this being that these entities are given a plenitude of experience they could never otherwise achieve.

Ritual mediates self-world relationships (Shorter 1996:ix). It brings us back from the "low-context" society we find ourselves in to functioning as we once did in "high context" society. But societies so largely adversarial as the modern ones are, by nature, alienated from the possibilities of overarching conviviality (Fernandez 1986:162). For this reason, they neglect the fundamental problem of relatedness ("high context"), which is actually the central problem of the whole – the restoration of the relatedness of all things. The experience of the "we", the foundation of all possible

communication, could only emerge from extended mutual "tuning-in" of the primordial kind we get through long mutual involvement at the perceptual level in primary groups (Fernandez 1986:165).

1.3 RITUAL (AND LITURGY) – DECEITFUL OR CONSTRUCTIVE?

Usually, when we think of symbolic strategies, we think of the use of symbols to manipulate persons and groups, most often for deceitful and self-serving purposes (Fernandez 1986:180). This is quite natural, since we are surrounded by an advertising environment that seeks to symbolically associate questionable products with desirable milieus of activity or belonging. But the prevalence of this use of symbolic strategies must not make us forget that there can also be another way in which symbolic strategies function – symbols/symbolic activities can be used to construct/reconstruct cosmological wholes. This use of ritual (symbolic strategy) – i.e. the creation of a meaningful whole through the unification of different and/or unique elements/fragments via liturgical/functional activities – is strategic in the most crucial sense (Fernandez 1986:181). It is this cosmological aspect that we are concerned with.

2 LITURGY – AN INTRODUCTION

2.1 THE PROBLEM WITH RITUAL AND LITURGY TODAY

What happens inside the church doors is its liturgy – it is there that life and fulfilment should be found (Taussig and Smith 1990:12). But, too often today, liturgy seems stale and lacking in vitality. It is dominated by an over-concern for the idea of "orthodoxy"/correct doctrine, tending to produce a sense of liturgy that is tied to "word" and emphasises a narrowed, single line of tradition. It is monolithic and rigid (Taussig and Smith 1990:16). This predisposition towards a particular view of liturgy has influenced the way in

which we read our texts: We find only what we are looking for and, possibly, miss what the texts have to tell us. This narrow ("low-context") view of ritual is one that is not only endemic to the modern church, but also to our culture as a whole (Douglas 1966:61-62). The problem is not so much a lack of faith as it is a lack of life in the liturgy itself. We have let our emphasis on preserving traditional forms and expressions overrule attempts to give vital expression to the life and faith of contemporary participants. The tradition is actually alive with meanings that we have too often overlooked (Taussig and Smith 1990:13) – liturgy *can* more effectively address the contemporary situation, if we can learn how to apply it to the aesthetic and symbolic language of today's culture.

So, on the one hand, liturgy must respond to the recognised foundations of the tradition, as found in the Book of Revelation and other documents of the early church. On the other hand, liturgy must also respond to the social and cultural circumstances of our time in a form that coheres with peoples' experiences and expectations (Taussig and Smith 1990:14). Here it is of the utmost importance that, to the extent that we in the church are part of an on-going history of interpretation, we allow the text to speak to us anew. This is not necessarily equal to making a biblicistic argument, but rather allowing the Apocalypse to speak to us on its own terms (Taussig and Smith 1990:16), determining what it actually says as apart from our traditional interpretations. For then we see that, just as it did in its original context (elaborated upon in Chapter 3), Revelation can witness to a multiplicity of liturgical practices for today's context, rather than just one. We also see that liturgy is not seen as a means to preserve the past, but rather as a dynamic way to address the church of the present (Taussig and Smith 1990:16).

2.2 FEELING AND ACTION – AN ESSENTIAL RELATION

What we have greatly missed up to now is the essential relation between "feeling" and exterior/embodied action (Taussig and Smith 1990:17). Ritual should be seen as an outlet for emotions, even as an enhancement to the emotional involvement of the individual in worship. Ritual, by its very nature, carries meaning – serving a purpose in our lives that we cannot deny. This means that we need to have a more precise understanding of the message that is being conveyed in our liturgy. We need to be more aware of how ritual functions and what the meanings of symbolic language and actions today are (Taussig and Smith 1990:18).

So we need to be giving more attention to the insights of ritual studies, since this perspective allows us to understand what "subliminal" messages (so to speak) are being proclaimed by the liturgical/ritual process. Exactly because it gives due weight to the affective power of liturgy/ritual, a power that taps into the deeper symbolic levels of culture.

2.3 LITURGY'S LANGUAGE, CREATIVELY SPEAKING

Finally, as a last introductory remark, the "language" that liturgy speaks needs to be reassessed and brought into line with the social and cultural circumstances of our time. Liturgy as a form of ritual speaks an aesthetic and symbolic language which cannot be reduced to mere words (Taussig and Smith 1990:19). This means that the ways in which the social and cultural realities of our time are reflected in liturgy needs to be re-examined as well. In times past the church drew strength from a lively interaction with the creative geniuses of culture. Today it seems that the church has become more and more estranged from the creative minds of contemporary culture, effectively cutting the lifeblood of culture off. As a result, we have lost touch with the symbolic language that is expressive of life as it is lived today. This

kind of new realisation of the diverse and dynamic origins of Christian ritual traditions can liberate us from old models and point us towards liturgies that are both reflective of the tradition, and energised by a creative interpretation with contemporary sensibilities and symbols (Taussig and Smith 1990:20).

3 LITURGICAL STUDY

3.1 THE OBJECT OF LITURGICAL STUDY

What is the object of liturgical studies? There are many possible answers to this question: It could e.g. be core pericopes in the New Testament that refer to ritual (such as relating to the institution of the Eucharist). Without exegesis of these basic sources of religious worship, liturgical practices would remain vague and imprecise. But, having said that, one also cannot ignore the necessity of examining the reception and interpretation of these basic texts at different times in the history of liturgy. Thus, church history (from earliest Christianity to modern times) can be regarded as an indispensable object of liturgical studies. In addition, the discipline has a theological object in the form of the religious notions expressed in liturgy (i.e. God, Jesus, and the Spirit). This makes systematic theological reflection and hermeneutic interpretation a requirement in the establishment of their relevance for present-day Christian liturgy. And, since their significance for human existence is said to crystallise in the sacraments, these are undoubtedly a key object of liturgical studies. Also, since liturgy represents the concrete locus of church and faith, ecclesiological and soteriological issues also qualify as objects of study.

But why look for an object of liturgy in the first place? According to a semiotic approach, the study of liturgy benefits from focussing on signs and symbols that facilitate communication in liturgy (Schilderman 2007:6). This applies not only to textual interpretation, but also to the study of the

abundance of liturgical expressions in religious music, architecture, and art. Liturgy, as the actual gathering of the faithful to celebrate their faith, has a theoretical significance of its own (Schilderman 2007:7).

3.2 QUESTIONS WHEN DISCUSSING LITURGY

The subject under discussion raises three closely interrelated questions, and they cohere in the sense that they challenge clear-cut scientific domain descriptions of liturgical studies (Schilderman 2007:5):

- Is liturgical study really an academic discipline with its own object? Should it be regarded as such?
- Can liturgical study really be adequately researched? Is it amenable to conceptual and technical design? If so, what is the appropriate theoretical apparatus and methodology for liturgical research?
- How does liturgical study relate to its manifest vantage-point, namely Christian religious and church practices?

3.3 PROBLEMS IN THE DOMAIN OF LITURGICAL STUDIES

A problem in the domain of liturgical studies is its method, for how should scholars of liturgy conduct their research? Can liturgical research be designed conceptually and technically? Answers to these methodological questions depend greatly on the sources that are tapped in research. Textual, linguistic, historical, and behavioural sources all require distinctive methods and techniques to study them and to describe and compare the data they generate (Schilderman 2007:7). The concomitant paradigmatic and theoretical approaches further complicate matters.

Then there is also the fact that, in theology, the debate on the aims of research often centres on a distinction between descriptive and normative research. The fact is, however, that these diverse aims, claims, and norms are readily identifiable in actual liturgical research practices. This implies that

there simply is no single umbrella characteristic or exclusive method in the tradition of liturgical studies that can claim to be the accepted approach (Schilderman 2007:8). Yet the statement that liturgy is a practice of religious worship that is studied critically and empirically implies a clear methodological stance, formulated in academic terms that fit the discourse of adjacent disciplines. Meeting these requirements calls for both demarcation of the discipline's domain, and cooperation with other empirical disciplines in the academic theatre. Applying a critical, empirically-oriented methodology in liturgical research assumes that its object is the human practice of worship. This includes behavioural characteristics, attitudinal dispositions in human experience, and contextual enrichment in cultures and institutions; i.e. how does liturgy affect our signification of reality (Schilderman 2007:8)?

4   LITURGICAL STUDIES AS FRAMEWORK FOR A LITURGICAL-PERFORMATIVE READING

The questions regarding object, method, and confession are complicated and can only be answered in the actual academic practice of liturgical studies (Schilderman 2007:10). In philosophy of science, disciplinary issues are usually settled by identifying scientific domains. In demarcating these domains, the classical distinction is between the material (the actual phenomenon being studied) and formal (the science's typical approach when studying that phenomenon) objects of a discipline. In the case of both the material and the formal object, liturgical studies seems to have no self-evident (or generally agreed upon) definitions of its domain. As noted already, its material object could be any of a multitude of objects, claimed by a host of theological and socio-scientific disciplines.

As one reads books on liturgy, searching for a definition of liturgy, you are confronted with many different definitions. Searle (1981:30-1) defines

"liturgy" as prayer, a celebration of life as mystery, and service (our service to God and God's service to us). Jones, Yarnold, Wainwright and Bradshaw's (1992:25) definition is that "the liturgy is making Christ present in Word, symbol, and Sacrament so that people today have a saving encounter with God". Schalk (1993:244) uses this definition: "The liturgy of the church, is the totality of the rites and ceremonies with which Christians…hear his Word, share his meal, and celebrate his goodness to all the world, is replete with music, abounding and overflowing with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs". Liturgy has thus been defined as a form including many – and varying – necessary elements. Two difficulties come from these definitions: 1) There seems to be no real definition of what liturgy is, for even the etymology of the word gives us a number of possible definitions for "service" (which can be the order of service to God, man's service to God, worship, or "the work of the people"). 2) If liturgy is just a form, then the style and content may be set by a pastor, minister of religion, worship committee, or congregation. If the former is true, then there is no point in trying to understand liturgy. If the latter is true, then the current state of worship practice in the church is right and proper as long as the required elements of form are present in the service. The challenge then becomes offering a domain definition of liturgy which, while sufficiently comprehensive to define liturgical studies as an academic discipline in its own right, still remains relevant to other disciplines as well. Important to remember is the fact that the distinction between a material and a formal object is clearly artificial if it does not take into account the interaction of the studied phenomena with the perspectives from which they are studied.

4.1 DEFINING THE LITURGICAL DOMAIN

4.1.1 Domain elements

To provide a more balanced view, we define the domain of liturgical studies in terms of a philosophical identification of four domain elements, which enable scientific disciplines to identify their object (Weingartner 1980:241–246).

4.1.1.1 The range of problems

Liturgy is a primary religious practice, and a religion is known by its public representation. Whatever its beliefs, its significance derives from its shared expression and its ritual form (Schilderman 2007:11). In practice, therefore, celebrated religion has priority over reflected religion. But liturgy is not practised without dissent or changes, making liturgy a contested notion fraught with problems (that nevertheless trigger dynamic development in liturgical practice). So, if one ascribes primary religious significance to liturgical quality, it is a valid problem range for empirical research in theology (Schilderman 2007:12). And, from an analytical perspective, the problems relating to liturgical practices can be classified as: Intra-religious problems, mainly linked to the development of liturgy over time. Inter-religious problems, which relate to the quality of a liturgy in comparison with the corresponding characteristics of other religions. Then, liturgy also faces problems of secularisms arising from its situation in a non-religious environment (Schilderman 2007:13). One way of describing the religious focus of liturgical studies is to clarify problems relating to liturgical quality, as this emphasis ensures the inclusion of both the dynamics of continuity and change, and the interaction of ritual and context (Schilderman 2007:14).

4.1.1.2 Interdisciplinary transfer

When describing disciplinary frontiers, a discipline's object is viewed from the angle of the interaction with adjacent disciplines. This leads to demarcation, integration, and innovation (Schilderman 2007:16). New fields of research are cultivated only temporarily by interacting, adjacent disciplines. The new knowledge domain gets staked out in the broader scientific field, which is protected from public scrutiny, its academic membership subject to new standards of admission and evaluation (Schilderman 2007:17). Empirical study is a fairly new venture in theology, only really taking its first steps with the *Journal of Empirical Theology*, started in 1988; the Brill book series *Studies in Empirical Theology*, which began publication in 1998; and with scholars like Johannes A. van der Ven (cf. Hermans and Moore 2004). Therefore, it still tends to be controversial, both inside and outside of theological faculties. A profile of liturgical studies as a theological discipline, practised from an empirical perspective, has direct consequences for its interdisciplinary status and its exchange with other disciplines. Saying that liturgical studies is a practical discipline entails a description and understanding of actual liturgical practices. But there is more to practice than just behaviour – practice requires practical reasoning that guides action, and action-based reasoning also requires norm-based reasoning (which invokes some imperative that, in principle, can be shared by all actors). So, if we regard liturgical studies as a practical discipline, we have to look not merely at the behavioural aspects of liturgical practices, but also at the moral ends of the actions involved, the norms that motivate the liturgical acts (Schilderman 2007:18).

Because concepts offer a theoretically informed contrast to the empirical variations they refer to, liturgical scholars should follow a conceptual approach. This has obvious consequences for understanding liturgical studies as a theological discipline. Usually, the values and norms that guide liturgical

practices are studied from a religious perspective. In a disciplinary perspective liturgical studies examines liturgical practise as a practical and theological discipline (Schilderman 2007:19). This perspective is not necessarily Christian. Being practitioners of a practical science, liturgical scholars study signs, texts, codes, and metaphors in their enacted form. They study religious gestures, texts, and codes. This characterisation as a theological discipline of enacted forms of meaning is not exclusively Christian (Schilderman 2007:20). But this does not imply indifference to specific religions and confessions. It simply makes it possible to relate liturgical studies to adjacent theological and non-theological disciplines (Schilderman 2007:21).

4.1.1.3 The actual object domain

A proper object domain describes the scientific identity of a discipline in terms of its own goals, as distinct from those of other disciplines (Schilderman 2007:22). The primary object domain of liturgical studies is liturgical action, for the notion of practice assumes that liturgy is a coherent framework of value- or meaning-oriented actions. To analyse the meaningful structure of liturgical actions, one can define liturgy in terms of three dimensions of liturgical practice in which meaning or value is expressed (Schilderman 2007:22–24):

- Belonging – reliance on a social and cultural structure for action with a public function of signification, a network to which people feel they belong.
- Believing – a liturgical act that assumes a distinction between religious and secular domains, residing in a space and time.
- Ritualising – the representation of beliefs in action, inculcating beliefs in a community.

In liturgical studies one can then study varieties of these as separate dimensions. But one can also study their interrelationship and interaction. In fact, the proper object domain of liturgical studies should be this dynamic (Schilderman 2007:25). By emphasising these interacting dimensions, liturgical practices are studied as a dynamic process of continuous exchange with their environment, as well as the resultant adaptation to problems that the environment poses. Liturgical practice may thus be described as a process of representing, modelling, and signifying the aforementioned three dimensions (Schilderman 2007:28).

4.1.1.4 The universe of the discourse

At what level of conceptualisation should we study liturgical practice? What types of variables are we looking for? These answers are provided by specifying a universe of discourse – a range of variables that represent objects of study on a micro-, a meso-, and a macro-level of discourse (Schilderman 2007:28).

- At *micro-level* the universe of discourse is that of liturgical action by agents in their interaction in small groups; engaging in liturgical prac-tices with their own perceptions, values and emotions (Schilderman 2007:28) – i.e. by describing their behaviour and elucidating their sub-jective meaning.
- At the *meso-level* the universe of discourse is that of liturgical action in the form of agents' organisations and institutions (Schilderman 2007:29) – focusing on agents acting in their capacity as carriers of the social characteristics of their organisations and institutions.
- At *macro-level* the universe of discourse is liturgical action in terms of the cultural and religious practices of agents within and between reli-

gions and cultures (Schilderman 2007:31) – shedding light on the reasons why dimensions of believing, belonging, and ritualising in liturgical practices have such different profiles in various countries.

4.2 THE PEOPLE'S WORK: COLLECTIVE INTENTIONS

Liturgy is not concerned only with the participants' particular intentions (De Jong 2007:115). Liturgy is, *per se*, "people's work" – there can be no liturgy, in the sense of a collective church service or communal celebration, unless the participants have (and realise) collective intentions (De Jong 2007:115). Now, by collective intentions we do not mean the aggregate of individual intentions and actions. It is not a matter of situations in which different people have the same particular intentions. A collective activity in our sense only happens if they all do something together that cannot be done by each participant alone (De Jong 2007:115). They must cooperate and coordinate their activities with a view to a common goal that they can only achieve *as a group* (from which their individual contributions derive). Such collective intentions and activities have a distinctive structure of two components that cannot be reduced one to the other without succumbing either to an individualistic or a collectivist concept of ritual (De Jong 2007:116):

- The *particular component* – the activity that each individual participant tries to perform as his/her contribution to the collective activity.
- The *collective component* – the collective activity performed in conjunction with others. These collective liturgical activities are only possible if all participants have a particular background (De Jong 2007:116); e.g. they must have an adequate sense of "us", they must have a cooperative attitude and they have to have a certain degree of social (especially communicative) skills.

4.3 LITURGY AS COLLECTIVE EXPRESSION

Liturgy is a special type of collective activity, often described as "expression" (De Jong 2007:117). This means that, in these activities, two psychological states have to be combined – the psychological state that one wants to express, and the intention to express it. In liturgy one can express faith, desires, resolves, and all manner of feelings. By "expression" we usually mean that people impose on physical forms the meaning that they have in mind (De Jong 2007:117). Hence "expression" entails imposing meaning on sounds, gestures, objects, or physical phenomena of whatever kind. These then become symbols or signs of the content of the psychological state one wants to express/represent. Liturgy has to be a collective expression – although it is not essential that all participants express their faith in the same way, what matters is that each wants to make a distinctive contribution to an expression that is more than the sum of the individual expressions.

4.4 LITURGY AS COMMUNICATIVE ACTION

Liturgical activity cannot be described simply as collective expression, for besides being expressive action it is also communicative action (De Jong 2007:118). That means that one wants to express faith, reverence, joy, or other psychological states in such a way that others will recognise that one has these feelings and intentional states. In addition, one wants to convey to them that one wants them to know it – that requires executing the intentions according to the rules of meaning imposition prevalent in the communication community concerned (De Jong 2007:119).

Collective communication in liturgy has another element: the person one seeks to communicate with is (primarily) God. All the communication occurs in human communicative forms and according to applicable rules, but it

centres on communication with God. It is usually of a serious nature and concerns an experience of the observable and beyond in a formal and ritual manner (De Jong 2007:119). In this context it is extremely important to realise that liturgy entails not just human activity and human beings' attempts to realise their communicative intentions, but that God himself joins in the activity (De Jong 2007:120) – that is, at any rate, what participants believe. Yet, in the administration of sacraments there is also communication on God's behalf, addressed specifically to those who receive the sacrament (De Jong 2007:119).

5 A PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON RITUAL AND LIT-URGY

5.1 THE FUNCTION OF REPETITION

Sudden, substantial, emotional arousal is a kind of general alarm for the cognitive system, an especially efficient means for signalling events and materials meriting our attention (McCauley & Lawson 2002:77). It may have nothing directly to do with supplying the details in memory, but only with occasioning increased cognitive alertness (which is not the same thing as engaging some unique mnemonic mechanism). Our cognitive alarm hypothesis, then, holds that when current circumstances are the cause of our emotional arousal, we will increase the attention and cognitive resources we devote to them. This, in turn, will increase the probability of their subsequent recollection (Damasio 2000:35-81; McCauley & Lawson 2002:78; Damasio 1995:127-164). *But* that sort of memory consolidation may only arise if that initial, heightened alertness receives ongoing vindication in subsequent experience concerning our sense of the event's significance. Otherwise, the hypothesised mnemonic impact of emotional arousal may achieve nothing more than apprising us that current events are (or, at least, may be) ones

worth remembering. This then initiates the fuel that is necessary for commencing the consolidation of memories (Barth 1975:54) – ranging from explicit, conscious judgements about the importance of an event's consequences, to the unconscious effects of prolonged emotional stimulation (whether through surprise or sensory pageantry).

Rubin (1997:90-121) emphasizes that a genre's formal constraints can substantially reduce the range of possibilities at any particular point. Analogously, the temporal coincidence of distinctive stimuli in multiple sensory modalities may also restrict the set of possible events that could have occurred. Simultaneously experiencing a specific constellation of stimuli across our various sensory modalities may serve to "triangulate" (at least) on some very small set of possible events and corresponding actions (to be remembered), thus jointly defining a distinctive action profile (McCauley & Lawson 2002:80). Whether the mnemonic mechanisms and processes in question are "perfectly ordinary" recollections is important, for both central and peripheral information about emotionally arousing stimuli can exceed that for neutral stimuli (Heuer & Reisberg 1990:496-506; Reisberg & Heuer 1995:84-92). In fact, initial emotional arousal predicts both the amount of information generated and the consistency of the story over time (Bohannon & Symons 1992:65-91; Brewer 1992:303-304). Narrative consolidation (Neisser, Winograd, Bergman, et al. 1996:337-357; Neisser & Harsch 1992:9-31) may also yield confidence, consistency, and perhaps even accuracy in memory because of the emerging distinctiveness of each person's story.

5.1.1 Repetition in Revelation

When looking at the Book of Revelation in terms of the author's strategy to address this important characteristic of successful liturgy/ritual, what immediately comes to mind is the "circling spiral" (as opposed to a linear

sequence) nature of the events described in the story (Barr 2010:642). One example of this is the reappearing sequences of seven elements throughout the Apocalypse – i.e. the seven messages to the seven churches (Rv 1-3), the seven seals (Rv 6:1-8:5), seven trumpets (Rv 8:6-11:19) and seven bowls/plagues (Rv 15:1-16:21). The author of Revelation also makes use of interludes and recapitulation. An interlude is a segment of material inserted into some larger unit. We can think of them as embedded narratives that interact with the larger narrative. Examples of this technique in Revelation are:

- The segment in Revelation 10:1-11:14 that comes between the sixth and seventh trumpets and that describes the actions surrounding the "little scroll" (Rv 10) and the "two witnesses" (Rv 11).
- The scene of the sealing of the 144 000, inserted into the sequence of seven seals, between seal six and seal seven (Rv 7:1-17).

Recapitulation is a way of describing various kinds of repetition in the story. In the Apocalypse this phenomenon is most clearly illustrated by how closely the content of the series of seven bowls parallels the series of seven trumpets (compare Rv 8:7-11:15 with Rv 16:2-17). This repetition is the author going over the same ground again, but now with some added depth and/or perspective, and therefore impact also.

5.2 RITUAL'S MNEMONIC IMPACT AND SIGNIFICANCE

The mnemonic impact of narrative consolidation ultimately turns on rehearsal – i.e. the many retellings that go into the formulation of a standardized version of each distinctive story. Collectively, participants must retain enough knowledge of these rituals to preserve a sense of both continuity and community. The functionally relevant measure of continuity being participants' sense that what they are doing presently is the same sort of ritual action that they or their forebears did before them, and that their

compatriots might be doing contemporaneously somewhere else. From such temporal factors as timing and sequence to such structural factors as the identities and properties of agents, various features of actions condition participants' judgements about the similarities and differences of religious ritual performance (McCauley & Lawson 1990:84-136). For, in pluralistic ("low-context") societies, concurrence both about the criteria for particular rituals *and* about the facts concerning particular performances of those rituals is diagnostic in identifying religious communities. Rituals, after all, are not incidental to religious systems – their performance is integral both to situating individuals within the larger religious community ("high-context"), and to sustaining that community (McCauley & Lawson 2002:83-84).

Apparently, what matters is whether a ritual produces conviction about mnemonic accuracy as opposed to the thing itself. Remembering cultural representations is thus necessary – but not sufficient! – for the transmission of culture. Participants must not only remember their cultural representations; they must also be motivated to transmit them (McCauley & Lawson 2002:112-113). Therefore, the cognitive alarm hypothesis – which suggests that high emotion tends both to marshal and to focus cognitive resources on its apparent causes – marks the event as especially memorable (McCauley & Lawson 2002:113), if vindicated by subsequent developments.

5.2.1 The function of liturgy in the Apocalypse

In terms of high emotion focusing cognitive resources and marking events as significant in the Apocalypse, the repeated and literal liturgies presented are the most relevant. These liturgies, in the midst of the seven churches' perceived chaotic and dangerous context, are a constant refocusing onto what is really important – the victory of God and the role of the faith community within that victory. We see this happening, first and foremost, with the vision of the throne room of God (Rv 4), and the introduction of the

victorious Lion/Lamb (Rv 5). The majesty and victory thus illustrated are constantly hearkened back to – the sealing of the 144 000, and the description of the praise of those that have come through the tribulation (Rv 7); the description of the eating of the scroll (Rv 10:8-11); the description of the heavenly scene with the blowing of the seventh trumpet (Rv 11:15-19); the song of Moses (Rv 15:3-4); the wedding feast of the Lamb (Rv 19); and the arrival of, and response to, the New Jerusalem (Rv 21-22). In this refocusing, in the repetition of elements such as phrases throughout the different liturgies, the Book of Revelation's mnemonic impact is assured.

5.3 THE RITUAL FORM HYPOTHESIS

5.3.1 Frequency versus form

The ritual form hypothesis, as suggested by McCauley & Lawson (2002:113), holds that, instead of ritual frequency, it is ritual form (more precisely, participants' tacit knowledge about differences in ritual form) that determine which religious rituals migrate to one or the other of the two attractor positions. The ritual form hypothesis accounts for the interplay between (McCauley & Lawson 2002:115):

- Ritual;
- sensory pageantry (and its accompanying emotion);
- memory; and
- motivation.

The ability to distinguish between agents and their actions respectively, from other entities and events, provides a child with all of the representational resources necessary for the operation of the action representation system that the theory of religious ritual competence proposes. Thus, possessing a full-blown theory of mind, permits their thorough-going entry into the world of religious thought and action (Boyer 2001:93-136).

The ritual form hypothesis also accounts for comparative levels of sensory pageantry between rituals, for quantitative measures of sensory stimulation in something as fluid as a ritual are not easy to obtain and are extremely difficult to compare across modalities anyway. Yes, emotional arousal is a many-splendored thing – an ecstatic response to good fortune is every bit as much of an emotional arousal as is the profound sadness that typically accompanies the loss of a loved one (Tucker, Vannatta & Rothlind 1990:145-166). And, even when they are possible, direct measures of emotional arousal (e.g. self-assessment) are not precise, and precise measures (e.g. heart rate) are not direct. But comparative judgements that are accurate often do not require constituent judgements that are precise. In this case, in particular, the differences are usually so substantial that the comparisons are non-controversial (McCauley & Lawson 2002:119). The ritual form hypothesis also makes sense of comparisons of rituals' levels of sensory pageantry (i.e. the comparative differences between the levels of sensory pageantry and emotional excitement that religious rituals possess) within particular religious communities (McCauley & Lawson 2002:119). The hypothesis does not predict differences, either between different religious systems, or even between different religious communities within the same religious system. This is because cultures and social classes can vary widely concerning the levels of sensory pageantry and emotional display that constitute the relevant base lines.

5.3.1.1 Revelation's sensory pageantry

The Book of Revelation is filled to the brim with sensory pageantry: Incense as symbol of both prayer and God's glory, power and blessing (Rv 8:3-4; and 5:8-10); the sealing/anointing and marking of those who believe, as promise and protection (Rv 7:2-3; and 22:4); the washing of robes in the sacrificial blood of the Lamb, and the importance of new and white/pure robes (Rv

7:13-14; and 22:14); and the crowning/reward of the faithful (Rv 2:10; 3:11; 4:4; 20:4; 21:3-7; and 22:1-5). These sensory and symbolic images, used when speaking of God in Revelation, are of great importance. If faith communities were to incorporate more of this imagery into their ritual gatherings, thus also incorporating more of the senses in the performative action of the community, the possibility of conscious and sub-conscious change becomes even stronger and more likely, as just seen in the ritual form hypothesis.

5.3.2 Representing ritual form

Participants' representations of ritual form contain the variables that determine which rituals include comparatively higher levels of sensory stimulation and which do not. Not only does the ritual form hypothesis offer additional independent cognitive grounds for why memory is important here, it also insists that memory is not the whole story about why some rituals introduce pageantry and arouse participants' emotion – motivation matters too. But the word "motivation" is inevitably vague, and talk of religious motivation only magnifies this vagueness. Minimally, motivation concerns the complex connections that link emotion and cognition with action and with one another. Religious motivation concerns such connections when the emotion, cognition, and action concern religious matters, dealing with the cluster of feelings, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours that bear on the probabilities of participants' acting to transmit religious knowledge (or, at least, affirming an intention to do so).

Thus, at the most general level, the hypothesis concerns ritual form. It is participants' tacit knowledge of (and resulting sensitivities to) the differences in ritual form between two broad groups of religious rituals that are the crucial variables that account for the connections between religious ritual and sensory pageantry (McCauley & Lawson 2002:121-122); i.e.

frequently performed rituals require less sensory pageantry, while less frequently performed or non-repeated (for the individual affected by the ritual) rituals are filled with sensory pageantry and require the agent in the ritual to have direct ritual connection to the superhuman agent/god(s). When the gods do something, either directly or indirectly through the agency of their certified representatives, they do it once and for all.

5.3.2.1 Action in the Apocalypse

Where results of the action of God is concerned in the Apocalypse, the encapsulation of the whole of Revelations' narrative by God introducing himself as "the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end" (Rv 1:8 and Rv 22:13), thus literally (and performatively) making him the majestic beginning and the victorious end to creation's story.

5.3.3 From emotion to conviction to transmission

So the high emotion of some religious rituals establishes convictions about the significance of both those events and the agents who are putatively responsible for them (especially when they appear to be directly involved). Usually, it is in the grip of such convictions that participants are subsequently motivated to transmit such information to others (as appropriate). This implies that religious rituals' manipulations of sensory pageantry and participants' emotions are not academic exercises about proving the gods' existence. The comparatively high emotion such rituals instigate helps to persuade at least some of the participants involved, not only that they have undergone fundamental changes, but also that the superhuman agents – who are ultimately responsible for these changes – are vitally important to them and (often) to their community as well.

5.3.3.1 The persuasive power of Revelation

In the Book of Revelation, no two sections can be more exemplary of this move from emotion to conviction and transmission – because of the involvement of superhuman agents – than the scenes before the heavenly throne involving God the Father and the Lamb (Rv 4-5) with which the visionary part of the Apocalypse starts, and the coming of Christ as bridegroom and the coming of God the Father and the Lamb with the coming of the New Jerusalem (Rv 21-22) with which the vision (and the book) ends.

5.4 INITIAL CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Two conclusions can be inferred from this theory (McCauley & Lawson 2002:114):

- Those religious rituals that settle around the second attractor – containing increased sensory pageantry – stimulate participants' emotions in order to augment their recall for these events and to motivate them religiously.
- This general theory of religious ritual competence explains why those rituals that most produce enhanced episodic memories are precisely the rituals that most fortify religious motivation.

Thus the ritual form hypothesis points to uniquely religious questions about motivation, and to a deeper account of the cognitive matters at stake. With the examples given from the Apocalypse of John, illustrating the author's use of each of these different elements of ritual theory practically, it is clear that, not only did the Apocalypse have such a liturgical/ritual impact on its initial audience, but that Revelation can still have a major role to play in the creation of meaning through liturgy/ritual today. In what follows, the developing understanding and use of experience in the creation of meaning

will be explored further. This will enable us to define, and elaborate on, a liturgical/functional model for understanding ritual in our present context.

6 THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF EXPERIENCE

Actions are realisations of intentions, and possibly of plans and desires (De Jong 2007:114). It is the fulfilment of a wish, the accuracy of an observation, or the granting of a request. Just as truth is correspondence between the content of a cognitive intentional state or representation on the one hand, and the reality represented in the intentional state on the other; so realisation is the correspondence between the actual activity and its representation in the intention (De Jong 2007:114).

6.1 ACHIEVING AUTHENTICITY

Dilthey (Rickman 1976:161) wrote that "reality only exists for us in the facts of consciousness given by inner experience". So what comes first is experience, and the anthropology of experience deals with how individuals actually experience their culture, i.e. how events are received by consciousness (Bruner 1986:4). By experience is meant not just sense, data, cognition or – in Dilthey's phrase – "the diluted juice of reason", but also feelings and expectations. Experience comes to us not just verbally, but also in images and impressions (Bruner 1986:5). Lived experienced, then, as thoughts and desires, as words and images, is the primary reality. In this, we seek the techniques by which individuals, in some sort of collectivity, develop ways of acting that will authenticate both the actors and the group simultaneously (Abrahams 1986:45).

6.2 THE PROMOTION OF THE INDIVIDUAL

Modishly, we replace the vocabulary and practices of vested authority with terms and procedures proclaiming equality of humankind and the need to make a space in our systemic analyses for the achievement of authenticity by the individual (Abrahams 1986:46). We place a growing emphasis on the individual's control over his/her own identity, which causes the institutional ways of engineering personal transformation to lose their power, in the process substituting authentication for authority (Abrahams 1986:52). And so we gather to mark the demotion of the key terms of authoritative rhetoric (high-context") – "tradition", "custom", and even "institution" – as we make one further effort at finding, in everyday speech, a vocabulary that will assist us in celebrating the project of self-possession, self-fashioning, and self-expression ("low-context"; Abrahams 1986:46). In this "new" social dispensation individuals may find a new redemption – or at least a validation – in the world of the here-and-now, even if it is no longer attached to a divinely sanctioned plan. By building on this world, which embodies that segment of life carved out by each of us, we follow in the great line of secular theologians – the clerisy – who make holy words of those which are otherwise most mundane (Abrahams 1986:46).

Yet, ironically, for such socially sanctioned transformations to occur, we must believe in the power of those invested with authority to mark these changes for us (Abrahams 1986:52). Reality is only understandable when we are able to contrast it with other kinds of experience, perception, and judgement (Abrahams 1986:66). Experiences are only interesting insofar as they are able to enlist participation (Abrahams 1986:69). That is, if the planning produces some sense of discovery, and some appearance of spontaneous exchange of energies (and information) with others.

6.3 DISCOVERING MEANING

But the discovery of the meaning of wholes is a problem for contemporary thought, because of the atomisation and economic individualisation of modern life (our change from a "high-context" to a "low-context" society; Fernandez 1986:160). This ideological promotion of our individuality, the defence of our freedom for self-actualisation, stands in compensatory contrast to the dividedness of our commitments; making us agnostic when any whole is suggested (Fernandez 1986:160). But – even when all deity is removed – the individual still remains a deity of great importance (Goffman 1967:95), who not only needs to replace the gods, but also needs to find a language to effectively replace the Word with new sacred words that will allow him/her to celebrate the survival of the human spirit (Abrahams 1986:47).

If we have such a term, "experience" is certainly it. "Experience" has such flexibility and can serve us so well in tying together the ordinary and the extraordinary (Abrahams 1986:49). So much of life is already there, enshrined in its circle of meaning as it is used in the vernacular. Apparently, the encounter with the new has been tied up in our imaginations with the prospect of social, cultural, and personal renewal. Indeed, one of the most important meanings of the word "experience" refers, in shorthand, to conversion/being saved (Abrahams 1986:50). Experience, in our perspective then, is not equivalent to the more familiar concept of behaviour (Bruner 1986:5). The latter implies an outside observer describing someone else's actions, as if one were in an audience to an event. It also implies a standardised routine that one simply "goes through". An experience is more personal than that, as it refers to an active self, to a human being who not only engages in, but shapes, an action (Bruner 1986:5). We can have an

experience (whichs include not only actions, but also reflections about those actions and feelings), but we cannot have a behaviour.

6.3.1 Expressing experience

Expressions are encapsulations of the experience of others or, as Turner (1982:17) wrote, they are "crystallized secretions of once living human experience". The relationship between experience and its expressions is always problematic, as it is clearly dialogical as well as dialectical (Bruner 1986:6). Experience structures expression in that we understand other people and their expressions on the basis of our own experience and self-understanding. But expressions also structure experience, in that the dominant narratives of a historical era (i.e. important rituals and festivals, classic works of art etc.) define and illuminate inner experience. That experience structures expressions, and expressions structure experience was, for Dilthey, a hermeneutical circle to be thoroughly examined (Rickman 1976:195).

The critical distinction here is between reality (i.e. what is really out there, whatever that may be), experience (how that reality presents itself to consciousness), and expressions (how individual experience is framed and articulated). Between life as lived (reality), life as experienced (experience) and life as told (expression) (Bruner 1984:7). But there are inevitable gaps between reality, experience, and expression – either because the experiences are not storyable, or because we lack the performative and narrative resources, or because the vocabulary is lacking (Bruner 1986:7). In this perspective an expression is never an isolated, static text. Instead, it always involves a processual activity, a verb form, an action rooted in a social situation with real persons in a particular culture and a given historical era (Bruner 1986:7).

6.3.2 The complexities of experience

The distinguishing criterion is that the communication of experience tends to be self-referential. Experience contains ordinary acts, from the causal to the most eventful occurrences, embodying both meaning and feelings (Abrahams 1986:49). The difficulty with experience, however, is that we can only experience our own life, and what is received by our own consciousness (Bruner 1986:5). This means that we can never know completely another's experience. But everyone censors or represses, or may not be fully aware of (or able to articulate) certain aspects of what has been experienced. How, then, do we overcome the limitations of individual experience? Dilthey's answer (Rickman 1976:230) was that we "transcend the narrow sphere of experience by interpreting expressions". By "interpreting", Dilthey meant understanding, interpretation, and the methodology of hermeneutics. By "expressions" he meant representations, performances, objectifications, or texts (Bruner 1986:5).

Even so, all experiences happen to individuals, and are therefore sometimes to be regarded as typical (Morris 1970:115); i.e. providing a measure for whether life is being lived to the fullest (Abrahams 1986:67). Yet, as a concept, experience underscores the persistence of life and the open character of ongoing actions; while also encouraging us to see actions as units of behaviour that can be separated from the rest of the action and talked about later. This makes it a term of connection that encourages us to discuss life in terms of how present activities of even the most threatening sort may be drawn on and replayed in some form in the future (Abrahams 1986:49).

6.4 ACCESS TO THE WHOLE

Life is not divided into classes and sub-classes. It is felt as an unbroken continuous whole which does not admit of clear-cut and trenchant

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distinctions (Cassirer 1960:108). Limits between spheres are not insurmountable barriers, they are fluent and fluctuating. What should interest us here are the principles of "consanguinity" and "metamorphosis" as essential to access to the whole – making it, in effect and by virtue of symbolic statement, greater than the sum of its parts (Fernandez 1986:161). It is what becomes available by way of ritual observation that proves to be lasting, relevant, and revelatory in each instance (Shorter 1996:25).

We are concerned with the mechanisms that lead to the conviction of wholeness, for "the whole" (whatever else it may be) is a state of relatedness and kind of conviviality in experience (Fernandez 1986:162). But in most human situations, particularly when we are trying to demonstrate how wholes are constructed, we must in some way pictorialize our topic (Fernandez 1986:165). By pictorializing in this way, we can inspect the organizing images that are at play in ritual performance and see how microcosm and macrocosm, inner things and outer things, centres and peripheries, upper things and lower things, time present and time past, are related. It is out of such parts that wholes are constructed (Fernandez 1986:165).

6.5 THE ARGUMENT OF IMAGES

To understand the "tuning-in" that occurs in social situations, we have to go beyond what is manifestly contained in the language events themselves, for these will tell us only so much about the emotions and relatedness that underlie the communication and the images evoked by it (Fernandez 1986:164). In order to do this, we must go beyond the given language information and give primacy to the imagination by studying the ongoing interaction of the "argument of images" that lie behind and accompany behaviour (Fernandez 1986:164). Some of these images have their origin in language, for powerful images may repose in lexicon alone. Many of them do

not – they are the arguments of images which lie behind (and accompany) such established things as language and grammar (Fernandez 1986:165). Since most well-schooled individuals in the modern world are intensively taught to perform operations on things to be competent, it is understandable that we are driven to search for elementary ideas.

But, it is important to be aware of the fact that, searching for these "elementary thoughts/images" could lead to misplaced concreteness and an inadequate assessment of the experience of coherence and wholeness as an experience of affinity (Fernandez 1986:170). Though participants may be within reach of such things, their reach inevitably exceeds their grasp. This is because such elementary ideas are not causal or controlling, but emergent and consequent to a stimulating thickness in experience, and are persuasive to our well-being (Fernandez 1986:170). They are first the personal pronouns that point at the unities of our experience, and second the sign-images/metaphors that are predicated onto them to give them actionable identity, so forming and stimulating experience. We are reaching for a language we don't know we possess to express a word we do not yet know we are capable of expressing (Shorter 1996:40).

7 CREATING EXPERIENCE AND MEANING

7.1 LIVED EXPERIENCE

In real life every beginning has its antecedents, and an ending does not imply that time has stopped or that the event is over. We create units of experience and meaning from the continuity of life with every telling in that we highlight some causes and discount others. That is, every telling is interpretive. The concept of an experience, then, has an explicit temporal dimension. We go through or live an experience, which then becomes self-referential in the telling (Bruner 1986:7). So what holds the present and the

past together is a unitary meaning (Bruner 1986:8). Yet that "meaning does not lie in some focal point outside our experience, but is contained in them [in experience] and constitutes the connection between them" (Rickman 1976:239). Although life is a flow, we can never experience that flow directly, because every observed moment is a remembered moment. In striving for a balanced and representative account, much of the meaning and the drama of the event itself is lost, robbing "lived experience" of its vitality (Bruner 1986:8).

7.2 INDIGENOUS EXPRESSION

How people experience themselves, their lives, and their culture turns our attention to experience and its expressions as indigenous meaning (Bruner 1986:9). This implies that the basic units of analysis are established by the people being studied. The definition of the unit of investigation is left up to the people, rather than imposing categories derived from our own ever-shifting theoretical frames. Expressions are the peoples' articulations, formulations, and representations of their own experience.

These expressions are not only naturally occurring units of meaning, but are also periods of heightened activity when a society's presuppositions are most exposed – when our core values are expressed, and when the symbolism is most apparent (Bruner 1986:10). Even if the events in an expressions are not contiguous in time and space, they do have a coherence based on common meaning. This does not mean that experiences or expressions are monolithic entities, for each breaks down into smaller processual units, and the interplay between these units frequently constructs its own dynamic (Bruner 1986:10). I.e. participants in a performance do not necessarily share a common experience or meaning, what they share is only their common participation (Bruner 1986:11). That is why it is important to

remember that the interpretive process always operates on two distinct levels (Bruner 1986:10):

- The people we study interpret their own experiences in expressive forms;
- and we, in turn, interpret these expressions.

We are thus interpreting the people as they are interpreting themselves.

7.3 THE DEATH OF RITUAL?

"Ritual" is now a word as overworked as "creativity", with its most common meaning today associated with repetition (Shorter 1996:27). It is referred to as "mindless", suggesting an act slavishly repeated without the intervention of thought. But is ritual dead? Certainly, outward and collective observances have suffered from neglect because of the emphasis being placed on doctrinary interpretations. Yet neither the need for ritual, nor the practice of rituals, has declined but has rather intensified and increased as institutionalised forms have lost their appeal and effectiveness (Shorter 1996:28).

8 A FUNCTIONAL MODEL FOR UNDERSTANDING RITUAL

To set a non-linguistic model alongside the dominant language-like model of ritual opens up greater possibilities of approaching ritual in a complementarity reminiscent of Ricoeur's (1976:54, 57) philosophical approach to hermeneutics. Especially when he contrasts the "non-semantic moment of a symbol" with the "semantic moment of a symbol". Lewis (1970:117) also advises against presuming that ritual is, essentially, a form of communication. Such a presumption can lead to both a "search for meanings that actors do not have" and to a "contrived intellectualism". This implies that it is here essential to differentiate between propositional

meaning and that meaning/significance related to emotions and embedded in the action of performance (Davies 2002:115). Propositional meaning is easily explained in terms of the formal ideas lying behind actions. Emotional forms of meaning are not so self-evident, as it expresses the satisfaction gained from doing something (i.e. a specific performance of some definite act). Or, as Needham (1985:177) emphasised: "It may well be that the purpose and meaning and effect of a rite will consist in no more than the performance of the rite itself. Ritual can be self-sufficient, self-sustaining, and self-justifying. Considered in its most characteristic features, it is a kind of activity...that man as a 'ceremonial animal' happens naturally to perform". Aune (1996:142-143) affirms the relationship between ritual liturgy and mundane life, expressing a growing consensus that interprets ritual as a "way of acting and speaking" that "provides a way to know the world and to act on such a world".

A ritual must be enacted, a myth recited, a narrative told, a novel read, a drama performed. These enactments, recitals, tellings, readings, and performances are what make the text transformative and enable us to re-experience our culture's heritage (Bruner 1986:7). Expressions are constitutive and shaping, not as abstract texts, but in the activity that actualizes the text. It is in this sense that texts must be performed to be experienced, and what is constitutive is in the production. In sacred story the word is ever-present and believed capable of release only in the telling (Shorter 1996:30). Unuttered, it loses its power. Enacted, it is the thing rendered in a form that becomes a landmark/turning point, releasing it for conscious realisation (however its innate symbolism will be interpreted). Thus, as expressions/performed texts, structured units of experience are socially constructed units of meaning.

8.1 RITUAL: CONSTITUTIVE PERFORMANCE

It is in the performance of an expression that we re-experience, re-live, re-create, re-tell, re-construct, and re-fashion our culture (Bruner 1986:11). The performance and/or speech act does not release a pre-existing meaning that lies dormant in the text, the performance/illocutionary force itself is constitutive (Derrida 1974; Barthes 1974). Meaning is always in the present, in the here-and-now; not in such past manifestations as historical origins or the author's intentions. Meaning arises when we try to put what culture and language have crystallised from the past together with what we feel, wish, and think about our present point in life (Turner 1986:33). All the senses can here be viewed as "modes of embodiment" (Davies 2002:117), caused to exist by external stimuli that leave a mood-memory with the embodied individual. These modes of embodiment coincide to the point of merging, fostering not only a sense of inner unity, but also of being "acted upon" by an external source that cannot be ignored (Storr 1992:96). It affords an end in itself and is not a means to an end. With this in mind, ritual is about "meaning-making through action" (Slough 1996:183). The force of the few words provides mental satisfaction, a sense that individuals may – after all – know the depths of each other; making it easy to grasp "the high degree of overlap between poet and prophet" (Friedrich 1997:193).

8.2 THE STATE "BETWEEN": RITUAL'S FUNCTION

Van Gennep (1977) provided us with a conceptual scheme within which to analyse cross-culturally recurrent processes. He tried to show that shifts in time, space, and social position have always been ritualised using the imagery of spatial movement as an analogue. The inherent logic of these being best described by the threefold structure of separation, marginality,

and aggregation (Anttonen 1992:15, 18-20; Houseman and Severi 1998:168-170).

Later, Turner (1969; 1981) developed Van Gennep's ideas into an analytical tool for showing how symbolic structures serve both to maintain social equilibrium, and to introduce novelties. He paid special attention to Van Gennep's concept of *marge*, on the basis of which he developed the notion of "liminality" – a state between two social positions, after the one has been given up and the other has not yet been attained. A position in which the subject is separated from what is familiar and habitual. Those who are undergoing this transition form a "communitas", with its own anti-structure which stands in contrast to the normal structure of the society. A state where people are receptive to religious experience. By thus temporarily questioning the social structure rituals serve ultimately to affirm it. Of the different types of rituals proposed, Turner (1981:7–10, 19) recognises only two – life crisis rituals and rituals of affliction – which he sees as "prescribed formal behaviour for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to beliefs in mystical beings or powers" (Lawson and McCauley 1990:49, 145-146; Bell 1997:39-46, 93; Houseman and Severi 1998:170-172).

The classification of rites according to their functions is also central in the work of Honko (1979:373-378), who divides rites into three categories: rites of passage, calendrical rites, and crisis rites. Rites of passage are organised by the society to move individuals from one state to another, are non-recurrent (from the individual's point of view), and always anticipated. Calendrical rites are group-oriented cyclical rites, located at the turning points of the socio-economic seasons, and are therefore also recurrent and anticipated. Crisis rites are occasional rituals, organised by an individual or group at unexpected times of crisis, which makes them non-recurrent and non-anticipated. It should here be emphasised that Honko's division is to be

seen as an analytical tool. It does not imply that every rite must fall neatly into just one of the three categories (Pyysiäinen 2001:82).

What is important to realise is that this classification is not based on types of ritual activity, or on a specific behavioural mode, but on specific behavioural contexts. There seems, however, to be a host of such behavioural contexts which do not necessarily have anything in common except for the ritual mode of behaviour which is used (Boyer 1994:188-191).

8.3 SEEKING RITUAL, INTERRUPTING LIFE

8.3.1 Ritual's core

At the core of ritual is an experience of life, death, and rebirth – symbolically registered – that will affect the being of participants in manifold and ongoing ways (Shorter 1996:30; Pyysiäinen 2001:92-94). Selves, social organisations, and cultures are not given but are problematic and always in production (Bruner 1986:12). Cultural change, cultural continuity, and cultural transmission all occur simultaneously in the experiences and expressions of social life. All are interpretive processes, the experiences "in which the subject discovers himself" (Rickman 1976:203).

So all human acts are impregnated with meaning (Turner 1986:33). Meaning which is hard to measure, though it can often be grasped (even if only fleetingly and ambiguously). Thus, putting forth a theory of adequate description, based on experiences, is valuable because they are agreed on by all of those participating. Also because they embody patterns of expectation that can be learned, rehearsed, and practiced together (Abrahams 1986:60). We operate both within and between these worlds and their realities (Abrahams 1986:67). They differ in what is brought into them in common by the participants, how focused and intense and stylised the activities become, and how important such factors are in affecting the experience itself and the

understanding of it. To seek ritual is to intentionally interrupt life in hopes of furthering it by making that contact (Shorter 1996:31).

But to regard all activities making up an experience as necessarily having such potential would severely undercut the usefulness of the idea of connecting the everyday with the special (Abrahams 1986:62). The difference is carried, in part, by the interpretative apparatus we use to discuss any experience, i.e. a frame of reference placed on the activity by calling attention to its extraordinary character through some kind of self-conscious stylisation of the activity, and through the development of some kind of preparation for it (e.g. rehearsal, warming up, or other kinds of anticipatory behaviour). The greater the degree of self-conscious preparation and stylisation, the more the experience may be shared. The risk that the prepared quality of the event will be regarded as restricting, rather than liberating, also becomes higher (Abrahams 1986:63).

Yet we have a number of ways of reminding ourselves of these cherished functions (Abrahams 1986:64): By explicitly talking about what they mean and how they have come to mean what they mean through formal discussion (when a ceremony is built into an event), or informally (when the occasion seems to successfully come off with some degree of spontaneity). Each performance, for instance, draws on energies and patterns of expectation brought to the occasion, not only because it embodies some life situation, but because it departs from the everyday to the degree that it is self-consciously and artfully imitated, replayed, and performed (Abrahams 1986:68).

8.3.2 Performance as revitalisation

How can performance be understood? What are the sources of performance? What are its full dimensions? To be able to answer these questions we need to come to terms with the relationship between brainwork and performance.

Turner (1983:222-224) views ritual as both a conservator of social values, and a generator of new values through transformation, liminality, *communitas*, and anti-structure. The brain's triune structure is outlined as (Turner 1983:224-228): the reptilian "stream of movement", the old-mammalian "stream of feeling", and the new-mammalian "stream of thought". He then asks whether ritualization has a biogenetic foundation, while meaning has a neo-cortical learned base? And if so, does this mean that creative processes, those which generate new cultural knowledge, might not result from a co-adaptation in the ritual process itself? In order to begin answering these, we need to deconstruct the "ready-mades" of individual behaviour, texts, and cultural artefacts into strips of malleable behaviour material (Schechner 1986:345). We need to ask ourselves to what depth are there cultural ready-mades? And how much of human equipment/action is reconstructable?

It is for this reason that it is so important to look for ways in which the ordinary and the extraordinary coexist. How convention permits the framing and stylising of activities, calling to attention the participants, and encouraging them to spell out the meanings and feelings carried within these activities (Abrahams 1986:70). Most structural analyses regard myth or ritual as being generated primarily to solve culture's problematic and unwelcome contradictions of a cognitive, sociological, or technological kind (Fernandez 1986:173). We will regard them as having two intentions: The intention to give definition to the inchoate, and the intention to return to the whole. The performance of ritual, then, is able to revitalise – through simple iteration – a universe of domains, an acceptable cosmology of participation and a compelling whole (Fernandez 1986:175). At that time and in that place one struggles to find a language and employs gestures with many meanings. Ultimately, what satisfies must reconcile both the past and one's yearning for

a destiny contending to become a part of the living present (Shorter 1996:33).

8.3.3 Continuous and discontinuous analogy

Sometimes the association of images in ritual performance is that of continuous analogy. What we find more often is the production of a sequence of domains of performance by discontinuous analogy. The relational structure (contiguities) existing in one domain of experience suggests, by analogy, the relational structure in another domain of experience (Fernandez 1986:176). In the play of discontinuous analogies in ritual, what occurs is that, in performing the contiguous experience of one domain, a sense of resonance/relation – by analogy – arises, together with some related part(s) of the contiguous structures of another domain. This produces: First, a shift from one domain of performance to another. Second, a sense of the coherence between the two domains by reason of analogous relational structures (Fernandez 1986:176). When we make these associations, a super-ordinate semantic category is created to which both now belong (Basso 1976:98-111), i.e. the concept formed by predication is always more inclusive than either of the categories involved (Basso 1976:103).

Acting penetrates deep into the brain (Schechner 1986:351), and performance does exist at the level of the autonomic nervous system (ANS). This means that acting is not only a neo-cortical event, but one that penetrates to the level of the old-mammalian and reptilian brains (Schechner 1986:348). This implies that the directional flow of motivation is not only down-up (from reptilian to neo-cortex), but can also be up-down – e.g. actors hear instructions and act accordingly, but the changes in their musculature lead to (or are identical to) changes in their ANS. So, without denying the existence of "cultural universals" – or at least an underlying neurologically based ritual process – displays of emotion can be so well

feigned by skilled performers that the distinction between what is "really happening" and what is "skilfully pretended" or "mechanically induced" becomes simply a matter of social/aesthetic convention (Schechner 1986:348). And there are systems of performer training, both ancient and modern, that say this "problem" is no problem at all, since both circumstances are true. The human animal is complex enough that emotions generate actions and actions generate emotions (Schechner 1986:349). The causal chain thus runs in both directions (Schechner 1986:350).

The experience is of the collapse of separation into relatedness. It is the "shock of recognizing" a wider integrity of things, the recognition of a greater whole. Metaphoric predication, thus, in its very nature, impels a return to (at least some) whole which is greater than its parts (Fernandez 1986:177). In situations of epistemological crisis – i.e. times of hyper- and hypo-arousal associated with the collapse of accustomed masteries, and the frustration of received strategies – ritual allows us to rise from those depths with old or newly rehabilitated images. With these images we can now re-classify and re-integrate a world in which personal pronouns can once again confidently move with the fullest sense of both the consanguinities of their context and their powers of transformation into something more than we as individuals are (Fernandez 1986:183).

8.3.4 Constructing myth: our basic instinct

Now, just as performative behaviour penetrates deep into the brain, so human ritual has its sources deep in evolutionary time (D'Aquili, Laughlin and McManus 1979:36-37). Interesting to note is that human rituals differ from animal ritualization because they are cognitive, i.e. they are a conscious attempt to try to explain or affect things (Schechner 1986:354). As Turner (1983:231) summarised: Human beings have no choice but to construct myths to explain their world and to orient themselves in what often appears

to be a capricious universe. Yet ritual works differently than myth (Turner 1983:231–232): Myth presents problems to the verbal analytic consciousness about life and death, good and evil, mutability, and an unchangeable "ground of being", the one and the many, freedom and necessity. Myth attempts to explain away such logical contradictions. Yet puzzlement remains on a cognitive level.

8.4 RITUAL, THE ANSWER TO MYTH'S QUESTION

Ritual, on the other hand, is often performed situationally to resolve problems posed by myth to the analytic verbalising consciousness. Ritual attempts to master the environmental situation by means of motor behaviour. In this case, in the form of ritual – a form going back into man's phylogenetic past and involving repetitive motor, visual, and auditory driving stimuli, kinetic rhythms, repeated prayers, mantras, and chanting – which strongly activates the ergo-tropic system/left brain.

This is appropriate since the problem is presented in the "mythical" or analytical mode. However, if excitation continues long enough, the tropho-tropic system is triggered too. There is something about repetitive rhythmic stimuli that may, under proper conditions, bring about the unusual neural state of simultaneous high discharge of both autonomic sub-systems (D'Aquili, Laughlin and McManus 1979:157). Practically, this means that the excited ANS "supersaturates the ergo-tropic/energy-expending system to the point that the tropho-tropic system is not only simultaneously excited by a kind of spill over, but also (on rare occasion) may be maximally stimulated so that both systems are intensely stimulated" (D'Aquili, Laughlin and McManus 1979:175). This results in the feeling of the inexpressible, which sometimes accompanies not only religious rituals but public performative gatherings of many different kinds as well.

8.4.1 Arousal and meaning

Fischer (1971:902) speaks of a "rebound to super-activity", or tropho-tropic rebound, which occurs in response to intense sympathetic excitation or the peak of ergo-tropic arousal. This is important because meaning is "meaningful" only at that level of arousal at which it is experienced. During the highest levels of hyper- or hypo-arousal, this meaning can no longer be expressed in dualistic forms, since the experience of unity is born from the integration of interpretive/cortical and interpreted/sub-cortical structures (Damasio 1996:xiii-xv, 69-70, 128, 132-142, 139, 143-145, 149-151, 158-159, 170-173, 177-179, 180-184, 205-222; Damasio 1999:35-81, 60-62, 147-148, 283-286; LeDoux 1998:128-137, 153-174, 181, 184-186, 196-197, 200-204, 206-213). This means that, if the experiences of the participants in the ritual have been rewarding, faith in the cosmic and moral orders contained in the myth cycle will be reinforced on all levels of the brain. This brings with it its own intrinsic rewards.

8.4.2 Imagination and actuality

So it seems that humans live at the interface between culture (both immediate and historical), and genetics (Schechner 1986:357; Pyysiäinen 2001:114-119, 131). Nothing humans do is itself and nothing else. No strip of behaviour or thought does not nest within something else, thereby communicating at least two messages – that it "is", and what it "as ifs". The amazing result is that humans, by imagining – i.e. playing and performing – can bring new actualities into existence (Schechner 1986:363). If accepted, subjectively as well as metaphorically, however, the ritual/image shapes us by revealing new dimensions of imaginable being. A metamorphosis of imagery occurs, which extends beyond the dimensions of the reasoned intellect alone (Shorter 1996:34; Pyysiäinen 2001:133-136). This makes

Schechner (1986:363) go as far as stating that "there is no fiction, only unrealized actuality".

Humans are able to absorb and learn behaviour so thoroughly that the new behaviour knits seamlessly into spontaneous action (Schechner 1986:367). But then humans, as a collective, in the process of constructing a shared collective destiny (Schechner 1986:366). Not one of us is ever really short of experience. We all have very much more of the stuff than we know what to do with. And if we fail to put it into some graspable form the fault must lie in a lack of means, not substance (Geertz 1986:373). The totality of a person can be transformed by formerly hidden elements now revealed (Shorter 1996:16). This power is captured in D'Aquili's bold conclusion that ritual might be one of the few means available to humanity to "solve the ultimate problems and paradoxes of human existence" (D'Aquili, Laughlin and McManus 1979:179).

8.4.3 Necessity: appreciating embodiment

This is almost unintelligible without an appreciation of embodiment, and a recognition that formal systems of thought play but a limited part in very many people's understanding of life (Davies 2002:118). Even in ritual performances, formal theological ideas are "simply not used in the deductive manner theologians would take for granted" (Boyer 1994:212-222). Realistically, individuals hold opinions, beliefs, and values that are partial, fragmentary, and changing. Values that interfuse with activities, rites, and the manifold endeavours of life. And, even though the pragmatic goal might be jointly achieved, participants might be engaging in a rite/ritual for different ideological reasons (Davies 2002:120).

For we hunger and thirst for such significant doings, but when we find them – simply by recognising them as significant, by thinking about them and by writing about them – we may elevate such occurrences to a status

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that makes considered examination difficult (Abrahams 1986:48). The problem arising from the observer of the regularities of human behaviour and conduct is that the simple process of observation and reporting does, indeed, alter the significance (and perhaps even the meaning of) the activities themselves (Trilling 1979:82). With the increasing distance between the act and the apprehension of it by the reader/hearer/viewer, a loss of the spirit and meaning is more likely. So, can any such "god term" (Donoghue 1976:123) remain holy in the relentlessly self-examining environment in which we live? For words in this world are hallowed only so long as they retain their novelty as a sign of their vitality. Such key words, or root metaphors, must contain such integrity and value that they can be employed, defended in their use, redeemed, and re-redeemed for the spirit that resides within them (Abrahams 1986:47).

Quality-time, for Christian activity, should thus involve symbolic participation in the founding events of Christ's life, enacted in contemporary worship, where the acts of God are related to the autobiography of each participant and to the group as a whole (Davies 2002:132). In order to be able to unite this history with the present, the group takes a step out of time and, in this *liminoid* moment, equality among believers is asserted. Rank and status have no place amongst those who are equally sinners and equally redeemed. A distinctive feature in this process is the stress placed on the Lord's presence by and through the Holy Spirit.

8.4.3.1 The Spirit and the process of flow

One theoretical way of approaching this sense of the Spirit from an anthropological perspective is through the notion of "flow" (Davies 2002:132): Flow describes periods when action and awareness merge with attention focused on a limited stimulus to achieve a set goal, and may affect individuals acting alone or in a group. This sense of flow takes place in

events that are reckoned to be ends in themselves and not means to some other end. "To flow is to be as happy as a human can be – the particular rules or stimuli that triggered the flow, whether chess or a prayer meeting, do not matter" (Turner 1982:58). Experiences motivate religious life, whether in the intensity of the divine presence impressing itself so forcefully that God seems more real than the devotee lost in adoration, or in a passing memory of the tradition witnessed in the faith of others. Excitement empowers much of this experience (Davies 2002:135). Thus both the body and experience stand in the fore, not least through the sense of "flow". Life is transformed from a heavy weight into a world of opportunities.

The question then becomes whether people are the same after major rites as before them? It is easy to argue on the conversionist model that people – once their old nature has been conquered by the new spiritual nature – set about converting that old nature in other people. But that is not the only case worth pondering. In most Christian traditions the spiritual nature is not complete in this life, but is set within an ongoing process of transformation, directed towards the self, within the religious community.

8.4.4 Rites of intensification

This is where "rites of intensification" come into play (Davies 2002:139). In these rites the process of conquest continues in two directions: One covering the ongoing conquest of the self by the Spirit. The other, the conquest of "the old" within social life. The significance of these "rites of intensification" have tended to be overshadowed by most scholars' preoccupation with "rites of passage". Yet, as early as 1942, rites of intensification have been identified as more significant in the "development of complex religious institutions" (Chapple and Coon 1942:410) than rites of passage. This is because rites of intensification both strengthen relationships amongst people

after they have been apart or engaged in different activities, and (more psychologically) also reinforce individuals in their patterns of behaviour.

Rites of intensification take place where people focus their attention upon their religious lives and values, and often reckon to come away "refreshed" – i.e. with a heightened commitment to their faith (Davies 2002:139). The distinctive feature here lying in the experience of flow, which brings to many individuals a sense of having achieved a purpose through their participation. In a much more "ordinary" sense, the regular services of religious groups serve a basic purpose of intensification of religious experience and beliefs through their pattern of confession, absolution, worship, and prayer.

The human need is for people to "realise, participate in, maintain, correct, transform, and not merely observe" (Rappaport 1999:459). In other words, there is a need for a "high and explicit sanctification" of concepts of this kind, if there is to be "a preservation of the world's wholeness in the face of fragmenting and dissolving forces" (Rappaport 1999:460).

9 COMBINING CONCLUSIONS

This chapter's study of the relevance of liturgy, ritual, and performative acts for people in today's society, with specific examples from the Apocalypse of John discussed in Section 5, has revealed that these things are not just relevant, but absolutely necessary. Without ritual/liturgy, we are lost in the self – unable to connect, and therefore meaningfully interpret and translate, our being in this world. In fact, it might even be argued that people today need ritual and liturgy even more than the people of the first century did. The people of the first century – to whom Revelation was initially addressed – lived in a "high-context" society. This meant that they had a shared memory, a broadly shared, well-understood knowledge of the content of anything that could be referred to. This included an understanding of the

universe and their place and role in it as community and individuals. In today's "low-context" society, there is almost no shared memory or unified social context. The irony is that it is still the one thing that we desire. That we have dire need of. For without it we have no story to unify us, to connect us, to make us feel recognised. Our "being" is still dependent on our "being in community".

The implication is that Chapter 3's liturgical functional reading is, in terms of the growing need for a preservation of wholeness, almost even more relevant and significant today than it was for its original hearers. Through the performance of, and their participation in, the ritual that is the Apocalypse of John, people today can find a unifying story – a story of past, present and future meaningfully intertwined; a story that provides clarity, purpose, and substance; a story that connects; a story that excites them into living as their best selves.

This suggestion becomes even more compelling when examining today's context in the following chapter. Though many things definitely have evolved and changed since the first century, the things that negatively influence our quality of life have not. In fact, because of the development and progression that has been a constant of modern society, many of the things that threatened the first century's society have now become of critical threat to ours. More on that in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

1 THE APOCALYPSE'S FIRST CENTURY CULTURAL ARCHAE-OLOGY

In order to attempt to ensure that this work continues to study the liturgical/functional (or affective) impact of the Book of Revelation comparatively (i.e. working with both its first century context and its contemporary contexts), this chapter begins with an exploration of the cultural archaeology of the Apocalypse's first recipients in Asia Minor. This will (hopefully) allow for a more focused and functional discussion when returning to today's cultural archaeology.

1.1 THE BOOK OF REVELATION AND THE ROMAN EMPIRE

It is important to remember that Revelation, although it has been demonstrated to have an important and lasting significance for our day (see Chapter 4 Section 5 for specific and practical examples hereof), spoke first and foremost to circumstances facing the churches in the Roman Empire of the late first century (Barr 2010:632-640, 2006:71-89; 2003:1-9; Du Rand 2007:14-101, Thompson 2003:25-47; Stefanovic 2002:2-9, 14-17; Aune 1997:xlvii-civ; Chilton 1987:1-10).

The Book of Revelation – a book that the author started writing just after the war and destruction in Judea around 70 C.E., and kept adding on to and editing until its release in the 90's C.E. – addresses different faith communities in Asia Minor. These communities had been facing several hardships: They had possibly faced physical persecution and martyrdom under Emperor Nero. They might have been fearful of further physical persecution and martyrdom to come under Emperor Domitian. And they were experiencing ever more tension and outright conflict with, and "betrayal" by,

the Jewish faith community of which they were once a sub-group. It is this betrayal by the Jewish faith community that brings us to the biggest direct problem these faith communities faced – by insisting with the Roman Empire that Christians were not a sub-group in the Jewish faith, Christians were no longer "protected" from having to partake in the Emperor and *Roma Aeterna* cult in order to progress in the world. This meant that, if they were to even partake (never mind succeed and move up in!) in the society of their day, they had to also partake in the Empire's civil religion. Failure to do so meant alienation, isolation, and no chance at success (i.e. economic persecution). The temptation to justify participation as "not really harmful" in order to be able to succeed and belong was very strong. A temptation strengthened by some Christian prophets, who encouraged participation in the Empire as God's will.

With these circumstances in mind, the writer of the Apocalypse makes use of a combination of letters and violent visions, to help Christians of the first century answer the two most important questions facing them:

- Who is in control of this world and its future? Where is God to be found in the picture they are faced with?
- What is the meaning of all their (real and perceived) persecution and suffering?

In the answering of these questions, the author's aim is to assist these communities, not only with how they must, can, and will resist "Babylon" (i.e. the Roman Empire and its civil religion), but also with why it is of the utmost essence to do so.

It does so, first and foremost, through its theo-poetic ("worship") genre. Through these faith congregations' participations in the performance of the text, it becomes a counter-liturgy to the widely publicised and practiced liturgy of the Empire's civil religion. In the performance of this liturgy Christians are reminded that the civil religion of the Empire must never

capture their imaginations, for it is not the alluring and beautiful entity it makes itself out to be. No, their version of reality must be informed by their allegiance to the Slaughtered Lamb and to worshipping the God and Father of Jesus Christ. Reading/participating in Revelation poetically was meant to shape their imagination as faithful disciples, in circumstances where the pressures of "Empire" attempted to lure them. As they worshipped God, the temptations of this evil age faded as they brought glory to God, partnering with God to usher in the emerging renewal of creation (Revelation 21-22). But Revelation is also a theo-political text. It is "uncivil". Revelation upsets the *status quo*, calls out civil religion in all of its forms, brings peace where there is violence, and summons the church to live as an alternative *polis* in the midst of rampant idolatry, greed, and injustice (the true form and essence of the Empire's civil religion). Finally, Revelation carried with it a pastoral-prophetic tone. One of "witness". This circular letter attempts to speak truth to various churches in Asia Minor, reminding Christ-followers of the radical cost of discipleship. The powers of evil, both invisible and embodied, must not win by pulling the church away from faithfulness to Christ. Revelation 1:3, at the beginning of the letter, sets this agenda clearly: "Favoured is the one who reads the words of this prophecy out loud, and favoured are those who listen to it being read, and keep what is written in it, for the time is near". To "keep" Revelation is to walk faithfully with God on the narrow road of discipleship in the face of temptation, thereby refusing to compromise, allowing the church to become a visible alternative to the powers of the Empire.

1.2 REVELATION: ENABLING FAITHFULNESS

The Apocalypse does the abovementioned very effectively and powerfully through its use of visionary material – it is through participation in this liturgy, filled with violent images and gory details, that those participating

first and foremost find release for their thoughts and emotions (McGowan 2014; Horsley 2011:125-155; Ruiz 2006:221-241; Filho 2002:213-234; Vanni 1991:348-372). A catharsis – an emptying of pent-up negative thoughts and emotions – is made possible by living through Revelation's liturgy. The participants are enabled to "get rid of their sadness" and "access their anger". By asking of these faith communities to participate in the performance of the text, their experience of the reality of evil and empire is confirmed and justified. It becomes clear that the Empire is one of the key manifestations of evil, as it makes use of civil religion to justify violence and various forms of injustice. This sort of evil always alienates people from God and people from each other, for it promises life but delivers death (both physical and spiritual).

The civil religion of the Empire is "unmasked" in the visionary material as an evil and ugly entity (in various guises) tempting the faithful to idolatry and immorality, with rituals and practices that legitimize dehumanizing actions for the sake of security or peace. It also highlights the by-product of the idol of civil religion – the exploitation of the most vulnerable. The intensity of their experience of suffering and persecution (whether physical, economic, or social) is thus not denied, but played out fully in all its bloody depth. Because they are allowed to explore these depths through their participation in the Apocalypse as liturgy, because the book does not hold back on the gory intensity of the different movements and moments to be found in Revelation, their negative thoughts and emotions are fully actualised, and therefore purged. It is only when the faithful's suffering and persecution has been legitimised by allowing them to experience these depths that positive action becomes a possibility. They are now able to see past their present experience, because they have been allowed to move through it, and focus on the bigger (cosmic) picture - the reign/rule of God, ultimately expressed in the Slaughtered Lamb. God and Christ rule from the

same throne and will share in the final victory. Because of this final victory – which has in actual fact already been won – Christians are called to Covenant faithfulness and resistance through subversive patterns of community, as they seek to faithfully unite themselves to God in Christ.

Covenantal faithfulness of this sort requires prophetic spiritual discernment, and may result in various kinds of suffering (some of which they are already experiencing). But the only way to be able to attempt to properly challenge the Empire is through the practice of discernment under the influence of the Holy Spirit. This challenge always acknowledges that God is King and is worthy of worship. As the church centres themselves around the Slaughtered Lamb and God, they practice "uncivil" worship in anticipation of a [re]new[ed] creation. In their worship and witness they must follow the pattern of Christ, which leads them to resistance, for Christian resistance to empire and idolatry is not passive but active, and consists of the formation of communities and individuals who pledge allegiance to God alone, who live in non-violent love toward friends and enemies alike, who leave vengeance to God, and who, by God's Spirit, create mini-cultures of life as alternatives to the Empire's culture of death.

1.3 PUTTING PAIN AND MARTYRDOM IN PERSPECTIVE

While there will come a day when the sacrificial victory of the Lamb and of his people will be apparent to all (Rv 5:13; 15:4; 21: 23-4), only those who embrace the perspective of the heavenly throne can see this reality. To all others, it looks like the beast has won, which is why they worship it (Rv 11:7; 13:4, 7). This sets up the battle between truth and deception that the Lamb's army is called to wage and that runs throughout Revelation. God's plan is to use faithful followers of the Lamb to free "all the nations" from the oppressive deception of the beast and to invite them to come into his kingdom.

What is being contested in this holy war between "deceit and truth" is the kind of power that is worthy of God and that will prove victorious in the end. The beast deceives people into believing that military and political power is the way forward. The Lamb and his followers proclaim and embrace the truth that suffering prevails in the end. John is communicating that the holy war that the Lamb and his followers are called to fight is no less real than earthly wars; and followers of the Lamb are called to fight no less valiantly than earthly warriors. It is just that the followers of the Lamb are called to fight the way the Lamb fought: not by killing, but by choosing to be killed rather than to resort to violence. Just as John transformed the traditional image of the Messiah as a mighty Lion by identifying it as a slain Lamb in Chapter 5, John transforms the traditional image of holy war by identifying it as a Lamb-war. Holy war language permeates this book (e.g. Rv 11:7; 12:7-8, 17; 13:7; 16:14; 17:14; 19:11, 19), to the point that it could be described as a "war scroll", similar to that found at Qumran. Yet, John turns this holy war imagery on its head by consistently associating it with the Lamb. While Qumran envisioned an eschatological war in which God's people would rise up violently against evil doers, Revelation envisions an eschatological war that has already begun and in which God's people rise up and voluntarily suffer at the hands of, and for the sake of, evil doers, just as Christ did. Hence, though it certainly is a war scroll, it is one of non-violent, self-sacrificial, warfare. The pervasiveness of the holy war motif in Revelation is reflected in the consistent depiction of the Lamb and his people as conquerors (Rv 2:7, 11, 17, 28; 3:5, 12; 3:21; 5:5; 12:11; 15:2; 17:14; 21:7). The foes they conquer are not fellow humans, however, but Satan, his demonic kingdom, and all forms of deception that they imprison the citizens of Babylon with. And they conquer these foes simply by faithfully imitating the Lamb and, therefore, by bearing witness to the truth of God's Lamb-like character, reign, and means of overcoming evil.

The call to martyrdom in Revelation is thus not a call to passively accept death. It is, rather, a call to actively resist the influence of Babylon and the beast to the point of death. John's transformation of the holy war motif is especially evident in Revelation 7. John hears that 144,000 people from the 12 tribes of Israel have been sealed (Rv 7:4-8), but when he looks, he sees "a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb" (Rv 7:9). By juxtaposing what he sees with what he hears, John transforms a traditional conception of an exclusively Jewish eschatological army into an innumerable army that is transnational in character (cf. Rv 5:9; 7:9; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6). Moreover, while the 144,000 are listed in the form of a military census, and while they follow the Lion of Judah, the soldiers in this vast trans-national army are victorious because they "have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Rv 7:14). In this way, they are martyrs, not traditional warriors, who conquer by participating in the sacrifice of the Lamb. In fact, the washing itself is a military metaphor, referring to the purification washing soldiers traditionally went through after battle. But while traditional warriors washed away the blood of their defeated foes, the warriors in the Lamb's army are washed in the shed blood of the One they follow. This imagery is no longer about sacrificing enemies; it is about being willing to be sacrificed by enemies and on behalf of enemies.

1.4 POSSIBLE MEANING FOR TODAY'S CONTEXT

It is only once the original context, and the meaning and impact it was meant to have there, is understood that it becomes possible to ascertain, from the Apocalypse itself, what its meaning could be for today's society – and then a possible meaning not just for the Christian community, for Revelation focuses on all evil to be found in the world, from the exploitation of the most vulnerable, to corporate evil and economic persecution, to

physical harm of those different from ourselves (Wood 2016; Mathews 2013; Barr 2010:648-651; Frey 2006:231-256; Friesen 2001; Kraybill 1996; Yarbro Collins 1976). These are, unfortunately, all things still to be found in society today.

Though the Roman Empire has long since ceased to exist, it seems that the ideology and religion of "empire" are still alive and well. Now it is just to be found in many different guises in various areas of life, not as one central idea coupled to a certain political regime's reign. Which means that Revelation's call to active resistance through the creation of alternate communities is one that still rings true. And it is a message that does not only affect the faithful, for even those who have abandoned faith altogether still perceive the systemic evils found in the world today and want to do what they can to fight them. By attempting to "interprete" the Apocalypse's impact and meaning for today, it becomes possible to say (at least) the following (Gorman 2011:78-79):

- The central image in Revelation is the Lamb that was slaughtered. Christ is victorious by absorbing violence, not by inflicting it. His word (a sword) is more powerful than any weapons of the empire(s) of all ages. God's Christ defeats spiritual and physical evil through being executed by the empire, and through such "Lamb power" shares the victory with all Christ-followers.

- Revelation still speaks to us because every age has to deal with the pressures of "Babylons" that rise and fall.

- To abandon so-called literal, linear approaches to the book of Revelation as if it were history written in advance, and use an interpretive strategy of analogy rather than correlation. Revelation is loaded with images and cartooning that were loaded with significance during the first century that may not have direct correlations to our day. Yet, we should note that this is a book that continues to warn us

of the various forms of "Babylon" in our midst today and into the future. We should be examining our ideologies and -isms for manifestations of idolatry and immorality as expressed in imperialism, militarism, nationalism, racism, classism (the worship of the corporate self and the degradation of the corporate other), consumerism, and hedonism (the worship of things and pleasure). We must especially examine our own Western, Southern, African, and even Christian systems and values, not some putative one-world government, for evidences of that which is antichrist. Revelation does not "predict" the future, but rather calls Christians to faithfulness in any age in which evil manifests itself.

- Focus on the book's call to public worship and discipleship enables us to remember the invitation into patterns of community life that are non-conformist, even if it leads to persecution or death. The hope of "a new heaven and a new earth" (Rv 21) invites Christians to worship and follow Christ as advanced signs of a world flooded with the love and justice of God. Revelation calls believers to non-retaliation and non-violence, and not literal war of any sort, present or future. By its very nature as resistance, faithful non-conformity is not absolute withdrawal but rather critical engagement on very different terms from the status quo. This is all "birthed and nurtured in worship" (Gorman 2011:79).

The validity of the possibilities described above will now be put to the test by moving to a detailed exploration of our current cultural archaeology and its formation.

2 DETERMINING TODAY'S CULTURAL ARCHAEOLOGY

2.1 WHERE ARE WE NOW?

In the spring of 1829 Thomas Carlyle composed his eloquent yet biting essay *Signs of the Times*. Much later, in 1848, Matthew Arnold would publish his own condemnation of soulless materialism and utilitarian functionalism in *Culture and Anarchy*. Ruskin would follow, in 1861, with his essays in *Unto this Last*. But it was with Carlyle's essay that we begin because he recognized early, before Marx, what later became known as the sociology of knowledge. He knew the importance of asking about where we stand.

> We were wise indeed, could we discern truly the signs of our own time; and by that knowledge of its wants and advantages, wisely adjust our own position to it. Let us, instead of gazing idly into the obscure distance, look calmly around us, for a little, on the perplexed scene where we stand. Perhaps, on a more serious inspection, something of its perplexity will disappear, some of its distinctive characters and deeper tendencies more clearly reveal themselves; whereby our own relations to it, our own true aims and endeavours in it, may also become clearer (Carlyle 1971:63-64).

Postmodernity promises neither clarification nor the disappearance of perplexity (it is, of course, debatable whether theology promises these things). Nevertheless, Carlyle's call to take stock of where we stand is pertinent, for the whole conception of there being a distinctive "postmodern theology" rests upon the notion that our thinking and our cultural/historical context are profoundly related. Part of what I hope to investigate in this thesis, especially because of my focus on affective reading, is the profundity of that relationship – the ways in which theological speaking and doing are implicated in contemporary culture, both as its products and its producers.

In 1998 Nicholas Boyle produced a stimulating collection of essays entitled *Who Are We Now? Christian Humanism and the Global Market from Hegel to Heaney*. My question is different, and follows in the footsteps of Graham Ward (2005:xii-xxvii), but my theological enquiry into our contemporary situation is similar. My question is: "Where are we now?" And, before beginning to attempt to answer that question with respect to what is variously termed "the end of modernity", "late-capitalism", "post-Fordism", "postmodernism", and "globalism", it is important to distinguish between two forms of cultural transformation (Ward 2005:xiii). The first form is a transformation within the logics of a certain movement. This transformation might radicalize elements already apparent within an historical epoch. For example, the postmodern thinking on the aesthetics of the sublime by Jean-François Lyotard (one of the earliest to write theoretically about the phenomenon of postmodernity) in 1988 and 1991 extends Kant's own analysis of the sublime in his *Critique of Judgement* (1987). This form of transformation may develop what is already there in the tradition. The second form of transformation is a radical break with the cultural logic of the past or present. The postmodern thinking of Michel de Certeau wishes to examine the Christ event as "an inaugurating rupture", and several post-structural thinkers employ words like "rupture", "diachrony", and "event" to mark an encounter with a wholly "Other" whose difference cannot be calibrated within the continuities of narrative. The "Other" fractures the symbolic systems that constitute any given cultural milieu. Some cultural analysts suggest postmodernity performs such a radical break with respect to the thinking and practices of modernity. That is something that could be questioned. Nevertheless, the times always change and, when we come to recognize that change, then consciousness marks a present situation from a past one. This distinction between two forms of cultural transformation is important when assessing where we are now, or, to put it more

"theologically", when we read the signs of the times. For, whatever label we place on the present cultural scene, the context issues form complex forms of transformation. Put briefly, the cultural situation we find ourselves in both develops certain themes evident in modernity – like the social arena as composed of barely repressed struggles and competitions regulated through contract; but also breaks with categories that maintained the hegemony of modernity – its naturalisms, positivisms, essentialisms, dualisms, and humanisms, for example.

2.2 POSTMODERNITY AS LABEL

I am going to label where we are now as "postmodernity". I do this because some of the other labels ("post-Fordism", "late-capitalism", even "globalism") are too tied to economic discourse, and it is necessary to demonstrate that where we are now is not simply a place economists can define (Ward 2005:xiii). To understand economics is fundamental for understanding history (Marx has taught us that), but the postmodern condition, as Frederic Jameson (1998, 1991) and David Harvey (1996, 1989) now see, is not simply the effect of free-market capitalism. Things are more complicated. Neither does the current fashion for describing where we are as at "the end" of something – the end of history (for Fukuyama), the end of metaphysics (for Derrida), the end of modernity (for Vattimo), the end of art (for Danto) – actually tell us anything. It simply spatializes time and maps humankind at the end of a promontory. Such labels can inform us about the current cultural scene in terms of the first form of transformation, but not the second. So, like Jameson (1998:49), I can say I occasionally get just as tired of the slogan of "postmodernism" as anyone else. But, when I am tempted to regret my involvement with it, to deplore its misuses and its notoriety, and to conclude (with some reluctance) that it raises more problems than it solves, I find myself pausing to wonder whether any other concept can

dramatize the issue in quite so effective and economical a fashion. Unlike Jameson, and in line with the work of Ward (1998), I do want to continue to maintain a distinction between "postmodernism" and "postmodernity". It is not a watertight distinction, but I think it is functional and helpful.

I follow Lyotard in seeing postmodernism as the other side that haunts the modern – Lyotard even suggests it comes before modernism, making it possible. It is characterized, according to Lyotard, by its acceptance of the plural and the rejection of grand narratives of progress and explanation. It is also characterized by a non-foundationalism – a hybridity that appeals to a certain excess, the employment of masks, irony, anti-realism, and self-conscious forms of representation. As such, postmodernism is both an aesthetic and a critical moment within the ideology of the modern. It is, on the one hand, a matter of style – Pop Art and John Portman buildings – and, on the other, a genre of theoretical para-Marxist writing. The Baroque and Weimar culture of the 1920's has been viewed by historians like Stephen Toulmin (1990) as proto-postmodern. Writers like Rabelais, Kierkegaard, Mallarmé and, of course, Nietzsche are then viewed as proto-postmodern. What postmodernism suggests is that a certain social sea-change is occurring; new emphases and sensibilities are making themselves felt, and older ways of looking at, and explaining, the significance of the world are becoming *otiose* (or no longer credible). If I were asked what was the substance of those emphases and sensibilities, then, very broadly, I would say (and this returns us to the theological) that the death of God had brought about the prospect of the reification and commodification (theologically termed idolatry), not only of all objects, but of all values (moral, aesthetic, and spiritual). Humankind has produced a culture of fetishes, or virtual objects, as now everything is not only measurable and priced, it has an image. It is the image which now governs what is both measured and priced. And so the age of the Promethean will to power – in

which human beings rationally measure, calculate, predict, and control –
turns into the age of Dionysian diffusion, in which desire is governed by the
endless production and dissemination of floating signifiers (Maffesoli
1996:61, 72). Furthermore, this cultural sea-change was paralleled by the
closing down of a certain political space for credible challenge. That is, it
paralleled the weakening of socialism – the one discourse that, in a galloping
secularism, had been able to arrest the social conscience for more than a
hundred years.

2.3 TWO CULTURAL CHANGES

These cultural changes can be seen as taking place – the production of what
Guy Debord (1977:6), nearly thirty years before the development of virtual
reality, termed "society's real unreality", and a realization of the
ineffectiveness of any cultural critique – in an astonishing essay written by
Michel de Certeau in August 1968, following the riots in Paris. The essay is
called, significantly, "A Symbolic Revolution". It argues that the May riots
had left in their wake the sense of a cultural trauma and the explicit feeling
of powerlessness:

> Something that had been tacit began to stir; something that
> invalidates the mental hardware built for stability. Its instruments
> were also part of what shifted, went awry. They referred to
> something unthinkable, which late May, was unveiled while being
> contested: values taken to be self-evident; social exchanges, the
> progress of which was enough to define their success; commodities,
> the possession of which represented happiness (De Certeau
> 1997:4).

The principles of established order have become questionable and what
remains is a "hole, opened by a society that calls itself into question". It is a
hole that cannot be covered over; nor can it be avoided. No quick-fix

solutions like a better division of goods or the call for true community are credible. And yet De Certeau ends his essay on a rhetorical high, speaking of "revolution", "revision", and "challenge". He dispatches the sense of failure and loss by making speech itself a transformative event, replacing the political revolution with a symbolic one. A real transformation has become a virtual one. And De Certeau (1997:10) is too astute not to allow the uncertainties of that victory to be registered: "taking speech is neither effective occupation nor the seizure of power". He recognizes that this rhetorical gesture only turns political and ethical values into aesthetic ones. Nevertheless, this is the only way forward that he can see. Out of failure and a lack of resources a virtual triumph is fashioned which, for the moment, curtails the void, the hole. It is fashioned out of words. Ward (2005:xv) calls this "hole" the implosion of secularism, and identifies the many consequences of that implosion that postmodernism explores and postmodernity expresses.

3 THE IMPLOSION OF SECULARISM

The implosion of the secular also facilitated a new return to the theological and a new emphasis upon re-enchantment: a return not signalled by theologians, but by filmmakers, novelists, poets, philosophers, political theorists, and cultural analysts (as was briefly discussed in Chapter 1). In my definition of "the implosion of secularism", I follow Ward (2005:xvi-xx), because it will be fundamental for understanding the nature of the change and its consequences.

First, the secular has to be conceived of according to a world of immanent values which has disassociated itself from, and in its various important discourses – the natural and human sciences – even discredited, the transcendent. It is a world grounded, resourced, and evolving according to its own internally conceived laws: physical laws like Newton's laws of

motion and Maxwell's laws of thermodynamics; psychical laws like Freud's Oedipal triangle; and the laws Descartes believed observable by "natural light". In order to compose and possess knowledge in such a world, there must be what Descartes (1985:181) describes as "the search for first causes and true principles which enable us to deduce the reasons for everything we are capable of knowing". The world must constitute an integrated system. The secular, therefore, is conceived as a world-system, constituted by forces it is increasingly coming to understand and which integrate various aspects of its systematicity. This world began to emerge in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.

Second, it is necessary to understand how it is that any system implodes. A thing is exploded when an external force is required to detonate and facilitate the explosion; an external force or principle which can tear the system apart and render it incoherent. But the radical immanence of secularism (which rejects an exteriority) cannot be exploded. Theologically, certain figures in Weimar Germany who propounded dialectical theology (founded upon a certain revelatory positivism) were trying to explode the secular, and religion as implicated within secularity. With the rallying calls of "crisis" and "judgement", they challenged the secular world-system itself. One commentator on the second edition of Karl Barth's *Der Romerbrief* suggested that the book was the pitching of a hand-grenade into a playground full of diehard liberals. The implosion of a system, on the other hand, comes about through internal processes, forces, or principles which no longer regulate the immanent order but overshoot it. A worldview becomes acceptable by being internalized. Its internalization brings about its naturalization. But various forms of critical thinking – from the so-called Masters of Suspicion (Marx, Nietzsche, Freud), to the work of the Frankfurt School and the post structural critical strategies of Foucault, Derrida, and Irigaray (amongst others) – have challenged aspects of this naturalization.

Each, in their own way, reminded the secular that it was produced, that it was self-constituted, and that such a constitution was governed by a certain cultural politics with particular ideological investments and presuppositions. Hence, the secular value-system was always unstable and fragile. The work of Bruno Latour and Alain Touraine (1995) has done much to develop our notions of the instability of modernity (or the secular worldview). Their historical analyses help us to understand the cultural background of postmodernity and something of its future. Touraine, in particular, believes the crisis and collapse of modernity is due to the advancing critiques of rationalism which took a rabid turn when left-wing intellectuals in the late 1960's, disillusioned with modernity's hopes and freedoms, turned against it. "[A] purely critical vision of modernity became a total rejection of the very idea of modernity and then self-destructed when it became postmodernism" (Touraine 1995:172). I accept this, but on Touraine's model of modernity's collapse humankind is left with a choice: either to continue the nihilistic drift which will lead to the fascisms and fundamentalisms of neo-tribal diversity, or to return, a little wiser now, to modernity's project.

> If we do not succeed in defining a different conception of modernity – one which is less haughty than that of the Enlightenment but which can still resist the absolute diversity of cultures and individuals – the storms that lie ahead will be still more violent than the storms that accompanied the fall of the *anciens régimes* and industrialization (Touraine 1995:198).

Touraine, albeit in a different way, joins forces with that neoliberal thinker Jürgen Habermas (see Touraine 1995:336-343 for an account of how Touraine differs from Habermas with respect to rethinking democracy). But the implosion of modernity leaves humankind with no opening to resurrect its project (though that does not deny the benefits modernity has bequeathed). Human beings live in the trajectory of what is coming to them

from the future; they never return to the same place twice to rethink the choices abandoned.

Furthermore, it seems that all these critiques and rejections of modernity, in already accepting secular immanence, can offer nothing to overturn the system. As rational extrapolations from the secular world, they can only attempt to ground the secular more securely (fostering a divorce between literary form and intellectual content – in Hume and Schopenhauer, for example – that Nietzsche sutured). The system turns increasingly into a hideous chimera that adapts itself to absorb the challenges posed and takes delight in its own destructive powers, rather like those proliferating aliens of contemporary science-fiction films whose strength and intelligence lie in their ability to adapt, virus-like, to new conditions and to turn attacks against themselves into a mechanism for further self-development. Some examples: In Kant the *noumenal* renders fragile an appreciation of the phenomenal, because it makes evident its constructedness and contingency. Nevertheless, the analysis on the basis of intuitions, synthetic *a priori*, and the *teleology* of transcendental reasoning reinforces the universal power of rationality itself. The Kantian critique then provides (as Kant himself intended it would in the face of Hume's scepticism) the metaphysics, the architectonics, for the instrumental reasoning required by ethics, aesthetics, and science. The liberating postmodern nihilisms of Baudrillard, Lyotard, and Deleuze are based upon returning to, and employing, this Kantian distinction and emphasizing the delights of the fragile appreciation of the phenomenal. The system adapts to serve another purpose. A second example, with respect to the critiques of commodity fetishism, is by Marx and various members of the Frankfurt School, for the postmodern shift from value to image fetishism is culturally pervasive. These early critiques of fetishism – in which the authentic is betrayed by the mass-produced, by the reification and alienation of the worker's labour from the value of the object-product – did not, and do

not, lead to the end of mass production, nor the collapse of the *bourgeoisie*. In fact, attention to commodity fetishism, to the processes of reification, could be absorbed and harnessed by market economics.

Thus, on the one hand, the "authentic", the "handmade", and the "customized" could become that which is most marketable; while, on the other, the first step towards the mass reproduction of Van Gogh's Sunflowers is the production of Van Gogh's work as an aesthetic object with a certain magic appeal, the aura of the authentic. An observation by the contemporary Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek, with respect to *The Communist Manifesto* and Marxian communism develops this point:

> This notion of a society of pure unleashed productivity outside the frame of Capital, was a fantasy inherent to capitalism itself, the capitalist inherent transgression at its purest, a strictly ideological fantasy of maintaining the thrust towards productivity generated by capitalism, while getting rid of the "obstacles" and antagonisms that were…the only possible framework of the actual material existence of a society of permanent self-enhancing productivity…Capitalism and Communism are not two different historical realizations, two species, of "instrumental reason" – instrumental reason as such is capitalist, grounded in capitalist relations; and "actually existing Socialism" failed because it was ultimately a subspecies of capitalism, an ideological attempt to "have one's cake and eat it", to break out of capitalism while retaining its key ingredient (Žižek 2001:18-19).

The demise of socialism as a critique of capitalism is, in itself, evidence of the way the secular system (which renders all values internally exchangeable and transferable) absorbs internal critiques. The secular – modernity – is founded upon the strength of its integrating mechanisms. Critiques and even rejections are themselves only turns within a certain secular logic that

remains itself uninjured. The most that can be achieved from such critique is the *ontologizing* of politics, which returns us to Hobbes or, more recently, the work of Thomas Keenan (1997) and William Connolly (1999). One cannot rebuild an imploding system, nor reject it from within – just as one cannot turn a black hole back into a red dwarf, nor counter the gravitational pull from within the black hole itself. According to Touraine's analysis, then, the alternative is a drift towards cultural nihilism, the replacement of value by image. But that alternative, too, is based on a view from within the system. Another possibility, which installs the theological project, can radically challenge the system from elsewhere, from an exteriority, or what Ernesto Laclau (1990:16-18) calls a "constitutive outside". Challenged from outside, a transformation of the cultural in the second mode outlined above becomes possible.

How then does the implosion take place if critique is already inherent to, or a subspecies of, the system? When the system comes to recognize itself as a system, rather than as a natural order; when it recognizes what it produces as production, rather than discovery of what is out there. How does this recognition take place? Modernity maintained a hierarchical order among secular values, an order predicated on a series of dualisms: public private, mind-body, reason-passion, universal-particular, nature-culture, object-subject, in which, generally, the former was valued more highly than the latter. These dualisms and separatisms structured a space for public action: they founded the liberal state. In postmodernity's development of the logic of modernity, these dualisms and the hierarchical system of values associated with them have collapsed. How this collapse took place is complex to narrate, but it has something to do with modernity's need, in the face of establishing this system of dualities, for finding ways of mediating between them (see e.g. Latour 1993). For it is not the case that "subject" and "object", "natural" and "cultural", "public" and "private" are on some kind of

spectrum in modernity's thinking. They are rendered essentially distinct from each other in order better to facilitate a program of public accountability (transparency). Diversity of opinion, democracy itself, is only made possible by such institutional quarantining.

Nevertheless, to establish a principle of difference and contradiction as such, at the heart of what is, can lead to scepticism of the Cartesian kind: that is, how can I as a subject know with certainty that the objective world I see is really there at all? Or, read politically, why – if I can indulge my private pleasures without interruption – should I be at all concerned for the public welfare? For Descartes (1985), God is the only guarantee of the world beyond the "I". In the wake of the death of God, however, there is no transcendental mediation. Thus the tools, the mechanisms for mediation between the dualisms, have to be found in-house. Methodologically, dialogue, dialectic, debate, reconciliation, synthesis, and the establishment of common self-interest offer themselves as means of mediation. So, for example, political representation of various kinds mediates between the private and the public; institutions such as the law and education mediate between nature and society; and nature itself is examined through certain constructions (like the vacuum pump) and the results published in various acknowledged journals. The implosion occurs when the processes of mediation – dialogue, dialectic, and debate – can no longer be held to operate; when certain incommensurable perspectives become apparent; when the subject increasingly loses the distinctiveness of its position and likewise the object; when the natural is seen as already cultivated; when the private is increasingly subject to social policy and internalizes a public surveillance; when the universal is recognized as representing a certain power/knowledge interest which necessarily marginalizes other interests. And so the hierarchy of values implodes, with no appeal possible to an authority outside the system itself – no principle, no shared ontology, no

grounding epistemology, no transcendental mediation. And so humankind moves beyond the death of God (which modernity announced), to a final forgetting of the transcendental altogether, to a state of godlessness so profound that nothing can be conceived behind the exchange of signs and the creation of symbolic structures.

3.1 RESPONSES TO THE SOCIAL IMPLOSION

Thus the godlessness which was inherent but not fully apparent in the secular world-system is now realized and spawns a variety of responses (including public enquiries into theological questions). In *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* Marx discusses the social implosion in terms of the logic of capitalism. I find this significant because of the associations between capitalism, modernity, and postmodernity. "At a certain stage of their development, the material forces of production come in conflict with the existing relations of production…From forms of development of the forces of production these relations turn into their fetters" (Marx 1970:20). More recently, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe have written about "a new logic of the social" which has begun "to insinuate itself, one that will only manage to think itself by questioning the very literality of the term it articulates" (Laclau & Mouffe 1985:8). From these two observations it could be said that the forces of secular production forged an understanding of the world whose very constructedness came increasingly to haunt and obsess it, so that the relations produced, instead of continuing to work on behalf of the system, came increasingly to shackle and finally dismantle it.

Secularity then gets locked into the virtual realities it has produced; locked into the paranoias of David Cronenberg's *eXistenZ* (Wikipedia 2015), and the Wachowski brothers' *The Matrix* (Wikipedia 2016c). The godlessness which was inherent, but not fully apparent, in the secular world-system is now realized. The system has exhausted its own self-conceived, self-

promoted symbols. The symbolic itself collapses (as Baudrillard observes, plaintively) because it is not standing in for, or symbolic of, anything. Liberal tolerance become post-symbolic indifference in the face of the endlessly plural and contingent relays of connections, disconnections, and erasures. In the implosion of the secular the weightless flow of signs which constructed the secular as a symbolic system views itself as such and, now, without alternative. The real is the simulated (see e.g. Stewart 1984:23) that installs an omnipresent commodification, a trading on emptiness, a pervasive cultural fetishism.

Postmodernity is then characterized by simulation, the play and creation of virtual realities, the surface suggestions of depth. Space collapses in carefully crafted perspectives and temporal distance dissolves; one is both resident and tourist, set adrift in a highly organized culture of nostalgia for a premodern world (see e.g. Frow 1997:86). This implosion of the secular produces a vacuum without values, a *horror vacui*. What De Certeau calls the hole, Heidegger called the *Zeug*, and Derrida and Irigaray have called the *Khora*. Fascination with it can transform it, too, into a commodity fetish. As fetishism characterizes contemporary culture, and focuses the effects of the implosion of secularism, it could be significant to examine it further.

3.2 FETISHISM

Contemporary accounts of fetishism weave Marx's observations on the magical nature commodities take on in the process of reification (Capital, Vol. 1) into Freud's, and Lacan's, analyses of the nature of desire. For Freud and Lacan, desire does not seek its fulfilment, for that would terminate the pleasure of desiring. Desire promotes the allure and attraction of an object that stands in for what it lacks, but its enjoyment lies in not having what it wants. The commodified object then becomes the cause of desire rather than the object of desire itself. In fact, pleasures issue from not having what one

wants – which produces the cultural prevalence of sado-masochistic desire (Ward 2005:192-208). It is significant that the structure of commodity fetishism involves both a recognition that the fetish is a substitute, not the object desired itself, and, simultaneously, a disavowal of its substitutional character. It has the grammatical structure of "I know, but even so…" As Jacques Lacan pointed out, this intrinsic disavowal renders desire itself unstable. The desire can then continually displace itself onto new objects (for a clear account of this logic see Kipps 1999:24). The pleasure of not getting what you want drives consumerism. Consumerism becomes an endless experience of fetishism – as Marx was inchoately aware.

The point I am attempting to make is that the effect of the implosion of the secular is a hole that is at once longed for and disavowed. Contemporary culture both wishes to embrace the nihilism of the abyss and screen it through substitutionary images. Another way this might be put, which draws upon the work of several feminist thinkers (from Hannah Arendt and Adriana Cavarero, to Grace Jantzen and Catherine Pickstock) and a statement by John Paul II in *Evangelium Vitae*, is that a profound necrophilia emerges: "a culture of death", a longing and a frisson for oblivion. Postmodernity embraces this fantasy and is sustained by it in the same way that certain people are able to cope with the ongoing struggle with life only by repeatedly fantasizing about suicide, fatal accidents, and terminal illnesses. "Beam me up, Scottie" expresses a more pervasive desire for vaporization, a total immersion in forgetfulness.

A certain paradoxical cultural logic, the logic of fetishism, is evident in postmodernity: David Harvey (from the New Left perspective) can lament the political vacuum, while Ernesto Laclau (1990, from the post-Marxist perspective) can find hope in the radical politicization of everything. Now you see it; now you don't. The same fetishist logic pertains to the theological in contemporary culture. The deepening sense of godlessness is the *apotheosis*

– both of the secular worldview and, simultaneously, the generator of theological questions, motifs, images, and mythemes articulated by a variety of secular sources in contemporary culture. What is this announcing but a certain pathological enjoyment of a postmodern sensibility; an enjoyment of the absence of God by the commercialization of God's presence – through angels and miracles, through stigmatas and sacramentalisms, through philosophies of charity and appeals to the "social divine?" (see e.g. the work of the contemporary French social anthropologist Michel Maffesoli [1996]) In Michel Serres's book *Angels: A Modern Myth*, the angels announce a pantheistic world of immanent fluxes, a world in which the Word is to be made flesh. But beyond the angelic hosts is the Most High or the All High God to whom all glory is due. Nevertheless, Serres (1993:288) concludes: "If our will becomes sufficiently good for us to make an agreement between us to accord the glory only to a transcendent absent being, then we will be able to live in peace". The logic of the fetishist desire is that pleasure is found in the failure to attain what one desires; pleasure is taken in absence itself. And so the profound alienation that the hole evokes is veiled and curtained. It will be necessary to return to this theme when examining postmodern theology.

Where does this leave humankind? Where do human beings stand? Michel de Certeau was in no doubt about the questioning which circled the hole at the heart of the social. "Our society has become a recited society, in three senses; it is defined by stories (*recits*, the fables constituted by our advertising and informational media), by citations of stories, and by the interminable recitation of stories" (De Certeau 1984:186). In a recited society people believe what they see and what they see is produced for them – hence, *simulacra*-created belief which installs the logic of fetishism: "The spectator-observer knows that they are merely 'semblances'…but all the same he assumes that these simulations are real" (De Certeau 1984:187-188). This "objectless credibility" is based upon citing the authority of others.

Thus the production of a *simulacrum* involves making people believe that others believe in it, but without providing any believable object. There is what De Certeau (1985:202) calls the "multiplication of pseudo-believers", promoted by a culture of deferral, credit, and accreditation. By the 1980's the culture of deferral and credit, the culture of the virtually real, had not yet taken on the pervasiveness which is registered by our current globalism. Nevertheless, postmodernity now becomes an epochal term describing a culture in which postmodernism is seen as the dominating worldview.

4 POSTMODERNITY AND POSTMODERNISM

At this point, this study aims to argue for the helpfulness of a distinction between postmodernity and postmodernism. It is a distinction that enables one to see why so many of the postmodern theological voices have turned to various forms of postmodern critical theory to help them analyse the contemporary cultural phenomena that most concern humankind. Postmodernism enables us to distinguish certain elements in our contemporary world which are other than postmodern and yet, all too often, can be lumped together as characteristics of postmodernity. For example, it enables us to distinguish between globalism and postmodernity. Put briefly, advocates of globalism, such as Francis Fukuyama, and historians of the world-system, such as Immanuel Wallerstein, quite explicitly discuss their ideas in terms of the grand narratives of Hegel (Fukuyama) and Marx (Wallerstein). In fact, along with the various forms of neo-Darwinism – right-wing political and social thought and its biological equivalent in the work of someone like Richard Dawkins – and neoliberal economic progressivism, grand narratives are making something of a cultural comeback. Certain postmodern "values" or "emphases" – on *simulacra*, pastiche, irony, kitsch – and certain postmodern understandings of space and time are developed considerably by what David Harvey terms "accumulative capitalism".

Nevertheless, it is important not to view these developments as antinomies of postmodernism but, rather, ways in which, within postmodernity, cultures become complex weaves of ideologies, values, symbols, activities, and powers.

The danger of tying postmodernism to developments in capitalism and conflating postmodernism with postmodernity, postmodernism with globalism – as Jameson (1998, 1991), Eagleton, Harvey, and Soja do – is that we can lose sight of postmodernism's critical edge. Its critical edge is important for the way it can sharpen theology's own analytical tools, enabling theology not only to read the signs of the times but to radicalize the postmodern critique by providing it with an exteriority, a position outside the secular value-system. That exteriority is founded upon the God who is revealed within, while being distinctively beyond, the world-system. Without that exteriority academics in cultural studies are faced with a dilemma: how is it that critical theory, which has been one of the driving forces behind postmodernism and which, in many ways, appeared as a mutation in the history of Marxist thinking, leads to and advances global consumerism? Academics in cultural studies face the challenge Nicholas Boyle (1998:318) speaks of when he states that "Post-Modernism is the pessimism of an obsolescent class – the salaried official intelligentsia – whose fate is closely bound up with that of the declining nation-state…The Post-Modernist endlessly repeats what he believes to be his parricidal act of shattering the bourgeois identity". In other words, without the radicality that a theological perspective can offer the postmodern critique, the postmodernist is doomed also to inscribe the ideology he or she seeks to overthrow. The radical critique is not radical enough. Hence the important contribution that theological discourse can make in postmodernity when "the historical *modus vivendi* called secularism is coming apart at the seams" (Connoly 1999:19).

When, in the early 1970's, Jean Baudrillard first introduced his thinking on simulation and *simulacra*; when, in the late 1960's, Roland Barthes first turned our attention to the empire of signs, and the erotic pleasures of surfaces without depth or shadows; when Thomas Pynchon was composing *The Crying of Lot 49*, and Guy Debord (1977) began instructing audiences on the society of the spectacle, the Cold War was still being played out, American money was still related to the gold standard, Keynesian economics and the GATT trading agreement still held, Mandel had not yet written his *Late Capitalism*, cable TV and video were unheard of, and the linking of two or more computers so that they might "talk" to each other was still a science-fiction fantasy. There was postmodernism before there was postmodernity. The ethical concerns for alterity and difference in the writings of Emmanuel Levinas (1969), Jacques Derrida, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva inevitably supplement the cultural logic of late-capitalism. On the one hand, what is happening today is the vast commodification of postmodern sentiments. On the other, the inevitable incommensurabilities of pluralism are coming to the fore – where the insistence upon difference vies with narratives of historical progress towards global democratization, the bureaucratic call to transparency and the fulfilment of Bentham's Panopticon dreams, the erasure of the other as non-consumer, and the flattening of differences in a world market. Here it is important to note that the return of scientific, social, and economic Darwinism would not count against a postmodern reading of contemporary culture. What it introduces is an incommensurability between determinisms and pragmatists – Fukuyama on the one hand, Rorty on the other. The incommensurability itself would be enough to demonstrate that, while determinism requires the acceptance of a grand narrative, it does not demonstrate the existence of a grand narrative. This is Lyotard's subtler point in *The Postmodern Condition* (1988): it is not that construals of development, progress, and explanation have disappeared,

but that, with the conflict of interpretations fostered by radical pluralism – that is, where perspectives are incommensurable – they are viewed as just one way of making sense of the world. And, because they are now only one way they are *petits récits* and not *grands récits*.

It is this very process of turning objects into idols, fetishism itself – which is more than just a matter of analysing economic processes – that theological discourse challenges. That is the theological difference, the theological critique. This theological difference has the potential for transforming culture in the second mode of cultural transformation I alluded to: that is, radically. That is why postmodern theology is not simply a product of the new re-enchantment of the world, but an important mode of critical analysis in such a world. Theologians are never above and beyond the cultural situation in which they work. Theological discourse not only employs the language of its times, but also inhabits many of its dreams and aspirations. Hence the question must arise as to the commodifications and fetishisms of its own projects. There is no room for a dogmatism that is not strategic, for polemic which is not self-consciously rhetorical, for categorical assertion which does not foreground its *poeisis*. Theology, too, is mediated and mediates, encultures and is encultured. It is a discourse which, as I have attempted to argue, has public relevance and can offer certain cultural critiques and insights. But it is a discourse. It traffics in signs and seeks to make its own beliefs believable. It must, on the one hand, make judgments while, on the other, rendering itself vulnerable to interruption, critical reflection, contestation, and engagement. There is no moral high ground. There are too many shades of liberal to conservative theological thinking, too many people working creatively between the positions, say, of Thomas Altizer and Don Cupitt on the one hand, and Jean-Luc Marion on the other. The development of the postliberal position, the emergence of a constructive theological project in the United States (associated with Kathryn Tanner,

Serene Jones, and Mary McClintock Fulkerson, among others), has close concerns with those of radical orthodoxy. Hence, categories collapsed because they proved unhelpful – too reductive, and too restrictive.

As Ward (1997:xv-xlvi) argued in his introduction to *The Postmodern God*, along with structuralism, Heidegger and the French phenomenologists are important genealogical roots for postmodern thinking. The turn towards encountering the "Other" raises ethical and political questions. And deconstruction's attention to semiotics rather than semantics opens up issues fundamental to aesthetics and hermeneutics. It is then no accident that these *foci* for critical attention in postmodern theology are prominent thematics in postmodernism itself.

4.1 RE-EVALUATING TECHNOLOGY

Hans Jonas, while closely examining *The Phenomenon of Life* (1966), came to the shocking and painful realization that life itself on this planet is seriously threatened by qualitatively new developments in modern technology (Bernstein 1995:13). According to Jonas (1984), we are, for the first time in the history of humankind, faced with the possibility of extinction by artificial means. What is at stake in modern technological life is not merely the good life, but life itself.

> Modern technology has introduced actions of such novel scale, objects and consequences that the frame of former ethics can no longer contain them...No previous ethics had to consider the condition of equal human life and the far off future, even existence, of the race. These now being an issue demands...a new conception of duties and rights for which previous ethics and metaphysics provide not even the principles, let alone a ready doctrine (Jonas 1984:6, 8 in De Villiers 2002:17).

According to Jonas (1984:4-5), four characteristics can be isolated as presupposed by all preceding ethics, which renders them inherently unsuited to a world now so thoroughly transformed by modern technology. They are:

- The belief that *techne* as a whole, excluding medicine, was ethically neutral concerning both the object and the subject of technical action.
- The belief that ethical significance was confined to direct human inter-action. That is, it was inherently anthropomorphic.
- The belief that, regarding action in this domain, humankind as an en-tity, including its basic condition, was considered as constant in es-sence and not itself an object of reshaping *techne*.
- The belief that the good and evil which an action had to concern itself with lay close to the act. That is, either in praxis itself or within its im-mediate reach. Matters of remote planning were absent.

Jonas (1984) argues that this has now radically changed. What lies at the heart of modern technology is a separation of means from ends. By the very complexity of its nature, human beings are no longer able to foresee their ultimate consequences, which might just be the exact opposite of their supposed intent for it. The technological human condition thus entails that humankind's relationship to technology is a relationship of doubt. Whereas human beings cannot predict that technology will threaten their basic conditions of existence (*a la* Ellul), the impact that it has recently had, certainly justifies human beings to reasonably doubt the belief that it will not. In order to ensure that this will not happen, humankind's only choice is to assume that it will. This leads us to a "heuristics of fear", closely examining the possibility of the "unlikely" consequences of technological progress, having learnt from experience that this is very often exactly the way things turn out.

The conditions of human existence have been transformed by modern technology; now being in doubt of the lasting conditions which makes its

very existence possible. Ethics should also be transformed, although not according to the rationality of that which it seeks to address – technology itself. In response, Jonas formulates the following imperative, invoking the form of a Kantian maxim: "Act so that the effects of your action are compatible with the permanence of genuine human life"; or, formulated negatively: "Act so that the effects of your action are not destructive of the future possibility of such life" (Jonas 1984:11 in Bernstein 1995:14). This could also be formulated as: "In your present choice, include the future wholeness of Man among the objects of your will" (Jonas 1984:11). Of course, for imperatives to be convincing they cannot merely be asserted; they need to be argued. However, here Jonas is confronted with a great difficulty, for the very foundations of human moral language have been eroded by that which puts humankind in most desperate need of an effective moral language, the movement of modern knowledge called science (Jonas 1984:22).

Jonas (1984:23) powerfully alerts us to humankind's present predicament: "Now we shiver in the nakedness of a nihilism in which near omnipotence is paired with near-emptiness, greatest capacity with knowing least for what ends to use it". The consequences are frightening; for a foundation for ethics is simultaneously of the utmost importance and completely impossible. Jonas, however, believes that a solution for this problem is possible, albeit an entirely unfashionable one. Jonas attempts to locate his above given maxims within the "ontological foundations of ethics". These maxims, of course, entail the more basic insight that human life and, more generally, life itself should be preserved, and that ethics is the primary protector of this task. Although this would seem like a fairly self-evident truth – at least from an emotional intuitive perspective – this is not enough for Jonas. The very notion that the continuance of life is imperative should be philosophically argued. According to Jonas, the answer to the question if

there ought to be human beings is subject to the most basic metaphysical question as to why there should be anything at all – as opposed to nothing (Jonas 1984:46, cf. Bernstein 1995:15). Only by securing the objective basis of "ought-to-be" in itself can the maxim that humankind is responsible to the continuance of being be grounded. The importance that the author assigns to this task is emphasized by the very fact that he does undertake this project, considering that the search for the objectivity of being might just rate as the most unfashionable philosophical project of modern times (Bernstein 1995:15). However, for Jonas the situation is grave enough to abandon all concern about fashionability.

The resources needed for life to continue is of such a nature that nothing except the objectivity of its necessity will move human beings towards it's realization. Jonas argues for this objectivity by developing his distinctive ontological theory of organic life. According to Jonas (1984: 81) there is a self-affirmation of being in the purposiveness of nature itself. If this holds true, the ugly ditch between "is" and "ought" can indeed be crossed as the only possible way of restoring objectivity. "The self-affirmation of being becomes emphatic in the opposition of life to death. Life is the explicit confirmation of being with not being" (Jonas 1984:81). This self-affirmation of being has a supreme objective obligating force on human beings. Human beings, as those who brought the current possibility of non-being upon all beings, have a supreme duty to ensure that life will exist into the indefinite future, also ensuring that human flourishing will be made possible (Bernstein 1984:15).

4.2 REDEFINING RESPONSIBILITY

Having provided an overview of Jonas' attempt to fundamentally ground the concept of responsibility, the question of what this responsibility would entail has still been left unanswered. In a certain sense, the concept of

responsibility has always been central to ethics (Bernstein 1995: 15). To speak of ethics is to presuppose that agents are responsible for their actions. What does Jonas (1984: 123) mean, then, in claiming that the concept of responsibility has never played a prominent role in past moral systems or in ethical theories? To understand this statement, it is essential to explore the distinctive meaning that Jonas assigns to the concept of responsibility. Jonas distinguishes between formal and substantive responsibility. Formal responsibility primarily entails the ascription of accountability to a moral agent. The agent is accountable for her actions, which can be retrospectively assessed. Substantive responsibility, on the other hand, is where we say of an agent that she has "responsibility for particular actions that commits an agent to particular deeds concerning them" (Jonas 1984: 90). This entails that humankind is responsible for caring for, or preserving, a particular object. For Jonas, substantive responsibility is real responsibility. This is the future responsibility that Jonas presents "as the mark of an ethics needed today" (Jonas 1984:93). Substantive responsibility "is a function of power and knowledge" (Jonas 1984:125).

Previously, our capacities were too limited to hold legitimate concerns over the future, or the very existence of it. The assumption was that human life would continue to persist. Jonas, in equating traditional ethics with virtue ethics, sees this form of moral thinking as more suited to this earlier setting, as it "concerned itself mainly with 'virtue' which just represents the best possible being of man and little looks beyond its performance to the hereafter" (Jonas 1984: 123). Alternatively, an ethics of responsibility must primarily concern itself with that which can no longer be taken for granted – that the conditions conducive to life will exist in future (Bernstein 1995:16). Although showing that an objective good which can exert force upon human will does exist is an important part of an adequate ethic of responsibility, the question of motivation cannot be neglected. Jonas (1984: 95) argues that

humans do possess a natural feeling of responsibility instilled by nature. This is "where the immanent 'ought-to-be' of the object claims it's agent *a priori*, in contrast to a contractual responsibility "which is conditional *a posteriori* upon the facts and terms of the relationship entered into" (Jonas 1984:95). The natural responsibility is not only the stronger form, but also the originary, the source of all other forms of responsibility. Such a responsibility is "non-reciprocal" – a form of care (Jonas 1984: 84).

At this stage of the argument, Jonas compares parental responsibility with political responsibility, that of the politician seeking power as an end to gain responsibility.

> Now it is of the utmost theoretical interest to see how this responsibility from freest choice and the one most under the dictate of nature, have, nonetheless across the whole spectrum at whose opposite ends they lie, most in common and together can teach most about the nature of responsibility (Jonas 1984:97).

Although Jonas' introduction of political responsibility positively does imply that technology should be dealt with at the political level, Bernstein (1995:16-17) questions the manner in which Jones draws direct parallels between parental responsibility and political responsibility. Bernstein argues that in parental caring the *telos* is not simply to care, but to care in such a way as to enable the child to become an autonomous, independent, human being. Jonas questions truly reciprocal responsibility towards one's fellow human beings (Jonas 1984: 94), which leads Bernstein to conclude that Jonas does not recognize multiple forms of responsibility, while not adequately motivating this position. By insisting that parental responsibility is also the paradigm for political responsibility, Jonas ignores the danger of inherently paternalistic politics.

It should have become clear that Jonas' ethics is thoroughly shaped by the concerns brought about by technology. What is most admirable about his

thought is his fundamental search for human ends not determined by technology. However, in order to justify these ends, Jonas has to rely on metaphysical propositions deeply unlikely to convince technological practitioners. In addition, although paying due attention to the political dimensions required by a technological culture, the author's claim that responsibility is a correlate of knowledge and power (Jonas 1984:125) is severely vulnerable to the possibility of those with the "knowledge and power" to determine human ends, leaving the back door open for even more technological colonization of the lifeworld.

By examining Jonas' thoughts I have endeavored to argue that the nature of technology is indeterminate. This leaves humankind's relationship to technology as a relationship of doubt. Ultimately, Jonas' ethics can provide humankind with a convincing case that a new form of ethics, centred around prospective responsibility, should be adopted. However, despite Jonas' denunciation of virtue ethics, I will argue that this can be achieved when integrated into a very distinctive form of virtue ethics. This is a form of ethics, unlike that of Jonas, not specifically developed in response to the demands of modern technology. It is, however, a form of ethics, like that of Jonas, developed in response to the moral impotence of modern times. This is the ethical theory developed by Alasdair MacIntyre in his *After Virtue* (1984), to which we shall now turn.

4.3 UNDERSTANDING HUMAN LIFE *TELEOLOGICALLY*

MacIntyre, in his *magnum opus After Virtue* (1984), exposes the ethics of modernity as inherently emotivist in character – emotivism then being an "ethics" without ends. The society defined by modern cultural presuppositions, as MacIntyre deals with it, chronologically roughly corresponds to the society defined by the presuppositions of modern technology. It should then come as no surprise that these modern conditions

of thought present a fertile breeding ground for technological rationality. MacIntyre wants to restore what modernity has eroded, a *teleological* understanding of human life. In other words, human life *lived to ends*. In doing so, he draws upon the rich resources of the Aristotelian tradition. However, MacIntyre's project entails a restoration of an Aristotelian conception of human action, while rejecting an Aristotelian conception of human form. MacIntyre's philosophy can then, in a certain sense, be regarded as a non-metaphysical form of Aristotelianism.

In noting MacIntyre's rejection of metaphysics, the first fundamental difference between an "adequate ethics" as proposed by MacIntyre, and an "adequate ethics" as proposed by Jonas, becomes clear. Whereas Jonas sees metaphysics as the only possible grounding for a form of ethics suited to the challenges of our time, MacIntyre is convinced that metaphysics can do nothing more than to undermine the credibility of a workable ethics. Secondly, Jonas argues forcefully that no "previous ethics" is up to the task of dealing with the challenges posed by modern technology. Although the first edition of *After Virtue* (published in 1981) was published after the original German edition of *The Imperative of Responsibility* (published in 1979), MacIntyre's ethics does not present itself as a "new" form of ethics, but rather as a re-appropriation of one of the oldest philosophically articulated forms of ethics. Thus, it would clearly fall under what Jonas terms "previous ethics". However, Richard Bernstein (1995:18-19) has argued that Jonas relies too heavily on "traditional ethics" for his rejection of this "previous ethics" to be taken as a substantial part of his argument. This rejection should rather be interpreted as a rhetorical device amplifying just how novel the challenge to traditional ethics is. Ultimately, just as Jonas has appropriated much of, for instance, Kantian ethics, a "previous" form of ethics expanded and redefined by the challenges that modern technology brings might be equally adequate. In fact, if drawing from a richer tradition

of providing foundations for human actions than Jonas' own "new" metaphysics, it can prove better suited to facing these challenges. It seems that even an uncritical appeal of the maxim that life, as an end in itself, should be preserved and that ethical action should structure itself according to this, might provide greater "argumentative" force than Jonas' metaphysics, which seems to obscure the powerful implications that he derives from this.

For this reason, I shall argue that MacIntyre's narrative understanding of human life can be expanded, especially for an affective reading method, to necessarily imply practices which can sustain the possibility of narrative. Only hereby can the traditions in which these narratives are situated, and which are themselves formed by it, present any resistance to being unwittingly destroyed by technology. I will argue this by individually examining the three key concepts of this argument, namely practices, narratives, and traditions.

4.3.1 Practices

> By a "practice" I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended (MacIntyre 1984:187).

By examining this "elegant" definition, the examples of what MacIntyre takes to count as practices, and that which he does not, can be understood firstly from the terms "coherent" and "complex". Practices are then firstly those activities which are constituted by lesser complex parts, structured in a

coherent fashion, producing a complex synthetic whole. What MacIntyre (1984:188) seems to take as even more central to this definition is the distinction between "internal" and "external" goods. External goods are that which humankind might more often associate with the rewards of engaging in an activity – tangible outcomes such as money, fame or, in less glamorous activities perhaps, merely recognition. Internal goods, however, are what really constitutes an activity as unique. This assertion relies on two closely related arguments. Firstly, the internal goods of an activity can only be realized by participation in that activity. MacIntyre's example of chess, for instance, cultivates in the participant skills such as "analytical skill, strategic imagination and competitive intensity" (MacIntyre 1984:188), which cannot be acquired in quite the same manner from any other activity. Secondly, the internal goods of an activity can only be experienced, understood, and judged by those who participate in it (MacIntyre 1984:189-190).

Against the backdrop of practices, virtue can then be defined as "an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods" (MacIntyre 1984:191). At this point it has been established that complexity, coherence, and the presence of internal goods are necessary for an activity to count as a practice. The full realization of internal goods, however, can only be achieved through the pursuit of excellence in a practice, and what counts as excellence in a practice can only be determined by those practitioners who have already sought it before, an historical community of practitioners. I can thus not redefine the practice upon my entrance into it. As a matter of fact, redefining a practice without subjugating myself to its established standards would entail that I was never a part of this practice and I would engage upon creating a "practice" which, lacking the standards of social cooperation upon

which its internal goods, standards of excellence etc. relies, would be no practice at all (MacIntyre 1984:190-191).

It follows from this that practices, at least internally, are immune to subjectivist and emotivist threats. Of course, this does not entail that practices are immutable, but rather that internal critique and change can arise only from an appeal to the standards of the practice itself and a context for rational discourse is hereby provided. It is precisely because of this that practices can be "systematically extended". Only because this quest for excellence has provided standards, the ability to achieve these standards can be advanced in time (MacIntyre 1984:194). In order to re-imagine a technological ethic, we will need to turn to that which it is located within – the narratives which shape the identity of technological practice.

4.3.2 Narratives

Human behaviour cannot be understood as simple atomistic movements. In fact, for these movements to count as action at all, they need to be characterized in relation to the intentions, desires, and goals of the person whose movements they are. Furthermore, to make sense of these intentions, they need to be understood in terms of what MacIntyre (1984:206) calls the "setting of the action".

Closely related to this is the relationship between short- and long term intentions, which can only be understood according to an actor's/actresses' life narrative (MacIntyre 1984:210). This holds true, of course, also for practices, as forms of human activity. MacIntyre argues that, since human actions can only be understood with respect to the stories that provide a context for their intentions, then that which coheres actions into sequences and, in turn, these sequences into a continuous whole can be nothing other than the story of one's life. My life as a unit can only make sense when my story is recounted. This provides a convincing alternative to Aristotle's

metaphysical biology. Whereas, for Aristotle, human identity amidst physical change and decay, would have been settled by the immutable human form, for MacIntyre narrative is that which ensures that we are essentially the same person as we were 10 years ago. This is because the central actor in this narrative, in the midst of the change and growth that a narrative necessarily implies, has been the same self. "A concept of a self whose unity resides in the unity of a narrative which links birth to life to death as a narrative beginning to middle to end" (MacIntyre 1984:205).

These narratives, however, are not only our own. Although I am the central character of my narrative, this character can only develop within a plot partly composed and enacted by other actors. In turn, I play this role in the narratives of other central characters. This provides an answer to the question as to what (or whom) we are accountable to after the fall of the *polis*. The quest for the common good that we share in is not provided by the *polis*, but by the fact that we are part of each other's stories (MacIntyre 1984:216-218). The narrative life is a life in quest of best living out the narrative unity of that life. As with *eudaimonia* the goal of this quest cannot be separated from the quest itself. It is because this quest educates the person engaged upon it, about themselves as well as about that which their quest is in pursuit of, that MacIntyre (1984:219) can define the good life for humankind as the life in quest of the good life.

In considering the centrality of narrative, MacIntyre now offers a second, revised definition of the virtues:

The virtues, therefore, are to be understood as those dispositions which not only sustain practices and enable us to achieve the goods internal to them, but which will also sustain us in the relevant quest for the good by enabling us to overcome the harms, dangers, temptations and distractions which we encounter, and which will

furnish us with increasing self-knowledge and increasing knowledge
of the good (MacIntyre 1984:219).

What immediately strikes one is the long term character of narrative – only
by recounting a meaningful whole, can a meaningful narrative be
constructed. This responsibility entails reflecting more fundamentally upon
the possible consequences of specific technological advances, as "the
dangers, temptations, and distractions which we encounter". In doing so, it
should not be presupposed that these effects will undoubtedly turn out either
as positive or negative as imagined. What is needed is a narrative
understanding of our doubtful relationship with technology.

4.3.3 Traditions

By situating moral discourse within narratives, even in our narrative
accountability to co-actors, MacIntyre does not provide an escape from the
always lurking danger of emotivism. We remain free to be accountable only
to those whom we choose to acknowledge as our co-actors/co-actresses.
Who this might be can be entirely dependent upon our preferences and our
like or dislike of certain people. MacIntyre thus has to take one step further.
As practices are imbedded within narratives, so are practices and narratives
imbedded within traditions. MacIntyre (1984:222) defines tradition as "an
historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument
precisely in part about the goods which constitutes the tradition". Thus, the
emphasis MacIntyre affords to traditions is not only due to his defence
against emotivism. He takes it that the ends of our narrative, the narrative
unity of life, can only receive its conceptual resources from the traditions
that these narrative lives are inevitably situated within. In fact, the
community which harbours this tradition can itself be described as a
narrative character with its own continuity which is, of course, longer than
the span of a single human life, and thus "historically extended".

A tradition is "socially embodied", as it is always lived in community. This community is centred around that which they perceive to be "the goods which constitutes the tradition". Tradition is an "argument" about the goods which constitute it precisely because of its narrative structure. As the quest for narrative unity allows for growth in insight as to what this entails, so does the living nature of tradition; for tradition is not merely repetition but the communal, historical quest for the good which constitutes it (MacIntyre 1984:222-224).

MacIntyre (1984:223) finally defines the virtues as follows:

> The virtues find their point and purpose not only in sustaining those relationships necessary if the variety of goods internal to practices are to be achieved and not only in sustaining the form of an individual life in which that individual may seek out his or her good as the good of his or her whole life, but also in sustaining those traditions which provides the practices and individual lives with their necessary historical context.

It is in examining the societies that we are a part of that we are able to become aware of the importance of traditions. In examining the role of traditions, the disquieting question that was raised at the end of my discussion of practices also becomes resolved. The goods of specific practices and narratives are naturally defined to a very large extent by the nature of these practices and narratives. However, these practices and narratives are always situated within traditions. Consequently, neither practices, nor narratives, have complete free reign over their self-understanding, especially in regards as to how it affects the other members of this tradition. Traditions are also not insular, demonstrating their inherent health by a vigorous interaction with other traditions.

In the possible effects that technology can soon bring upon the whole of humanity, various traditions, be it political or otherwise, have found common

ground where previously not possible. It is in the meaningful interaction of the various traditions, in a dialogue about the relationship between the nature and ends of that which it is centred around – technology.

5 ENCIRCLED BY CATASTROPHE

There are also contingent threats of catastrophe originating from outside the earth, e.g. meteorites. In fact, it would seem that the universe itself, on the largest possible scale on which humankind is able to observe it, is balanced between the competing effects of the initial big bang (or blowing apart) and the pull of gravity (or drawing matter together). And humankind's knowledge is not sufficiently accurate to enable one to be sure which tendency will ultimately win. Either way, it seems that the observable universe is condemned to eventual futility, as there is no obvious evolutionary fulfilment to be found in either of the tendencies (Polkinghorne 2000:31). This, then, implies that there is no answer to the actual fact of ultimate futility. Humanity, with all its knowledge and insights and arts and culture, is but a transient episode in what is fundamentally an inane cosmic history. The implication being that all that we can do is inhabit our little island of meaning in a world of unmeaning, maintaining a stoic defiance in the face of the dark and hostile universe that surrounds us (Polkinghorne 2000:32). And, though this stance is not without its austere nobility, it remains a deeply pessimistic view. At a deeper level the world still ends up as being meaningless. Although the universe in its beautiful order and fruitful history might seem to be a cosmos, it would have to be asserted that ultimately this is all but an illusion, because in the end chaos still engulfs everything (Polkinghorne 2000:32). So, when cosmologists peer into the future, their story is one of eventual futility rather than one of fulfilment (Polkinghorne 2000:29). How can one then believe in God and think of God and God's intentions with the

world when human remembrance and history will finally come to an end in anyway?

5.1 EXORCISING HORROR AND TERROR FROM HISTORY

One way of understanding and evaluating a metanarrative, such as the myth of progress, might be to see it as a way of dealing with the "horror" and the "terror" of history (Bauckham & Hart 1999:11): By "horror" is meant all of the vast pain, suffering and loss which occur in human history, with the obstacle these pose for all attempts to find meaning in history. And by "terror" is meant fear of the unpredictable and uncontrollable future, which always threatens our attempt to maintain happiness and/or improve our lot. The idea of progress was designed to exorcise both, because the myth of progress (more than any other ideology or worldview) sought meaning within the process of human history (Bauckham & Hart 1999:12).

Whereas Jewish and Christian views of history have looked to the transcendent God's activity within history, and God's intention and power to bring history to a meaningful conclusion, the Enlightenment typically abandoned transcendence in favour of wholly immanent meaning. The historical process itself contains and achieves its meaning. Belief in the inevitability of progress was thus a kind of faith in the process of history itself – progress was the way the world was going. This belief was strongly bolstered by the myth of biological evolution. Then not referring to evolution simply as a descriptive and scientifically exploratory account of biological change, but to the evaluation of this as an ever-ascending movement culminating and continued in human history (Bauckham & Hart 1999:12). Enlightened people were part of the process of the world's inherent tendency towards the goal of human perfection and domination of the world. But this whole approach entailed giving a radical evaluative priority to the future (Bauckham & Hart 1999:13).

The idea of progress combines some sense of an imminent tendency towards utopia – inherent in the historical process – and a sense of human power through reason and technology to control the future. Sometimes historical inevitability and the exercise of human freedom to bring about the future goal seemed to coexist in necessary (even if not fully consistent) complementarity. One is a kind of secularised version of the traditional Christian understanding of providence. The other, a kind of human assumption of the responsibility for creating the future (which had previously been in God's hands). Transcendence, in other words, was replaced by immanent teleology, human rationality, and freedom. Thus the power and responsibility for creating the future were seen as wholly human, with reassurance that human efforts to plan and achieve the future were headed in the right direction coming from the sense of a teleology inherent in the world's system (Bauckham & Hart 1999:14). Where the latter senses decay, as it has done in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, confidence in progress comes to hang much more precariously on the ability of human power to shape the future according to rational planning.

5.2 AN EVALUATION OF THE SUCCESS OF THIS EXORCISM

What then of the "horror" of history? It was the barbarian now steadily receding into the past. The eggs broken to make the utopian omelette. The idea of progress was a kind of immanent theodicy or justification of history in which all the pains and losses were justified by the goal. Whether this was conceived of as a distant but finally-to-be-achieved utopia, or simply never-ending progress. Thus, so long as the horror could be located predominantly in the past (or beyond the bounds of European civilisation), this theodicy seemed plausible to many. This was because everything negative in history was being steadily overcome. But this way of thinking represents time in purely quantitative terms, allowing one to focus on the continuous forward-

moving advance and ignore the discontinuities and tragic losses of real history. Purely quantitative time, the homogenous time that moves like a straight line into the future, ignores the tragedy and loss inherent in the historical process.

And what of the "terror" of history? Here, too, the image of time as a forward-moving line is instructive. It encourages one to think of a single, set, direction in which the future is a continuous line running from the past through the present. It does not allow for the representation of the unlimited openness of the future, from which any of an indefinite range of different possibilities – unpredictable, uncontrollable, and often threatening – can occur in the present.

So, it would seem, the declining credibility – leading to virtual refutation – of the myth of progress in the twentieth/early twenty-first century resulted from its inability to cope with either the horror of twentieth century history or the terror of the later twentieth/early twenty-first century. Put even more strongly: the civilisation that has made the idea of historical progress the myth by which it lives has itself increased both the horror and the terror of history (Bauckham & Hart 1999:15). In fact, horror must surely be, to all whose vision is not ideologically distorted, one of the most prominent features of twentieth/early twenty-first century history (Steiner 1997:103). In wars, genocides, political torture, and state terrorism literally hundreds of millions have died. A number which still fails to record the extremes of barbarity and the refinements of torment which equal that of any previous century (e.g. the millions whose deaths from starvation were preventable but not prevented).

5.3 MORAL REGRESS

In the face of such facts talk of moral progress might sound like a sick joke. Perhaps it might be more accurate to speak of moral regress. Perhaps it is

not that human intentions have become more wicked, only that the technological means of effecting evil have increased. Perhaps there are moral advances in other respects, which must be weighed against the evils to which have been referred. But such moral arithmetic seems not only to be impossible, it is also an inappropriately detached response to the incalculable horror of twentieth/early twenty-first century evil. No one with the moral sensitivity to feel its evil could bear it sufficiently to weigh it in any balance. Regress there may have been, progress there certainly wasn't (Bauckham & Hart 1999:16).

So, not only do these horrors demonstrate the lack of progress, they also destroy any credibility the myth's "theodicy" of history ever had. If these horrors are the price of progress, then progress is not progress. In facing these horrors, humankind must surely concede that history cannot be justified unless it can be justified to the dead (Bauckham & Hart 1999:17). Progress leaves the victims behind. The future cannot repair the past. It leaves the dead dead (Benjamin 1969:257-258; Alter 1991:114-115).

And breaking eggs to make the utopian omelette seems to have become a regular practice in ideologically justified political atrocities. This makes it clear that the justification of history by means of progress is not only incredible, but also dangerous.

6 CONTEMPLATING SCIENCE AND THEOLOGY

6.1 CHALLENGE AND REVELATION

It should have become clear that our contemporary scientifically and technologically oriented culture strongly challenges Christian and other religious visions, whether they be of the afterlife, resurrection, or the "new heavens and the new earth". Any meaning or hope in an ultimate destiny tied to such conceptions is considered by many as pure illusion, without any

shred of real foundation in reality or support from anything in our experience. They are simply projections of our own yearnings for meaning and significance, merely symbols embedded in our universe of cultural meaning to allow us to live happy and productive lives, having little or no actual bearing on our ultimate fate (Stoeger 2000:19). Yet not only science in this sense is to blame for the disillusionment humankind is dealing with today. The Biblical Sciences also embraced modernity's advances and techniques, e.g. rationalism and "biblical hermeneutics", in which all aspects of philosophical and linguistic hermeneutics were considered to be applicable to the biblical texts. And, though advances were made in leaps and bounds with the inclusion of these philosophies and techniques, it has also led to growing suspicion and misgivings where the text is concerned. In fact, contemporary biblical interpretation makes plain that there are many problems in receiving and reading the Bible as the Word of God. In the twentieth/early twenty-first century, more than any previous period of the Christian era, there seems to be a rising tide of unbelief and rejection of the authority of Scripture. For sincere Christians, who realize that their own faith in God and their joyous hope of the future is vitally related to Scripture, there is the demand to re-examine the claims of the Scriptures and to determine, at least for their own satisfaction, whether God has spoken authoritatively in His Word. Rival claims for final authority in matters of faith, the beliefs of non-Christian religions, and the conclusions of various national systems of thought tend to oppose the authority of Scripture.

All of these different movements have worked together to make the concept of authority one of the most controversial notions of modern times. Though the methods developed in this time all had/have as their aim to help the student of the Bible get closer to the truest version and real meaning and interpretation of any given text, the connection between students of the texts and believers in the text has almost entirely been lost in the process.

The Biblical Sciences became alien to the ordinary believer. And yet, interestingly, this apparent chaos and the seeming pointlessness of life today still put forward questions which, in turn, prompt search and revelation – processes which are in and of themselves a form of ritual (Shorter 1996:i). Thus our religious capacity is still active.

The nature of Christian eschatology, in the context of natural science, arises in a particularly acute form in the integrations of science and eschatology developed by scientists. Over the last hundred years or so many areas of (apparently) secular thought have taken over religious themes and given them new life (Watts 2000:49). When discussing the topic, the natural sciences make predictions about the future of the universe (Watts 2000:48). Indeed, contemporary practitioners of naturalistic quasi-eschatology are probably more widely read than any recent theological eschatology (Watts 2000:49). Now, whether these predictions are based on the second law of thermal dynamics (a law focused on the question of whether the Christian hope is compatible with the bleak cosmological predictions characteristic of modern society), or on the anxiety caused by the issue of where the universe is headed (which arises from the big bang cosmology), they still lead to an ever-expanding and intensifying dialogue between science and theology.

6.2 ESCHATOLOGY: THE DIVIDER

The topic of *eschatology* has been particularly challenging in this dialogue/discourse between theology and science, between believers and the Biblical Sciences, as it seems to provoke an irreconcilable split between the sciences and theology by implying that there are two distinct realms of reality (Polkinghorne & Welker 2000:1). This has meant that the last thirty odd years have witnessed an astounding shift in eschatological moods (Polkinghorne & Welker 2000:7): In the sixties, Jürgen Moltmann's *Theology of Hope* and its "messianic" optimism became one of the most influential

books of the second half of the century. A mere thirty years later apocalyptic (and even exterministic) modes of eschatological thinking and feeling dominate the scene. The proclamation by the sciences of the definite finitude of the world – combined with the environmental crisis, the continuing surge of global poverty, as well as the threat of an age of increasing conflict, scarcity, and despair – has come as a cultural shock and has caused many people around the world to look to a future without hope or joy. A universe moving from big bang to hot death and/or cosmic crunch hardly seems to lend comfort to the human heart (Polkinghorne & Welker 2000:7).

This has meant that eschatological ideas have taken a very different turn: They seem to have become exclusively propositional and no longer function as messages of hope. They also function without God, which could be taken to mean that they are not balanced (Watts 2000:50). In this way the myth of progress has again failed to dispel the terror of the future. What has happened is that the great modern project to master nature and the future through technology has, paradoxically, itself become a threat. For many, hitherto unforeseen, effects of "progress" are conspiring to achieve present widespread ecological destruction, threatening the very future of the planet.

And, even though ways of avoiding the worst effects are now known, it seems impossible to control the technological and economic juggernaut which seems to be hurtling towards Armageddon. Hurtling without an apparent driver, because the real drivers are those who make up the affluent elite of the world, with the ghost of progress at their side. The point here is not that catastrophe is actually inevitable but that it can easily seem so, since the route to it is the continuation of the route we used to consider the road to utopia.

6.3 OUR PRESENT DILEMMA

The result? Humankind is in a dilemma. Though the future seems out of control, it is precisely the attempt to control the future that has created the present threat. Human beings can no longer be comforted by the illusion that what the West already has will inevitably in time also benefit the "developing" world. So, should we simply intensify our faith in the technological project, or should we relapse into helpless fatalism?

Why does the ghost of the idea of progress still stalk the corridors of power and the homes of affluent people? It might be because there are two spheres in which it still has much influence (Bauckham & Hart 1999:19): 1) The scientific community, where the scientific myth and technological domination of nature is still the ideological context in which many practising scientists think. And 2) that of professional politicians, whose perceived freedom of action and imagination tends to be so circumscribed as to strongly favour the continuation of the direction in which the line from the past through the present points. For most human beings, there is also another factor: The demise of the idea of progress does not put our society in a novel situation, for most societies have lived without any idea of progress. But we differ from those societies in that we still have to live with the continuing – exponentially increasing – rate of change which the modern project of technological domination powered (Bauckham & Hart 1999:20). The idea of progress might have enabled people to welcome rapid and radical change but, without the confidence that change must be progress, change has become disorientating and threatening. Having to evaluate specific changes is very demanding, and trying to affect the direction of change can be depressingly ineffective. And so the image of progress easily transmutes into its opposite, the driverless juggernaut. Important to understand here is that this is not a way of diminishing all the very real achievements of the

modern period. What is at issue here is the "metanarrative" by which the modern age has (very self-consciously) understood itself.

7 FACING THE INQUISITION

7.1 ULTIMATE QUESTIONS

Together these scientific and cultural developments pose powerful questions to theology: What are the true purposes of the Creator of such a world of change and decay? What ends are being brought about within it by the divine purpose? Should there not be an unflinching recognition that despair is the real foundation for human thought about the future, bringing about the end of belief in the Christian God of hope? Fundamentally, the issues centre around the ultimate question: "Does the universe make *complete* sense, not just now but always? Or is it in the end 'a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing'" (Polkinghorne 2000:32)? In these circumstances – living in a time where the secular eschatologies of the modern age's hopeful striving for a utopian future have lost credibility (and even turned against hope) – a *functional reading* might be just what is needed. This is the kind of reading that accentuates the way in which texts' assist us in our day-to-day functioning in the world. In this way, the alienation of the Biblical Sciences from the life and faith of the ordinary believer could be addressed – as this type of reading focuses on the reader ("audience") and their experience of a literary work. Functional reading pays attention to the reader's role in creating the meaning and experience of the biblical text. It recognises the reader as an active agent who imparts "real existence" to the work and completes its meaning through interpretation. And it views the biblical texts as a performing art in which each reader creates their own, possibly unique, text-related performance. With this type of reading, then, the formalism, reduction and intellectualisation that have become characteristic

of modern Biblical Studies could be counter-balanced – deeply and exten-sively informed by the Bible and the Christian tradition – while at the same time staying creatively alert and related to its particular readers and context (Bauckham & Hart 1999:xi).

7.2 SPACE AND MEANING

Now, what we study when we study religion functionally is one mode of constructing worlds of meaning, worlds within which human beings find themselves and in which they choose to dwell (Smith 1978:290). What we study is the passion and drama of humankind discovering the truth of what it is to be human (Smith 1978:291). With history acting as the framework within whose perimeter those human expressions, activities, and intentionalities that we call "religion" occur. Thus religion is the quest, within the bounds of the human historical condition, for the power to manipulate and negotiate one's "situation" so as to have "space" in which to meaningfully dwell. It is the power to relate one's domain to the plurality of enveloping environmental and social spheres in such a way as to guarantee the conviction that one's existence "matters" (Smith 1978:291).

Seen in this context, cosmology could have a bearing on how theology views life and death and imagines future communities (Bouchard 2000:89). With whatever future we are given, we are also given moral responsibility and occasions of insight. And it is in the cultural sphere – where insights are contextualised by social practices and traditional categories of interpretation – that convergences between cosmology and theology may be understood and assessed.

7.2.1 A case in point: the nature of the resurrection

It may be helpful to focus these issues about Christian hope by having a brief look at a related area of eschatology – the nature of the resurrection. The

resurrection of Christ can be discussed in dialogue with either the natural or the human sciences. Which dialogue partner is chosen nudges the understanding of the doctrine in one direction or the other (Watts 2000:53). The idea of the resurrection of the body is where the natural sciences would take the most interest, with possible questions/areas of interest being: The possibility of physical resurrection. The nature of the resurrection body of Christ, as well as its relation to time and space (e.g. one could suggest that the resurrection body has the same kind of relationship to ordinary space as the eternity of the risen Christ bears to time). But are these appropriate questions to be pursued? Especially when keeping in mind that most contemporary theologians do not choose to pursue them (whether it be because they do not feel competent to do so, or because they feel such questions involve a misunderstanding of the nature of the resurrection)?

It can certainly be conceded that the resurrection is not just about what happened to a body. The New Testament itself sees the resurrection as having a much broader significance. Some would even say that it is not primarily a physical but a spiritual event (Watts 2000:54). Which may indeed be the case. But does that make it an exclusively spiritual event? Especially when keeping in mind that the worldview of the New Testament, and indeed most pre-modern theology, does not make the sharp distinction we all too easily make between the physical and the spiritual (Watts 2000:54)?

It sometimes seems that this wariness of getting into dialogue with the natural sciences about resurrection comes from the fear that, if the concept of resurrection is brought into dialogue with natural science, it will appear indefensible. So the only way of safeguarding the doctrine of the resurrection is to keep it well away from the context of the natural sciences. And it is a matter for concern that contemporary science seems to exercise such a tyranny over theological discussion, a fact which is not often openly admitted to (Watts 2000:54).

Shall we on these grounds then choose a different dialogue partner and consider resurrection in connection with the human sciences? Here, again, there is much of interest to be discussed and explored: The way in which belief in the resurrection arose out of the grief processes of the disciples. The transformation of memory in the grief process and the sociology of collective grief. But the key question remains the question about the relationship of such interdisciplinary dialogue to how the doctrine of the resurrection is understood (Watts 2000:54). It would thus seem that both the natural and human sciences can illuminate different aspects of the nature of resurrection, but that it is elucidated most adequately and in the most balanced fashion when they are both taken into account (Watts 2000:55).

8 A MULTI-DISCIPLINARY APPROACH

Insofar as the horizons in which we view cosmology are plural and fragmentary, we cannot describe them *in toto*, since other perspectives in culture, science, and theology invite us to reconsider. What we *can* do is juxtapose certain fragments of literature, science, and theological reflection, and then explore the spaces these juxtapositions offer us (Bouchard 2000:90). This could help us to imagine community today – as well as in the cosmic future – as being enfolded in relations of appreciation and transformation. That is, in aesthetic and ethical relations. For it could be said that, insofar as discoveries in the cosmos can occasion experiences of awe, realisations of responsibility by identifying the fragile resources of life and intelligence (even in different forms and under austere future conditions), and lead to our imagining of very distant futures; it may also invite us to revise our views of nearer times (Bouchard 2000:90). One cannot imagine the fate of the cosmos, unfolding over hundreds of billions of years, apart from the fate of local worlds (our lives, communities, nations and planet). Our memories and continued awareness of historical catastrophes (which

may themselves thwart the imagination) bear upon how we assess modern cosmology (Bouchard 2000:91).

This recognition of the inadequacy of a merely reductionist account of physical reality has encouraged attempts at the study of the behaviour of complex systems. The result is the infant science of complexity theory (Polkinghorne 2000:36). Reductionist science gained many of its insights from mathematical techniques based on the twin themes of continuity and linearity. But it seems that holistic complex systems have associated with them an altogether more jagged geometry, involving the famous fractals (Gleick 1988:81-118) – entities whose proliferating micro-structure never settles down to smooth variation. Holistic complexity is non-linear, which means that adding a new component totally changes the situation in a radical way. Holistic complexity is also reflexive, with effects reacting back upon their causes in a feedback process (Polkinghorne 2000:37). What does seem to be becoming increasingly clear is that, in the description of realistically complex physical process, two complimentary modes of description will be necessary for an adequate account of what is happening: One deals with energy and, equivalently, matter. The other deals with what one might, in some highly generalized sense, call "pattern" or the formation of interrelated structure (Polkinghorne 2000:37).

8.1 COMPLEMENTARY PARTS

If scientists forswear scientism and are content that science should act in a complementary role toward theology, i.e. not pretending to be able to give a complete account of what is the case and what we might hope for, then it has something to offer which might prove to be of wider metaphysical value (Polkinghorne 2000:34). This might just be possible, as twentieth-century science has seen the death of a merely mechanical, deterministic, and atomized account of the physical world. This loosening-up and conceptual

expansion of the story that science has to tell needs to be taken into consideration by theology, as it might even afford help in the latter's thinking about the coherence and credibility of eschatological hope (Polkinghorne 2000:34).

Thus twentieth-century/early twenty-first century science differs from that of preceding centuries in its recognition of the relational character of physical reality, and in a consequent acknowledgement of the need to consider totalities as well as constituent bits and pieces (Polkinghorne 2000:34). Previously, science has been methodologically reductionist, partly because the "divide and rule" strategy has enabled it to quite often reduce consideration of complex situations to discussion in terms of manageable components (Polkinghorne 2000:36). But it has become increasingly clear that only part of nature's story can be told in this fashion - the physical world fights back against a merely bits and pieces account (Polkinghorne 2000:36).

8.2 SYSTEMATIC THINKING AND THE THEORY OF RELATIVITY

We thus encounter here concepts that are consonant with the ideas of those thinkers in the realm of human experience who emphasize the distinction between a person irreducibly involved in, and indeed constituted by, a network of human relationships – the abstracted notion of an isolated individual (Polkinghorne 2000:36). Now, fundamental to the special theory of relativity discussed above is the assumption that light provides this universal means of signalling, its velocity being an absolute constant of nature found to be the same by all observers, whatever their state of motion relative to the light (Polkinghorne 2000:34). Because of this finding absolute notions of space and time were abolished, and a relational aspect was introduced into the character of spatial and temporal properties. However, there is also an underlying structure that enables the reconciliation of the differing accounts given by different observers: In essence, it asserts that the sub-atomic world

of quantum theory cannot be described atomistically. Once two quantum entities have interacted with each other – however far they subsequently separate – they retain a power of mutual and immediate causal influence upon each other (Polkinghorne 1986).

They thus continue to constitute a single system, and this is an ontological effect, not merely an epistemological one. There is a real entanglement of the two quantum entities, which implies that they should be thought of as constituting a single system (Polkinghorne 2000:35). This strange "togetherness in separation" (non-locality) is an actual property of nature, with the sub-atomic world being interconnected in a way that means that it can never adequately be thought of as a collection of separate bits and pieces (Polkinghorne 2000:35). The discovery of what has, somewhat unfortunately, been called "chaos theory" has revealed the existence of many systems of exquisite sensitivity to circumstances. This means that the slightest disturbance is capable of totally changing, in an unpredictable way, the pattern of the system's future behaviour (Polkinghorne 2000:35). Chaotic systems of this kind can never truly be isolated from their environments, since their sensitivity makes them vulnerable to the slightest variation in surrounding circumstances. Therefore, they must be considered holistically, as order and disorder intertwined in the process of the physical world (Polkinghorne 2000:36).

The conclusion here might be that an unaided scientific account of the world does not succeed in making complete sense of cosmic history. An apocalyptic theology fares no better, for it introduces an irrational opposition into the story of creation (Polkinghorne 2000:38).

8.3 CONTINUITY/DISCONTINUITY

All of the above implies that the search for a truly unified "theory of everything", one in which the universe makes complete sense, will be

through something like the continuity/discontinuity of the Christian resurrection hope. The theological motivation for entertaining that hope lies in the resurrection of Jesus and in the faithfulness of God (Polkinghorne 2000:38). Yet here there is also the metaphysical question of the coherence of such a hope to consider. Could the degree of discontinuity necessary to deliver human and cosmic destiny from being a mere resuscitatory revival (with its dismal implication of slavery to an eternal return) be compatible with the degree of continuity necessary to ensure that it is this person, or this world, whose fulfilment lies beyond the threatening fact of anticipated demise (Polkinghorne 2000:39)?

Here, the complementary dichotomy of energy and pattern may be of help in considering this eschatological dichotomy of continuity and discontinuity: The "matter-energy" of the world to come will certainly have to be radically different in its physical properties to the matter-energy of this present creation, for the matter of this universe is perfectly adapted to its role of sustaining that evolutionary exploration of potentiality (which is theologically to be understood as the old creation being allowed to "make itself"). In an evolving world of this kind, death is the necessary cost of life, and transience is inevitably built into its physical fabric (Polkinghorne 2000:39). The entities arising in this way are sufficiently structured to endure for a while, and sufficiently flexible to develop and grow, but they can only sustain their dynamic patterns for limited periods. If the world to come is to be free from death and suffering its "matter-energy" will have to be given a different character, i.e. there will have to be a discontinuous change of physical law (Polkinghorne 2000:39).

Where the continuity between the two worlds might be expected to be expressed is in a carry-over of pattern. In other words, we can hope to revive the Aristotelian-Thomistic notion of the soul as the form/pattern of the body, so that its restoration to psycho-somatic existence (in a divine act of

resurrection) constitutes the element that links the one who dies in this world to the one who lives re-embodied in the "matter" of the world to come (Polkinghorne 2000:39). This modern understanding of the soul will need to take a less individualistic form than that of its predecessors – in acknowledgement of all that has been said about the significance of relationality, it is important to recognize that the pattern that is the soul is not simply carried by an embodiment contained within the confines of our skin. The pattern that is "me" must include those human relationships that do so much to make me what I am, and it must also express the nature of my unique creaturely relationship with God (Polkinghorne 2000:39). It would seem a coherent hope that this vastly complex pattern that is a human person could, at death, be held in the divine mind to await its re-embodiment within the life of the world to come.

8.4 MATTER, SPACE AND TIME: A SINGLE PACKAGE

In modern scientific thought space, time, and matter all belong together in the single package of "general relativity theory". A nexus of relationship that we might expect to be characteristic of the created order generally (Polkinghorne 2000:39). In this case, resurrected beings will not only be embodied in the "matter" of the new creation, they will also be located in its "space" and immersed in its "time" (Polkinghorne 2000:40). Understood in this way the continuity of human nature would imply for humanity an everlasting destiny, rather than some timeless experience of eternity.

Eternity would thus not be a concept of elongated serial time, but would be open to a description of life as a process in which the abundance of energy is in a steady transgression into informational contemplation. This process then again gives rise to energy. Thus it is not about the seriality of an ordered time that would decay into mere quantity, but about the ongoing productive process of overflow from information to energy. Finding

informational structure would make the hope for this disclosure more than a mere ordering of time - it would be full of surprise (Linke 2000:45). This modern recognition of the role of "becoming" in the unfolding history of the present creation encourages a dynamic concept of being (and of being's perfection), for change does not imply imperfection (Polkinghorne 2000:40).

8.5 THE BOOK OF REVELATION: AN UNFOLDING PROCESS

There is another aspect of continuity that one might expect to link the old and the new creations with – the history of this universe is that of an unfolding process, and it has already been said that the life of the world to come may also be expected to involve a similarly unfolding process, which will surely take the form of an everlasting encounter with God. The old creation is a world that contains sacraments, particularly covenanted occasions in which God's presence is most transparently perceived (Polkinghorne 2000:40). The new creation will be wholly sacramental, for God will be "all in all" (2 Cor 15:28). Ultimate human fulfilment will thus be a continuing sharing in the life of God, not a timeless moment of illumination (Polkinghorne 2000:40).

Looking at the above in terms of the impact it has on our understanding and use of the Apocalypse, it again makes us aware of the way in which Revelation – firstly in its physical composition – deals with important issues (such as of eschatology, ecclesiology, Christology the meaning of God's sovereignty, the nature of evil, and the role of humans in establishing God's rule in the world). In dealing with these issues, the Apocalypse does not so much teach a doctrine as tell the story in a way that implies certain conclusions. Thus the image of God on the heavenly throne (Rv 4), the assertion that God "was, is, and is to come" (Rv 1:4, 8; 4:8), as well as the repeated appellation "the almighty" (Rv 1:8; 4:8; 11:7; 15:3, etc.) clearly imply divine sovereignty. At the same time, the inclusion of the witness of

the martyrs along with the blood of Jesus (Rv 12:11), the role of the innocent lives under the altar (Rv 6:11), and the cosmic significance assigned to the prayers of the saints (Rv 8:3-5), all imply that humans play a central role in the drama. Evil clearly originates with Satan (Rv 12:9, 12), but just as clearly it is focused through Roman political and economic exploitation (Rv 13; 18), and manifests itself in human action (Rv 19:19), even within the church (Rv 2-3).

As has been emphasised before, the Apocalypse contains extensive liturgical material, so much so that some have suggested it derived from an actual liturgy of the late first century. And a considerable amount of this liturgy/text deals with what happens in church: not only the seven messages (Rv 1-3), but also the narrative framework of the scene in heaven which involves a kind of divine liturgy (Rv 4-11). It has been observed that this liturgical portrayal of God's rule precedes the dramatic presentation of that rule in scenes of holy war. This suggests a central role for the church in John's vision.

One aspect of the central role of the church is the inherent connection between story and ritual; ritual really is the acting out of the vital story of the group. The Christian story, and thus Christian ritual, centers on the death and resurrection of the Christ. This is the fundamental story of the Apocalypse. Some have suggested that the Apocalypse really is the dramatization of the Lord's Prayer: "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven…" It is this inherent connection between worship, story, and kingdom that explains the tensions between John's community and the Roman government. It is not incidental that the heavenly worship portrays God on a throne – an inherently political image.

A second aspect of the centrality of the church involves the question of how one ought to live in society, an issue at the heart of the tensions within

John's community. There were some leaders who advocated a more moderate stance toward Rome. They, like Paul in an earlier generation, thought some accommodation was possible so that they could participate in the civic and economic life of the cities. They probably represented the more affluent members of the community, those engaged in trade, members of the guilds, active in civic life. John saw these leaders as betraying the faith and named them after ancient villains who had been responsible for tainting Israel's worship of the one true God with elements of other religions: Balaam and Jezebel.

It has thus again been made clear that John's Apocalypse sought nothing less than the redefinition of the church, achieved through a redefinition of reality. Reality is now defined not by Roman power but by the redemptive death of Jesus and the suffering of his faithful followers. In our current context, one which has been shown above to be a society longing for coherency – for a bigger picture – and for an integrating redefinition of the reality we are faced with, the Book of Revelation is still ideal. This is exactly because, even though the "oppressors" have changed, the reality of the freedom God established through Christ, the security the revealing of the cosmic liturgy affects, the literal envelopment of the narrative performance by God ("the beginning and the end") still has the same affective influence. It can redefine our current reality.

9   THE WAY FORWARD

9.1 WHAT REMAINS?

If we take progress out of the picture, do we have anything else with which to face the future? Is there something that we can put in its place? Does the demise of this dominant myth of modernity mean we must now live without any such metanarrative, as many postmodernists propose? Can we manage

with mere disillusioned pragmatism or hedonism? Can we live in the present without meaningful hope for the future? With all these questions in mind, and despite our inherent confidence (arrogance?) we are faced with admitting that we see no clear way forward (Soskice 2000:86).

Christian eschatology has an unavoidable stake in these questions. It is itself a metanarrative/revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial, insofar as it involves another, supernatural world. Rightly understood, Revelation sees God's involvement with God's people as expressed by God's involvement with history. This involvement is not fatalistic but is concerned with issues of power, freedom, and faithfulness in suffering. It holds together the paradoxes of the sovereignty of God and the reality of evil. It is an indispensable part of the Christian metanarrative – the story which Christians tell about the meaning of the world (Bauckham & Hart 1999:9), the narrative that runs from creation to consummation. Moreover, it resembles the mood of the myth of progress, at least to the extent that it is orientated to the future and proffers ultimate hope for the future of the world. Indeed, the Enlightenment's idea of progress was certainly, to some degree, indebted to the Christian eschatology it repudiated – in fact, it has often been seen as a secularised form of the Christian metanarrative. It should come as no surprise, then, that in the modern period Christian eschatology has been in a constant and changing relationship to the modern myth of progress.

9.2 REDISCOVERING HOPE AS METANARRATIVE

A responsible Christian eschatology for our times needs to take full account of the decline of this myth (Bauckham & Hart 1999:10). Christian hope needs to be rediscovered in its own integrity and distinctive character. It is

only in this way that hope in God for the whole of God's creation – capable of resisting a cultural loss of future in the present (Bauckham & Hart 1999:xi) – can be proven once again. With this end in mind, it is necessary to set "hope against hope" (Bauckham & Hart 1999:xi) – hope in the transcendent possibilities of God the Creator who gives God's creation future; against hope in the merely immanent possibilities of human history, that now threaten the future as much as they promise to create it.

9.2.1 Revelation 21-22: Hope's fullfillment

As has been demonstrated in Chapters 3 and 4, the whole of the Apocalypse builds up to the climactic reunion of God with his people in Revelation 21-22, combined with the transformation of the whole of the created world. It is the epitomy of the transcendent possibilities of God the Creator. It is for this reason that I now turn to these chapters again – in order to attempt to demonstrate the hope that can be created by an affective reading/performing of this text.

One of the most powerful and evocative aspects of these last chapters of Revelation is in the difference now clearly to be seen between the "old" and the "new": Before Revelation 21 constant reference is made to a/the temple (Rv 7:15; 11:1-2, 19; 14:17; 15:5-6, 8; 16:1, 17). Suffering, death, war, killing, the second death, dying, and the desire to rather die fill the Apocalypse (Rv 2:10-11, 22-23; 3:1-2, 10, 12, 19; 6:1-8, 16-17; 7:14; 8:7-11; 9:3-6, 10, 15-19; 11:5, 7-8, 10, 17-18; 12:11, 17; 13:7, 10, 15; 14:9-13, 15-20; 16:2-3, 8-11, 18-21; 17:6, 8, 16; 18:7-9, 15, 19, 24; 19:2-3, 15, 18-21; 20:5-6, 9-10, 13-15; 21:8). A sea "like glass" before the throne of God is also spoken of (Rv 4:6; 15:2), along with, for example, the beast that emerges from the sea to cause havoc (Rv 13:1). All of these things change dramatically in Revelation 21-22 with the arrival of the new heaven, the new earth, and the New Jerusalem. The sea vanishes along with the old

heaven and earth (Rv 21:1) – as promised at the beginning of the book when Christ introduces himself to John as the one who "has freed us from our sins" (Rv 1:5) and "has authority over death and the world of the dead" because of his death and resurrection (Rv 1:18), a promise that is repeated in the praise song of God's people upon the introduction of the Lamb (Rv 5:6, 9-11), and with the defeat of Satan (Rv 12:10-11). God announces that he will be with his people forever in the New Jerusalem that comes down, and that there his presence with them will cause there to be "no more death, no more grief, crying or pain" (Rv 21:3-4). All things are made new (Rv 21:5), and anyone who is thirsty is given the right to drink from the fountain of the water of life (Rv 21:6). In the New Jerusalem there is no temple, because "its temple is (the presence of) the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb" (Rv 21:22). The only waters left in the New Jerusalem is the "river of life" that sparkles like crystal and flows forth from the throne of God and the Lamb (Rv 22:1-2). On each side of this river the tree of life is to be found (Rv 22:2). Because of the eternal presence of God and the Lamb "the city has no need of the sun or the moon…for the glory of God has illuminated it and its lamp is the Lamb" (Rv 21:23). Pain, suffering, death and darkness have been completely wiped out and replaced by the bright radiance of the glory of God and the Lamb.

This transcendental act of God as the ultimate end to which all the suffering (even martyrdom), endurance, and faith "in spite of" utter difficulty and persecution of the righteous leads is where hope is solidified/embodied. Christ's letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 already make it clear that times to come will be difficult and will ask much of the church. But, to those who endure these trials, promises are also made. They will have: "the right to eat the fruit of the tree of life (Rv 2:7); life as their "prize for victory", which means they "will not be hurt by the second death" (Rv 2:10-11); "hidden manna" and a white stone with a "new name" (Rv 2:17); "the

same authority that I (Christ) received from my Father", and "the morning star" (Rv 2:26-28); "clothed in white", with Christ "openly proclaiming" that they belong to him (Rv 3:5); "the name of God and the name of the city of God" written on them, along with Christ's new name (Rv 3:12); and the "right to sit beside me (Christ) on my throne" (Rv 3:20). The suffering alluded to in the letters to the churches then plays out graphically in Revelation 7-20, for saints and sinners alike. In Revelation 21 and 22, all the promises that were made to the seven churches at the beginning of the book, the promising interludes of Christ with his faithful seen throughout the scenes of judgement (e.g. Rv 5; 7; 10-11; 14:1-5; 15:2-4; and 19), are realised/brought to final fruition. The new heaven and the new earth, the New Jerusalem and the permanent presence of God and the Lamb with their faithful is not only a promised reward, but a performed and an embodied transcendent experience.

9.2.2 Translating the message for today

There is still much suffering in the world. Innocent people are killed by terrorists. Children die of malnutrition because government leaders divert money to the leaders' own use. Much of the world's population is forced to live in extreme poverty. Many have asked how God can allow this suffering, and the usual answer involves two parts. First, suffering is caused by humans, not by God, for humans have free will. And second, God will someday bring all such suffering to an end. But, if God has the power to end suffering and evil, and intends one day to use that power, by what logic can God allow innocent suffering to continue? A police officer, a judge, even a social worker would be held liable in such a case. John seems to recognize this issue in the telling of the story, for just this question is raised by the martyrs whose lives have been poured out on the altar: "Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long will it be before you judge and avenge our blood on

the inhabitants of the earth?" (Rv 6:10). That such an issue is raised within the story suggests that the author is not unaware of these moral concerns.

The divine response to the martyrs is first to give them a white robe (signifying their victory) and then to tell them that they have to rest a little longer, until the number would be complete both of their fellow servants and of their brothers and sisters, who were soon to be killed as they themselves had been killed (Rv 6:11). If one probes the possible meaning of this portrayal, two aspects of John's ethics become clear. First, the answer has to do with the quantity of the martyrs. Now, it would be silly to imagine that John portrays God as having some magic number, acting only when that number is reached. No, there is a logic at work, and it is the logic of the accumulation of evil. Every society can bear up under small amounts of social disorder, but when the disorder reaches a sufficient amount, disastrous consequences ensue. But, before we pursue this logic further, we need to consider a second aspect of John's ethics: victory does not obviate the need for suffering. Just the opposite: victory comes through suffering. The crucial scene for portraying victory through suffering occurs in Revelation 5. In the scene, John is perplexed that no one can be found to open the sealed scroll. He becomes so distressed that he cries.

> Then one of the elders said to me: "Do not weep. See, the Lion of
> the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can
> open the scroll and its seven seals". Then I saw…among the elders
> a Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered, having seven horns
> and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all
> the earth (Rv 5:5-6).

There could not be a starker symbolic contrast between the figure announced by the angel and the character actually seen by John: conquering lion/slaughtered lamb. Now on one level this is a portrayal of early Christian experience – they had heard that the Messiah would come with justice and

vengeance, but what they actually saw in Jesus was quite the contrary – one who suffered. And it is precisely this suffering that makes him worthy to open the scroll.

It is quite surprising that it is this Lamb who gathers the 144,000 holy warriors on Mount Zion (Rv 14:1); it is the Lamb on whom the armies of evil make war (Rv 17:14); it is even the Lamb who marries and rules after the war (Rv 19:7; 22:3). In this story, evil is conquered by the death of the Lamb, not by the exercise of divine power. Even when the story seems to portray divine violence, the opposite (innocent suffering) is said to be the real force at work. This is seen clearly in the miniature scene in Revelation 12:7-8, in which we are told the story of a war in heaven. The traditional language of holy war is used; but the language, story, and moral situation are inverted by John's coda: "But they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they did not cling to life even in the face of death" (Rv 12:11). Again we find a radical symbolic inversion: images of power are replaced by images of suffering. Similar inversions occur at every point in the story – even in the climactic scene in which the heavenly warrior kills all his enemies, for his conquest is by means of a sword that comes from his mouth, not by the power of his arm (Rv 19:21). John is consistently remythologizing the warrior with the image of the suffering savior so that the death of the warrior and not some later battle is the crucial event. At every juncture in this story where good triumphs over evil a close examination shows that the victory is finally attributed to the death of Jesus (Barr 1998).

This then leads us back to the first point about the delay. Why is postponement necessary? By what logic must retribution await further suffering? The logic of judgment is articulated by the angel of the waters when the third bowl causes the earth's water to turn to blood: "Because they shed the blood of saints and prophets, you have given them blood to drink.

It is what they deserve!" (Rv 16:6) Notice both the appropriateness – the justice – of the retribution (blood because of blood) and also the inevitability of the retribution. The best analogy to this thinking can be found in our own impending ecological crisis. Because we have polluted our rivers we will have polluted water to drink. Retribution thus does not require some divine, tyrannical power over us; nor can any amount of divine mercy save us from it. So in our story the martyrs have to wait till their "number would be complete" (Rv 6:11). This is not because God waits in some dispassionate indifference to the suffering of the innocent, but because in John's story God acts through the process of suffering. There comes a time in every oppression when the amount of coercion needed to maintain a system will itself destroy the system, as we ourselves have seen in Russia and South Africa. So the great whore has become drunk with the blood of the saints (Rv 17:6); Rome's very act of killing becomes her own death. Such is John's vision. In this story evil is overcome by suffering love, not by superior power, and the apparent delay in judgment of the wicked is not due to divine indifference but to John's basic understanding that human acts cause human downfall.

John's vision is not an easy solution, nor is it easy to accept. Events like September 11 and suicide bombings call out for retaliation, violence begetting violence in an endless round. John's vision peers behind the violence of this world, offering a glimpse of the cosmic war between good and evil, a war only won through suffering. The purpose of the Apocalypse is to tell again of the vile things that Rome has done (and is doing). It was Roman power, after all, that crucified Jesus; it is Roman power that constitutes the totalitarian state in which the audience now lives. If, as the saying goes, politics makes strange bedfellows, John wanted his audience to know just whom they were getting in bed with. John's Apocalypse is a revelation of the true nature of Roman power and Roman culture. Seeing

Rome in this light could lead to despair, but it is a measure of John's achievement that he has created a story that both reveals the mistake of accommodating to Rome and provides a *rationale* for resistance.

In this story the prayers, the patience, the persistent resistance of the saints is what overthrows the powers of evil and bring the transcendent beauty and majesty of God's kingdom into reality. Therein lies our hope, even today. "Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book" (Revelation 22:7).

9.3 DELINEATING THE WORK TO BE DONE

Seen retrospectively after this look at our modern world, the liturgical functional reading of the text of the Book of Revelation finds an alternative to both the myth of progress, and process theology's reduction of individual eschatological hope. In fact, by making use of this method, this dissertation hypothesises a move beyond the paralysing constant reduction of hermeneutic meaning to two conventional poles when discussing hope (i.e. the early Christian movement's hope through reversal, and contemporary nihilism).

It is for this reason that Chapter 6 is dedicated to a re-evaluation of the success of hope as metanarrative for today. In this I aim to suggest that, as has already been intimated through our liturgical functional reading of Revelation in its original context (see Chapter 3), and its modern contexts (see Chapter 4-5) Christian hope is not imaginary – it is irreducibly imaginative. For "reality is never just the world as it exists; it is the world as it is experienced through the lenses of social perception" (Barr 2010:636). In the following chapter, the precise possible affective impact of the liturgical/functional reading of the Book of Revelation (see Chapters 2-5) on today's contextual archaeology will be discussed – specifically in terms of hope in all its dimensions. I do this because it has become clear that the

Apocalypse was intended to encourage its original readers to "endure" in the midst of any and all possible resistance. In fact, because of the encouragement it provides them with, the Apocalypse actually wants to inspire them into living lives that resist the negative meta-narratives (e.g. persecution, the imperial cult etc., see Chapters 3 and 4) and inspire others to faith. The definition and discussion of "hope" that follows in Chapter 6 will attempt to make clear exactly why it can be seen as the logical affect (result) of a liturgical/functional reading of the Book of Revelation in today's context.

CHAPTER 6

1 MOVING BEYOND CONVENTION: A RE-ENCHANTMENT OF HOPE

Hope is a powerful ally, for hope is a sign of health, a fighting spirit, and faith that somehow good will prevail (Averill, Catlin and Chon 1990:v). Yet what exactly is hope? How is it different from ordinary wants and desires? Under what circumstances do hope arise? When is it lost? Is hope an emotion – like anger and love – or something altogether different? And, if it is an emotion, does that imply that it is a universal phenomenon? Or, might "hope" be experienced differently in different cultures?

1.1 THE VALIDITY OF HOPE

Over five decades ago, during the height of the cold war, Menninger (1959:491) posed a question: "Are we not duty bound to speak up as scientists, not about a new rocket or a new fuel or a new bomb or a new gas, but about this ancient but rediscovered truth, the validity of hope in human development?" Since then, reflecting on the salutary effects of hope in a variety of challenging contexts – especially recovery from illness – references to hope are now frequent in medical and psychological writings (Breznitz 1986; Frank and Frank 1973; Friedman, Chodoff, Mason, et al. 1963; Gottschalk 1974; Spence, Scarborough and Ginsberg 1978; Snyder 1989). But these references are scattered, and systematic analyses have been few (Fromm 1968; Lynch 1965; Stotland 1969). What does it mean to say that a person has gained, or lost, hope, for example, when faced with a life-threatening disease such as cancer?

Important to realise is that this question does not call for a strict scientific definition of hope (Averill, Catlin and Chon 1990:1). It concerns the

way people think and reason about hope in everyday life, and the consequences of such thinking for their well-being. So it is about making explicit our implicit (everyday) conception of hope, exploring the relation of this hope to social systems on the one hand, and to individual behaviour on the other (Averill, Catlin and Chon 1990:2).

1.2 HOPE: A SHORT HISTORY

The idea of hope has been a major thread running through much of Western history, which means that hope has been the subject of many analyses of a broad philosophical and/or cultural nature. These analyses began with the ancient Greeks and Pandora – the tale of Pandora is an ambiguous one, leaving us with questions like: Was hope another ill, like the others, that had escaped? Or was it a benefactor left behind to aid humankind? The Greeks seemed ambivalent about hope. In general, they viewed it more as a bane rather than a boon (e.g. Plato in *Timaeus* 69d and Euripides [as referred to in Menninger 1959:483]). Our current conception of hope owes more to the Judeo-Christian tradition, which treats hope as a highly valued condition, than classical Greek thought. Hope is, in fact, one of the three theological virtues recognised by Christianity – the others being faith and love (e.g. 1 Thess 1:3).

In view of the above, it is not surprising to learn that hope was regarded as a fundamental emotion throughout much of the medieval period (e.g. Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*). Even later, more secularly orientated writers like Hume (1888) and Hartley (1966), still classified hope among the fundamental positive "general passions of human nature". For a somewhat different orientation, we might mention the views of Kant (1978; 1966). He was primarily concerned with the free and proper exercise of reason by the individual, aiming to resolve disputes between empirical and rationalist approaches. For Kant, the former asserted that all knowledge comes through

experience. The latter maintained that reason and innate ideas were prior. Kant argued that experience is purely subjective, without first being processed by pure reason. He also said that using reason, without applying it to experience, only leads to theoretical illusions. Kant asserted that, because of the limitations of argumentation in the absence of irrefutable evidence, no one could really know whether there is a God and an afterlife or not. But, for the sake of morality, and as a ground for reason, Kant affirmed people being justified in believing in God, even though they could never know God's presence empirically. Kant (1966:237-238) explained:

> All the preparations of reason, therefore, in what may be called pure philosophy, are in reality directed to those three problems only [God, the soul, and freedom]. However, these three elements in themselves still hold independent, proportional, objective weight individually. Moreover, in a collective relational context; namely, to know what ought to be done: if the will is free, if there is a God, and if there is a future world. As this concerns our actions with reference to the highest aims of life, we see that the ultimate intention of nature in her wise provision was really, in the constitution of our reason, directed to moral interests only.

Kant argued that our experiences are structured by necessary features of our minds. In his view, the mind shapes and structures experience so that, on an abstract level, all human experience shares certain essential structural features. Among other things, Kant (Warburton 2011:111) believed that the concepts of space and time are integral to all human experience, as are our concepts of cause and effect. One important consequence of this view is that one never has direct experience of things – the so-called *noumenal* world – and that what we do experience is the phenomenal world as conveyed by our

senses. The sense of an enlightened approach and the critical method required that:

> If one cannot prove that a thing is, he may try to prove that it is not. And if he succeeds in doing neither (as often occurs), he may still ask whether it is in his interest to accept one or the other of the alternatives hypothetically, from the theoretical or the practical point of view. Hence the question no longer is as to whether perpetual peace is a real thing or not a real thing, or as to whether we may not be deceiving ourselves when we adopt the former alternative, but we must act on the supposition of its being real (Kant 2004:161-163).

The presupposition of God, soul, and freedom was then a practical concern, for

> "Morality, by itself, constitutes a system, but happiness does not, unless it is distributed in exact proportion to morality. This, however, is possible in an intelligible world only under a wise author and ruler. Reason compels us to admit such a ruler, together with life in such a world, which we must consider as future life, or else all moral laws are to be considered as idle dreams..." (Kant 1966:238-242).

Kant indicated that one of his three major critiques – the Critique of Judgment – corresponds roughly to the question: "For what may I hope, if I do as I should?" (Kant 1966:516). The implication seems to be that hope is like a disease if it leads one to act immorally or imprudently, but that it is good if it inspires one to lead a moral and rational life.

During the age of the Enlightenment, the explicitly religious rationale for hope was gradually replaced by a different kind of faith – progress based on reason. For the more radical advocates of the Enlightenment, man became

god, science became religion, and hope became secularised. But man proved to be a feeble and unwilling god, and the promises of science rang hollow in the sweatshops spawned by the industrial revolution. Not surprisingly, then, the Enlightenment gave way to nihilism, in which hope is described as "the worst of all evils, for it protracts the torment of man" (Nietzsche 1986:45).

This very brief historical survey illustrates three important points (Averill, Catlin and Chon 1990:5):

- Hope has almost always occupied a prominent role within Western cultural tradition.
- Hope has often been treated as a basic/fundamental emotion.
- Our conception of hope is, to a certain extent, culturally relative.

1.3 HOPE VERSUS OPTIMISM

When confronted with the prospect of a desired but uncertain event, people may adopt either an emotional or a non-emotional model (Averill, Catlin and Chon 1990:95): "Hope" signifies the adoption of an emotional model. "Optimism", in important respects similar to hope, does not have the corresponding emotional connotation. We expect claims of optimism to be based on evidence that can be judged in terms of rational criteria. The result is that optimism increases linearly with the probability of attainment, whereas there exists a curvilinear relationship between hope and the probability of an event (i.e. one does not hope for things that are virtually assured). Another important difference between hope and optimism relates to the importance of an event. If an event is sufficiently important, hope may be considered appropriate, even though the chances of fulfilment are practically nil. By contrast, the importance of an event does not, by itself, justify optimism.

Hope is also related to a person's value structure differently than is optimism (Averill, Catlin and Chon 1990:96). The range of appropriate

objects of hope is tightly curtailed by the moral ideals of the individual and society, whereas optimism is more neutral in this respect. To oversimplify – hope tells us about the person's values, optimism about the person's assessment of the situation. Important to remember here is that both "rational" and "emotional" behaviour can be understood to be expressions of a single system with a range of capabilities (Averill, Catlin and Chon 1990:98). The differences between the two simply represent differences in the way processes are organised, not an essential difference in the processes *per se*.

1.4 WHY HOPE?

But why adopt an emotional (hope), rather than a non-emotional (optimism) model? "If only there were endings. If only the moment arrived when there was no more longing, and the story froze and was stilled beyond grief and disappointment and age and death" (Williams 1998:340).

Hope, it has been said, is the best medicine (Averill, Catlin and Chon 1990:100). It nourishes, guides, uplifts, and supports a person in times of difficulty. Hope maintains loyalty and commitment, without requiring rational justification. From a social perspective, hope is a command to "keep the faith" and remain loyal and committed to action, secure in one's moral righteousness – even when rational considerations and empirical evidence might call for scepticism (Averill, Catlin and Chon 1990:104). It is a powerful social tool, and it, undoubtedly, has been independently invented many times in many different places.

Hope is "the passion for the possible" (Kierkegaard 2005:151). But, for hope to be meaningful in the fullest sense, the possible must take two forms (Averill, Catlin and Chon 1990:104): First, the world itself must consist of possibilities, not necessities. Second, human nature too must consist of

possibilities. If this is the case, then – with hope – we can begin to realise the possibilities inherent in both the situation and in ourselves.

2 HOPE: DISTINCTIVELY HUMAN

Hope is among those capacities or activities that mark off the territory of the distinctively human within our world (Bauckham and Hart 1999:52). Humans, we might say, are essentially insatiable. Driven forwards by a desire for contact with a reality the fullness of which constantly eludes us. We step out in faith, trusting that there is something more, something better, something worthwhile to be discovered or encountered, and, that we shall duly make contact with it. From the simplest purposeful action to the most complex scientific, artistic, or political engagement with the human condition, humanity lives not only by instinct and by desire but by hope. We live, that is to say, by stepping outwards and forwards from our present location. We take these outward and forward steps in the hope that something positive will come of us doing so. That such action is worthwhile (Bauckham and Hart 1999:53).

So, hope is a matter of both knowledge and will. We know what has happened before, and we know what we desire. Hope is characterised, above all, by the application of imagination and trust to a future which is essentially open and unknown. With its eyes wide open to the threat which the future holds, it nonetheless sees ways of averting this threat. Hope is, in this sense, an activity of imaginative faith.

2.1 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HOPE AND FEAR

Of course, imagination is also the source of fear (Bauckham and Hart 1999:53), whether pathological or well-founded. For fear and hope are necessary opposites. Hope is not rooted in an air-brushing of difficulty out of

the picture, but in an imagining of the future which envisages ways of flourishing in spite of genuine dangers and threats (Steiner 1992:145). William Lynch (1965:35) describes hope as a constant decision to move into the future. A bid to transcend the present with its perceived limits and difficulties, to imagine a way out of that which constrains and threatens to engulf or imprison us, into a brighter and better alternative. Thus hope is that which insists upon expanding our perceived horizons of possibility, broadening the landscape of reality in such a way as to set our present circumstance in a wider perspective, thereby robbing it of its absoluteness.

Hope, in such an account of things, is essentially liberating and invigorating, transfiguring every empirical present by relating it to a vision of the future. Hope is not an essentially quietistic and other-worldly attitude, which robs us of the will to struggle against various ills in the world (Moltmann 1993:21). In fact, it is only insofar as we are able to envisage how things might be different from the way they are now in this world – how they might change in the future and how they are intended by God ultimately to be – that we have grounds for refusing to accept the way the world presently is (Bauckham and Hart 1999:56). And so, hope prevents us from getting used to deprivation (Bloch 1986:451), since it enables us to transcend the present and, upon our return, to perceive all too clearly its lacks and needs.

2.2 A LACK OF HOPE

In truth it is pathological lack of hope, i.e. hopelessness, which saps our energy and imprisons us within the tyranny of an absolute present. In our own society this hopelessness is worryingly apparent (Bauckham and Hart 1999:57): Overwhelmed by the enormity of the ideology of indetermininancy and relativism, crushed by the thought of ultimate nothingness. The West, having had its hopes temporarily raised by the myth of progress, only to see

them dashed again; has, for some decades, been presenting symptoms of corporate stress disorder. The social body, drained of energy and enthusiasm by two and a half centuries of strenuous effort chasing impossible goals, lies exhausted. It would not be inappropriate so say that the social body's "get up and go" has long since "got up and gone", taking with it any serious sense of public accountability or concern (Bauckham and Hart 1999:57).

Thus, not wanting to be bothered with a despairing shared world, postmodern individuals retreat into their private televisual and computerised virtual realities. Realities which they can programme, control, and edit to their own advantage and personal delight. This alternative postmodern cosmos of cyberspace recreates momentarily the frisson of that power which the myth of progress institutionalised, fostering "the delusion of the frontier mentality while implying that you can get (whatever) you want simply by pressing a button" (Sardar 1997:62). And so, the postmodern ethos of play is all about the "cathartic power to make what is impossible at an empirical level of existence possible at the symbolic level" (Kearney 1994:367-368).

But such imagining has no aspiration to transcendence, no moving forward and potentially liberating direction. Such imagining is deployed only as a narcotic to substitute various virtual alternatives for reality, designed to satisfy our unnaturally circumscribed desire, so distracting us from the actual impossibility and futility of life. Meanwhile, as we are reminded each time we log out of cyberspace and our colourful simulations fade, the anxiety-inducing contours of our shared history remain the same. Indeed, every time we retreat into individualistic fantasy, it threatens to simply reinforce these contours by diverting the vital resources of energy and effort – which might otherwise make some small, but intrinsically worthwhile, difference. The diversion, in turn, fosters a sense of alienation which I may then choose to participate in or not, leading to the eventual loss of the other (Kearney 1994:361f.). And, when the need of the other ceases to meet with any deep

response, we can be sure that the question of the erosion of our humanity itself has become deadly serious (Bauckham and Hart 1999:60).

The net result of hopelessness is thus precisely to change nothing. Except, perhaps, insofar as it allows things to get even worse. Having thus officially abandoned belief in the existence of any way out of the labyrinth (or a golden thread to lead us there), incapable of relevant acts of imaginative self-transcendence, we are threatened with the loss of our own humanity (Bauckham and Hart 1999:61).

2.3 HEALTHY HOPELESSNESS

Yet not all hopelessness is bad for us (Bauckham and Hart 1999:62). Hopelessness can be a perfectly healthy condition. Correspondingly, hope may be pathological. It all depends on how well-founded our hope proves to be. For hope has its legitimate limits, and it is vital that we identify them correctly, lest we mistakenly invest ourselves in a dead end. Real hope is less focused on its own capabilities, and is not concerned with some supposed right or capacity to choose and to create the reality which it desires. Real hope is, essentially, rooted in the qualities and capabilities of "otherness", of that which lies beyond itself in other people. Real hope is an "interior sense that there is help on the outside of us" (Lynch 1965:40). A hunch about what is genuinely possible. The implication is that hope does not fit well into a predominantly individualistic DIY culture of self-sufficiency, because it knows it needs help *and* it thinks it knows where to find it (Bauckham and Hart 1999:63). We keep going and keep striving to find a way forward because we believe there is such a way forward, even when we cannot yet see it clearly.

Real hope thus liberates us and moves us forward. False hope entraps us and leaves us, listless, essentially where we began. But is such a final hope, belief in a "good ending", possible any longer for humanity? Not if we

seek to root it in the soil of modern or postmodern ideologies. Neither of these is capable of sustaining an "ecology of hope". Their failure to do so does not, of course, in itself do anything to render the broad outlines of Christian hope inherently believable, let alone demonstrate their truth (Bauckham and Hart 1999:65). Perhaps, though, it at least gives pause for thought, and raises the question of whether a careful reconsideration of the imaginative resources of Christian eschatology is not overdue. After all, what is to be lost in such a venture? It is certainly incumbent upon Christians, in a context where such questions have become urgent, to return to their tradition and familiarise themselves with its distinctive stock of images and ways of imagining the future. And to make these available in intelligent contemporary versions for public consideration (Bauckham and Hart 1999:66).

3 EMPHASISING (AND CONTROLLING) THE IMMEDIATE

It is arguable that, whereas pre-modern (traditional) societies gave priority to the past, and modern (progressive) societies gave priority to the future, with the decline of the idea of progress a postmodern society is emerging in which priority is given to the present (Bauckham and Hart 1999:26). In contemporary Western culture, with its emphasis on the immediate and the instantaneous, its feverish drive to squeeze as much as possible into time as a limited commodity, its augmentation of time into allocated quantities, and its obsessive organisation of time, we live increasingly in the present and its prolongation.

More and more rapid change, combined with the pressure to focus on the present as a duration to be used and filled with activity, cuts us off from continuity with the past. History is not part of a story we ourselves are living, it is merely a theme park that we visit for amusement. The future, on the other hand, is shrinking to a short-term prolongation of the present. That

future we can extrapolate from the present, and that we have already allocated and planned. Thus the future already contained in the present, not the sphere of the unpredictable and the unexpected, of an indefinite range of possibilities which might eventuate. It is because of this that Helga Nowotny (1988:29), who speaks of "what nostalgically is still called the future", predicts "the abolition of the category of the future and its replacement by the idea of an extended, but manageable and controllable, present". It is paradoxical that this virtual elimination of the future is the long-term result of the success of modernity's great technological project to master the future.

But there is a more sinister aspect to the idea that the future is becoming controllable (Bauckham and Hart 1999:27). Insofar as humans determine the future, it comes about as a result of the interaction of innumerable choices and decisions made by many people. This is what makes the future unpredictable, for people are unpredictable, and the results of the conjunction of their choices even more so. Control of the future is conceivable only if people's choices are also managed and controlled. This is precisely the dream (or nightmare) of a "post-historical" age – there will no longer be freedom or contingency, no unpredictable novelty, and thus no "history" (Moltmann 1996:218–226). This is because history ends when there are no longer any alternatives. The result to which the pursuit of progress, understood as rational and technological mastery of the future, logically leads. The modern "metanarrative" is thus reaching its conclusion, and the emerging postmodern or "post-historical" age lives "happily ever after" in a present without future.

3.1 THE THREAT OF A PRESENT WITHOUT FUTURE

However, the idea that progress is reaching its fulfilment in a post-modern present without future must be seriously questioned (Bauckham and Hart

1999:28). It is an interpretation of the present in the light of the idea of progress, rather than in the light of the failure of the idea of progress (which we have already discussed). The project to control the future now threatens the world with apocalyptic catastrophe, which will certainly not be avoided by continuing further along the same road. A different future, not simply the prolongation of the present, needs to be imagined and chosen. We need a new respect for the limits of planning, prediction, and control, coupled with a vision that transcends the short-termism of political and bureaucratic management.

Although it is true that we live more and more in the "compressed time" of the crammed and organised present, we also live with "the tension, so unbearable that the effort is made to bury it deep in the unconscious, between the pressures of the moment and the uncertain times that lie ahead" (Chesneaux 1992:26). Psychologically, our immersion in the immediate and the manageable is also an avoidance of the terror of the open future, which seems to threaten more than it invites hope. Insecurity of employment, increasing crime and a disintegrating social order, environmental catastrophe and other terrors lurk in the uncontrollable future. The greater the technological control, the greater the anxiety about its uncontrollable effects.

3.2 THE END OF HISTORY AND THE METANARRATIVE

Postmodernists also celebrate the present without past and future, now that history has ended. In their case, history has ended not in the modernist sense that the modern metanarrative has reached its conclusion, but in the sense that there can be no more metanarratives (Bauckham and Hart 1999:29). This rejection of any kind of grand story about the whole of reality is rooted, on the one hand, in applying a hermeneutic of suspicion to the idea of progress and exposing it as an ideology of dominance. On the other

hand, it also entails the postmodern epistemology in which texts are about texts and ideas about ideas in a continual regress that allows no grasp on non-linguistic reality (Kearney 1994:360).

So, far from offering a way out of the contradictions of modernity, postmodernism appears to resolve them in a dead end from which there is no escape (Bauckham and Hart 1999:30). The postmodernist deconstruction mimetic imagination extends to the deconstruction of all narratives (whether historic, fictional, or autobiographical). The unity and coherence which stories give to the past, present, and future – the personal identity which the narrative of one's life gives one – are mystifying constructions which can be deconstructed. Thus, postmodernist time fragments into disconnected presents.

Yet it is doubtful whether we are really witnessing the end of narrativity. Even in the compressed present, which most of us inhabit much of the time, human experience remains inescapably temporal (Wicker 1975:47). Yes, our temporal experience has become more fragmented and less amenable to representation as a unidirectional story, but we can scarcely speak of it all without narrative (Bauckham and Hart 1999:31). This means that, though narrative might be interrogated and deconstructed, it cannot be replaced. In popular culture, story continues to flourish. This is so because narrative imposes form and order on the inherently chaotic world (Kermode 1967:64), assuaging the horror of history by humanising the utterly inhuman, in order to console us (Cook 1997:55).

3.3 MEANINGFUL HOPE = MOVING TO AN ENDING

Essential to this function is the end to the story. Plots move through time to an end, which confers meaning on the whole as simultaneously the least true to reality and the most aesthetically satisfying (Bauckham and Hart 1999:32). But, if such endings only remind us that life is not really like that,

will not our satisfaction in them be intolerably contradicted by this reminder? The gulf which the sense of an ending creates between narrative and reality can be understood nihilistically. It can also be understood eschatologically – i.e. only God can supply a conclusion to real life, and God will do so (Bauckham and Hart 1999:33). Wolfhart Pannenberg (1973:192–210) argues that all apprehensions of meaning implicitly anticipate the end of history. Since all reality is historical and intrinsically connected, the truth of things must be sought in what they turn out to be in the end, and the meaning of any part is not finally separable from that of the whole. Truth and meaning require a wider social context of meaning. So, only when history is completed, will the final meanings of all things – and hence of each thing – be achieved.

This sense of an ending, which the quest for narrative meaning seems necessarily to entail, suggests that either reality cannot satisfy this quest, or it will do so eschatologically (Bauckham and Hart 1999:34). In the latter case, we can say that narrative corresponds to reality without meaning. That, in some naive way, it is a transcript of what actually happens. Narratives are always highly selective and strongly perspectival – they need not be untrue, but they are necessarily provisional and never complete. In the satisfying conclusions we know to be fictional, we express the hope for the truly satisfying conclusion in reality, that can only come at the end of history. Perhaps it is no accident that the heyday of realism in imaginative literature was roughly contemporaneous with the heyday of the myth of progress. But, now that we know that history will not of its own accord produce utopia, the only credible eschatology is a transcendent one which looks for a resolution of history that exceeds any possible immanent outcome of history (Bauckham and Hart 1999:35). Only from the transcendent possibilities of God can this world be given a satisfying conclusion.

3.4 THE FUNCTION AND SIGNIFICANCE OF SYMBOLIC UNIVERSE

A strategic legitimating function of symbolic universe, for individual as well as communal life, is the "location" of death. "Symbolic universe shelters the individual from ultimate terror" (Berger and Luckmann 1967:102). The same is true for its social significance. It is a sheltering canopy over institutions, and legitimates the political order by reference to a cosmic order of justice and power. With respect to the future it establishes a "common frame of reference", bestowing meaning on the suffering of the community and on individual death. The empirical community is transported to a cosmic plane and made majestically independent of the vicissitudes of individual existence (Schüssler Fiorenza 1998:197).

Such world construction in myth is primarily occasioned by conflicting definitions of reality, which are aggravated if only one party has the power to enforce its own interpretation of reality (Schüssler Fiorenza 1998:197). The effect thereof is that there is often a reversal of appearances (Bauckham and Hart 1999:ix) – it is the judge who is judged; the prince of this world turns out to be powerless; and there is another truth, which is a way, which leads to life.

4 CAN HOPE BE SHAPED BY VIOLENCE?

4.1.1 The "dark side" of the Book of Revelation

When considering the Book of Revelation's creation of an alternate vision for the churches of Asia Minor and for the church today and, in that, hope (see Chapter 3-5), a very important aspect that must be addressed before we can move on with our ecology of hope is the violent nature of the Apocalypse. Revelation is a book that continues to be used as "trump card" against Christian non-violence, as it posits a future tribulation and war in which Christ comes back to lead people into a battle, one that apparently

contradicts everything he taught during his earthly ministry. According to many scholars, as well as many Christian laypeople, the Jesus we find in the Book of Revelation engages in a great deal of violence. This violence reaches a zenith in Chapter 19, where we find Jesus going out to make war on a white horse (Rv 19:11). He is dressed in a blood stained robe (Rv 19:13) and has a sword coming out of his mouth "to strike down the nations" while he "treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty" (Rv 19:15). Jesus and his army fight "the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies" (Rv 19:). They capture the beast and the false prophet and throw them "alive into the fiery lake of burning sulphur," and they slay "[t]he rest…with the sword" (Rv 19:21). This delightful account ends with the observation that "all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh" (Rv 19:21).

4.1.2 Four observations

To address this issue, this section begins with four observations about why the popular literal interpretation of Revelation is not viable (Wood 2016; Chester 2014:333-347; Morgan 2014:287-304; Carey 2006:169-180; Barr 2006:205-220; 2003:97-108; Van Henten 2006:181-203; Farmer 2003:109-118; Paulien 2003:151-161; Yarbro Collins 1976).

- First, most scholars agree that Revelation's basic framework is apoca-lyptic. So, as is common among apocalyptic works, Revelation purports to let its audience in on a divine secret by offering them a heavenly perspective of earthly events. More specifically, Revelation reveals a theological interpretation of events that its audience is "soon" going to experience (Rv 1:1; 22:6). Hence, though John uses end-of-the-world imagery, as you'd expect from an apocalyptic type of work, the close proximity of the events Revelation is speaking about should rule out in-terpreting Revelation as though it was describing the end of world. Moreover, the very fact that it shares so much with the apocalyptic

genre, which trades heavily in symbolism, should make us very hesitant to interpret anything it describes literally.

- Second, interpreting Revelation's symbolism as referring to literal end-time events produces a multitude of contradictions and absurdities. To offer one trivial but clear example, when I first read Revelation as a new 17-year-old Christian in a traditional reformed church, I was troubled by John's statement that all the stars fell from the sky "to the earth, like figs" (Rv 6:13). Since I had been taught that this work provides a literal depiction of future events, the cosmological absurdity of this passage bothered me. And my disquietude only intensified when I discovered two chapters later John reporting that the stars were back up in the sky (Rv 8:12) only to have a third of them swept away once again four chapters later (Rv 12:4)! Revelation is filled with word-pictures such as these that are absurd if interpreted literally but that are altogether unproblematic and deeply insightful when interpreted symbolically.

- Third, it is important to understand that Revelation, like the Gospels, was written as an oral performance. This much is reflected in the book's opening pronouncement: "Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it…" (Rv 1:3). We must therefore understand Revelation along the lines of a dramatic performance. Hence, careful attention must be paid not only to the theological significance of Revelation's dramatic symbols, but also to how these symbols were intended to impact hearers. Revelation is a poetic book that aims to influence and even persuade the churches to respond. This again means that the author is not attempting to provide his audience with esoteric information about how world history is going to wrap up. He is rather employing imaginative symbols to alter his audience's understanding of their world as a means of motivating

them to respond to it in certain way. More specifically, he is using graphic symbolism to motivate his audience to resist the ways of "Babylon" – the author's symbol for the Roman Empire and all the kingdoms of the world that are under evil's deception – and to do so even if it means that they will be martyred.

- And fourth, while a casual reading of Revelation gives the impression that it is reporting a series of spontaneous visions, it is important we understand that this book has actually been composed with great skill. Some scholars argue that this is one of the greatest literary works of the New Testament. The most important implication of this observation is that it means that we must pay close attention to details and patterns as we interpret this work.

The most important key to interpreting John's violent imagery is found in the heavenly throne room scene in Chapters 4-5. This throne room represents heaven's perspective on events that are occurring on earth, which is contrasted throughout Revelation with the false perspective of the "inhabitants of the earth" (Rv 8:13; 11:10; 13:8, 12, 14; 17:2). The only real battle that is waged throughout Revelation is a battle between truth and deception. It is, more specifically, a battle between the truth that the Lamb's slaughtering was victorious and the lie that it was the Lamb's defeat. John invites us to see the truth by allowing us to witness the drama that is unfolding in the heavenly throne room. Here we find a mysterious sealed scroll, which contains the secret that Revelation unveils. The drama of this scene reaches a pinnacle when someone raises the question: "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" (Rv 5:2). John weeps when no one is found worthy (Rv 5:4). How long before we learn the secret of the role that Jesus' martyrdom plays in God's victory over evil?

The answer is finally brought forth when John hears "one of the elders" in the throne room declare that "the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of

David, has triumphed," and he is therefore worthy "to open the scroll and its seven seals" (Rv 5:3-5). This image represents the kind of enemy-slaying Messiah most first century Jews had been hoping for. But, surprisingly enough, when John looks to see this mighty messianic Lion, he instead beholds a little lamb that had already been slaughtered (Rv 5:6). Yes, John is saying, the Lion of the tribe of Judah has "triumphed," but he triumphed not by violently slaying his enemies, he triumphed by becoming a slain Lamb who offered up his life on behalf of his enemies. And yes, Jesus wages war with the aggression of a Lion, but the power that he aggressively wields is the Lamb-like power of self-sacrificial love that was perfectly manifested on the cross. In this way, John has transformed an image of power and domination into an image of vulnerability and nonviolence. We thus discover that John has subtly, and brilliantly, subverted, and even reversed, the violence that he seems to ascribe to Jesus. It is hard to overstate the importance of this remarkable symbolic transformation for our interpretation of Revelation. John's transformation of the Lion of Judah into the sacrificial Lamb constitutes the climactic turn that anchors most of John's other symbolic reversals. Once the Lion has been revealed to be the Lamb, we never again find Christ referred to as a Lion, though he's referred to as the Lamb twenty-seven more times. Indeed, it is not an overstatement to say that the rest of the book of Revelation is simply an unfolding of the Lamb-like victory revealed in Revelation 5 and depicted (from a different angle) in Revelation 12. The remainder of Revelation, in other words, is an apocalyptic-like expression of the heavenly truth — spoken against all lies to the contrary — that by means of Jesus' sacrificial death and the faithfulness of his followers, the "kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah" (Rv 11:15).

4.1.3 Understanding Revelation 19

I will conclude this contemplation on the violent imagery in Revelation by addressing the infamous eschatological battle scene found in Chapter 19:11-21, for it is this graphically violent section of Revelation that is most frequently appealed to by those who argue against the claim that Jesus reveals an enemy-loving, non-violent God that is unconditionally opposed to violence. Revelation 19 begins, not with an army preparing for battle, but with an army celebrating God's victory in a battle that has already been fought (Rv 19:1-4). The inhabitants of heaven proclaim the truth that God has already defeated the prostitute (representing "the arrogance of the earthly power") and has thereby already avenged the shed blood of his servants (Rv 19:1-4). The only thing resembling a battle is one regarding the truth of the Lamb's victory, known by the inhabitants of heaven, to once-and-for-all vanquish the demonic deception that continues to oppress the inhabitants of the earth. The irony is that, while Revelation 19 is frequently appealed to as the clearest example of Jesus engaging in literal violence, in reality it does not depict a single violent act.

John utilizes traditional warfare imagery to imaginatively express this final battle between truth and deception, but, as usual, he completely transforms this imagery in the process. To cite one example, John applies to Jesus Isaiah's macabre vision of Yahweh as a warrior wearing robes that are covered with blood (Is 63:1-3; Rv 19:13). In Isaiah's vision, however, Yahweh is stained with the blood of his enemies whom he has trampled like grapes in a winepress in his "day of vengeance". By contrast, Jesus' robes are blood stained before he goes into battle, and the stains are from his own spilled blood as well as the blood of his martyred servants. It represents, once again, that Christ and his followers win by having their own blood shed, rather than by shedding the blood of others. Also in keeping with traditional apocalyptic symbolism, John depicts Christ wielding a "sharp sword" to

"strike down the nations" (Rv 19:15). But it is extremely important to notice that the sword that Jesus wields comes out of his mouth (Rv 19:15, 21; cf. Rv 1:16; 2:26; 3:26). His weapon, clearly, is nothing other than the truth he speaks, which is why the title he rides into battle with is "Faithful and True" (Rv 19:11).

Finally, a word should be said about John's lurid depiction of Jesus on a white horse "treading on the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty" (Rv 19:15). This is not John's first use of this winepress imagery. The "great winepress of God's wrath" is first mentioned in Chapter 14 (vv. 19-20), and in this context John has significantly nuanced the details of the traditional imagery (see Is 63). While the traditional imagery depicts sinners being crushed like grapes because of their wickedness, John here depicts grapes being crushed simply because they are ready to be harvested (Rv 19:15, 18). Moreover, while the traditional imagery identifies God's judgment with the crushing of wicked grapes, John identifies God's judgment with people drinking the wine that is formed from ripened crushed grapes (Rv 19:10). The crushed grapes express the wrath of God not because they are crushed, but because they form "the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath" (Rv 14:10; cf. Rv 14: 8-9; 16:6; 17:6). God's wrath is thus directed not toward the grapes, as it is in the traditional use of this imagery, but toward the unrepentant who are made to drink the wine that is a by-product of these grapes being crushed. When we put this together with John's pervasive theme that believers overcome by their willingness to be martyred, it suggests that the blood that flows from the winepress of God's fury is not the blood of God's enemies, but the blood of his servants whom these enemies murdered. John's use of the traditional winepress imagery provides yet another stunning example of how John turns violent imagery on its head by radically reinterpreting it through the lens of the self-sacrificial Lamb. Followers of the Lamb are called to

participate in the war and to share in the victory of the Lamb, and we are called to do it the way the Lamb himself did it; namely, by choosing to love our enemies and suffer at their hands rather than to take up arms against them.

4.1.4 In conclusion

John's revision of traditional warfare imagery, with its stunning reassessment of power, is so contrary to normal human practice that most churches throughout history have not agreed with John. I suspect that this is at least part of the reason why the genius of John's transformation of violent imagery and the beauty of his non-violent, self-sacrificial message, have so rarely been grasped throughout history. To this day, it seems, the majority of Christians are more comfortable with a militant Messiah who slays our enemies than they are with a loving Messiah who would rather die out of love for his enemies and who calls us to do the same.

5 AN ECOLOGY OF HOPE

5.1 LIFE AS A STAGE

"There is such a thing as an ecology of hope. There are environments in which it flourishes and others in which it dies" (Sacks 1995:150). The story of hope in the Western world is one which threatens to end tragically, for the postmodern eschewal of story may itself ironically be construable as a tragic narrative denouement (Bauckham and Hart 1999:44): A dark and despairing final scene in which dashed hopes, failed plans, and unfulfilled promises litter the stage like corpses. A vision of ultimate meaninglessness, a mood of cosmic loneliness, and endurance of absolute and seemingly futile loss. An inability to see beyond the horizons of the present (itself shaped by a past

from which there is no final escape). An incapacity to imagine a future which is genuinely other than this present.

The great paradox of tragedy lies in the fact that its evocation, skilfully handled by the writer, is actually the source of pleasure for an audience – a pleasure contingent largely on the relative detachment of the spectator from the action as such (Gardner 1971:22). We participate in these experiences, these moods, vicariously rather than directly (Bauckham and Hart 1999:45). Unlike the characters themselves, we know that we shall be able to leave the theatre at the end of the performance. It is this tacit awareness that enables us to find satisfaction (and even *consolation*) in the tragic drama played out before us. It is not that we do not consider the script or performance to be true to reality, but simply that (for the time being, at least) we are able to transcend it. We are able to walk away from the stark vision of finitude and the questions lying at its boundaries.

These same experiences and moods, though, are also the forces that threaten to engulf our own society, under the guise of creeping apathy, indifference to public concerns, and even nihilism. In this context we are no longer spectators, but actors who cannot leave the stage. From this perspective we discover that the "tragedy" looks different, it is less aesthetically pleasing. In our tale, this role is played by the impassioned but unnatural union between an emergent secular materialism and classical Christian eschatology. This act of miscegenation daily spawned the modern myth of progress. But, as an object or source of hope, the immanent goddess to which the myth of progress pays homage has not – and will not – deliver the goods, even though she has received a good many sacrifices (Bauckham and Hart 1999:46).

5.2 GOD'S SECOND DEATH

With what might well be described as God's second death, however, the mood is altogether different: The chilling words inscribed on the portals of Dante's Hell – "Abandon every hope, all you who enter" – are displayed prominently above the entrance to the disillusionment of postmodernity (Alighieri and Musa 2003:14). They apply now, not to those whom God has rejected, but to those who have rejected God. Both the God of the Christian story, and the deified principle substituted for God within the plot of the myth of progress. In a society whose imagination is bounded by purely immanent horizons, while modest local hopes may still be entertained and realised, there appears to be only one serious alternative to worshipping (Bauckham and Hart 1999:47). Nature as a source of ultimate or cosmic hope – to face the spectres of meaninglessness, purposelessness, and hopelessness.

And yet our humanity is affirmed, not by embracing the loss of these, but in the pain which this same embrace causes. The postmodern mood, in its bid to liberate/distract us from such "oppressive" concerns, encourages temporary, superficial, and irresponsible modes of response to the world. In this way revealing itself to be an unsuitable host for the tragic, and therefore also for hope. The distraction, like all anaesthetics, is limited in its effect and duration. Before long, sharp twinges of reality remind us of the intensity of its true ache. Now, while our postmodern minds may accept that it is thus, every other fibre in our humanity cries out with incredulity at this answer (Bauckham and Hart 1999:48). We cannot, in the end, accept that this fruitless and desolate end to our story really reflects the end (*telos*) of our shared existence. To do so would, in effect, be to deny the significance of that existence. Deep down, we find that impossible to do.

The cost of God's second death, in other words, may finally be the loss of our essential humanity. All that we have habitually identified as "distinctly human", appears to be contingent upon the assumption of meaningfulness. It will not suffice to appeal, as many postmodernists do, to the human capacity for invention and creativity as the source of all meaning. Human creativity (artistic or otherwise) is never *ex nihilo*, but is a response to constant epiphanies through which reality impinges upon our existence (Bauckham and Hart 1999:49).

5.3 A WAGER ON TRANSCENDENCE

What, though, of the meaningfulness of the human story as a whole? In this context the problem is precisely that so much of what we experience of life conflicts with the wager on the meaningfulness of meaning/God (Steiner 1989:226). Yet our deepest intuitions, our gut feelings, resonate sympathetically with the wager. We protest against the horror of history, and the concomitant terror which that horror inspires in us. The question, then, is about how we should respond to these.

The problem with the myth of progress was not its essential hopefulness, but rather its inability to deal with the way the world and we actually are. The lack of any serious indication that things are either getting (or going to get) better. By mistakenly investing its faith in a glorious future, which would grow naturally out of the conditions and potentialities of the present, the myth pointed to a meaningfulness which did not and could never exist within the terms of nature and history themselves. The myth of progress' hope proved to be a false hope, and so it had to come to an end, for false hopes inculcate only despair. It is to the credit of postmodernity that it has exposed the ideology of the myth. Yet its own essential hopelessness leaves us no better off, offering us only analgesic in place of false diagnosis.

6 THE DIVINE COMEDY

If the human story is to be a comedy rather than a tragedy then, it seems, it will have to be a *divina commedia*. And then not one rooted in the natural ebb and flow of nature and history. It will have to be a "fiction of improbable resolution" (Bauckham and Hart 1999:50), and the improbability will be rooted in factors and possibilities lying beyond those apparent within the story itself. The immanent will not be able to drag itself by its own bootstraps out of the tragic mire which seems, according to all the evidence, to be the human lot.

Here, then, we are forced to reckon with a "wager on transcendence" – not on a vertical transcendence, but with a transcendent God whose way of being transcends ours and our world, in the present moment. On a horizontal transcendence, and on a God who faithfully awaits us beyond the very end of history itself. We have to wager on a God whose capacities are such as to fashion out of our tragic endings (both individually and as a race) a future which wholly transcends the potential latent within history. We must leave the stage where the tragedy is being played out, and appeal to a wider vision of reality than its limited scenery allows us (Bauckham and Hart 1999:51). Forced to resort to an appeal beyond this world and its intrinsic capacities altogether, to another world as the sole guarantor of ultimate meaning and purpose – the sole source of genuine hope.

Within the story which author of the Apocalypse of John tells us about the destiny of our world, just such a "wager" is to be found (see Chapters 3-4). This wager is more familiarly referred to as faith in the God of the resurrection. In faith our imagination is engaged, stretched, and enabled to accommodate a vision of a meaningful and hopeful future for the world. A future which could never be had by extrapolating the circumstances of the tragic drama of history itself. The "comic" ending is unlooked for,

unexpected, and improbable in the extreme while our imagination is constrained by the conditions of the immanent. Only by allowing our imagining to be blown wide open by a transcendence which blows the future itself wide open can we begin, however partially and tentatively, to envisage a *telos* which may legitimately furnish us with an object of hope.

As was pointed out in Chapter 3 and 4 by way of a few examples, a good place for our imagining to begin is with the performative use of the Apocalypse. In the Book of Revelation, the human story is provided with the wider vision it needs to be able to transcend this world (cf. Chapter 4). Humankind is provided with a saviour and a future that would never be possible, were we left to our own devices (cf. Chapter 5). With the Apocalypse, the "improbable resolution" to our problems is provided, rooted in the eternal God that exists beyond the story itself. The God that redeems and resurrects the immanent by his own sacrifice, enabling humankind to not only imagine, but ritually experience a future which is genuinely other than this present. God, by "making all things new" (Rv 21:5), provides the unexpected "comic" ending. God opens up the immanent to the eternal, allowing us to step of this stage, and into a new world – the New Jerusalem.

CHAPTER 7

1   REFLECTIONS ON CONCLUDING

It seems "odd" - wrong almost - to be writing a conclusion to this study, while also being necessary and fitting at the same time.

When I embarked on this journey more than five years ago, I thought I had at least an understanding of the complexity of the subject matter. This was my field of interest, after all. And that I would be able to neatly and definitely package this research. Only now, after having spent these years digging deeper into the subject, to have come to the realisation that I had no more than an inkling of the true depth and vast diversity that is encapsulated in this field. Therefore, the feeling of it being "wrong" to be coming to a conclusion. I know that what I have done in this thesis is merely scratch the surface of even the elements I worked at studying in depth. That this work can never be a neat nor definitive thesis. That there will always be more to take into account. Those gaps, which I am only too aware of and which will inevitably be only some of the gaps to be identified, I will address in my summation.

And yet, though this thesis cannot be near the last word on this subject, it does not mean that it is not a potentially valuable word. As Seth Godin (2015:n.p.) so aptly puts it:

> We live in an ever-changing culture, and that culture is changed precisely by the ideas we engage with and the ones we choose to share. Sharing an idea you care about is a generous way to change your world for the better. The culture we will live in next month is a direct result of what people like us share today. The things we share and don't share determine what happens next.

Therefore, as an idea and a concept that I have been wrestling with, studying, formulating, and re-formulating for five years, I am content that this thesis – this word – is as thought-through, worked out, and complete as it needs to be for it to be a possible contribution to the field. Also, I rest in the fact that a doctoral thesis is not meant to be an *opus magnus*, but rather the reasoned springboard for a lifetime's research.

2 IN SUMMATION

2.1 STUDIES OF REVELATION

In several respects, the Apocalypse of John is an anomaly (Aune 2006b:1), an extraordinarily complex literary composition of immense learning (Bauckham 1993b:ix): Of meticulous literary artistry, creative imagination, political critique, and theology. The sequence of literary forms in Revelation in its present state conforms to no known ancient literary conventions (Aune 1997:lxxxix). By placing apocalyptic traditions within a prophetic framework (Rv 1-3, 22:10-20), and by juxtaposing apocalyptic with prophetic elements throughout the entire composition, the author appears to have attempted to give a new lease on life to the apocalyptic tradition. This tradition struggled (and is still struggling) to retain its vitality and impact in mainstream Christianity, mainly because of its (seeming) indissoluble association with nationalistic myths connected with the royal ideology of ancient Israel (Aune 1997:xc). This is even more true for today. The strange, even bizarre, world of apocalypses and apocalypticism seems light-years away from the world that most of us inhabit (Aune 2005:242). Therefore, among the major works of early Christianity included in the New Testament, for many Christians it remains the Cinderella (Bauckham 1993b:ix) – rarely fully appreciated (Bauckham 1993a:1). A book with seven seals, seldom read and relegated to a curiosity in the Bible (Schüssler Fiorenza 1998:1); on the margins of the

Christian canon and mainline theology. But the Book of Revelation is not only seen as strange and difficult, sometimes it is also deemed theologically offensive (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:6). The polyvalent symbolism of apocalypse has proven to be a two-edged sword, and the Revelation of John in particular has frequently been commandeered by sectarian movements that have perverted its message in support of destructive and pathological behaviour (Aune 2005:243). For this reason it has received only a fraction of the amount of scholarly attention that has been lavished on the Gospels and the major Pauline letters (Bauckham 1993b:ix-xii), even taking into account that there has been a dramatic increase in publications on the Apocalypse in the last two decades, with a corresponding diversity of approaches (Barr 2010:633).

Historically minded interpreters of Revelation have assiduously sought a range of historical contexts which might provide the information necessary to interpret this book in terms of the author and his original audience in the first century Mediterranean world (Malina & Pilch 2000:vii). For others it has become *the* book of the New Testament, full of information about the present and the future, providing detailed applications to contemporary persons and events. Throughout history relevance seeking Bible readers have looked for contemporary social signs of the times that might be made to make fit the scenes of Revelation, thus demonstrating what is soon to happen in our own historical period, e.g., "the Beast" symbolises such contemporary personalities as the Pope in Rome, Hitler, Stalin, and (more recently) the leaders of Islam who are against the West; while movements such as communism, humanism, and/or feminism are viewed as "the plagues" of the end of time. Such ethnocentric and anachronistic readings of the New Testament are quite common in our society. They result from the fact that readers (most often) use scenarios rooted in their contemporary social experience to envision what they read in the New Testament, thus reading

themselves and their world back into the document in ways they do not even suspect. Awareness of such re-contextualisation is critically important for students of the Book of Revelation. Otherwise – with reader and writer coming from mutually alien social systems – non-understanding or, at best, misunderstanding, will be the rule (Malina & Pilch 2000:22).

Scholars generally agree that the book should be understood in the context of the first century and the cultural ambience of its first readers (Aune 1997:xlviii-lxx; Schüssler Fiorenza 1981:15). Almost everyone also recognizes mythic elements in the Apocalypse, e.g. the dragon, land and sea beasts, threatened births, wicked kings, and avenging knights. The question then becomes what to make of such themes (Barr 2010:635). As was stated in Chapter 2 itself, it would be impossible to do a comprehensive study of all the research done on Revelation in the course of this one thesis. Therefore, I chose to focus on three main lines of interpretation in the structuring of this chapter, making use of the three scholars – who are generally agreed as having pioneered these lines of interpretation – to form the basis for my exposition. To their work I made sure to add those of scholars following in their interpretative footsteps, in order to formulate a *representative* discussion of these main threads where the study of Revelation is concerned. Though I stand by my choices, and the insight they have provided me with, it would be foolhardy to claim that I have now covered the full scope of work on Revelation. Even to the short discussions of things like hermeneutics, much could still be added. But, with these scholars, the *gamut* of approaches to the Apocalypse are sufficiently represented that a reasonable evaluation could be made as to possible gaps in the scholarly approach.

This reading of the range of approaches to studying the Book of Revelation has made one thing very clear – though all of them do touch on the idea of the importance of understanding the text's function, none of these approaches really venture into the reader-response arena. Little to no

attention is given to experience as foundation of communication, the persuasive intent and effect of the text, or liturgy as the context within which the Apocalypse functioned and still functions. As was stated at the end of Chapter 2, the performance of a text has the power to recreate its meaning. The fact that the Apocalypse is also an instance of secondary orality, in which a reader "sounds again" the words written on the page (Rv 1:3) is widely accepted as well (Aune 1997:liv; 2012:174). But, in understanding the Apocalypse as an oral performance, the meaning can now not be simply in its words; it has to also be in the experience it provided to the audience. An experience in which one hears the voice of John and, more significantly, the voice of Jesus (e.g. "I John…" in Rv 1:9; and "I Jesus…" in Rv 22:16). Viewed this way, the purpose of the Apocalypse is not just to communicate information – it intends to make Jesus present to the assembly (Barr 2010:636). However, if theology is defined as the systematic reflection on, and explanation of, religious experience, we then should not speak of the theology of the Apocalypse, for *it is a portrayal of experience* not a reflection on it (Barr 2010:648). It does, however, raise important issues that theology seeks to deal with – i.e. issues of eschatology, ecclesiology, and Christology. It also raises many other themes, such as the meaning of God's sovereignty, the nature of evil, and the role of humans in establishing God's rule in the world (cf. Aune 1997:lxxii-lxxc). In each of these cases the Apocalypse does not so much teach a doctrine as tell the story in a way that implies certain conclusions. Yet, however much theology may wish to explain and resolve these issues, John never does (Barr 2010:648).

One recent major work by John Paul Heil (2014) – *The Book of Revelation: Worship for Life in the Spirit of Prophecy* – does present a new proposal for the structure and the worship theme of the book. It presents a new chiastic structure that attempts to account for all textual data (Heil 2014:1), in contrast to most previous proposals, which have been based on

selectivity and manipulation of the textual data (DeSilva 2008:343-371). With this structure he aims to provide a visual guide to the oral presentation of the text as it was heard by its original audience in a context of liturgical worship (see e.g. Barr 1986:243-256; Seal 2011:38-51; Skaggs & Doyle 2011:19-37; and Lee & Scott 2009). In doing so, Heil (2014:1) demonstrates a new unifying theme by which Revelation functions as a liturgical prophecy to exhort and enable its implied audience to witness against idolatrous worship and for true worship in accord with the eternal life now available as a result of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The sub-title of his book – Worship for Life in the Spirit of Prophecy – sums up this unifying main theme of worship (Heil 2014:2). This theme is seen as of such important because the social and cultural context of the implied audience (the seven churches) includes the idolatrous worship of pagan gods and emperors, a major problem addressed throughout Revelation (Heil 2014:10). It is clear that this book presents a new (and much-needed) analysis of the worship theme in the Book of Revelation. This study is thus one of the first to fully engage with the liturgical essence of Revelation – with the ritual performance of the text and what the desired audience response was to taking part in this hearing and performing of the text, especially the Eucharist. In this way it is ground-breaking.

Yet the study does not address what the implications of this liturgical reading, this understanding of Revelation as a ritual/performative text, might have for today's reader. Especially when considering that, in our times, the context into which the Apocalypse now has to speak has become so very complicated. There seems to be a disconnect between what the performance of Revelation intended to create in its initial participants (i.e. what it meant to those who first heard it) and what this same performance might mean for audiences today. In fact, the question might have to be rephrased into: Can the Apocalypse as liturgical/performative text still have a meaningful impact

on people living today? What kind of meaningful reader-response can the performance of Revelation still cause in such a radically changed context?

2.2 A LITURGICAL FUNCTIONAL READING OF THE APOCALYPSE

In the twentieth century, Biblical scholars turned to methods practiced in other fields of research and used them to interpret both the Old and the New Testaments (Wainwright 1993:150). The social sciences of psychology, sociology, and anthropology spread across the Biblical academic world. Along with students of other disciplines, Biblical scholars looked to these sciences for help; and, at the same time, scholars in those fields devoted attention to the Bible. With its visions and strange images, the Apocalypse is an attractive subject for psychologists. Attempts have also been made to look at the Apocalypse in the light of sociology and social history as well as psychology. Closely linked with sociology is the discipline of anthropology. This diversity of interpretations is even more remarkable than the diversity of its interpreters. For twenty centuries, men and women have attempted to probe the book's mystery. They have emerged with a bewildering assortment of answers. So numerous and conflicting are its interpretations that many people despair of making sense of it. A tempting solution to the problem would be to seize on one particular account and dismiss all others as worthless. Such a procedure fails to do justice to the seriousness of interpreters. It also neglects the essential character of the book, which is written in such a way as to be capable of a variety of meanings. The divided voice of scholarship testifies to the book's ambiguity, and is evidence that the Apocalypse resists attempts to find agreed answers to the questions that are asked.

In apocalyptic thought, when the bastions of goodness seem to have crumbled beyond recognition or repair, God remains sovereign and thus "a cosmic renewal occurs, or a golden age arrives, or the earth is transformed

into a paradise" (Cook 1995:28). Neither the worst that bad people can do, nor the best that good people can do limits what can happen; only God has that power and potential (Jones & Sumney 1999:31). This conviction that God can and will unveil power, goodness, and justice as yet unseen must find some way from the heart and soul to the hands and feet. No one can truly embrace that conviction and do nothing – if it is felt, it must be lived (Jones & Sumney 1999:32). What we believe about God should influence, form, and shape what we do and think. In fact, it has been said that "it is existentially impossible to believe in God's coming triumph and to claim [God's] Holy Spirit without a lifestyle that conforms to that faith" (Beker 1982:110). Only a very few scholars of apocalyptic have argued that apocalyptic has no concern for ethics because it has separated the kingdom of God from earthly realities (Jones & Sumney 1999:21). One of the primary reasons authors wrote apocalyptic texts was to encourage faithfulness to God and loyalty to the Law of God, even if it leads to death. All apocalypses are hortatory – discourses that encourage ethical living and that specify what that means are common in apocalyptic texts (see e.g. Dn 1-6 and 2 Esd). So apocalyptic does not entirely abandon the world to evil. The people of God are expected to act justly and to work for a more just world, even though the forces against them are overwhelming (Jones & Sumney 1999:22). This reflects the heart of apocalyptic thought (Käsemann 1969:108-111): Belief that God shows no partiality calls for our impartiality. Belief that the power of God finds its fullest expression in love calls for fewer acts of domination and many more acts of compassion. Belief that God hears the cries of the oppressed and promises release calls for our acts of justice and liberation. Belief that God sends the gospel because of our need and not because of our merit calls for nothing less than a reordering of human relationships.

This brings us to the theological centre of apocalyptic thought – the life and ministry of Jesus the crucified, resurrected, and enthroned Christ (Jones

& Sumney 1999:34). The Jesus of apocalyptic thought is crucified because crucifixion indicates that evil is as powerful as it is pervasive. Apocalyptic thought thus forces us to see, even on the heavenly Lamb of God, the marks of slaughter – this reminds us of the cost and nature of our salvation. "Resurrection cannot be celebrated if no one is dead." (Craddock 1986:275). Christian faith does not allow us to escape suffering – it clings to God by a thread called hope in the midst of, and despite, suffering. That thread expands and becomes a lifeline because this crucified Jesus is also resurrected. God, who is not limited to what we have yet seen and experienced, has an answer for the very worst humanity can do (Buttrick 1988:65). We dare to face oppression and rejection because the triumph of God revealed in Jesus shatters any defeat humans can muster. The enthroned Jesus completes the picture, for authority abides in the Lamb. The details of that glory may not be as clear to us as are those of the world around us, but that does not diminish our confidence that glory will come.

Apocalyptic literature does not limit its shocking pictures to portrayals of Jesus – apocalyptic literature regularly features startling and unsettling images for the sake of awakening/revealing. These startling images alert us to two certainties (Jones & Sumney 1999:38): The awesome powers of evil will fall before the even more impressive power of God; and the faithful play no part in this victory. Apocalyptic literature risks making us uncomfortable by depicting a startlingly powerful God, who does for us what we cannot do for ourselves, a God who inspires both awestruck devotion and trembling obedience (cf. Yarbro Collins 1996:16; and Rowland 1998:506). Apocalyptic literature in this way nurtures the church, consoles the church, chastises the church, and holds the church accountable. It challenges the church as a whole to comfort and encourage the faithful to resist the ways and influence of the opponents of God, and to bear witness to the promises and presence of God that transcend historical circumstances.

The persuasive power behind apocalyptic literature lies not in an appeal to scriptural exegesis or rational deduction, but rather in the authority of the seer and the revelation received (Murphy 1996:3). The apocalyptic writer does not attempt to convince hearers that he/she is right as much as the writer seeks to include the hearer in the unfolding drama of what God is doing in the world. Since human beings can do nothing to hasten or delay the activity of God, the focus is on response. As the visions of Revelation unfold, the seer describes, envisions, reports, recounts, and narrates; and, in doing so, encourages, exhorts, warns, and advises; but does not prove. Apocalyptic literature thus challenges us to respond to that which lies beyond proof, to believe what we have yet to understand clearly, to play with an image until it holds us within its grasp and awakens us to unseen presence and possibility, to encounter a mystery so deep that it demands that we be more than we've ever been and gives us hope beyond any we've ever had (Brueggemann 1998:195-212). The message of the apocalyptic writer, like nearly every blessing of faith, is too important for proof – it must be accepted, welcomed, and lived. The apocalyptic writer will not let us forget that regardless of what is or will be, the faithful have reason to praise God. The apocalyptic preacher will offer that praise whether we do or not.

Interest in the book's relationship to worship revived in the twentieth century, although there was division of opinion about the nature of that relationship. Although theories about liturgy are largely conjectural, the visions of heavenly worship, and the inclusion of hymns in the text, suggests a liturgical setting, and the book was probably meant to be read aloud at worship (Wainwright 1993:149; Barr 1984:45, 1986:243-256). But it cannot be proved that the Apocalypse was related to the paschal liturgy, planned for lectionary use, based on the Jewish calendar, or designed in opposition to pagan cults. Neither can it be proved that it was planned as an initiation rite. There may be some truth behind these theories, but there is no clear

evidence to support them. They are matters for speculation. Yet, even if we should conclude that the hymns must be regarded as heavenly liturgies having no connection with the historical procedures of the contemporary church, we may still find some relevance in these hymns as indications of worship patterns worth following.

The writer of the Apocalypse clearly had an intention, which was to effect change in the audience and readers – to strengthen their faith and to keep them loyal in times of persecution. Yet the visions are sufficiently ambiguous to leave themselves open for further interpretation. It is this openness of the book that makes it relevant for every generation. Underlying the book's lack of clarity is a challenge. The possibility of more than one meaning challenges us to consider whether an ideal state of affairs can be realised now, or must await us in the future. The book evokes a sense of the transcendence of God. The strangeness of its symbols conveys the notion of a realm that is beyond human understanding. In poetical power, it exceeds all other New Testament writings. For centuries its pictures of heaven have provided material for praise and adoration. This is because the Apocalypse affirms God's sovereignty and the ultimate fulfilment of God's purpose. In this way it offers strong support to individuals in maintaining their faith. It is a book for the Christian, the church, and the world. To those who share its faith, though they may not hold it in precisely the same form as its author, it gives assurance of the victory of God and the triumph of the Lamb.

In making use of the social sciences, scholars have endeavoured to show how the Apocalypse and apocalyptic ideas bring about change in people during times of tension. They have not made a judgement on the accuracy of the book's prophecies or the correctness of its theological beliefs. Instead, they have shown its effectiveness in helping men and women deal with crisis. It does not follow, however, that the psychological, sociological, or anthropological interpretations are the only correct ones. The Apocalypse can

be effective in ways described by the social sciences, while at the same time having theological significance. The two approaches do not exclude each other. In fact, the emphasis on the theological relevance of the Apocalypse provides an important corrective to the tendencies of critical interpretation.

It is important to see the Book of Revelation in this particular historical context of the believing community which created it, because Christianity and its documents and doctrines relate to specific moments in history (Court 2000:7). But it is also important to see the book as a visionary interpretation of the church and its future. Here we need to give full weight to the ideas and images contained in its visions. The complementarity of different approaches – historical, literary, and psychological – is vital for a modern understanding (Court 1994:18-21). We do not need to take Revelation literally, but we should take it seriously, for it shows a relationship between pain, martyrdom, and Christian belief. And it clearly depicts a continuity between past, present, and future for the church and the individual believer, from which the disillusioned churches of today can learn (Court 2000:7). It is profitable to enquire what function the heavenly worship scenes serve in the purpose of the whole book before we conclude that the passages have been influenced by contemporary worship. If the passages concerned are a vital key to the appreciation of the Apocalypse as a whole, which seems undeniable (Guthrie 1987:88), we should not wrest them from their context without taking into account their essentially eschatological purpose. The liturgical passages are not an end in themselves, but lead up to the great crescendo in Revelation 21 and 22.

Turning to Revelation, specifically looking for rituals to strengthen believers' understanding of themselves as located "on Easter Sunday", quite a few possibilities presented themselves in Chapter 3. A ritual/liturgical functional reading of Revelation 1, 5, 7, 11, 14-15, 19, and 21-22 was done as representative examples of what such a reading would pan out as. The

twin themes of conflict and consummation, found constantly throughout these readings, are intended to be an encouragement to the Christian church. Those experiencing the conflict are assured of the victorious outcome. Whatever the weight of evil opposition, there is no possibility of its ultimate success. The assurance that the consummation of history is not fortuitous, but is firmly in the hands of God, is of the highest relevance in an age threatened with self-destruction. The New Jerusalem vision, with which the book fittingly ends, is a positive hope for all who have embraced the Christian gospel. The end of the present age will not come until the way has been opened for a glorious future which evil will be powerless to spoil.

All of the above could help us, in this meanwhile, to live and travel in hope; able to face squarely and in all their awfulness the horrific aspects of that history within whose temporal boundaries we actually still live. We would be able to do so, precisely and only because the terror of history no longer haunts us. Instead, through the captivity of our imagination, God's Spirit draws us forward into the reality of his own future – a future of which the openness is no longer a threat, but a source of that joyful energy under the influence of which God calls us, for now, to live, labour, and "witness" in the world.

2.3 PERSPECTIVES ON RITUAL AND LITURGY

"Ritual" is now a word as overworked as "creativity", with its most common meaning today associated with repetition (Shorter 1996:27) – it is referred to as "mindless", suggesting an act slavishly repeated without the intervention of thought. But is ritual dead? Some time was spent on this question in Chapter 4. Certainly, outward and collective observances have suffered from neglect because of the emphasis being placed on doctrinary interpretations. Yet neither the need for ritual, nor the practice of rituals has declined, but has intensified and increased as institutionalised forms have

lost their appeal and effectiveness (Shorter 1996:28). Our harried existence has led to the appeal of lowest common denominators and utilitarian all-purpose currencies that generalise shared experience at a very reduced and impoverished level of reality (Fernandez 1986:160). In the separated cells of our modern organic forms of solidarity, individual reality looms very large, and the study of strategy tends to be the study of "the manipulative ploys of individuals" (Bailey 1969). In an increasingly complex world, with the place the media now assumes in our lives, we rely not on people but networks to interpret our traditions; directly mediating both myth and meaning (Shorter 1996:7). This makes returning to the whole seem somehow beyond our reach, as something that pertains to societies characterised by mechanical forms of solidarity, strong feelings of consanguinity and affinity, and the real possibility of mystical participation (Fernandez 1986:181).

Yet, if we attempt to live with conscious awareness of who we are, then conditional behaviour, the origins of purpose, motivation and transformation, along with unclaimed images of the sacred have to be faced. This implies that the volatile chaos of today becomes unbearable without asking questions about "How come?" and "What for?" Answers to these questions inevitably and naturally involve us with ritual processes and revelation experienced concurrently with life's development (Shorter 1996:ix). Individually then, ritual takes root in a sense of aloneness so bewildering and hazardous that one will sacrifice a previous identity in order to make contact with something more, a strength elsewhere (Shorter 1996:21). There are those that think that analytic reason alone is sufficient to temper the ambitions of separated men and women, so that they may subordinate themselves to such common interests. Rappaport (1979:236-237) argues that the "ultimate corrective operation inheres in systems as wholes", with the ultimate strategy then being that of returning to the whole. Such retrieval and construction is the ultimate and recurrent strategy of the

human experience (Fernandez 1986:184), a precarious quest that nevertheless leads ultimately to an inner awakening and change (Shorter 1996:25). Ritual mediates self-world relationships (Shorter 1996:ix). But societies so largely adversarial as the modern ones are, by nature, alienated from the possibilities of overarching conviviality (Fernandez 1986:162). They therefore neglect the fundamental problem of relatedness, which is actually the central problem of the whole – the restoration of the relatedness of all things. The experience of the "we", the foundation of all possible communication, could only emerge from extended mutual "tuning-in" of the primordial kind we get through long mutual involvement at the perceptual level in primary groups (Fernandez 1986:165).

What we have greatly missed up to now is the essential relation between "feeling" and exterior action (Taussig and Smith 1990:17). Ritual should be seen as an outlet for emotions; even as an enhancement to the emotional involvement of the individual in worship. Ritual, by its very nature, carries meaning, serving a purpose in our lives that we cannot deny. Liturgy is a special type of collective ritual activity, often described as "expression" (De Jong 2007:117). In these activities two psychological states have to be combined – the psychological state that one wants to express, and the intention to express it. In liturgy one can express faith, desires, resolves, and all manner of feelings. By "expression" we usually mean that people impose on physical forms the meaning that they have in mind (De Jong 2007:117). Hence "expression" entails imposing meaning on sounds, gesture, objects, or physical phenomena of whatever kind. These then become symbols or signs of the content of the psychological state one wants to express.

Liturgy has to be a collective expression. Although it is not essential that all participants express their faith in the same way, what matters is that each wants to make a distinctive contribution to an expression that is more than

the sum of the individual expressions. But liturgical activity cannot be described simply as collective expression, for besides being expressive action it is also communicative action (De Jong 2007:118). That means that one wants to express faith, reverence, joy, or other psychological states in such a way that others will recognise that one has these feelings and intentional states. In addition, one wants to convey to them that one wants them to know it. That requires executing the intentions according to the rules of meaning imposition prevalent in the communication community concerned (De Jong 2007:119). Collective communication in liturgy has another element: the person one seeks to communicate with is (primarily) God, and is usually of a serious nature and concerns an experience of the observable and beyond in a formal and ritual manner (De Jong 2007:119). Such sudden, substantial, emotional, arousal is a kind of general alarm for the cognitive system - an especially efficient means for signalling events and materials meriting our attention (McCauley & Lawson 2002:77), which will increase the attention and cognitive resources we devote to them. This, in turn, will increase the probability of their subsequent recollection (Damasio 2000:35-81; McCauley & Lawson 2002:78; Damasio 1995:127-164). *But* that sort of memory consolidation may only arise if that initial, heightened alertness receives ongoing vindication in subsequent experience concerning our sense of the event's significance. Collectively, participants must retain enough knowledge of these rituals to preserve a sense of both continuity and community. From such temporal factors as timing and sequence to such structural factors as the identities and properties of agents, various features of actions condition participants' judgements about the similarities and differences of religious ritual performance (McCauley & Lawson 1990:84-136). Actions are realisations of intentions, and possibly of plans and desires (De Jong 2007:114). It is the fulfilment of a wish, the accuracy of an observation, or the granting of a request. Just as truth is correspondence

between the content of a cognitive intentional state or representation on the one hand, and the reality represented in the intentional state on the other, so realisation is the correspondence between the actual activity and its representation in the intention (De Jong 2007:114).

The relationship between experience and its expressions is always problematic, as it is clearly dialogical as well as dialectical (Bruner 1986:6): Experience structures expression, in that we understand other people and their expressions on the basis of our own experience and self-understanding; but expressions also structure experience, in that the dominant narratives of a historical era (i.e. important rituals and festivals, classic works of art etc.) define and illuminate inner experience. The critical distinction here is between reality (i.e. what is really out there, whatever that may be), experience (how that reality presents itself to consciousness) and expressions (how individual experience is framed and articulated). Between life as lived (reality), life as experienced (experience) and life as told (expression). An expression is never an isolated, static text. Instead, it always involves a processual activity, a verb form, an action rooted in a social situation with real persons in a particular culture and a given historical era (Bruner 1986:7). This makes it a term of connection that encourages us to discuss life in terms of how present activities of even the most threatening sort may be drawn on and replayed in some form in the future (Abrahams 1986:49). The concept of an experience, then, has an explicit temporal dimension, in that we go through or live an experience, which then becomes self-referential in the telling (Bruner 1986:7). So what holds the present and the past together is a unitary meaning (Bruner 1986:8). Yet that "meaning does not lie in some focal point outside our experience, but is contained in them [in experience] and constitutes the connection between them" (Rickman 1976:239).

This implies that it is here essential to differentiate between propositional meaning and that meaning/significance related to emotions and embedded in the action of performance (Davies 2002:115). Propositional meaning is easily explained in terms of the formal ideas lying behind actions, but emotional forms of meaning are not so self-evident, as it expresses the satisfaction gained from doing something (i.e. a specific performance of some definite act). Aune (1996:142-143) affirms the relationship between ritual liturgy and mundane life, expressing a growing consensus that interprets ritual as a "way of acting and speaking" that "provides a way to know the world and to act on such a world". A ritual must be enacted, a myth recited, a narrative told, a novel read, a drama performed. These enactments, recitals, tellings, readings, and performances are what make the text transformative and enable us to re-experience our culture's heritage (Bruner 1986:7). In sacred story the word is ever-present and believed capable of release only in the telling (Shorter 1996:30): Unuttered, it loses its power. Enacted, it is the thing rendered in a form that becomes a landmark/turning point, releasing it for conscious realisation (however its innate symbolism will be interpreted). Meaning arises when we try to put what culture and language have crystallised from the past together with what we feel, wish, and think about our present point in life (Turner 1986:33). All the senses can here be viewed as "modes of embodiment" (Davies 2002:117), caused to exist by external stimuli that leave a mood-memory with the embodied individual. These modes of embodiment coincide to the point of merging, fostering not only a sense of inner unity, but also of being "acted upon" by an external source that cannot be ignored (Storr 1992:96). It affords an end in itself and is not a means to an end. With this in mind, ritual is about "meaning-making through action" (Slough 1996:183): The force of the few words provides mental satisfaction, a sense that individuals may – after all – know the depths of each other (Friedrich

1997:193). The amazing result is that humans, by playing and performing, can bring new actualities into existence (Schechner 1986:363). A metamorphosis of imagery occurs, which extends beyond the dimensions of the reasoned intellect alone (Shorter 1996:34; Pyysiäinen 2001:133-136).

This is almost unintelligible without an appreciation of embodiment, and a recognition that formal systems of thought play but a limited part in very many people's understanding of life (Davies 2002:118). Even in ritual performances, formal theological ideas are "simply not used in the deductive manner theologians would take for granted" (Boyer 1994:212-222). Realistically, individuals hold opinions, beliefs, and values that are partial, fragmentary, and changing. Values that interfuse with activities, rites, and the manifold endeavours of life. We, as human beings, hunger and thirst for such significant doings, but when we find them – simply by recognising them as significant, by thinking about them and by writing about them – we may elevate such occurrences to a status that makes considered examination difficult (Abrahams 1986:48). The human need is for people to "realise, participate in, maintain, correct, transform, and not merely observe" (Rappaport 1999:459).

Chapter 4's study of the relevance of liturgy, ritual, and performative acts for people in today's society has revealed that these things are not just relevant, but absolutely necessary. Without ritual/liturgy, we are lost in the self – unable to connect, and therefore meaningfully interpret and translate, our being in this world. In fact, it might even be argued that people today need ritual and liturgy even more than the people of the first century did. The implication is that Chapter 3's liturgical functional reading is, in terms of the growing need for a preservation of wholeness, almost even more relevant and significant today than it was for its original hearers. Through the performance of, and their participation in, the ritual that is the Apocalypse of John, people today can find a unifying story – a story of past,

present and future meaningfully intertwined; a story that provides clarity, purpose, and substance; a story that connects; a story that excites them into living as their best selves.

2.4 THE REALITY WITHIN WHICH WE EXIST

In Chapter 5, we saw that mankind's present "frame of mind" can be described as one characterised by disillusionment. Some scholars have stated that, starting more than a few decades ago, we live in a world in which humankind is defined as a world-creating being; and culture is understood as a symbolic process of world construction (Smith 1978:290). In this age of form and the systemic manipulation of these forms in mathematics, physics, music, the arts, and the social sciences (Fauconnier & Turner 2002:3), human knowledge and its progress seem to have been reduced in startling and powerful ways to a matter of essential formal structures and their transformations. There is nothing more basic in human life than cause and effect. In fact, it has been a triumph of mathematics, science, and engineering to break up unified events into causal chains made up of much more elementary events – such that each is the effect of the previous and the cause of the next (Fauconnier & Turner 2002:75). But progress was by no means conceived in purely material terms – democratic freedoms and human rights also evolved slowly but steadily from the principles of the Enlightenment. The result being that life in all its richness and complexity had become fundamentally explainable as combinations and re-combinations of a finite genetic code (Fauconnier & Turner 2002:3), and the practical products of this triumph are now part of our daily life and culture.

Interesting to note is that this modern idea of historical progress, a characteristically secular notion, has sometimes also taken religious forms (Bauckham & Hart 1999:3), The constant movement into an unlimited future

as the universal movement of human history, enabled that sense of the accelerating advance of civilisation that dominated modern (and even post-modern) thinking. The frustration of this long-term optimism that characterised science's early years was, ironically, encouraged by science's own findings. The expectation that cosmic evolution will not lead to ultimate fulfilment but rather to final futility casts a long shadow on the search for meaning in the present. "There's this thing called progress. But it doesn't progress. It doesn't go anywhere. Because as progress progresses the world can slip away." (Swift 1983:291) This can be attributed to the fact that the breaking down of an event into a set of smaller events, each understood consciously and separately, can paradoxically give us a feeling of less understanding – exactly because we feel we have not grasped the essential whole (Fauconnier & Turner 2002:76). And this feeling has led to the existence of a legitimate plurality of strategies of investigation and inquiry which cannot easily be reduced to one methodological paradigm (Schwöbel 2000:107). But, as substitutes for the grand narratives of religion and modernity, these scientific narratives can only be anti-metanarratives, offering explanation but not meaning (Updike 1999:34).

Increasingly, in public opinion, scientists are no longer benevolent magicians, but sorcerers' apprentices letting loose forces they cannot control and whose effects they cannot predict (Bauckham & Hart 1999:8). Because pluralism has today even conquered the world of science, modern-day science is (for many of its practitioners) no longer such a clearly defined "culture" as it used to be. Instead, it has become rather a complex family of activities with loosely defined boundaries (Schwöbel 2000:107). The power of the myth of progress is now, for most of us, the haunting power of its ghost (Bauckham & Hart 1999:7); for the twentieth century has drained almost all the life out of it. In fact, disorientation, hopelessness, and a profound sense of the ultimate meaninglessness of life and reality prevail

among a large proportion of the population in developed countries (Stoeger 2000:65).

Because of all the dynamics now at play, as discussed above, nihilism is in the ascendant in the postmodern West; and hope is on the way out. A gap seems to yawn between the world as described by science (the "real world" of quantification and measurement) and the world as seen by "merely" human beings (Soskice 2000:79-80). So, it would seem, the declining credibility of the myth of progress in the twentieth/early twenty-first century resulted from its inability to cope either with the horror of twentieth century history or with the terror of the later twentieth/early twenty-first century. Put even more strongly: the civilisation that has made the idea of historical progress the myth by which it lives has itself increased both the horror and the terror of history (Bauckham & Hart 1999:15). In fact, horror must surely be, to all whose vision is not ideologically distorted, one of the most prominent features of twentieth/early twenty-first century history (Steiner 1997:103).

This leads to a peculiar paradox: Although Christians are happy to ignore the Book of Revelation, no other biblical writing captures the popular secular imagination more than the Apocalypse (Maier 2002:ix). A feature which becomes clearly evident when we look at those forms which humankind has always used to express itself - the creative arts, especially literature and film/television; but then, specifically, the burgeoning (mainstream) popularity of *noir*. Everything *noir* has in common a tone, a certain attitude toward the pervasiveness of evil – it is systemic, obsessed not with the bad apple or the single sin, but with a pervasive human corruption that makes a mockery of our pretensions to goodness, law, and order (Bertrand 2011:n.p.). *Noir* looks our broken reality in the face. Sometimes it revels in the extent of "the Fall", and sometimes it's horrified by it, but *noir* never denies that everything's gone wrong. So *noir* exists as

the fiction of moral breakdown, the fiction of corruption, and yes, the fiction of reprobation. To its practitioners, this also makes it realistic fiction, because it depicts the world as it truly is: not a realm of Newtonian regularity on the path to an ever brighter future, but a shattered, dystopian place only putting on a show of law and order (Bertrand 2011:n.p.). Following the breakdown of institutionalised religion, coupled with the advent and growing popularity of nihilism, the singular and the individual are lost, and a sense of the sacred and of ritual has ostensibly also vanished from the modern world (Shorter 1996:i). This idea of a world empty of religion (i.e. of God), and empty of hope, only strengthens the vision(s) of cosmic futility. And even more worrying than this loss of the foundation for aesthetics is the idea that all human values, whether aesthetic or moral, are merely subjective (Soskice 2000:81).

And yet, in all of the nihilism that surrounds us, there remains within us a strong and unquenchable desire for meaning, for hope. No matter what the reality surrounding us shows, no matter what we convince ourselves of rationally and intellectually, within us always remains the need for something more. This apparent chaos and the seeming pointlessness of life today still put forward questions which, in turn, prompt search and revelation – processes which are in and of themselves a form of ritual (Shorter 1996:i). The scientific accounts of origins we have from cosmology, astronomy, geology, and biology do provide us with images and narratives to use when we construct our cultural cosmology. This is because they insert both us as individuals and as communities within the physical context they portray in an understandable and significant way (Stoeger 2000:75). However, these accounts cannot provide the key elements that provide meaning, orientation, and value. Common sense tells us that form is not substance – the blueprint is not the house, the recipe is not the dish, and the computer simulation of

weather does not rain on us. On their own forms are hollow, and meaning is not just another kind of form (Fauconnier & Turner 2002:4-6).

Insofar as the horizons in which we view cosmology are plural and fragmentary, we cannot describe them *in toto*, since other perspectives in culture, science, and theology invite us to reconsider. What we *can* do is – juxtapose certain fragments of literature, science, and theological reflection, and then explore the spaces these juxtapositions offer us (Bouchard 2000:90). This could help us to imagine community today – as well as in the cosmic future – as being enfolded in relations of appreciation and transformation. That is, in aesthetic and ethical relations. For it could be said that, insofar as discoveries in the cosmos can occasion experiences of awe, realisations of responsibility by identifying the fragile resources of life and intelligence (even in different forms and under austere future conditions), and lead to our imagining of very distant futures; it may also invite us to revise our views of nearer times (Bouchard 2000:90). One cannot imagine the fate of the cosmos, unfolding over hundreds of billions of years, apart from the fate of local worlds (our lives, communities, nations and planet). This recognition of the inadequacy of a merely reductionist account of physical reality has encouraged attempts at the study of the behaviour of complex systems. The result is the infant science of complexity theory (Polkinghorne 2000:36).

Holistic complexity is non-linear, which means that adding a new component totally changes the situation in a radical way. Holistic complexity is also reflexive, with effects reacting back upon their causes in a feedback process (Polkinghorne 2000:37). What does seem to be becoming increasingly clear is that, in the description of realistically complex physical process, two complimentary modes of description will be necessary for an adequate account of what is happening: One deals with energy and, equivalently, matter. The other deals with what one might, in some highly

generalized sense, call "pattern" or the formation of interrelated structure (Polkinghorne 2000:37). This loosening-up and conceptual expansion of the story that science has to tell needs to be taken into consideration by theology, as it might even afford help in the latter's thinking about the coherence and credibility of eschatological hope (Polkinghorne 2000:34). Thus twentieth-century/early twenty-first century science differs from that of preceding centuries in its recognition of the relational character of physical reality, and in a consequent acknowledgement of the need to consider totalities as well as constituent bits and pieces (Polkinghorne 2000:34). We thus encounter here concepts that are consonant with the ideas of those thinkers in the realm of human experience who emphasize the distinction between a person irreducibly involved in, and indeed constituted by, a network of human relationships. The discovery of what has, somewhat unfortunately, been called "chaos theory" has revealed the existence of many systems of exquisite sensitivity to circumstances.

All of the above implies that the search for a truly unified "theory of everything", one in which the universe makes complete sense, will be through something like the continuity/discontinuity of the Christian resurrection hope. The theological motivation for entertaining that hope lies in the resurrection of Jesus and in the faithfulness of God (Polkinghorne 2000:38). Yet here there is also the metaphysical question of the coherence of such a hope to consider. The complementary dichotomy of energy and pattern may be of help in considering this eschatological dichotomy of continuity and discontinuity: The "matter-energy" of the world to come will certainly have to be radically different in its physical properties to the matter-energy of this present creation, for the matter of this universe is perfectly adapted to its role of sustaining that evolutionary exploration of potentiality (which is theologically to be understood as the old creation being allowed to "make itself"). In an evolving world of this kind, death is the

necessary cost of life, and transience is inevitably built into its physical fabric (Polkinghorne 2000:39). The entities arising in this way are sufficiently structured to endure for a while, and sufficiently flexible to develop and grow, but they can only sustain their dynamic patterns for limited periods. If the world to come is to be free from death and suffering its "matter-energy" will have to be given a different character, i.e. there will have to be a discontinuous change of physical law (Polkinghorne 2000:39). Where the continuity between the two worlds can be expected to be expressed is in a carry-over of pattern. It would seem a coherent hope that this vastly complex pattern that is a human person could, at death, be held in the divine mind to await its re-embodiment within the life of the world to come.

In modern scientific thought space, time, and matter all belong together in the single package of "general relativity theory". A nexus of relationship that we might expect to be characteristic of the created order generally (Polkinghorne 2000:39). In this case, resurrected beings will not only be embodied in the "matter" of the new creation, they will also be located in its "space" and immersed in its "time" (Polkinghorne 2000:40). Understood in this way the continuity of human nature would imply for humanity an everlasting destiny, rather than some timeless experience of eternity. Eternity would thus not be a concept of elongated serial time, but would be open to a description of life as a process in which the abundance of energy is in a steady transgression into informational contemplation. This process then again gives rise to energy. Thus it is not about the seriality of an ordered time that would decay into mere quantity, but about the ongoing productive process of overflow from information to energy. This modern recognition of the role of "becoming" in the unfolding history of the present creation encourages a dynamic concept of being (and of being's perfection), for change does not imply imperfection (Polkinghorne 2000:40).

There is another aspect of continuity that one might expect to link the old and the new creations with – the history of this universe is that of an unfolding process, and we have already said that the life of the world to come may also be expected to involve a similarly unfolding process, which will surely take the form of an everlasting encounter with God. The old creation is a world that contains sacraments, particularly covenanted occasions in which God's presence is most transparently perceived (Polkinghorne 2000:40). The new creation will be wholly sacramental, for God will be "all in all" (2 Cor 15:28). Ultimate human fulfilment will thus be a continuing sharing in the life of God, not a timeless moment of illumination (Polkinghorne 2000:40). Ironically it is exactly the lack of a positive and dynamic concept of continuing exploration into God that renders theology's reduction of individual eschatological hope a pallid and unsatisfactory process (Polkinghorne 2000:41). Together these scientific and cultural developments pose powerful questions to theology: What are the true purposes of the Creator of such a world of change and decay? What ends are being brought about within it by the divine purpose? Should there not be an unflinching recognition that despair is the real foundation for human thought about the future, bringing about the end of belief in the Christian God of hope? Fundamentally, the issues centre around the ultimate question: "Does the universe make *complete* sense, not just now but always? Or is it in the end 'a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing'" (Polkinghorne 2000:32)?

Of course, it remains to be seen whether the Christian metanarrative, with its orientation to the cosmological future, can provide the genuine hope which the myth of progress has in the end failed to provide, and to which the anti-progressivists' anti-metanarratives do not aspire. In these circumstances – living in a time where the secular eschatologies of the modern age's hopeful striving for a utopian future have lost credibility (and even turned

against hope) – a *functional reading* might be just what is needed, for a functional reading pays attention to the reader's role in creating the meaning and experience of the biblical text. It recognises the reader as an active agent who imparts "real existence" to the work and completes its meaning through interpretation. And it views the biblical texts as a performing art in which each reader creates their own, possibly unique, text-related performance, constructing worlds of meaning, worlds within which human beings find themselves and in which they choose to dwell (Smith 1978:290).

There are many elements or areas where Chapter 5 could be found lacking, for it aims to describe a very vast and complex phenomenon in the span of a chapter, and then as part of a thesis aiming to argue a certain subjective viewpoint. Though I attempted to be as fair and thorough as space and my own capacity allowed, it still does not change the fact that – in order to begin to do justice to all of the different cultural phenomena and to every scholar mentioned in Chapter 5 – multiple theses would be needed. My goal is to keep on addressing these phenomena, and to keep on engaging with these and other scholars, in my continued research.

2.5 DISCUSSING "HOPE"

In Chapter 6 we turned our attention to "hope". Hope is a powerful ally, for hope is a sign of health, a fighting spirit, and faith that somehow good will prevail (Averill, Catlin and Chon 1990:v). Over five decades ago, during the height of the cold war, Menninger (1959:491) posed a question: "Are we not duty bound to speak up as scientists, not about a new rocket or a new fuel or a new bomb or a new gas, but about this ancient but rediscovered truth, the validity of hope in human development?" Since then, reflecting on the salutary effects of hope in a variety of challenging contexts – especially recovery from illness – references to hope are now frequent in medical and psychological writings (Frank and Frank 1973; Friedman, Chodoff, Mason, et

al. 1963; Gottschalk 1974; Spence, Scarborough and Ginsberg 1978; Snyder 1989). But these references are scattered, and systematic analyses have been few (Fromm 1968; Lynch 1965; Stotland 1969).

What does it mean to say that a person has gained, or lost hope, for example, when faced with a life-threatening disease such as cancer? Important to realise is that this question does not call for a strict scientific definition of hope; for it concerns the way people think and reason about hope in everyday life, and the consequences of such thinking for their well-being. So it is about making explicit our implicit (everyday) conception of hope, and exploring the relation of this hope to social systems on the one hand, and to individual behaviour on the other (Averill, Catlin and Chon 1990:1-2). Now, when confronted with the prospect of a desired but uncertain event, people may adopt either an emotional or a non-emotional model (Averill, Catlin and Chon 1990:95): "Hope" signifies the adoption of an emotional model. "Optimism", in important respects similar to hope, does not have the corresponding emotional connotation. We expect claims of optimism to be based on evidence that can be judged in terms of rational criteria. The result is that optimism increases linearly with the probability of attainment; whereas there exists a curvilinear relationship between hope and the probability of an event (i.e. one does not hope for things that are virtually assured). But why adopt an emotional (hope), rather than a non-emotional (optimism) model? Because hope is "the passion for the possible" (Kierkegaard 2005:151) – it nourishes, guides, uplifts, and supports a person in times of difficulty; and hope maintains loyalty and commitment, without requiring rational justification.

Hope is among those capacities or activities that mark off the territory of the distinctively human within our world (Bauckham and Hart 1999:52). Humans, we might say, are essentially insatiable – driven forwards by a desire for contact with a reality the fullness of which constantly eludes us.

We step out in faith, trusting that there is something more, something better, something worthwhile to be discovered or encountered; and, that we shall duly make contact with it. We live, that is to say, by stepping outwards and forwards from our present location. We take these outwards and forwards steps in the hope that something positive will come of us doing so, that such action is worthwhile (Bauckham and Hart 1999:53). So, hope is a matter of both knowledge and will – we know what has happened before, and we know what we desire. Hope is characterised, above all, by the application of imagination and trust to a future which is essentially open and unknown. With its eyes wide open to the threat which the future holds, it nonetheless sees ways of averting this threat – hope is, in this sense, an activity of imaginative faith.

Of course, imagination is also the source of fear (Bauckham and Hart 1999:53), whether pathological or well-founded. For fear and hope are necessary opposites. Hope is rooted in an imagining of the future which envisages ways of flourishing in spite of genuine dangers and threats (Steiner 1992:145). Thus hope is that which insists upon expanding our perceived horizons of possibility, broadening the landscape of reality in such a way as to set our present circumstance in a wider perspective, thereby robbing it of its absoluteness. Hope, in such an account of things, is essentially liberating and invigorating, transfiguring every empirical present by relating it to a vision of the future. Real hope is an "interior sense that there is help on the outside of us" (Lynch 1965:40); a hunch about what is genuinely possible.

The implication is that hope does not fit well into a predominantly individualistic DIY culture of self-sufficiency, because it knows it needs help *and* it thinks it knows where to find it (Bauckham and Hart 1999:63). We keep going and keep striving to find a way forward because we believe there is such a way forward, even when we cannot yet see it clearly. It is at this

point that it becomes clear that the Christian story does afford a route beyond the *impasse*; an exit from the labyrinth of postmodern despair; an environment in which an ecology of hope can flourish. The Christian story does so precisely by virtue of its own peculiar "wager of transcendence". The point here is that the tragic dimensions of human life cannot, and will not, be resolved within the boundaries of either history or nature. If this story is to have a comic rather than a tragic ending, Christian faith recognises that it will only be through the contrivance of the God of the resurrection – the God who is able to bring life out of death and being out of non-being – that all is resolved well and everything finally works together for good (Bauckham and Hart 1999:68).

One way of assisting, ritually/practically, with this constant positioning as faith community is by looking at the Apocalypse from a functional point of view. This could help us, in this meanwhile, to live and travel in hope, able to face squarely and in all their awfulness the horrific aspects of that history within whose temporal boundaries we actually still live. This method of reading the Apocalypse, proposed and fleshed out in Chapter 3 and 4, is not meant as a replacement for the extensive and always relevant studies discussed in Chapter 1. No, the method proposed is rather to be seen as the exploring of an alternative, leading to an extension of interpretative models. This is especially true in the case of the Book of Revelation – for, when this thesis used disciplines like psychology, sociology, and archaeology as lenses to study the text and the impact of Revelation, a unique new world opened up. A world in which it is possible to focus on the functional and performative elements of the book and the impact that such a reading might have, especially for the communities of faith in which Revelation is read – a group, as we saw earlier, who has become alienated from Biblical Studies as a science.

3 POTENTIAL CONTRIBUTION MOVING FORWARD

It is arguable that, whereas pre-modern (traditional) societies gave priority to the past and modern (progressive) societies gave priority to the future, with the decline of the idea of progress a postmodern society is emerging in which priority is given to the present (Bauckham and Hart 1999:26). In contemporary Western culture, with its emphasis on the immediate and the instantaneous, its feverish drive to squeeze as much as possible into time as a limited commodity, its augmentation of time into allocated quantities, and its obsessive organisation of time, we live increasingly in the present and its prolongation. But, although it is true that we live more and more in the "compressed time" of the crammed and organised present, we also live with "the tension, so unbearable that the effort is made to bury it deep in the unconscious, between the pressures of the moment and the uncertain times that lie ahead" (Chesneaux 1992:26). Psychologically, our immersion in the immediate and the manageable is an avoidance of the terror of the open future, which seems to threaten more than it invites hope. Insecurity of employment, increasing crime and a disintegrating social order, environmental catastrophe and other terrors lurk in the uncontrollable future. Thus the greater the technological control, the greater the anxiety about its uncontrollable effects.

Yet it is doubtful whether we are really witnessing the end of narrativity – even in the compressed present which most of us inhabit much of the time, human experience remains inescapably temporal (Wicker 1975:47). Yes, our temporal experience has become more fragmented and less amenable to representation as a unidirectional story, but we can scarcely speak of it all without narrative (Bauckham and Hart 1999:31). This means that, though narrative might be interrogated and deconstructed, it cannot be replaced. In popular culture, story continues to flourish. This is so because narrative

imposes form and order on the inherently chaotic world (Kermode 1967:64). It assuages the horror of history by humanising the utterly inhuman, in order to console us (Cook 1997:55). Even more importantly, Wolfhart Pannenberg (1973:192–210) argues that all apprehensions of meaning implicitly anticipate the end of history. Since all reality is historical and intrinsically connected, the truth of things must be sought in what they turn out to be in the end, and the meaning of any part is not finally separable from that of the whole. Truth and meaning require a wider social context of meaning. So, only when history is completed, will the final meanings of all things – and hence of each thing – be achieved. And, now that we know that history will not of its own accord produce utopia, the only credible eschatology is a transcendent one which looks for a resolution of history that exceeds any possible immanent outcome of history (Bauckham and Hart 1999:35). Only from the transcendent possibilities of God can this world be given a satisfying conclusion.

Within the story which the Christian gospel tells us about the destiny of our world, just such a "wager" is to be found. A wager more familiarly referred to as faith in the God of the resurrection. In faith our imagination is engaged, stretched, and enabled to accommodate a vision of a meaningful and hopeful future for the world. A future which could never be had by extrapolating the circumstances of the tragic drama of history itself. The "comic" ending is unlooked for, unexpected, and improbable in the extreme while our imagination is constrained by the conditions of the immanent. Only by allowing our imagining to be blown wide open by a transcendence which blows the future itself wide open can we begin, however partially and tentatively, to envisage a *telos* which may legitimately furnish us with an object of hope.

By making use of this idea of a functional reading of the text of the Apocalypse, it became possible to move beyond the often-perpetrated

hermeneutic reduction of hope to two conventional poles – the early Christian movement's hope through reversal, and contemporary nihilism – by providing a third possibility that focuses on the power of the functional and performative aspects of Revelation. In this way, we move away from the idea of extreme poles into the hermeneutical spiral, which allows for the affecting of both conscious and sub-conscious change. This is especially important when further considering the discussion of Chapter 5, where it became clear that we as society are in dire need of something that transcends both ourselves and the intellectual circles we run in – if we are not to lose our essential humanity. This investigation proposes that what is needed is something that transcends our intellect, our perception of reality, and our working out of the end (if there is such a thing). In a functional reading, we found the beginnings of endless possibilities that enable us to do just that. When focusing on ritual and function and its application for reading and understanding the text, we are forced to engage with our mind as a whole and with ourselves as embodied beings.

The reading, then, is not about criticism (or even understanding in the traditional sense), but about allowing ourselves to be taken up into the ritual performance of the text in such a way that it affects us both consciously and sub-consciously. This brings about transcendence of ourselves that we need, opening us up to the previously unnoticed manifold possibilities that our reality and the future holds, without having rationally worked out anything. We are changed at a level deeper than our intellect can take us, and it has the potential to change everything.

But, as has been said before, this can be nothing more than an exploratory study. A study in which we asked the question: "Is such a method even a possibility?" And, if indeed it is, what could be the possible ramifications of such a method for the way we read, understand, and use texts (in this case Revelation specifically)? As such, I think it is a good start.

But only that – a start. To further this method and deepen the study thereof it would be good to include qualitative research as to the effect of the suggested uses of the text on both individuals and congregations. This would mean taking the suggested uses of the text of Revelation from Chapter 3 and 4, fleshing them out into different liturgical/ritual possibilities, and then having a few congregations practice these liturgies and rituals over a period of time. With an evaluation of the successful effect (if any) on individuals and congregations, it would become possible to take the method and apply it to an even wider scope of texts. And so on, and so forth. But that, as has been said, would be a lifetime's work.

For the purposes of this thesis, I am satisfied that I was able to identify that the possibilities hemmed into a functional reading of the text of the Apocalypse of John can indeed be very valuable, and that I was able to start down the road of discovery as to what the impact of such a reading might be. For such a time and context as ours, this could be a game-changing method. But only further study will illuminate just how much it can (and does) change this game called life and our understanding of it and living in it.

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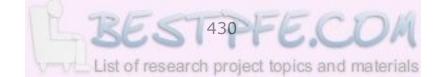Dell'Amore, Christine. World War Z: Could a Zombie Virus Happen? *National Geographic*, 25 June 2013. http://voices.nationalgeographic.com/2013/06/25/world-war-z-could-a-zombie-virus-happen/ [accessed on 4 June 2016].

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I declare that <u>Ritual functions of the Book of Revelation: hope in dark times</u> is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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ABSTRACT FOR UMI QUESTION 10

Through a *critical-functional*, rather than literal, reading of the text of Revelation, this dissertation hypothesises a move beyond the paralysing constant reduction of hermeneutic meaning to two conventional poles when discussing hope – the early Christian movement's hope through reversal, and contemporary nihilism. In order to do so in a responsible manner, it is necessary to study other research done on the topics of eschatology and hope – especially as seen in the book of Revelation. For this reason, the most popular and representative scholars of the Book of Revelation are studied. This overall look at current scholarships' views regarding the Apocalypse will help detect any possible missing elements in our approach to Revelation.

But no study of this topic can be considered near complete if other disciplines are not involved; in this case especially when moving on to a critical-functional reading of Revelation. This thesis thus features an exploratory study of the functioning of ritual and hope within the human psyche; from archaeological to psychological perspectives. This emphasises the importance of, and leads into, the possibilities of a functional reading of the Book of Revelation.

All of the above work leads to a re-evaluation of the success of hope as metanarrative for today. The suggestion is that Christian hope is not imaginary, but is irreducibly imaginative. For "reality is never just the world as it exists; it is the world as it is experienced through the lenses of social perception" (Barr 2010:636).

(vii) Summary:

Through a *critical-functional*, rather than literal, reading of the text of Revelation, this dissertation hypothesises a move beyond the paralysing constant reduction of hermeneutic meaning to two conventional poles when discussing hope – the early Christian movement's hope through reversal, and contemporary nihilism. In order to do so in a responsible manner, it is necessary to study other research done on the topics of eschatology and hope – especially as seen in the book of Revelation. For this reason, the most popular and representative scholars of the Book of Revelation are studied. This overall look at current scholarships' views regarding the Apocalypse will help detect any possible missing elements in our approach to Revelation.

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(viii) Key terms describing the topic of a dissertation/thesis (±10 key terms):

The Book of Revelation; The Apocalypse of John; Critical-functional reading; Cultural archaeology; Progress; Nihilism; Eschatology; Science and theology; Representative studies; Myth; Ritual; Liturgy; Epistemology; Theory of relativity; Continuity and discontinuity; Hope; Optimism; Metanarratives; Psychological perspective; Anthropology of experience; Creating experience and meaning; Resurrection; Ritual possibilities

Ritual Functions of the Book of Revelation: Hope in Dark Times

by

Hanré Janse van Rensburg

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