A SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL VIEW OF THE EFFECT
OF THE LANGUAGE (PAROLE) OF THE APOCALYPSE OF JOHN

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Our vision, stories and utopias are not only aesthetic: they engage us.
(Wilder 1976:79)

ABSTRACT
The purpose of this presentation is not to give a comprehensive analysis of the Greek syntax of the Apocalypse of John, but to follow up the suggestion by Jeske that much of the scholarly attention to the Apocalypse of John has shifted from the historical to a socio-political and socio-psychological analysis (1988:337). Instead of 'treating the Apocalypse at arm's length, content with a rationalist decoding of its symbolism and an historicist reading of its esoteric fantasy' (Barr 1988:340), the emphasis will be laid on a socio-psychological reading of the effect of the language of the Apocalypse of John. That does however not minimise the importance of a thorough study of the Greek syntax of the Apocalypse (cf Charles 1920:cxviiiff).

1 INTRODUCTORY POINTS OF DEPARTURE

1.1 Concerning the genre
The question concerning a description of the genre of the Apocalypse of John has received much attention during the last decade. It ranges from semiotic (Hellholm 1986) and morphological analyses (J Collins 1984) to literary (Blevins 1980) and historically oriented analyses (cf Betz 1983; Sanders 1983; Muller 1983; Aune 1986). Vorster maintains that the Revelation of John is a circular letter in narrative form (1983:1-14). His view that in a certain sense genre seems to be cultural convention, is provoking (1988: 108; cf Bal 1981:19f). It is based on the assumption of a relationship between society and genre; convention and text. And in that sense genre is a reflection of a social situation (cf Frow 1980:73). The function of the genre of the Apocalypse could be understood socially and psychologically, in the sense that it is the expression of the literature of the oppressed (cf Sanders 1983:456f) or as a literary device 'to shape one's imaginative perception of a situation' (Collins 1984:32; cf Vorster 1988:118). Keeping in mind that the main purpose of the Apocalypse is to encourage, as well as to admonish Christians and that it was probably read aloud, I am convinced that the Apocalypse could be called a dramatic narrative (cf Du Rand 1990:180f) reflected in the language (parole).
1.2 Sociological and psychological function
An historical understanding of the text and the possible context of the Apocalypse of John is essential, but not adequate for coming to complete grips with its meaning. We also have to take into consideration that much human action has unconscious functions which have to be explored by means of sociological and psychological methods (cf A Collins 1984:19f). This means that the psychological functions of the language are to be explored. One of the functions is the cohesive effect which implies that individuals with common interest and casualties are bound together as a group.

1.3 Intra- and extratextual components
Language as the communication code, recorded in the text of the Apocalypse, carries ideas and themes which give meaning to a specific social context. Van Aarde even speaks of the 'recognition of the indispensable role that the historical context plays in the interpretation of texts' (1989:1). This means that there are intratextual as well as extratextual components which should be taken into consideration. The intratextual components are mainly concerned with the narrative discourse of the Apocalypse as such and the extratextual component with the social context, consisting of the cultural codes of the extratextual readers. The following quotation from Lotman and Uspenski in Danow (1987:352) serves to support this point of view:

A text can only be understood if it is compared extensively with the culture, or more precisely with the behavior of the people contemporary with it; and their behavior can likewise only be made sense of if it is juxtaposed with a large number of texts.

In order to be persuasive, the rhetoric of the language of the Apocalypse reflects a certain life situation. It is a fitting response to the social and religious situation of Christians in Asia Minor (cf Fiorenza 1985:192; Barr 1988:342). It should be kept in mind that an adequate and satisfactory psychological analysis of the situation reflected in the functional language of the Apocalypse cannot be done because we do not have the full range of data covering every individual in Johannine apocalyptic Christianity. The gap between text and socio-historical reality should also not be underestimated. The methodological challenge therefore is to integrate available historical perspectives with sociological, psychological and literary methods of approach.

2 TO ARRIVE AT A GENERAL CHARACTERISATION OF THE LANGUAGE

2.1 Linguistic form and theological content
How are we to understand the language of the Apocalypse in general? Is it a secret code or sign system denoting events that can be equated with historical persons or theological themes (cf Perrin 1974:12f; Fiorenza 1986:126)? How can theological meaning be distilled from apocalyptic language? Fiorenza is very cautious not to separate linguistic form from theological content (1983:298). Every interpreter of the Apocalypse should be careful to reduce such imaginative symbolic language to abstract philo-
sophical language and conceptuality.

2.2 Ontological interpretation

Charles discusses the language (parole) of the Apocalypse at length under the heading: ‘A short grammar of the Apocalypse’ (1920:cxvii–clix) and indicates that John’s grammatical ‘blunders’ should be considered as deliberately chosen constructions. In this regard a very interesting thesis is proposed by Georgi, namely that the style of the Apocalypse is not an expression of linguistic incompetence or barbarism, but rather an ‘original creation of a singular language with its own rather consistent grammar, syntax and vocabulary’ (1986:123). A comprehensive monograph by Mussies on the morphology of the Koine Greek used in the Apocalypse of St John (1971) indicates Semitic influences in the Greek syntax (cf 1980:168–177).

The valuable input by Minear helps us further in coming to grips with a general characterisation of the language of the Apocalypse although the aims of this presentation is to get to the effects of the apocalyptic language of John. He advocates the view that the Apocalypse’s mythopoietic language and symbols are to be understood by literary-critical analysis. This means that he objects against understanding the language of the Apocalypse as a system of signs in need of decoding or symbols as equations with historical events and persons, and images forecasting definite incidents and happenings (1968:46f; cf Fiorenza 1986:127). Instead Minear sees the historical reality of Roman power and its oppressive effect on Christians in Asia Minor as symbolic manifestations of ultimate transhistorical realities and archetypes. The historical reality of Rome is just representative of the ultimate power and city (cf Ellul 1977:189). Such an archetypical, ontological interpretation has the function of breaking open the symbolic language, but does not fully explore its evocative powers in a specific socio-historical situation (cf Fiorenza 1986:128).

2.3 Informative, expressive and performative functions

Therefore it is useful to page back to Jakobson’s discussion of the contextual aspects of communication. He identifies three ways in which language functions to provide context (cf 1960:350–77): In addition to the informative (referential) function, he distinguishes the poetic (language’s ability to call attention to itself — through meter and rhyme), phatic (to open up the channels of communication) and metalingual (the use of language to create various codes in which certain communications are transmitted) functions (cf Barr 1986:16f). And from this we derive the informative, expressive and the performative functions applied to the language of the Apocalypse. The hearers and readers of the Apocalypse experience its language as a social experience with functions of performance and cohesion. They participate dynamically.

The powerful apocalyptic language of Revelation, a subdivision of symbolic speech (cf Barr 1986:1), causes a kind of response which, together with its orality, forms an essential element of its hermeneutic (Barr 1986:243; cf Kelber 1983). The readers/hearers are in a continuous dynamic process of identification with the victorious Lamb, Jesus Christ.

As poetic language, the Apocalypse stimulates and organises imaginative experience. It evokes rather than defines meaning. And as rhetoric, the
language of the Apocalypse persuades people and calls on them to react. Poetry instigates and invites imaginative participation while rhetoric instigates a change of attitude and motivation (cf. Fiorenza 1986:130). It is important to keep in mind that imaginative participation (poetry) and persuasive change (rhetoric) are totally intertwined in the Apocalypse as a poetic-rhetorical work of art.

3 RHEtoric in a Rhetorical Situation

3.1 Language in a historical situation

The language of the Apocalypse of John represents a poetic-rhetorical construction of an alternative symbolic universe as a response to a specific historical-rhetorical situation. The rhetorical language of the Apocalypse is best understood within the possible rhetorical situation which has generated such a language. The socio-historical and religious situation of Johannine Christianity in Asia Minor fits as an ideal context for such a response (cf. Du Rand 1990:206). The following words of Jameson (1982:83) underlines it: 'as to constitute not merely a scene or background, not an inert context alone but rather a structured and determinate situation, such that the text can be grasped as an active response to it.... The text's meaning then, in the larger sense of Bedeutung will be the meaningfulness to a gesture that we read back from the situation to which it is precisely a response' (cf. Fiorenza 1986:135).

The rhetorical situation is often characterised by exigency and urgency: 'the controlling exigency of the situation specifies the mode of discourse to be chosen and the change to be effected' (Fiorenza 1986:135). This means that the Apocalypse as dramatic narrative obtains its rhetorical character from the exigency and urgency of the situation that generates it. The exigency of the Apocalypse lies in the reality that the Christians are economically and socially threatened, deprived and destitute because they refuse to take the mark of the beast (cf. Rv 13).

It should be kept in mind that such an historical situation is not accessible to us except through textual reconstructions. In the words of Fiorenza: 'we are never able to read a text without explicitly or implicitly reconstructing its historical subtext within the process of our reading' (1986:125; cf. Jameson 1982:68ff).

3.2 Language in a crisis

Apocalyptic literature is often evoked by some kind of crisis. The Apocalypse of Ezra (2 Esdras 3-14) and the Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch (2 Baruch) are examples of responses by the Jewish people to serious crises. The first historical readers of the Apocalypse were probably also in the grip of a crisis to which several elements could have contributed:

3.2.1 Persecution

The basic contextual issue which determines the rhetoric of the Apocalypse is probably Roman persecution because of the emperor cult, although explicit evidence is scarce (cf. Sherwin-White 1966:772). Some historians have even come to doubt the statement that Christians of Asia Minor experienced exceptional persecution under Domitian (cf. Thompson 1986; Sweet 1979).
That is why Collins (1984:84 f) prefers to call it a perceived crisis instead of a real crisis as Fiorenza does (cf 1985:181ff). It remains a legitimate question whether the Apocalypse is trying to overcome the unbearable tension perceived by the Christian society between what is experienced and what life should be (cf Collins 1984:87f).

Hemer proposed a real persecution (1986:7ff). After the fall of Jerusalem (70 C E), the focus of Christianity shifted from Judea but was not yet established in Rome. Therefore, the great cities of proconsular Asia were the scenes where Judaism of the diaspora met Hellenistic and oriental culture under the authority of Rome (1986:8). After comparing the text of the Apocalypse with material drawn from classical literature, epigraphy, numismatics and archaeology, Hemer concluded that the crisis facing John's churches, according to the Apocalypse, may be real and need not be simply perceived.

He inter alia concentrates on the description of the two cities which possessed 'synagogues of Satan' (cf Rv 2:9; 3:9). From the Martyrdom of Polycarp 13:21 and the Acta Pionii 4:14-15, it is clear that the Christians had to cope with Jewish hostility, especially in Smyrna (cf Hemer 1986:216n21).

Although direct evidence regarding a possible Domitianic persecution is scanty (no direct Domitianic edict against Christianity is extant), the emperor insisted on the obligations of the imperial cult. He was called dominus et deus (cf Suetonius Dom 13). Even Deissmann called the antagonism between church and cult a 'polemical parallelism' (1927:342) between the titles of emperors and institutions. And this antagonism is reflected in the imagery of the Apocalypse.

Also to be mentioned in connection with possible persecution is Pliny's letter to Trajan about the Christians (Ep 10:96) which states that some had abandoned their faith twenty or twenty-five years previously, A D 92, due to social pressure (cf Hemer 1986:10) which implied harassment and sufferings, if not persecution.

A possible persecution of Christians at the end of the first century, probably during the reign of Domitian, from A D 81 to A D 96 has in my opinion to be taken seriously in establishing the social conflict, reflected in the language of the Apocalypse (cf Katz 1984:55; Schmithals 1985:359ff).

3.2.2 Conflict with Judaism
The public status of Christians was precarious (cf Collins 1984:85ff). They were not rooted in an ethnic tradition or even homeland of their own like the Jews. Therefore the awareness of such differences between the Christians and Jews created crisis. On the other hand, those Christians who, like John, were Jews by birth, experienced the same tension especially after the exclusion from the synagogues. The social impact of such a tension became apparent when the Christians no longer enjoyed the social, economic and political security which they had experienced while being attached to the Jewish communities (cf Rv 2:9-10; 3:7-9).

The same could be said of Jerusalem. On the one hand, Jerusalem is rejected by means of the use of symbolic names such as Sodom and Egypt (cf 11:18). On the other hand, Jerusalem seems to be sketched as a symbol of
salvation in the Apocalypse (cf 3:12; 21:3,10). The Christians were even branded by the Synagogue as the revolutionaries against Rome because the Jews did not want to accommodate the pagan Christians (cf Schmittals 1987:372f). And this led to discrimination against and even persecution of the Christians.

3.2.3 Conflict with the gentiles
The Christians were also discriminated against and even hated by the gentiles. The lifestyle of the Christians was interpreted as a demonstration of their exclusiveness because they avoided gentile political and social life (cf Collins 1984:87). They were even accused of crimes such as arson, incest and cannibalism because of their sharing in the eucharist and Nero's accusation that it was the Christians who had caused the fire in Rome.

The Christians were in a position to make a choice for assimilation: Were they to adopt pagan customs for the sake of economic survival, for example by becoming members of the guilds dedicated to the idols? John was totally against any openness which he regarded as syncretistic and therefore idolatrous (cf 2:6,15; Smith 1980:12).

It is interesting that Christian communities in the Graeco-Roman world of the time of origin of the Apocalypse were grouped into unofficial associations such as the collegia of the day (cf Judge 1960:40ff). Such collegia were regarded with suspicion by the authorities because some of them, like the gentile collegia, could become centres of political unrest, leading to public disorder.

3.2.4 More conflict with Rome
The feelings of Christians against the Roman reign are reflected in the language of the Apocalypse. From the sixties on, following the fire in Rome (64) during the reign of Nero, the Christians had been arrested, convicted, even tortured and executed (cf Frend 1965:104ff). That instigated action against the Christians in the provinces as well. The Apocalypse, written probably thirty years after Nero's reign, portrays Nero, along with Antiochus Epiphanes, as the prototype of evil in chapters 11, 13 and 17, although his name is not mentioned.

The death of Antipas (2:13) may have been due to his being a Christian: Whatever the reason, it was regarded as a traumatic event in Christian circles in Asia Minor.

The banishment of John, the prophet, (relegatio) to Patmos, also indicates some form of Roman repression (cf Collins 1984:102) and probably illustrates the Christian's precarious legal position, especially when they opposed Rome's political perspectives.

The issue of wealth and poverty in general also played a prominent role in the tensions experienced by the Christians (cf Rv 18), particularly the resentment of the East against Rome because of the heavy taxes, not to mention the virulent attacks on Rome by the Jews as recorded in the Sibyl-line oracles of Jewish origin (cf SibOr 3:350-355; 4:145-148; 5:160-161,166,173).

The use of the name Babylon, symbolising Rome, in chapters 17 and 18 speaks for itself. Rome is symbolised as the 'second' destructor of Jerusa-
The author of the Apocalypse polemises against the tendency to adaptation to conform to the Roman political powers (cf Ephesus, Pergamum and Thyatira). That would imply a theological compromise by Christians participating in the political, economical and social life of the Roman cities.

3.2.5 Social deprivation
A definite problem in the Christian communities was that of social deprivation. Social defects in their society necessitated a psychological catharsis. Although it is difficult to verify the economical and sociological data applied to Asia Minor at the end of the first century, we are probably confronted with a situation of at least relative deprivation which the sociologists describe as 'a negative discrepancy between legitimate expectation and actuality' (Aberle 1962:209f).

Part of the Christians' social deprivation could probably be ascribed to a feeling of rootlessness due to their move away from the context of Hellenistic Roman culture to a Christian Jewish culture and again from the Jewish atmosphere to the more isolated context of Christianity. The expulsion from the synagogue caused a feeling of animosity towards the Jews, as well as social insecurity. The social status of Christians in Asia Minor was threatened. Some were even disenfranchised and in such a way associated with the poor against Rome.

To sum up, the Christians were faced with a dilemma: whether to identify with pagan society by making sacrifices to the emperor and participating, as expected, in the activities of guilds and other social matters, or to compromise with Judaism on terms which would win them acceptance in the synagogue, but which would imply a denial of the Messiah (cf Hemer 1986:10). Therefore the Apocalypse is not just a simple response to a certain social situation, but a particular interpreted religious view within a specific situation; the product of the interaction between a kind of pre-understanding and the prevailing socio-historical situation (cf Collins 1984:107).

4 MORE SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS

4.1 Functional language
The rhetorical language which has grown from a specific rhetorical situation is functional. By means of a cathartic journey it moves the hearers/readers from alienation through purification to redemption (cf Fiorenza 1986:141). The function of the language is to overcome the tension between the expectations of the believers and reality, that is the cognitive dissonance (cf Collins 1984:141). This does not really remove the socio-political exigency or religious tensions or economical discrimination, but helps to control the destructive effects of these realities. The language helps the readers/hearers to control their fear; to sustain their vision and to fasten their belief in the Lamb.

As already stated, the language of the Apocalypse guides the hearers/readers through purification to redemption. As part of such a journey, chapter 1 awakens expectations concerning the protagonist Jesus. The seven messages in chapters 2-3 are applications of chapter 1. The narrative fur-
ther unfolds in spirals in which redemption and judgement are juxtaposed as part of God's process of purification. The emphasis on redemption is strengthened by sketching the activities of the Lamb (cf chapter 4f). The narration regarding the seals, trumpets and bowls is not included to scare people, but as part of God's process of purification. The final process of redemption as identification with the followers of the Lamb happens when the readers'/hearers' suffering and persecution have been transformed into a triumph in 19:11-22:5.

4.2 Informative, cognitive, expressive and evocative types of language

It is important to note the types of language we are dealing with in the Apocalypse: informative language - to gain information about people and things (cf 1:14f); cognitive language - to think interpretively about things and people (cf 1:20); expressive language - to display attitudes and feelings (14:7) and evocative language - to elicit attitudes and feelings (cf 6:10) (cf Collins 1984:149f).

Although the language of the Apocalypse could be described as informative and cognitive, therefore referential, allowing us to relate Revelation to its socio-historical context, the primary purpose is not to give information, but to call for commitment to the attitudes and actions mentioned. The effect is that the hearer or reader shares responsively in the interpretation! Reading and hearing the language of the Apocalypse therefore manipulate the hearer's/reader's attitudes and even feelings by the use of effective symbols.

The techniques used in the language (parole) vary from effective symbols to an artful plot. The Apocalypse is presented as an authoritative revelation of heavenly origin. It comes from God through Jesus Christ (1:1) and John's testimony which he receives from the angel is valid (cf 1:2). On the other hand, the Roman reign is demonstrated to have Satan on their side, but the experience of powerlessness is mitigated by the assurance that the Christians have access to privileged information of heavenly origin (cf Collins 1984:152f).

4.3 Mythic therapy or symbolic transformation?

Gager sees the language of the Apocalypse as mythic therapy (1975:49f). Through the recital of the myth, the believer is transported into the 'ideal time'. This means that the narrative overcomes the duality within the present situation, providing the believer with 'an experience of millenial bliss as a living reality' (1975:55; cf Barr 1984:47). And this approach which contains an important element of truth, reminds us of Levi-Strauss' analogy between mythic and psychoanalytic processes (1967:181ff).

I would, however, prefer to see John's use of symbolic language as transformations intended to fit into his symbolic universe. In chapter 5 John is told that 'the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David has conquered' (verse 5: RSV). Instead, John sees 'a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain' (verse 6: RSV). The strong symbol of the Lion with its meaning (from a viewpoint of Hebrew messianic expectations) is transformed into the 'weak' symbol of the Lamb. John in effect says: Jesus is Messiah through his death, therefore the Lamb is the Lion. The Lamb's death is not his defeat but his guarantee of victory. Together with the Lamb (14:1),
every hearer/reader who suffers, is the real conqueror. And in that sense of symbolic transformation, the language of the Apocalypse has a power of its own (cf 4 Ezra 13:15-50; Apoc Bar 40:1-2).

4.4 A symbolic universe
By constructing a symbolic universe, the language of the Apocalypse persuades the reader to participate. The strength of the persuasion and motivation does not only lie in the theological framework or historical arguments of the Apocalypse, but also in the hortatory, emotional and dramatical language which persuades the reader or hearer by evoking identification, emotions and reactions. In order to apply this at ground level in the reading and hearing of the Apocalypse, the community of Christians is motivated and encouraged in its historical situation of persecution and humiliation at the end of the first century in Asia-Minor.

The author of the Apocalypse, probably an apocalyptic prophet John (cf Du Rand 1990:187), could have written an ordinary letter of exhortation to the oppressed community, but by means of a specific application of language, he creates a symbolic universe within the framework of a prophetic pastoral letter (cf Fiorenza 1986:130). The vision of a symbolic world serves to encourage the Christians to gain perspectives in the face of persecution. The reader's or hearer's emotions and intellectual identifications are to be channelled into desired attitudes.

The formation of such a symbolic universe as symbolic transformation of the world is strategically legitimated for the individual, as well as for the community, because of the shelter it provides from ultimate terror. For example, an individual is anticipating his or her own death with the terror of death sufficiently mitigated (Berger & Luckmann 1967:102; cf Fiorenza 1986:130). The same applies to social institutions. Through reference to a cosmic order of justice, the individual comes to realise that the suffering and discrimination of the present world will be transported to a cosmic order where God will bring about justice.

We do find many overtones derived from Graeco-Roman society and religion, but the dominant overtones of the language, sketching the symbolic universe of the Apocalypse, come from the cult of Israel. This cultic symbolic language of Israel (cf the temple, priests, sacrifice altar, hymns, to name but a few) functions as a language within a certain framework to construct the heavenly symbolic universe. It even helps to alienate the readers further from the Roman and pagan mysteries and pagan cult.

4.5 A cathartic journey
The readers/hearers of the Apocalypse are confronted with a language which is not only the vehicle for the alleviation of stress, but a catharsis in itself through which the incomprehensible comes to be understood. It takes the believers on a journey which begins and ends in the real world through another reality, seducing the readers away from the chaotic reality in which they live (cf Barr 1984:48). The readers understand that through their everyday suffering as martyrs, they are partaking in the process of bringing salvation and judgement to the world. The language of the Apocalypse has a definite cathartic effect, not only in the sense of a catharsis of emotional feelings of fear and resentment towards Rome (the view of
Collins 1981:6), but in the sense of eschatological identification. They experience, during the present, the reality that victims are actually victors. They do not suffer helplessly at the brutal hands of Rome, but are participating in God's victorious march to overthrow evil and establish his kingdom.

This cathartic effect of the language of the Apocalypse does not solve every problem, but directs the psychological feelings of fear and resentment towards theological perspectives. The hearers/readers are convinced that Jesus, the Lamb, though slain, controls the destiny of the world (ch 5). The inspiring perspective of a heavenly outcome where a Lamb and martyrs reign, from a socio-psychological viewpoint functions as an imaginative way of solving the tension between expectations and social reality. This is especially demonstrated in 11:12 when a loud voice from heaven says: 'Come up hither. And in the sight of their foes they went up to heaven in a cloud'. The two witnesses are saved and taken by God to God himself!

It is argued that the Christian communities experienced fear of and resentment at the power of Rome leading to feelings of envy and vengeance (Collins 1984:152ff). Forbidden emotions are to be overcome through the purgatory effect of the language. A Collins has put her view of the language of the Apocalypse too strongly and to my opinion one-sidedly. The Christians are not blood-thirsty in their so-called desire for vengeance. Although we do not agree with every part of Collins' theory, she forces us to take the psychological impact of the language of the Apocalypse into serious consideration.

5 A PSYCHOTHERAPEUTIC DIMENSION

According to a hermeneutic of displacement, developed by Lurvey (1983) from Jung and Assagioli's therapeutic model of the ego, the self and the unconscious, the language of the Apocalypse possesses levels of meaning that are observed and require further interpretation (1983:102ff; cf Du Rand 1988:71ff). These depths of meaning in the language are uncovered by treating the subject matter as unconscious psychological processes within the personality which means that the apocalyptic context of Revelation is momentarily displaced by an anthropological and psychological frame of reference (Du Rand 1988:72). The socially therapeutic effect of apocalyptic language, as in the Apocalypse of John, is that another world transcends and informs the world of everyday consciousness. The higher realm, like in psychosynthesis, is generally supreme over the lower realm. To summarise the theory: parallel to the so-called this world/other world of the Apocalypse of John (the symbolic universe) is the conscious/unconscious or conscious self/higher self relationship in psychosynthesis (cf Lurvey 1983:105).

Applied to the language of the Apocalypse of John, it would mean that feelings of deprivation and dissonance among the Christians in crisis at the end of the first century in Asia Minor are reflected in the language and symbolism. Moreover, the unconscious world of the higher self provides personally transcendent knowledge and therapeutic healing to the conscious self (Lurvey 1983:138; cf Du Rand 1988:72).

The other-world angel guides the human John into the transcendent mys-
tery. This does not mean that the Apocalypse is only the result of the
seer's unconscious psyche!

The marriage of the Lamb (19) and the heavenly Jerusalem (21) functions
as a transcendent mystery, with therapeutic healing to the conscious self
of Christians caught in the crisis and conflict of Roman dominance.

Such an hermeneutical approach awakens a lot of theological questions,
but opens up stimulating perspectives covering the therapeutic effect of
the language of the Apocalypse that cannot be ignored.

6 A CONCLUSIVE APPLICATION

Let us select some moments from Revelation 14 as an example of this socio­
psychological effect of the language of the Apocalypse. Revelation 14:1-5
has a clear structure which consists of a specific vision (vi): the 144
000 with the Lamb on Mount Sion; the audition (vv2-3): the voice from hea­
ven with a song no one could learn except the 144 000 and the identifica­
tion as explanation of the 144 000 (vv4-5) as virgins, followers of the
Lamb, a first fruit and the spotless (cf Mounce 1977:267f; Fiorenza

The 144 000 around the Lamb in 14:1-5 symbolise the anti-image of the
beast and its followers, sketched in the preceding chapter 13. And this
vision is followed by three angelic proclamations concerning God's judge­
gment of the world (vv6-7), the fall of Babylon (v8) and punishment for
those who worship the beast (vv9-11).

According to a socio-historical interpretation, the beast and cult­
agent probably refer to Rome. And the 144 000, the anti-image of the fol­
lowers of the beast: Who are they? Jewish Christians; elect Christians;
Christian ascetic males; the holy rest of Israel; highpriestly followers
of the Lamb; the military army of the Lamb preparing for the messianic
battle (cf Böcher 1975:56-63)? Rather than making a choice for one speci­
fic meaning or even adding another possibility, one can also find meaning
in the language used (parole). The symbolic-poetic images portray meaning
and have the power of persuasion in its own socio-historical situation (cf

The 144 000 with the divine name on the foreheads represent a vision
antithetical to that of the dragon, two beasts and their followers. In the
co-text of the Apocalypse as a whole it also carries the motif of the two
witnesses, the measuring of the temple and the woman and the child. It is
also linked with the visions of redemption and salvation: it reminds of
the slaughtered but exalted Lamb in chapter 5; the sealing of the 144 000
and their company with the Lamb in chapter 7; the victory of the Lamb and
his followers in 17:14 and the vision of the sacred marriage of the Lamb
in 19:10, as well as the service of those with the divine name on their
foreheads in 22:3-5.

The author is persuading and motivating the hearers and readers to
choose for salvation by juxtaposing the followers of the Lamb with the
followers of the beasts who also have marks on the foreheads and hands (ch
13). Only the 144 000 are able to learn the song sung by the heavenly
choir (v3). The rhetorical language convinces the readers to identify with
these 144 000. They are those 'who had been redeemed from the earth' (RSV)
(οι ἡγορασμένοι ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς). The identification with the saved is very
clear. It is emphasised even more when the strong ἀγοράζειν ἀπὸ in 14:3 is compared with ἀγοράζειν ἐκ in 5:9 to speak of the redemption of Christians.

The followers of the Lamb are called παρθένοι (virgins) and ἀπαρχή (first fruit). That is the rhetorical description of the 144,000 with whom the readers or hearers are to be identified, explained further in verses 12-13. The property of God, those with the name of God and the Lamb on the forehead, are the followers of the Lamb who leads to salvation (cf 7:17) whereas the beast from the abyss will go to destruction (17:18). Following the Lamb now means salvation and fullness of life.

The expression παρθένοι points strongly to the cultic purity of the Lamb's followers. They are the actual bride of the Lamb and the new Jerusalem (cf 21:9-11). The anti-image to the pureness of the followers as παρθένοι is that of Babylon who seduces the nations (cf 17:1ff). The rhetorical function of this description of the 144,000 in 14:1-5 is to stress that the life and attitude of the readers/hearers are preconditional for eschatological salvation. Identify with the 144,000 in everything you undertake! Therefore, to keep up your παρθένοι-ship means to cling with ὑπομονή to the word of God and the faith of Jesus (14:12). This is even further emphasised at the end of the passage, in verse 13: 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth.' The build-up in the explanation of the 144,000 and the rhetorical function of persuading the hearers and readers are convincing. The life-practice of the hearers and readers is treated as the condition for eschatological salvation. They are to make the right choice for the Lamb against the beast and to live accordingly.

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SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL VIEW — THE LANGUAGE OF REVELATIONS


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