‘NOW THE SALVATION OF OUR GOD HAS COME...’ A NARRATIVE PERSPECTIVE ON THE HYMNS IN REVELATION 12-15

JAN A DU RAND

ABSTRACT
The hymns in the Apocalypse of John function as interpretative commentary on decisive events in the unfolding of the plot. From narratological perspective, it is clear that the reader becomes involved in responsive worshipping through association with the hymns. The reader, representing the faithful, experiences a catharsis in associating with the hymns, to live from the perspective that God's kingly rule is visually manifested through the decisive Christ-event. From an analysis of 12:10-10 and 15:3-4 it becomes even more clear that the struggle between good and evil, represented spatially in heaven and on earth respectively has been won by God. Therefore, the faithful have reason to praise God for his deeds, ways and righteous acts and the fact that his kingly rule and salvation have arrived on earth.

1 THE APOCALYPSE AS DRAMATIC NARRATIVE
The Apocalypse of John should be read as a unity. The Christ-event plays such a dominant role as structuring principle of cohesion that the Apocalypse as narrative also has to be analysed as a dramatic narrative, like a musical (cf Du Rand 1993). Therefore, the staging of God's execution of salvation and judgement in the unfolding of the narrative of the Apocalypse can be described as three acts:

Act one: God's involvement in the church because of the Christ-event (chapters 1-3)
Act two: The unfolding of God's plan of salvation and judgement in the cosmos on the basis of the Christ-event (chapters 4-11)
Act three: The final unfolding of God's salvation and judgement in history because of the Christ-event (chapters 12-22) (cf Du Rand 1993).
On the one hand the narrative, as a unity, provides a structured framework to the sequence of hymns in the Apocalypse, and on the other hand the hymns add interpretation to the structure of the narrative as a whole.

2 THE HYMNS AS PART OF THIS DRAMATIC NARRATIVE

The Apocalypse as dramatic narrative is very much concerned with the worshipping community (cf Thompson 1990:53-73; Vanni 1991:365).

Some scholars have even argued that the structure of certain chapters or the Book as a whole is based upon liturgical patterns. Shepherd traced the structure of the Apocalypse back to the church’s paschal liturgy (1960:47) and Lauchli to the liturgy of Asia Minor (1960:364). Recently, scholars have argued that the hymns are the creations of the author designed to fit functionally into the literary and theological framework of the dramatic narrative (cf Carnegie 1982:247, Prigent 1964:68). Thompson, for example, sees worship as the context and setting within which the eschatological narratives unfold. He also emphasises that heavenly worship is the literary form by means of which the seer realises the kingship of God and his judgement (1969:342). The point to be made at this stage is that the hymns are functional in the literary dramatic narrative of the Apocalypse.

From a narrative perspective, the hymns reflect not only meaningful commentary within the above-mentioned three dramatic acts of the Apocalypse, but also initiate reader participation in the narrative world. The aim of this contribution is to enter the research field regarding the application of the narratological methodology by analysing the hymns in chapters 12-15. Furthermore the aim is to determine the functional role of the hymns within the meaningful unfolding of the narrative.

The function of hymns in general has an exciting history in the Jewish-Christian tradition. In the Hebrew Old Testament, the Psalms, for example, give thanks and adoration to God, who through his mighty deeds has led his kingdom throughout history. Ps 9 is but one typical example of this. Phlp 2:5-11, Eph 5:19, Col 1:15-20 and particularly the Lucan series in chapters 1-2 are amongst the most famous hymns in the New Testament. Such hymns do not only play a functional role in every context, but are also decisive to the structure and meaning of the New Testament writings.

Before the narrative function of the hymns in Rv 12-15 can be determined, the following questions must be answered: What is a hymn? And also: On what basis is a hymn in the Apocalypse constituted? In other words: Are the hymns separately added contributions to the text on liturgical grounds or are they the work of the author himself? The latter statement enjoys the most support (cf Harris 1988:12). The hymns are artistically and functionally interwoven in the narrative of the Apocalypse. However, this does not exclude the cult practices
of the readers, as well as the content of the narrative. Therefore we also have to
honour the contextual information concerning the historical and literary ques-
tions of the text.

For example, do the hymns in the Apocalypse function in the same way as
the praise songs in the Greek tragedies? Blevins supports this statement
(1984:19), by referring to Brewer and Bowman (1955:67), who distinguish
between individual songs in the Apocalypse (cf 12:10-12; 14:7,8,9-11,15,18;
16:5-6,7; 18:2-3,4,20,21-24; 19:18; 21:3-4) and choir hymns (4:6ff, 10f; 5:9 v,
11f, 13; 6:9ff, 15-17; 7:9ff, 11; 1:15, 16f; 15:2-4; 18:4-19; 19:1ff). Harris,
however, demonstrates convincingly that these theories include elements of
validity but fail to explain the purpose and meaning of the hymns in the Apoca-

Another viewpoint is that the hymns in the Apocalypse do provide valuable
commentary on the unfolding of events in the dramatic narrative. Even though
the choirs in the Greek dramas can also provide interpretive comments on the
events, they often function as a separate character, and sometimes even contra-
dict the views of the protagonist. A simplistic parallel between the choirs in the
Greek dramas and the hymns in the Apocalypse can therefore not simply be
drawn. For this reason the somewhat simplistic classification of hymns by
Brewer and Bowman on the grounds of such a parallel with the Greek tragedies
and dramas is not valid.

In apocalyptic literature we should rather make use of criteria from the text
itself to help us understand the hymns. Stylistic criteria can, amongst others,
include the following: the form of the verbs (for example in second or third
person), the use of particles, possible parallelismus membrorum, the introduc-
tion of paragraphs and anti-paragraphs, rhetoric elements such as inclusio,
chiasms and antithesis and possible hapax lagomena. Co-textual criteria which
should also be considered are: the use of leading formulas such as λέγω, the
presence of elements such as petition to God for help, and a prayer or song of
praise at the end of the hymn.

Jørns succeeds in making a valuable contribution by distinguishing as follows
between the hymns on the grounds of the principle of verse and anti-verse
(1971:15-19):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VERSE</th>
<th>ANTI-VERSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4:9</td>
<td>4:11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:9b-10</td>
<td>5:12-13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:10b</td>
<td>7:12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:15</td>
<td>11:17-18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16:5b-6</td>
<td>16:7b</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If a selection of the mentioned stylistic and co-textual criteria is considered, taking into account Jörns' classification according to verse and anti-verse, and 4:8, 12:10-12 and 15:3 are taken as clearly being hymns, the following passages in Revelation can be classified as hymns: 4:8-11; 5:9-13; 7:10-12; 11:15-18; 12:10-12; 15:3-4; 16:5-7; 19:1-8

References to hymns are also made in 5:11-12,13 and 14:2-4. The hymn sections may reflect certain liturgical elements from tradition on a historical level, but functionally form part of a final narrative product which is probably the work of one author. Therefore they contribute functionally to the 'Gestalt' of the dramatic narrative as a whole.

Once one is certain of the function of the hymns in the narrative, it is necessary to consider more questions in general: To whom are these hymns addressed? Who are the participants? And also: Does the form of the hymns contribute in any way towards to the functional understanding of the message of the Apocalypse?

A selective overview helps to answer these questions and to come to grips with the narrative and the functional role of the hymns in the unfolding of the plot of the Apocalypse:

In the opening vision of heaven, the hymn in chapter 4 is addressed to God 'who sat there' on the throne (4:3). The living creatures praise Him: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come' (4:8). And the 24 elders worship Him: 'You are worthy...for you created all things...'
The emphasis in the hymn in chapter 4 falls on God as Creator. It serves as a prelude to the praise God as Saviour in chapter 5. Now the emphasis falls explicitly on the Christ-event when the Lamb is addressed in the new song: 'You are worthy to take the scroll...because you were slain and with your blood you purchased men for God...' (5:9). This is followed by the many angels, singing: 'Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain...' (5:12). The attributions to God in 4:11 are transferred to the Lamb in 5:12 and used for God in 7:12. The prominence of the Christ-event is again brought to the fore in 7:10 when God and the Lamb are addressed: 'Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne and to the Lamb'. The combination of God and the Lamb constitutes a striking pattern of interpretation in the hymns of the Apocalypse. This fits into the structural conclusion that the Christ-event represents a crucial element in structuring the Apocalypse into three acts to be compared with a musical drama. Although it is stated that God alone is to be worshipped (19:10; 22:8-9), the real implication is that the Lamb also has to be worshipped. In 11:15-18 the combination of the Lord and his Christ is once again repeated. God has conquered the
world and his kingly rule will be for ever. After Satan has been thrown from
heaven, the struggle proceeds on earth (12:10-12)—but the faithful conquer
because of the blood of the Lamb. In 15:3-4 and 16:5-7 God is praised as the
almighty King and the holy One and in 19:1-8 the same pattern is followed. The
worship is addressed to God and the Lamb, but primarily to God, the Almighty,
who brought salvation through the Christ-event.

The identity of the participants or worshippers are, to a certain extent, also
linked to the Christ-event. The great multitude, wearing white robes and holding
palm branches according to 7:9, consists of those ‘who have come out of the
great tribulation’, who have ‘washed their robes and made them white in the
blood of the Lamb’ (7:14). They are the same as the 144 000 mentioned in 7:4-
8, as well as the army described in 14:1. They sing a new song in front of the
Lamb (14:3). It is the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb (15:3). They
may be viewed as the people of the new exodus. They were ‘victorious over the
beast and his image’ (15:2). The reference to the song of Moses probably em­
phasises the aspect of salvation. The combination of Moses and the Lamb,
therefore, rests on the meaning of salvation brought by Moses and the Lamb for
the people of God. According to 19:1-3,6, the great multitude represents the
same group mentioned in 7:9-10, the army of the Lamb, preparing for the
wedding of the Lamb (19:7,9), at which they will be called the ‘armies of
heaven’ (19:14). The martyrs who join in the worship of heaven are selected as
the followers of the Lamb who share in his work and witness his conquest. Even
the followers’ identity as worshippers is defined by the Christ-event, the victory
of the Lamb. The hymn, sung by the few living creatures in 4:8, reminds of the
trisagion of Isaiah’s vision (Isa 6:3) and that of the twenty-four elders in 11:15-
18, of the enthronement psalms (cf Pss 93,97 and 99). And the ‘new songs’
(4:3; 5:9) probably recall the introductory exhortations to ‘sing unto the Lord a
new song’ (Pss 96,98) (cf Laws 1988:75). While the ‘hallelujah choir’
(19:1,3,4,6) recalls the Hallel psalms (cf Pss 146-150). Although, the expres­
sion ‘you are worthy’ (4:11; 5:9,12) lacks Biblical precedent, the framework of
reference indicates the dominance of the Christ-event in identifying the wor­
shippers.

Is there any pattern to these hymns? The first impression is that they are
antiphonal, which means that the choir answers the choir. For example, in 4:8
the living creatures open with the trisagion to God, after which the twenty-four
elders respond with ‘You are worthy’ (4:11), to be followed by a combination
of the living creatures and elders to form one choir praising the Lamb’s work in
5:8-10, to which the chorus of myriads and angels reply with ‘worthy is the
Lamb who was slain...’ Then, ‘every creature in heaven and on earth’ (5:13)
follows the example and they all praise God and the Lamb together in crescendo
(5:13). The final moment in this series of antiphonal singing comes from the
few living creatures who conclude with an ‘Amen’ in 5:14. The orchestrated series of performances recall the Hellenistic theatre: the dramatic achievement of the chorus, interpreting, commenting and explaining the action around a specific theme. The presentation of the hymns as media of worship reflects the centrality of the ‘basso ostinato’, the functional Christ-event from chapter to chapter, whatever the act may be. And in the process of listening, the readers or audience experience a catharsis from the negative experience of their own world. The readers are overwhelmed and can only answer in one way: by worshipping God and the Lamb (cf 4:10; 5:8; 7:11; 9:4).

The form and content of worship are contingently contained in the hymns themselves To understand the functional place of the hymns in the apocalyptic narrative therefore means to consider worship an integral part of the story. It should be kept in mind that worship in the Apocalypse is mainly that of heaven or the cosmos (5:13), and not that of people on earth (cf Laws 1988:79).

The combination of worship and singing functionally proves that the central theme of the Christ-event has finally elicited a response from man. Singing becomes the spontaneous worshipping interpretation. With Aune one can conclude, that the hymns are ‘devices to advance the plot’ (1987:243). The unfolding of the decisive meaning of the Christ-event in the narrative receives interpretative attention in the hymns of the Apocalypse.

Through liturgical celebration eschatological existential expectations are experienced in the present (cf Thompson 1990:61). In the context of worship the dominance of the Christ-event, like a ‘basso ostinato’, emphasises the realisation of the eschatological dimension. And so, heaven and earth, as well as future and present are linked in the celebration of the hymns in chapters 12-15. These chapters are to be analysed as a separate unity.

3 NARRATIVE FUNCTION OF THE HYMNS IN 12:1-15:8

3.1 12:1-12

3.1.1 Framework
Before embarking upon the analysis 12:1-12, we should also take notice of the preceding hymn in 11:15-19. The expression ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ’ (11:15), is retrospective of the events that were initiated in the first seal series (cf Harris 1988:149), that is the actualising of the kingship of God on earth (cf Jörns 1971:93). According to Lambrecht (1980:101), it could also be described as a proleptic reflection on the final victory of God. Semantically the function of the spatial distinction between heaven and earth should also be taken into consideration. It spells out the empirical manifestation of ideological oppositions in the framework of the
narrative. Good is manifested in heaven and evil on earth. In the unfolding of the narrative, God visits punishment upon the earth (evil) in the two series of seven, but, according to chapter 11, He is demonstrating the establishment of his kingship on earth. God's kingly rule is visibly conquering the evil on earth so that the kingdom of the earth becomes the kingdom of God and of the Lamb (cf Bauckham 1993:88). In the following act (Act three, 12:1-22:21) this reality will manifest in history. The seventh trumpet majestically proclaims the kingly rule of God and his Anointed at the end of Act two (11:55) and reaffirms the decisive position of God and the Lamb in the cosmos.

The third act tells of the combat between the divine and evil forces, as well as the historical unfolding of salvation and judgement. The crucial moment of salvation is symbolised by the birth of the child (12:5) and evil by the evil trio: the dragon and two beasts (12:3-13:18). The messianic protagonist is historically set up against the apocalyptic evil antagonist. The woman has to deliver the child and the dragon has to distract the child. The outcome of the conflict between these opposing forces is decisive for man and history. From the viewpoint of the evil dragon the birth of the child will bring about its own death and destruction. In order to prove his own power and superiority, God has to intervene to allow the birth of the child to realise. And this is exactly what happened according to 12:5-6. The child was born and snatched up to God and to his throne (12:5). On the other hand, the great dragon, the devil was conquered and hurled to the earth. The opposite destinies of the good (heaven) and the evil (earth) are once again emphasised. And in the unfolding of this conflict, the reader becomes more and more convinced that God is getting the upper hand over evil: God is the Conqueror through the Christ-event.

It reminds very strongly of the typical mythic pattern and the Messianic war traditions e g the 07 of combat which was widespread in the Near Eastern world (cf Collins 1976:57-59). According to Fontenrose's scheme, the following applied elements can be recognised in a probable pattern of myth in chapter 12 (cf Fontenrose 1959:6-11; cf Yarbo Collins 1976:59-61), which definitely influences the meaning of the hymn in 12:10-12: a) The dragon (3); b) Chaos and disorder (4a); c) The attack (4b); d) The Champion (5a); e) The champion’s death (5b); f) Recovery of the champion (7a); g) Battle renewed and victory (7b-9); h) Restoration and confirmation of order (10-12a) and i) The dragon’s reign (12b-17). After the battle has been renewed and won (12:7-9), restoration and confirmation of order follow. This is celebrated in the hymn in 12:10-12 in the words: ‘Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ.’

3.1.2 Analysis of 12:10-12
The hymn in 12:10-12 can be analysed as follows:
3.1.2.1 Text of 12:10-12

| Strophe 1 | v10 1.1 | ἀρτι ἐγένετο ἡ σωτηρία καὶ ἡ δύναμις καὶ ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν |
| Acclamatio | 1.2 | καὶ ἡ ἐξουσία τοῦ Χριστοῦ αὐτοῦ |
| | 1.3 | ὁ κατήγαρος τῶν ἁδελφῶν ἡμῶν |
| | 1.4 | ὁ κατηγορῶν αὐτοὺς ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτὸς |

| Strophe 2 | v11 2.1 | Καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐνίκησαν αὐτὸν διὰ τὸ ἀίμα τοῦ ἁρπίου |
| Acclamatio | 2.2 | καὶ διὰ τὸν λόγον τῆς μαρτυρίας αὐτῶν |
| Sacred myth | 2.3 | καὶ οὐκ ἠγάπησαν τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτῶν ἀρχι θανάτου. |

| Strophe 3 | v12 3.1 | διὰ τοῦτο εὑφραίνεσθε οἱ οὐρανοὶ καὶ οἱ ἐν αὐτοῖς σκῆνοῦντες |

3.1.2.2 Translation of 12:10-12

| Strophe 1 | v10 1.1 | Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. |
| Acclamatio | 1.2 | For the accuser of our brothers has been hurled down |
| | 1.3 | who accuses them before our God day and night. |

| Strophe 2 | v11 2.1 | They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb |
| Sacred myth | 2.2 | and by the word of their testimony; |
| | 2.3 | they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. |
v12 3.1 Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them!

strophe 3

3.2 But woe to the earth and the sea,

Ehchortatio

3.3 because the devil has gone down to you!

b 3.4 He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.

3.1.2.3 Conclusive comments
From the above analysis the following conclusive observations can be made:

- The hymnic composition comprises of three strophes, consisting of four, three and four lines respectively.
- According to content and form the structure can be schematised as follows:

**STROPHE 1: ACCLAMATIO** (verse 10)

a Statement

'Now have come…'

1.1 God's salvation, power and kingdom

1.2 Christ's authority

b Cause

The accuser is hurled down

1.3 The accuser is hurled down

1.4 What the accuser does

**STROPHE 2: ‘SACRED MYTH’** (verse 11)

a Statement

They overcame the accuser

2.1 They overcame the accuser by the blood of the Lamb

2.2 They overcame the accuser by word of their testimony

b Cause

They did not shrink from death

2.3 Because they did not shrink from death

**STROPHE 3: EXHORTATIO** (verse 12)

a Statement

Therefore rejoice and woe…

3.1 Rejoice heavens and indwellers

3.2 Woe to the earth and sea
b Cause
Devil has gone down

3.3 The devil has gone down
3.4 Knowing that his time is short

The strophes are constructed as parallels, in a pattern of emphasising the statement and stating the cause. In strophes 1 and 3 the causes are indicated by ὅτι and in strophe 2 by an epexegetic καὶ.

The breaking through of God's salvation, power and kingdom and Christ's authority in strophe 1 dominate the message of this hymn, that is the acclamation to be elaborated on in strophes 2 and 3. The prominent linking of God and Christ in 1.1 and 1.2 is striking. The reason for this breakthrough is the symbolic reference to the Christ-event through which the accuser is cast down (compare 1.3 and 1.4 with 2.1). In strophe 2 the 'story' of the accuser's downfall is told. This can be called 'sacred myth' (cf Topping 1969; Barkhuizen 1989:14). It is the dramatic retelling of the Christ-event. The 'sacred myth' in strophe 2 is actually an expansion of the cause in 1.3 and 1.4, namely that the accuser is hurled down.

In strophe 3 the readers are exhorted to rejoice because of the breakthrough of the kingdom of God on the grounds of the accuser being cast down. The reader is once again reminded that good is seated in heaven and evil on earth (3.1 and 3.2). The exhortation is urgent because the struggle between good and evil, although represented as woe in the Christ-event, goes on.

Reader commitment is stimulated by the repetitive use of the genitive to express association (cf ἡμῶν (1.1), αὐτοῦ (1.2), ἡμῶν (1.3) and ἡμῶν (1.4)).

Note the parallelism in δύναμις τοῦ θεοῦ and ἔξουσία τοῦ Χριστοῦ (1.1 and 1.2); κατήγορον ὁ κατηγορῶν (1.3 and 1.4); διὰ τὸ αἷμα and διὰ τὸν λόγον (2.1 and 2.2); ἐνίκησαν and ἡγάπησαν (2.1 and 2.3); ἐὑφραίνεσθε and οὐκι (3.1 and 3.2—antithetic); οὐρανοὶ and γῆ (3.1 and 3.2—antithetic).

It is obvious that the first two lines of each strophe emphasise the result of something that happened in the past, the victory of God over the evil, that is the Christ-event. And the following line (strophe 2) or lines (strophes 1 and 3) state the cause (cf Collins 1976:137).

The typical background of 12:10-12 as hymn could be paralleled with the so-called Siegeslieder or victory songs (cf Gunkel, Begrich 1966:32-94). This is...
according to the pattern of argumentation: firstly, the breakthrough of salvation and victory is proclaimed in God's kingship (strophe 1); then the victory is described in 'sacred myth' form (strophe 2), to be followed by the exhortative call for rejoicing (strophe 3). Examples of such a pattern can be found in Psalms 46:1-8, 48:1-9, 76:1-10, 97:1-5 and 98:1-6 (cf Gunkel 1966:84-88). According to Collins (1976:142) the victory song (12:10-12) reflects the pattern of the Canaanite combat myth.

3.1.2.4 Summarised interpretation

The hymn in 12:10-12 can be viewed as an interpretative commentary on 12:1-9. The commentary follows on the decisive event of the casting down of the devil or Satan out of heaven onto the earth (12:9). According to the narrative, this was the result of the meaningful Christ-event, namely 'the blood of the Lamb', as well as the martyrdom of the saints and their testimony (cf Harris 1988:157). Satan is defeated. The narrative in the Apocalypse has reached a climax. God is Conqueror through the Christ-event which led to the martyrs' testimony for which they were not afraid to die. Giving one's life constitutes the ultimate example of giving witness as the result of one's imitation of the Lamb (12:11). And because of the role of the martyrs, Satan can no longer function in heaven as accuser of the faithful before God. But Satan's wrath has not come to an end (12:12). He is still active on earth. To sum up: According to the narrative, the defeat of Satan is linked to the martyrdom of the saints. The martyrdom of Jesus (cf 'blood of the Lamb' (12:11)) is linked to the martyrdom of the saints ('because they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death' (12:11)). This is remarkable information for understanding the rest of the unfolding of the narrative.

It is also meaningful to note that this hymn functions as a narrative expression of heavenly worship stressing the spatial dimension of things to come (cf Thompson 1990:67). And the presence of spatial as well as temporal (this age and the age to come) dimensions guarantee that the story of Revelation is integrally related to human existence. By means of the reference to the Christ-event ('basso ostinato'—cf Du Rand 1993:infra) the reader is reminded of a transcendent reality in which he or she participates liturgically.

Collins makes an interesting observation in this regard. Satan's loss of access to the heavenly court means no further accusations against the faithful in heaven (cf 1976:141). The accuser is silenced. Verse 10b (strophes 1.3 and 1.4) refers to the heavenly court where the accuser accuses our brothers before God day and night, and verse 11 refers to the earthly court where the faithful 'did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death' (strophe 2.3). The faithful's participation in the expiation of the Christ-event have won them acquittal in the heavenly court (Collins 1976:142). It applies only to those who 'did not love
their lives so much as to shrink from death'. They are to rejoice, but those who dwell on earth (and therefore in evil) will have woe (12:12) because Satan is yet to be defeated on earth (12:12). The application of the narrative has shifted from the national entity of the church, the mother (12:1), to the individual martyr. Only those individuals who share in the Christ-event have reason to rejoice!

3.2 Narrative overview of 12:13-14:20
A few accompanying remarks should suffice to establish a narrative bridge between the song in 12:10-12 and 15:3-4.

After the accuser has been hurled down to earth, he becomes very anxious to pursue his earthly enemies (12:12). He once again tries to devour the woman who gave birth to the child (12:13—cf Harris 1988:159). The woman is taken to the desert where she is nourished by God (12:14). The earth also helps the woman (12:15). The narrative emphasises that God is in control of creation, particularly of the faithful and those who hold to the Christ-event (12:17). The onslaught of Satan is not directed against a national group but against individuals who 'obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus' (12:17).

The shift in the narrative is obvious: after the devil has been cast down from heaven, the further decisive battle rages on earth, and is particularly directed against the individual faithful who have made the choice for the Christ-event.

In chapter 13 the narrator tells of a beast rising out of the sea (13:1). It is part of the onslaught of the dragon: a threefold onslaught. This beast is presented as a metaphorical representation of the Roman emperors (cf Harris 1988:160) and functions within the narrative as a parody of the Lamb. A very meaningful narrative marker in this chapter is the rhetorical question in 13:4: 'Who is like the beast? Who can make war against him?' It is not only reminiscent of 5:2: 'Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?', but emphasises the roll of the Lamb, personifying the Christ-event. It is only the Lamb who is worthy and only the Lamb can make war against the beast. A further narrative marker in this section is the use of the divine passives in 13:5,7 and 15, indicating that the beast and dragon are operating under God's control. The faithful are conquered by the beast, under the allowance of God (13:7). According to the narrative commentary in 13:9-10 the faithful are not to retaliate with violence, 'If anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he will be killed'. This is because the faithful are to imitate the Lamb. They belong to the Lamb (13:8) and they have to die like the Lamb did if necessary.

In chapter 14 the narrative shifts to the scene on mount Zion, indicating God's presence as well as that of the marked 144 000 according to 7:4. Only the 144 000 can learn to sing the new song because they have not defiled themselves with woman and 'they follow the Lamb wherever he goes' (13:4). This expres-
sion once again emphasises the polarity between the followers of the Lamb and the followers of the whore, Babylon (cf 17:7-18). The faithful are the first fruits of the work of God and the Lamb, and the language used is reminiscent of Jesus’ resurrection! The new song (14:3; cf 5:9) is related to the martyrdom of the Lamb and the reign of the saints in the kingdom of God (cf Harris 1988:163). The element of ‘newness’ projects forwards to the new Jerusalem (21:2), the new heaven and earth (21:1) and the newly created order (21:5). The term helps the reader to reorientate to a different sphere, a transition to the ‘new’ order. This also takes the reader to 15:1-8 where the ‘new song’ is given a name. The ‘new song’ as ‘the song of the Lamb’ (15:3) supersedes ‘the song of Moses’ (15:3). The conquering of the devil (12:9) results in a new exodus, the faithful bigger and better than that of Moses!

The three comments by the three flying angels in heaven (14:6-13) are meaningful contributions to the flow of the narrative. The first comment calls on the reader to give glory to God because of the arrival of his hour of judgement (14:6) and to worship God, which forms a contrast to the worship of the beast in 13:8. The reference to the fact that God’s judgement has come (14:6), is to be understood proleptically and analeptically: it is also mentioned in the hymns in 11:15-18 and 12:10-12: His judgement has come through the plagues, but still has to reach its final manifestation. In the same sense the fall of Babylon is narrated in the second comment, although the final fall is not described before 16:19.

The third comment mentions that those who receive the mark of the beast and worship him will be subject to God’s wrath (14:9). The reader is reminded of the opposing destinies of the faithful and the evildoers: the wicked will endure eternal torment (14:17-18; 20:11-14) while the faithful will have eternal bliss (21:3-4,22-27; 22:3-5).

In 14:12-13 the narrator is therefore encouraging the readers in reply to the statements by the flying angels. The faithful have to persist in keeping God’s commandments and following Jesus. These are deeds of martyrdom, and once again, remind the reader of the effect of the Christ-event.

In the next section the implications of 14:7, that God’s judgement has come, are spelled out. An angel comes from the temple and commands the Son of man to reap with the words: ‘Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe’ (14:15). We further read: ‘and the earth was harvested’ (14:16). The second angel reaps the vine of the earth and casts it into the great winepress of God’s wrath (14:19). It is widely accepted that the second reaping represents judgement and the first, that of the Son of Man, salvation (cf Mounce 1977:282).

The breakthrough of God’s kingly rule, power and salvation, as a result of the devil’s being cast from heaven (12:9-12), is accompanied by God’s final
cleaning up the earth, by his judgment as represented by the seven bowls.

3.3 15:3-4

3.3.1 Framework
The hymn in 15:3-4 is an interpretative commentary on the preceding events, but also an introduction to the final seven plagues (15:1-16:21). The seven angels with the seven last bowls mark the completion of God’s wrath (15:1). The last phase of the destruction of the earth (evil) by God’s wrath has begun. The entire earth will be affected. God’s final triumph and judgement will become visible on earth. Everyone has to recognise God as the Almighty king who is revealing his righteous deeds. Before the unfolding of the seven final plagues, the faithful are assured of their faith in the only God by calling in remembrance his deeds, to which they answer with fear and worship. This hymn results in a special moment of orientation for the faithful.

3.3.2 Analysis of 15:3-4
The hymn in 15:3-4 can be analysed as follows:

3.3.2.1 Text of 15:3-4

| Strophe 1 | v3 | 1.1 | μεγάλα καὶ θαυμαστὰ τὰ ἔργα σου |
| Acclamatio | a | 1.2 | Κύριε ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ |
| | b | 1.3 | δίκαιοι καὶ ἅλθηναι αἱ ὁδοὶ σου |
| | | 1.4 | ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν ἐθνῶν |
| Strophe 2 | v4 | 2.1 | Τις οὐ μὴ φοβηθῇ κύριε, |
| Exhortatio | 2.2 | καὶ δοξάσει τὸ ὄνομά σου; |

(Rhetorical question)

3.3.2.2 Translation of 15:3-4

| Strophe 1 | 1.1 | Great and marvellous are your deeds, |
| Acclamatio | 1.2 | Lord God Almighty. |
| | 1.3 | Just and true are your ways, |
| | 1.4 | King of the ages. |
2.1 Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name?

3.1 For you alone are holy.
3.2 (For) all nations will come and worship before you;
3.3 For your righteous acts have been revealed.

3.3.2.3 Conclusive comments

This hymn (15:3-4) can be classified as a doxology. It is structured in a pattern of three strophes consisting of four, two and three lines respectively. The structure of its content can be schematised as follows:

**STROPHE 1: DOXOLOGY: ACCLAMATIO** (verse 3)

1.1 His deeds (ἐργα)
1.2 God Almighty
1.3 His ways (ὁδοῖ)
1.4 God as King

**STROPHE 2: EXHORTATIO: RHETORICAL QUESTION** (verse 4a)

2.1 Fear the Lord
2.2 Glorify (worship) his name

**STROPHE 3: DOXOLOGY: CAUSE** (verse 4b)

3.1 For (ὁτι) you (God) are holy
3.2 For (ὁτι) nations will worship you
3.3 For (ὁτι) your acts are revealed

Strophes 1 and 3 are parallel related in the respect that they are both doxological. In strophe 1 we find doxological acclamations and in strophe 3 the doxological causes. God is praised as Almighty (1.2), King (1.4) and holy (3.1) while He is known by his deeds (1.1), ways (1.3) and righteous acts (3.3). The threefold pattern is obvious. By way of a rhetorical question in strophe 2, the reader is involved in this doxological presentation of the hymn.
° The occurrence of the genitive σοῦ referring to God in 1.1, 1.3, 2.2, 3.2 and 3.3 is striking. God is addressed and praised. It also functions as a unifying factor.

° Strophe 1 is an example of synonymous parallelism: the expression, μεγάλα καὶ θαυμάσια (1.1) is parallel to δίκαιοι καὶ ἀληθινοί (1.3) as well as the τὰ ἔργα σοῦ (1.1) to αἱ ὀδοί σου (1.3). Further, God is ὁ παντοκράτωρ (1.2) and ὁ βασιλεὺς (1.4). This reminds us of the typical Semitic style.

° The content of the hymn is referred to as ‘the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb’ (15:3). This is a reference to the song of Moses in Exodus 15:1-18 after the people had crossed the Red Sea and were very grateful towards God for the victory he had wrought through the plagues and deliverance from the Pharaoh. Such intertextual appropriation should be taken into consideration. The context of the song of Moses is probably political according to Exodus 15. Within the wider co-text of 15:3-4, the beasts can be viewed as politically interpreted figures, like the Pharaoh. They are represented in the narrative as the ‘new’ Pharaoh. The narrative parallel is completed when God is once again praised as the almighty King whose righteous acts have been revealed, just like in his deliverance of his people from Egypt. The deliverance of which the song of Moses sang in Exodus 15:1-18 prefigured the new deliverance brought about by the Christ-event.

° Strophe 2 is in the form of a rhetorica; question aimed at stimulating reader commitment. It reflects reaction to the doxology in strophe 1. It also functions proleptically in the sense that the exhortative call to fear the Lord (2.1) and to glorify his name (2.2) is taken up again in 3.2, with its exhortation to worship the Lord. Strophe 2 reflects the response of the reader, namely to praise God for what he is and for all he has accomplished (cf Mounce 1977:288; Roloff 1984:231).

° Strophe 3 is doxological in meaning but causal in format. The prominent threefold occurrence of ‘for’ (ὅτι) emphasises the reason for fearing the Lord and glorifying his name, because he is holy and his righteous acts have been revealed. The climax of agreement on the kingly rule of God lies in the nations’ coming to worship (προσκυνήσουσιν) before him.

° From another angle, the content of this hymn is projected to answer the following questions:

Prof Dr Jan A du Rand, Department of Biblical Studies, Rand Afrikaans University, PO Box 524, JOHANNESBURG, 2000 Republic of South Africa.