

## CONCLUSION

The book of the Apocalypse is a great work of literature. It manifests many contemporary literary features: it exhibits a lot of similarities to the prophetic literature; it has some characteristics in common with the epistolary literature; it also has some affinity to the Greek Tragedy; but it is the apocalyptic literary framework to which it predominantly adheres.

### **The Apocalypse as Prophetic Literature**

The apocalyptic had its beginnings in passages in the works of the prophets. It has been said that the apocalyptic was really an attempt to rationalise and systematise the predictive aspect of prophecy. Like the prophets, the apocalyptists see in the unfolding of history a purpose. The evil in the world may confound and confuse man but the divine will cannot be frustrated; the present ungodly phase and the consequent trials and tribulations will be replaced by the just and righteous rule of God established after vanquishing the evil forces and their agents. There are, however, significant variations. The prophet, to a large extent, announced his message orally, the written form is later codification. The apocalyptist, on the contrary, conveys his message in writing. The prophet generally spoke in his own name but the apocalyptist, for the most part, has recourse to pseudonymity: attributing his work to a person of antiquity, like Daniel, Enoch, Ezra, Baruch, etc.

The Apocalypse refers to itself as prophecy on six occasions: of these one each is found in the opening and the penultimate chapters (1:3; 19:10) and the others occur in the last chapter of the book (22:7,10,18,19), whereas 'revelation' is used only once (1:1).

The expression 'the prophets' is rare in the Jewish apocalypses but is found seven times in the Apocalypse (10:7; 11:10; 16:6; 18:20,24; 22:6,9).

John is given a mission to prophesy: And I was told, "You must again prophecy about many peoples and nations and tongues and kings" (10:11). This is similar in nature to the prophetic commissions of the Old Testament.

And he said to me, "Son of man, I send you to the people of Israel... and you shall say to them...

(Ez 2:3ff)

The word of the Lord came to me saying, "Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem ... (Jer 2:1ff)

And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said,

"Here am I! Send me." And he said, "Go and say to this people..." (Is 6:8ff)

The command is fulfilled in chs 12-22.

Prophecy was an important phenomenon in the nascent Christian communities. Corinth had prophets and prophetesses playing an active role in the community (1Cor 11:2-16; 14:1-40). Paul exhorts the Corinthian community as,

Make love your aim and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit. On the other hand, he who prophesies speaks to men for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation... (I Cor 14:1ff)

His letter to Timothy, too, points out the existence of prophecy among the early Christians (1 Tim 1:18; 4:14). In his letter to the Ephesians he speaks of the various ministries in the community:

And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers... (Eph 4:11ff)

Matthew also refers to prophets in the early church (7:22; 10:41). He who receives a prophet because he is a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward ... (Mt 10:41)

And so does Luke:

On the morrow we departed and came to Caesarea; and we entered the house of Philip the evangelist,

who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. And he had four unmarried daughters, who prophesied. While we were staying for some days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. And coming to us he took Paul's girdle and bound his own feet and hands, and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this girdle and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'" (Acts 21:8-11)

Hence, we can reasonably contextualise the Apocalypse in the prophetic ministry of the early Christian communities. Further, though the book taken as a whole fits into the apocalyptic genre, it does exhibit certain features of prophetic literature. The oracle is the most prominent prophetic literary form. An oracle is a divine revelation directly given by the deity, in this case, Yahweh. It may be of woe or weal, i.e., prophecy about future evil or future welfare. Feuillet argues that the Apocalypse is composed in the form of prophetic books, viz., woes against Israel and woes against nations - we find a striking example of this feature in Ezekiel chs 1-24 and 25-32. He points out that the chs 4-11 in the Apocalypse match the first category while chs 12-20, the second. The first reveals God's wrath against the Jews for rejecting Jesus and the consequent judgement resulting in the destruction of Jerusalem in A D 70. The second concerns with the destruction of Rome, the persecutor of God's people. The final chapters deal with the vindication and salvation of the faithful.<sup>1</sup> M Hopkins, too, expresses a similar view of the Apocalypse.<sup>2</sup> D E Aune holds that the message to the seven churches are prophetic oracles.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, the oracle is not always predictive; its use for denunciation of sin (e.g., Is 1:2-3; Jer 5:23-24; Am 5:21-22) or call for repentance (e.g., Is 1:16-17, 19-20; Jer 15:19-21; Amos 4:4-5; Zep 2:3) is not uncommon. The following is an example of its use in denouncing sin:

Sons have I reared and brought up,  
but they have rebelled against me.  
The ox knows its owner,  
and the ass its master's crib;

but Israel does not know,

my people do not understand. (Is 1:2-3)

Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;

remove the evil of your doings

from before my eyes;

cease to do evil,

learn to do good;

seek justice,

correct oppression;

defend the fatherless,

plead for the widow. (Is 1:16-17)

If you are willing and obedient,

you shall eat the good of the land;

But if you refuse and rebel,

you shall be devoured by the sword;

for the mouth of the Lord has spoken. (Is 1:19-20).

**The Apocalypse employs oracles for all the three purposes. The fall of Rome is announced in cryptic terms**

**Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the**

**wine of her impure passion (14:8).**

**Denunciation of sin and call for repentance is found in the letters to the seven churches (2:5, 14-16, 20-23;**

**3:1-3,15-16),**

**Remember then from what you have fallen, repent and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to**

**You and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent (2:5).**

**The word of God is revealed to the prophets in auditions and visions (Amos 7:1-9; 8:1-3; 9:1ff; Jer 13:1-**

11). The descriptions of these visions are quite lengthy in Ezekiel (ch 8; 37:1-14) which are imitated by apocalyptic writers, the difference being, in the latter, the vision itself is the substance rather than merely the occasion or setting for the revelation. The Apocalypse abounds with such auditions and visions.

The prophetic word is often expressed in poetic form. The Apocalypse too makes use of this style (7:15-17; 13:10)

Therefore are they before the throne of God,  
and serve him day and night within his temple;  
and he who sits upon the throne will shelter them with his presence.  
They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more;  
the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat.  
For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd,  
and he will guide them to springs of living water;  
and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. (7:15-17)

Another prophetic literary form is the dirge. The book of Lamentations is a good example of this literary form. We find them elsewhere, too (Is 15:1-9; Jer 4:19-31; Ez 19:2-14). The Apocalypse has also imitated this genre. In ch 15, John mourns the doom of Babylon.

Obscurity is another characteristic feature of prophecy. Even today the precise significance of Isaiah 7:13ff is not understood. The oracles of Amos (3:3ff), Micah (5:2), Jeremiah (31:22) and the like present no less difficulty. The Apocalypse, too, shares this feature. Symbolic numbers, bizarre images and obscure allusions are used to highlight the ineffable mystery of revelation.

The prophetic word is also modelled on temple liturgy. The following example from Micah illustrates

this factor.

Hear what the Lord says:

Arise, plead your case before the mountains,

and let the hills hear our voice.

Hear, you mountains, the controversy of the Lord,

and you enduring foundations of the earth,

for the Lord has a controversy with his people,

and he will contend with Israel.

"O my people, what have I done to you?

In what have I wearied you?

Answer me!

For I brought you up from the land of Egypt,

and redeemed you from the house of bondage;

and I sent before you Moses,

Aaron, and Miriam.

O my people, remember what Balaak king of Moab devised,

and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him,

and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal,

that you may know the saving acts of the Lord."

"With what shall I come before the Lord,

and bow myself before God on high?

Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,

with calves a year old?" (Mic 6:1-6)

We have other examples in liturgical psalms (Pss 107, 114, 118, 119, 121, 134, 136). The Apocalypse uses this feature generously (4:11; 5:9-10; 11:17-18; 15:3-4; 16:5-7; and 19:1-8). Note the liturgical

setting of the following hymn:

And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshipped God, saying,

" We give thanks to thee Lord God Almighty, who art and who wast, that thou hast taken thy great power and begun to reign.

The nations raged, but thy wrath came,

and the time for the dead to be judged,

for rewarding thy servants, the prophets and saints,

and those who fear thy name, both small and great,

and for destroying the destroyers of the earth." (11:16-18)

Most symbols of the Apocalypse are borrowed from the prophetic tradition thereby forging a close link with it: a woman represents a people (12:1ff) or a city (17:1ff); horns refer to power (5:6; 12:3); eyes speak of knowledge (1:14; 2:18; 4:6; 5:6); wings denote mobility (4:8; 12:14); trumpets herald a superhuman, divine voice (1:10; 8:2ff); sharp sword indicates the Word of God, an instrument of God's judgement and punishment (1:16; 2:12,16; 19:15,21); white points to joy of victory (1:14; 2:17; 3:4-5,18; 4:4; 6:11; 7:9,13f; 19:11,14); white robes signify the glorious state (16:11; 7:9, 13-14; 22:14); black indicates death (6:5,12); purple shows luxury and kingship (17:4; 18:12,16); palms signal triumph (7:9); crown symbolises kingship and sovereignty (2:10; 3:11; 4:10; 6:2; 12:1; 14:14); and the sea stands for evil (13:1; 21:1).

The Apocalypse uses numbers symbolically as did the prophets: 2 (also referred to as 'double' or repeated twice) indicates abundance, full measure (Is 40:2; 61:7; Jer 16:18; Zech 9:12; Ap 14:8; 18:2,6); 3 in its repetition (triple repetition) of a gesture or a word expresses emphasis or the superlative

(1Kgs 17:21; Jer 7:4; Is 6:3; Ap 4:8; 13:18); 4 represents cosmic totality (the four directions: front, back, right and left - the four creatures Ez 1:5 and Ap 4:6; the four winds Ez 37:9; Is 11:12 and Ap 7:1); 7 stands for a complete course or series (Lev 4:6,17; 8:11; 14:7; Num 19:4; 2 Kgs 5:10) thereby indicating perfection (Is 30:26; Zech 4:2; Ap 1:12,16; 3:1; 4:4; 5:1,6; 8:2; 10:3; 15:1; 17:9); 6 typifies imperfection, its triple repetition highlighting the greatest imperfection (Ap 13:8); 12 is the number of lunar phases of the year and, hence, stands for entirety or perfection (the twelve tribes of Israel, the twelve apostles, the vision of the new Jerusalem with twelve gates with the names of the twelve tribes on them and built on the foundation of the twelve apostles in Ap 21:12-14; the people saved are 144,000, i.e, 12 times 12 thousand in Ap 7:4-8; 12 stars on the crown of the woman (Ap 12:1) meaning the 12 zodiacal constellations).

### **The Apocalypse as Epistolary Literature**

Before we comment on the epistolary features of the Book of the Apocalypse it is necessary to briefly examine the epistolary form of literature. Deissmann distinguishes between a 'letter' and an 'epistle'. According to him, 'A letter is something nonliterary, a means of communication between persons who are separated from each other. Confidential and personal in its nature, it is intended only for the person or persons to whom it is addressed, and not at all for the public or any kind of publicity.<sup>4</sup> In style, tone, and form it can be free, intimate, familiar, frank as conversation. As A.G.Gardiner says, 'It cannot be too simple, too commonplace, too colloquial. Its familiarity is not its weakness, but its supreme virtue. If it attempts to be orderly and elaborate, it may be a good essay, but it will certainly be a bad letter.'<sup>5</sup>

In the Old Testament we find summaries of official correspondence during the pre-exilic kings (2 Sam 11:14-15; 1 Kgs 21:8-10; 2 Kgs 5:5-6; 10:1-6 etc.) There are also summaries of letters in the exilic and post-exilic periods but they preserve the form of the ancient letters (Ez 4:11-16, 17-12). In Esther 9:20;

12:4 we find a mention of a memorandum of Mordecai and a letter of the king about Purim (a feast celebrated on 14th and 15th of Adar (February-March) in memory of the victory of the Jews of Persia over their would-be exterminators). In Baruch chapter 6 we find the Letter of Jeremiah (Jer 29:1). Many letters written by Jews, Romans, Seleucid rulers, and Spartans are found in the Book of Maccabees (1 Mac 5:10-13; 8:23-32; 10:18-20,25-45; 2 Mac 1:1-2:18). Most of these letters fall into this category.

An epistle, on the other hand, is an artistic literary form, just like the dialogue, the oration, or the drama. It has nothing in common with the letters except its form: apart from that one might venture the paradox that the epistle is the opposite of a real letter. The contents of an epistle are intended for publicity - they aim at interesting 'the public'.<sup>6</sup>

The Greco-Roman letters of the New Testament times had three clear parts: opening formula, message and final greeting. The opening formula consisted of the senders name as well as that of the addressee together with a short greeting as, for instance, in 1 Maccabees 10:18,25; 11:30; Acts 15:23; 23:26; and James 1:1

King Alexander to his brother Jonathan, greeting (1 Mac 10:18);

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,

To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion:

Greeting (Jas 1:1).

The message was determined by the concrete situation and was an elaboration of certain themes or clarification of certain issues or instructions and exhortations. The final greeting was merely a leave-taking word (Acts 15:29); in official letters the date was also added (2 Mac 16:21,33,38)

Farewell (Acts 15:29)

Farewell. The one hundred and forty-eighth year, Xanthicus fifteenth (2 Mac 11:33).

The form of contemporary Jewish letters written either in Aramaic or Hebrew and modelled on older Assyrian, Babylonian or Canaanite forms, was similar to that of the Greco-Roman. The opening formula was either like the Greco-Roman form, or more frequently with a double sentence; the first part named the sender and the addressee and the second part expressed a blessing as:

King Nebuchadnezzar to all peoples, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you! (Dan 4:1);

or

Thus speaks Baruch, the son of Neriah, to the brothers who were carried away in captivity: Grace and peace be with you (2 Apo Bar 78:2).

While referring the book as apocalypse (1:1) and as prophecy (1:3) John is spoken of in the third person while in most of the rest of the Apocalypse, he speaks in the first person. At the point of this transition from the third person to the first person we find the epistolary elements being introduced. Notice the typical New Testament epistolary formula: the sender, the addressee and the greeting

John to the seven churches that are in Asia:

Grace to you and peace from him who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth (1:4-5).

The greeting is elaborate as in the letter to the Galatians.

Paul an apostle - not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead - and all the brethren who are with me,

To the churches of Galatia:

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father; to whom be glory

for ever and ever. Amen (Gal 1:1-5).

In many New Testament letters, Pauline and others, the greeting is followed by a thanksgiving or a benediction (Rom 1:1-8; 1 Cor 1:1-4; 2 Cor 1:1-4; Eph 1:1-3; Phil 1:1-5; Col 1:1-3; 1 Thes 1:1-2; 2 Thes 1:1-3; 2 Tim 1:1-3; Philem 1:1-4; 1 Pet 1:1-3). In the Apocalypse, the greeting is followed by a doxology as in the letter to the Galatians:

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen (Ap 1:5-6).

The book also ends with a benediction:

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen (22:21), which is the typical ending formula of the ancient letter genre (Rom 16:27; 1 Cor 16:23; 2 Cor 13:14; Gal 6:18; Eph 6:23-24; Phil 4:23; Col 4:18; 1 Thes 5:28; 2 Thes 3:18; 1 Tim 6:21; 2 Tim 4:22; Tit 3:15; Philem 25; Hebr 13:25; 1 Pet 5:14).

Yet in a major aspect the Apocalypse does not conform to the epistolary form: in the New Testament letters, the body of the letter follows the thanksgiving or the benediction, as the case may be. The body of the letter in the Apocalypse does not follow the doxology but is followed by two prophetic sayings (1:7-8) which do not seem to have a direct bearing on the letter as such, and then by a report of the epiphany of Christ (1:9-3:22) and other visions and auditions (4:1-22:5). Then we find the juxtaposition of various sayings (22:6-20). Thus, John has used the epistolary form as a framework, an envelope to enclose his apocalypse.

The exigencies of the situation may have compelled John to resort to this method. His banishment to the island of Patmos definitely hampered his direct personal communication with the churches of Asia Minor. It is also possible that by the time epistolary form had become the accepted authoritative form of

communication expected of the leaders in the Christian communities. It would be pertinent to note here that of the 27 books of the New Testament 21 are called 'Epistles' which in itself points to the popularity of the form in the contemporary Christian milieu. Of course, it was Paul who popularised this form, and was imitated by the later Christian writers. From the study of the Fathers of the Church we know that Ignatius of Antioch and Polycarp of Smyrna also wrote to the Christian communities in Asia Minor. Further, a combination of the apocalyptic and the epistolary forms is not the unique feature of the Apocalypse. It is also found in 2 Apocalypse of Baruch:

The letter of Baruch, the son of Neriah which he wrote to the nine and half tribes.

These are the words of the letter which Baruch, the son of Neriah, sent to the nine and a half tribes which were across the river in which were written the following things:

Thus speaks Baruch, the son of Neriah, to the brothers who were carried away in captivity: Grace and peace be with you.... When you, therefore, receive the letter, read it carefully in your assemblies. And think about it, in particular, however, on the days of your fasts. And remember me by means of this letter in the same way as I remember you by means of this, and always.

And it happened when I had finished all the words of this letter and had written it carefully until the end, I folded it, sealed it cautiously, and bound it to the neck of the eagle. And I let it go and sent it away.

The end of the letter of Baruch, the son of Neriah (chs 78-87).

### **The Apocalypse as Drama**

The Apocalypse is a narrative rather than direct action in which various characters present themselves as living and moving before the audience. As such it does not qualify to be called a drama. But as some Biblical scholars have pointed out, it does have some affinity with tragedy.<sup>7</sup> Firstly, the subject matter. According to Aristotle, the subject matter of tragedy should be serious rather than ordinary or trivial, as in a comedy. The subject matter of the Apocalypse is serious. Secondly, the function of tragedy. Aristotle holds that catharsis, viz., the purgation of pent up emotions through fear and pity, is the function of a real

tragedy. The plot should depict the change of fortune from good to bad of the hero who has a flaw. Audience should pity him and fear that the misfortune such as his might befall them. The Apocalypse, like other apocalypses, excites fear by portraying the terrors of the world to come for the unfaithful. It also depicts the glorious victory for endurance. Thirdly the performance. Norwood explains that Greek tragedies were usually performed by three actors, and a chorus (15 in number after 5th cent. BC). The drama alternated between episodes or acts performed by the actors and songs performed by the chorus. In addition to the songs performed by the chorus, there used to be short, lively songs expressing sudden joy and other types of involvement of the chorus in action. Occasionally, a few words were sung by a member of the chorus.<sup>8</sup>

In describing his visions, John often presents individuals and groups speaking. Three of such performances are songs (4:8,11; 5:9-10; 15:3-4): those who had conquered the beast sang with the harps in their hands,

"Great and wonderful are thy deeds,  
O Lord God the Almighty!  
Just and true are thy ways,  
O King of the ages!  
Who shall not fear and glorify thy name, O Lord?  
For thou alone art holy.  
All nations shall come and worship thee,  
for thy judgments have been revealed." (15:3-4)

The sayings, in many cases, serve as a commentary on the actions reported in the visions preceding them (12:10-12; 16:5-7; 18:10, 16-17, 18-19).

And I heard a loud voice in heaven saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down,

who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. Rejoice then, O heaven and you that dwell therein! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short! (12:10-12)

There are calls for rejoicing and expressions of joy (18:20; 19:6-8)

Rejoice over her, O heaven,

O saints and apostles and prophets,

for God has given judgment for you against her! (18:20)

This interplay of reported action and songlike commentary by either groups or individuals may have been due to the influence of the Greek Tragedy.

### **The Book of the Apocalypse as Apocalyptic**

Let us begin with what is 'unapocalyptic' of the Apocalypse. We have seen that the apocalyptic literature evinced a keen interest in the secrets of cosmos, the nature and working of seasons, historical reviews, angelic orders, and so on. But the Apocalypse does not attempt to reveal the mysteries of cosmogony, of astronomy, the unfolding of the ancient history, or the details of the angelic orders. Its focus, on the other hand, is on the contemporary events and their eschatological significance. Secondly, the apocalyptic works are pseudonymous. Here, too, the Apocalypse deviates from the apocalyptic tradition. It is not attributed to a man of the antiquity. On the contrary, the author identifies himself as John (1:1,4,9; 22:8). The author's address to the seven churches clearly points to his being well-known and occupying a position of authority among the contemporary Christian communities. Thirdly, many of the apocalyptic works were written in ancient or archaic script, their message being meant only for a select group. But the Apocalypse is written in the language of the people in vogue, the Greek; its message is not concealed from the public; it is not meant only for a small group; but is addressed to the seven churches, symbolising

the entire Christian community (1:4). Fourthly, the apocalyptic attempted to review history in order to present the past as future. But, the book of the Apocalypse does not attempt to present a review of world history from John's point of view, as was traditionally held, in tune with the symbolic reviews of history which characterise Jewish apocalyptic literature (Daniel, 1 Enoch chs 83-90, 2 Apocalypse of Baruch). Most authors agree that the similarities between the seals (6:1-8) and the messianic woes in the Synoptic Gospels (Mt ch 23; Mk 12:38-40; Lk 11:37-52; 20:45-47) clearly indicate that the seals depict the imminent eschatological future, not the past or the present, though the past and the contemporary events may be used to portray the future.<sup>9</sup> Finally, the book of the Apocalypse, being a Christian apocalypse, has a Christological conception of history: Christ is closely associated with God who is the supreme Ruler of the universe (3:21); he is the Lamb who has redeemed his people (5:9f), will lead them to the final victory (19:1ff), establish his kingdom in which the Jews and the Christians will be integrated (21:12,14), thus bringing history to consummation (22:3-5,12).

The book of the Apocalypse claims to be an apocalypse. It is the 'revelation of Jesus Christ.' The message contains information about 'what must soon take place,' i.e., unravelling of history as determined by God. The revelation of such a mysterious nature can be made by God alone. God is too transcendent to make direct contact with man. He does it through his angel (1:1-2). Therefore, to state that the book of the Apocalypse is an apocalypse is to be, strictly, tautologous for, as we have seen, the word 'apocalypse' itself means an unveiling or unfolding of things previously not known and which could not be known apart from the unveiling.

The book as a whole fully confirms the claim made in the opening lines. The mystery is revealed in a series of visions (54 times). The first cycle of visions (1:10-11:19) contains an epiphany of Christ (1:13-16); the scroll with seven seals (4:1-8:5) with the two inserted visions of 144,000 sealed (7:1-8) and the salvation of a multitude (7:9-17); seven trumpets (8:2-11:19) with the two inserted visions of a mighty

angel and a little open scroll (10:1-11) and the temple and two witnesses (11:1-13). The second cycle consists of the woman and the dragon (12:1-17); the beast from the sea (13:1-10); the beast from the earth (13:11-18); the lamb and the 144,000 (14:1-5); the three angels (14:6-13); harvest and vintage (14:4-20); salvation of the conquerors (15:2-4); the seven bowls (15:1-16:21); the visions of the last things (19:11-22:5) with the second coming of Christ (19:11-16), call to the banquet (19:17-18), the final battle (19:19-21), the binding of Satan (20:1-3); the thousand year reign (20:4-10), the last judgement (20:11-15), and, finally, the new heaven, new earth and new Jerusalem (21:9-22:5).

Symbols, an integral part of the narrative, are everywhere. The reader is prepared for the bombardment of unearthly visions and symbols in the first chapter itself:

Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden girdle round his breast; his head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters; in his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth issued a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength. (1:12-16)

A woman represents a people (12:1ff) or a city (17:1ff); horns indicate power (5:6; 12:3), especially dynastic power (13:1; 17:3ff); eyes, knowledge (1:14; 2:18; 4:6; 5:6); wings, mobility (4:8; 12:14); trumpet, divine voice (1:10; 8:2ff); a sharp sword, God's word which judges and punishes (1:16; 2:12,16; 19:15,21); white robes, the world of glory (6:11; 7:9,13f; 22:14); palms, triumph (7:9); crown, authority and kingship (2:10; 3:11; 4:10; 6:2; 12:1; 14:14); sea, evil (13:1; 21:1); white, joy (1:14; 2:17; 3:4f,18; 4:4; 6:11; 7:9,13; 19:11,14); purple, luxury and kingship (17:4; 18:12,16) and black, death ((6:5,12).

Symbolic numbers, too, abound in the book. 7 (used 54 times: 1:12,16; 3:1; 4:5; 5:1,6; 8:2; 10:3; 15:1;

17:9 etc) symbolises fullness, perfection; its half is also mentioned (11:2-3, 9-11; 12:6; 13:5); Inversely 6 (7 minus 1) is the type of lack of perfection (13:8), the triple repetition of 6 (666) indicating the highest imperfection and evil possible; 12 (used 23 times) recalls the 12 tribes of Israel and indicates that the people of God has reached its eschatological perfection; 4 (16 times) points to the universality of the visible world; 3 (11 times); 1000 (6 times in ch 20, often in multiples) implying multitudes. There are three intriguing cases: the duration of the persecution is given as 1260 days (11:3; 12:6) or 42 months (11:2; 13:5) or three years and a half (12:14); 144,000 'follow the Lamb wherever he goes' (7:4-8; 14:1-5); and the Beast referred to by the number 666 (13:8).

This elaborate use of symbols suggests the mysterious nature of the revelatory matter. The supernatural character of the truths unveiled is highlighted by other means also. The seer is able to receive the revelation only through the assistance and enlightenment of the Spirit (1:10; 4:2). Every detail comes to him through the visions (54 times) and explained by an angel (67 times). The seer also is taken to the desert (17:3) and to the top of a high mountain (21:10), associating it with mysticism and theophanies.

The author presents himself as one persecuted for his faith (1:9), a feature among all apocalyptists. He attempts to encourage and strengthen his fellow Christians in the face of the persecution by unraveling the meaning of their suffering and the glorious reward for faithful adherence to their faith. The historical setting is the persecution of the Church by the Roman Empire. But John sees in this confrontation the battle between God and Satan. The outcome is evident. Christ will vanquish his foe, the Satan and the never-ending divine rule will be established with the creation of a new heaven and new earth. All those who persevered in their faith will become the citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem. This vision of a cosmic struggle with the definite and sudden breakthrough of God's kingdom is common to all apocalyptic writings.

Further, it shares all the characteristic features of the Jewish apocalyptic literature. Its *raison d'être* is to help the Christians of the first century AD to make sense out of a situation that seemed terribly hard to comprehend. The early Christians believed that Jesus of history was indeed the Christ. He died on the cross, no doubt, but God raised him from the dead and made him the Lord of heaven and earth. This firm belief reflected in the early Christian hymn (Phil 2:5-11) and reverberating throughout the NT is represented in the Apocalypse. They who confessed Jesus as the Lord are cleansed by his blood and have received the fulness of life; become the heirs of God's Kingdom. They are 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people' (I Pet 2:9). Note the striking similarity with the faith of the Jews. But the antagonism of the Jews and the total misunderstanding of the people around culminating in the unprecedented barbaric persecution unleashed against them definitely seemed to be at odds with their faith. God had called them to be His own in Christ Jesus and they had responded in faith. And what did they get in return? Many of them were arrested, dragged in chains thrown into prisons, tortured and brutally killed, or thrown into the arena to be ravaged by savage beasts. This was surely not what an early Christian bargained for. The misunderstanding and, to certain extent, the opposition from the Jews was explainable. But the might of the Roman Empire directed against and threatening the very existence of a harmless and defenceless religious community having no political or material ambitions but engaged in prayer, living a common life, eagerly awaiting the parousia was beyond rational explanation. Something was really wrong. Something did not add up. The whole situation was indeed inexplicable. Where was their loving God? Where was His almighty power? Could He not match the Roman might? What should they make of Jesus' promise of fulness of life? No doubt they needed extraordinary courage and unwavering faith to tide over this crisis which threatened to wipe out their new faith in its infancy. No human being could have sustained them in the trial of such a magnitude. And so, John is given a revelation in which Jesus himself in striking imagery and unequivocal terms urges his followers to remain faithful and endure the persecution as their enemies would be completely

destroyed and they would be rewarded with the fulness of life in the heavenly Jerusalem. John writes it down as the Apocalypse.

It is written almost exactly on the Jewish pattern. It follows the basic concept of the dualism of time: there is this present age, totally bad, under the power of satanic forces, and, therefore, doomed to destruction; there is the golden age to come in which the satanic powers will be overthrown, and a new heaven and a new earth will be created where God will wipe every tear from every eye, where all the faithful shall live in perfect peace and bliss. The only difference is that the author of the Apocalypse has substituted the 'coming in power of Jesus Christ' to the Jewish 'Day of the Lord' motif.

Not only do we find the conformity in the pattern but also in the details. The Jewish apocalyptic had envisaged a divine Messianic figure of power and glory who would descend from heaven into the world to conquer the evil powers; he existed in heaven before the creation of the world, before the sun and the stars were made; he was preserved in the presence of the Almighty (1 Enoch 48:3,6; 62:7; 4 Ezra 13:25f). In the book of the Apocalypse, though the idea is not very explicit, it is, nevertheless, evident (Ap 1:17-18 read with Jn 1:1-2, 14).

The apocalyptic imagination does not portray a Messiah with gentle or meek character full of compassion. On the contrary, he is a mighty avenging warrior descending from heaven with power and glory before whom the whole earth trembles. He would come to put down the mighty from their seats, to dethrone the kings of the earth, and to destroy the sinners and to restore the righteous (1 Enoch 45:2-6; 48:2-9; 62:3-13; 69:26-291). We find a similar portrayal of Jesus Christ as Messiah in the Apocalypse (14:14-20; 19:13-26).

The coming of the Messiah was to be preceded by Elijah who was to stand on the hills of Israel and

announce the coming of the Messiah with a voice so loud that it would be heard from one end of the earth to the other. The Apocalypse does not mention Elijah by name but the attributes of the two witnesses makes it clear that one of them is Elijah (11:3)

The last terrible times preceding the Messianic age were known as 'the travails of the Messiah', they were described as 'birth-pangs' (Mt 24:8; Mk 13:8). The Apocalypse depicts terrible sufferings, death and destruction as a prelude to the coming of the Messiah (Ap 6:7-8, 12-17; 8:6-12; 9:1-20; 14:18-20; 18:8).

The last days will be a time of terror. During those days even the mighty will weep bitterly (Zeph 1:1-16; Joel 2:1; 1 Enoch 1:4-7; 102:1-3). The Apocalypse, too, describes 'the kings of the earth and the great men and the generals and the rich and the strong...' wailing and trying to run away to the mountains to escape the terrors of the day (Ap 6:15-17). It will be a time of cosmic upheavals when the universe will be disintegrated: the stars will be extinguished; the sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood (Is 13:10; Joel 2:30-31; 3:15); the firmament will crash in ruins; there will be a cataract of raging fire, and creation will become a molten mass (Sib Or 3:80-87); the seasons will lose their order, and there will be neither night nor dawn (Sib Or 3:88-90). The book of the Apocalypse, too, enumerates these cataclysmic events in graphic detail (6:12, 14; 8:12; 11:13, 19; 16:17-21; 20:11).

It will be a time when the structure of human relationships will be destroyed, the very fabric of familial affinity will be disrupted: hatred, enmity, and dissension will rule the earth (Zech 14:13); brothers will kill each other; parents will murder their own children; from dawn to dusk they shall slay one another (1 Enoch 100:1-2). There will be scant regard for human values: wise men will be rare to find; honour will be turned into shame, strength into humiliation, beauty into ugliness; men will become violent and give in to every kind of passion (2 Bar 48:33-37). Though the reference to familial dissensions is conspicuous by its absence in the Apocalypse, there is a detailed description of various passions

indulged in by sinners and evil ways followed by the unrighteous, and the consequent judgement on them in the prophecy of doom of Babylon (ch 18). It also speaks of the rider of the red horse being permitted 'to take peace from the earth, so that men should slay one another' (6:4). It will be a time of judgment. God will come like a refiner's fire and none can face that day (Mal 3:2-3); by fire and sword God will deal with men (Is 66:15-16). The Apocalypse describes the risen Christ as the universal Judge who will judge the nations with sword and fire (1:16; 8:7; 14:14-20; 15:8; 16:5-6; 19:15; 20:12-13)

The Son of Man will destroy sinners from the face of the earth (1 Enoch 69:28); they will be burned up as Sodom and Gomorrah (Jubilees 36:10); and the smell of brimstone will fill the earth (Sib Or 3:60). The Apocalypse, too, delineates the fate of the sinners and the oppressors of the faithful in striking imagery (9:18; 11:17-18; 14:9-11; 18:1-24; 19:2, 17-21; 20:3,10; 21:8).

In those days, the Jews who had been scattered and exiled throughout the four corners of the world will be gathered in the Holy city again: they will come back from Assyria and from Egypt and worship the Lord on His holy mountain (Is 27:12-13; Bar 5:5-6; Pss Sol 11:2-3). The apocalypse does not mention gathering of the Jews, obviously because its perspective is Christological. However, it does speak of Christ as the 'Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David' or as 'the root and offspring of David' (Ap 5:5; 22:16) implying the 'restoration' of the Davidic dynasty. It also describes the new heaven and new earth, the former things having passed away and all things being made new (Ap ch 21); John also is given a vision of a great multitude in heaven (Ap 7:9), of 144,000 standing on Mount Zion with the Lamb (Ap 14:1), and the inscription of the names of the twelve tribes of Israel on the gates, and of the twelve apostles of the Lamb on the walls and twelve foundations of the new city of Jerusalem (Ap 21:12). The song praising God in heaven which John sees in a vision (Ap 19:6-7) is strikingly similar in tone and setting to that of Ps 122, a Zion psalm pouring out the joy of the pilgrims when they, finally, reached the Temple of Jerusalem for worship. The other hymns he hears (4:11; 11:17-18; 15:3-4; 16:5-6) also echo the Jewish

liturgical celebration in the Jerusalem Temple. Thus, the Apocalypse clearly envisages the fulfilment of this dream in the worship in the new city of Jerusalem, but with a Christological emphasis (Ap 4:11; 5:9-10; 7:15-17)

Nature will rejoice at this turn of events: the hills will be removed, the valleys will be filled in, and the trees will gather to provide shade for them as they come back (Bar 5:7-8; Pss Sol 11:4-5). The Apocalypse depicts the tree of life 'on either side of the river' that flows in the middle of the new city of Jerusalem; it would yield an abundance of fruit round the year and its leaves were 'for healing the nations' (Ap 22:2).

The Gentiles are not mute spectators to these events, they are very much a part of the whole scheme of things. But their participation is variously mentioned as being completely destroyed: Babylon will become a desolation (Is 13:19-22); God will tread down the Gentiles in His anger (Is 63:3,6); or as gathered in a last battle against Jerusalem and being totally routed (Ez 38:14-39:16; Zech 14:1-5; Sib Or 3:660-697). In the Apocalypse, John hears an angel announcing the eternal torment of the 'worshippers of the beast and its image' (14:11); he is granted a vision of 'the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who sits upon the horse and against his army,' that is, Christ and his faithful, the beast and the false prophet being captured and 'thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulphur' and the rest being 'slain by the sword' issuing from the mouth of Christ (Ap 19:19:21); he, then, hears an angel announcing the doom of Babylon in imagery similar to that in the prophet Isaiah (Ap ch 18); he is further granted a vision of Satan deceiving 'the nations which are at the four corners of the earth, that is, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle' against the people of God and being completely consumed by fire from heaven and the devil being 'thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur where the beast and the false prophet were' (Ap 20:7:10), or as getting converted through the light of Israel (Is 45:20-22; 49:6; 1 Enoch 48:4-5; Pss Sol 17:34; Is 49:6). In the Apocalypse, too, we read that the glory of God is the light of the new city of Jerusalem and the Lamb is its lamp and by its light 'shall the nations

walk; and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it, and its gates shall never be shut by day and there shall be no night there; they shall bring into it the glory and the honour of the nations' (21:23:-26).

The city of Jerusalem preserved in heaven in all her glory, beauty and splendour will descend from heaven in the last days (4 Ezra 10:44-59; 2 Bar 4:2-6). The Apocalypse presents a vision of the 'holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God...' (Ap 21:2, 10). The new Jerusalem will be unparalleled in her dazzling beauty with foundation of sapphires, windows of agate, gates of carbuncles, borders of pleasant stones, the latter house, i.e., the new Jerusalem, will be more glorious than the former (Is 54:12; Tob 13:16-17; Hag 2:6-9). We find a similar description of the new city in the Apocalypse. John is shown by an angel 'the holy city of Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal' (21:10-11); the twelve 'foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every jewel; the first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gate made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, transparent as glass' (21:19-21).

In the last days the dead will be raised (Dan 12:2; 1 Enoch 51:1-2). In the vision of the judgement, John sees Death and Hades giving up the dead in them and the 'dead, great and small, standing before the throne,' and the righteous being rewarded with eternal life while the sinners being condemned to eternal torment (Ap 20:12-15).

The Messiah will rule the earth with his saints. The most usual view of the duration of the Messianic kingdom was that it would last for ever (Dan 7:27) but some believed it to last 400 years; it was computed by comparing Genesis 15:13 and Psalm 90:15. According to the Apocalypse, 'The kingdom of the world

has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever' (Ap 11:15); it also mentions a Messianic reign of a thousand years at the end of which a final battle will take place in which Satan will be vanquished and the new age will be inaugurated (Ap 20:3,4).

The apocalyptic literature also describes various blessings of the new age. The Jews earnestly believed that the unification of the divided kingdom will take place in the last time. The prophets declared that the house of Judah would walk again with the house of Israel (Jer 3:18; Is 11:13; Hos 1:11). In the Apocalypse, it is a fait accompli: the new city of Jerusalem 'had a great, high wall, with twelve gates... and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed' (21:12); John also says that 'the city had twelve foundations, and on them the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb' (21:14) showing the universal character of Christianity and the essential unity of the Jews and the Christians in Christ Jesus.

The land would be extremely fertile (Is 51:3; 35:1; 2 Bar 29:5-8; Sib Or 3:744750); it would bring forth in abundance. It would become like the garden of Eden (Is 51:3); the desert would rejoice and blossom like a rose (Is 35:1); Baruch stretches the expectation to its very limit (2 Bar 29:5-8). The Apocalypse indicates the fertility of the earth by referring to the abundance of the yield of the tree of life round the year (Ap 22:2).

The coming age will bring an end to weariness, sorrow, pain, and moaning. The people will have plenty and languish no more (Jer 31:12); they will enjoy everlasting joy (Is 35:10; 49:10). According to the Apocalypse, the righteous 'shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat' (7:16).

People will be blessed with long life, no one will die an untimely death (Is 65:20-22); death will be

swallowed up in victory and God will wipe all tears from their faces (Is 25:8); disease will withdraw; anxiety, anguish and lamentation will pass away; childbirth will have no pain; the reaper will not grow weary and the builder will not be toilworn (2 Bar 73:2-74:4). An angel in the apocalypse tells John that the righteous will neither hunger nor thirst any more because 'the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water; and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes' (Ap 7:17); in the vision of a new heaven and a new earth, John hears a loud voice telling that God 'will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away' (Ap 21:4).

Unrighteousness will be unheard of in the age to come. It will be an age of perfect holiness and righteousness. The mankind will be good, living in fear of the Lord in the days of mercy (Pss Sol 17:28-43; 18:9-10). The Apocalypse, in the vision narrative of the new heaven and new earth portrays the new city of Jerusalem as being inhabited by righteous people alone, the evil men being completely excluded from it (Ap 21:8, 27; 22:3,14).

There would be total peace and harmony in the new age. There would be no wars. The swords would be beaten into ploughshares and the spears into pruning hooks (Is 2:4; 54:13-14); the children of God would enjoy great peace; there would be no sword or battle-din, there would be a common law for all men and a great peace throughout the earth, and kings would be friendly with each other (Sib Or 3:751, 756-759). The vision of the new city of Jerusalem in which there would be perfect happiness and joy depicted in the Apocalypse clearly implies that peace and tranquility will reign throughout the new creation.

The apocalyptic literature portrays the restoration of the original harmony in Nature: the leopard and the kid, the cow and the bear, the lion and the fatling will play and lie down together (Is 11:6-7; 62:25; Sib Or 3:789-793); there will be a new covenant between man and the beasts of the field (Hos 2:18); even a child

will be able to play where the poisonous reptiles have their holes and their dens (Is 11:8-9; 2 Bar 73:6; Sib Or 3:794f). Thus, in all nature, between man and man, between people and people, between beast and beast, and between man and beast there will be universal cordial relationship, a reign of uninterrupted peace and harmony. The Apocalypse makes use of all these details in the e portrayal of the new earth and new Jerusalem.

The Apocalypse, therefore, is apocalyptic literature, which borrows heavily from the prophetic tradition, and is enveloped in epistolary casting, and exhibits some affinity with the Greek Tragedy. It is composed in the pattern of the Jewish apocalyptic and portrays the Jewish apocalyptic aspirations as being fulfilled and the history as being consummated in Christ Jesus. It is the expression of the fundamental and agonised cry of the Christian soul in distress, in the same way as the Jewish apocalypses had expressed the anguish of the imprisoned and humiliated soul of Jewry. John followed the same literary methods of his predecessors: the mysterious combinations of numbers and the esoteric descriptions alluding to the existing situation. Like his predecessors, he takes the contemporary tragedy as his starting point and constantly refers to it. This enabled his mind to travel far beyond the model set before him and to attain far wider horizons of the essential drama of man and his destiny, and the fundamental opposition between the world and Christ; he embarked upon his terrifying descriptions of the end of the world in order to find therein the fulfilment of the promise of Christ, the realisation of the hope of salvation to the righteous in the ultimate victory of good over evil. In the process he reached the height and sublimity of literary achievement no earlier author of the genre had scaled. It is the greatest classic, the climax of the apocalyptic literature.

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