

SUFFERING AND RESISTANCE IN THE APOCALYPSE:

A CULTURAL STUDIES APPROACH

TO APOCALYPTIC CRISIS

By

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SUFFERING AND RESISTANCE IN THE APOCALYPSE: A CULTURAL STUDIES APPROACH TO APOCALYPTIC CRISIS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The theme of suffering permeates the Apocalypse. According to a leading scholar on the Apocalypse, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, there is general consensus only as to the purpose of the book: “The author seeks to give courage and perseverance to Christians threatened by persecution insofar as he refers to the nearness of the final eschatological salvation.”¹ This dissertation problematizes this very assumption by trying to reclaim under-defined meanings of resistance in the Apocalypse. Against the grain of the reductionist reading of the Apocalypse as offering pacifism or passive resistance against oppression or persecution, this study intends to argue that the hermeneutical meaning of resistance requires more activist interpretations of the text on the part of those who are suffering.

To my mind, the popular assertion that the Apocalypse encourages the people of God to persevere through suffering rather than actively deal with evil in the world is theological and ideological. It is theological in the sense that the relation of suffering to resistance envisioned in Revelation is reconfigured by reference to other New Testament books. It should be noted that the Apocalypse may represent a minority opinion in the NT regarding the relation between Christian and society, insofar as most of the later NT writings counsel quiet adaptation to Greco-Roman society.² I seek to undermine theological agendas that lie behind attempts to explain away Revelation’s resistance language. In this regard, I attempt to reconstruct the meaning of resistance on a theological level. It is ideological in the sense that it may

¹ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 36.

² Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 133.

represent the concerns of a particular social group. Purporting to read the Book of Revelation as non-involved observers, interpreters may end up serving the interests of the dominant power. In particular, we have to underscore the shadow of empire in the production of modern readings of the ancient texts.³ The correlation between power dynamics and biblical interpretation should be brought to the fore. I seek to undercut political agendas that lie behind attempts to explain away Revelation's resistance language. In this sense, I attempt to reconstruct the meaning of resistance on an ideological level.

In order to construct the meaning of resistance from the Book of Revelation over against traditional interpretations, I seek to approach the text from the perspective of those who suffer to such a subhuman extent as to elicit the will to resist. Reclaiming the Apocalypse as resistance literature assumes that the book was written, and should be read, from the point of view of the oppressed. This assumption might be vulnerable to the argument that the Apocalypse's portrayal of the Roman Empire is not only one-sided but also distorted, to the extent that it speaks for the vengeance and envy of those facing crisis.⁴ This criticism presupposes that authors can and must transcend their own relationship with the world. On the contrary, the text of Revelation may be ineluctably informed by the author's religious construction of the world, which draws on his own life experiences. The question to ask is what socioreligious agenda lies behind John's writing. Again, we may have to highlight the shadow of empire in the production of ancient writings.⁵ Along these lines, I would like to view the Apocalypse as an example of how marginal Christians reacted to the oppressive realities of the Roman Empire. A warrant for approaching the Apocalypse from below lies in the fact that it was written from below.

Previous work on Revelation scarcely speaks on behalf of real readers who are suffering, because, from their point of view, the ways of resistance are not fully reconstructed from the text. I would highlight two cases where the Apocalypse has been marginalized: first, from resistance literature to peace literature

³ Fernando F. Segovia, "Biblical Criticism and Postcolonial Studies: Toward a Postcolonial Optic," in *Decolonizing Biblical Studies: A View from the Margins* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2000), 128.

⁴ Adela Yarbro Collins, "Persecution and Vengeance in the Book of Revelation," in *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East: Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Apocalypticism, Uppsala, August 12-17, 1979*, ed. David Hellholm (Tübingen: Mohr, 1989), 747.

⁵ Segovia, "Toward a Postcolonial Optic," 126.

by those who overemphasize its supernatural characteristics; second, from resistance literature to violent literature by those who overstress its disturbing imagery.

First, the Apocalypse is marginalized from resistance to peace literature by, for example, fundamentalists who fail to see the exigency of suffering in apocalypticism, let alone the sociohistorical matrix of the book. In contrast with genuine apocalypticism, which is never a theological program self-consciously constructed in security and repose but arises within a setting of alienation, P. D. Hanson characterizes pseudo-apocalyptic movements, especially during the medieval period, as movements

which do not generate alternative universes of meaning in response to alienation, but which take the symbolic universe of an earlier movement and exploit it programmatically, often for nationalistic, racist, or dogmatic purposes. This phenomenon does not represent genuine apocalypticism, but is blind imitation bereft of the pain and struggle of attempting to relate faith to the experience of a disintegrating social and cosmic universe.⁶

If the question is posed whether apocalypticism arises from the experience of suffering or mechanically uses earlier apocalypticism in service of selfish interests,⁷ it is likely that much of modern apocalypticism will lose its apocalyptic force. The popular assumption that apocalyptic language concerns the introduction of the new world, aloof from the realities at the time of writing is undercut by the historical-critical method, which has called attention to the sociohistorical context of the original readers. Some rightly ascribe the main political impact of apocalyptic literature not to any program it may imply for the future but to its rejection and condemnation of the present order as represented by an evil empire, such as the Roman Empire in the Apocalypse.⁸ The apocalyptic vision draws its enduring vitality from its insight into the temporality of all human existence, rather than the illusory certainty of a new kingdom.⁹ Thus, the Apocalypse is no less a revelation of human relations than a revelation of the supernatural. In view of the explicit political criticism of apocalyptic works, it is no surprise that in the time of Justin Martyr the reading and dissemination of Jewish apocalyptic literature was considered a crime and that under Japanese colonialism

⁶ *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: An Illustrated Encyclopedia*, ed. Keith R. Crim. Supplementary Volume (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), s.v. "Apocalypticism."

⁷ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁸ John J. Collins, "Temporality and Politics in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature," in *Apocalyptic in History and Tradition*, ed. Christopher Rowland and John Barton (London: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 40-41.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 43.

during the Second World War Korean preachers were prohibited from preaching from the Apocalypse.¹⁰

The ways in which the Book of Revelation represents the voices of suffering readers by resistance language remains largely untapped in the studies of Revelation. Even when suffering is acknowledged to play a role in the Apocalypse, the popular idea that apocalyptic language tries to solve the problem of human righteous suffering via the introduction of a new world order is usually pursued in such a way that the need to end, yet not change, this world becomes the focus of apocalypticism. It is argued that both Jewish and Christian apocalyptists envision, though in real terms, the defeat of evil and the wicked as taking place only at the end of history, because the final judgment belongs to the future.¹¹ The great majority of Jewish apocalypses—and the Book of Revelation¹²—are quietist in the sense that they depend on divine intervention rather than human action for the transformation of the world.¹³ The new world of the apocalyptists is not a human construct but God's new creation.¹⁴

The argument I want to make is that the Apocalypse urges its readers to play a synergistic role, as executors of restorative as well as retributive justice, in God's judgment of the oppressive world. The reason why the Apocalypse is considered a serious threat to dominant powers is because its language of resistance is tinted and shaded with real dangers on the part of those suffering in the hope of God's salvation. Revelation's pacifist language should not be completely denied. However, it should be understood alongside a socioreligious account of and solution to the problem of human suffering. Apocalyptic discontent with the status quo extends in Revelation to human efforts at the transformation of human empire, beyond passively waiting for God to end it. I shall argue that Revelation's socioreligious critique of empire

¹⁰ Allan A. Boesak, *Comfort and Protest: Reflections on the Apocalypse of John of Patmos* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987), 17.

¹¹ John Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 278.

¹² The Book of Revelation has deep and obvious Jewish roots (Collins, "Temporality and Politics," 26).

¹³ *Ibid.*, 37-38.

¹⁴ Mitchell G. Reddish, ed., *Apocalyptic Literature: A Reader* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1995), 27. Even when apocalyptic literature is viewed as referring to active resistance, what is foregrounded is not violent resistance but a form of nonviolent resistance, such as martyrdom as a result of refusing to accept the worldview of the oppressors, because human efforts to change the course of world events determined by God are considered to be futile (*Ibid.*, 25-26).

presupposes a corresponding kind of suffering and requires a corresponding way of resistance. To my mind, Revelation calls for active resistance against institutionalized evil across various sectors of empire, in response to the empire's multidimensional program of domination. As oppression is an essential part of the operation of empire, so are resistance and suffering essential elements of the identity of suffering subjects. By focusing on how to end righteous suffering rather than on its origin or meaning, I argue for a resistance hermeneutic that accounts for Revelation's anti-imperial resistance strategy, expressed in both public and hidden discourses in terms of ideological opposition as well as embodied actions.

Second, the Apocalypse is marginalized from resistance to violent literature by scholars who call into question the ethical values of the book by highlighting its inhumane language and imagery. According to Adela Yarbro Collins, for example, the Apocalypse works against the values of humanization and love insofar as the attainment of humanity and dignity by the marginalized involves the degradation of others.¹⁵ She warns of Revelation's "tremendous potential for real psychological and social evil" due to its call for vengeance and possible function as an outlet for envy.¹⁶ Similarly, gender readings of the Apocalypse often view the book as a misogynistic text. Further, the Apocalypse comes under more serious criticism when a postcolonial perspective problematizes its language or imagery, which is allegedly reflective of Rome's imperial ideology of power and domination and thus legitimates an unethical means to challenge the status quo.

It seems to me that these readings overestimate the similarity between Revelation and secular culture. It is one thing to say that the language of Revelation reflects that of contemporary culture, but another to argue that linguistic resemblance means ideological dependence. First and foremost, the Apocalypse is not caught in the trap of Rome's imperial ideology, based on oppression and alienation. It is my conviction that the Apocalypse can and should be read as a helpful, liberating text to the extent that it derives from the experiences of the disinherited. I would argue that John is aware of what it means to live

¹⁵ Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), 171-72.

¹⁶ Yarbro Collins, "Persecution and Vengeance," 747.

with imperialism or colonialism and turns its oppressive elements on their head to construct his own liberation ethic. By focusing on how to construct strategies of resistance rather than on any semblance of imperial language, I argue for a hermeneutic of liberation that accounts for Revelation's anti-imperialist language, expressed in both public and hidden discourses in terms of ideological opposition as well as embodied actions.

In keeping with these considerations, I shall argue that the Apocalypse contains such a convoluted language of resistance that any attempt to pinpoint the one apocalyptic means of resistance, despite its partial explanatory power, fails to account for the dynamic counter-discourse that the subaltern can derive from the text in opposition to imperial discourse. The Apocalypse is strewn with themes indicative of suffering and resistance. Revelation's complex strategy of resistance is expressed not only in religious and pacifist but also in social and activist language. Thus straddling the tension between passive endurance and active resistance, I read Revelation as a disguised and ambiguous protest, of the sort usually ascribed only to the Jesus of the Gospels.¹⁷ The hermeneutical focus is placed not only on whether the book is a helpful or harmful text but also on the ways in which real readers can appropriate the writing for the purpose of reconstructing resistance strategies on a practical as well as ideological level. In what follows I present a critical review of previous Revelation Studies in terms of suffering and resistance with special reference to how the book has been marginalized along the lines mentioned above. In so doing, I seek to construct a new critical approach that views resistance as a leitmotif of the Apocalypse.

Survey of Suffering and Resistance in Revelation Studies

The theme of suffering and resistance in Revelation has been by no means unknown to traditional methods of interpretation such as historical, literary, and sociocultural criticism, all of which pursue, in one way or another, the goal of retrieving the univocal meaning of Revelation.¹⁸ However, while the religious

¹⁷ Warren Carter, *The Roman Empire and the New Testament: An Essential Guide* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2006), 128-33.

¹⁸ For an excellent review of competing interpretive strategies, see Fernando Segovia, "'And They Began to Speak in Other Tongues': Competing Modes of Discourse in Contemporary Biblical Criticism," in *Decolonizing Biblical*

suffering of Rome's persecuted is widely recognized, less attention has been paid to the social suffering of Rome's oppressed. Even when the suffering of the original readers is acknowledged, the possibility that the Apocalypse envisions its ending by means of human resistance is mostly rejected or minimized. Moreover, and perhaps not unrelated to the corresponding assumption of the existence of a neutral and disinterested reader, traditional methodology has frequently marginalized the role of real readers in the (re)constructing of meanings from the ancient text in the light of their own experiences. This section is devoted to an overview of Apocalypse Studies in recent years, with attention to the ways in which the meaning of suffering and resistance has been construed by representative works in each traditional criticism.¹⁹ I will compare historical, literary, and sociocultural criticism on the one hand, and contrast them with cultural studies criticism on the other hand.

Historical Criticism

It could not be rightly said that biblical scholarship has seen a weakening of the traditional historical-critical method, which dominated the interpretation of Revelation until the 1970s, with its allegedly scientific and objective hermeneutic and its reconstruction of the original meaning of the text within its historical context. Indeed, the historical-critical method has contributed to the understanding of Revelation by calling attention to the close relationship between the text and the historical context *behind* it. The method has even been valued by some for its ability to secure rational Christianity against the dangers of such unreasonable hermeneutics as radical fundamentalism, liberation theology, and postmodernism.²⁰ The end of the millennium saw the appearance of two thorough works on the Apocalypse from a historical-critical perspective, by G. K. Beale and David Aune, respectively.

Studies, 3-33.

¹⁹ Though I list representative works on Revelation from each mode of interpretation, it must be noted that a clear-cut categorization of the following commentaries is mostly impossible because they often deviate from their main method when necessary. More importantly, not every critic seems aware of the mode of interpretation that he or she pursues explicitly or implicitly. It may also be stated that the classification of the works that follow is based on the theme of suffering and resistance and thus reflects an interest of the present writer as a real reader.

²⁰ Edmondo F. Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, trans. Maria Poggi Johnson and Adam Kamesar (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 10-12.

G. K. Beale

Interestingly enough, however, historical-critical commentators on Revelation do not always take seriously the world behind the text insofar as they underestimate historical reference in favor of symbolic meaning or calling historicity into question. Beale is one such example. He professes to interpret the Book of Revelation in pursuit of “a thoroughgoing, inductive, historical-exegetical approach to the text.”²¹ Yet, he believes that the greater part of the material in Revelation should be read in a nonliteral, figurative way and thus regards symbolism as the predominant characteristic of the genre of Revelation.²² While overemphasizing the transtemporal character of symbols, he hesitates to ascribe particular historical events to the symbols. It is argued that no specific prophesied historical events are to be discerned in the Book of Revelation—except for the prophecies for the local churches in Asia Minor, on the one hand, and the parousia of Jesus and accompanying events, on the other hand—because the Apocalypse symbolically portrays events in church history.²³ This position rejects the Roman version of the preterist school of thought, which limits the historical identifications only to one historical reality.²⁴ In the meantime, Beale lays special emphasis on the importance of analyzing Revelation’s use of Hebrew Bible passages and their treatment in the Jewish exegetical tradition, because it is Revelation’s use of the HB, along with its structure and argument, that has the most significant bearing on interpretative concerns.²⁵

However, interpretations of the Apocalypse that overemphasize its symbolic, suprahistorical meanings scarcely do justice to the socioreligious aspects of life faced by the original readers, let alone their sufferings. While symbolic readings may extend Revelation’s references to human suffering beyond the first century, it may well dilute the specific and concrete meanings of suffering in favor of timeless significance. More importantly, one does suspect that Revelation invokes symbolic connotations or HB allusions only to the extent that the book refers to specific historical conditions or events that enable such

²¹ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 3.

²² *Ibid.*, 52.

²³ *Ibid.*, 48.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 49.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

associations in first-century Greco-Roman cultures. It is far from evident how symbolism can be completely separated from historicity. The meanings of symbols are based, at least in part, on their historical references. From the place where suffering real readers stand, suffering is a most pressing matter, informing an apocalyptic worldview, and thus cannot be easily symbolized or generalized. For them, the theme of suffering deserves more attention, at least inasmuch as the Apocalypse is to be read as not just reflecting but also addressing suffering.

David Aune

Another monumental work from this perspective is David Aune's WBC commentary on Revelation.²⁶ Since all biblical books are communications between author and audience within a particular historical, social, and cultural context, all these factors, he argues, must play a basic role in the interpreting of the text.²⁷ Aune concedes that John's incorporation of prophetic concerns that are historically oriented gives the Apocalypse a less suprahistorical perspective than other pseudepigraphical apocalypses, which are usually divorced from real settings.²⁸ Along the lines of literary criticism, however, Aune looks not so much for the real audience as the *implied* audience, which the author conceptualizes in literary terms. This is due to the fact that the book does not fit in easily with what is known of the church in Asia Minor around the turn of the century.²⁹ In addition, Aune does not treat suffering as an indispensable feature of apocalypse. In response to an attempt to define apocalyptic genre in light of the theme of suffering,³⁰ Aune follows John Collins³¹ in arguing that suffering is merely one feature of apocalyptic, which cannot be elevated to the status of central element in the apocalypse genre.³² It is understandable, therefore, that he

²⁶ David Aune, *Revelation*, 3 vols., Word Biblical Commentary 52A-C (Dallas: Word Books, 1997; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998). Aune's work might well be considered not so much an exegetical, hermeneutical commentary as an encyclopedic reference book.

²⁷ Aune, *Revelation*, 1: xlix.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, xc.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, xlix.

³⁰ James Kallas, "The Apocalypse—An Apocalyptic Book?" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 86 (1967): 69-80.

³¹ Collins, "Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre," *Semeia* 14 (1979): 12.

³² Aune, *Revelation*, 1: lxxxviii.

takes a more positive view on Rome than John apparently does.³³

First and foremost, however, the allegation that the Christianity depicted in the Apocalypse is rather removed from historical evidence must not go unchallenged. It flies in the face of many other historical-critical readings that rely on the historicity of John's account of Christianity as well as Rome. Besides, the degree to which the theme of suffering conditioned the composition of the Apocalypse cannot be underestimated. There is almost consensus that the Book of Revelation is a product of suffering or crisis, whether it is real or perceived, as will be shown later. Rome is criticized for the sufferings it has inflicted on its subjects. Suffering is thus better understood as an essential element of the Apocalypse. Viewed from where suffering real readers stand, moreover, suffering is a most pressing matter and an indispensable feature of apocalyptic that cannot be derived from anything other than real sufferings. For them, the theme of suffering deserves more attention, at least insofar as the Book of Revelation is read as primarily interested in the issue of human suffering and its solution.

Literary Criticism

The last quarter of the twentieth century saw the rise of literary criticism in biblical scholarship as a competing mode of interpretation with historical criticism, with its allegedly scientific and objective hermeneutic based on the original meaning retrieved from *within* the unified text. The literary-critical method has indeed made a contribution to the understanding of Revelation by drawing attention to the relation between the reading process and the literary features and clues within the text, although some literary critics view the historical-critical and literary-critical methods of interpretation as complementing each other. An exemplary study on the Apocalypse from this perspective is that of James L. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John: A Narrative Commentary* and *Revelation Unsealed: A Narrative Critical Approach to John's Apocalypse*.

Predictably enough, however, literary-critical commentators on Revelation do not take seriously

³³ Aune, *Revelation*, 3: 1010. The Apocalypse never deals with the issue of economic exploitation (Ibid., 990).

the world behind the text, since its literary, formal features within the text are considered hermeneutically more important than the historical conditions behind it. Resseguie gives insufficient consideration to the social context of the Apocalypse, as is indicated by the emphasis on the symbolic and representative meaning of settings³⁴ as well as by the assertion that John's bizarre characters are expressive of archetypal characteristics that reveal the nature of good and evil in our world, rather than being thin disguises for historical personages of the first century.³⁵ While note is at times taken of not only the social and cultural location but also the ideological point of view of the narrator, this ideological position is thought of as part of what the implied author intends the implied reader to adopt,³⁶ rather than as a conditioning factor in the composition of a text or in the reading of the text. It is further argued that, although a real flesh-and-blood reader is not the implied reader hypothetically constructed by the implied author, real readers are to interpret the text in the same way as the implied author intends the implied reader to do.³⁷ The role of real readers is thus denied or minimized.

However, readings of the Apocalypse that overemphasize its literary features hardly do justice to the socioreligious aspects of life faced by the original readers, let alone their sufferings. By assuming the existence of a neutral reader, literal critics separate the experience of real readers, ancient or modern, from the text. As with Beale, besides, Resseguie's focus on symbolic, thus supracultural, meanings mitigates the specific and contextual meanings of life, including suffering. One may well suspect that the author of Revelation used literary technique because he believed it would be easily associated with historical conditions shared by both author and reader. It is less evident how literary skills can produce intended effects separated from historical reality. From the social location of suffering real readers, moreover, suffering is such an immediate, pressing, and existential matter that it cannot be properly understood even by the implied reader who is competent and universal. The theme of suffering deserves more consideration,

³⁴ James L. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John: A Narrative Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 2-8.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 18, 42. Resseguie takes "ideology" to denote "the norms, values, and beliefs that the narrator wants the reader to adopt" (*Ibid.*, 42).

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 54.

at least to the extent that Revelation is read as directly dealing with real sufferings and their resolution.

Sociocultural Criticism

The uprising of literary criticism was followed by the emergence of sociocultural criticism in biblical scholarship as a competing mode of interpretation with historical and literary criticism, with its allegedly scientific and objective hermeneutic based on the retrieval of the original meaning of the text from its social and cultural context. The sociocultural approach thus makes a contribution to the interpretation of Revelation by calling attention to the close connection between the text and the sociocultural conditions and situations *behind and within* it. It is often objected that, despite the usefulness of sociological and anthropological theories in understanding ancient texts, “primary attention must be given to the documents themselves and to their peculiar contours” and that such a theory or model cannot be expected to apply to all ancient apocalypses;³⁸ hence, a detailed analysis of the social aspects of Jewish apocalypticism must begin with the individual writings.³⁹ However, certain social and cultural aspects—like cultural hegemony, colonialism, alienation, etc.—seem to be ever-present throughout history and thus can be applied to most, if not all, ancient texts. Representative work from this perspective includes the commentaries by Bruce Malina and John Pilch, and Leonard L. Thompson.

Bruce Malina and John Pilch

Intriguingly enough, however, sociocultural interpretations of Revelation often mitigate the importance of the world behind the text insofar as realities experienced by the original readers are not taken seriously enough. For example, on the assumption that adequate communication takes place if and only if the same social system and cultural context are shared by writer and reader, Malina and Pilch argue for a reading that is consonant with the social systems and cultural contexts behind the writing of Revelation by

³⁸ George W. E. Nickelsburg, “Social Aspects of Palestinian Jewish Apocalypticism,” in *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East*, 648.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 649.

employing adequate social-scientific models, which traditional historical studies and literary analysis alone cannot.⁴⁰ Surprisingly, however, they depoliticize the Book of Revelation by focusing on astrology to the detriment of the sociocultural background of Rome. It is alleged that “the inhabitants of the sky formed an integral part of the social environment of the period of the first-century Mediterranean world” for the contemporaries of Jesus, Paul, and the writer of Revelation, as evidenced by the huge amount of astronomical/astrological documents from the Greco-Roman period.⁴¹

To say the least, Malina and Pilch overemphasize the role of ancient astrology in the understanding of the first-century social systems and human relations. To corroborate their observation, they must view the NT as written for what anthropologists call a “high-context” society, in which a broadly shared, concrete knowledge of the context of anything referred to in writing was presumed and thus no writer needed to explain them. In the case of Revelation, a high knowledge of the star lore of Jewish tradition is assumed.⁴² However, it is one thing to say that some knowledge is assumed between writer and reader, which is most probable, and it is quite another to assume that knowledge of a specific subject governs the social environment of the first-century Mediterranean world for the contemporary author. Astrology may be a part of the common knowledge of John’s age, but we cannot say that astrology constitutes the *Weltanschauung* of the Apocalypse merely because the book refers to astrological entities. This might be better understood as an accidental characteristic of apocalyptic writings concerned with revelation via heavenly mediators.

Moreover, regardless of whether or the extent to which there was astral lore shared by John and his audience, it seems almost impossible to separate the astral dimensions of the Apocalypse from the historical ones. Malina and Pilch even regard the move from the astral context of John and his fellow Israelite Jesus-group prophets to the historical framework of the first-century Mediterranean Roman hegemony as an unfortunate one for the understanding of John and his group.⁴³ Simply because John and his community

⁴⁰ Bruce J. Malina and John J. Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 22-23.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, vii.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 19.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 21-22.

envisioned the eschatological events in terms of astrology/astronomy does not make it any less likely for such language to be read as relevant to the visible historical events. In my opinion, John's immediate concerns were with contemporary historical situations, which were coded in language of ancient astrology. It is highly unlikely that the sky comprised a social arena for the first-century Christians. The most that can be said is that the denizens of the sky meant more to ancient people than to modern people.

Leonard L. Thompson

Leonard Thompson's sociological commentary on Revelation is based on a twofold assumption regarding the relation of apocalypse to reality: on the one hand, John's symbolic universe cannot be separated from sociopolitical realities; on the other hand, his apocalyptic message does not address conflicts or crises in the world of his audience. Rather, John offers a *revealed* understanding of what the *whole* world is like.⁴⁴ Such topics as conflict, crisis, hope, and exhortation, which express John's negative attitude toward the Roman Empire, are commonplace to the apocalyptic genre and, therefore, cannot be considered appropriate clues to the social location of the Apocalypse. Consequently, instead of beginning with these generic *topoi*, we should begin with a more basic fact: apocalypse is revelatory literature.⁴⁵

It is further assumed that John and his audience were not exactly oppressed people economically or politically; rather, they merely understood themselves as a minority in opposition to the larger Christian community as well as the Roman social order.⁴⁶ In alignment with Peter Berger's definition of a *cognitive minority* as a group of people whose world view, formed around a body of *deviant knowledge*, is significantly different from the one generally taken for granted,⁴⁷ Thompson supposes that the crisis stems from the revealed, deviant knowledge possessed by a *cognitive minority*, rather than vice versa.⁴⁸ The Book

⁴⁴ Leonard L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 33.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 191-92.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 195.

⁴⁷ Peter L. Berger, *A Rumor of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1969), 7.

⁴⁸ Thompson, *Apocalypse and Empire*, 194.

of Revelation is not a book of crisis. Thompson theorizes that a social location as cognitive minority is a sufficient cause for distress and comfort.⁴⁹ Put differently, the notion of perceived crisis sheds no light on the social setting of an apocalypse.⁵⁰

While Thompson's position may extend Revelation's references to human suffering beyond the social location of its audience to the whole world, it sacrifices the concrete and specific meanings of suffering in favor of ubiquitous significance. Besides, viewing Revelation as a product of revealed knowledge rather than of experienced reality does not do justice to the socioreligious aspects of life faced by the first readers, let alone their sufferings. By foregrounding the cognitive conflict between John and Rome, Thompson seems to underestimate more existential problems such as persecution and oppression. As argued earlier, it is not likely that the elements of crisis in the Apocalypse could accomplish the authorial aim of providing readers with revealed knowledge, if they were merely formal elements of the genre and remarkably different from the real sociohistorical conditions at the time of reading. It seems unlikely that a sincere author or reader would perceive any social situation as one of crisis. What strengthens most the plausibility of revealed knowledge appears to be the sense of a truth experienced rather than a cognitive or religious commitment to it. Experienced reality engenders and legitimates revealed reality, but not vice versa. From the place where suffering real readers stand, suffering is a most urgent matter, one that informs an apocalyptic worldview and so cannot be appropriated by those who are not marginalized. The theme of suffering deserves more consideration, not least inasmuch as the Apocalypse is more properly read as a product of existential sufferings.

Multimethodological Readings

The above-mentioned critics usually apply one mode of discourse to the interpretation of the Apocalypse as a whole. In one way or another, besides, they show less concern with the experience, including suffering, of ancient as well as modern real readers. Two books on Revelation published in the

⁴⁹ Ibid., 194.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 28.

late 20th century not only revived but also had a landmark impact on Revelation Studies by dealing with these problems in more detail: *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (1984) by Adela Yarbro Collins and *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment* (1985) by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. Not only do both scholars underscore the hermeneutical relevance of the Apocalypse to those who are suffering, but they also acknowledge the need for a multimethodological approach to Revelation. Yarbro Collins attempts to complement a historical-critical reading of the book with insights and tools from both literary and sociological analysis.⁵¹ Schüssler Fiorenza's rhetorical strategy of reading integrates both historical and literary analysis, while seeking to make sense of Revelation in terms of the book's persuasive power both in its original and in its present-day rhetorical situation.⁵²

Adela Yarbro Collins

Yarbro Collins makes a significant contribution to the understanding of the Apocalypse by foregrounding the aggressive feelings evoked by the sociopolitical situation, while at the same time emphasizing the psychological effect, i.e., catharsis, of the book on readers under intolerable crisis. The Apocalypse functions as an outlet for the desire for revenge and as a means of creating catharsis for the readers. Catharsis is produced when emotions of fear and anger are released by the recurrent presentations of the destruction of the hearers' enemies.⁵³ The authorial purpose was to overcome the tension between what was and what ought to have been, what sociologists call "cognitive dissonance." For this, however, the author must create that tension for readers who are not aware of it, because such tension is not so much real as perceived by the author.⁵⁴ Despite her view of Revelation as an outlet for such emotions as fear and

⁵¹ Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 13-23.

⁵² Schüssler Fiorenza, *Vision of a Just World*, 20.

⁵³ Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 154. By letting the hearers perceive the devastation of Rome indirectly, i.e., through the heavenly voices and earthly mourners, John "opens the way for venting feelings of resentment and anger" against Rome (M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* [Louisville: John Knox, 1989], 186).

⁵⁴ Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 141. Yet, she elsewhere interprets perceived crisis as expressing "distress experienced by a number of individuals who share a certain social location" (Yarbro Collins, review of *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire*, by Leonard L. Thompson, *Journal of Religion* 72 [1992]: 99). For a similar view, see John G. Gager, *Kingdom and Community: The Social World of Early Christianity* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-

resentment, Yarbrow Collins doubts that John and his addressees were suffering unbearable injustice and oppression.⁵⁵

John tries to overcome such cognitive dissonance through an act of literary imagination.⁵⁶ A major function of apocalyptic language is to resolve a social crisis on the level of the imagination, although that resolution has implications for action.⁵⁷ It is argued that “the literary attack on Rome is the most basic element of social radicalism in the Apocalypse.”⁵⁸ The Apocalypse fails to provide ways of sociopolitical transformation.⁵⁹ Victory is promised on the other side of suffering.⁶⁰ Yarbrow Collins thus stops short of detecting active resistance embedded in Revelation by viewing the book as recommending the audience to passively accept suffering.⁶¹ In addition to cathartic effects, readers are encouraged to withdraw from Greco-Roman society into an exclusive group in anticipation of imminent judgment against their enemies and their own salvation.⁶² In the meantime, the Apocalypse decidedly rules out violent deeds by limiting vengeance and envy to the imagination.⁶³ Aggressive feelings are transferred to God and Christ as vindicators, because “aggressive action is not desirable and aggressive feelings cannot simply be suppressed or converted into other feelings and activities.”⁶⁴ She even finds an analogy between the vision of Revelation and the imagination of the schizophrenic, which is creative yet ultimately dysfunctional. In order to make sense of the current sociopolitical situation of Christians, the Apocalypse, like the schizophrenic, resorts to an act of creative imagination that withdraws from empirical reality, from everyday experience

Hall, 1975), 49-57. Referring to Claude Lévi-Strauss’s comparison of myth and psychoanalysis (“The Effectiveness of Symbols,” in *Structural Anthropology* [Garden City: Anchor, 1967]), Gager argues that the Book of Revelation is “a form of therapy, much like the technique of psychoanalysis, whose ultimate goal is to transcend the time between a real present and a mythical future” (Ibid., 51). He holds, however, that the suffering of John’s readers was real and overwhelming (Ibid.).

⁵⁵ Yarbrow Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 170.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 141.

⁵⁷ Yarbrow Collins, “Persecution and Vengeance,” 729.

⁵⁸ Yarbrow Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 124.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 161.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 152.

⁶¹ Yarbrow Collins, “The Political Perspective of the Revelation to John,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 96/2 (1977): 245-52.

⁶² Yarbrow Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 137.

⁶³ Yarbrow Collins, “Persecution and Vengeance,” 747.

⁶⁴ Yarbrow Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 156.

in the ordinary world.⁶⁵

However, Yarbrow Collins's reading of Revelation, which uses the notion of a perceived crisis, does not fully appreciate the meaning of the real sufferings that the original readers had to undergo in socioreligious aspects of life. Ironically, the author of Revelation creates a situation of crisis in order to help the readers overcome it. In order for the book to achieve its intended purpose, the readers must be persuaded by the author to accept, on the one hand, his sense of perceived crisis and, on the other hand, his appeal for cathartic imagination. Since the second is predicated on the first, a more important question to ask is whether or to what extent the first readers accepted the authorial understanding of the crisis. The point here is, once more, that there should be sociohistorical conditions harsh enough to be successfully associated by the readers with the author's perceived crisis. In terms of communication between author and reader, the genre of apocalypse belongs to a cultural framework shared by both author and reader.⁶⁶

Presumably related to her focus on the function of literary imagination in solving cognitive dissonance, Yarbrow Collins has the reader imagine the destruction of Rome, rather than face and resist suffering in a real world. Yarbrow Collins points out that fear and resentment of Roman power are evoked or intensified in Revelation.⁶⁷ Literary presentations of the destruction of one's enemies might well produce catharsis. Less convincing is her idea that fearful feelings are released when they are expressed, especially when projected onto a cosmic screen of conflict.⁶⁸ Did the projection of fear and aggressive feelings into cosmic categories really provide the hearers with a feeling of detachment from their experience and thus great control?⁶⁹ I would argue that the externalizing and aggrandizing of human conflicts bring about more fear than catharsis. This would explain, at least in part, why the Apocalypse is not read as widely as other NT writings. This might also account for why Revelation is popular among those who seek a way to avoid such cosmological conflicts as depicted therein by, for example, reading into the text the "rapture." Mere

⁶⁵ Ibid., 154-55.

⁶⁶ Lars Hartman, "Survey of the Problem of Apocalyptic Genre," in *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East*, 340.

⁶⁷ Yarbrow Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 153.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 153.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 161.

foreknowledge intensifies fear and grief.

Even though catharsis is created via literary imagination, one suspects that it is, at best, temporary and that it must be repeated until real solutions are implemented. The psychological effects of the Apocalypse are helpful only inasmuch as they are complemented by pragmatic considerations. Otherwise, the objectification of present circumstances may well intensify fear and cause readers to feel more frustrated than cathartic. One could even argue that the major function of the Apocalypse lies in enabling suffering readers to resist evil in real life rather than in apocalyptic imagination. Then, victory is promised on the other side of resistance rather than of suffering. From the place where suffering real readers stand, righteous suffering is that which must be avoided and resisted, whenever possible. My reading of Revelation as commending resisting activities undermines Yarbro Collins's assertion that Revelation transfers aggressive feelings to God and Christ as vindicators. By envisioning a vindicating God, the Apocalypse does not contain aggressive feelings but rather sublimates them as religiously acceptable methods of correcting social problems. Active resistance is a theme deserving more attention, at least to the extent that Revelation is read as inscribing, implicitly or explicitly, strategies for socioreligious transformation in the interest of the marginalized.

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza

Schüssler Fiorenza points toward the relevance of Revelation's concern for justice for modern readers who are suffering and exploited, in continuity with the tradition of the prophets, including Jesus.⁷⁰ Revelation is taken to unveil the dehumanizing character of institutional power and, accordingly, to present the hope of redemption as liberation in political and socio-economic, rather than spiritualistic and individualistic, terms. Babylon/Rome in Revelation "is the powerful incarnation of international exploitation, oppression, and murder."⁷¹ Although it seems difficult to resolve the question of whether there were harsh persecutions during the years of Domitian, Schüssler Fiorenza correctly calls attention to

⁷⁰ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 24.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

the importance of whose perspective one adopts: John's perspective from below expresses the experiences of the marginalized.⁷² In contrast to Yarbro Collins, Schüssler Fiorenza observes that the reason why John views Rome as an exploitative and dehumanizing power is because some of the Asian communities, including his, have experienced poverty, violence, and murder.⁷³

Schüssler Fiorenza further identifies resistance as Revelation's rhetorical motivation.⁷⁴ She regards the Christians as the agents of the power and empire of God and Christ on earth, in opposition to Rome's imperial powers as the agents of the demonic power of Satan.⁷⁵ Her focus, however, is on divine judgment and God's kingship, which is identified as the main motif of Revelation: "The focal point of the 'already' and 'not yet' of eschatological salvation is not history but the kingdom of God and the rule of Christ."⁷⁶ History is significant only in relation to the short time before the eschaton. It is only the judgment of God that ends and vindicates the suffering of Christians.⁷⁷ In other words, the eschatology of Revelation is not dependent on historical events.⁷⁸ Instead, the goal of the composition of Revelation is the final eschatological judgment and salvation.⁷⁹ Christian suffering is solved by arguing for a God who will rule on earth in the future rather than act now.⁸⁰ As long as Babylon has the power on earth, a realized understanding of redemption and salvation must give way to an eschatological one.⁸¹

Consequently, as with most commentators, Revelation does not so much envision the reversal of fortunes as engenders hope and encouragement for those struggling for liberation from exploitation and

⁷² Ibid., 9.

⁷³ Ibid., 8. She compares John's experience with that of Martin Luther King, Jr.: his experience of the oppression of his people and his own imprisonment led him to his theology of justice and judgment. If the dehumanizing power of racism is understood as evil, his indictment of racist White America cannot be construed as "envy" deficient of Christian love (Ibid.).

⁷⁴ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Vision of a Just World*, 129.

⁷⁵ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Invitation to the Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Apocalypse with Complete Text from The Jerusalem Bible* (Garden City: Image, 1981), 28.

⁷⁶ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 24.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 48.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 46.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 47.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 48.

⁸¹ Ibid., 75.

persecution.⁸² This is the way in which the book attempts to motivate the audience to steadfast resistance.⁸³ Revelation has the function of strengthening and consoling the Christians who are persecuted for their witness to God's and Christ's power and kingship in this world.⁸⁴ When the present is ruled by oppressive forces, the function of apocalyptic narrative is to carry readers forward into the future and confirm the hope for their future vindication by God.⁸⁵ In one word, the author of Revelation "speaks of future salvation for the sake of exhortation."⁸⁶ Predictably, her liberationist interpretation of Revelation views sufferings as a part the audience plays in the struggle for an oppression-free world.⁸⁷

It must also be stressed that Schüssler Fiorenza critiques the language and imagery of Revelation for being in danger of conceiving divine power as imperial and oppressive power: the envisioning of God and Christ in analogy to the Roman emperor is the theological "Achilles' heel" of the Apocalypse.⁸⁸ Insofar as it fosters and inculcates patriarchal militarism and oppressive domination, such patriarchal language must be changed into a theological language that furthers both democratic responsibility and engaged resistance to destructive powers.⁸⁹

Schüssler Fiorenza indeed foregrounds the theme of suffering in the interpretation of the Apocalypse by emphasizing the realities of econo-socio-political experiences of the original readers in a more decided way than the above interpreters. The genre of apocalypse as a communication between writer and reader thus reflects a cultural framework shared by both parties, as far as suffering is concerned. Schüssler Fiorenza's assumption that John's perspective is from below is especially important in the sense that it abandons a decontextualized analysis of the text in favor of a perspectival one. She further acknowledges a multiplicity of interpretations elucidating Revelation's different aspects⁹⁰ and the agency

⁸² Schüssler Fiorenza, *Vision of a Just World*, 101.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 130.

⁸⁴ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 138.

⁸⁵ Schüssler Fiorenza, "The Phenomenon of Early Christian Apocalyptic: Some Reflections on Method," in *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East*, 309.

⁸⁶ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 168.

⁸⁷ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Vision of a Just World*, 122.

⁸⁸ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 9.

⁸⁹ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Vision of a Just World*, 124.

⁹⁰ Schüssler Fiorenza, "Babylon the Great: A Rhetorical-Political Reading of Revelation 17-18," in *The Reality of*

and subjecthood of readers in negotiating and creating meanings in specific contexts and situations.⁹¹

However, while acknowledging the agency and perspective of contextualized readers in the construction of meaning, Schüssler Fiorenza does not go on to read Revelation as resistance literature by setting forth concrete and conscious ways of resistance artfully embedded in the book. The author of Revelation, according to her, achieves pathos by constructing a symbolic universe rather than by analyzing or directly discussing the problems of his day.⁹² Schüssler Fiorenza's focus on divine judgment also likely prevents a reading of the book in terms of human participation in the judgment of evil political powers before the breaking in of the kingdom of God. In overemphasizing the meaning of futuristic eschatological salvation, she likewise minimizes the role of human agency and resistance in the realization of a just order in this world. It is my assertion that suffering readers need to view Babylon as something that awaits not only eschatological judgment but also this-worldly transformation. To them, the function of Revelation consists in empowering readers to fight against oppression in present history. An ultimate future vindication generates encouraging results when it is interconnected with immediate results. In order for a vision of just order to be prophetic as well as apocalyptic, it has to envision materialized methods for changing the current course of history.

Further, Schüssler Fiorenza's neglect of the theme of fortune reversal in her reading of the Apocalypse will be less convincing to suffering readers than to complacent readers. The reversal of fortune theme plays an important role in the Apocalypse, insofar as it envisions an immediate victory achieved through human resistance as well as an eschatological divine judgment. From the social location of suffering readers, righteous suffering is that which should be avoided and resisted, whenever possible.

Last but not least, it is far from obvious that an apocalypse can foster democratic responsibility as well as engaged resistance to oppression. One doubts how any language of tolerance can achieve liberation, while keeping the latter goal in the foreground. In particular, suffering readers, to whom liberation is the

Apocalypse: Rhetoric and Politics in the Book of Revelation, ed. David L. Barr (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 245.

⁹¹ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Vision of a Just World*, 13.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 129.

most urgent concern, would presumably see less of a contradiction between democratic ideals and less democratic ways to that goal than might be expected of complacent readers. If the author of an apocalypse takes a perspective from below to give voice to the existential problems of the disadvantaged, the same author quite likely presents a solution to them from the same perspective. As far as both resistance and suffering are concerned, the Book of Revelation, as apocalyptic communication between author and audience, reflects a cultural framework shared by both parties.

A caveat is in order before ending this critical overview of previous scholarship. I am not rejecting the value of historical, literary, and sociocultural criticism but rather criticizing the reluctance or negligence embedded in their interpretive methods to consider the concerns and interests of the subaltern. Needless to say, each mode of interpretation provides valuable insights that can be appropriated in ideological criticism. I see previous interpretive modes as supplementing ideological criticism, not only in terms of their contribution to biblical interpretation but also in the sense that they enhance our understanding of how ideological agenda can be inscribed both in the text and in its interpretation.

Ideological Criticism

In presupposing the univocal meaning of the text, which is to be retrieved by an objective, universal, and informed reader, most of the above approaches and critics fail to take sufficient note of the role of the flesh-and-blood reader, ancient or modern, in (re)constructing the meaning of both suffering and resistance.⁹³ In particular, they have excluded, in one way or another as well as in varying degrees, the experiences and voices of the subaltern from apocalyptic studies. My suggestion that Revelation can be read from the perspective of suffering people in terms of resistance is reinforced by the recent critical position that the realities of culture and experience play an important role in biblical criticism.⁹⁴ This paradigm shift, which has been gaining ground among biblical scholars, especially since the late 20th

⁹³ Schüssler Fiorenza may well be an exception.

⁹⁴ Insofar as what one sees and where one stands go hand in hand, not simply the text but social-ideological location and rhetorical context as well decide the interpretation of biblical texts as well as the reconstruction of historical realities (Schüssler Fiorenza, "Babylon the Great," 255).

century, has drawn attention, among other things, to the social location of both the author and the reader. This method of criticism is best expressed by the term “ideological criticism,” which “draws explicit attention to the values, belief systems, and power dynamics involved in the composition and interpretation of biblical texts.” In so doing, ideological criticism seeks not only to uncover the ideology that shapes a given text but also to read a biblical text through the lens of contemporary ideologies.⁹⁵ Thus, the Apocalypse also began to be viewed in relation to the ideology and culture of the reader as well as the author. Scholars wonder whether and why certain voices are foregrounded not only in the text itself but also in its interpretations, and what ideological interests and political agendas are at work. Along the lines of ideological criticism, I interpret both suffering and resistance as depicted in the Apocalypse in light of the social location and ideology of those concerned with the composition and reading of the text.

Ideological interpretations of the Apocalypse have been pursued in a twofold manner. While some have read Revelation as a helpful text, following a hermeneutic of affirmation, others have read it as a harmful text, following a hermeneutic of suspicion. Richard Kearney notes,

Myth is an ideological function. But it is also more than that. Once a hermeneutics of suspicion has unmasked the alienating role of myth as an agency of ideological conformism, there remains the task of a positive interpretation. Hermeneutics, as Ricoeur insists, has a double duty: to ‘suspect’ and to ‘listen.’ Having demythologized the ideologies of false consciousness it labours to disclose the Utopian symbols of liberating consciousness. This involves discriminating between the falsifying and emancipating dimensions of myth.⁹⁶

Myths are not considered neutral but supportive of specific interests, yielding not only positive but also negative functions. Ricoeur observes that both destructive and liberating reinterpretations of myths are produced, depending on how each generation receives them according to their needs and ideological motivations.⁹⁷ Along similar lines, some, but not all, critics foreground liberating dimensions of the Apocalypse.

⁹⁵ Gail R. O’Day, “Johannine Literature,” in *The New Testament Today*, ed. Mark Allan Powell (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 79.

⁹⁶ Richard Kearney, “Between Tradition and Utopia: The Hermeneutical Problem of Myth,” in *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*, ed. David Wood (New York: Routledge, 1991), 67. For Ricoeur’s idea on “myth,” see Paul Ricoeur, “Myth as the Bearer of Possible Worlds,” in *On Paul Ricoeur: the Owl of Minerva*, by Richard Kearney (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), 117-26.

⁹⁷ Ricoeur, “Myth as the Bearer of Possible Worlds,” 121.

Positive Readings: A Hermeneutic of Affirmation

Brian K. Blount

From an African American perspective, Brian Blount posits active resistance in the Apocalypse. After professing to be a product of the African American church, Blount proposes to interpret the Apocalypse by using the actual experience of African American slaves as an interpretive lens to clarify the ethic of the book.⁹⁸ If not read from the point of view of the suffering ones who offer resistance, the Book of Revelation comes across as vengeful and escapist.⁹⁹ He further stresses that the visions of John and the slaves do not simply suggest a new future, but create the future in the present.¹⁰⁰

However, Blount fails to expand active resistance far enough to involve social activities in the undermining of institutional evil. The methods of resistance are limited, it seems, to the “religious” and the “ethical,” in traditional fashion. In one word, according to Blount, the Apocalypse promotes an ethic of active resistance by means of *witnessing* to the truth that the Lamb, not Rome, is in control of human history.¹⁰¹ Blount sees correspondence between John and Martin Luther King, Jr.: while John’s oppositional witness manifested itself through preaching and prophesying, King’s contrary witness against segregation does so through sermons and marches.¹⁰² Hence, John’s witness-active resistance is related to civil disobedience in the form of nonviolent resistance and the act of perseverance.¹⁰³ Besides, Blount sees suffering as inevitable for the transformation of society rather than something to be avoided: neither King nor John focused on the suffering and dying that *accompanied* the witness.¹⁰⁴ According to Blount, King even desired the manifestation of suffering in a public way, because this was the only way in which America would see and change the horror of the system of segregation.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁸ Brian K. Blount, “The Witness of Active Resistance: The Ethics of *Revelation* in African American Perspective,” in *From Every People and Nation: The Book of Revelation in Intercultural Perspective*, ed. David Rhoads (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 28.

⁹⁹ Blount, “Witness of Active Resistance,” 45.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁰² Brian K. Blount, “Reading Revelation Today: Witness as Active Resistance,” *Interpretation* 54 (2000): 412.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 398.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 412.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 412.

Blount argues that the polyvalent text indeed conveys “meaning potential” rather than a single meaning, that the meaning potential of a text is limited by the linguistic markers that give interpretive direction, and that decoding depends on the context of the reader.¹⁰⁶ Thus, Revelation’s meaning potential can be deciphered in a different way than Blount himself does, to the extent that it is supported by the linguistic markers of the book and relevant to the socioreligious context of the reader. Consequently, one could construe suffering as something to be avoided, at least in certain circumstances, rather than to be welcomed and endured. Further, nothing prevents suffering readers from choosing a reading of Revelation that is focused on more active resistance than he allows for. To my mind, these two observations more fully appreciate the existential realities of suffering people as reflected in the Book of Revelation and thus help to create practical strategies of resistance, beyond bearing witness, in the interest of suffering people.

Pablo Richard

Insofar as he declares that he seeks to produce a work that is scholarly and exegetically well-grounded from the standpoint of the oppressed,¹⁰⁷ resistance does indeed come to the fore in Pablo Richard’s commentary on Revelation, which is taken to offer hope for a political utopia that unfolds in history. The Apocalypse is a liberating book that transmits a spirituality of resistance.¹⁰⁸ Richard’s reading of Revelation empowers those suffering in a more practical way than others, to the extent that the book is not viewed as oriented toward the second coming or the end of the world, but as focused on the reign of God now.¹⁰⁹ In a word, Revelation is diametrical to ideology, in its pejorative sense, which conceals oppression and legitimizes domination—apocalypse unveils oppression and legitimizes liberation.¹¹⁰

Yet, it seems to me that Richard overemphasizes the spiritual meaning of resistance. He stops short of exploring the full meaning of resistance in Revelation as *praxis* in its simplest sense, when he finds its

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 398-99.

¹⁰⁷ Pablo Richard, *Apocalypse: A People’s Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995), 3.

¹⁰⁸ Richard, *People’s Commentary*, 3.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 3.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 26.

basic element to be testimony, denying it any positivist sense.¹¹¹ The oppressed are invited to apocalyptic praxis through the employment of strategies of nonviolence. Just as the risen Jesus is a lamb rather than a lion, the martyrs achieve victory through witness.¹¹² God's people struggle against Rome by dying and rising, as did Jesus.¹¹³ Apocalyptic praxis is spiritual power: the force of consciousness, myths, and the Word.¹¹⁴ Insofar as apocalyptic praxis is ethical and spiritual resistance,¹¹⁵ Revelation's violence is more literary than real.¹¹⁶ As a result, what is stressed is God's liberating action intervening in history rather than liberating actions carried out by suffering humans.¹¹⁷

However, it is no less likely that Revelation's apocalyptic praxis subsumes strategies of resistance as a positivist would understand them. In my opinion, John's resistance language attests to a Christian praxis that surpasses testimony. Further, praxis in a positivist sense is not necessarily incompatible with praxis in a spiritual sense. This binomial distinction might be more a product of modern rationalism than John's view of praxis, which includes actions other than witnessing. To the extent that Revelation's violent language is understood in a positivist as well as spiritual sense, it is not only literary but also real. The remaining question is how one can incorporate it into a liberationist reading of the text in an ethical manner.

More importantly, if a liberationist reading assigns a specific role of resistance to the alleged beneficiaries of that reading, such a role may be not so much liberating as confining in terms of reading pedagogy. It may be stated that diversity in readings is part of a movement of liberation in recent biblical criticism from hegemony of approach and practitioners to diversity in approaches and practitioners.¹¹⁸ Real readers of the Apocalypse cannot be denied other interpretations focused on active resistance along with and beyond testimony. Liberationist readings of Revelation need not reject the possibility that John has his

¹¹¹ Ibid., 33.

¹¹² Ibid., 4.

¹¹³ Ibid., 136.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 4.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 136.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 4.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 34.

¹¹⁸ Fernando Segovia, "Pedagogical Discourse and Practices in Cultural Studies: Toward a Contextual Biblical Pedagogy," in *Decolonizing Biblical Studies*, 92.

readers not only proclaim but also work out liberation.

Allan A. Boesak

Allan Boesak differs from the previous critics in that he takes seriously the function of power in resistance as well as domination within the framework of liberation theology. The white power structure defines the reality of black life, and the solution lies in confronting the white power with another kind of power, i.e., black power.¹¹⁹ It is the responsibility of the powerless to build an alternative power based on righteousness to counter the power of the oppressor.¹²⁰ Thus, oppression becomes a problem of the oppressed as well as of the oppressor. Boesak even argues that to share power is to be fully human, because humanity has been endowed with God's liberating power.¹²¹

However, Boesak falls short of applying that principle of power to his interpretation of the Apocalypse. The Apocalypse is taken to provide a basis for a Christian liberation theology and call the church to resist evil; yet, again, it is a witness—even unto death—for the Messiah and for justice that is required of the church engaged in a life-and-death struggle with the oppressive powers. John's intention was to comfort, encourage, and inspire by calling the church to persistent faith and obedience to the true king.¹²² What is most disturbing for the oppressor and most comforting for the faithful is the *knowledge* that Jesus is king forever.¹²³ Those who have faith in Jesus must not seek to avoid suffering as a consequence of the struggle for the gospel.¹²⁴ Boesak seems more concerned with the fact that Revelation offers comfort and encouragement rather than the possibility that the book may empower suffering people to confront oppressive power with liberating power.

It should be clear by now how readings of Revelation focused on witness fail to take into due

¹¹⁹ Allan A. Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence: A Socio-Ethical Study on Black Theology and Power* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1977), 56.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹²² Boesak, *Comfort and Protest*, 33-35. Jewish apocalyptic literature likewise reflects the longing of the suffering Jewish people for God's intervention (*Ibid.*, 17).

¹²³ Boesak, *Comfort and Protest*, 36.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.

account other dimensions of resistance that can be derived from an activist reading of the book, especially from a liberationist point of view. As far as power relations are concerned, Boesak at best minimizes his own understanding of how power is and should be used between oppressor and oppressed by overstressing the function of faith in and knowledge of Jesus as the true king.

It is my assertion that Revelation's resistance language justifies the use of counterpower as a solution to the illegitimate use of power by the oppressor. John's deconstruction of the sociopolitical base of Babylon indicates that building an alternative power system is a no less efficient weapon for liberation than revealing the false lordship of the dominant. A liberationist reading of Revelation needs to integrate the ways in which the oppressed can use power legitimately and effectively for the good cause of liberation. In this vein, therefore, righteous deeds must receive no less emphasis than right knowledge and faith in the interpretation of Revelation. As in the case of Richard, Boesak's liberationist reading of Revelation can be accused of being hegemonic in terms of reading pedagogy, if the reader is deprived of a right to interpret the text in a more active way than he does.

Negative Readings: A Hermeneutic of Suspicion

Tina Pippin

Tina Pippin reads the Apocalypse through the lens of a hermeneutic of suspicion. She looks at the Apocalypse from a feminist perspective as a misogynistic text that marginalizes women. The subversive text of Revelation subverts Rome without subverting the typical gender relations in the culture, which subordinate women to men.¹²⁵ Revelation, therefore, is not a liberating text for women readers.¹²⁶ Her deconstructionist gender reading even considers Revelation irredeemable to such an extent that women are encouraged to create their own apocalyptic tales and utopian narratives.¹²⁷ Furthermore, women have to

¹²⁵ Tina Pippin, "The Heroine and the Whore: The Apocalypse of John in Feminist Perspective," in *From Every People and Nation: The Book of Revelation in Intercultural Perspective*, ed. David Rhoads (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 129.

¹²⁶ Tina Pippin, *Death and Desire: The Rhetoric of Gender in the Apocalypse of John* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 80.

¹²⁷ Pippin, *Death and Desire*, 105.

refuse the call to mimic Christ as a sacrificial lamb. Instead of desiring martyrdom, contemporary women (and men) are called to take risks for social change, for martyrdom becomes another form of patriarchal abuse when the majority of the world population suffers from hunger.¹²⁸

To begin with, it is not conclusive that John's androcentric language as signifier is exclusively androcentric in its signified as well. To some, it is more inclusive, conventional, and generic.¹²⁹ As far as suffering and resistance are concerned, Revelation makes no distinction between men and women (e.g., 12.17; 13.16; 18.4). John resists any characters that are exempt from suffering and discourage resistance, whether they are male or female, Christians or Jews or pagans. Besides, any gender analysis that fails to consider the constructed character of gender in terms of power relations may be, argues Schüssler Fiorenza, in danger of becoming apolitical:¹³⁰ "Gender is always constructed and inflected by relations of domination."¹³¹ More significantly, whereas a gender reading of Revelation aims to interrupt the gender ideologies inscribed therein, it may prevent one from reading the book in different feminist terms.¹³² In other words, Pippin's approach precludes the reader from reading the book through a lens of reconstructionist hermeneutics so as to reconstruct its liberating message for both women and men. If an ideological reading claims to be binding for a specific group of people, then it ceases to be ideological in the sense that it denies or minimizes the role of real readers in choosing the best reading in their interest. We are reminded of the liberation of reading pedagogy to which Segovia has called attention, as mentioned above.

Last but not least, Pippin's call to risk-taking active resistance for the transformation of society may seem to be similar to my reading of Revelation as a resistance literature that envisions diverse roads to freedom and liberation. Yet, one need not abandon the Apocalypse as an abusive text beyond reclaiming in order to reach that conclusion. The same message can be derived from the Apocalypse, if the text is

¹²⁸ Ibid., 101-102.

¹²⁹ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 208.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 208.

¹³¹ Ibid., 216.

¹³² Ibid., 217-18.

shown to point toward a variety of legitimate forms of resistance, including martyrdom. Martyrdom might be misappropriated, as, for example, when it is welcomed as the way out of suffering that can be avoided through resistance. However, the value of martyrdom need not be downgraded, if it is thought of as a form of resistance rather than a form of abuse. It is a legitimate form of resistance, especially when it cannot be avoided without becoming unfaithful. It is in this sense that the Apocalypse regards martyrdom as one form of resistance under imperial persecution and oppression.

Greg Carey

Some postcolonial critics bring ethical concerns or questions to the Apocalypse. Even when Revelation is read as resistance literature within the context of colonialism, it is often not its liberating voice but its moral ambiguity that is emphasized. Greg Carey, for instance, argues that a resistant reading and a postcolonial perspective serve to tease out ambiguity and disrupt certitude, rather than assure resolution. Read as resistance literature, the Apocalypse need not necessarily be assessed as either liberating or oppressive, but as stimulating questions and inviting diagnosis.¹³³ Worse still, Revelation may, in effect, be considered a harmful text, because not only its resistance discourse amplifies injustices but also its suppressed, internalized rage wounds and causes disorders among its readers.¹³⁴

However, even if a resistance reading is at times more concerned with questions and ambiguities than answers to suffering or colonialism, that should not be taken to preclude other viable options. As Carey himself admits, resistance criticism has mostly engendered sympathetic readings of the Apocalypse as embodying and empowering the voice of the oppressed.¹³⁵ Carey himself understands that Jesus's followers in the Apocalypse are urged to struggle in order to endure and conquer by testimony.¹³⁶

Carey's focus on the negative effects of the Apocalypse may be contrasted with that of Yarbro Collins, who highlights, as noted earlier, Revelation's cathartic effects. Carey's reading, however, is due to

¹³³ Greg Carey, "Symptoms of Resistance in the Book of Revelation," in *The Reality of Apocalypse*, 173.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 180.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 172.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 179-80.

a failure to read from the text a sound ethic of resistance, one that aims at liberation by constructively externalizing anger. If the Apocalypse is read as providing active methods of resistance (surpassing mere endurance and witness), which not only deal with righteous indignation but also resolve injustice, readers will be psychologically as well as practically enabled, rather than disabled, to face the realities of suffering. When expressed and implemented in hidden or public sectors of life, anger is no more a threat to the oppressed, though it may very well be a threat to the dominant power. Hence, my reading of the Apocalypse, which views its resistance language as empowering suffering readers, undermines readings that overemphasize, either positively or negatively, its psychological effects on readers. The Apocalypse produces catharsis only when resistance in imagination is supplemented with resistance in action. The Apocalypse engenders disorder only when anger is repressed instead of being sublimated into constructive forms of resistance. In both cases, the implementation of practical methods of resistance plays a crucial role.

Stephen D. Moore

Whereas the notion of a reversal of fortune contingent on human agency has explanatory power in the interpreting of Revelation from a postcolonial perspective, it is at times considered vulnerable to a different another type of postcolonial criticism that it still works within the framework of power structure: Revelation as an imitation of imperial ideology. Stephen Moore's postcolonial criticism brings to the forefront the possibility that the Apocalypse reinscribes Roman imperial terms having to do with the binarism between imperial metropolis and Christian periphery, while resisting Roman imperial ideology.¹³⁷ He argues, "To construct God or Christ, together with their putatively salvific activities, from the raw material of imperial ideology is not to shatter the cycle of empire but merely to transfer it to a transcendental plane, thereby reifying and reinscribing it."¹³⁸ Consequently, Revelation's theo-imperialist orientation enabled the Roman state and Christianity to fuse into the curious phenomenon of Constantinian Christianity,

¹³⁷ Stephen Moore, "The Revelation to John," in *A Postcolonial Commentary on the New Testament Writings*, ed. Fernando Segovia and R. S. Sugirtharajah (London: T & T Clark, 2007), 451.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 452.

notwithstanding the book's ostensible hostility to Rome.¹³⁹

However, a postcolonialist reading from a different angle may suggest that such concepts as liberation and resistance presuppose a boundary between oppressed and oppressor. It is one thing to say that the world envisioned for the period after liberation must transcend the imperial-colonial binarism, but it is quite another to say that the roadmap to that goal also must transcend the imperial-colonial binarism. One wonders how liberation is achieved without othering those who are at the center of empire. It is doubtful how resistance can be performed without boundary maintenance. Moore himself is aware of the function, in terms of Gayatri Spivak's "strategic essentialism," that envisioning a cosmic counter-empire ruled by a divine emperor may perform in struggles for liberation from desperate oppression, as work on Revelation by Allan Boesak and Pablo Richard testifies.¹⁴⁰ A postcolonial reading of Revelation is in order that seeks to construe the text as a resistance literature that not so much reinscribes as contests imperial ideology by strategically appropriating imperial language including bifurcation.

In addition, Moore's understanding of Constantinian Christianity is not at all beyond dispute. The Apocalypse can be read as resistance literature to such an extent that it still opposes the kind of Constantinian Christianity that is based on domination and oppression. Constantinian Christianity was possible not so much because Revelation's theology was framed by imperial ideology or terminology as because early Christians could not, or more likely would not, read the resistance language dispersed throughout the book. When oppressed people express resistance using the language of their oppressors, what stands out is presumably its main ideas, which eclipse other contestable connotations. On top of that, is it not too much to ask a marginal people to create a pure resistance language from a donor language? The oppressed just manipulate the donor language in their best interest, i.e., for liberation.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 451.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 452.

Robert Royalty

Some even bring to the fore Revelation's accommodation, not resistance, to imperial ideology. According to Robert Royalty, the Apocalypse is at variance with passages on wealth in the HB in that it lacks concern for socioeconomic justice and care for the poor.¹⁴¹ In parallel with the function of wealth in solidifying status in aristocratic Greco-Roman culture, the wealth imagery in the Apocalypse mimics the way in which wealth supported the dominant culture that it attacks.¹⁴² In view of the wealth imagery ascribed to God and Jesus in other portions of Revelation, chapter 18, often interpreted as a Marxist critique of Rome's economic oppression and injustice, should not be allowed to speak for the entire narrative world of the book.¹⁴³ He instead proposes that the same wealth images and motifs function to vilify Babylon and to praise the power of God.¹⁴⁴ John's characterization of Rome's wealth, but not that of heaven, as originating from commerce lowers its status, in reflection of the widespread attitude toward commerce and trade in the Roman world.¹⁴⁵ In one word, by opposing the dominant culture of power, Revelation does not attempt to redeem that culture but rather to replace it with a Christianized version of the same thing.¹⁴⁶

First of all, it is difficult to deny Revelation's predilection for those suffering economically as well as religiously, as many commentators, including those mentioned above, demonstrate. I further argue that the wealth imagery ascribed to the deity in the Apocalypse explores a new meaning of wealth as a means of common-wealth that operates the kingdom of God, rather than mimicking the way in which wealth as a means of alienation supports the dominant culture of the Roman Empire. The focus should be on the difference in attributes between God and Rome rather than on the similarity of language used to depict both.

Besides, in overemphasizing the meaning of the wealth motif in Revelation, Royalty seems to give short shrift to the main idea of the text as a whole as substantiated by that motif, i.e., that Rome is judged

¹⁴¹ Robert Royalty, *The Streets of Heaven: The Ideology of Wealth in the Apocalypse of John* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998), 40.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 245.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 3-4. Richard Bauckham and Yarbrow Collins typify a Marxist approach (*Ibid.*, 3).

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 102. In contrast, agriculture and investment in land were the means to both wealth and status (*Ibid.*, 102).

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 246.

and its subjects are vindicated. The objection that the Apocalypse shows no concern for socioeconomic justice loses ground to the fact that John disparages Rome's wealth by bringing into relief its dependence on economic injustice, rather than, as Royalty argues, by associating it with commerce and trade. The Book of Revelation as resistance literature does not merely Christianize but revolutionize the dominant ideology of wealth by condemning wealth acquired by exploitation. Even though ancient conceptions of the economy and wealth might have been different from modern ones,¹⁴⁷ John's harsh assessment of Rome's crimes from a socioeconomic point of view is comprehensible to modern as well as ancient readers.

Evaluation of Ideological Interpretations

A couple of comments are in order regarding ideological interpretations of Revelation that tend to marginalize the text as a by-product of the dominant ideology by overstressing its linguistic associations, which are viewed as derived from power structures. First and foremost, critics who problematize Revelation's reinscription of imperial ideologies rarely present alternative ways, completely detached from imperial ideologies, in which victims of empire can resist and correct oppressive imperial systems. One asks whether justice can be realized without the reversal of fortune that assumes imperial binarism, or whether that reversal of fortune can be envisioned without transferring glory from Rome to the New Jerusalem.

Second, I have the impression that critics of Revelation in this vein deplore the linguistic similarities between secular discourse and biblical counter-discourse, rather than assess any positive *functions* of the latter. I would contend that Revelation's illocutionary liberation ethic should countervail any locutionary problematics of its language. The Apocalypse might be criticized for reflecting contemporary ideological presuppositions; yet, these are better understood as manipulated by the author for the construction of a counter-discourse that will disrupt the status quo. The danger of Revelation lies not so much in a theology of dominance that is influenced by imperial ideology as in the reader's incapability of

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 244.

seeing the just society envisioned and conveyed in language conventionally used in the Roman Empire. In so doing, the Apocalypse exposes and criticizes the dominant ideology in the interest of the suffering ones. Revelation rejects, rather than mimics, the dominant ideology, at least inasmuch as it disapproves of and resists the tools of persecution and oppression employed to maintain the status quo supported by that ideology. This is exactly the opposite of what ideological critics criticize about the relation between text and power.

As we have seen, some read Revelation as peace literature by overemphasizing such traditional values as pacifism or passivism. Others fail to recognize the value of Revelation as resistance literature by focusing on its alleged problematics. In both cases, the role of resistance in the removal of unwarranted suffering is not fully recognized. I aim to construct a cultural studies interpretation of Revelation that foregrounds a notion of resistance understood as constructively ideological in the sense that it helps to put an end to unjust suffering.

New Critical Approach

Although the above interpretations have much to commend them, they do not fully appreciate the role that the oppressed can play in the interpretation of the Book of Revelation and ultimately for the transformation of society. It is suggestive that most commentators presume that the major function of Revelation lies in informing and encouraging rather than empowering the suffering audience. Daniel Patte's distinction between "legitimacy" and "validity" in biblical interpretation is of great help in this regard. Patte argues that interpretations of a given text are legitimate as long as they are based on textual evidence and account for its semantic coherence and that readers choose a specific interpretation because it best matches their contextual concerns and interests. He thus acknowledges both the contextual character of our interpretations and the role of the text in the process of reading.¹⁴⁸ Besides, in order to be ethically responsible in selecting one from among the various legitimate interpretations, interpreters are confronted

¹⁴⁸ Daniel Patte, *Ethics of Interpretation: A Reevaluation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 27-29.

with the question of validity not only in terms of their own interests and concerns but also in terms of those of other people. One thus must ask whether or to what extent the chosen interpretation is helpful or hurtful to whom.¹⁴⁹

Along the lines of this “multidimensional critical exegesis,” I would argue: first, that all readings of Revelation considered above may be considered legitimate analyses of Revelation, insofar as they are supported by certain semantic dimensions of the text and reflect specific contexts of the interpreters; second, that their ethical validity must be questioned, inasmuch as the suffering ones are affected by their interpretations in positive or negative ways.

We have seen that suffering is not so much terminated as perpetuated: (1) when suffering is not problematized in its historical context but sublimated to symbolic, spiritual meaning; and (2) when suffering is problematized in its historical context yet simultaneously understood as something to be endured rather than to be ended in the present by means of resistance. Suffering readers may well want a legitimate interpretation of Revelation that is ethically responsible to their concerns for justice and liberation and liberative enough to empower them to effectively resist and remove oppression and injustice. They must not be deprived of the right to focus on its textual dimensions that condemn their sufferings and enable their resistance in historical context. I want to read the Apocalypse with those suffering from this point of view, with a view to producing a meaning of resistance from the text that furthers the interests and concerns of the oppressed.

Cultural Studies Criticism

To achieve the goal of reading the Apocalypse in the interest of the suffering ones, through the construction of a new hermeneutic of liberation that takes seriously both textual and contextual considerations, I find it necessary to avail myself of insights from the above-mentioned modes of discourse. Of special importance is ideological criticism, which enables us to interpret both suffering and resistance

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 125.

as depicted in the Apocalypse in light of the social location and ideology of those concerned with the composition and reading of the text. However, most, if not all, of previous scholarship, including ideological criticism, fails to give due consideration to the possibility that suffering readers may well desire to maximize their interests by exploring the meanings of suffering and resistance to such an extent that one is regarded as the way to the end of the other. In tandem with ideological criticism, I turn to another disciplinary paradigm that provides a most substantive theoretical basis for a hermeneutic of resistance, in order to reclaim the Book of Revelation as resistance literature from the viewpoint of suffering real readers.

In response to the proponents of previous interpretations of Revelation, which in one way or another compensate for its resistance language, I regard cultural studies as essential to a methodological formulation that enables us to read the book as a liberating text that exposes and seeks to end oppression and suffering. In addition to “a basic tenet of critical cultural studies that operates with a dialectic of text and context, situating and reading texts through their social contexts and better understanding context through critical reading of texts,”¹⁵⁰ my approach to the Book of Revelation takes seriously the following interrelated concepts of cultural studies.

First, the paradigm of cultural studies helps to foreground the political meanings of the Apocalypse, because it insists on the political dimensions of knowledge. Despite the lack of consensus about the politics of intellectual work, the intellectual project of cultural studies is always at some level marked by a discourse of social involvement.¹⁵¹ Cultural studies has been informed not by value-free scholarship but by political commitment.¹⁵² The concept of culture is important here: the term “culture” in cultural studies is neither aesthetic nor humanist in emphasis, but political, as “a way of living within an industrial society that encompasses all the meanings of that social experience.”¹⁵³ Therefore, an interested effort to depoliticize the concept of cultural studies, whose whole prior history has been preeminently political and oppositional,

¹⁵⁰ Douglas Kellner, “Cultural Studies and Social Theory: A Critical Intervention,” in *Handbook of Social Theory*, ed. George Ritzer and Barry Smart (London: SAGE, 2003), 405.

¹⁵¹ John Frow and Meaghan Morris, “Australian Cultural Studies,” in *What is Cultural Studies? A Reader*, ed. John Storey (London: Arnold, 1996), 354.

¹⁵² Alan O’Connor, “The Problem of American Cultural Studies,” in *What is Cultural Studies?*, 187.

¹⁵³ John Fiske, “British Cultural Studies and Television,” in *What is Cultural Studies?*, 115.

is made at the cost of blocking cultural studies from having any critical purchase on social life.¹⁵⁴

However, there is good reason to suspect that Apocalypse Studies are still largely informed by apolitical stances at the heart of the debate. Much work on the Apocalypse fails to view the Christian apocalypse as a representation of political commitment against destructive power structures, though some ascribe political significance to Revelation's apocalyptic worldview. Accordingly, one suspects that such depoliticizing of the Book of Revelation ignores the existential problems of the marginalized and ultimately furthers the interest of existing power structures. In order for Apocalypse Studies to expedite the progress of liberation, resistance as praxis is to be highlighted by a mode of discourse that takes seriously sociopolitical involvement on the part of the real reader as well as the author in the deconstruction of oppressive power structures. This process is prerequisite to the liberation of those who are sociopolitically marginalized.

Second, cultural studies foregrounds the fact that culture is not an organic expression of a community but "a contested and conflictual set of practices of representation bound up with the processes of formation and re-formation of social groups."¹⁵⁵ The focus is on meaning-construction. Stuart Hall argues that meaning is not determined by the structure of reality itself but is conditional on the social practice of signification.¹⁵⁶ Hall draws on the work of V. N. Volosinov¹⁵⁷ to highlight meaning as the result of a social struggle in terms of "differently oriented social interests."¹⁵⁸ Culture is ideological in the sense that it is a terrain of struggle over meaning, in which subordinate groups resist the imposed meanings that bear the interests of dominant groups.¹⁵⁹ The fact that people actually contest and transform the meanings circulated by culture industries and, in so doing, affect the political and intellectual life of others is a given

¹⁵⁴ Cary Nelson, "Always Already Cultural Studies: Academic Conferences and a Manifesto," in *What is Cultural Studies?*, 274-75.

¹⁵⁵ Frow and Morris, "Australian Cultural Studies," 356.

¹⁵⁶ Stuart Hall, "The Rediscovery of 'Ideology': Return of the Repressed in Media Studies," in *Culture, Society and the Media*, ed. Michael Gurevitch et al. (London: Routledge, 1982), 77.

¹⁵⁷ V. N. Volosinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (New York: Seminar Press, 1973), 23.

¹⁵⁸ Hall, "Rediscovery of 'Ideology,'" 77.

¹⁵⁹ John Storey, "Cultural Studies: An Introduction," in *What is Cultural Studies?*, 3.

of contemporary politics and one determinant of the social context in which cultural studies is practiced.¹⁶⁰

In viewing culture as an arena of struggle, the discipline of cultural studies recognizes the dialectical relation between production and consumption in terms of Neo-Gramscian hegemony theory: “The consumer always confronts a text or practice in its material existence as a result of determinate conditions of production. But in the same way, the text or practice is confronted by a consumer who in effect *produces in use* the range of possible meanings(s)” which cannot just be read off from the materiality of the text or practice.¹⁶¹ In terms of cultural studies within biblical criticism, the construction of meaning is the result of an encounter or interchange between text and reader, both of which are socially and historically conditioned.¹⁶²

The concept of “production in use” is expanded into that of intertextuality. From the perspective of cultural studies, a text can be studied only when it is located across a range of competing moments of inscription, representation, and struggle, because texts exist only within networks of intertextual relation. In other words, the different moments of cultural production—material, symbolic, and textual production as well as the “production in use” of consumption—must be kept in equilibrium; otherwise, one may *ideologically* narrow one’s focus to one moment by which the others are taken to be adequately explained.¹⁶³

Studies on the Apocalypse are indeed aware of the fact that the book is an attempt to contest the representation by the Roman Empire of reality, political or apolitical. However, it is usually ascribed to the original intention of the author to the exclusion of the function of readers, ancient or modern. The concept of production in use has been largely overlooked in previous Apocalypse Studies, which have been focused on the retrieval of original meaning. Thus, readers are prevented from reclaiming legitimate meanings of the book in the process of reading it. Besides, the authorial intention is not fully appreciated in the light of intertextuality, as discussed above. The formation of John’s apocalyptic language in terms of intertextuality

¹⁶⁰ Frow and Morris, “Australian Cultural Studies,” 351.

¹⁶¹ Storey, “Cultural Studies: An Introduction,” 9.

¹⁶² Fernando Segovia, “Cultural Studies and Contemporary Biblical Criticism: Ideological Criticism as Mode of Discourse,” in *Decolonizing Biblical Studies*, 42.

¹⁶³ Storey, “Cultural Studies: An Introduction,” 2.

is well noted;¹⁶⁴ yet, Revelation's intertextuality is frequently used as evidence for the book's *dependence* on the earlier moments of textual production in Jewish writings, including the HB. The author does not so much contribute to the production of a constellation of apocalyptic meanings as repeat prior meanings in different language. This deprives the author of a right to make a creative use of intertextual parallels. As a result, previous work on Revelation gives short shrift to the role of the author as well as that of the reader in constructing new apocalyptic meanings, including a discourse of resistance, in the light of the existing realities in which they are situated.

On the contrary, John's vision was creatively written in interaction with his own life experience and his familiarity with intertextual antecedents. Real readers may want to approach the text of Revelation in the same way. When viewed as socially involved and politically committed, the Book of Revelation can further the liberation of suffering people to the extent that they employ a resistance reading strategy, as cultural production, which enables them to construe conflictual meanings in reflection of their contextual concerns. Suffering readers are not excluded from the process of meaning construction.

Finally, cultural studies offers an invaluable insight into how common people react to official culture. The project of cultural studies centers on, though it is not reduced to, the study of popular culture.¹⁶⁵ Cultural studies has traditionally been deeply concerned with how all cultural production and the broad terrain of popular common sense influence each other, so that "people with ingrained contempt for popular culture can never fully understand the cultural studies project."¹⁶⁶ Cultural studies further insists that production in use or making popular culture can be empowering to subordinate understandings of the world, while being resistant to dominant ones.¹⁶⁷ By viewing popular culture as an arena of counter-hegemonic struggle, cultural studies supports the contention that "ideological insubordination of subordinate groups also takes a quite public form in elements of folk or popular culture."¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁴ For instance, Pierre Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, trans. Wendy Pradels (Tübingen: Mohr, 2001).

¹⁶⁵ Storey, "Cultural Studies: An Introduction," 1.

¹⁶⁶ Nelson, "Always Already Cultural Studies," 279.

¹⁶⁷ Storey, "Cultural Studies: An Introduction," 9.

¹⁶⁸ James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press,

Unfortunately, Revelation Studies has failed to give due consideration to the ways in which Christian popular culture can resist Christian high culture by appropriating the text in their interest. A dominant discourse may be sustained by a discourse of endurance that treats resistance as a threat to Christian culture, based on the theological premise that peace and forgiveness are more Christian virtues than justice and judgment. This mainstream interpretation seems to be considered more legitimate than the “deviant” readings by ordinary people, because it is performed by elite readers and thus better matches the authorial intention. In contrast, I would maintain that popular culture construed as an arena of counter-hegemonic struggle can empower unprivileged readers to construct a counter-discourse of resistance intended to undermine existing power relations characterized by social injustice. In order for Apocalypse Studies to expedite the progress of liberation, resistance as a Christian virtue is to be highlighted by a mode of discourse that foregrounds what common people are already doing and can do in order to contest and challenge an unjust status quo.

To sum up, in every decade of its history, the best of cultural studies has always been mindful of this point: “We make culture and we are made by culture; there is agency and there is structure. It is not enough to celebrate agency; nor is it enough to detail the structure(s) of power—we must always keep in mind the dialectical play between resistance and incorporation.”¹⁶⁹ Reading the Apocalypse as resistance literature—or as peace literature—is an attempt to make sense of this dialectical interrelation between John and the Roman Empire, on the one hand, and to suggest ways in which suffering readers can appropriate the ancient text for analogous situations in which they are positioned, on the other hand. The remaining question is whose interests are advanced, those of the dominant or those of the dominated.

Keeping in mind these elements of cultural studies, I intend to read the Apocalypse as a cultural production that represents socioreligious resistance on the part of suffering Christians against the oppressive high culture of the Roman Empire. In doing so, my cultural studies optic pays attention to the ways in which suffering real readers can produce legitimate meanings of resistance from the book with a view to

1990), 157.

¹⁶⁹ Storey, “Cultural Studies: An Introduction,” 11.

constructing a hermeneutic of resistance applicable to their existential problems. As far as the process of production in use is concerned, the flesh-and-blood reader who confronts the Apocalypse creates the range of possible meanings in the light of given socioreligious conditions, just as John did with Jewish apocalyptic writings.

Postcolonial Criticism

Among a range of methods informed by insights and elements of cultural studies, I take as metatheory for my engagement with Revelation a postcolonialism that foregrounds the unequal relationship between center and periphery. Postcolonial studies not only recognizes the formidable impact of the dominating center on the subordinate periphery, the colonial, but also analyzes the periphery in its own terms, away from the center—its own reality and experience, cultural production and social context, structures and contradictions.¹⁷⁰ This postcolonial optic enables the oppressed to construct a hermeneutic of resistance as a response to the reality of suffering, which is not only imposed by the oppressor but also challenged by them.

In so doing, postcolonial criticism also calls into question traditional biblical criticism, which has often resulted in advancing the interests of the central at the cost of the peripheral. In other words, the postcolonial optic points toward the fact that modern Christian theology emanated from the center, grounded as it was in Western civilization.¹⁷¹ In constructing a hermeneutic of resistance as a reading strategy for the Apocalypse that furthers justice and liberation, my postcolonial reading of Revelation attempts to produce a counter-discourse against the modes of discourse that establish and maintain the mutual dependence between biblical interpretation and dominant culture. This postcolonial approach to the Apocalypse thus enables the oppressed reader not only to come to grips with the historical reality of suffering but also to devise reading strategies over against other oppressive readings of the book that

¹⁷⁰ Fernando Segovia, "Mapping the Postcolonial Optic in Biblical Criticism: Meaning and Scope," in *Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: Interdisciplinary Intersections*, ed. Stephen Moore and Fernando Segovia (London: T & T Clark, 2005), 68-69.

¹⁷¹ Segovia, "Toward a Postcolonial Optic," 123.

represent the social agenda of the dominant.

Moreover, a postcolonial optic is all the more pertinent to the reading of apocalyptic literature, when the relation between empire and apocalypse is recognized. I find convincing the hypothesis that the rise of apocalyptic in the history of Israel is related to the shift in mode of production from tributary to imperial slave-based. Thus, while prophecy was proper to the tributary mode of production, since protest could be made within the system, apocalyptic arose in the transition to an imperial slave-based mode of production, in which protest places one outside the system.¹⁷² Insofar as the Apocalypse emerged as the result of an encounter between the Roman Empire and its subject, one can perform a postcolonial reading of the book to discern any traces of imperialism that the author could not possibly protest within the imperial system but chose to embed in the biblical text in apocalyptic language.

Asia Minor and Korea

If we correctly assume that experience and interpretation go hand in hand, we may further infer from the last observation that those who have been under the influence of imperialism or colonialism are in a better position to understand John's apocalyptic language from a postcolonial point of view. In this vein, my interpretation of Revelation is perspectival to the extent that my hermeneutical interests represent me as a contextualized reader who has been conditioned by the history of Korea—a history of colonialism and division. At the same time, I approach the Apocalypse as a conscientized reader informed by a critical theory of postcolonialism in conjunction with ideological criticism and cultural studies. Aware of this twofold autobiographical construct of mine, I read the Apocalypse from where I stand in order to reconstruct the postcolonial or anti-imperial meaning of suffering and resistance from the book, with special reference to the way in which my experience informs my interpretation.

Modern Korean history shows how colonialism can devastate a nation both in and after colonial times. Korea groaned under Japanese rule for thirty five years (1910–1945). With the end of World War II,

¹⁷² Richard, *People's Commentary*, 24.

Korea witnessed not only her sought-after independence from Japan but also her unwanted geopolitical division, as a result of Cold War tensions, between South and North. Even after the tragedy of the fratricidal Korean War (1950–1953), the remaining vestiges of not only Japanese colonialism but also Cold War rivalries have continued to haunt many sectors of Korean society. Communist oppression befell North Korea, on the one hand. South Korea experienced political turmoil, accompanied by an ideological division from within on perspectives toward North Korea and Japan, on the other hand.

I place Revelation in the context of the Korean peninsula. Besides shaping my cultural perspective, Korea's (post)colonial history offers a vantage point from which a child of such a history is able to understand the analogous realities in which the original readers of Revelation were positioned: the seven churches in Asia Minor in the first-century were not simply suffering under Roman rule, they also had to deal with internal contradictions in their relations to both the Romans and the Jews. To my mind, the politico-ideological *realia* of first-century Asia Minor under Roman imperialism are similar to those of twentieth-century Korea under and after Japanese colonialism. It is not accidental that there are analogies between an ancient imperial power and a modern imperial power, which John's audience and Korean readers of his book had to confront, respectively. As Segovia argues, the reality of empire—of imperialism and colonialism—is an omnipresent, inescapable, and overwhelming reality in the world.¹⁷³

As I see it, no less violent than the bitter form of colonial rule imposed on Korea by Japan is the language from the inside that views it as something meaningful, something to be endured rather than resisted. Such a self-degrading view of history seems to have been determined, at least in part, by elite Koreans complicit with the propaganda of (ex-)colonial powers, after the fashion of the beast from the land (Rev 13.11ff.) or the false prophet (Rev 19.20), which serve as pawns of the beast from the sea, symbolizing the Roman Empire. Some Koreans are not conscientized enough to be able to name the beasts that have plundered their land.

John's critique of churches in his letters might well presuppose the presence of a similar colonial

¹⁷³ Segovia, "Toward a Contextual Biblical Pedagogy," 92-93.

worldview among their members. To John's eye, they are carrying a mark of the beast (13.16-17). If John named the beast outside and its followers inside the churches, the Korean church also must name the beast and its instruments at work within and without. Otherwise, the church masks the beast that is transformed from the aide of the dragon into that of the Lamb. Postcolonial categories that problematize interdependence between oppressors and oppressed foreground the need for conscientization before or after liberation on the part of the latter. My postcolonial analysis of the Apocalypse takes seriously discursive as well as physical domination. I want to write back.

Yet, I am not satisfied with merely naming the beast and its agents, though this is an essential part of a resistance that brings about conscientization. I want to disarm the beast as well as its dupes via resistance strategies that require actions. It is my assertion that liberation is not achieved until Babylon is fallen. My commitment to the construction of resistance strategies along these lines comes from my realization of this historical fact: the process of decolonization in Korea that showed no or little concern for justice and judgment did not yield a society of love and forgiveness, but perpetuated rather a colonial legacy, in one form or another, of neocolonialism, in which the beast continues to work secretly or subtly. My postcolonial analysis of the Apocalypse takes seriously activist resistance beyond ideological resistance. I want to fight back.

With these preunderstandings in mind, I interact with the Book of Revelation, construed as resistance literature, to produce a resistance hermeneutic that is attentive to the agonies of the silenced oppressed, with special attention to both ideological and pragmatic resistance. On the presupposition that conscientized readers who have been exposed to undue suffering are in a favorable position to understand John's apocalyptic language in the light of justice and liberation, I wish to rewrite the meaning of resistance embedded in the text from the perspective of the (ex-)colonized. To begin with, I find the ideas of Antonio Gramsci and Pierre Bourdieu helpful in conceptualizing a new reading strategy for Revelation's anti-imperial language against Rome's ideological hegemony.

Antonio Gramsci and Pierre Bourdieu

Colonial constructs of resistance as passive and nonviolent endurance are often internalized by the (ex-)colonized in the form of false consciousness, a process that reflects and furthers the interested perspectives of (neo)colonial government, thus re-victimizing the victim. I appropriate Antonio Gramsci's "cultural hegemony," meaning *domination by consent*, to foreground the role of conscientization as an indispensable weapon of the postcolonial. Gramsci regards intellectual and moral leadership as the determining factor of hegemony and points out the need to gain consent *before* the material conquest of power.¹⁷⁴ Conditions can be set in favor of a change in the social structure, after the bourgeois class has been weakened in the ideological field.¹⁷⁵ Conversely, then, resistance begins in intellectual and moral realms before dealing with material oppression and alienation.

Pierre Bourdieu also calls attention to how domination is justified by consent on the part of the dominated in sociological terms. In distinction from Marxism, which stresses economic and class structures, Bourdieu emphasizes the role of the symbolic dimensions of power relations in the reproduction of social inequality.¹⁷⁶ Bourdieu rightly stresses the importance of symbolic manipulation in conjunction with culture and the fact that there is symbolic as well as economic power.¹⁷⁷ Symbolic systems including religion as well as science and language not merely provide cognitive and integrative functions but also serve as instruments of domination.¹⁷⁸ Symbolic power is *violence* in that it legitimates domination by eliciting consent of the dominated as well as the dominant.¹⁷⁹ If symbolic power legitimates existing power relations, resistance against domination must also take into account the way in which symbolic power can be undermined.

In order to read the Apocalypse through a postcolonial optic, one needs to pay attention to the

¹⁷⁴ Antonio A. Santucci, *Antonio Gramsci* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2010), 154.

¹⁷⁵ Santucci, *Antonio Gramsci*, 155.

¹⁷⁶ David Swartz, *Culture and Power: the Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 82.

¹⁷⁷ Swartz, *Culture and Power*, 82.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 82-83.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 89.

function of cultural hegemony or false consciousness in the relationship between Rome and its province of Asia. For instance, Stephen Moore argues that the Gramscian meaning of hegemony illuminates the situation of Roman Asia, a province that originated not in invasion but in an invitation, when Attalus III of Pergamum bequeathed his kingdom to the Romans. The mainspring of the hegemonic mechanism that enabled Roman governance of Asia was the competition for imperial favor among the principal Asian cities.¹⁸⁰ Hegemony or false consciousness indeed has explanatory power.

However, one may overemphasize the potency of hegemony at the risk of marginalizing other factors that contribute to its construction. For instance, it is my contention that hegemony does not always work apart from coercion. The probability that the Roman Empire could resort to hegemony as an important tool of domination must be understood against the historical background that Rome was a warrior state, which had hard won its vast empire in a series of fiercely fought campaigns.¹⁸¹ At times, hegemony does not so much precede as presuppose power.

Besides, it is not obvious that Rome's ideological domination was successful in most, if not all, strata of society in Asia Minor. Moore admits that the governance of Asia, like any Roman province, depended on the active cooperation of the local urban *elites*.¹⁸² The ruling class of a province would indeed operate in complicity with Rome's ideology, which benefited them as well. On the other hand, if hegemony fundamentally refers to the power of the ruling class to convince other classes that their interests are the interests of all,¹⁸³ Moore's understanding of the relation of Rome to Asia in terms of hegemony is plausible only insofar as the provincial elites successfully persuaded their subjects that their cooperation with Rome would benefit society at large.

Presumably, the presence of empire, with its threats of reprisal, sustained the high status and administrative powers of the wealthy. The wealthy of a city were allowed self-government in return for

¹⁸⁰ Moore, "The Revelation to John," 439.

¹⁸¹ Christopher Kelly, *The Roman Empire: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 4.

¹⁸² Moore, "The Revelation to John," 439.

¹⁸³ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2007), 106.

fulfilling the basic demands of empire, such as paying annual tribute to Rome, supplying labor, and providing recruits for the army.¹⁸⁴ In contrast, it is likely that the lower strata of Rome's provinces were at times disillusioned by the discrepancy between hegemonic claims and experienced realities. To that extent, then, hegemony loses its power. A hegemonic ideology may encourage a naturalization of domination, but it cannot easily account for those occasions in which subordinate groups "pick themselves up by the bootstraps of their own collective desires."¹⁸⁵

Moreover, Gramsci himself was always suspicious of grand explanatory schemes and did not set out to explain historical reality armed with such a full-fledged concept as hegemony. Instead, Gramsci repeatedly stressed the need to observe phenomena in all their particularity and specificity. Thus, Gramsci was conscious of the diverse ways in which hegemony operates, paying attention to concrete social, economic, cultural, and political circumstances experienced by individuals.¹⁸⁶ If the way in which hegemony works is changeable according to circumstances, the extent to which the concept works may well be likewise varied. My postcolonial reading of Revelation appropriates the Gramscian notion of hegemony against the background of the specific historical circumstances that surrounded John's apocalyptic visions, with an eye to redefining his conception of hegemony in a way that best sorts out the layers of meaning in the language of resistance inscribed in the text.

In a nutshell, domination and hegemony do not always go hand in hand. History seems to support this hypothesis. Few colonizers have been able to establish colonies without encountering continued resistance, as Robert Young puts it: "The history of colonialism is characterized throughout by intransigent opposition to conquest and rebellions against alien domination and loss of sovereignty."¹⁸⁷ Hegemony indeed works; yet, there are numerous cases in which domination and resistance are two sides of the same

¹⁸⁴ Kelly, *Roman Empire*, 46.

¹⁸⁵ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 148.

¹⁸⁶ Joseph A. Buttigieg, foreword to *Antonio Gramsci*, by Santucci, 16-17. Gramsci was aware of the danger of the text being misused. According to Buttigieg, Gramsci's work suffered instrumental (mis)interpretations and (mis)appropriations, despite the fact that the *Prison Notebooks* warns against textual manipulation and hermeneutical dishonesty (Ibid., 14).

¹⁸⁷ Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001), 161.

coin. Therefore, resistance is better taken as performed at a practical level than at a theoretical level. In the chapters that follow, I will show that counter-hegemonic resistance overrides hegemonic persuasion in the Apocalypse. The will to resist on the part of subaltern classes comes to the fore.

Homi K. Bhabha

Homi Bhabha's postcolonial concepts play an important role in my interpretation of Revelation. According to Bhabha, Said's picture of the West constantly and brutally subjugating the East minimizes spaces of resistance.¹⁸⁸ Bhabha's concepts—hybridity, mimicry, and ambivalence—describe ways in which the colonized resist the power of the colonizer, which is never as secure as it seems to be. In so doing, Bhabha emphasizes the active agency of the colonized population and calls attention to moments in which the colonizer is less powerful than is apparent and the colonized are able to resist dominance.¹⁸⁹ However, I appropriate Homi Bhabha's postcolonial concepts with caution.

Mimicry, bordering on mockery, is indeed a form of resistance, as we will see in the analysis of Revelation. Encouraged by colonial discourse to mimic the colonizer in compliant fashion, the colonized never simply reproduce the habits, assumptions, and values of the colonizer, but instead produce a blurred copy of the colonizer, after the fashion of parody, in a threatening manner.¹⁹⁰ Yet, the question of agency on the part of the colonized is not clearly resolved. Despite the fact that mimicry can be transformed into a strategy of resistance, the colonized may not actually be said to *choose* to be a mimic by adopting mimicry as a deliberate strategy.¹⁹¹ Bhabha seems to imply that the unintentional, unconscious strategy of mimicry is the best or only possible mode of resistance to colonial discourse.¹⁹²

However, as Bhabha comments in relation to Frantz Fanon's concept of violence, there are "apocalyptic" situations in which, for any number of reasons, mimicry or dissimulation no longer works as

¹⁸⁸ David Huddart, *Homi K. Bhabha* (London: Routledge, 2006), 6.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

¹⁹⁰ Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies*, 124-25.

¹⁹¹ Huddart, *Homi K. Bhabha*, 61.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 68.

a strategy for survival and all negotiation is canceled.¹⁹³ There comes a time when the colonized—not satisfied with merely reacting, though in a creative way, to the demand of colonial discourse to imitate the colonizer—want to devise methods for resistance in which they can take the initiative to subvert colonial relations. They would disagree with Bhabha, for whom the degree to which resistance is actively pursued as a strategy is less important than the fact of resistance itself.¹⁹⁴

Bhabha also employs the term “hybridity” in order to analyze colonizer/colonized relations, whereby they are seen as characterized by interdependence and the mutual constructions of subjectivities.¹⁹⁵ Theories of hybridity may assert a model for resistance that undermines the foundation of the imperialist/colonialist discourse of superiority via the subversive counter-discursive practices implicit in colonial ambivalence itself.¹⁹⁶ Yet, although the idea of hybridity *per se* does not speak of a mutuality that negates the hierarchical nature of the imperial process or that involves the idea of an equal exchange, the perception that theories stressing mutuality inevitably downplay oppositionality and perpetuate postcolonial dependence has led many to criticize the frequent use of hybridity in postcolonial discourse as simply meaning cross-cultural exchange for its failure to consider the unequal power relations involved.¹⁹⁷

Of special importance to my construal of Revelation’s resistance language is Bhabha’s use of the term “ambivalence” in colonial discourse. According to Bhabha, a complex mix of attraction and repulsion characterizes the ambivalent relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. Thus, complicity and resistance coexist in a fluctuating relation within the colonial subject, who is never simply and completely opposed to the colonizer; therefore, colonized subjects cannot be dichotomized between complicit and resistant ones.¹⁹⁸

This may account for some colonial realities. However, Bhabha’s proposition that, because the

¹⁹³ Vitor Westhelle, “Multiculturalism, Postcolonialism, and the Apocalyptic,” in *Theology and the Religions: a Dialogue*, ed. Viggo Mortensen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 12.

¹⁹⁴ Huddart, *Homi K. Bhabha*, 62.

¹⁹⁵ Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies*, 108.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 111.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 109.

¹⁹⁸ Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies*, 10-11.

colonial relationship is *always* ambivalent between mimicry and mockery, it generates the seeds of its own destruction is controversial, insofar as it predicts the disruption of the colonial relationship regardless of any resistance or rebellion on the part of the colonized.¹⁹⁹ This stance is in diametric contradiction to my claim that oppression does not vanish of itself but disappears only with the defeat of the oppressors. This fact led John to envision the dissolution of evil forces by means of both divine punishment and human resistance.

Last but not least, the value of the above interrelated concepts, in particular ambivalence and hybridity, must be assessed in view of the danger incurred by their possible misappropriation on the part of colonial collaborators to blur the distinction between themselves and others, such as nationalists. For example, it is not uncommon to hear the casuistry that there were few, if any, who were not collaborators during Japanese colonialism in Korea. We cannot simply emphasize and problematize such overlapping and intersections between the colonized and the colonizer, because it may underplay the opposition between them. I pay attention to the importance of making a distinction not simply between colonizer and colonized but also between complicit and resistant colonized subjects. My postcolonial reading of the Apocalypse will show that opposition accounts for the dualism of the book better than interdependence. Revelation not only distinguishes between center and periphery but also makes nuanced distinctions among the marginalized in terms of distance from the colonial center.

In short, Bhabha stresses the unexpected forms of resistance on the part of the colonized as well as the equally unexpected anxieties on the part of the colonizer.²⁰⁰ I want to argue that no less emphasis should be laid on other expected ways of oppression and opposition between colonizers and colonized. The Apocalypse attests to the value of a postcolonial perspective that takes seriously deliberate resistance as a means of liberation or decolonization. My hypothesis, which stresses conscious resistance in terms of action as well as ideology, undermines previous scholarship, which seeks in Revelation solely psychological comfort, either by merely imagining the destruction of enemies or by simply waiting for the objective,

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Huddart, *Homi K. Bhabha*, 8.

eschatological events. However, it is not easy to decide on the type of action that subordinates can take in resisting oppressive powers. In this regard, I position James C. Scott (*Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, 1990) between Walter Wink (*Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination*, 1992) and Frantz Fanon (*The Wretched of the Earth*, 2004).

Walter Wink and René Girard

Walter Wink proposes a hermeneutic of peace in terms of nonviolent resistance. According to Wink, the myth of redemptive violence—which goes back to the Babylonian creation myth, the *Enuma Elish*, in which Marduk, god of Babylon, creates the cosmos from the corpse of Tiamat, goddess of chaos—legitimizes the use of violence for the purpose of maintaining order and thus perpetuates the dominance of elite groups and nations.²⁰¹ By promising salvation through identification with Marduk and his earthly regents, the myth of redemptive violence makes the nonprivileged endorse rather than resist their oppressors.²⁰² It is argued that Jesus taught the love of enemies, while Babylonian religion taught their extermination.²⁰³

Wink also makes a distinction between the Gospels and the Apocalypse: the lust for vengeance in Revelation is regarded as a biblical instance of the myth of redemptive violence,²⁰⁴ whereas Jesus offers, between flight and fight, a third way of responding to violence, i.e., nonviolent direct action.²⁰⁵ Likewise, Jesus's solution to the economic problem of Palestinian peasants was neither utopian nor apocalyptic, but a simple realism based on egalitarian sharing (Mt5.42//Lk 6.30).²⁰⁶ Wink further contends that, in the situations of unequal relations in which Jesus was living, retaliation would have invited retribution.²⁰⁷

²⁰¹ Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 13-31.

²⁰² Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 28-29.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 13.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 28. Other examples include the total destruction of every living being at Ai and Jericho, the Matthean account of sinners being tortured in fire and brimstone for all eternity, etc. (*Ibid.*, 28).

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 175.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 183-84.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 176.

To begin with, to the extent that the myth of redemptive violence is understood as an illusion that elite groups manipulate to sustain power relations by forestalling the will to resist on the part of the subordinate, it is susceptible to the weaknesses as well as the strengths ascribed above to the concept of hegemony or false consciousness. In addition, Jesus's teaching on nonviolence does not necessarily presuppose that all kinds of violence are seen as redemptive violence, of the sort to be found in Babylonian mythology. Otherwise, it would be difficult to account for the violent image of the deity (e.g., Mk 12.1-9).

More importantly, Wink's hermeneutic of peace in terms of active nonviolent resistance is confusing to the extent that the myth of redemptive violence is indiscriminately applied to both the oppressor and the oppressed. While the myth of redemptive violence well explains how privileged classes and nations, as Marduk's regents, manage to justify their political agenda at the expense of the less privileged, it seems incapable of ethically evaluating the violence of the oppressed. Perhaps for this reason, Wink admits that we cannot say that nonviolent actions are in every situation the will of God, although nonviolence is at the heart of the gospel.²⁰⁸ Desperate counter-violence against the massive violence of an unjust order is not to be condemned.²⁰⁹ Nevertheless, he stops short of constructing a hermeneutic of resistance for the oppressed by opposing every form of violence on the assumption that God's domination-free order is coming through nonviolence.²¹⁰ Counter-violence cannot be justified even when it is the only responsible choice.²¹¹ Violence must be minimized even in an "apocalyptic" time, when oppressors become irredeemable and suffering people can no longer endure.²¹² Instead, Christians have to lean all their weight on divine grace, relying on the guidance by the Holy Spirit.²¹³

However, Wink's critique of the myth of redemptive violence is based on his interpretation of the Gospels, and thus one has to decide, taking into account differences in literary genre as well as in historical conditions at the time of writing, whether and to what extent it legitimately applies to Revelation as

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 218.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 224.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 229.

²¹¹ Ibid., 225.

²¹² Ibid., 240.

²¹³ Ibid., 237.

apocalypse. Insofar as the apocalyptic optic looks at the world in a more radical way than other worldviews, we might well have to expect that apocalypse works with a different definition of resistance. For example, in apocalyptic times, when the status quo is taken as breaking down, resisting people need not worry about retribution as a result of retaliation.

Apocalyptic literature requires apocalyptic worldviews, although they may not exclude ordinary modes of resistance, including nonviolence. Otherwise, one might become a tutor in leading suffering readers to the master rather than to the Master, just as the Church in the colonies did not call the colonized to the ways of God, but to the ways of the oppressive master.²¹⁴ From an apocalyptic point of view, my interpretation of Revelation via a postcolonial optic takes seriously its violent language, instead of completely symbolizing its reference, in order to consider the possibility that John makes a distinction between redemptive violence on behalf of the oppressed and repressive violence on the part of the oppressors.

I therefore disagree with Wink on how to characterize the oppressor. Reminiscent of Bhabha's notions of ambivalence and hybridity, Wink suggests, as the alternative to the myth of redemptive violence, seeing ourselves as no different in kind from our enemy—regardless of the difference in degree—which means not only admitting evil in ourselves but also acknowledging God in the enemy.²¹⁵ He assumes a loving and forgiving God who can transform even the most wicked person or society in the world.²¹⁶ However, this is vulnerable to the very criticism under which such postcolonial notions as hybridity and ambivalence come. It does seem to be a theological proposition that fails to see the essential difference between the experienced realities of the colonizer and those of the colonized. Viewed from within the sector of the colonized, the sector of the colonizer is a domain operated by satanic powers rather than by a converting God. Revelation's language of judgment seems to presuppose such a dualism.

In a way reminiscent of Wink's critique of the myth of redemptive violence, René Girard

²¹⁴ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove, 2004), 7.

²¹⁵ Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 30.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.* In my view, this position entails that there is no apocalyptic time when oppressors become irredeemable (cf. n. 212 above).

problematizes the way in which communities restore order by sacrificing a victim through the process of scapegoating.²¹⁷ Distinct from this sacrificial victimization, the Bible shows a tendency to side with the victims by placing the responsibility for the victims' death on the community. This biblical tendency culminates in the Gospels where Jesus, by dying against sacrifice, reveals its nature and renders it defunct. In other words, the violent God of the past is superseded by the nonviolent God of the Gospels.²¹⁸

Girard's attempt to explain away the apparently violent image of God in the NT does not seem to be successful. First, Girard has to deal with the apocalyptic language that appears in the Gospels. He solves this problem by attributing the apocalyptic violence depicted in the Gospels not to God but to human beings.²¹⁹ In order to show that Jesus does not credit God with violence, Girard must overemphasize the different accounts of the parable of the tenants between Matthew, on the one hand, and Mark and Luke, on the other hand. He prefers the complete Matthean account, which has the audience conclude what God would violently do to the wicked tenants (Mt 21.41), to the Marcan and Lucan accounts, which have Jesus say so (Mk 12.9; Lk 20.16). Matthew is reluctant to have Jesus speak of a violent God.²²⁰ However, it is far from certain that Matthew's version of the parable of the tenants is more original than those of Mark and Luke. Even if Matthew's text were more original, Jesus is hardly regarded as disagreeing with the conclusion of the listeners, in which God is depicted as a violent, retributive God.

Second, Girard regards the text of Revelation as clearly less representative of the gospel inspiration than the apocalyptic chapters in the Gospels.²²¹ This is convincing only insofar as the Gospels are shown to envision a nonviolent God, the legitimacy of which is in part dependent on the above-noted question. I will attempt to show in the following chapter that the deity is often depicted in the Gospels as violent, not only in the end times but also in historical time. Though the Gospels primarily speak of a nonviolent God, it has been my assertion that the nonviolent language of the Gospels may not be incompatible with the

²¹⁷ René Girard, "Mimesis and Violence," in *The Girard Reader*, ed. James Williams (New York: Crossroad, 1996), 11-12.

²¹⁸ Girard, "Mimesis and Violence," 17-18.

²¹⁹ René Girard, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 186.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 188.

²²¹ *Ibid.*

violent language of Revelation, insofar as they show differences in literary genre as well as in historical conditions at the time of writing. As in the case of Wink, moreover, Girard does not seem to make a distinction between the type of violence inflicted on the oppressed, including the victims of the scapegoat mechanism, and the type of violence brought on the oppressors, including its perpetrators. As I read it, Revelation condemns the former, but not the latter.

Frantz Fanon

In attempting to construct a discourse of apocalyptic resistance, I am concerned with the tendency within biblical scholarship that seems to show bias in favor of symbolic and thus less active methods of resistance, with little or no consideration of the social contexts in which resisting subordinates are positioned. We are reminded in this regard of the figure of Gandhi, who is said by Young to have “himself increasingly preferred symbolic forms of activism to more active forms of ‘passive resistance’ that always ran the danger of becoming violent or calling forth a violent response.”²²² In marked contrast, Frantz Fanon foregrounds violence in his postcolonial discourse. In order to understand Fanon’s view on violence, we must first look at how he reconfigures the world between the colonizer and the colonized. Some readers, in particular suffering ones, may very well find his binary characterization of the colonial situation directly relevant to their (post)colonial circumstances: “Challenging the colonial world is not a rational confrontation of viewpoints. It is not a discourse on the universe, but the impassioned claim by the colonized that their world is fundamentally different. The colonial world is a Manichaeian world.”²²³ For Fanon, further, the colonized subject, although coercively dominated, is not domesticated by the hegemonic authority of the colonizer; on the contrary, the colonized subject is constantly alert to catch the colonist off guard.²²⁴

Fanon thus contrasts with not only Bhabha but also Gramsci. In assessing Gramsci’s hegemony

²²² Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, 331-32.

²²³ Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 6.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

and Bhabha's hybridity and ambivalence, I have earlier suggested that they show theoretical or historical plausibility, but to a limited degree. Conversely, this shows that Fanon's idea is to be partly adopted as well. Fanon is right only where Bhabha and Gramsci are wrong, and vice versa. Mindful of the tension between these two poles, I read *Revelation* as a representation of colonial/imperial realities that not just divides the periphery from the center, as Fanon contends, but also recognizes possible interinfluence between them, as Gramsci and Bhabha assert.

According to Fanon, colonialism is naked violence, not a machine equipped with reason, and so collapses only when confronted with greater violence.²²⁵ To my mind, those who argue for a purely peaceful resolution of colonialism should listen to Fanon, as he points out the impracticability of any equal cohabitation of colonized with colonizer:

The intellectual who, for his part, has adopted the abstract, universal values of the colonizer is prepared to fight so that colonist and colonized can live in peace in a new world. But what he does not see, because precisely colonialism and all its modes of thought have seeped into him, is that the colonist is no longer interested in staying on and coexisting once the colonial context has disappeared.²²⁶

From the long-term perspective of justice, Fanon *realistically* argues that violence be turned against its causes, the real evils of social oppression.²²⁷ One may suspect that, as long as oppression is a reciprocal relation between the colonizers and the colonized, resistance needs to be conceptualized in the light of the agenda of the oppressors.

Before determining the ethical character of Fanon's view of violence, we may have to consider whether and to what degree the attitude of the colonized toward violence/nonviolence is affected by the ideology of the colonizer. Jean-Paul Sartre points out the possibility that even one's nonviolent thoughts are a condition born of age-old oppression.²²⁸ Sartre argues, the greater part of the world population, i.e., the natives, borrowed the word possessed by the West, through the intermediary of corrupt kinglets, feudal

²²⁵ Ibid., 23.

²²⁶ Ibid., 9.

²²⁷ Rollo May, *Power and Innocence: A Search for the Sources of Violence* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1972), 194-95.

²²⁸ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*, trans. Azzedine Haddour, Steve Brewer, and Terry McWilliams (London: Routledge, 2001), 169.

landowners, and false bourgeoisie.²²⁹ At this point, one may wonder whether the popularity of nonviolence as a resistance weapon with most biblical scholars is an objective truth or a Western norm.

At the same time, it is very important to note that violence also is something that has not been chosen by the colonized but imposed on them by the Other. Fanon writes,

The very same people who had it constantly drummed into them that the only language they understood was that of force, now decide to express themselves with force. In fact the colonist has always shown them the path they should follow to liberation. The argument chosen by the colonized was conveyed to them by the colonist, and by an ironic twist of fate it is now the colonized who state that it is the colonizer who only understands the language of force.²³⁰

Therefore, one may not be able to blame the colonized for resorting to violence as a method of resistance without blaming the colonist as well who has inculcated them with such a sense of violence. At the very least, the violence of the oppressed must be understood in relation to the violence of the oppressors.

It is ironic that the colonized subject is positioned between the nonviolent thoughts conditioned by the colonist and the violent thoughts instilled by the same colonist. Interestingly enough, the colonized is almost always encouraged to choose the former as a means of resistance. Instead, one might want to hypothesize that Fanon's violence represents a viable option that the colonized subject may want to take up as a means of resistance. "Fanon was angry," and without the basic political instinct of anger there can be no hope for "the wretched of the earth [who] are still with us."²³¹

Nonetheless, Fanon's one-sided view of violence may well unsettle some. By viewing violence as the perfect mediation for the liberation of the colonized,²³² Fanon *de facto* closes the door on other nonviolent or less violent ways of liberation strategies. I disagree with Fanon's rather extremist view of violence, as, for example, in his positions to the effect that decolonization is always a violent event²³³ or that reckless violence is the most effective way of fighting against the colonial system.²³⁴ For the same

²²⁹ Sartre, *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*, 153.

²³⁰ Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 42.

²³¹ Homi Bhabha, foreword to *Wretched of the Earth*, by Fanon, x. Bhabha here cites David Macey, *Frantz Fanon: A Life* (London: Granta Books, 2000), 503.

²³² Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 44. Fanon seems to overestimate the psychological effects of violence when he argues that violence is a cleansing force in that it gets rid of the inferiority complex as well as passive and despairing attitude of the colonized and so restores their self-confidence (Ibid., 51).

²³³ Ibid., 1.

²³⁴ Ibid., 25.

reason, I find strained Sartre's assertion that violence alone can get rid of the marks of violence.²³⁵ This study seeks to demonstrate that the Apocalypse is inscribed with a variety of resistance tactics, which fall short of espousing violence.

Among the various readings of Fanon's violence, I find that of Bhabha to be the most suited for a resolution of the issue of suffering and violence in relation to the Book of Revelation. In distinction from Hannah Arendt, who criticizes Fanon's violence as leading to the death of politics on the one hand,²³⁶ and from Sartre, who praises Fanon's violence for drawing the fiery, first breath of human freedom on the other hand,²³⁷ Bhabha proposes to read Fanonian violence as part of a struggle for *psycho-affective* survival and a quest for human agency amidst the agony of oppression.²³⁸ Fanon explores the psycho-affective realm, a place of social and psychic mediation, which is neither subjective nor objective. A psycho-affective relation or response, despite its semblance of universality and timelessness due to its emotional or imaginal characters, he declares, "is only ever mobilized into social meaning and historical effect through an embodied and embedded action, an engagement with (or resistance to) a given reality, or a performance of agency in the present tense."²³⁹

In my view, John would not regard Fanonian violence as a legitimate means of resistance. For John, neither nonresistance nor violence is the perfect mediation for the liberation of the colonized. However, their discourses on resistance seem to share two important similarities. First, it is important to note that Fanon's discourse on violence was informed by his own social context. Fanon's idea on violence and counter-violence was forged during the "apocalyptic times" fraught with life-and-death exigencies.²⁴⁰ Both John and Fanon were concerned with unmitigated suffering. Any practical discourse on the legitimacy of violent resistance should be mindful of the nature and extent of suffering.

²³⁵ Sartre, *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*, 166.

²³⁶ Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1970), 69

²³⁷ Sartre, *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*, 149-50. For their views on violence, see Arendt, *On Violence* and Sartre, preface to *Wretched of the Earth*, by Fanon, xliii-lxii.

²³⁸ Homi Bhabha, foreword to *Wretched of the Earth*, by Fanon, xxxvi.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, xix.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, xxxiv-xxxv.

Second, John might agree that apocalyptic resistance should be practiced in physical as well as psychic forms. I want to highlight the significance of psychic resistance, including ideological defiance, as the starting point of any embodied resistance. I would argue that psychic resistance acquires a social and historical meaning only through tangible acts of resistance. My postcolonial optic thus regards Revelation's resistance as a strategically effective means of liberation inasmuch as it is performed not only at a psycho-affective but also at a practical level in engaging with an oppressive reality. The nexus of psychic and physical resistance is most efficacious in stopping suffering. Revelation illustrates these two interrelated processes.

James C. Scott

In my view, James Scott's theory of resistance complements the claims by Gramsci, Bhabha, and Fanon and thus contributes to my reclaiming the Book of Revelation as resistance literature. According to Scott, most of the political life of subordinate groups is found in the vast territory between overt collective defiance of powerholders and complete hegemonic compliance. This territory does not consist solely of performances onstage and hidden discourse offstage; rather, subordinate groups employ manifold strategies to insinuate their resistance, in disguised forms, into the public transcript.²⁴¹ In reaction to complex forms of historical domination that have been presented in the form of a metaphysics, a religion, or a worldview, subordinate groups have developed correspondingly elaborate forms of hidden transcripts.²⁴² It is argued that nearly all public actions by subordinate groups are pervaded by disguise, unless they reach the times of license and liberty, such as revolt and carnival, when the hidden transcript may be disclosed, the latter with masks, the former in full view.²⁴³ Thus both covert and overt forms of resistance are recognized.

Scott claims that subordinates in ordinary circumstances have an interest in performing resistance as well as avoiding explicit displays of insubordination. They achieve these two apparently contradictory

²⁴¹ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 136.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 115.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 182.

objectives by refraining from openly confronting authorities and instead pursuing resistance in safe forms and ways.²⁴⁴ The assumed explanatory power of theories of hegemony is undermined by the observation that not only ruling elites but also subordinates strategically act on the open stage: whereas subordinates produce the impression of compliance to evade stringent surveillance, elites desire to preserve appearances of unity in order, for example, not to expose their tenuous authority or encourage other acts of defiance.²⁴⁵ In one word, relations of domination are at same time relations of resistance.²⁴⁶

However, Scott seems to underestimate the penetrating and persistent influence of cultural hegemony as developed by Gramsci. Scott believes that there are a great many objections to the case for hegemony and false consciousness, many of which, taken singly, are crippling, and, taken together, are fatal.²⁴⁷ However, to the extent that “cultural hegemony” is a product of Gramsci’s experienced realities, it presupposes social relations that can be explained by that notion. The historical record, at least in the case of Korea, seems to show that subordinate people more often than not believe and act in accordance with the dominant ideology in their private as well as public interactions with the status quo. Between Gramsci and Scott, the best option would seem to be to recognize the limited power of hegemony. I avail myself of postcolonial categories that recognize both the power and the limitation of hegemony.

I view Scott and Bhabha as complementary for my interpretation of the Apocalypse. To begin with, mimicry fits nicely with Scott’s view of resistance. Mimicry would be an element of both the hidden and the public transcript: not only an offstage critique of the dominants, but also an onstage menace to the dominators.²⁴⁸ Second, as we have seen, theories of hybridity enable the colonized to disrupt the foundation of the colonialist discourse of superiority. Yet, hybridity is less compatible with Scott’s understanding of the relation between the powerful and powerless in terms of oppositionality rather than mutuality. However, this should not be taken to invalidate Bhabha’s concern with the process of hybridization in

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 86.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 89-90.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 45.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 77.

²⁴⁸ David A. Sánchez, *From Patmos to the Barrio: Subverting Imperial Myths* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), 117-18.

colonizer/colonized relations, as long as it leads the oppressed to reflect on their possible in-between positions and thus make a purer and sharper weapon for the weak out of other forms of resistance. Third, for Scott, the subordinate are not attracted but resistant to the dominant. The concept of ambivalence is, therefore, at variance with Scott's view of resistance, which is focused on the persistent attempts, in various forms, by subordinates to resist their oppressors.

To sum up, whereas Bhabha uses the concepts of hybridity and ambivalence to foreground the interinfluence between the colonizer and the colonized, Scott highlights the conflictual relationships between the dominant and the dominated. In my opinion, their ideas can be appropriated in a way that views them not as mutually exclusive but as supplementary. Neither scholar can explain all cultural relations, though Scott seems to have more explanatory power. Aware of the tension between these two critics, I hypothesize for my reading of Revelation that mutuality and oppositionality coexist in power relations and that both contribute to the construction of a hermeneutic of resistance for justice and liberation. Whereas I attempt to reclaim the Apocalypse as resistance literature, I foreground even the reality of interdependence between the dominant and the dominated to highlight the need to rupture those relations that maintain as well as increase oppression.

Scott seems to be closer to Fanon than to Bhabha. First of all, both Scott and Fanon have in common a binary demarcation of the powerful and powerless. Second, both refuse to acknowledge the full persuasive power of cultural hegemony. As a result, third, both emphasize oppositional and resisting relations between dominant and subordinate groups. On the other hand, Fanon and Scott differ significantly from each other in that the former views violence as the perfect means of resistance, while the latter believes that resistance in most cases is practiced in disguised forms. Still, violent resistance, as construed by Fanon, could be subsumed under a wide variety of tactics that, Scott argues, subaltern people make use of to resist the authority of their oppressors, insofar as Scott is aware of those "apocalyptic" moments, including revolt, when the hidden transcript of resistance surfaces as a direct threat to the established order.

To conclude, the above-mentioned critics inform, in one way or another as well as in varying degrees, my discourse of resistance for a postcolonial reading of Revelation. As I read it, the resistance

language of Revelation alludes to a variety of modes of resistance, though, as will be shown in chapter 3, it does not unambiguously endorse violent resistance on the part of the oppressed Christians. Within the gamut of resistance strategies embedded in the Apocalypse, all of which are considered effective in different specific situations, my postcolonial hermeneutic foregrounds both ideological and embodied resistance to interpret the book with respect to suffering and resistance. We have noted that ideological resistance is the starting point for other forms of pragmatic resistance. Discursive resistance alone cannot account for the cases in which the oppressed outwit the physical oppression of the ruling class.

Resistance Hermeneutics

In light of the above-mentioned considerations, I regard a hermeneutics of resistance informed by postcolonial studies within the interpretive paradigm of cultural studies or ideological criticism as the best interpretive method for enabling a strategic reading of the Apocalypse on behalf of the suffering. In keeping with the spirit of justice, I seek to construct a hermeneutics of resistance that provides an analytic lens with which to empower suffering readers to interpret Revelation as a liberating text, in search of the disturbing voices of those oppressed by the Roman Empire. I will explore a hermeneutic of resistance whereby Revelation is viewed as an anti-hegemonic discourse posing a threat to oppression itself as well as offering comfort to those suffering. Liberation through resistance takes center stage in my interpretation of Revelation. Revealing means resisting. To this end, I draw on a hermeneutic of affirmation as well as a hermeneutic of suspicion. Paul Ricoeur draws attention to a double motivation that animates hermeneutics: willingness to suspect and willingness to listen.²⁴⁹

Paul Ricoeur

A hermeneutic of suspicion plays a crucial role in my interpretation of the Apocalypse, since I adopt ideological criticism as my critical approach in examining the ways in which differential power

²⁴⁹ Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. Denis Savage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 27.

formations and relations in society and culture have played, and continue to play, a role in the formation and interpretation of religious-theological texts. We have seen, however, that ideological interpretations of Revelation from the point of view of a hermeneutic of suspicion have been scarcely able to generate constructive meanings from the text. To the degree that I see the Book of Revelation as a liberating text, a hermeneutic of suspicion is better applied to the interpreters, or the history of interpretation of Revelation. In order to reclaim the Apocalypse as resistance literature, we need to be able to recognize any ideological agendas behind biblical interpretation that have forestalled resistance and so contributed to the sustenance and increase of injustice. When a text is informed not so much by a dominant ideology as by a subordinate ideology, a hermeneutic of affirmation provides a better reading strategy, one that helps readers derive empowering meanings from the text. My interpretation of Revelation thus negotiates between a hermeneutic of suspicion and a hermeneutic of affirmation to elaborate a hermeneutic of resistance.

According to Ricoeur, the present is a time of crisis, when expectation takes refuge in utopia and tradition becomes nothing but a dead deposit of the past. Faced with this crisis, we have a double task: on the one hand, “to bring purely utopian expectations into connection with the present by strategic action concerned to take the first steps in the direction of the desirable and the reasonable”; and, on the other hand, “to resist the narrowing of our space of experience by liberating the unused potentialities of the past.”²⁵⁰ Previous scholarship, however, has overemphasized the discontinuity between tradition and utopia in the interpreting of Revelation. Traditional readings of Revelation that are solely contingent on utopian expectations, configured in language completely detached from present *realia* and demarcated from previous possibilities, may have to be replaced by a new reading that not just emphasizes present-day utopian practices but also views traditional elements as essential to the envisioning of utopia. I maintain that the concept of resistance can perform this twofold function: on the one hand, resistance is a form of “strategic action” that those waiting for utopia can take, in a way unsettling to the status quo, to expedite the inauguration of utopia; on the other hand, strategic resistance is a potentiality of the past that those

²⁵⁰ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 3: 235.

acting out utopia can recover to inform the actions intended to unsettle the existing status quo. While resistance is one of the actions that connect utopian expectations with the present, strategies for resistance can be reconstructed in consideration of traditions of resistance. When applied to the tradition of Christian apocalyptic, this argument means, first, that Christians must take specific actions in order to inaugurate utopia, instead of passively waiting for the realization of John's utopian thoughts in the future, and, second, that the Book of Revelation provides strategies of resistance that can be appropriated by real readers who act out utopia in order to undermine the dystopian realities.

Reinhold Niebuhr

Last but not least, for the construction of a hermeneutic of resistance by using the *topos* of resistance, I also find it decisive to pay attention to Reinhold Niebuhr's "Christian realism," which identifies justice as a controlling ethic for intergroup relationships. As Larry Rasmussen interprets him, Niebuhr's Christian realism is based on two assumptions. First of all, human nature exhibits self-regarding impulses that are magnified in the lives of groups, which are generally stronger than other-regarding or social impulses. On the other hand, intergroup relations are determined by the proportion of power distributed between groups at least as much as by the comparative needs and claims of each group rationally and morally appraised. As a corollary, not love but justice should be the relevant moral norm for the ordering of society, and the most equitable distribution of power must be strategically sought. In short, self-interest and power are foregrounded as factors that offer resistance to established norms.²⁵¹

My study on the reality and need of power is not to justify the use of violence but to show that emancipation is achieved when power is balanced through strategic empowerment—a more realistic strategy than expecting love from the dominant. Nor am I arguing that power is all about violence, but that the power to resist is another weapon of the weak, besides the power to endure. In one word, resistance is all the more feasible for those who manipulate power-driven tactics in addition to love-driven ones. The

²⁵¹ Larry Rasmussen, ed., *Reinhold Niebuhr: Theologian of Public Life* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 20.

privation of power means the privation of resistance, and vice versa. The concept of power so represented helps to liberate subaltern people not only from dominance but also from the mode of resistance imposed by the powerful.

We remember Fanon's insightful remark that the colonist is not interested in equal coexistence with the colonized subject. As long as those in power are unwilling to live in peace with those without power, the only feasible response would seem to be that the latter must stage powerful resistance in order to undermine the forceful domination of the former. The deconstruction of Babylon, as envisioned in the Apocalypse, can be construed as endorsing the need for the suffering powerless to develop and exercise counterpower over the oppressive powerful. The Apocalypse illustrates countervailing forces inaugurated by divine intervention in apocalyptic times.

It has been my assumption that inasmuch as the interpretation of the text is dependent on the social location of the reader, Revelation's hermeneutic of resistance is best recovered from the viewpoint of the oppressed in the light of their contextual concerns and interests. The Book of Revelation is thus taken from the dominant, who have used it as a weapon of hegemony, to be given back to the dominated, who can use it in an ethically more valid manner as a weapon of resistance. Informed by Ricoeur, the real reader can realize John's utopian visions in the present moment by reconstructing strategic resistance as envisioned in the Apocalypse. Informed by Niebuhr, the real reader can regenerate Revelation's strategic resistance, which does not exclude power as a means of resistance but values the variety of resistance tactics, which encompasses not only love-based but also power-based resistance.

In keeping with these considerations and observations, the remainder of this project is organized as follows. Chapter 2 surveys the intertextuality of Revelation's resistance language by examining whether and to what degree violence was regarded as a legitimate means of resistance in apocalyptic discourse within ancient Judaism and the NT. It will be shown that Jewish apocalyptic writings endorse both nonviolent and violent resistance by the suffering righteous in apocalyptic times, whereas the Gospels and Paul are silent about the legitimacy of violent resistance in response to apocalyptic oppression. My hypothesis is that the Apocalypse is inscribed with resistance language that incorporates a variety of tactics,

subsuming nonviolence but not violence, into an apocalyptic resistance strategy, to the extent that the concepts of justice and anthropodicy are taken as complementing the notions of love and theodicy. In doing so, I attempt to define the apocalypse genre with special reference to the theme of reversal of fortune through human resistance as well as divine intervention.

Chapter 3 explores the hypothesis that John views resistance as something to be elaborated by subordinates in the interest of liberation, in consideration of their relationships with their oppressors, who employ equally elaborate methods of domination. To this end, I draw primarily on Scott's theory of resistance in terms of public and hidden discourses, which best accounts for Revelation's language of resistance, since it incorporates a variety of modes of resistance, pursued in both material and ideological fashion. It will be argued that Christians in Asia Minor are encouraged to oppose Rome's dominance through diverse strategies of resistance, ranging between passive endurance and active resistance.

Chapter 4 will carry out a literary analysis of Revelation 18 from the point of view of socioeconomic criticism in order to reconstruct a resistance language inscribed within the text in relation to the Roman economy. John is taken to criticize Rome's imperial economy for preying upon the disinherited. Among other things, I read Revelation 18 as encouraging marginalized Christians to act as agents of God's economic judgment on Babylon for its economic sins, beyond warning the complacent to withdraw from its economic system, and containing a voice of resistance on the part of conscientized subordinates, which previous readings fail to recover. It will be claimed that Revelation's sharp criticism of Rome's economics reflects the bitter tensions inherent in the wealth differentials within Rome's economy.

Chapter 5 will show, by way of conclusion, how my thesis has been advanced and summarize what has been found in the previous chapters. Special attention will be paid to the possibility that the Apocalypse is concerned with the fate of those who are neither God's people nor Rome's faithful allies. I will extrapolate the argument from the observations thus far that a hermeneutic of resistance is an effective tool for engaging the contemporary world, with special reference to the danger of mystifying global capitalism, which is vulnerable to Revelation's critique of imperial economics. Suggestions for further studies on Revelation in the light of suffering and resistance will bring the work to completion.

CHAPTER II

INTERTEXTUALITY OF REVELATION: SUFFERING AND RESISTANCE IN APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE

In the previous chapter, I offered a hermeneutic of resistance that draws on a spectrum of resistance strategies—from ideological struggles to embodied oppositions, which range between passive endurance and active resistance—in apocalyptic situations. The importance and legitimacy of this meaning of resistance was validated through a reading of the Apocalypse from a postcolonial point of view, informed by cultural studies criticism. To see whether and to what extent my resistance hermeneutic explains the resistance language of the Apocalypse within the framework of a postcolonialism informed by cultural studies, I now turn to one of the three connotations of cultural studies elaborated in chapter 1: the struggle over meaning-production in intertextual relations.

The other elements of cultural studies, i.e., the sociopolitical dimensions of discourse and the tension between popular and official culture, are also inherent in my reading of the Apocalypse. First, the political commitment of the book colors my hermeneutic of resistance, to the extent that I approach the Apocalypse from a postcolonial point of view that problematizes the dynamics of power between the colonizer and the colonized. Second, the concept of production in use naturally relates to the role of popular culture, since it is understood to empower the (ex-)colonized to construct their own symbolic universe as a means of counter-hegemonic struggle. In so doing, my reading of the Apocalypse foregrounds what the disenfranchised can do in response to power differentials between cultures.

To begin with, in order to corroborate the position adopted in this study—namely, that Revelation points toward a convoluted method of resistance as a result of intertextual relations—I take a close look at how other apocalyptic texts viewed contemporary apocalyptic events in terms of suffering and resistance. Given apocalyptic strategies of resistance that incorporate human agency in violent as well as nonviolent resistance, the next step is to make sense of them in terms of the dialectical relation between love and justice,

along with the tension between theodicy and anthropodicy. On the basis of such new findings, I will propose a new definition of apocalyptic genre that foregrounds the theme of human resistance. After seeking to view the theme of resistance as a leitmotif of the Apocalypse, I will discuss the relation of John's experienced sufferings to his conscientized perspective. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion about how underprivileged readers can reclaim the Apocalypse as resistance literature by generating counter-hegemonic readings.

Intertextuality of Revelation's Resistance Language

In this section I seek to locate Revelation in apocalyptic tradition in order to see whether or to what extent the book uniquely integrates elements of resistance from Jewish apocalypses in the reflection of burgeoning Christianity. I want to raise the possibility that apocalyptic writings, preceding or contemporary with the Book of Revelation, entertain violent as well as nonviolent resistance strategies against oppressive powers.

From the point of view of intertextuality, as comprehended within cultural studies, Revelation integrates the language and symbol of resistance from other apocalyptic literature. As regards intertextual relations, Stefan Alkier states:

No text is produced and received in isolation from other texts. The concept of intertextuality therefore involves the task of investigating the relationships that a text can have with other texts. The hermeneutical consequence of this insight regarding the unavoidable intertextual composition of every text consists of the decentring and pluralizing of textual meaning: texts have no meaning *per se* but rather enable the production of meaning in the act of reading. The generation of meaning is always codetermined—intended or not, consciously or unconsciously—through the actualization of potential relationships of the text in relation to other texts.¹

Along these lines, I hypothesize that Jewish apocalyptic literature is of special relevance to the formation and interpretation of Revelation. To begin with, literary dependence between Jewish apocalyptic writings and NT writings cannot be ignored. One has only to recall that a tradition concerning the imprisonment of

¹ Stefan Alkier, "The Book of Re(ve)lation: How to Read Intertextually," in *Ancient Christian Interpretations of "Violent Texts" in the Apocalypse*, ed. Joseph Verheyden, Tobias Nicklas, and Andreas Merkt (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 295.

the fallen angels, as narrated in Enoch, is portrayed in 1 Peter, 2 Peter, and Jude.² More importantly, both John's choice of traditional Jewish language and the fact that he denies his rivals the title of "Jew" show his high appreciation for Judaism.³ Further, stronger literary dependence between the Apocalypse and Jewish apocalyptic literature may be postulated if it is assumed that the extent of intertextuality is greater between writings of the same genre than between writings of different genres. It is important to note in this regard that most Jewish apocalypses were written between 200 B.C.E. and 100 C.E.⁴ and that apocalypticism in early Christianity was developed within Jewish apocalypticism in the decades preceding and following the first Jewish revolt against Rome.⁵ If, as most scholars agree, Revelation was written toward the end of the first century C.E., one could reasonably suppose that the author of Revelation was at least as much familiar with Jewish apocalyptic literature as with earlier prophetic literature.

Pacifism in Jewish Apocalyptic Writings

There are many apocalyptic passages that account for Revelation's pacifistic attitude in response to persecution and oppression. Human initiative more often than not falls short of violent methods of resistance. In response to questions about theodicy that arose from the destruction of Jerusalem, 4 Ezra arrives at a twofold answer: while the text gives *no* answer to the existence of suffering and inequities, since God's ways are above human understanding, it does move the discussion from theodicy to eschatology by pointing toward the ultimate solution of retribution in the next world.⁶ The brunt of 4 Ezra's exhortation to perceptive Jews frustrated by the catastrophe of 70 C.E. is to renounce mortal life and look to the judgment after death (14.14, 35). In so doing, the book turns the attention of the reader to the transcendent perspective

² Lewis R. Donelson, *I & II Peter and Jude: A Commentary*, The New Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010), 116-17. Enochic concepts are found not merely in Jude that quotes it explicitly (1.14f.) but also in various NT books, including the Gospels and Revelation (E. Isaac, "1 [Ethiopic Apocalypse] of Enoch [Second Century B.C.—First Century A.D.]," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, *Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments*, ed. J. H. Charlesworth [Garden City: Doubleday, 1983], 8).

³ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Vision of a Just World*, 135-36.

⁴ Aune, *Revelation*, 1: lxxvii.

⁵ Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 256.

⁶ Reddish, *Apocalyptic Literature*, 58.

provided by apocalyptic revelation.⁷ Whereas 4 Ezra presents a retrospective interpretation of the past event, the future is more important than the present in dealing with issues of theodicy.

The Epistle of Enoch takes a similar view of the judgment of the wicked. Although the majority of the accusations against the wicked are concerned with social issues that reflect class divisions (94.8; 96.5), the Epistle of Enoch (1 Enoch 91-108) exhorts the righteous who are oppressed in this world to persevere in the hope of salvation *outside* of it and the eventual reversal of the present world order (92.3; 100.4; 104.2-6).⁸ Since the eschatological judgment is in focus, the violent punishment by the righteous of the sinners (98.12) may not conjure up the image of violent resistance on earth in the mind of the reader. Both 4 Ezra and the Epistle of Enoch indeed downplay human agency in solving historical contradictions insofar as they look ahead to the eschatological judgment.

The story of Taxo in the *Testament of Moses* views moving an avenging God to action rather than violent rebellion as the way to bring about a change in the course of history (9.6-7). One is thus encouraged to let oneself be killed instead of breaking the law.⁹ While William Farmer draws attention to the role of the Maccabees in the formation of Jewish revolutionary ideas in the later period,¹⁰ Collins regards the story of Taxo as an antitype; as a result, both violent and nonviolent attitude of resistance coexisted in Judaism throughout the period leading up to the war with Rome.¹¹

In addition to the pacifist language of Jewish apocalyptic literature, which might have deterred Jewish revolutionaries, presumably John could not dismiss the catastrophic result of the Great Revolt. The suggestion has been made that the war against Rome dampened eschatological fervor, Messianic hopes, and the apocalyptic fanaticism that had aggravated the disasters of the Jewish people.¹² As a result of

⁷ Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 210-11.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 66-67.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 131.

¹⁰ Not only were the Maccabees historical counterparts to the Jewish nationalists of the first century A.D., but they were also remembered via such a national holiday as Hanukkah by the Jews in Palestine during the same period (William Reuben Farmer, *Maccabees, Zealots, and Josephus: An Inquiry into Jewish Nationalism in the Greco-Roman Period* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1956], 125-58).

¹¹ Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 133.

¹² P. Alexander, "3 (Hebrew Apocalypse of) Enoch (Fifth to Sixth Century A.D.)," in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 235.

recognizing the limitation of militancy, John perhaps felt the need to circumscribe the role of violence as a resistance tactic, thus accounting for Revelation's sophisticated methods of resistance, which subsume passive and active resistance, but not violent resistance. These remarks lead me to take into account not just literary but also historical influence on Revelation's resistance language.

Before turning to Jewish apocalyptic literature that views violence as a method of resistance against persecution or oppression, I want to pay attention to the likelihood that the Book of Daniel maintains a tension between nonviolent and violent resistance. The Book of Daniel is often taken to dismiss the Maccabees, if they are acknowledged at all, as only a little help:¹³ "When they [i.e., wise teachers] fall victim, they shall receive a little help, and many shall join them insincerely" (Dan 11.34).¹⁴ The wise teachers of the people, to whom the author of Daniel belongs, are portrayed as activists who do not fight but make the masses *understand* the predetermined outcome of events. Thereby they enable the faithful Jews to bear up under persecution, even to the point of laying down their lives in the hope of a reward at the resurrection.¹⁵ Collins objects to the popular identification of the wise teachers with the Hasidim who were militant supporters of Judas Maccabeus by arguing that the real battle was left to Michael and his angels and the wise teachers merely imparted understanding to others.¹⁶

Indeed the insightful teachers would enlighten many people (Dan 11.33). However, the statement that the wise teachers will receive a little help when they fall by a *sword* (Dan 11.33) does seem to be speaking of some kind of militant assistance. Though the wise teachers may not be identified with the Hasidim, it does not exclude the possibility that the text refers to the help the Hasidim brought to the wise teachers. At least, Dan 11.33-34 acknowledges the usefulness of militant resistance, though to a limited extent, and shows an ambivalent attitude toward violent resistance.

¹³ Collins, "Temporality and Politics," 38.

¹⁴ Unless otherwise indicated, quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

¹⁵ Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 111.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 112.

Violent Resistance in Jewish Apocalyptic Writings

It is not difficult to encounter Jewish apocalyptic ideas expressed in violent language. R. H. Charles has argued, “It was a well-known Jewish expectation that the righteous would take part in the destruction of the wicked” (1 Enoch 38.5; 90.19; 91.12; 95.7; 96.1; 98.12; 99.4, 6; Wisd. 3.8).¹⁷ Joel 2.28-3.21 describes the end time in apocalyptic terms, predicting the punishment of Judah’s enemies and the restoration of its land to a paradisiacal abundance.¹⁸ While pointing out similarities between Revelation and Joel, Alkier finds a significant difference with regard to the role of human agency in divine judgment. God destroys enemies in both books, but only Joel has the people get involved in the violence, as is indicated in Joel 3.13a: “Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe.” In the Book of Revelation, in contrast, no Christian on earth takes part in the war waged by God and his heavenly agents against the powers of evil. The readers, standing between these different positions, have to decide how to deal with the problems of violence in their societies.¹⁹ It seems certain that Rev 14.14-20 attenuates Joel’s reference to human agency in the eschatological war,²⁰ regardless of the legitimacy of Alkier’s assumption that human participation in the cosmological war is excluded in the Apocalypse.²¹

Of special importance to my study of apocalyptic violence is the Animal Apocalypse (1 Enoch 85-90). Its composition can be dated to the time of the Maccabean revolt on the grounds of the description of the ram with a great horn (90.9-16), which is widely recognized as a historical reference to Judas Maccabeus:²² “And I looked until horns came up on those lambs, but the ravens cast their horns down; and I looked until a big horn grew on one of those sheep, and their eyes were opened” (90.9).²³ The militant

¹⁷ R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), 2:74.

¹⁸ Michael D. Coogan, *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 441.

¹⁹ Alkier, “Book of Re(ve)lation,” 298-99.

²⁰ John indeed has an angel swing a sickle in Rev 14.19. Depending on the meaning of the one like a son of man in 14.14, Jesus or another angelic being executes this punishment. In either case, human beings are scarcely involved in the double image of harvesting inspired by Joel 3.13.

²¹ A sharp distinction has been suggested between the HB in which God judges by inflicting suffering and the Apocalypse wherein God judges by accepting suffering (Anthony Tyrrell Hanson, *The Wrath of the Lamb* [London: SPCK, 1957], 168ff.).

²² Reddish, *Apocalyptic Literature*, 43.

²³ Translation by M. A. Knibb, used in Reddish, *Apocalyptic Literature*, 51. Knibb’s work is contained in *The*

tone of the Animal Apocalypse is also explicit in 90.19: “And I looked until a big sword was given to the sheep, and the sheep went out against all the wild animals to kill them, and all the animals and the birds of heaven fled before them.”

One might argue that the Animal Apocalypse envisions the destruction by the heavenly angels of the Gentiles rulers. While admitting a militant role for the righteous, which is lacking in Daniel, Collins argues that the victory is still in the hands of God and his angels.²⁴ Indeed an angel helps Judas and the Lord punishes evil animals (90.14ff.). It may be noted, however, that Judas himself was not easily beatable (90.12). As Rainer Albertz has argued, the Animal Apocalypse views the Maccabean struggles as crucially important for the last days and sees the coalition with the Maccabees as greatly contributing to the apocalyptic enlightenment of many people (90.10). Besides, the Maccabean struggles as holy wars lead directly to the eschatological battle in which God and Israel fight together to defeat their enemies (90.18ff.).²⁵

In commenting on “that sword which had been given to the sheep” in 1 Enoch 90.34, C. K. Barrett notes that it refers to the fierce and successful Jewish resistance under the Maccabees, “which the author seems to regard as foreshadowing, or even ushering in, the messianic age.”²⁶ This construal is further evidenced by 90.37, in which the Messiah, symbolized by “a white bull,” is portrayed as a somewhat otiose figure that is born after the completion of the major eschatological events, because the author’s admiration for Judas Maccabeus left little room for him.²⁷ The fact that 1 Enoch 90.6-27 associates the opening of the lambs’ eyes with the rise of Judas Maccabeus as their champion and connects his battles with the eschatological war and final judgment may indicate that the Hasidim of 1 Maccabees thought that they were

Apocryphal Old Testament, ed. H. F. D. Sparks (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984).

²⁴ Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 70.

²⁵ Rainer Albertz, “The Social Setting of the Aramaic and Hebrew Book of Daniel,” in *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception*, ed. John Collins and Peter W. Flint, with the assistance of Cameron VanEpps (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 1:195.

²⁶ C. K. Barrett, *The New Testament Background: Writings from Ancient Greece and the Roman Empire That Illuminate Christian Origins*, rev. ed. (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1989), 328.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

waging eschatological warfare in connection with the judgment.²⁸ According to C. H. Dodd, we have in Enoch 90.6-19 a prototype of the militant seven-horned Lamb of the Apocalypse.²⁹ Therefore, the military role of the Maccabees, along with its association with the eschatological battle, is better viewed as complementary, rather than ancillary, to the role of supernatural beings.

The Apocalypse of Weeks (1 Enoch 93.1-10 and 91.11-17) also apparently endorses violent actions on the part of righteous people. Although dating this apocalyptic work is evasive, there have been attempts to date the writing to pre-Maccabean times (prior to 166 B.C.E.).³⁰ History is divided therein into ten periods of “weeks,” and the author is living in the seventh week, which is considered an apostate generation. I am concerned with the seventh and eighth periods, which predict the violent judgment of the sinners: “And after this the roots of iniquity will be cut off, and the sinners will be destroyed by the sword . . . And after this there will be another week, the eighth, that of righteousness, and a sword will be given to it that the righteous judgement may be executed on those who do wrong, and the sinners will be handed over into the hands of the righteous” (1 Enoch 91.11-12).³¹ Endorsement of the use of the sword against the wicked is obviously compatible with the ideology of the Maccabean revolt.³² Even if the Maccabean revolt should be eliminated from its interpretation, the writing certainly legitimates the use of violence by the righteous.

The idea that humanity takes part in the eschatological war is also found in the Qumran community. The *War Scroll* describes the final eschatological battle between two forces: on the one hand, the Sons of Light, the faithful Israelites, primarily the members of the Qumran community, joined by a host of angels and led by the archangel Michael; on the other hand, the Sons of Darkness, the traditional enemies of the Israelite people along with the unfaithful Jews, assisted by the angels of Belial.³³ In particular, columns 2-9 contain various regulations and descriptions for military mobilization, which deal with battle trumpets

²⁸ Nickelsburg, “Social Aspects of Palestinian Jewish Apocalypticism,” 653-54.

²⁹ C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 232. Dodd likewise reads *Testament of Joseph* 19.8 which depicts a lamb overcoming and destroying its attackers (Ibid., 232).

³⁰ Reddish, *Apocalyptic Literature*, 54.

³¹ Translation by M. A. Knibb, used in Reddish, *Apocalyptic Literature*, 56.

³² Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 71.

³³ Reddish, *Apocalyptic Literature*, 229.

and standards, weapons and battle formations, purity regulations, and so on.³⁴

It is the case that the whole of the *War Rule* is diffused with a sense of the presence of angelic forces and that the overall picture of the *War Rule* is a far cry from the pragmatic approach presented by 1 Maccabees.³⁵ However, the belief that not only angels but also people, godly and ungodly alike, will participate in the eschatological war appears to presuppose another belief that the eschatological battle is an earthly event to a certain degree. It may be noted in this regard that the Qumran community believed that they were already living the risen life with the angels.³⁶ Insofar as this doctrine reflected a realized eschatology, the eschatological battle against the Sons of Darkness may have been likewise proleptically understood. It is even quite possible that the Qumran community, convinced that the Day of Revenge had come, took up arms against the Roman army in 68 C.E.³⁷

The Apocalypse of Abraham attributes the destruction of the temple to the sins of the Jews and apparently condemns the violence of 66-70 C.E., which most probably refers to the inner-Jewish struggles at the time of the revolt against Rome.³⁸ However, the Apocalypse of Abraham may be taken as sanctioning the use of violence in the eschatological age, when the righteous “will destroy those who have destroyed them, they will rebuke those who have rebuked them through their mockery, and they will spit in their faces” (29.19). God works in consort with the righteous to punish the wicked: the implication in 31.1-2, and much stronger in 29.17-19, is that the righteous who are being presently oppressed will rise up to destroy their oppressors. Thus, the oppressed are urged to take an active role, which is the most striking feature of the Apocalypse of Abraham.³⁹ It is also possible that “the Apocalypse of Abraham stands as an example of a response to the destruction of the Second Temple which may have contributed to the atmosphere which precipitated the revolt of Bar Kokhba.”⁴⁰

³⁴ Ibid., 229.

³⁵ Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 168.

³⁶ Ibid., 174.

³⁷ Ibid., 171.

³⁸ Ibid., 231-32.

³⁹ James. R. Mueller, “The Apocalypse of Abraham and the Destruction of the Second Jewish Temple,” in *Society of Biblical Literature 1982 Seminar Papers*, ed. Kent Harold Richards (Chico, CA: Scholars, 1982), 348.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 349.

In contrast, Collins is of the opinion that insofar as violence is envisaged as eschatological, the Apocalypse of Abraham itself does not advocate rebellion against Rome at the time, as with the Bar Kokhba revolt, but only at the end of the age.⁴¹ Nonetheless, he suggests that the Jewish apocalypse, somewhat similar to the Qumran *War Scroll*, could be construed as endorsing violence if the messianic age was thought to have arrived.⁴² There may be times when readers, who believe that they can perceive the apocalyptic meaning of contemporary circumstances, attempt to tease earthly meanings out of apocalyptic texts in which a final judgment, though inevitable, is confined to the eschatological age. In particular, readers subject to domination may be tempted to find themselves positioned nearer to the eschatological climax as contributors to the divine judgment of evil powers. This illustrates a case in which readers engage the text from their social context.

The central oracles of Sibylline Oracle 5 were composed between the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. and the great Diaspora revolt in 115-17 C.E.⁴³ Despite its mythological imagery and supernatural savior figure, Sibylline Oracle 5 does not envisage salvation beyond this world, but it does politically contest the nations in general and Rome in particular. It articulates Jewish anger, which is generated in part by social oppression (Sib. Or. 5: 416-17), but chiefly by Rome's destruction of the temple and its arrogance in posturing as God. Moreover, unlike other apocalyptic literature, the book reflects Jewish anger against the heathen power in terms of political struggles, even to the point of fomenting rebellion, presumably representative of the feelings of Jews who joined in the Diaspora revolt during the reign of Trajan.⁴⁴ A number of references to the destruction or dereliction of pagan temples (52-59, 484-91), which was a notable feature of the Jewish Diaspora revolt, may indicate the atmosphere which fostered that revolt in the early years of the second century.⁴⁵ Significantly enough, anti-Roman sentiment was possibly associated in apocalyptic literature with a rebellious attitude.

⁴¹ Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 232.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 232.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 234.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 238.

⁴⁵ John Collins, "Sibylline Oracles (Second Century B.C.—Seventh Century A.D.)," in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 390.

It is now clear that Jewish apocalyptic literature shows a plurality of resistance strategies, derived not from one apocalyptic theology of resistance but rather from “multiple theologies of resistance.”⁴⁶ The question remains whether John’s anti-Roman attitude may be conceived as involving violent as well as nonviolent language as a result of literary dependence on Jewish apocalyptic writings. Of importance here is the probability that “Hellenistic rule in Judea set the stage for resistance and for the emergence of the literary genre apocalypse.”⁴⁷ Insofar as Revelation reflects and addresses the socioreligious reality of Roman rule, intertextual analogies between the book and Jewish apocalyptic literature are a matter not merely of literary dependence but also of social significance.

While I seek to investigate the intertextual relations of the Apocalypse with other apocalyptic texts that would inform a new construal of the meaning of resistance in the book, this must not be taken to imply that all apocalyptic texts inside and outside the NT can be read as resistance literature on the same level as the Apocalypse. Such a move would merely level the variegated meanings of resistance which apocalyptic texts produce in the light of their specific socioreligious contexts. What is to be emphasized is the ways in which the writer of Revelation enriches the meanings of resistance by adapting them to his own social context and agenda and thus produces a constellation of meanings of resistance with new dimensions.

Given all the intertextual interplays between the Apocalypse and other Jewish apocalypses, the Christian apocalypse of John may be said to be different from the Jewish apocalypses on two related levels. First, whereas all the Jewish apocalypses conceal the situation of the historical author and thus emphasize not the uniqueness of historical events but recurring patterns,⁴⁸ Revelation takes pains to insure, though at times subtly, that the contemporary sociohistorical situation is not so much covert as overt. For example, John’s politico-economic condemnation of Rome in Revelation 17 and 18 is explicit rather than implicit. In particular, as will be discussed in chapter 4, Revelation 18 is more open than any other chapter of the book in criticizing Rome’s socioeconomic crimes. This should be understood in relation to the realized

⁴⁶ Anthea E. Portier-Young, *Apocalypse against Empire: Theologies of Resistance in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 3-4. Portier-Young’s sources include Daniel, the Apocalypse of Weeks, and the Animal Apocalypse.

⁴⁷ Portier-Young, *Apocalypse against Empire*, 382.

⁴⁸ Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 51.

eschatology of early Christianity.

The historical conviction that the Messiah had already come and the firstfruits of the resurrection have taken place marks a distinction between Jewish and Christian apocalypticism.⁴⁹ We recall that the author of Revelation did not need to use the literary technique of pseudonymity to enhance the authority of the visionary, because the belief that the eschatological age had begun lent new authority to prophetic utterances in early Christianity.⁵⁰ There is no need to portray the historical conditions of the day in purely mythological terms, because they are already in the eschatological course of events. Rather, John employs mythological language to produce a new mythology of symbolic resistance to dominant mythology in defense of a minority perspective.⁵¹ It is in this vein that I accept Aune's position that the suprahistorical perspective of apocalyptic literature is mitigated in the Apocalypse through the incorporation of prophetic concerns which have a historical orientation.⁵²

Second, human responsibilities within history are given more weight in Revelation than in Jewish apocalypses. As we will see in the following chapter, John not just devises a spectrum of resistance strategies, ideological as well as practical, against the present oppressive system, but he also maintains a dialectical tension between passive endurance and active resistance, excluding violence, which appears in Jewish apocalyptic writings. This may reflect the tradition of Christian apocalyptic deviating from Jewish apocalyptic literature that was often obsessed with otherworldly and cosmic speculations, disregarding the historical responsibility of the believer within the world.⁵³ Utopia no longer belongs entirely to the future.

Again, the realized eschatology of early Christianity plays an important role. Just as the messianic

⁴⁹ Ibid., 268.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 271. But it is suggested that oppressed writers speak out against their oppressors under a false name of dead heroes and that the author of Revelation chose a Christian pseudonym, in so doing avoiding the danger of being punished by the Romans who would recognize the thinly transparent disparaging references to Rome in the book (Revelation 17) (Norman A. Beck, *Anti-Roman Cryptograms in the New Testament: Symbolic Messages of Hope and Liberation* [New York: Peter Lang, 1997], 135-36).

⁵¹ Steven J. Friesen, "Myth and Symbolic Resistance in Revelation 13," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 123/2 (2004): 313.

⁵² David Aune, "An Intertextual Reading of the Apocalypse of John," in *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic in Early Christianity*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 199 (Tübingen: Mohr, 2006), 149.

⁵³ Richard, *People's Commentary*, 15.

age is being realized at present, so are the messianic woes naturally conceived as invading into history as well. If the Jewish apocalypses conceal the historical specificity of the immediate situation by placing it on a mythical or supernatural level and in so doing put it in a deterministic perspective that serves to guarantee the resolution of the problems of the present,⁵⁴ I suggest, the Book of Revelation assumes the inevitable confrontation with and victory over the evil powers in early Christianity. Inasmuch as they consider the eschatological era underway through Jesus's earthly ministry, his subjects might have felt not only entitled to enjoy its blessings but also obliged to increasingly realize the eschatology in their present lives. This consciousness may well have been enhanced by a sense of eschatological imminence, as found in Revelation.

Collins concludes that, whereas apocalypses often envision the transformation of the earth, the most distinctive features of apocalyptic hope are otherworldly, including resurrection or life with angels.⁵⁵ It is claimed that apocalypse as a genre involves a conceptual structure comprising both a supernatural world and an eschatological judgment.⁵⁶ The conceptual structure functions as a framework for viewing the problems of life in that it provides assurance and guidance through supernatural revelation and clarifies values for a final judgment.⁵⁷ Along these lines, readers will likely seek to understand their existential problems in otherworldly and futuristic terms. Apocalyptic language *per se* may be read in support of this position.

What is less likely is the assumption that the supernatural is more important than the earthly in apocalyptic literature. It is assumed that, while modern people view the mythological world of the gods as a projection of human experience, ancient people regarded earthly affairs as reflections of the greater world of the gods.⁵⁸ Although we cannot suppress an otherworldly orientation inherent in apocalyptic mythology, it must be noted that it is the historical and sociological forces impinging on a community, as in the post-

⁵⁴ Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 51.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 281.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 105.

exilic Jewish community, that spawn a profound need for new forms and conceptual modes that replace old ones.⁵⁹ Besides, the heavenly may not always take precedence over the earthly in apocalyptic writings, if the relations between the earthly and the heavenly are construed as dialectical rather than unilateral. Resseguie argues, Revelation describes events that take place not only in heaven but also on earth, and the above event is interpreted by the below perspective, or vice versa; for instance, Michael's war against Satan in Rev 12.7-9 represents an above perspective of what happens below on earth, i.e., on the cross.⁶⁰ This observation provides a vantage point from which to gain insight into the relation between the conceptual framework of apocalypse and the social matrix of the reader.

Moreover, although apocalyptic writers may have truly assumed the priority of the heavenly reality over the earthly, it does not necessarily mean that they were more attentive to the heavenly affairs than to the earthly ones. I suppose that the content of any apocalypse is ultimately concerned with human relations, despite the literary fact that its form employs the apocalypse genre. Mythic narratives involving supernatural figures interpret everyday existence, expressing profound convictions and feelings about the world that cannot be expressed as well by any other medium.⁶¹ It would be more accurate to say that apocalyptic writers resort to the heavenly reality as a lens through which to make sense of the earthly reality, which is otherwise *unfathomable*. If human affairs are comprehensible in earthly language, they need not be expressed via apocalyptic genre, which by nature deals with the supernatural.

If apocalyptic visionaries, despite their use of mythic language, were more concerned with human realities than with celestial ones, we may infer that their solutions to historical problems expressed in heavenly language could be interpreted as inviting human engagement as well as promising divine intervention. Indeed apocalypses in general more often than not stress the role of supernatural beings in the course of history. This language is usually taken to be meant for comforting suffering readers by assuring

⁵⁹ Paul D. Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic: The Historical and Sociological Roots of Jewish Apocalyptic Eschatology*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 408.

⁶⁰ James L. Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed: A Narrative Critical Approach to John's Apocalypse* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 7.

⁶¹ Frederick J. Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon: The Revelation to John* (Harrisburg: Trinity, 1998), 22-23.

them of the ultimate vindication. At the same time, an apocalypse may perform the illocutionary act of producing specific actions on the part of the reader, when the role of supernatural beings is construed as providing a heavenly point of view from which human problems should be resolved, thus reflecting authorial concern for human involvement in history. The reader interacts with the text in order to not only interpret the meaning embedded within its conceptual structure but also reconstruct earthly meanings to appropriate them to her own situation.⁶² Instead of simply waiting for a transcendental finale, readers may seek to lower heavenly and advance eschatological solutions to their urgent problems by eliciting practical ethics from the conceptual framework of apocalypse.⁶³

We now examine whether and to what degree the Jesus depicted in the Gospels and Paul can be read as eliciting eschatological imminence in the mind of the reader in terms of suffering and resistance. It will be shown that neither can be viewed as a literary antecedent for John's resistance language, informed by his imminent eschatological expectations.

Violence in the New Testament

The question whether John regards nonviolence and/or violence as a legitimate means of resistance may not be directly answered on the basis of what the evangelists or Paul has to say about the ways in which God and humans deal with evil powers in apocalyptic times. These writings belong to different genres. Nevertheless, it has been suggested that Revelation's apocalyptic worldview was an essential part of the mainstream early Christian tradition and was shared by both the Gospels and Paul to a significant degree.⁶⁴ I shall position John's resistance strategy in relation to apocalyptic segments in the Gospels and Paul in

⁶² John Collins speaks of "the essential multivalence of apocalyptic symbolism," which means that symbolic description, to the extent that it is transposed to a mythological plane, allows readers to apply its language to any other analogous historical situations (Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 51). In my opinion, however, an apocalyptic text can be reapplied to later situations not so much because of the universality of apocalyptic crisis as because readers find plausible analogies between the crisis they are facing and the crisis in *whatever* form the ancient text is handling.

⁶³ Perhaps Boring is right that John has reversed the precedence of heavenly events over earthly history in ancient myth. In Revelation, the life of Jesus and the lives of Christians that happen on earth result in the defeat of the evil powers in the transcendent world (Boring, *Revelation*, 159).

⁶⁴ Christopher Rowland, "The Apocalypse: Hope, Resistance, and the Revelation of Reality," *Ex Auditu* 6 (1990): 131-35.

order to investigate whether or how their apocalyptic perspectives show any different attitudes toward dealing with the evil powers.

Violent Deity in the Gospels

Confronted with the apparent coexistence of nonviolence and violence in Matthew, Barbara Reid ascribes the latter only to God and the end-time. Whereas nonviolent confrontation of evil-doers advocated in the Sermon on the Mount is relevant to what Jesus's disciples do in the present, violent confrontation of evil in Jesus's parables is applicable to the end-time judgment performed by God.⁶⁵ Thus, the Gospel of Matthews is not devoid of violence purveyed by the deity. John Kloppenborg argues against Reid's claim that the fault line lies with eschatology. Kloppenborg instead distinguishes between terrible violence purveyed by the deity in historical time, on the one hand, and the more humane virtues expected of humans, on the other hand.⁶⁶ For example, the divine explicitly intervenes with lethal force to kill Jesus's human opponents in the parable of the tenants (Mk 12.1-9).⁶⁷ Yarbrow Collins observes that Jesus's designation as "the one who is more powerful than I" in Mk 1.7 evokes connotations of the divine warrior and his royal messiah or another agent in battle.⁶⁸ The argument in Mk 3.27 that the stronger Jesus binds the strong Satan not simply recalls Mk 1.7,⁶⁹ but it also assumes one who wields overwhelming violence vis-à-vis the violent local don.⁷⁰ In sum, it may be noted that the deity is at times described in the Gospel as violent, not only in the endtime but also in historical time; in comparison, Jesus's followers are expected to avoid violent confrontation with evil powers.

⁶⁵ B. E. Reid, "Violent Endings in Matthew's Parables and Christian Nonviolence," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 66 (2004): 252.

⁶⁶ John S. Kloppenborg, "The Representation of Violence in Synoptic Parables," in *Mark and Matthew I: Comparative Readings: Understanding the Earliest Gospels in their First-Century Settings*, ed. Eve-Marie Becker and Anders Runesson (Tübingen: Mohr, 2011), 330.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 336.

⁶⁸ Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible, ed. Harold W. Attridge (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 146.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 233.

⁷⁰ Kloppenborg, "Representation of Violence in Synoptic Parables," 332.

Yet, the issue of whether the Jesus of the Gospels rejects any kind of violence on the part of his followers is not that simple. One might well recall his speech that he has not come to bring peace, but a sword (Mt 10.34). According to W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, the sword within prophecies of eschatological affliction involves both strife and persecution and embraces the thought of martyrdom.⁷¹ This reading seems to be supported by Jesus's encouragement in the immediate context to take up the cross and follow him and lose your life for his sake (Mt 10.38-39). Davies and Allison dismiss attempts to relate Jesus to the Zealots or to political revolutionaries by way of the saying about the sword, because there is too much clear evidence pointing in the other direction.⁷²

I suggest that Mt 10.34, read by itself, may point toward an eschatological battle initiated by Jesus rather than an eschatological woe launched by the evil powers, insofar as it is Jesus who brings a sword to the earth. The best solution may be implied when Davies and Allison agree with Ferdinand Hahn that the last struggle has broken out with the coming of Jesus, though it is not stated in what way this struggle is to be carried on. In this context, the sword denotes every kind of dispeace.⁷³ The kingdom inaugurated by Jesus may not only suffer but also inflict suffering.

The saying of the Lucan Jesus that the one who has no sword must sell his cloak and buy one (Lk 22.36) is another place wherein he sounds violent. A symbolic reading is popular. The symbolic point of selling one's outer garment for a sword lies in the fact that the disciples are entering a state of testing in which they will be without external resources and in danger.⁷⁴ Understood literally as a Zealot-like call to arms, the reference to the purchase of a sword radically conflicts with Jesus's other teachings; hence, it is best understood in some metaphorical sense as indicating being armed for spiritual warfare.⁷⁵ Jesus's reply ("It is enough!") in 22.38 breaks off further conversation with the disciples, who misunderstood his words

⁷¹ W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *Matthew 8-18*, International Critical Commentary (New York: T&T Clark, 1991), 218.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 219, n. 30.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 218-19; Ferdinand Hahn, *The Titles of Jesus in Christology: Their History in Early Christianity*, Library of Theological Translations, trans. Harold Knight and George Ogg (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2002), 153.

⁷⁴ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1991), 347.

⁷⁵ Robert H. Stein, *Luke: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, New American Commentary 24 (Nashville: B & H, 1992), 555.

in 22.36 by interpreting them literally.⁷⁶ Jesus's exasperated termination of the discussion with the disciples ("It is enough," Lk 22.38), who say that they have two swords, is matched by his chagrin when the sword is actually used violently ("No more of this!" Lk 22.51).⁷⁷

As in the above case, Lk 22.36, read by itself, may be interpreted as foregrounding the limitations of passive endurance. It seems to me that Jesus's reply in 22.38 ("It is enough!") does not so much disapprove as approve of the way in which the disciples have understood his words in 22.36. Also, the reason why Jesus says "No more of this" in 22.51 may well be because one of the disciples cut off the right ear of the *servant* of the high priest (22.50). This is not an implausible interpretation in view of Jesus's tender care for the man, whose ear he touches and heals (22.51). As I understand the passage, the disciples not merely misunderstood the object of the sword but also interpreted its meaning *hyperliterally*. Just because Jesus admitted a need for a sword does not necessarily mean that he authorized a flourish of a sword. Perhaps the Jesus of Luke seized the opportunity to make it known to the disciples that there would be times when passive endurance alone cannot resolve problems.

This is not to be taken to argue that the Jesus as depicted in the Gospels flat-out endorses violence on the part of his followers. Indeed the Sermon on the Mount—and other passages—is in favor of nonviolent resistance. While granting that the Gospels as a whole prefer nonviolence to violence, at the same time I am inclined to read Jesus's possible references to more active forms of resistance than passive endurance in the writings in such a manner as not to subordinate them to his obviously nonviolent language. The remaining question is whether or to what extent Jesus's followers are permitted to act violently against persecution or oppression in apocalyptic times.

Nonviolence in the Olivet Discourse

As we have seen, violent resistance or judgment carried out by the righteous oppressed comes to expression in Jewish apocalyptic literature. Unlike Jewish apocalypses, the so-called Little Apocalypse in

⁷⁶ Ibid., 556.

⁷⁷ Johnson, *Gospel of Luke*, 347.

the synoptic Gospels (Mk 13; Mt 24; Lk 21) does not espouse violent resistance. The disciples are not to be deceived or misled (Mk 13.5-6, 22) but to witness (Mk 13.9; cf. Lk 21.13), endure (Mk 13.13), and flee (Mk 13.14). The resistance language of the Olivet discourse appears to be at variance with that of John's Apocalypse, which this study argues shows a spectrum of resistance strategies.

Some cast doubt on the genre of Mark 13, traditionally defined as apocalyptic text. Vernon K. Robbins observes that the definition of Mark 13 and its parallels as an apocalypse was called into question by the definition of apocalypse brought forth by the Society of Biblical Literature "Genre of Apocalypse" group in 1979.⁷⁸ This included, among other things, a revelation mediated by an otherworldly being; in contrast, Jesus in Mark 13 functions as an earthly teacher of his disciples (13.1).⁷⁹ Robbins further argues that, whereas apocalyptic *topoi* appear in manifold places throughout the Gospel of Mark, the apocalyptic discourse of Mark 13 is deeply informed and guided by wisdom, miracle, suffering-death, and prophetic *topoi*, uncharacteristic of fully apocalyptic discourse.⁸⁰ In another place he writes that Mark 13.1-37 intermingles dimensions of farewell speeches, apocalypses, and Temple dialogues.⁸¹

Aune also argues for the secondary nature of the framework of the eschatological discourse in Mk 13 in the light of the introductory framework of the chapter (13.1-4): two questions elicit Jesus's oracle after the fashion of Greco-Roman literary composition, which also accounts for the chapter's peripatetic dialogue and seated dialogue in full view of the temple. Besides, Mark 13 contains a number of prophetic sayings of Jesus, such as the prediction of the destruction of the temple (13.2) and the prediction of the coming of the Son of man (13.26-27).⁸² One is reminded of Yarbrow Collins's description of Mark 13 as "a

⁷⁸ Collins, "Towards the Morphology of a Genre," 9. It goes as follows: "Apocalypse" is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial, insofar as it involves another, supernatural world."

⁷⁹ Vernon K. Robbins, "The Intertexture of Apocalyptic Discourse in the Gospel of Mark," in *The Intertexture of Apocalyptic Discourse in the New Testament*, ed. Duane F. Watson (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 36.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁸¹ Vernon K. Robbins, *Jesus the Teacher: A Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation of Mark* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 174.

⁸² David Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 186-87.

scholastic dialogue with prophetic or apocalyptic content.”⁸³

In addition, the rhetorical situation of Mark 13 seems to be different from that of Revelation. The Book of Revelation was presumably written in response to a crisis, real or perceived, for the purpose of encouraging the suffering Christians to resist Rome’s oppression and persecution. In comparison, Mark 13 was primarily written to persuade the audience to reject the claims of messianic pretenders that appeared during the first Jewish-Roman war.⁸⁴ While the audience of Mark 13 would feel the presence of the Roman Empire in the background, Rome indeed appears in the forefront in the Apocalypse. The difference between Mark’s anxiety about the popularity of the false messiahs and prophets and John’s concern about Rome’s repression of the prophets and saints accounts to some extent for the difference between what they have to say about evil powers. One deals with the sustenance of faith among insiders, and the other with the undermining of oppression from outsiders.

Moreover, those things that must take place as prophesied by the Marcan Jesus do not constitute the end that is still to come (Mk 13.7), and he does not know the date for the end of the world (Mk 13.32). For the Jesus of Mark, the end times have not yet come when his followers are allowed to resist the Roman state in various apocalyptic ways. In contrast, Jesus in the Apocalypse of John is in ultimate control of end-time events, and the end time is impending when the followers of the Lamb are urged to resist Rome in one way or another. Hence, we cannot hastily conclude that the Apocalypse read as calling for active resistance is at odds with the so-called Synoptic Apocalypse construed as demanding passive resistance. The genre and rhetorical situation of Revelation are significantly distinct from those of Mark 13.

Some argue that the movement represented by the Apocalypse should be construed in relation to the Jesus movement, which also took its rise within the prophetic-apocalyptic movement,⁸⁵ though the

⁸³ Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Beginnings of the Gospel: Probing of Mark in Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 77.

⁸⁴ Adela Yarbro Collins, “The Apocalyptic Rhetoric of Mark 13 in Historical Context,” *Biblical Research* 41 (1996): 5-36.

⁸⁵ Richard, *People’s Commentary*, 3. Pablo Richard follows Richard A. Horsley and John S. Hanson, *Bandits, Prophets, and Messiahs: Popular Movements in the Time of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1985), which situates the Jesus movements in the historical context of the popular movement of his time, primarily in the context of the apocalyptic movement (Ibid., 10).

institutionalization of the church during the post-apostolic period witnessed a de-eschatologization of Christianity, which in turn prompted the church to be adaptive to the Roman Empire.⁸⁶ If the historical Jesus stood against the backdrop of apocalyptic that energized the Jewish peasant movement against the Roman Empire,⁸⁷ such an apocalyptic perspective may be reflected in the concern of the Lucan Jesus with the liberation of the oppressed (Lk 4.18). In contrast, I suggest, the risen Jesus of Revelation stands against the backdrop of apocalyptic that empowers urban Asian Christians to resist against the varied versions of imperial or colonial oppression. Another difference between the apocalyptic perspective of the Jesus of the Gospels and that of John is that the former is concerned with the overcoming of evil in non-apocalyptic ways informed by an apocalyptic worldview and the latter with the judgment of the evil powers in apocalyptic ways informed by apocalyptic imminence.⁸⁸

Nonviolence in Paul's Apocalyptic Thought

The above-mentioned assumption that early Christianity shows an element of inaugurated eschatology is essential for my construal of Paul's apocalyptic views. Howard Marshall, basically following the argument of Richard Longenecker in his article "The Nature of Paul's Early Eschatology," remarks that in Paul's writings, as elsewhere in the NT, apocalyptic hopes in relation to the parousia of Jesus occupy a secondary place to the message about his incarnation, death, and resurrection. Although the two letters to the Thessalonians, in which the parousia is prominent, provide the significant exception, even there the topic of the parousia is only a part of the message rather than the center.⁸⁹ This leads to the observation that for early Christians, including Paul, there was a sense in which with the earthly ministry of Jesus, including his resurrection, the final intervention of God in history had already taken place and the end time

⁸⁶ Ibid., 13.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 10.

⁸⁸ For the same reason, the exhortation of the Jesus of the Gospels against retaliation (e.g., Mt 5.38-44) may not apply to apocalyptic times, regardless of whether they are above all individualistic teaching that cannot be adequately applied to societal issues.

⁸⁹ Howard Marshall, "A New Understanding of the Present and the Future: Paul and Eschatology," in *The Road from Damascus: The Impact of Paul's Conversion on His Life, Thought, and Ministry*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 48-49.

had already commenced.⁹⁰ Yet, these elements of realized eschatology are somewhat limited in Paul's thinking. Alongside the conviction that the new age or the last days had already dawn, Paul always held the belief that history had still to run its course to its consummation and that therefore people were living in the overlap of the ages.⁹¹

While Paul's eschatological thought can be indeed construed as reflecting the tension between the "already" and the "not yet," leaning towards the former, John's eschatological view, I contend, has a tilt to the latter, showing the same tension. Marshall lists five signs of the new age that contribute to Paul's eschatological thought in this regard: Jesus as the Messiah during his earthly life; the resurrection of Jesus as an anticipation of the general resurrection that would consummate the new age; the universal outpouring of the Spirit on the Christians as a sign of the end; the replacement of the Torah by the coming of Christ⁹²; and Paul's Gentile mission as an eschatological event.⁹³ In contrast, while presumably assuming all of these, the author of the Book of Revelation is more concerned with the events that would consummate the new age that has already been inaugurated: Jesus as the warrior in the eschatological scenario (cf. 5.5); the general resurrection that introduces the New Jerusalem (chapter 21); the universal outpouring of the plagues on the earth; the introduction of the heavenly books that inform the unfolding of eschatological events (5.1; 10.2; 20.12); and the punishment of the nations and their surprising reappearance in the New Jerusalem (21.24).

Paul's bias in favor of the already inaugurated end time along with God's final intervention in history may account for his urging every Christian to be in subjection to the governing authorities (e.g., Rom 13.1). Paul's moral admonition in relation to apocalyptic expectation, as in 1 Thessalonians, includes "behavior that will be benign in the eyes of outsiders" as well as internal discipline.⁹⁴ The reason for there

⁹⁰ Ibid., 50.

⁹¹ Ibid., 50-52.

⁹² For this, Marshall refers to the thesis in Christian Dietzfelbinger, *Die Berufung des Paulus als Ursprung seiner Theologie* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1985).

⁹³ Marshall, "New Understanding of the Present and the Future," 55-59.

⁹⁴ Wayne A. Meeks, "Social Functions of Apocalyptic Language in Pauline Christianity," in *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East*, 694.

being no or little language of active resistance by Christians against evil powers even in Paul's apocalyptic thought (e.g., 1 Thess 4.13-5.11; 2 Thess 2.1-12) is likely because he believed that the final stage of the end time had yet to begin and the world was still compatible with the gospel.

This is evidently different from John's assessment of the Roman state as evil authority to be resisted and punished. John's *Weltanschauung*, informed by both realized and imminent eschatology, allows him to construct a new socioreligious agenda over against the same beast that has been afflicting the church. Paul's writings apparently stress the beginning and blessings of the "already" and in so doing show less concern for the "not yet" and its concomitant woes, with which John is more concerned. Insofar as the "already" and the "not yet" reflect the heavenly and the earthly respectively, apocalyptic language asserts the need for their convergence, which reaches its climax in the Apocalypse when the New Jerusalem comes down out of heaven onto earth and God dwells among his peoples (21.2-3). Paul simply does not develop human resistance into an element of apocalyptic expectation. The remaining question is whether and to what degree Paul would encourage the Christians to resist assertively or violently against persecution or oppression in apocalyptic times.

In sum, the NT provides not a monolithic but a convoluted teaching concerning resistance, informed by a paradoxical tension between passive endurance and active resistance. The evangelists and Paul can be taken to endorse pacifism under normal circumstances. However, they are rather silent about whether believers can resort to other forms of resistance than passive endurance in response to persecution or oppression in apocalyptic times. In comparison, active resistance is apparently framed in more positive terms in the Book of Revelation, though it does not give sanction to open violence, while approving of passive endurance.

This comparison illustrates the correlation between the biblical text and the context in which the author is positioned. The difference in deploying a hermeneutic of resistance between the evangelists and Paul, on the one hand, and John, on the other, is to some degree due to the point in time at which they believed they were living. This observation runs counter to the expectation that the NT writers would show similar apocalyptic points of view. Christian apocalyptic texts are better understood as reflecting different

eschatological stages as perceived by the authors than as pointing to one phase of the end times. Some are more apocalyptic than others. On the basis of this finding, I assert that the resistance language of the Gospels and Paul must be cautiously applied to apocalyptic situations and that Revelation's resistance language may not be legitimately applied to nonapocalyptic circumstances. They are better understood as providing supplementary strategies of resistance for different periods of time.

Justice and Anthropodicy in the Apocalypse

I have above explored the hypothesis that not all NT apocalyptic texts portray the resolution of imperial contradictions in the same way. By comparing the concern of other writers with future justice achieved by divine intervention with Revelation's emphasis on both future and contemporary justice accomplished by human resistance as well as divine retribution, I further want to point out the significance of two key characteristics of Revelation as apocalyptic literature: justice and anthropodicy—along with and beyond love and theodicy.

One of the reasons why the canonicity of the Apocalypse is sometimes underestimated is apparently because of its unrestrained language. Without regard to the possibility that the book takes a different apocalyptic point of view toward early church history from other NT texts, some scholars simply subordinate the violent language of Revelation to the nonviolent language of the Gospels to resolve the apparent tension between them. Judith Kovacs and Christopher Rowland, for example, argue that the fourfold story of Jesus has been primarily determinative within the Christian community in making sense of the disparate books of the Bible. Christian faith is thus given shape by the Gospels, neither by the epistles nor by the Apocalypse, and the life of the church has been shaped by the fundamental story of a crucified messiah who refused armed struggle as a way of inaugurating the kingdom of God (Mt 26.53; Jn 18.36). Therefore, the slaughtered Lamb who is the faithful witness in Revelation must play a key role in the interpretation of the apocalyptic book. In terms reminiscent of Wink, Kovacs and Rowland take the further step of asserting that we have to confront the demons in ourselves as well as in the institutions of church and state. Thus not only "baptizing" the status quo or naïve complacency but also revolutionary violence

are eliminated.⁹⁵

The understanding of the peaceful language of the Gospels as a guide in the interpretation of Revelation's resistance language is far from monolithic, because such a notion is based on the assumption that the Gospels and the Apocalypse reflect the same situation. I have proposed that the apocalyptic language of John sounds more imminent than those of the Jesus of the Gospels and Paul. Interestingly enough, Kovacs and Rowland make an important statement in passing in this regard: the NT books other than the Gospels bear witness to "a creative exploration of what faith may mean in new situations that are removed from the particularity of Jesus's circumstances."⁹⁶ This observation, I contend, may constitute evidence not only for the precedence of the Gospels over the rest of the NT, including the Apocalypse, but also for the distinctive features of the Apocalypse as apocalyptic genre. To the extent that the author of Revelation interprets current events from a new point of view informed by eschatological imminence, he is constructing alternative meanings of faith according to a point in time that is perceived as nearer to the eschatological climax than the circumstances of the Jesus of the Gospels or Paul.⁹⁷

It is in this sense that I accept the argument that the Apocalypse shows a transvaluation of the historical Jesus rather than a transvaluation of apocalyptic imagery, by conforming the picture of Christ to the expectations of the apocalyptic genre.⁹⁸ As a result, the ethics of Revelation is focused not on loving our enemies or forgiveness but on justice and judgment in the tradition of Jewish apocalypticism.⁹⁹ Insofar as apocalypticism anticipates divine retribution, justice naturally takes precedence over love. A creative exploration of faith needed for a new apocalyptic context invites justice rather than love.

⁹⁵ Judith Kovacs and Christopher Rowland, *Revelation*, Blackwell Bible Commentaries (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 248-49.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 248.

⁹⁷ It may be noted that the Jesus of the Gospels did not follow his teaching verbatim as far as resistance is concerned. The Jesus of the Fourth Gospel did not technically turn the other cheek when he was struck on the face for speaking "disrespectfully" to the high priest (Jn 18.22-23). It is not certain that, as Wink argues, Jesus is here finding a creative equivalent, in a new situation, to turning the other cheek (Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 228). Jesus's verbal resistance to slapping ("Why do you strike me?," Jn 18.23) does seem to be more aggressive than literally turning the other cheek. I suggest that the Gospel of John depicts Jesus creatively coming up with a new way of dealing with suffering somewhat different from that taught in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5.39). The answer probably lies in the difference between the context assumed by the Sermon on the Mount and that of the trial before the high priest.

⁹⁸ Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 278.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 278.

One reasonably doubts that both love and justice can be satisfied in such apocalyptic situations as portrayed in Revelation. Some warn of a dark side of Revelation, i.e., its failure to achieve the personal dignity of all people.¹⁰⁰ I would assert that the subjugation of justice to love is no more legitimate than the subjugation of love to justice: it is the context that decides which should be preferred. The oppressed are positioned between dignifying their oppressors to suffer and die and condemning their oppressors to resist and survive. Rather than viewing love along with nonviolent resistance as reflected in the Gospels—and the epistles as well—as a norm that the Christians should advocate under all circumstances, suffering readers might want to regard justice along with active resistance as embedded in Revelation as informing extended resistance strategies applicable to apocalyptic situations.

In this regard, I take seriously what James Cone had to say about the relation of love and justice. In rejecting the common tendency to define righteousness in light of love, which leads to an overly sentimental view of God's love, Cone calls for a recovery of the biblical emphasis on the wrath of God, on the assumption that the concepts of love and liberation belong together.¹⁰¹ As John Phelan correctly observes, God's justice is a manifestation of God's love in the view of those who are threatened by the violence of oppressors, the confiscation of their lands and goods, the death of their children.¹⁰² Judgment is an aspect of God's love not so much because, as Osborne argues, it provides an opportunity for repentance,¹⁰³ as because it provides an opportunity for peace by disarming impenitent evildoers. Perhaps "the true antithesis is not between God's justice and love but between his holiness and evil in this world."¹⁰⁴ From the perspective of marginalized readers, the contrast in the Apocalypse lies between oppression and freedom rather than between love and justice. This position informs my reading of John's resistance language.

¹⁰⁰ Yarbrow Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 172.

¹⁰¹ Warren McWilliams, *The Passion of God: Divine Suffering in Contemporary Protestant Theology* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1985), 65. McWilliams here cites James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1970), 127-28, 131, 138.

¹⁰² John E. Phelan, Jr., "Revelation, Empire, and the Violence of God," *Ex Auditu* 20 (2004): 71.

¹⁰³ Grant R. Osborne, "Response to Phelan," *Ex Auditu* 20 (2004): 87.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 87.

In foregrounding the concept of justice, the Apocalypse maintains a dynamic balance between two concepts, theodicy and anthropodicy. Interpretations of Revelation that focus on God's judgment view the eschatological resurrection of the dead as the assurance of theodicy.¹⁰⁵ In contrast, I argue that the traditional idea that justice belongs to the deity and the coming age is merged in Revelation with the recognition that the future has invaded the present, expanding the role of humans in conjunction with divine retribution in the unfolding of eschatological events. In distinction to other NT texts that highlight the role of the deity as retributer in the coming age, the Book of Revelation envisions human beings acting as agents of divine judgment in the present age, which is considered coterminous with the coming age. Instead of simply awaiting the appointed time of God's intervention to resolve imperial contradictions, the suffering righteous can transform social relations operating on the basis of injustice and violence. In other words, the writer of Revelation endorses a synergistic retribution of the evil powers between God and humans. The Apocalypse of John can be read in the light of anthropodicy to the extent that it is replete with examples of resistance as well as suffering. Whereas other NT texts, including apocalyptic segments, emphasize the need to endure suffering that is viewed as inevitable, the Apocalypse sees suffering as something to be resisted in one way or another.

In discussing the rise of such concepts as justice and anthropodicy in the Apocalypse, it is important to give due attention to the shift of images for Jesus: from the Lamb, as reflected in the rest of the NT, to the Lion, as reverberated in this book. Although Jesus is predominantly called the Lamb in the Apocalypse, it is not the suffering Lamb but the exalted Lamb that judges churches and fights against evil powers. The Lamb as warrior dispenses justice rather than love. The apocalyptic Lamb that the audience are encouraged to follow (e.g., 14.4) is not informed so much by the suffering Lamb as much as it is informed by the warrior Lamb. By envisioning a synergistic cooperation between the Lion and his followers in the eschatological punishment of the powers of evil, the Apocalypse highlights the concepts of justice and anthropodicy, along with and beyond love and theodicy.

¹⁰⁵ Alkier, "Book of Re(ve)lation," 294.

To recapitulate, readers may find in the NT at least two ways of resolving problems in human relations. On the one hand, pacifist readers can follow a principle of nonviolence, after the fashion of NT writers who emphasize love and endurance. On the other hand, the reader may also adopt a hermeneutic of resistance, in the manner of the Apocalypse that stresses justice and resistance. The Apocalypse discloses that resistance informed by justice, rather than endurance informed by love, is a principle on which Christians, especially marginalized ones, can look at the world under certain apocalyptic circumstances. Christians make the ultimate decision between these two biblical teachings according to their interpretation of where they find themselves positioned in terms of eschatology. The Apocalypse is presumably more attractive to those who find the existing conditions so intolerable that they must be undermined in the present age.

The Book of Revelation as Apocalyptic Genre

Incorporating the characteristics of apocalyptic writings as gleaned from the above comparison of the Apocalypse with Jewish apocalyptic writings, on the one hand, and with other New Testament apocalyptic texts, on the other, I now attempt to construct a new definition of the apocalyptic genre. Then I shall examine how this definition applies to the Apocalypse and helps ordinary readers to read it in their interest.

Apocalypse as Genre

Collins rightly points out that, while the specific problems, guidance, and demands may vary from one apocalypse to another, they are all articulated within the framework of shared presuppositions, and the reader expects an apocalyptic work to frame its message within the view of the world characteristic of the genre.¹⁰⁶ The major strength of Collins's definition, cited earlier, is that it takes account of both temporal and spatial features of apocalypses. As Aune puts it, however, there are two problematic features that have

¹⁰⁶ Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 9.

surfaced in critical reactions to it, “(1) the problem of the *function* of the genre and (2) the problem of the hierarchical arrangement of various generically salient features of apocalypses.”¹⁰⁷ I believe these are essential questions to ask in interpreting Revelation.

First, there is no agreement on the answer to the question whether there is a homogeneous function of apocalypses. Whereas Collins refuses to assume that there is a common setting and function,¹⁰⁸ Hellholm believes that there are characteristics general enough to serve as the function of the genre apocalypse.¹⁰⁹ Therefore, Hellholm attempts to complete Collins’s definition, which he accepts as a “paradigmatically established definition of the genre ‘Apocalypse,’” by adding the following function: “intended for a group in crisis with the purpose of exhortation and/or consolation by means of divine authority.”¹¹⁰ Similarly, Hartman thinks that a typical message of apocalypses, in terms of the illocution of the text, is one of comfort and exhortation to steadfastness.¹¹¹ Although he refuses to define apocalypse in terms of function¹¹² and views the function of an apocalypse as lying in shaping one’s *imaginative* perception of a situation rather than producing a publicly discernible effect on a historical crisis,¹¹³ Collins himself admits that “the illocutionary functions of exhortation and consolation can generally be maintained for the Jewish apocalypses.”¹¹⁴ I believe that function must play a crucial part in the interpreting of each apocalypse.¹¹⁵ The question remains whether function should be considered constitutive of the definition of apocalypse.

Second, after suggesting a list of groups of genre constituents, Hartman states that we may ask

¹⁰⁷ Aune, *Revelation*, 1: lxxx. These reactions reflect from David Hellholm, “The Problem of Apocalyptic Genre and the Apocalypse of John,” *Semeia* 36 (1986), esp. 27 and Hartman, “Survey of the Problem of Apocalyptic Genre” (*Ibid.* lxxix-lxxx).

¹⁰⁸ John Collins, “The Apocalyptic Technique: Setting and Function in the Book of Watchers,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 44 (1982): 94.

¹⁰⁹ Hellholm, “Problem of Apocalyptic Genre,” 27.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Hartman, “Survey of the Problem of Apocalyptic Genre,” 334.

¹¹² Collins, “Towards the Morphology of a Genre,” 1-2. The main problem with specifying the function in the definition of apocalypse is that the purpose of a text may be a matter of dispute (Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 41).

¹¹³ Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 41-42.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹¹⁵ I find helpful Hellholm’s suggested analogy between a concept as of “chair” and genre. The constituents of both must include characteristics that belong not only to form and content but also to function (Hellholm, “Problem of Apocalyptic Genre,” 17).

whether some constituents are more important than others for demarcating a genre.¹¹⁶ In particular, Hartman suggests that one should take into account the hierarchical structure of such propositional constituents as plot, motif and themes, which have to do with the contents of a text.¹¹⁷

I argue that function should be at the top of any suggested hierarchical structure of the genre constituents. This assertion is based on the simple assumption that any literary work is not only produced by an author, who intends to influence the reader, but also approached by a reader, who expects such authorial intent. In criticizing that Collins' definition is a scholar's tool, not a reader's aid, with its precision being useful to the scholar but not to the reader,¹¹⁸ David Barr foregrounds the need to understand how the *audience*, ancient or modern, read the Apocalypse.¹¹⁹ In my view, authorial intent in association with audience expectancy accounts largely for the function of a literary work, which, in turn, is an essential part of its meaning.

My cultural criticism reading of Revelation foregrounds its resistance language as a crucial part of its meaning as it is informed by the function of the apocalyptic genre. E. P. Sanders makes a remarkable statement: "What is peculiar to the works which have traditionally been considered Palestinian Jewish apocalypses is the combination of revelation with the promise of restoration and reversal."¹²⁰ Sanders views the revelation that promises reversal and restoration as the most striking point of the Jewish apocalypses, which separates them from others.¹²¹ Of importance in relation to my reading of Revelation as resistance apocalyptic is his idea that Palestinian Jewish apocalypses are coherent sociologically, as well as historically and geographically, meaning that "none of the apocalypses comes from the 'mighty.' They

¹¹⁶ Hartman, "Survey of the Problem of Apocalyptic Genre," 335. The list includes linguistic constituents, propositional elements, the illocution of the text, and sociolinguistic function (Ibid., 332-35).

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 335-39.

¹¹⁸ David Barr, "Beyond Genre: The Expectations of Apocalypse," in *The Reality of Apocalypse*, 75-76.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 77.

¹²⁰ E. P. Sanders, "The Genre of Palestinian Jewish Apocalypses," in *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East*, 456.

¹²¹ Sanders, "Genre of Palestinian Jewish Apocalypses," 458. In contrast, "the revelation of *transcendent reality* (Collins) is as much a concern of the Hermetic literature, many of the Nag Hammadi works and the Gospel of John (for example) as of the apocalypses" (Ibid., 458). Yet, Sanders asserts that one theme does not make a genre (Ibid., 457). Although there are works which can be called "Palestinian Jewish Apocalypses," they do not constitute one tightly defined, neat literary genre (Ibid., 458).

are either from the oppressed within Israel or from 'Israel' conceived of as oppressed."¹²² P. D. Hanson, likewise, sees the revelation of a vision of reversal and glorification within settings of persecution as the main function of apocalypses composed from the period 200 B.C.—200 A.D. and suggests that it is made possible by concentration on heavenly realities.¹²³

Collins argues that Sanders' "essentialist" definition of Jewish apocalypses, despite its attractive simplicity, which views the social function of the genre as literature of the oppressed, suffers from two crucial disadvantages: the combined themes of revelation and reversal are also characteristic of both biblical prophecy and the political oracles of the ancient Near East; and it takes no account of the cosmological and mystical tendencies in the apocalypses.¹²⁴ The prophetic tradition should be distinguished from the apocalypses, because the former lacks interest in the heavenly world and focuses on a this-worldly transformation of life.¹²⁵

This objection is plausible. Defined exclusively on the basis of the theme of reversal and restoration, apocalypses may become indistinguishable from prophetic writings. Insofar as revelation is given in such a supernatural form as to include an angel, a vision, an appeal to inspiration by the Spirit, etc.,¹²⁶ one should make a distinction between the apocalypses and the prophetic texts. Besides, one needs to consider the fact that apocalypses do not confine the promise of restoration within the context of human history but extend it into the heavenly realms. Both the form in which the reversal of fortune theme is revealed and the content of reversals envisioned contrast apocalypse with prophecy.

However, Collins's objection is of limited value, because the cosmological and mystical tendencies in the apocalypses can be construed as giving form and content to, rather than replacing, the dominant theme of reversal and restoration. Instead of having to choose between the two scholars, one might want to incorporate Sanders' essentialist suggestion into Collins's popular definition. While attending to

¹²² Ibid., 457.

¹²³ *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, s.v. "Apocalypse, Genre."

¹²⁴ Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 9-10.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 24.

¹²⁶ Sanders, "Genre of Palestinian Jewish Apocalypses," 457.

cosmological or mystical speculations, I am inclined to highlight the theme of vindication or reversal of fortune, which is constitutive of the texture of ancient apocalyptic texts, as the most salient feature of the apocalypse genre.

More convincing than the “two crucial disadvantages” of Sanders’ essentialist definition of Jewish apocalypses is Collins’s third objection: unlike apocalypses of the historical type, apocalypses of the otherworldly-journey type cannot easily be viewed as literature of the oppressed.¹²⁷ Indeed, otherworldly journeys sometimes do not even deal with a historical crisis. To take an example, the *Testament of Abraham* which is an otherworldly journey provides consolation for ordinary mortals who fear death but who can experience an “apocalyptic cure” for the fear of death by following through Abraham’s experience.¹²⁸ Hence one may not insist that all apocalypses contain the motif of reversal.

However, Sanders shows that the theme of restoration and reversal is not restricted to the historical apocalypses. He includes five otherworldly journeys¹²⁹ in his list of Palestinian Jewish apocalypses that indicate restoration and reversal: Apocalypse of Abraham; Book of the Watchers (1 Enoch 1-36); Heavenly Luminaries, i.e., Astronomical Book (1 Enoch 72-92); Similitudes (1 Enoch 37-71); and *Testament of Levi* 2-5.¹³⁰ Sanders’ list also accounts for all six historical apocalypses according to Collins’s classification. Sanders’ “definition” of Jewish apocalypses has explanatory power to the extent that the theme of reversal applies to the majority of Jewish apocalyptic writings.

Sanders’ view entails, quite rightly in my view, that the oppressed and powerless are the best readers of apocalyptic literature. People on the periphery would naturally read an apocalyptic text in the light of reversal inasmuch as it questions the status quo, though the connotations of “reversal” might show shades of difference according to the socioreligious factors that generate specific apocalypses. The

¹²⁷ Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 10.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 253-54.

¹²⁹ For a distinction between historical apocalypses and otherworldly journeys, see Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 6-7.

¹³⁰ Sanders, “Genre of Palestinian Jewish Apocalypses,” 456-57. Collins admits that the *Similitudes of Enoch* offer to the powerless the respect and dignity denied in the present but guaranteed by a heavenly patron (Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 191). Of John Collins’s list of otherworldly journeys, Apocalypse of Zephaniah, *Testament of Abraham*, 3 Baruch, and 2 Enoch are not accounted for in Sanders’ list.

likelihood is even higher, if the author and the reader share the same social context, whence the theme of reversal and restoration is engendered by the encounter between authorial intent and audience expectancy.

If an apocalypse contains the reversal theme in relation to the particular context of the suffering readers, its understanding as literature of resistance may not require any literary skills on their part. It is often argued that, in order for a genre to work with the reader, she or he must have learned and been trained in its usage.¹³¹ This position calls for a technically proficient and informed reader, which literary criticism presupposes.¹³² However, if apocalyptic writings are originally the literature of those who are peripheral to power, then they would hardly be aimed by the author at well-informed readers, who predictably belong to the privileged rather than to the disenfranchised. It is not the artistic features but the contextual interests embedded in apocalyptic texts that the reader needs to share with the author in order to be able to comprehend them as literature of resistance.

In the view of ordinary readers who are at the margins of society, resistance amid suffering is an integral part of the literary-social function of the Apocalypse that meets their own needs. Following Collins,¹³³ Aune makes a distinction between the literary function and the social function of an apocalypse: the former is concerned only with the indications within the text of the purpose of the composition, while the latter includes not just its original purpose but also the “the entire history of varied utilization which it (as any other literary text) has experienced.”¹³⁴ Thompson refuses a clear distinction between literary and social functions, because a literary work cannot be isolated from a social context.¹³⁵ From the perspective of cultural studies that foregrounds a dialectic of text and context, the literary function and social function of the Apocalypse fuse into one indistinguishable purpose, inasmuch as it is the social matrix of suffering real readers that enable them to understand the literary function of the book, which concerns the plight of first-century Christians.

¹³¹ Hartman, “Survey of the Problem of Apocalyptic Genre,” 331.

¹³² Segovia, “And They Began to Speak in Other Tongues,” 20.

¹³³ Collins, “Apocalyptic Technique.”

¹³⁴ David Aune, “The Apocalypse of John and the Problem of Genre,” *Semeia* 36 (1986): 89.

¹³⁵ Thompson, *Apocalypse and Empire*, 32.

The theme of reversal might be called into question from an ethical perspective, especially when hope for reversal is associated with desire for revenge in the interpreting of apocalyptic language. For instance, Yarbro Collins finds in Revelation 18 the motif of the reversal of roles of the persecutor and persecuted and sees in this hope a tint of vengefulness.¹³⁶ The traditional element of the reversal of fortunes to which that motif is related plays a role throughout the Apocalypse.¹³⁷ Yarbro Collins is suspicious of the ethic of praying for the destruction or impoverishment of one's enemies and warns of the real danger of the opposer becoming like the oppressor.¹³⁸ This reading, however, is based on the assumption that no immanent law of justice is portrayed in the Apocalypse.¹³⁹ Various kinds of indignities that the subordinated weak must endure, suggests Scott, provide the seedbed for the anger, indignation, frustration, and swallowed bile.¹⁴⁰ Justified indignation must not be confused with vengefulness without cause. Apocalyptic literature is not just revelatory but prophetic in the sense that it shows moral indignation about the present order.¹⁴¹ The present work warns of the real danger of the oppressed continuing to be oppressed.

Read as parts of a popular hidden transcript, suggests Horsley, the Q speeches of Jesus can be construed as resonating with Galileans' emotional-cultural sense of dignity and indignation, well beyond a simply abstract or sapiential level; for example, the saying "Blessed are the poor..., but woe to the rich..." restores a sense of dignity.¹⁴² It would come as no surprise that the Synoptic Gospels contain anticipations of political-economic reversal and divine condemnation of the dominant oppressors: the prayer for the kingdom (Lk 11.2-4); the beatitudes on the poor and woes on the rich (Lk 6.20-26); the baptism of fire (Lk 3.7-9, 16-17); the promise of the kingdom coming with power in judgment on their persecutors (Mk 8.34-9.1); and the demonic (Roman) "Legion" being driven back into the sea and destroyed (Mk 5.1-20).¹⁴³ The

¹³⁶ Yarbro Collins, "Persecution and Vengeance," 738.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 745.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 746-47.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 746.

¹⁴⁰ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 111.

¹⁴¹ Isaac, "Enoch," 9.

¹⁴² Richard A. Horsley, "Introduction: Jesus, Paul, and the 'Arts of Resistance': Leaves from the Notebook of James C. Scott," in *Hidden Transcripts and the Arts of Resistance: Applying the Work of James C. Scott to Jesus and Paul*, ed. Richard A. Horsley, Semeia Studies 48 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), 16.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 17.

hidden transcript of Paul's assemblies, like that of the Synoptic Gospels, includes apocalyptic anticipations of historical transformation and reversal, specifically God's judgment of the Roman imperial order and the imminent establishment of the kingdom of God.¹⁴⁴

These considerations lead me to conclude that reversal of fortune can be considered an indispensable element of justice. Over against a longstanding powerful strand of thought in the Christian tradition that de-justicizes the NT by viewing love as the theme of the NT, supplanting justice, the theme of the OT, Wolterstorff argues that *real* justice, along with *real* injustice, is one of the main themes in the NT.¹⁴⁵ It has been my contention that the concept of justice plays a leading role in the introduction of a new order in the Book of Revelation. It is more than doubtful whether justice can be properly achieved apart from reversal. One presupposes the other. The Apocalypse is not tainted by vengefulness but portrayed by themes relating to justice. It is in this sense that wrath can be considered an essential trait of a liberating God, as understood by Cone.

Is belief in justice not the source of strength that keeps the oppressed and persecuted alive amidst extraordinary duress? In my view, what is most important to the understanding of the theme of reversal of fortune is to recognize the fact that the dominant stratum is not interested in any negotiations with the dominated in this regard. As Fanon points out, the intellectuals who have been "edified" by the ideal values of colonialism do not perceive that the colonists are no longer interested in living in peace with them outside of the colonial context.¹⁴⁶ If recovery of personal dignity is not negotiable with the oppressor, I would like to argue, the oppressed might only desire a reversal of fortune, and Revelation's theme of reversal needs to be understood in much the same fashion. The *topos* of *mundus inversus* is essential to understanding

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 20.

¹⁴⁵ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 96. In his chapter devoted to "What Is Justice?," Wolterstorff mentions one of the most famous definitions of justice ever offered by the third-century Roman jurist, Ulpian, which appears at the beginning of *The Digest*, Justinian's great codification of ancient Roman law: Justice (*iustitia*) is rendering to each his or her *ius*, which referred both to a person's rights and just deserts (Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Just in Love* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011], 85-86). According to Wolterstorff, the distinction between rights and just deserts reflects the most fundamental distinction within the order of justice, that between what he calls *primary* justice and *corrective* justice (Ibid., 86). But he focuses entirely on primary justice.

¹⁴⁶ Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 9.

apocalyptic language.

Last but not least, it is important to consider the manner in which the motif of suffering contributes to the definition of apocalyptic literature. James Kallas regards the attitude toward suffering as the basic hallmark of apocalyptic literature.¹⁴⁷ A piece of writing is truly apocalyptic only when and if it views suffering as coming from God-opposing forces and a thing that God himself would crush:¹⁴⁸

In short, apocalyptic has flatly reversed ancient Jewish views. Suffering is seen neither as retributive nor as corrective, stemming from God, but is seen instead as malicious, vindictive, arbitrary, senseless attacks of Satan upon God's elect. God, in the apocalyptic literature, is not the source of suffering but the answer to it — "God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come." There throbs through this literature the stirring conviction that God will send a celestial deliverer who will meet and master Satan, liberating those who languish under him.¹⁴⁹

It is objected that the attitude toward suffering in apocalyptic literature may not be as consistent as Kallas suggests.¹⁵⁰ The apocalyptic writings, including the Apocalypse, show such a spectrum of attitudes toward suffering that suffering cannot be the hallmark for distinguishing Revelation from the other books.¹⁵¹ For instance, Bruce Jones counters Kallas' claim by asserting that the suffering in Daniel is decreed by God rather than by Satan (Dan 9.24).¹⁵² Although the God-opposing powers cause the tribulation in Daniel, these powers work by the permission of God; even Antiochus IV is only a tool in the hands of God.¹⁵³

The way I see it, however, Kallas rightly stresses the relation of the theme of suffering to the development of apocalyptic genre. Although apocalypses speak of retributive suffering permitted by God, such suffering cannot be viewed as causing the author to write an apocalyptic text; only righteous suffering does that. Apocalypses, including Daniel, are primarily concerned with the sufferings caused by evil forces on earth and the ways in which they can be put to an end. The themes of reversal and resistance presuppose unwarranted suffering. The sufferings God inflicts on the wicked must be understood along these lines.

¹⁴⁷ Kallas, "Apocalyptic Book?," 69.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 71.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 74.

¹⁵⁰ Bruce W. Jones, "More about the Apocalypse as Apocalyptic," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 87 (1968): 325.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 326.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 325.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

What I find problematic is Kallas' failure to see the Book of Revelation as apocalyptic. According to Kallas, Revelation is not an apocalyptic book because the book—as opposed to apocalyptic and the thought of Jesus and Paul—views suffering as God's retribution for human sin.¹⁵⁴ In the case of Revelation, Satan and Rome are the instruments God uses to purify and punish the lukewarm and wayward church.¹⁵⁵

The letters to the seven churches may indicate that they deserve sufferings.¹⁵⁶ However, there is no hint in the Apocalypse that the church repented in response to God's alleged punishment. Even amidst divine judgment, God's people are urged to leave the city of Rome (18.4). If God uses Rome to purge the tepid church, it is hard to explain why God punishes Rome and its allies throughout the book, apparently without accomplishing such a purpose. The plagues are primarily targeted at the wicked (6.16; 9.4, 20-21; 16.2, 6, 9, 11, 21). Jones rightly points out that Rev 1.9 and 6.9-11, which view suffering as a result of bearing faithful witness to the word of God, contradict Kallas' assertion that suffering in Revelation is the result of God's retribution.¹⁵⁷ Whereas John's letters may be construed as dealing with the sufferings faced by the seven churches, the rest of Revelation takes issue with Rome about the sufferings it imposes on its subjects. The Apocalypse of John looks at Rome's suffering purely from a retributive point of view.¹⁵⁸ Except for that, the Apocalypse rejects and resists suffering for no other reason than it is undeserved from the perspective of prophetic eschatology.

In addition, the reason why the church is warned of divine punishment may be because some of its members are compromising or colluding with Rome, which is persecuting Christians and oppressing its

¹⁵⁴ Kallas, "Apocalyptic Book?," 78.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 80.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 78.

¹⁵⁷ Jones, "More about the Apocalypse as Apocalyptic," 325.

¹⁵⁸ As I read it, besides, the Apocalypse hints that the oppressed cause suffering via resistance in their oppressors. Suffering and resistance form a mirror image in this sense. The Apocalypse also seems to speak about reverse resistance on the part of the powerful. For example, the aggressive works of the two witnesses (11.3-6) are resisted by the beast and those who follow it (11.7-10). Over against the plagues of the first six bowls (16.1-12), the demonic spirits and their followers wage war against God's camp (16.13-16). The war in 20.7-8 seems to refer to the similar resistance by the evil powers against the millennium kingdom, wherein previously oppressed people "dominate." These instances illustrate the "inverted binomial of resistance/fear," where the margins actually take the initiative and in so doing force the center into a reactive position (Segovia, "Toward a Postcolonial Optic," 129).

subjects. Then, retributive justice can account for the sufferings that not only Rome but also the churches confront.

I want to consolidate the results of the above discussion concerning the definition of the genre apocalypse. I see Collins's definition of the apocalypse genre as essential to my new definition in that it offers both temporal and spatial features of apocalypses. I follow Hellholm's suggestion that function should be added to the definition of the genre apocalypse. I think the theme of reversal, as suggested by Sanders, is more adequate than any other leitmotif or theme for describing not only the temporal but also the spatial characteristics of apocalypses, to the extent that reversal of fortune applies to evil spirits as well as evil humans. When it is admitted that function is a dominant genre constituent and reversal and restoration is a prevalent theme of apocalypses, we can expect the function of an apocalypse to be concerned with the ways in which reversal and restoration is achieved.

However, I would refrain from Sanders' statement that the authors of apocalyptic works promise restoration by *God* from present oppression.¹⁵⁹ It is my assertion that apocalyptic authors envision the achievement of the reversal of fortunes by means of human agency as well as divine intervention. In associating the function of apocalypse with the theme of reversal of fortunes, I suggest that apocalypses not only console the suffering readers via promise of divine judgment but also encourage them to resist against sufferings that originate from evil forces. Taking these considerations into account, I define apocalyptic genre as follows:

Apocalyptic literature is a literary genre that takes narrative form in which an otherworldly mediator reveals the heavenly world and thereby reconfigures earthly problems, especially of human relations, and solutions thereof, with special reference to the promise of eschatological salvation by means of divine punishment of and human resistance to the evil forces responsible for persecution and oppression.

This definition emphasizes not only a transcendent reality disclosed by an otherworldly mediator but also an earthly reality (re)viewed from a transcendent point of view. I have suggested earlier that apocalyptic texts, despite their use of mythic language, are more concerned with human realities than with heavenly

¹⁵⁹ Sanders, "Genre of Palestinian Jewish Apocalypses," 459.

counterparts. Whilst revealing the heavenly realities, apocalyptic writers not only recast the earthly realities but also envision their solutions from a heavenly point of view. In other words, apocalypse is an attempt to rewrite reality in three dimensions: the revelation of the heavenly world, the reconfiguration of human relations, and the resolution of human contradictions.

Traditional overemphasis on the apocalyptic dimension of the book might account for the neglect of the prophetic dimension, which invites human participation in the cosmological battle against the evil powers. It seems to me that there is a dynamic tension between the ways in which the Apocalypse presents apocalyptic hope as a basis for endurance in righteous suffering and prophetic resistance as a means of struggle to subvert oppressive systems. The Apocalypse is not exclusively apocalyptic but a mixture of apocalyptic and prophetic features, though the scales appear to be tilted toward the former.¹⁶⁰ Apocalyptic genre may overlap to a certain degree with prophetic genre in the sense that problems in human relations are considered presently solvable via human agency.

In terms of a tension between the “already” and the “not yet” of the envisaged new world, apocalyptic writings are to be understood as providing an eschatological promise that requires a process undertaken by people. Hence, human agency in terms of resistance comes to the fore in my definition of apocalypse. I construe the role of human agency as essential to the fulfilment of a future promise, which is meaningless without the evil powers getting their just deserts. The heavenly world to be disclosed is a hidden yet given fact. There is nothing humanity can do about its reality. In comparison, the present order to be reversed is promised but invites human initiatives, which are less predetermined than divine activities, for its fulfillment. Humans can make a contribution to world history. The status quo to be resisted is human responsibility, though its downfall is primarily the result of God’s intervention in history. Human contradictions are resolved in a synergistic manner by means of both divine agency revealed and human agency invited. The Apocalypse can be reclaimed as resistance literature only when it enables marginalized

¹⁶⁰ Barr points out that earlier interpreters had simply equated John’s Apocalypse with prophetic works until 1832, when Friedrich Lücke for the first time suggested that it belongs to a distinctive literary type (“Beyond Genre, 74).

people to solve, though in part, human problems, rather than simply revealing the inevitability of the eschatological judgment.

The above definition thus enables us to solve the weakness of traditional definitions of apocalypse, in particular that of Collins, which highlight the temporal and spatial dimension of the genre without regard to the role of humans positioned between them. The spatio-temporal binarism is in part due to the traditional understanding of apocalyptic writings in terms of semantics rather than pragmatics. Their value is taken to lie in whether they provide correct information about the transcendent. What is important on the part of the reader is to be informed about what is above and ahead rather than to be empowered to transform what is. Here there is no dimension for the role of readers in advancing what ought to be, though the involvement of heavenly forces in the events leading to a final judgment is acknowledged.

However, as Collins comments, the value of the apocalyptic revelations is not to be assessed by the extent of correspondence between prediction and history, but by evaluating the actions and attitudes they supported; yet, theologians have not adequately appreciated the role apocalyptic language plays in committing the readers to the actions and attitudes worthy of a new worldview.¹⁶¹ Nonetheless, Collins also fails to reflect this element in his definition of apocalypse insofar as it gives short shrift to the function of apocalypse in this regard. In contrast, my definition makes it clear that apocalypses not only reveal transcendent realities but also encourage the readers to take action, beyond attitude change, in opposition to evil forces. The Apocalypse is fraught with relevant examples.

The diagram below shows the three-dimensional relation implicit in my suggested definition of apocalypse:

¹⁶¹ Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 282-83.

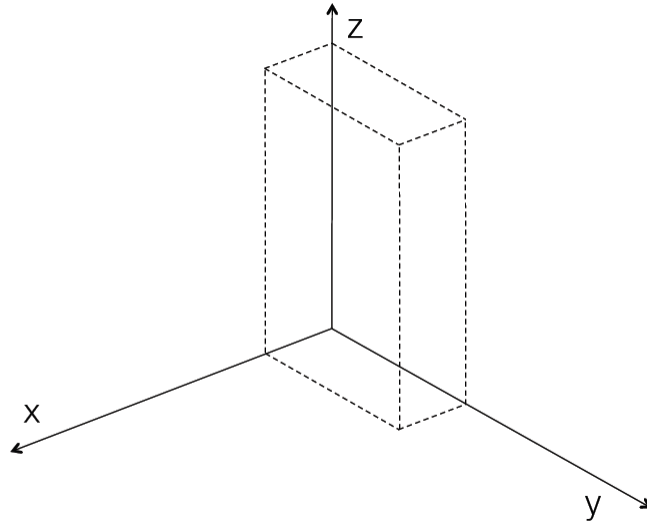


Figure 1: Diagram of Apocalyptic Worldview

If axes y and z refer to the horizontal and vertical (i.e., temporal and spatial) dimension of the apocalypse, axis x can be drawn from the combination of each coordinate to refer to the role of human beings positioned in relation to the other two axes. Although not only divine but also human agency is involved in the development of end-time events, I want to highlight the latter via axis x because and insofar as it directly relates to the rhetoric of a given apocalypse in terms of function, while the former is considered a part of the heavenly world revealed. The diagram thus recognizes human agency in the determining of the course of human history, though it may be an adjunct to divine predetermination, which is presupposed in most apocalypses.

I hypothesize that Revelation alludes to a range of ways in which humans, assisted by divine intervention, can work for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven and that the degree to which they make a contribution varies. This is not to underestimate the psychological effects of apocalyptic writings but to foreground the fact that apocalyptic writers view human agency as conducive to the reversal of fortune. Hence, the temporal and the spatial dimension of apocalypse are not only positioned in relation to each other, but they are also correlated with the role of humanity. These three dimensions are correlated with each other as if in a palimpsest, though each of them may well be foregrounded according to authorial

intention.

Theoretically, the coordinate can have the value of y from zero, indicating the present time, to the end point of the axis, representing the end of history. The value of z likewise expands, via the intermediate realm between them, from the earthly world, indicated by zero, to the heavenly world, represented by the end point of the axis. The value of x also varies from zero, marking the absence of human agency, to the end point of the axis, referring to the maximized human agency.

The z -axis is different from the other axes in that only it is a constant that reveals the heavenly events or realities as predetermined. Both the y -axis and the x -axis are variants insofar as the former represents the progress of human events contingent on the contribution of human participation indicated by the latter. Whereas human as well as divine agency are a contributing factor to the development of the eschatological events, only the latter is construed as set.

The suggested diagram has several strengths. One strength is that it captures the three corresponding dualities that characterize the apocalyptic universe: (a) the cosmic duality between heaven and earth, (b) the temporal duality between this age and the age to come, and (c) a social duality between the righteous and the unrighteous.¹⁶² It also goes further to view the social dualism not as completely predetermined by God but as something to be affected by human behaviors. Instead of passively waiting for the intervention of the cosmological or eschatological elements, the suffering righteous may feel entitled by the Apocalypse to make a contribution from their places to the realization of an eschatological hope of justice. Maintaining a dialectical balance between theodicy and anthropodicy, the author of the Apocalypse envisions the new era as the outcome of divine-human synergistic works. It is in moving human agency from the background to the foreground of human history, alongside of divine intervention, that Revelation's innovativeness lies.

This is where John's literary genius integrates both the old and the new. The eschatological beliefs not only make use of the known and accepted traditions in new ways but also introduce innovations in a

¹⁶² Meeks, "Social Functions of Apocalyptic Language," 689.

traditional way.¹⁶³ In the case of Qumran and Paul, as in Galatians, “eschatological beliefs provide warrant, within a traditional context, for sharply modified practice.”¹⁶⁴ If the radical innovations of the Qumran sect were based on their belief that they were living at the End of Days and the even more radical innovations of the Pauline Christians were supported by the claim that the Messiah had already come,¹⁶⁵ John’s innovative language of resistance is upheld by the merging of both convictions: John believes that Jesus has come as the Messiah to introduce the kingdom of God and that his contemporary Christians are living at the end of history, in the sense that Rome is about to be overthrown to be replaced by the New Jerusalem. This twofold conviction leads to the belief that the faithful are to resist Rome in an apocalyptic manner that transcends traditions. An eschatological theodicy can be revolutionary to the extent that divine intervention in the course of events requires or allows human cooperation.¹⁶⁶

The tension between the roles deities and humans play in the advancement of eschatological events brings to mind the dialectical relation between structure and agency, of which cultural studies is well aware. Previous studies on the Apocalypse have focused on detailing the structures of supernatural power regarded as (pre-)determining human history rather than celebrating human agency in association with them. Cultural studies allows us to view ordinary people as a contributing factor to the direction of human history, rather than simply as “pawns” maneuvered by extramundane beings. We are made by apocalypse and we turn apocalypse into reality.

I posit that this relationship between structure and agency can be translated into the dialectic between expectancy and experience, along the lines of Ricoeur’s thought. The Utopian project does not dissolve into an empty dream-world but solicits responsible commitment when we bring it closer to the present by formulating intermediary projects, within the scope of social action, which are historically realizable.¹⁶⁷ In so doing, a utopian expectancy not only problematizes the immediate crisis but also

¹⁶³ Ibid., 688.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 697.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 697.

¹⁶⁶ Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (1967; reprint, New York: Anchor Books, 1990), 69.

¹⁶⁷ Kearney, “Between Tradition and Utopia,” 56.

foregrounds human agency as an element in utopian thinking. The problem today, according to Ricoeur, is that we are without concrete and practical *paths* to utopia, as a result of which utopia becomes a sickness.¹⁶⁸ I read the Apocalypse as providing utopian ideals that not only bear on the experienced reality of readers but also take seriously their role in achieving that goal.

Another strength of the suggested cubic definition of apocalypse is that it not only foregrounds human agency but also accounts for the fact that some acts on the part of the suffering righteous are envisaged as more active than others in the Apocalypse. I hypothesize that the further axis x is away from the origin, i.e., the closer history unfolds to the perceived eschaton, the more human resistance is influenced by God's violent judgment. Revelation's apocalypticism forms a three-dimensional spiral that moves increasingly further away from a center of nonresistance toward a circumference of resistance circle. The focus seems to be on passive endurance when the end times are seen as not yet having reached their climax. I have argued that this is illustrated by the apocalyptic texts in the Gospels and the epistles. At the perceived end of history, on the other hand, Christians are entitled to more active forms of resistance against Babylon, in terms reminiscent of the rare moments of political electricity when the oppressed defy their oppressors in a direct and public manner.¹⁶⁹ According to Scott, there are historical circumstances that suddenly lower the danger of speaking out enough to the extent of emboldening the timid.¹⁷⁰ That Revelation attests to similar apocalyptic moves on the part of the suppressed righteous is nicely handled by the above diagram, which posits the strengthening of human agency against evil powers as the eschaton draws nearer. Under an eschatological crisis, strategic maneuvers become more direct and daring.

The suggested three-dimensional description of reality in apocalyptic narratives also enables Christians to confute the criticism that apocalyptic writings pay no or little attention to the harshness of the present life by focusing only on the afterlife. This critique is often explained away as unfair on the grounds

¹⁶⁸ Paul Ricoeur, "The Creativity of Language," in *States of Mind: Dialogues with Contemporary Thinkers on the European Mind*, ed. Richard Kearney (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 231.

¹⁶⁹ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, xiii.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 210. Somewhat irrelevant to my argument is Scott's another claim that the courage to venture a long-suppressed transcript is in large part a matter of individual temperament, anger, and bravado (*Ibid.*, 210).

that the apocalyptic writers protest by refusing to accept the present social and political reality and providing visions of a better world.¹⁷¹ However, challenging the status quo by cherishing a different *view* of the world may not be enough, insofar as it is not so much a real as an imaginary form of protest. When a discourse of utopia ceases to critique the powers that be, Ricoeur states, “Utopia becomes a future cut off from the present and the past, a mere alibi for the consolidation of the repressive powers that be.”¹⁷² Theodicy, according to Cone, should not be solely based on eschatological compensation.¹⁷³ Christian apocalypticism might be undergirding, rather than undermining, the existing conditions, if it does not result in any attempts to bring on a change in the reality of oppression in favor of apocalyptic imagination. Perhaps Scott is right that the hidden transcript has no reality, since pure thought as well as practices and discourses of resistance exist only to the extent they are articulated and practiced among those subject to the same terms of subordination.¹⁷⁴ If a hidden transcript is a source of satisfaction, it is so in large part owing to practical gains obtained by concrete resistance.¹⁷⁵ My apocalyptic vision, which takes seriously apocalyptic praxis through resistance for the realization of utopian possibilities, is no less concerned with shortening the days of suffering than with longing for the days of rejoicing.

Leitmotif of the Apocalypse: Resistance

The literary structure of the Apocalypse is more intricate than that of nearly every other ancient apocalypse.¹⁷⁶ Instead of choosing one among various analyses of the structure, which even trained readers would find equally complicated, I would like to read the book as a whole through the recurring theme of resistance.¹⁷⁷ Yarbrow Collins argues that each series of seven except for the seven messages (1.9-3.22)

¹⁷¹ Reddish, *Apocalyptic Literature*, 26-27.

¹⁷² Ricoeur, “Creativity of Language,” 230.

¹⁷³ Warren McWilliams, “Theodicy according to James Cone,” *Journal of Religious Thought* 36/2 (1979): 48.

¹⁷⁴ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 118-19.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 191.

¹⁷⁶ Aune, *Revelation*, 1: xci.

¹⁷⁷ I regard the letters to the seven churches as apocalyptic epistles written within the framework of apocalyptic vision, as is indicated by the designation of Revelation as a whole as *apocalypse* (Rev 1.1). The subgenre of the seven letters might be different from the visions that follow, but the genre is the same.

expresses the whole message of the book in its own fashion, and she regards the punishment of the persecutors, along with persecution and salvation, as a constant element of the message.¹⁷⁸ I suspect that the letters also refer to the same essential element as the rest of the book. From the point of view of literary criticism, it seems less likely that the messages to the seven churches in Asia Minor fail to contain the constant elements of the message of the book, while being a constituent part of its structure. For the same reason, I find less convincing the analysis of the macrostructure of Revelation in terms of the transformation (chapters 4-20) of a problematic situation (chapters 1-3).¹⁷⁹ I assume that a constant theme permeates the Apocalypse as a whole. It has also been suggested that the seven letter visions are integrally connected to the book in terms of judgment and salvation, in which God and Christ play leading roles.¹⁸⁰ However, this explanation at best minimizes human agency in the execution of justice and judgment. My definition of apocalypse requires a more active role on the part of those awaiting salvation and judgment.

A better explanation for the integration of the Book of Revelation as a whole is to regard human resistance as a leitmotif of the book. As I see it, the motif of resistance occurs in the letters as well as in the rest of Revelation. Not only does John directly praise resistance (e.g., 2.2), but the fact that the letters first and foremost condemn accommodation means that they are primarily intended to persuade the suffering readers to resist compromising with the oppressors in one way or another. Judgment and salvation, which also appear in the letters (e.g., 3.9-10), are better understood as influenced by human resistance, a constant element of the message of Revelation. Both the messages to the seven churches and the eschatological visions that follow reveal God's will concerning the ways in which God's people should act in response to persecution and oppression. While the theme of resistance runs through the entirety of Revelation, the major difference seems to be that the scope of the seven letters is local, in that they deal with ecclesial problems,

¹⁷⁸ Yarbro Collins, "Persecution and Vengeance," 731. According to Yarbro Collins, Revelation is organized into two great cycles of visions, 1.9-11.19 and 12.1-22.5, and each cycle is composed of three series of seven: the seven messages, the seven seals (4.1-8.5), and the seven trumpets (8.2-11.19) on the one side, and seven unnumbered visions (12.1-15.4), the seven bowls (15.1-16.20), and another seven unnumbered visions (19.11-21.8) on the other side (Ibid., 731).

¹⁷⁹ Alkier, "Book of Re(ve)lation," 289-90.

¹⁸⁰ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 174-75.

while that of the ensuing visions is universal, in that they handle universal catastrophes at the turn of the era.

This reading entails both repetition and consistency in the Apocalypse. Collins criticizes Charles for failing to appreciate the tolerance of repetition and inconsistency in the apocalyptic text, which Hermann Gunkel suggests are intrinsic features of apocalyptic writings. Gunkel insightfully points out that the apocalypses, instead of aspiring to conceptual consistency, allow diverse formulations to complement each other.¹⁸¹ However, repetition and consistency may not always be mutually exclusive. Whereas repetition may have been one of the literary conventions familiar to apocalyptic authors, one cannot hastily conclude that they had to abandon consistency for repetition. Some writers may iterate in order to emphasize essentially the same thing. I posit that John achieves thematic consistency through repetition to the extent that the theme of resisting oppression and persecution accounts for Revelation's reiterated visions. Granted the importance of the theme of resistance in the composition and reading of the Apocalypse, the next section discusses how the meanings of resistance are constructed in the light of the reality of suffering.

Suffering and Resistance: Real and Perceived

Sanders is right that the audience probably understood such devices as revelation and visions as pressing the authorial promise of restoration by God from present oppression.¹⁸² Apocalyptic genre indeed enhances hope for a bright future insofar as it envisions the introduction of a new era. However, a silver lining is presented against the background of a most dismal account of a present day that is considered irredeemable. The question is whether the harsh conditions depicted in the Apocalypse are reality-based or not.

It has been suggested above that the mythic language of apocalyptic narratives helps to make sense of earthly realities that are otherwise inexplicable. One of the reasons why given historical conditions are

¹⁸¹ Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 14-17. Collins refers to Hermann Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1895); Gunkel, "Das vierte Buch Esra," in *Die Apokryphen und Pseudepigraphen des Alten Testaments*, ed. E. Kautzsch (Tübingen: Mohr, 1900), 2: 331-401.

¹⁸² Sanders, "Genre of Palestinian Jewish Apocalypses," 459.

deemed incomprehensible is because they are intolerably undeserved and harsh in the eyes of the author. While it is generally agreed that apocalypses are produced as a response to a harsh socioreligious setting, which authors consider a crisis, scholars differ over whether or to what extent the author's perception of reality is historically reliable. As discussed in chapter 1, it is often claimed that apocalyptic literature is crisis literature, produced during a time of perceived crisis to offer hope to the oppressed by providing an alternative picture of reality.¹⁸³ The assumption is that the reality of the crisis is less important than the perception of the situation, on the basis of which apocalyptic writings are composed.¹⁸⁴ Imperial persecution, though it triggered the writing of Revelation, was hardly a reality to the author and those who were feeling oppressed and threatened, to the extent that contemporary sources offer virtually no evidence of official persecution of the church during the latter years of the first century.¹⁸⁵ The absence of evidence leads Thompson to conclude that the Roman Empire—especially under Domitian—was beneficial to not only rich but also poor provincials and that the urban setting in which Christians worshipped and lived was stable and beneficial to all who participated in its social and economic institutions.¹⁸⁶

To begin with, the hypothesis of a perceived crisis cannot be used to restrict the appropriation of Revelation to analogous real crises. If a mere perceived crisis generated such strong language of resistance in Revelation, how much stronger a reaction would a real crisis create? The theory of perceived crisis does not weaken but strengthen the desperation and urgency that Revelation instills into suffering real readers and thus reinforces the ethical legitimacy of assertive resistance against real sufferings.

At the same time, I take seriously the theory of perceived crisis in two respects. First, there might be a possibility that John's perceived crisis originated in a rather close-knit community that shared a distinct worldview, in which case most, if not all, members of the community probably interpreted the current situation in much the same way. Yet, it seems less likely that the apocalypse stemmed from a closed community like Qumran and more likely that John's perception of the socioreligious situation was not far

¹⁸³ Reddish, *Apocalyptic Literature*, 24.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁸⁶ Thompson, *Apocalypse and Empire*, 166-67.

detached from the real situation. Most of all, John's repeated warnings against accommodation do seem to presuppose that his community was not so much enclosed as vulnerable to external influences. I lean toward the suggestion that "at some time or other all Israel may have felt oppressed, and it is impossible to say that the revelation of coming triumph circulated only within small circles in Israel."¹⁸⁷

Second, it may be observed that the author's *understanding* of the *realia* also plays a role in reconfiguring the relation between world and church. The fact that John tried to persuade other Christians to agree on his judgment of Rome presupposes that they held a different view of Rome. While they were presumably collaborating with Rome, it is also possible that even some of Rome's oppressed were not able to recognize the beast, because they were not aware of the *realia* of oppression and exploitation. The reason why Rome's marginalized failed to resist it is because they were not conscientized enough about their existential problems. I am inclined to think that John's perceived crisis is a result of not so much his purely imaginary reconstruction as his conscientized perception of the fractured reality of injustice. Not all powerless people can see through the reality of the crisis they face. John was one of those who had a conscientized eye with which to discern the true nature of the sufferings they were experiencing, unlike those who labored under false consciousness.

Otherwise, the theory of perceived crisis is to be undermined. I made the case in chapter 1 that the theory of perceived crisis assumes an unlikely twofold process with regard to the literary function of the apocalypses: first, the author must persuade the readers to perceive a situation as one of crisis; second, the same author uses the genre of apocalypse to help the readers overcome the perceived crisis. Instead, I argue that the crisis implicit in the Apocalypse is a consequence of the interaction between John's experience of suffering and his conscientized perspective. It is far from certain that apocalyptic writers are more dependent on their understanding of the situation than on the situation as such. The hypothesis of perceived crisis is based on the argument from silence. Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. The alleged fact that there is no historical record proving that there was severe persecution does not necessarily mean

¹⁸⁷ Sanders, "Genre of Palestinian Jewish Apocalypses," 459.

that there was in fact no severe persecution.

Besides, one should ask who it is that makes a distinction between perceived and real crisis. The extent to which suffering is considered justifiable depends on who the viewer is. One person's justice may be another person's injustice. In the view of Schüssler Fiorenza, the assessment of life in the cities of Asia as generally flourishing represents the perspective of the powerful and wealthy; as a matter of fact, the vast majority of the population suffered from colonialist abuses of power, exploitation, slavery, and famine.¹⁸⁸ It is only when viewed from within the dominant symbolic universe that sufferings look endurable. Insofar as history is written by those in positions of power, historical records may well be constructed in such a way that they serve their interest and maintain the status quo. Absence of evidence for persecution may be due to either absence of persecution or absence of interest in persecution. Viewed from below, any colonial/imperial history is laden with unbearable contradictions, and there is an empirical basis for John's perception of the crisis as a real one.

In brief, perceived crisis is formed as a result of the interaction between experience and conscientization. As indicated earlier, I view conscientization as a fundamental ideological process that enables the marginalized to recognize reality for what it is. People sharing the same experience show different perceptions of reality due to varying degrees of conscientization. If the Apocalypse is biased, it is because it represents the perspective of the disenfranchised. I can only partly agree with the assertion that what counts is the apocalypticist's experience and perception of his circumstances and that, therefore, an apocalypse can be a biased document that must be used with caution as a source of information for historical reconstruction.¹⁸⁹ Rather, in viewing the Apocalypse as written by a conscientized author, who has an in-depth understanding of imperial contradictions, I claim that its historicity is reliable in the sense that it unveils the realities of power disguised as justice. My definition of apocalyptic genre must be read on the basis of the conclusion that the earthly problems that apocalyptic writings intend to solve are not only perceived but also real problems. It would be more correct to say that a reality reflected in an apocalypse is

¹⁸⁸ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Vision of a Just World*, 126-27.

¹⁸⁹ Nickelsburg, "Social Aspects of Palestinian Jewish Apocalypticism," 651.

a reconstructed reality in the sense that outer reality is filtered through the author's perspective. Conscientization is an indispensable weapon of the postcolonial.

Then, the question comes to the surface whether and to what extent the Apocalypse is concerned with practical solutions to sufferings. My working hypothesis is that the author of Revelation presents practical as well as cognitive solutions to oppression and persecution insofar as his perceived crisis is reality-based. However, as we saw in chapter 1, apocalyptic writings are frequently read as providing ideas for affective rather than active reactions against righteous suffering. As we have seen above, Collins argues that the apocalyptic technique of viewing the problem in the light of a transcendent reality, rather than in terms of the historical factors, allows the apocalyptic literature to provide a resolution in the imagination by imparting revealed knowledge and conviction, instead of producing a practical effect on a historical crisis.¹⁹⁰ We recall Yarbrow Collins's theory of perceived crisis and her reading of the Apocalypse in terms of crisis and catharsis, which limits vengeance to the imagination and transfers aggressive feelings to God and Christ as vindicators. The resolution of John's perception of the situation lies in an eschatological *understanding* of the current situation to the exclusion of any actions on the part of the human beings: the heavenly armies would defeat Rome, and therefore what is required of the faithful is to endure their situations under the assurance of God's triumph.¹⁹¹ In one word, "the apocalyptic revolution is a revolution in the imagination."¹⁹²

There seems to be some correlation between the hypothesis that apocalyptic crises are more perceived than real and the assertion that apocalyptic writings intend to affect the way in which the readers imagine the punishment of evil powers. However, such is not the case. Though she calls attention to the real sufferings the author of Revelation was experiencing,¹⁹³ Schüssler Fiorenza also thinks that the power of Revelation's language lies not in theological argumentation or historical information but in its evocative

¹⁹⁰ Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 41-42. For example, the Book of the Watchers does not explicitly address its specific setting or advocate specific conduct but evokes a sense of awe and instills conviction by revealing the transcendent world and the coming judgment (Ibid., 59).

¹⁹¹ Reddish, *Apocalyptic Literature*, 25.

¹⁹² Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 283.

¹⁹³ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 8.

persuasion, inviting imaginative participation in terms of emotions, feelings, and convictions.¹⁹⁴ Her focus is naturally on the final eschatological judgment by God as vindicator to the detriment of a realized understanding of redemption that would invite attempts at this-worldly transformation of society.¹⁹⁵

It is noteworthy that, regardless of whether Revelation's crisis is deemed perceived or real, scholars tend to see its solutions to the crisis as imaginative rather than practical. John's promise for future eschatological salvation indeed produces psychological effects, including catharsis, in the imagination of the readers. I argue, however, that just as apocalyptic crises are based on the experience as well as perception of the authors, so do apocalyptic solutions require both imaginative and practical roles on the part of the readers. This position is well reflected in my definition of the genre of apocalypse, which underscores both a final judgment and immediate resistance. Revelation's solutions to persecution and oppression are imaginative in the sense that they promise an eschatological salvation in the future and practical in the sense that they encourage immediate resistance to injustice. Nickelsburg is right that not only the thought structure of an apocalyptic response to social factors, and the social factors themselves, but also the manner in which the response was worked out in life must be integrated into a whole.¹⁹⁶

Revelation and Ordinary Readers

My definition of apocalyptic genre has been attentive to the theme of resistance in response to righteous suffering. This section looks at how real readers, especially suffering readers, can interact with the text of Revelation instead of being strained by the literary technique of the genre apocalypse. In my opinion, the fact that the Book of Revelation belongs to apocalyptic literature, while enhancing the power or authority of the text, accounts in part for the widely accepted belief that it must be decoded rather than appropriated. When appropriated, Revelation is usually cited as evidence in favor of a dominant discourse based on an ethic of peace, which may result in justifying an unjust peace. Ironically, this popular reading

¹⁹⁴ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Invitation to the Book of Revelation*, 18.

¹⁹⁵ Hypothetically, when considered a *real* crisis, a perceived crisis could be diagnosed as requiring a practical solution, rather than an imaginary resolution.

¹⁹⁶ Nickelsburg, "Social Aspects of Palestinian Jewish Apocalypticism," 649.

represents the interest of the elite, giving short shrift to the contextual needs of the readers subject to domination. The major claim of this study is that Revelation can be reclaimed as resistance literature in its full sense only when due consideration is given to what ordinary readers are doing and can do over against such an elite reading, with a view to constructing an ethic of resistance for liberation.

From the point of view of cultural studies criticism, this is a counter-hegemonic struggle between official culture and popular culture. My cultural studies interpretation of the Apocalypse highlights the role of the underprivileged reader in undermining oppressive readings imposed by the elite sector of society. This reading is possible with readers who not only experience unwarranted suffering but also have a conscientized perspective on the fractured reality of injustice, just as the Apocalypse is a result of John's conscientized perception of imperial contradictions. If suffering readers passively accept the dominant readings of Revelation, which are in the interest of powerholders, instead of positively reclaiming legitimate meanings in their interest, they might not be able to avoid the criticism that they are in part responsible for the misappropriation of the book. I am not saying that the fate of the powerless is entirely in their hands. The point here is that a liberationist reading of the Apocalypse would not easily come from a hegemonic culture. Powerholders who would not spontaneously give up their invested interests presumably would not part with power-related discourses to their advantage. To highlight the role of ordinary readers is not intended to depreciate what has been achieved by traditional biblical criticism but to problematize the possibility that it may end up supporting a particular group of readers, and so open the door to what still can be achieved by another group of readers via new interpretive methods.

Moreover, I reject any attempt to negatively stereotype a subordinate group by calling into question its ethic of resistance rather than the underlying power relations. In calling attention to how the dominant attribute "unacceptable" patterns of behavior and speech, which are adaptations to inequalities in power, not to the effect of arbitrary power but rather to the natural characteristics of the subordinate group itself, Scott mentions the attempt of the ersatz science of race at the turn of the century to justify their continued

domination.¹⁹⁷ We cannot ignore traditional biblical interpretation when it problematizes ethical lacunae in resistance discourse. At the same time, I want to emphasize the possibility that such a move may, in effect, dampen the enthusiasm of the subaltern for their liberation. While being attentive to the danger of resistance discourse in ethical terms, my cultural studies reading of Revelation foregrounds the will to resist by problematizing the oppressive power relations behind its discourse of resistance.

On the other hand, I further suggest that the subaltern cannot develop an effective hermeneutic of resistance as a reading strategy for the Apocalypse when they overemphasize the reasons from without for their undue sufferings. A postcolonial concept illustrates this point. I think the theory of neocolonialism sheds light on the persistent relations of sophisticated domination between ex-colonist and ex-colonized.

According to Young, however, what neocolonialism as a concept fails to do is:

register and conceptualize the changing modes of resistance and cultural assertion that have developed in response to the political developments since the early years of independence. As a concept, neocolonialism is as disempowering as the conditions it portrays. Removal of the possibilities of agency is equally a problem of more recent theories of power operating through economic exploitation.¹⁹⁸

Dependency theory, in like manner, presents a descriptive picture of a core-periphery relation between underdeveloped and developed economies and ascribes underdevelopment to external factors. In so doing, it refuses to acknowledge significant responsibility on the part of the dependent nation and “gives little practical scope for change, for recognition of what has been achieved, while not explaining the differences between ‘periphery’ nations that allow some to develop at a far faster pace than others.”¹⁹⁹

My suggested definition of apocalypse lays the foundations for a new liberationist reading of the Apocalypse, one that stresses human agency in the form of both ideological and activist resistance, while paying sufficient attention to diagnosing any extrinsic reasons for unwarranted suffering. To the extent that the Apocalypse can be construed as promoting justice and liberation, suffering Christians have not only a right but also a responsibility to resist unjust social relations that are in diametric contradiction to the claims

¹⁹⁷ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 35-36.

¹⁹⁸ Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, 49.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 54.

of the book. The chapter that follows tries to read the Apocalypse along these lines, thereby demonstrating a characteristic feature of the apocalypses: while revealing the inevitable triumph of God, the apocalypses do not portray individual human destiny as preordained but rather as subject to a response of identification with the divine purposes.²⁰⁰ Human destiny is contingent on human response to apocalypticism revealed.

Though Revelation is read as encouraging active engagement of a political kind, it is not by emulation of the exercise of divine judgment but through patterns of discipleship that proclaim the reality of the Lamb whose victory at present remains unseen.²⁰¹ On the other hand, Stephen Moore provocatively questions the ethics of Revelation's alleged militaristic language by raising the possibility that it might have encouraged later readers to inflict violence proleptically upon their enemies: "If the slaughter of the 'ungodly' should be permissible at the Parousia, then why not before?"²⁰² As I understand it, however, the Apocalypse does not go so far as to approve of human violence, though the book views the eschatological judgment as a result of the synergy between God's punishment and human resistance. In pointing out the danger of reenacting Revelation's vilification of the Jews in the United States today, where the majority of religious people are Christians and the Jews are a minority, Yarbrow Collins draws attention to the fact that John's polemic was part of the struggle of Christians, who were an extreme minority in a very precarious position in western Asia Minor, to *survive* physically and to establish an identity.²⁰³ As Moore admits, John never expected that Christians might be in a position long before the parousia to triumph over their enemies through military might.²⁰⁴ This is where the Apocalypse departs from Jewish apocalyptic literature, which invites the reader to the eschatological judgment in a more violent manner.

²⁰⁰ Rowland, "Hope, Resistance, and the Revelation of Reality," 137.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 130.

²⁰² Stephen Moore, "Revolting Revelations," in *The Personal Voice in Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Ingrid Rosa Kitzberger (London: Routledge, 1999), 192.

²⁰³ Yarbrow Collins, "Vilification and Self-Definition in the Book of Revelation," *Harvard Theological Review* 79 (1986): 319-20.

²⁰⁴ Moore, "Revolting Revelations," 192.

Conclusion

In order to examine how Revelation generates a new meaning of resistance in terms of intertextuality, I have looked at Jewish apocalyptic texts with special reference to whether and to what degree human beings are authorized to resort to violence in order to make a contribution to the introduction of a utopian society. While consonant with the Jewish apocalyptic language of resistance, Revelation's resistance language has been taken to fall short of espousing obviously violent resistance, which is often approved of in Jewish apocalyptic writings. I have argued that the resistance language of Revelation is different from that of the Gospels and Paul as well. While the Gospels and the epistles concentrate on nonviolent resistance, because divine intervention belongs to the future insofar as the eschaton is a future event, John believes that Christians can effectively resist Rome's evil powers by constructing more active forms of resistance strategies informed by the conviction that the eschaton is near and so is divine intervention. In so doing, I have stressed the roles that justice and anthropodicy, along with and beyond love and theodicy, play in the Apocalypse as concepts justifiable under apocalyptic situations in which both divine judgment and human agency surface.

In consideration of these findings, I have suggested a new definition of apocalyptic genre using a three-dimensional diagram to argue that apocalyptic language not only discloses transcendent realities in terms of space and time but also invites assertive resistance to injustice from the readers. Human agency in the form of resistance takes center stage in the authorial intent of shaping a *Weltanschauung* between the other generic elements, i.e., the spatial and temporal dimensions of transcendent reality. In order to apply this finding to the Book of Revelation, I have posited that the theme of resistance recurs throughout the book, including the letters to the churches in Asia. Instead of adopting a dichotomous division between real and perceived crisis, I regard John's resistance language as a response to the crisis situation as it is experienced and perceived by him. Insofar as apocalyptic crises result from the dialectical interaction between experienced reality and perceived reality on the part of the authors, human contributions to apocalyptic solutions are likewise based on practical as well as imaginative resistance on the part of the suffering readers. Conscientization plays an important role in both cases. Finally, I have considered how

ordinary people can reclaim Revelation as a resistance literature that is inscribed with repercussive tactics against intolerable sufferings, over against the elite readings, which underscore an ethic of peace with little or no attention to the possibility that it may perpetuate injustice. Along these lines, the next chapter analyzes the Book of Revelation in search of an apocalyptic hermeneutic of resistance that foregrounds a variety of survival tactics that keep a paradoxical tension between passive endurance and active resistance.

CHAPTER III

ARTS OF DOMINATION AND ARTS OF RESISTANCE

“Don't wait for the Last Judgment. It happens every day.”
Albert Camus

In seeking to apply elements of cultural studies to the interpretation of the Apocalypse, I previously noted that popular culture can be cultivated in such a way as to empower subordinate understandings of the world while resisting dominant ones. As an arena of struggle over meaning-production, biblical criticism can be considered a cultural production that is political as well as religious, insofar as it enables ordinary readers to appropriate ancient texts in their interest by defining, as well as being defined by, them. From the perspective of the subaltern, this chapter attempts to reclaim a resistance language from the Apocalypse by coalescing elements from both their encounter with the text and their contextual experiences. I will analyze key passages in the Apocalypse that are concerned with the theme of resistance with a view to generating a critical reading that can be used as a counter-discourse in the service of those who are dissatisfied with the status quo.

Over against the claim that the current sociopolitical situations are relativized in the Apocalypse to the extent that they are considered only temporary,¹ I see the book as being concerned with shortening the days of this-worldly injustice as well as with anticipating the days of other-worldly justice. It is my claim that the Apocalypse is rife with complex and diverse forms of resistance in both the material and ideological realms. The first question to ask is whether John envisions violent resistance on the part of the saints in apocalyptic times. I explore the hypothesis that Revelation's apocalyptic hermeneutic of resistance embraces a dialectical balance between passive endurance and active resistance, which excludes violence.

¹ Reddish, *Apocalyptic Literature*, 25.

The second question is how real readers can incorporate such a convoluted discourse of resistance into their resistance tactics in given historical conditions. I argued in the previous chapter that NT writers espouse different methods for solving contemporary human problems, depending on the extent to which they view the existing realities in terms of eschatological imminence. My aim here is to devise an interpretive strategy for the Apocalypse that can enable the downtrodden who are undergoing apocalyptic suffering to choose other ways than passive endurance in which to take a stand against injustice in an ethical manner.

So what do people do when things go awry? According to P. D. Hanson, who like Sanders acknowledges the importance of “reversal” in apocalypses, the symbolic universe produced by a visionary movement in opposition to the dominant society resolves contradictions between religious hopes and the experience of alienation “by according ultimate meaning solely to the cosmic realm, from which imminent deliverance is awaited.”² However, Hanson lists different forms of opposition in which apocalyptic movements construct a symbolic universe against the symbolic universe of the dominant society: social protest aimed at reform (“alternative symbolic universe”); withdrawal to establish a new society (“symbolic utopian universe”); going underground to form a subsociety (“symbolic subuniverse”); and recourse to revolutionary violence (“symbolic counteruniverse”).³

In my opinion, all these forms of resistance except for the last one, and others, are present explicitly or implicitly in the Apocalypse, which was written under Roman rule. There are always parts of the social experience that the dominance of an ideology or social system, no matter how apparently complete, cannot cover and control; from these comes very frequently opposition to a dominant structure.⁴ In principle, I accept the assumption that there is always resistance to the center on the part of the subordinated margins,⁵ except in the cases wherein cultural hegemony prevails.

There is another assumption being made here that power is a means of liberation, while the process of liberation involves a spectrum of resistance tactics. While stressing the need for divine love to be

² *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, s.v. “Apocalypticism.”

³ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁴ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993), 240.

⁵ Segovia, “Toward a Postcolonial Optic,” 129.

expressed in the power of black people to destroy their oppressors, here and now, by any means at their disposal,⁶ Cone later seems to take a step back when he says, “The oppressed are called to fight against suffering by being God’s suffering servants in the world.”⁷ Although Cone sees that vocation not as passive endurance of injustice but as a sociopolitical praxis of liberation,⁸ it is not clear how accepted suffering contributes substantially to the deconstruction of the causes of oppression or, in his words, to the “relieving [of] the suffering of the little ones.”⁹ When empowered, I would argue, the oppressed may as well avoid and resist suffering, whenever possible. My aim is to highlight the need to read the Apocalypse in search of feasible strategies for sociopolitical transformation, along with and beyond passive endurance.

I find Scott helpful in that he emphasizes the agency of the dominated as it is embodied in polymorphous modes of resistance. In my view, his theory about the interaction between domination and resistance accounts in great part for the ways in which oppressors and oppressed react to each other as implied in the Apocalypse. I primarily draw on Scott’s work, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, to show how the powerful and the powerless use distinct yet interrelated tactics to undergird and undermine domination, respectively. Above all, Scott allows the marginalized more latitude of resistance in their negotiations with their oppressors by foregrounding ideological as well as material resistance, on the one hand, and underscoring not only overt but also covert defiance, on the other hand. Thus read, the Apocalypse is about two competing human instincts. On the one hand, it condemns the will to oppress on the part of the privileged. On the other hand, it praises the will to resist on the part of the less privileged. My overriding concern here is the ways in which disenfranchised readers of the Apocalypse can draw strategically on its allusions to resistance tactics to give expression to their voice against injustice.

In appropriating Scott’s theory of resistance, I depart from the consensus that even the Christian apocalyptic vision sees the defeat of evil and the wicked, though real, as taking place only at the end of

⁶ Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation*, 132.

⁷ James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1997), 177.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 177.

⁹ *Ibid.*

history, although the death of Jesus is seen as having launched the eschatological age.¹⁰ This is not to argue that the final judgment has come; it still belongs to the future. However, if the concept of realized eschatology permits us to view Jesus's earthly ministry as marking the beginning of the eschatological aeon, it is natural to infer that it also marks the beginning of the eschatological judgment as well as salvation as part of the eschatological era. As long as they are entitled to a part in apocalyptic judgment, oppressed Christians, especially when the eschaton is considered to be imminent, can read John's apocalyptic language as not only promising divine vindication but also thematizing human resistance as a means of resolving socioreligious contradictions. It is along these lines that the author of Revelation can expand an ethic of peace that predominates in the rest of the NT, which is more concerned with salvation, by constructing an ethic of resistance that is more concerned with justice and judgment. The belief that human beings take part in the development of apocalyptic judgment leads to engendering a wider variety of resistance tactics than when such judgment is considered as divinely determined. This reflects not merely discontinuity but also continuity between Revelation and other NT texts.

I cannot agree with Rudolf Bultmann who terms the Christianity of Revelation "a weakly Christianized Judaism," in which the significance of Christ lies only in giving eschatological hope a certainty that the Jewish apocalyptists lack. Because Revelation fails to grasp the peculiar between-ness of Christian existence due to a new beginning into which believers have been transferred, Bultmann argues, the present is understood, as in the Jewish apocalypses, as a time of temporariness and waiting, and thus faith is conceived as endurance, as in Judaism.¹¹ The way I see it, Revelation and other NT books simply underscore different aspects of Christian existence. Revelation intensifies the eschatological character of the kingdom of God, described in the Gospels as inaugurated by Jesus's ministry, by tilting the scales toward not so much salvation as judgment, which is informed by John's consciousness of eschatological

¹⁰ Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 278.

¹¹ Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. Kendrick Grobel (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007), 2:175. Again, this interpretation is based on the assumption that the whole book of Revelation is pervaded by the praise of endurance, even to the point of martyrdom (*Ibid.*, 174).

imminence.¹² Revelation does not so much portray the blessings of the unique between-ness of Christian life as expands the possibilities of the new beginning to which the believers are entitled in terms of a justice that is denied to them.

In order to conceptualize a new Christian meaning of resistance within this apocalyptic framework, I now proceed to elucidate the theory of hidden and public transcripts by Scott and then apply such concepts to John's understanding of the relation between Babylon and Christians. While attempting to demonstrate that John envisions resistance against empire according to the relationships between Babylon and its disadvantaged, I pay special attention to the exceptional occasions in which a sense of eschatological imminence emboldens the persecuted to defy their persecutors in a direct and open manner.

James Scott, Public Transcripts, and Hidden Transcripts

Scott is a scholar who fully appreciates the meaning of life as an arena of struggle and strife between agency and structure, to which cultural studies draws our attention. Inasmuch as his theory about a seamless blend of public and private interactions between the dominator and the dominated foregrounds human agency in the light of oppression and resistance in intergroup relations, Scott helps in the appropriation of the Apocalypse as a guide for those who are subject to imperial contradictions.

Transcripts: Public and Hidden

Scott starts with the presupposition that the dissembling of the weak in the face of power is ubiquitous.¹³ All is not what it seems. The term "public transcript" is used to refer to a subordinate discourse in the presence of the dominant that describes the open interaction between powerful and powerless. This is skewed in the direction of the discourse represented by the dominant, i.e., in close conformity with how the dominant group would wish to have things appear. Because power relations are

¹² For instance, the proclamation in Mt 10.34 that Jesus has come to bring a sword to the earth seems to speak of the eschatological character of the kingdom of God.

¹³ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 1.

most manifest in the public domain, the public transcript is likely to give the impression that subordinate groups willingly endorse the terms of their subordination, though in effect not only the dominant but also the dominated tacitly conspire in misrepresentation in their own interest.¹⁴

The term “hidden transcript,” on the other hand, is used by Scott to characterize discourse that takes place “offstage.” According to Scott, the powerful develop a hidden transcript that represents the practices and claims of their rule that cannot be openly acknowledged.¹⁵ His focus, however, is on the formation of hidden transcripts by subaltern people behind direct observation by powerholders. Scott argues: “Every subordinate group creates, out of its ordeal, a ‘hidden transcript’ that represents a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant.”¹⁶ This consists of those behind-the-scenes speeches, gestures, and a wide range of practices that confirm, contradict, or inflect what appears in the public transcript.¹⁷

Interestingly enough, the hidden transcript is typically expressed openly, albeit in disguised form.¹⁸ Although subordinate groups, out of tactical prudence, rarely blurt out their hidden transcript directly, they take advantage of anonymity or ambiguity to manage in numerous artful ways to imply that they are grudging conscripts to the performance.¹⁹ Scott attributes the political activity of subject classes primarily to the immense political terrain that lies between quiescence and revolt.²⁰ What is directly relevant to my reclaiming of Revelation as resistance literature is the idea that there are moments of “political electricity” at which the hidden transcript is spoken directly and publicly in defiance of power.²¹ Arts of resistance in the form of the hidden transcript may infiltrate the public transcript at critical moments, when resistance is no longer secret and safe but rather becomes public and risky.

Scott’s view that resistance takes polymorphous forms, largely in veiled and safe forms, recalls the image of the *veil* that conveys contradictory meanings depending on who the viewer is. The veil can

¹⁴ Ibid., 2-4.

¹⁵ Ibid., xii.

¹⁶ Ibid., xii.

¹⁷ Ibid., 4-5.

¹⁸ Ibid., xii-xiii.

¹⁹ Ibid., 15.

²⁰ Ibid., 199.

²¹ Ibid., xiii.

symbolize control or defiance, oppression or autonomy, patriarchy or non-western communal values.²² The veil itself is fluid and ambivalent. There are not only many different kinds of veils but also many different ways of wearing a particular veil at different times. Besides, veils “change, shift, modify, and are adapted to different needs and new circumstances.”²³ In like manner, the same act on the part of the dominated, especially when it is disguised, may mean different things between submission and resistance depending on the viewer. Resistance as such is flexible and adaptable. There are many distinct tactics of resistance, which may be deployed in different ways in the reflection of oppression strategies. To the extent that oppression and resistance are coextensive, resistance tactics also change and evolve in adaptation to new circumstances of domination. In this sense, the contention that the subaltern resist domination in one way or another constitutes the two sides of the same coin, along with the claim that the reality of empire—of imperialism and colonialism—is an omnipresent, inescapable, and overwhelming reality in the world.²⁴

Scott and John

While Scott indeed sheds light on the ways in which power relations are maintained and challenged between dominant and dominated groups as they are implied in the Apocalypse, it is important to note the differences between Scott and the author of the book. To begin with, Scott seems to overestimate the frequency with which subordinates practice resistance: in response to the unceasing attempt of a dominant elite to maintain and extend its material control and symbolic reach, a subordinate group is always putting the naturalization of domination to the test in small but significant ways in both dimensions.²⁵ In other words, disguised ideological dissent is virtually always expressed in practices that aim at an unobtrusive renegotiation of power relations. Thus, a hidden transcript functions as a source of practical resistance, and practical struggle functions as a source for a backstage discourse of resistance.²⁶ However,

²² Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 80.

²³ Young, *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction*, 85.

²⁴ Segovia, “Toward a Contextual Biblical Pedagogy,” 92-93.

²⁵ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 197.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 190-91.

John seems to be aware of the occasions in which subordinates do not problematize the legitimacy of dominance under false consciousness, as will be discussed shortly. Some of John's resistance strategies also appear to assume that even conscientized people often can resist only symbolically under draconian conditions of dominance.

According to Scott, more importantly, even the appearances imposed forcefully on subordinate groups, such as linguistic deference and gestures of subordination, are actively used as a means of resistance and evasion, serving as a veil or a barrier that the dominant cannot penetrate.²⁷ Feigned deference is an art of resistance.²⁸ Short of a revolutionary crisis, most acts of power from below, including protests (implicit or explicit), strategically conform, rather than ethically submit, to the properties of the dominant class under challenge, in the realistic expectation that the central features of the form of domination will remain intact.²⁹ Powerless groups have a self-interest in conspiring to reinforce hegemonic appearances.³⁰ However, John would not fully agree with Scott that the hidden transcript is typically expressed onstage in *disguised* form. John does not seem to encourage his readers to feign deference, presumably because Babylon is satanic to the bone, on the one hand, and its judgment is imminent, on the other hand. This twofold condemnation of Rome invites not so much disguised as public forms of resistance.³¹ Inasmuch as he condemns the strategic use by Christians of Rome's public transcript to their advantage, John refuses to make a significant distinction between *bona fide* submission and strategic compliance, which is significant to Scott's analysis of public interactions between oppressors and oppressed. John's understanding of the public transcript as being determined by the hidden transcript undermines Scott's claim that the hidden transcript never

²⁷ Ibid., 32.

²⁸ Ibid., 23-26.

²⁹ Ibid., 92-93.

³⁰ Ibid., xii.

³¹ John would also disagree with Gramsci, to whom "telling the truth" is not the first and foremost moral imperative of an honest man of culture, but a "political necessity" closely tied to the main concept of his theoretical perspective, hegemony (Santucci, *Antonio Gramsci*, 168). While truth-telling for the purpose of exposing hegemony may well be a part of the resistance strategy necessary for the undermining of an unjust society, the Apocalypse condemns all kinds of lies, including not just sociopolitical but also moral and religious lies (cf. "all liars" in Rev 21.8). To tell the truth is a remedy for the cosmic evil of falsehood, which the false prophets endeavor to disseminate throughout all human relations. No one who practices falsehood enters the New Jerusalem (Rev 21.27). Truthfulness is necessary for both the deconstruction of a hegemonic discourse and the construction of a counter-hegemonic discourse.

becomes a language apart but is in constant dialogue or argument with dominant values, ensuring that the hidden and public transcripts remain mutually intelligible.³²

Hegemony and False Consciousness

Scott employs the concept of “infrapolitics of the powerless” to explain disguised insubordination as performed in ideological as well as material dimensions.³³ He maintains that material and symbolic resistance are part of the same set of mutually sustaining practices.³⁴ This is predictable to the extent that domination is exercised in both material and ideological realms. Although material appropriation is, ultimately, largely the purpose of domination, Scott observes, the public transcript includes a domain of ideological justification for inequalities as well as a domain of material appropriation.³⁵ Just as it is impossible to separate the ideas and symbolism of subordination from a process of material exploitation, so is it impossible to separate veiled symbolic resistance to the ideas of domination from the practical struggles to thwart or mitigate exploitation.³⁶ Whereas resistant practices may mitigate material appropriation, ideological domination must be resisted by a counterideology that provides a general normative form to fragmentary practices of resistance.³⁷

Scott underestimates theories of hegemony or false consciousness, according to which subordinate groups acquiesce with resignation to the social order in which they live, which the dominant ideology convinces them to accept as natural and inevitable.³⁸ He argues that the greatest problem with the concept of hegemony is the assumption that the ideological incorporation of subordinate groups necessarily reduces social conflict. Hegemony does not achieve a self-perpetuating equilibrium, as evidenced by the fact that

³² Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 135.

³³ *Ibid.*, xiii.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 184.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 111. The hidden transcript also responds and rejoins offstage to a domain of public mastery and subordination, such as rituals of hierarchy, deference, and punishment (*Ibid.*).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 188.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 117-18.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 77. See *Ibid.*, 72, where he makes a distinction between this “thin” version of false consciousness and the even less persuasive “thick” version, which claims that a dominant ideology successfully elicits consent from subordinate groups.

social conflict and change do originate from below even when elites manage to exert symbolic as well as material domination.³⁹ False consciousness and revolutionary action are not mutually exclusive inasmuch as revolutionary movements led by subordinate classes typically seek goals *within* their understanding of the ruling ideology.⁴⁰ In other words, radical attacks frequently originate in taking issue with the failure of ruling elites to take seriously the hegemonic values taken in by subordinates.⁴¹

Scott interprets the performance of imagining the reversal of fortune as evidence against the popular notion of false consciousness. He criticizes Gramsci's analysis of hegemony, which works primarily at the level of thought by calling attention to the common pattern that subordinate classes rather freely imagine the reversal of dominant ideologies: they are less constrained at the level of thought and ideology and more constrained at the level of political action and struggle.⁴² The hidden transcript at its elementary level represents an acting out in fantasy—and occasionally in secretive practice—of the suppressed anger by the presence of domination.⁴³ The millennial theme of a world turned upside down can be found in nearly every major cultural tradition characterized by inequities of power, wealth, and status, including serfdom, slavery, and the caste system.⁴⁴

In my opinion, however, the grip of false consciousness deserves to be taken more seriously, for domination is often static, though not for good, with the aid of hegemony. Scott seems to overstate his case when he maintains that hegemony can be exercised provided that subordinates are rather completely atomized and closely surveyed, though such draconian conditions practically do not exist in any real society.⁴⁵ It seems to me that there are times at which some members of a subordinate group, even under less than draconian conditions, are convinced to a greater or lesser extent that the dominant ideology is ultimately in their interest. False consciousness is not so much impedimental to as instrumental in

³⁹ Ibid., 78.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 78.

⁴¹ Ibid., 106.

⁴² Ibid., 90-91.

⁴³ Ibid., 37-38.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 80.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 83-84.

domination insofar as it deters subversive action. I partly disagreed in chapter 1 with Scott when I made the case that the dominant ideology more often than not informs the way subaltern people see the world. As Gramsci—and indeed Bourdieu—notes, there do seem to be colonial constructs in intellectual or symbolic dimensions of power that are internalized by the powerless. It seems most wise to view the ideas of Gramsci and Scott as complementary rather than mutually exclusive, because neither position alone is sufficient to account for how meaning is reproduced by the socially marginalized. I am inclined to see a forceful, though not overwhelming, sway of false consciousness on the subaltern. I admit the limited power of cultural hegemony.

Peter Berger

Granted that cultural hegemony works, it seems not easy to determine whether and to what extent false consciousness determines the cultural production of common people. It is often contended that false consciousness exists detached from what its victims actually do. According to the sociological explanation of Berger, the fundamental dialectic process of society consists of three steps: *externalization, objectivation, and internalization*. Externalization refers to the continuous projection of human being into the world in the mental as well as the physical activity, consequently producing a society. Objectivation occurs when the products of this activity attain a reality that confronts its original producers as a facticity external to and other than themselves, as a result of which society becomes a *sui generis*. Society produces humans when humans internalize or reappropriate this objective reality as structures of the subjective consciousness.⁴⁶ “Alienation” takes place when the individual forgets the dialectical relationship between the individual and the world, namely, the fact that the world is always co-produced by him or her. In other words, as a result of alienation, which is “an overextension of the process of objectivation,” the producer is apprehended only as product and the actor only as that which is acted on.⁴⁷ “The essence of all alienation,” states Berger, “is

⁴⁶ Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 4.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 85-86.

the imposition of a fictitious inexorability upon the humanly constructed world.”⁴⁸ One could further contend that alienation occurs in the process of meaning-construction as a part of world-building. Along these lines, real readers who are at the margins of society become victims of alienation when they are called on to internalize traditional interpretations of the Apocalypse, which have been externalized and objectified by those who are at the center of society.

The question is whether this kind of alienation is one of activity or of consciousness. Berger claims that even in an alienated world a person continues to co-produce a world and thus alienation is a phenomenon of false *consciousness*.⁴⁹ It might well be a phenomenon of false consciousness if every person takes part in the process of meaning-production in one way or another. Yet, it is doubtful that marginalized individuals are *de facto* co-producers of a world of meaning. Even if they take part in the process of externalization, it is still implausible that their voices, which are in competition with those of the privileged, survive through the process of objectivation. Granted little or no contribution by the subaltern to the formation of the world, alienation is a process more of *activity* than of false consciousness. From the point of view of cultural studies, which views culture as a terrain of struggle over meaning, the objectified meaning is to be considered a cultural product or construct in the wake of the social activity of privileged readers as culture consumers/producers. Marginalized readers suffer from false consciousness when they internalize the objective meaning as natural rather than culturally oriented.

The essence of alienation in biblical interpretation lies in the imposition of a fictitious inexorability on the culturally constructed interpretation. Conscientization is an important tool for critiquing biblical interpretation informed by such hermeneutic alienation. In attempting to undermine the claim that the ideological efforts of ruling elites are directed at convincing subordinates of the justness of their subordination, Scott maintains that the folk Catholicism of the European peasants was not so much an anesthesia as a provocation that provided the ideological underpinning for countless rebellions against

⁴⁸ Ibid., 95.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 86.

seigneurial authority.⁵⁰ At the same time, religion may end up reinforcing, rather than undermining, hegemony, though Karl Marx's statement that religion is the opiate of the people is a skewed one. If for some subordinated peoples the Bible provided much of the central content of the "official transcript" of Western culture, which legitimated various forms of domination, subordinate peoples also found in biblical traditions materials they could use in resistance.⁵¹ This is where hermeneutic de-alienation is required. When applied to the interpretation of the Apocalypse, a hermeneutic of suspicion enables the readers under false consciousness to critique the previous interpretations of the book that marginalize its liberating voices. Via conscientization, common people resist not only suffering as such but also the elite readings that have in effect illegitimated the desire of the disenfranchised to resist unwarranted sufferings.

Conscientization and John

John's condemnation of the accommodationists within the churches (Revelation 2-3) may be well understood in terms of false consciousness. As I read it, the reason why the Apocalypse denounces the accommodationist Christians is because they are in the grip of Rome's false ideology. That John refutes ideological control presupposes that it is successful. On the assumption that not only the oppressors but also the oppressed act on an ideological configuration, the Apocalypse foregrounds ideological or symbolic resistance over against imperial hegemony. The readers are advised to imitate the author, who is conscientized enough to perceive the satanic nature of Rome's ruling ideology.

While the same social settings invite not only accommodationists but also hard-liners, depending on whether the viewer is conscientized or not, the same imperial contradictions may be regarded as something to be endured or to be resisted, depending on whether the conscientized viewer believes that he or she is living in apocalyptic times or not. I maintain that John's conscientization is closely related to his apocalyptic consciousness in this regard. When the eschatological judgment is considered imminent, one has to draw a sharper distinction between good and evil than under normal circumstances, because everyone

⁵⁰ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 68.

⁵¹ Horsley, "Leaves from the Notebook of James C. Scott," 12.

must be either an evildoer or a righteous person (22.11). It is for this reason that John's apocalyptic language challenges, in terms reminiscent of Fanon's view that the colonial world is a Manichaean world,⁵² even human authorities that are valued elsewhere in the NT for their role in keeping a just society (e.g., Rom 13.1-7; 1 Tim 2.1-2; 1 Pet 2.13-17).⁵³ John's apocalyptic consciousness that the eschaton is impending accounts for his multilayered language of resistance that shows his concern with activist as well as ideological resistance.⁵⁴ One need not draw a sharp distinction between them when Babylon is considered already fallen (18.2). In effect, conscientization as a part of counter-hegemonic discourse may well be a starting point for practices of resistance. A more stringent apocalyptic evaluation of human institutions means a more assertive resistance against them when found guilty.

In this regard, John's infrapolitics is distinguishable from Scott's in that, while the latter views infrapolitics as the silent partner of a loud form of public resistance,⁵⁵ the former, I contend, positions it closer to public resistance in terms of the tension between the "already" and the "not yet." For Scott, infrapolitics follows the logic of disguise, which requires more than a little interpretation.⁵⁶ For John, it is legitimate for Christians living in the "already" age to perform assertive actions that problematize the "not yet," in so doing bringing out a fuller meaning of the "already."

Injuries and Insults

In understanding Scott's theory about domination and resistance, it is very important to see suffering in a psychological as well as physical sense. Scott foregrounds the human indignities that the dominated must suffer as a consequence of material appropriation by the dominant. Insofar as these indignities develop into a sense of indignation, which in turn nurtures the hidden transcript, resistance

⁵² Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 6.

⁵³ However, Paul does not seem to regard human institutions as essentially good when he says that Christ in the end will destroy every ruler and every authority and power (1 Cor 15.24).

⁵⁴ A close interconnectedness between thought and action is assumed, for example, in Rev 2.23, which states that Jesus who judges people according to their deeds also searches human minds and hearts.

⁵⁵ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 199.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 200.

originates not simply from material appropriation but also from the personal humiliations that characterize that exploitation.⁵⁷ Richard Horsley points out that one of the most important potential gains in recognizing the reality of the hidden transcript may be Scott's enlargement of the field of vision to include the emotional-cultural dimension of subordinated people's lives.⁵⁸ Scott indeed helps NT interpreters understand how material and political dimensions are interconnected with the emotional and religious dimensions.⁵⁹

The suggestion that the subaltern have to deal with not only material but also emotional oppression should affect how we assess the ethic of resistance. That Revelation denies subordinate people an ethically elegant posture should come as no surprise when viewed from the perspective of a subordinate group whose life is shot through with injuries and insults. Scott observes that for the natives being lazy is a form of sabotage and petty thieving marks the beginning of an as yet unorganized resistance.⁶⁰ No less attention must be paid to the "inevitability" of these underhanded forms of resistance than to their "unethicalness." However, when dominators deny the fact that their sociopolitical benefits are due in large part to the fractured reality of injustice, they downgrade called-for resistance to a problem of indiscipline. Unfortunately, this ideological propaganda seems to work even on some marginalized people, though Scott would be reluctant to agree.

Rollo May, a psychotherapist, mentions life-giving as well as life-denying violence for certain people. May writes of two symptoms shown by the powerless living in subhuman conditions. On the one hand, when blacks, colonial peoples, and minorities of whatever sort cannot assert themselves overtly, they will covertly do so by resorting to magic, occult force.⁶¹ Interestingly enough, May observes that our gasping for utopias shows our magical tendencies.⁶² On the other hand, violence remains an ultimate exit in imagination when all other avenues are denied.⁶³ The impulse for revenge, aggression, suppressed rage

⁵⁷ Ibid., 111-12.

⁵⁸ Horsley, "Leaves from the Notebook of James C. Scott," 9.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 21.

⁶⁰ Sartre, *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*, 162.

⁶¹ May, *Power and Innocence*, 94-95.

⁶² Ibid., 265 n. 1.

⁶³ Ibid., 97.

can be turned inward and against one's self in a self-destructive manner, which means that the eruption of violence becomes more important than its aim or direction.⁶⁴ At the same time, the despondent powerless may wreak violence, for the sake of their own autonomy, on those to whom they have been subordinated for good or bad reasons. It is even argued that irrational, life-destroying violence can become also life-giving violence; in this sense, violence may be an essential element to one's full humanity.⁶⁵ Moreover, violence in the form of political rebellions can raise the human dignity of people living in subhuman situations by causing groups to break out of their apathy and wrenching social reforms from the dominant group, who are scarcely willing to give up their power.⁶⁶

Concerning May's view on violence, Yarbro Collins comments that the limited, rational use of violence in the quest for human dignity is a difficult achievement.⁶⁷ Thus, she considers Revelation's achievement ambiguous. Aggressive feeling and violence can be constructive in the sense that it enhances the humanity and dignity of the marginal, the poor, and the powerless. At the same time, it can be destructive in the sense that the achievement of personal dignity involves the degradation of others, since the Apocalypse requires a reversal of roles.⁶⁸

One may opt for a reading of the Apocalypse that limits its violence to imagination. Scott suggests that a public humiliation is fully reciprocated only with a public revenge.⁶⁹ He draws attention to the psychological release as well as the social meaning of breaking the silence: a public *act* of defiance brings forth a sense of satisfaction in the release of resisting domination, on the one hand, and the release of finally expressing the response that had previously been choked back, on the other hand.⁷⁰ He claims that a retaliation that actually affects the agent of injustice provides far more in the way of catharsis than forms

⁶⁴ This accounts for the ghetto riots which may turn out to be against those closest and dearest to the rioters (Ibid., 96).

⁶⁵ May, *Power and Innocence*, 95-97.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 192. May finds in Fanon's description of the Algerians the prototype of constructive violence (Ibid.).

⁶⁷ Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 171.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 171-72. The Book of Revelation was written not to encourage but to avoid violence (Ibid., 171). Yet, "what is cathartic for one person may be inflammatory for another," although the violent imagery of Revelation is intended to release aggressive feelings in a harmless way (Ibid.).

⁶⁹ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 215.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 213.

of aggression that leave the object of frustration untouched, and that aggressive play and fantasy increase rather than decrease the likelihood of actual aggression.⁷¹

If one's pent-up emotions cannot be fully released unless their underlying causes are removed, then the issue again boils down to the question regarding the extent to which the oppressed can be permitted to retaliate against their oppressors. A justice-sensitive reading of the Apocalypse may achieve this difficult task of appropriating retaliation as legitimate tactic of resistance. Nicholas Wolterstorff cites Anders Nygren, from his now-classic book, *Agape and Eros*,⁷² to the effect that what we learn from Jesus's words and deeds is that where such "spontaneous love and generosity are found, the order of justice is obsolete and invalidated."⁷³ Wolterstorff finds internally contradictory Nygren's position that agape is justice-blind and that the paradigmatic example of agape is forgiveness of the wrongdoer, in particular God's forgiveness of human wrongdoers.⁷⁴ Justice-blind love cannot forgive, he argues, because "forgiveness can occur only in the objective context of the agent having a right that has been violated and acquiring retributive rights on that account, and in the conceptual and epistemic context of the agent recognizing that she has been wronged and that she has thereby acquired retributive rights."⁷⁵

The way I see it, Revelation is concerned with retrieving a retributive right in this regard. If the awareness that domination evokes resentment, which, in turn, evokes resistance, enables NT scholars to recognize the underlying motives for the Jesus movement and Paul's mission to other subject peoples of the Roman Empire,⁷⁶ how much more reason would there be for an analogous reading of Revelation that shows more indignation about oppression than any other NT writings? As Schüssler Fiorenza argues, the punishment of Rome in Revelation is not reflective of resentment and revenge but of the theology of justice.⁷⁷ The outcry for divine justice cannot be theologically questioned, because it is borne out of the

⁷¹ Ibid., 186-87. Aggression displaced on other objects is rarely an effective substitute for the direct confrontation of the frustrating agent (Ibid., 213).

⁷² Translated by Philip S. Watson (London: SPCK, 1953), 90.

⁷³ Wolterstorff, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs*, 1.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 105.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 107.

⁷⁶ Horsley, "Leaves from the Notebook of James C. Scott," 8.

⁷⁷ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 8.

injustice that Christians were experiencing.⁷⁸ It is only those who hunger and thirst for justice that can fully understand the outcry of Revelation for justice and judgment.⁷⁹ Many exegetes who label the plea for vengeance as un-Christian (6.9-11) do so because they are exempt from intolerable oppression and from the quest for justice.⁸⁰ When understood in the light of a theology of justice, the theme of reversal may sound less offensive or destructive. The theme of reversal is justified by the desperate desire of suffering people for justice, unless or until an alternative judgment is proposed that does justice to the offenders without degrading them, if it is possible at all. Granted that justice is a higher value than love in Revelation, the remaining question is whether the subordination of love to justice is justified by the circumstances not only at the time of writing but also in any analogous situation.⁸¹

Scott's theory is well applied to Jesus and Paul in *Hidden Transcripts and the Arts of Resistance: Applying the Work of James C. Scott to Jesus and Paul*, leading to the conclusion that his book is suggestive and stimulating for explorations of both Jesus and Paul.⁸² In the section that follows, I will attempt to apply Scott's theory to the text of Revelation in order to tease out variegated resistance tactics imbedded therein. My purpose is to demonstrate that if the Lamb is worthy to judge the world because of his suffering (5.5-6), so are the Christians who are undergoing unwarranted dire sufferings.

Revelation and Resistance Tactics

Ideological Resistance

In foregrounding not only material oppression but also ideological control, I have argued that the Apocalypse presents two major approaches to the relations of resistance to domination: ideological resistance and pragmatic resistance. I construe ideological resistance in terms of two related tactics: imagination and conscientization.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 8.

⁷⁹ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Invitation to the Book of Revelation*, 31.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 84-85.

⁸¹ Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 170.

⁸² Horsley, "Leaves from the Notebook of James C. Scott," 3.

Imagination of a Reversal of Fortune

Faced with intolerable injuries and insults, the oppressed readers of Revelation are invited to imagine the punishment of their oppressors. As observed earlier, many scholars highlight the power of Revelation in comforting its readers by imagining the reversal of fortunes, an enduring theme of the book. In this sense, the Book of Revelation is often seen as entertaining as well as imparting knowledge to its readers: enjoying the story of good destroying evil.⁸³ In the meantime, in Revelation vengeance is left to God and Jesus; the saints must not fight against the unbelievers.⁸⁴ It may be granted that Revelation produces these kinds of psychological effects, especially when the book is taken as having been written under draconian social conditions, in which other practical effects seem unachievable. We saw in chapter 1 how Yarbrow Collins reads Revelation in terms of crisis and catharsis.

Further, fantasy life is viewed as likely taking the form of *Schadenfreude*—pleasure at the misfortunes of others, which represents a wish for a settling of scores whereby the high shall be brought low and the last shall be first, a vital element in any millennial religion.⁸⁵ Along the lines of Yarbrow Collins, Michael J. Gilmour finds elements of *Schadenfreude* in the Apocalypse of Peter, which attempts to justify the readers' delight in imagining the suffering of their foes.⁸⁶ The depiction, though in imagination, of the punishment of the oppressive powerful in Revelation might lead one to problematize its ethic in terms of voyeuristic *Schadenfreude*. It has been asserted that the panoptic God appearing in early Christian apocalyptic literature colonizes audiences by positioning them as observed subjects within narrative worlds of perfect, unreciprocated surveillance.⁸⁷ However, if Jeremy Bentham designed the Panopticon to allow a guard to watch all inmates of a prison, without the former being seen and the latter knowing their being surveilled,⁸⁸ I would argue that the textual panopticon of Revelation ensures that the observed subjects of

⁸³ Alkier, "Book of Re(ve)lation," 292.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 293-94.

⁸⁵ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 41-42.

⁸⁶ Michael J. Gilmour, "Delighting in the Sufferings of Others: Early Christian *Schadenfreude* and the Function of the Apocalypse of Peter," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 16/1 (2006): 134-38.

⁸⁷ Harry O. Maier, "Staging the Gaze: Early Christian Apocalypses and Narrative Self-Representation," *Harvard Theological Review* 90/2 (1997): 140-43.

⁸⁸ For Foucault's theorization of this concept, see Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*,

an imperial institution see that their inspectors are watched by another anti-imperial panopticon without any knowledge of such surveillance. Inasmuch as Revelation's perspective is one from below that opts for the powerless, the all-seeing God can be read as colonizing the colonist inspector and decolonizing the colonized under surveillance. According to this reading, Revelation reflects the desire of the colonized reader for a divine surveillance that would supervene upon imperial or colonial surveillance

Yet, these cathartic fantasies cannot exhaustively account for Revelation's resistance language. In contrast to Gilmour's suggestion, Kimberly Stratton argues that, because the majority of sins which receive eternal punishment in the Apocalypse of Peter are sexual sins and sins of speech rather than persecution or oppression, the primary function of the text does not lie in catharsis in times of persecution so much as in social control—intimidating readers into accepting social practices approved by the author.⁸⁹ I find the ideas of Gilmour and Stratton as complementing each other in interpreting John's apocalyptic language. I agree with Stratton that social control also figures in Revelation, but I can only partly agree with her claim that John's intended social control through a vision of threatening judgment concerns a sectarian vision of piety and social segregation.⁹⁰ As I see it, John's intended social control concerns not only sectarianism but also opposition to Rome's segregation. Revelation points the readers in the direction of socioreligious acts that the author authorizes, to the extent that the book condemns the crimes of Rome in not only the religious but also the social realm, as shown by chapters 17 and 18.

John's imagination of Rome's punishment deserves serious consideration because it is the seed for pragmatic tactics of resistance. It may be noted that in the premodern era millennial expectations that envision a life free of exploitation often provided the mobilizing ideas behind rebellions.⁹¹ The hidden transcripts from the utopian fantasy life of subordinate groups are not merely abstract exercises, because they are embedded in ritual practices and provide the ideological basis of revolts.⁹² In dealing with skeptics

trans. Alan Sheridan, 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage, 1995).

⁸⁹ Kimberly B. Stratton, "The Eschatological Arena: Reinscribing Roman Violence in Fantasies of the End Times," *Biblical Interpretation* 17 (2009): 69-70.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 70-71.

⁹¹ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 81.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 80.

who would view the hidden transcript as a matter of hollow posing, rarely acted out in earnest, Scott cites Barrington Moore as saying, “Even fantasies of liberation and revenge can help to preserve domination through dissipating collective energies in relatively harmless rhetoric and ritual.”⁹³ Over against the safety-valve theory, which regards the world-upside-down tradition as harmlessly draining away social tensions that might otherwise threaten the social order, Scott correctly contends that such tradition plays an important imaginative function by creating an imaginative breathing space in which the existing power relations are less than completely inevitable.⁹⁴

Less conclusive, however, is his assertion that the argument that offstage or veiled forms of aggression offer a harmless catharsis that helps to maintain the status quo embodies an idealist fallacy, insofar as it ignores a concrete, material struggle between dominant and dominated groups.⁹⁵ Here, it does seem to me, skeptics have a point. There exists the danger of imaginative resistance replacing active resistance, thereby posing no practical threat to the status quo, as when apocalyptic works are construed as envisioning fantasies of vindication, exclusively or primarily in the age to come. In reclaiming the Apocalypse as resistance literature, this study argues that, to the extent that the consummation is considered imminent in terms of inaugurated eschatology, a hermeneutic of resistance needs to integrate practical as well as imaginative solutions that enable a proleptic experience of future liberation.

Conscientized Prayer

In foregrounding ideological struggle against hegemony or false consciousness, this subsection seeks to demonstrate that the importance of ideological resistance is implicit in the author’s understanding of prayer. My main concern is with the synergistic role that prayer plays in the development of eschatological events. Two examples are prominent: the prayer of the souls under the heavenly altar for a reversal of fortune (6.10-11) and the prayers of all the saints for a universal judgment (8.3-5).

⁹³ Ibid., 185. He quotes Barrington Moore Jr., *Injustice: The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt* (White Plains, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1987), 459n.

⁹⁴ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 167-68.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 187.

The probability that prayer influences the course of eschatological events is implicit in the description of the fifth seal (6.9-11). A hint of synergism has been recognized in the sense that the role of the saints is not purely passive, since each martyr's death brings the eschaton closer.⁹⁶ More importantly, the fact that the cry for vengeance is immediately followed by the final battle against the kings of the earth in the sixth seal suggests that John views that battle as divine vengeance for the innocent blood.⁹⁷ Further, I want to draw attention to the interesting fact that the fifth seal is not apparently accompanied by a catastrophic event.

The statement that there are more saints to be martyred (6.11) may be construed as viewing martyrdom as a kind of eschatological calamity. The "plague" of the fifth seal would thus affect the righteous. This reading might be compatible with the view that, while the sufferings of the endtime are set in motion by the Lamb who opens the seals, they are not willed but simply tolerated by God and Christ.⁹⁸ Yet, I do not see any significant difference between the will and the toleration of God in this case. Inasmuch as they are opened by the Lamb, I suggest, the seals are better understood as what God or Christ inflicts on the earth, which is considered overall corrupt. Though some evil powers might be instrumental, as is indicated by the repeated use of the divine passive (e.g., 6.2, 4), the seals as a whole represent divine punishment. Thus, it is unlikely that the plague of the fifth seal is meant to affect the righteous.

I think that it is not accidental that the prayer of the slaughtered is positioned between the first four seals, which affect an unspecified number of the general public (6.2-8),⁹⁹ and the sixth, which disturbs the wicked who are afraid of the wrath of the Lamb (6.16).¹⁰⁰ The call of the fifth seal for an avenging God

⁹⁶ Yarbro Collins, "Political Perspective," 249. Yarbro Collins distinguishes between Daniel and the Assumption of Moses, both of which recommend a stance of passive resistance: the former belongs to the pure type of passive resistance in which the elect can do nothing to hasten the eschatological battle, while the latter to the synergistic type wherein the elect can bring on the Day of Wrath by sacrificing their lives (Ibid., 245).

⁹⁷ Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 114.

⁹⁸ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Invitation to the Book of Revelation*, 84.

⁹⁹ The fact that the target of the first four seals is not specified undermines Schüssler Fiorenza's claim that the first four seals indicate the destructive powers of the endtime tribulation, while the sixth seal describes their judgment and punishment (Ibid., 86). As mentioned below in relation to Moses and Elijah, the idea of God inflicting people in general is not unprecedented in biblical literature.

¹⁰⁰ Contra the claim that in Rev 6.15 the kings of the earth, the magnates, the generals, and the rich are singled out from among all people who are affected by the judgment of the sixth seal (Yarbro Collins, "Persecution and Vengeance," 745-46).

fits in with the sequence of the seals, which involves such a shift in the target of the plagues. Thus read, the fifth seal means a catastrophe for the wicked rather than for the righteous.

I argue that the importance of the prayer of 6.10 lies in the conscientized perspective of the prayers, which recognize the need for justice and judgment. The likelihood that the Apocalypse commends a conscientized prayer as a form of symbolic resistance is increased by the account that the martyrs who call on God to punish their murderers are each given a white robe (6.11). While white robes seem to be a sign of victory in 3.5, where they are promised to those who conquer, they appear to be associated with righteous acts in 3.4, where a few persons in Sardis are commended for not having soiled their clothes amidst others whose works are reproached (3.2). This is confirmed in 19.8 according to which white robes symbolize righteous acts: “To her it has been granted to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.”¹⁰¹ Although the note of personal vengeance may not be wholly eliminated from the prayer of the martyrs in 6.10,¹⁰² the fact that they are not rebuked but are each given a white robe appears to presuppose that their resistant supplication for God’s retribution is approved as an act of righteousness, in addition to righteous suffering as an act of righteousness.

Moreover, I take seriously the possibility that later readers might want to imitate the attitude of the departed souls under the altar in Revelation 6. If the prayer of the martyrs is not rejected as ethically unchristian, there is no other way of preventing Christians from cherishing the same desire for retribution, except by restricting such a license to the slaughtered saints. However, the readers of the Apocalypse may feel permitted to imitate their heavenly counterparts, if they see the convergence of the heavenly and the earthly as a feature of apocalyptic language. In the end times, when God’s will is done on earth as it is in heaven, a prayer for vindication may be said on earth as it is in heaven.

Interestingly enough, while admitting that Christians can fervently pray for the day of divine retribution, William Klassen asserts that Christians cannot hasten the end of history by fighting with or for

¹⁰¹ White robes in Rev 7.14 seem to signify, among other acts of righteousness, an act of suffering or martyrdom, for they are given to those who have come out of the great ordeal.

¹⁰² Charles, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 1:175.

the Lamb and that this accounts for the fact that there is no call in the Apocalypse to arm for the great slaughter of Armageddon.¹⁰³ Though I admit that the Apocalypse does not encourage its readers to take up arms, I suspect that Klassen's claim puts Christians in an awkward position, namely, achieving retributive justice in imagination but not in practice. I read the Apocalypse as inviting persecuted Christians to not simply pray for divine judgment but also fight with the Lamb/Lion in ethical ways that keep a dialectical balance between passive endurance and active resistance.

The prayers of 6.10 and 8.3 are often treated as essentially the same. As in the fifth seal, the act of the angel in 8.3-5 who, after offering the prayers on the heavenly altar, takes fire from the altar and throws it to the earth suggests that the destruction that follows the trumpets is the divine answer to the prayer of the saints.¹⁰⁴ Like the outcry of the martyrs in the fifth seal, the prayers of the persecuted saints demand justice and foster the judgment of God.¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless, I would highlight a couple of differences between the two depictions of prayer. First, different people pray: in one it is the slain souls; in the other, all the saints (8.3), presumably including the earthly believers. Second, the prayers play a distinct role: while the prayer of the martyrs in 6.10 shifts the target of destruction from people in general to the wicked, who are primarily powerful or rich (6.15-16), the prayers of all the saints in 8.3 inaugurate universal catastrophes. The redirection of the fifth trumpet at those who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads (9.4) seems to presuppose that the preceding four trumpets are targeted at people in general, especially in view of the random and largely ecological harm done to *many* people (8.11).¹⁰⁶

Thus read, conscientized prayer as a form of resistance sometimes quickens the beginning of the universal judgment accompanied by endtime woes (8.3-5) and at other times accelerates the punishment of

¹⁰³ William Klassen, "Vengeance in the Apocalypse of John," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 28 (1966): 310-11.

¹⁰⁴ Yarbrow Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 114.

¹⁰⁵ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Invitation to the Book of Revelation*, 101.

¹⁰⁶ Contra Yarbrow Collins who takes the statement that the fifth trumpet is aimed at those who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads (9.4) as a hint that the trumpets are directed against a particular group (*Crisis and Catharsis*, 114). She also holds that the commentary on the third bowl that designates that plague as a punishment on people who have shed the blood of the saints (16.5-7) clarifies 8.3-5 ("Persecution and Vengeance," 736). As in the case of the seals, some catastrophes are not God's *direct* punishment and thus affect people in a random manner, while others reflect the wrath of God or the Lamb.

the wicked (6.10-11). In either case, human response to apocalyptic reality via prayer synergistically draws the eschaton to a close by entreating divine intervention in human history. This twofold function of prayer, I suggest, is anticipated by the mention in 5.8 of “golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints,” after which the eschatological plagues are started.

To sum up, prayer is an operative means of resistance in John’s apocalyptic worldview, according to which being conscious of the *present* is as important as hoping for the future. Herein lies the importance of showing not only the things which will take place but also the things which are (1.19). The fact that the Apocalypse puts a process of conscientization at the beginning of the plagues (5.8) indicates John’s awareness of the significance of hegemony in imperial structure. If “the capacity to influence the thought of the colonized is by far the most sustained and potent operation of imperial power,”¹⁰⁷ resistance should start with counter-hegemony. John is aware of this fact.

Resistance between Passive Endurance and Active Resistance

The thesis of this study on the Apocalypse is that the book can be reclaimed as resistance literature, envisioning apocalyptic resistance against oppression and persecution in a way that keeps a dialectical tension between passive endurance and active resistance. This paradoxical relation is informed by the ambivalent imagery of Jesus, depicted as the Lion over and above the Lamb.

Ambivalent Imagery of Jesus: Lion and Lamb

It is necessary to examine how Jesus is portrayed in the Apocalypse, because the oppressed Christians are exhorted to follow him, in addition to imagining the punishment of their oppressors. For example, one may want to draw much from 2.26, where the reader is encouraged to continue to do the works of Jesus. Jesus’s works here may mean the sacrificial ministry performed by the historical Jesus. It seems equally possible that they refer to more assertive actions taken by the warrior Jesus as depicted in

¹⁰⁷ Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies*, 107. “The strongest ally of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed” (Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence*, 57).

the Book of Revelation (cf. 19.11-21).

It is widely believed that by juxtaposing the Lamb with the Lion, John replaces the traditional imagery of the messiah of might and conquest evoked by the lion with a new definition of victory through the sacrificial death of a lamb.¹⁰⁸ Some see a rebirth of images whereby militant violence is transmuted into sacrificial suffering.¹⁰⁹ Christ as lamb replacing lion represents the vulnerability that inevitably accompanies faithful witness.¹¹⁰ Perhaps it is along these lines that David deSilva argues, in response to the charge that John reinscribes the dominant culture's practices of violence, that Revelation pushes the logic of violence to a secondary position, almost as a cleanup operation, and offers the ultimate argument of self-giving love and self-sacrificing witness, which were embodied in the actions of the historical Jesus.¹¹¹

Perhaps the two symbols of lion and lamb are better understood to be held in tension, in the sense that the Lamb who suffered an ignominious death is now enthroned in power and glory as the Lion.¹¹² Rather, I am of the opinion that the tension lies in the messianic image of the lion overshadowing, though not superseding, the sacrificial image of the lamb. The Lion is a more prominent figure than the Lamb in that the leonine image fits in better with the apocalyptic genre, which is concerned with messianic associations, while the Lamb image, with its sacrificial connections, is primarily devoted to the historical Jesus. Josephine Ford argues that the Lamb in the Apocalypse is in complete accord with the apocalyptic, conquering lamb expected in Jewish apocalyptic texts.¹¹³ It may be observed that in 2 Baruch (72.6), which was composed late in the first century C.E., the Messiah is described as a militant warrior, who slays the

¹⁰⁸ Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed*, 134.

¹⁰⁹ J. P. M. Sweet, "Maintaining the Testimony of Jesus: The Suffering of Christians in the Revelation of John," in *Suffering and Martyrdom in the New Testament*, ed. William Horbury and Brian McNeil (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 113. Sweet here follows G. B. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 73-75.

¹¹⁰ Loren L. Johns, *The Lamb Christology of the Apocalypse of John; an Investigation into Its Origins and Rhetorical Force*, *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament* 2/167 (Tübingen: Mohr, 2003), 204.

¹¹¹ David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John's Way: The Rhetoric of the Book of Revelation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 342-43.

¹¹² Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 274.

¹¹³ J. M. Ford, *Revelation*, Anchor Bible (Garden City: Doubleday, 1975), 31.

gentiles by the sword.¹¹⁴ Written at about the same time as 2 Baruch, 4 Ezra depicts the Messiah as the lion who will denounce, judge, and destroy the ungodly (11.37-12.34).¹¹⁵

I agree with Steve Moyise that, although the tendency among scholars to read the Lion in terms of the Lamb fits well with certain strands of modern theology, such as Moltmann's "crucified God," exposing our ideas of God's power as mere projections of human dominance, it is questionable that such a theology is really to be found in the Apocalypse.¹¹⁶ In commenting that references to the vulnerability of the Lamb do not outweigh references to its supreme power, Moyise cites Aune as observing that a theology of the cross, which is a central theological emphasis in Revelation 5, is a marginal conception elsewhere in the Apocalypse.¹¹⁷

The text undermines the popular reading that the Lion image of Jesus is eclipsed by the Lamb image of Jesus. The sacrificial image of the Lamb is counteracted by a sovereign image created by his depiction as having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God (5.6). The seven horns might well recall the ram with a great horn in the Animal Apocalypse (1 Enoch 90.9), which, as we saw in chapter 2, historically referred to Judas Maccabeus. Also noteworthy is the fact that even the career of the messiah is represented in a highly condensed synopsis in Rev 12.1-6.¹¹⁸ Although Jesus is primarily called the Lamb in Revelation, it is not the suffering Lamb as reflected in the rest of the NT but the exalted Lamb that judges the churches and fights against the evil powers. Perhaps ἀρνίον is used instead of ἀμνός for a reason. The Greek term ἀμνός, with its sacrificial connotations, would be insufficient for the Apocalypse, where the Lamb is not merely a sacrificial lamb but also a triumphant warrior.¹¹⁹

In particular, the Lamb/Lion is depicted as a warrior rather than a victim in 19.11-21. Some try to

¹¹⁴ J. H. Charlesworth, "Introduction for the General Reader," in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, xxxii.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, xxxii.

¹¹⁶ Steve Moyise, "Does the Lion Lie Down with the Lamb?" in *Studies in the Book of Revelation*, ed. Steve Moyise (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2001), 182.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 184; Aune, *Revelation*, 1: 352. However, referring to the claim of C. H. Dodd that the Christian writing, in view of the historical crucified Messiah, has fused the bellwether of God's flock with the lamb of sacrifice (Dodd, *Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, 232), Aune states that the author of Revelation has fused the sacrificial and apocalyptic/messianic associations of the lamb image in the single figure of the Lamb (Aune, *Revelation*, 1: 368).

¹¹⁸ Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 275.

¹¹⁹ Norman Hillyer, "'The Lamb' in the Apocalypse," *Evangelical Quarterly* 39 (1967): 229.

weaken the war imagery of this passage by arguing for a chronological anomaly: the heavenly warrior's robe is dipped in blood even before the battle begins.¹²⁰ It is not impossible that Jesus's robe is stained with the blood that he himself shed on the cross. However, it is no less likely that the blood is that of his enemies. Apart from the fact that the Apocalypse is not concerned with chronological consistency, the statement at the beginning of the passage to the effect that the warrior makes war (19.11) can be construed as presuming that war has begun. This possibility is enhanced by the depiction of the war as a result of the fury of the wrath of God (19.15). Thus, the robe sprinkled with blood that Jesus is wearing (19.13) shows him as the glorious, divine victor (cf. Isa 63.1-2).¹²¹

Rev 19.15 may provide a good reason for viewing the final war as nonviolent, if the sword that protrudes from Jesus's mouth is taken to refer to the Word of God.¹²² More likely, despite the fantastic, miraculous character of the violence of the messiah who prevails by divine power rather than normal military means, his violent judgment is nonetheless real in the sense the wicked are actually destroyed.¹²³ This is well reflected in the gathering of all birds for the great supper of God, for which the flesh of the opponents of the Lamb/Lion is served (19.21). These considerations lead me to suspect that the repeated use of the term "Lamb" is informed to a greater or lesser degree by the symbol of the Lion. If one is reluctant to accept the notion of divine warrior as implied in the Apocalypse, he or she only needs to consider the possibility raised in chapter 2 above that the Gospels are also aware of God's violent judgment in historical time as well as in the end time.

Ambivalent Imagery of the Followers of the Lamb/Lion

In constructing the ambiguous imagery of Jesus between the Lamb and the Lion, I have tilted the balance in favor of the latter. I argue that the readers are invited to a similar ambiguous role in following

¹²⁰ David L. Barr, *Tales of the End: a Narrative Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge, 1998), 137.

¹²¹ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 98.

¹²² Klassen, "Vengeance in the Apocalypse of John," 308.

¹²³ Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 277-78.

not only the Lamb but also the Lion, with the balance tilted toward the former rather than the latter. The ambivalent imagery of Jesus thus informs the tension of resistance tactics between passive endurance and active resistance deployed in the Apocalypse. It is my assertion that resistance goes beyond a “cruciform irony” that is satisfied with disturbing society instead of trying to transform it by taking one’s place in it.¹²⁴ This fact accounts for why the Apocalypse is hated by empire. In particular, the religious meaning of martyrdom as passive witness to God in imitation of the Lamb is complemented by the social implications of active resistance against imperial oppression in imitation of the Lion. Read as endorsing subversive strategies, the Apocalypse foregrounds retributive justice as the result of synergism between the Lion and his followers under the apocalyptic conditions of Rome’s multifarious domination system.

Followers of the Lamb

In reclaiming the Apocalypse as resistance literature, I do not deny the consensus view that the book holds martyrdom in high regard. To follow the Lamb means to endure suffering, as long as the Lamb is associated with the death of the historical Jesus on the cross. Although μάρτυς may have been used in the Apocalypse with no martyrological understanding as part of the dictionary definition of the word, death is associated with the word in one way or another in all five uses (1.5; 2.13; 3.14; 11.3; 17.6).¹²⁵ Antipas the faithful martyr is commemorated (2.13). Martyrdom is regarded as a prerequisite for the eschatological consummation (6.11) and held up as an example to be followed by persecuted Christians (12.11).

However, when considered a form of passive resistance, martyrdom might seem less threatening to the official transcript than might be expected of John’s dark portrait of Rome. Martyrdom plays an important role in my study not so much because it represents an ideal type of passive resistance as because it is one form of public, active resistance in the Apocalypse. Indeed, the Apocalypse views martyrdom as an idealized form of suffering required of the Christians who will reign on earth (20.4-6). Yet, what is more

¹²⁴ Harry O. Maier, *Apocalypse Recalled: The Book of Revelation after Christendom* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 198-207.

¹²⁵ Allison A. Trites, “Μάρτυς and Martyrdom in the Apocalypse: A Semantic Study,” *Novum Testamentum* 15 (1973): 80.

important than martyrdom as such may be the way in which such an action is construed. According to Scott, the political struggle to impose a definition on an action may be as important as the action *per se*.¹²⁶ In this regard, I argue that the religious meaning of martyrdom as passive witness to God should be supplemented by its sociopolitical connotations as assertive resistance to oppression. The martyr publicly testifies to the discourse of God's sovereignty over against Rome's counterpart. Elizabeth Castelli calls our attention to the likelihood that martyrs disrupt inequitable power relations by turning a moment of becoming that which others see into one of testifying to what they have seen. The perpetrators of martyrdom cannot achieve their goals precisely because the discourse of martyrdom is predicated on the inversion of conventional meanings, making death into life.¹²⁷

I suggest that martyrdom simply exposes what constitutes the hidden transcript, i.e., "a discourse of dignity, of negation, and of justice" elaborated in response to the humiliations of domination.¹²⁸ Notwithstanding the value of the hidden transcript, one suspects that a public insult is never fully laid to rest except by a public reply, because the hidden transcript, no matter how elaborate it may become, always remains a substitute for an act of assertion directly in the face of power.¹²⁹ *Bona fide* resistance, I submit, is performed when the oppressed can publicly oppose the fractured reality of injustice without *fear* of reprisal. Martyrdom is a case in point.

It seems ironic that martyrdom, which is presumably the most passive form of resistance, is perhaps closest to *bona fide* resistance thus defined, because it is performed by those who are willing to reciprocate a public humiliation in a most nonviolent yet most public and declared manner. In the sense that it is a moment when the sublime of the hidden transcript comes to the surface to oppose the ridiculous of the official transcript, martyrdom, which itself is a public humiliation for the martyr, is also a public

¹²⁶ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 206. For example, it is often in the interest of elites to label revolutionaries as bandits (Ibid., 206).

¹²⁷ Elizabeth A. Castelli, *Visions and Voyeurism: Holy Women and the Politics of Sight in Early Christianity*, ed. Christopher Ocker, Protocol of the Colloquy of the Center for Hermeneutical Studies (Berkeley: Center for Hermeneutical Studies, 1995), 12.

¹²⁸ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 114.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 115.

humiliation for the perpetrator. The perpetrator wins the battle; the martyr wins the discourse. It is because the dominant are well aware of this fact that they are reluctant to produce martyrs. Scott claims that, so long as they are not openly declared or displayed where they would publicly threaten the official story, private violations of official reality, though widely known among subordinates, matter little to the dominant, who hold only publicly declared contradictions publicly accountable.¹³⁰

This understanding of martyrdom is apparently incompatible with Scott's theory of public transcript. According to him, people subject to domination ordinarily dare not contest the terms of their subordination openly, although the same people behind the scenes voice offstage dissent to the official transcript of power relations.¹³¹ Perhaps some Christians in Asia Minor were reacting to Rome's public transcript along these lines. However, John urges his readers to abandon such ordinary practices when he praises martyrdom as a glorious method of resistance to Rome's persecution. Whereas subordinated people have good reason to pretend in their interest to comply with the public transcript of the powerholders, John's message is that such feigned compliance is not for the benefit of Christians, because of the imminent eschatological judgment of evil, which is satanic to the bone.

However, the efficacy of martyrdom as a resistance tactic is limited, insofar as it is primarily a discourse of resistance that enables the persecuted to keep their faith rather than transform society. The effect of martyrdom as resistance tactic lies in forbidding the persecuted Christian to commit apostasy. As such, however, martyrdom hardly produces immediate effects on existing human relations. One may want to read the Apocalypse in search of other forms of resistance, keeping in mind the possibility that a religious discourse on martyrdom may presuppose a case in which it is the only option available.

The followers of the Lamb may employ strategic nonviolence. When we come to 13.10, it seems difficult to dispute the traditional reading that the Apocalypse rejects any form of violent resistance against persecution: "If you [lit. "anyone"] are to be taken captive, into captivity you [literally, "he"] go; if you [literally, "anyone"] kill with the sword, with the sword you [literally, "he"] must be killed" (13.10ab).

¹³⁰ Ibid., 51.

¹³¹ Ibid., xi.

However, I would argue that 13.10 is not evidence for John's espousal of unconditional nonviolence.

It is not easy to interpret the second part of the warning because of the variant readings. In favor of the aorist passive infinitive (ἀποκτανθῆναι αὐτὸν, "if anyone is to *be killed* with the sword"), which is supported by Codex Alexandrinus, Bruce Metzger argues that, perhaps under the influence of such sayings as Mt 26.52 ("All who take the sword will perish by the sword"), copyists may have modified the difficult Greek construction to introduce the idea of retribution that persecutors will be requited in accord with the *lex talionis*.¹³² This translation may be preferable in view of LXX Jer 15.2 and LXX Jer 50.11, on an allusion to which the formulation of the proverbial saying in 13.10ab is based. These texts in Jeremiah do not involve the principle of *lex talionis*, but they indicate that those whose lot is captivity, the sword, and so forth will have to endure those fates.¹³³ Then, the verse could be taken to urge Christians to realize their loyal resistance and faithful steadfastness by going into captivity or being executed.¹³⁴ Whereas in Jeremiah such punishments are the consequences of the sins of the people, in Revelation the fates of captivity and the sword are the fated consequences of faith and endurance, as the beast from the land is permitted to make war on the saints and conquer them (13.7).¹³⁵

In contrast, one may favor an active reading of 13.10b in line with most manuscripts, which have the Greek word in a future or present active indicative instead of the aorist passive infinitive. This reading adopted by the NRSV is more satisfactory according to the principle of textual criticism of the more difficult reading: the active reading is in less perfect parallelism with the first part of the warning and also raises the question of why John, who was far more concerned in the letters about the assimilation of Christians to Rome, would need to convince his audience not to take up the sword against the Romans, an option that would seem a rather remote possibility.¹³⁶

¹³² Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2002), 675.

¹³³ Aune, *Revelation*, 2: 749-50.

¹³⁴ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Vision of a Just World*, 84.

¹³⁵ Aune, *Revelation*, 2: 750.

¹³⁶ Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon*, 308. Nonetheless, this context itself dissuades Murphy from adopting the active reading.

The active reading could be read in light of the principle of *lex talionis*. For example, Boesak argues that 13.10b is addressed to those who use the sword, i.e., the evil powers. Although he believes that there is no justification in the biblical message for the use of violence, Boesak suggests that they will be avenged by God's servants, who will be doing the bidding of God.¹³⁷ Yet, this reading is somewhat undermined by the statement that the verse is intended for anyone who has an ear, viz., the saints (13.9), and by the following comment that it is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints (13.10).

On the assumption that 13.10b speaks to the saints, I suggest a new reading based on its active readings that can explain why the author gives warning to the Christians who want to take up the sword. Though a violent revolt would have been a remote possibility in his view, John may have been worried about the possibility that his apocalyptic language concerning the imminent disintegration of the present order would be construed by some readers as endorsing violent resistance. Whereas the letters are primarily concerned with the accommodation of Christians to Roman culture, the cosmological events that follow are apparently focused on the punishment of Rome and its allies as well as the salvation of the people of God. John may have felt it necessary to circumscribe any hasty conclusion that the city can be destroyed by human attack.

However, this is not to be taken to mean that the author of Revelation unconditionally condemns violent resistance *per se*. John merely highlights certain circumstances under which violent resistance is not effective. I want to pay attention to the fact that the text simply states that those saints who kill with the sword run the risk of being killed with the sword. This death is not to be construed as divine punishment, insofar as they are killed with the sword of the wicked. The point is that Rome is not as yet vulnerable. The concluding remark of 13.10 helps. In view of 13.10c, which calls for (literally, "here is" [ὅδε ἐστίν]) the endurance and faith of the saints, captivity and the sword are regarded as the reason for, rather than the result of, faithful endurance. God's people are urged to endure in faith because they will face imprisonment or death, i.e., because they cannot defeat evil simply by virtue of human violence.

¹³⁷ Boesak, *Comfort and Protest*, 102.

It must not go unnoticed in this regard that the beast from the sea is allowed to not just overcome the saints but also blaspheme the name and dwelling of God (13.6). Granted that the pericope speaks of a time when the power of the beast is insurmountable, 13.10 can be construed as dissuading the saints from pursuing a rash tactic of open resistance. In terms of John's synergistic understanding of the eschatological judgment, it would be reckless for Christians to oppose evil powers in violent ways when the Lamb is silent. I find less convincing the analysis that 13.9-10 names two options: either to become a victim of violence by opposing empire at its own game, or to become a captive by standing firm in resistance to the violence of the beast.¹³⁸ To my mind, the verses discourage violent resistance not so much because it is part of empire's own game as because it is simply untimely. There are times when the powerless have to keep a low profile, because other-than-nonviolent forms of resistance are virtually precluded.

However, 13.10 does not say whether the persecuted can resist the beast in a violent way when it becomes vulnerable. John's focus is on the vulnerability of the saints. Instead of reading the Apocalypse as requiring passive endurance regardless of the circumstances or the consequences,¹³⁹ oppressed readers may want to employ it as one tactic within a spectrum of resistance strategies in consideration of their specific socioreligious contexts. Suffering readers need to consider not only the effectiveness but also the danger of the tactic adopted. This consideration may not be overlooked, insofar as the Apocalypse is read as concerned with the social as well as religious context of the reader.

At the same time, we must remember that nonviolent resistance is not always free from danger. There might well be times when the powerless can resort to civil disobedience in attempts to appeal to the social consciousness of the human community.¹⁴⁰ However, even nonviolence and peaceful resistance as advocated by Gandhi would not always be successful. If Gandhi had tried his Indian campaign of civil disobedience in Indochina, wrote Ho Chi Minh, he "would long since have ascended into heaven."¹⁴¹ The

¹³⁸ Wes Howard-Brook, "Revelation's Call to Resistance," *The Other Side* 35/5 (1999): 24.

¹³⁹ Thomas B. Slater, "Context, Christology and Civil Disobedience in John's Apocalypse," *Review and Expositor* 106 (2009): 57.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ Christopher M. Andrew and A. S. Kanya-Forstner, *France Overseas: The Great War and the Climax of French Imperial Expansion* (London: Thames & Hudson: 1981), 246.

“politician,” who gives the greater weight to the consequences of an action than to its motive, must conclude that “Gandhi’s fate would have been quite different if instead of being up against the British Raj he had faced dictators who do not play good-natured games with their opponents,” though such a consideration is irrelevant to the “saint,” who bases his or her entire life upon the unwavering acceptance of a moral principle such as that of nonviolence.¹⁴²

The followers of the Lamb may have to endure economic suffering. Economic endurance seems to be endorsed amidst the descriptions of Rome’s formidable power in Revelation 13: “Also it [i.e., the beast from the earth] causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, so that no one can buy or sell who does not have the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name” (13.16-17). The juxtaposition of buying and selling with the mark of the beast leads Yarbrow Collins to see here an apparent allusion to Roman coins that bear the image and name of the current emperor. Significantly, she links it to Zealot theology and practice: the refusal to use Roman coins, which would result in the inability to buy or sell, is analogous to the Zealot refusal to carry, look at, or manufacture coins bearing any sort of image.¹⁴³

Instead, I want to construe the verses as referring to a severe economic crisis as a result of economic boycott, which has nothing to do with the Zealot theology that is sympathetic to armed rebellion against Rome. As observed earlier, the language of Revelation 13 as a whole sounds too dark to elicit any resistance spirit on the part of the oppressed readers. The passage is concerned with a time when the power of the beast is insurmountable to such an extent that one cannot engage in economic activities without receiving the mark of the beast. Under such harsh socioreligious conditions, when the Lamb/Lion is silent, it would be to the advantage of the saints not to pursue any rash tactic of overt resistance, whether it be military (13.10) or economic (13.16-17). There are times when the powerless have to keep a low profile and let passive endurance take the primary position; otherwise, they run the risk of becoming a victim of

¹⁴² Kenneth D. Kaunda, *Kaunda on Violence* (London: Collins, 1980), 25-27.

¹⁴³ Yarbrow Collins, “Political Perspective,” 253. For the Zealot ban on images, Yarbrow Collins cites Martin Hengel, *Die Zeloten: Untersuchungen zur jüdischen Freiheitsbewegung in der Zeit von Herodes I. bis 70 n. Chr.*, *Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums* 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1961), 195-201.

violence not so much because they oppose empire at its own game as because assertive resistance strategies would be untimely and ineffective. Then again, the Apocalypse need not be understood as rejecting any active forms of resistance in economic terms. As will be discussed in the next chapter, Revelation 18 invites the suppressed saints to resist Rome's economic oppression in assertive ways. Thus, the Apocalypse could be read as keeping a dialectical balance between active and passive resistance in economic terms. Rev 13.16-17 is not evidence for John's espousal of unconditional passivism, insofar as it does not say whether the oppressed can resist the beast in an active way when it becomes vulnerable. John's focus is on the vulnerability of the saints.

Nonviolence and Beyond

Fanon might be right when he asserts that colonialism collapses only when challenged by greater violence because colonialism has nothing to do with reason.¹⁴⁴ I think that John would agree with Fanon on this issue. Yarbrow Collins speaks of the possibility that Revelation serves as a reminder to the privileged that they benefit from the system that may cause real hardship to others.¹⁴⁵ Richard Bauckham argues that John's critique of Rome appeals to those who can share in her profits to take sides with her victims and become victims themselves.¹⁴⁶ It seems to me that such an apocalyptic book as Revelation, which is concerned with justice, intends to not so much lead the oppressors to repentance as judge them in order to vindicate the victims. History, especially when viewed from a postcolonial viewpoint, seems to show that it is at best naïve to expect such self-consciousness or conscientization from privileged classes. Oppression does not easily resolve itself on its own. In fact, injustice seems to end only when those responsible for it are incapacitated.

Therefore, I find implausible Phelan's suggestion that John views the downfall of the empire as

¹⁴⁴ Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 23.

¹⁴⁵ Yarbrow Collins, "Persecution and Vengeance," 747.

¹⁴⁶ Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), 378.

the natural result of its own abuses rather than as a direct act of God.¹⁴⁷ If the forces and structures of evil fall apart under the weight of their own inherent corruption,¹⁴⁸ one can reasonably ask how many years the oppressed must suffer and endure. Does history really not tell us that empire persists despite all its contradictions? Surprisingly enough, Phelan sees the fallen empire as a victim of scapegoating.¹⁴⁹ Phelan's reading is due in part to drawing too much from 17.15-16: the peril of empire lies in being admired, used, and hated all at the same time, because the very people that sought its favor sought its destruction as well.¹⁵⁰ It will be shown below that the verses are better read as making fun of Rome's imperial propaganda, which claims peace and security, rather than as a realistic expectation. In either case, as most commentators agree, Babylon falls primarily because of divine judgment, though the extent to which human beings participate in the judgment may be a moot question. The fallen empire should not be considered a victim but a victimizer that must be brought to justice.

Followers of the Lion

This subsection considers the possibility that Revelation endorses violence on the part of suffering Christians, with special reference to the question whether John envisions Christians taking part in the eschatological holy war. I suggest that over against an official discourse in support of imperialism based on military power (13.4), Revelation constructs a counter-discourse that is informed by holy war tradition. Revelation's war imagery, which might seem out of place in the NT, is somewhat predictable if, as widely recognized, John is well-versed in the HB. Gerhard von Rad argues that the concept of faith, i.e., trust in the action of Yahweh, had its actual origin in the holy war and from there it took its own peculiar dynamic character.¹⁵¹ Not only was Yahweh's power in battle a major consideration in early Israelite worship, but

¹⁴⁷ Phelan, "Revelation, Empire, and the Violence of God," 79.

¹⁴⁸ Vernard Eller, "How the Kings of the Earth Land in the New Jerusalem: 'The World' in the Book of Revelation," *Katallagete* 5 (1975): 24.

¹⁴⁹ Phelan, "Revelation, Empire, and the Violence of God," 79.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ Gerhard von Rad, *Holy War in Ancient Israel*, trans. Marva J. Dawn and John H. Yoder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 71.

the Israelites were even expected to come to the help of the Lord in battle (Judg 5.23).¹⁵² Although, in much later times, the power of the deity would be taken as a reason for quietism on the part of human worshippers,¹⁵³ such a synergistic understanding might well have been regenerated by the conviction that the end time was near, as evidenced by Jewish apocalyptic literature that envisions human participation in the eschatological war.

The question is whether Revelation endorses human mobilization for holy war. The suggestion has been made that, while Michael plays a key role in the final phase of the battle in such Jewish apocalypses as Daniel and the Qumran *War Scroll*, he is relegated to the first phase in Revelation 12, yielding the role to Christ as divine warrior in Revelation 19.¹⁵⁴ In accordance with my definition of Revelation as an apocalypse that foregrounds the contribution of human agency to the development of eschatological events, the defeat by Michael of the Dragon in the first phase of the battle (12.7-9) and the defeat by Christ of the wicked in the final phase of the battle (19.11-21) are supplemented by a similar conflict that happens on earth between the two junctures.

I suggest that John envisages human participation in the eschatological war in ambiguous terms. Despite the need to read the book in historical terms, Revelation as a poetic work calls for acknowledgment of its ambiguity and openness.¹⁵⁵ I also take seriously the possibility that subordinate groups undercut the authorized cultural norms by virtue of cultural expression disguised by its polyvalent symbolism and metaphor.¹⁵⁶ The public expression of ideological insubordination is indirect and garbled enough to secure two readings, one of which is innocuous.¹⁵⁷ Yet, it is a moot question whether John was concerned about the safety of writing or reading his book. Leo Strauss argues that writing between the lines allows one to get away with uttering a heterodox truth in print even under persecution.¹⁵⁸ Over against the assertion that

¹⁵² John Collins, *Does the Bible Justify Violence?* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 4.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

¹⁵⁴ Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 276.

¹⁵⁵ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 186.

¹⁵⁶ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 158.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 157.

¹⁵⁸ Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 24.

John employs symbols and coded language in order to avoid the chastisement of the Roman authorities and make the criticism of Rome secret from outsiders, Yarbrow Collins claims that symbolic language was used because it produces evocative power rather than because it successfully camouflages its critique of Rome.¹⁵⁹ Given the vivid condemnation of the beast, no other candidate for the beast might have come to mind. Any reader in the Mediterranean world in John's time would have associated the worshipped beast (13.7-8) and the seven hills (17.9) with Rome.¹⁶⁰ I am of the opinion that John would expect his symbolic language to be translucent rather than transparent to the outsiders. Revelation subsumes both the sealed (5.1) and opened (10.2) scroll.

While admitting the possibility that ambiguity is a weapon whereby John criticizes Rome with impunity to a limited degree, I would further argue that this literary technique also defines his resistance tactics. We have above considered Scott's idea that there are moments of political electricity when the hidden transcript is spoken openly in bold resistance to power. I would reappropriate the concept of political electricity to refer to a critical moment when the author or reader of apocalypse anticipates the imminent collapse of the oppressive world order. The Book of Revelation attests to such a galvanic time when the Lamb/Lion intervenes to set things right. The apocalyptic belief that God's judgment of the wicked will begin any minute may well mean to oppressed believers the crumbling of the power structures that have prevented overt resistance and the need for a corresponding change in resistance tactics.

While restricting the publicity of the hidden transcript to the eschatological crisis, John comes short of urging the Christians to perform public defiance against the wicked in violent manners. The followers of a violent deity is not expected to be violent in the same way. So long as millennial imagery is an infrapolitical form of resistance that is strategically assumed under conditions of great peril,¹⁶¹ John's apocalyptic language amounts to not so much exhorting as envisioning what Scott means by political electricity. The downfall of Babylon still belongs to the future, though immediate.

¹⁵⁹ Yarbrow Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 124.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 124.

¹⁶¹ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 199.

John's vision of a reversal of fortune is depicted in vivid language in Rev 2.27, which promises the conqueror authority over the nations "to rule (ποιμανεῖ) them with an iron rod, as when clay pots are shattered." According to Charles, 2.27, like 19.15, implies the actual destruction of the heathen nations, in which the martyrs participate as members of the heavenly hosts.¹⁶² Klassen criticizes Charles for missing the symbolism of the expression: shattering of a potter's vessel is to be symbolically understood in view of its symbolic usages in the Egyptian coronation ritual and in Mesopotamian texts.¹⁶³ Regardless of whether John was aware of these literary antecedents, Klassen misses the possibility that the author of Revelation wanted to appropriate the expression in the reflection of the new social matrix and the genre of the book.

Although ποιμανεῖ can mean "to herd or govern," the context is too negative to allow this meaning.¹⁶⁴ More importantly, that the conqueror's authority is likened to that of Jesus ("even as I also received authority from my Father," 2.28) favors Charles' interpretation. The meaning of wielding a rod of iron by the followers of the Lamb/Lion is informed by the violent manner in which he performs the same act in the final battle (19.15). Nevertheless, the violent image of the verse is undermined to the extent that it is realized *after* the parousia (2.25). The returning Jesus and those conquerors who receive him may rule over the nations in a violent manner, but, in the meantime, the followers of the Lamb/Lion before the parousia resist evil powers in a manner that is presumably short of such violence.¹⁶⁵

The holy war image predominates in Rev 14.4 and 17.14.¹⁶⁶ Rev 14.4 speaks of those who have not defiled themselves with women and who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. Schüssler Fiorenza argues that following the Lamb in 14.4 refers both to following the Lamb to captivity in the past, as pronounced in 13.10, and to the eschatological salvation to which the Lamb leads in the present.¹⁶⁷ She interprets the

¹⁶² Charles, 1: 75.

¹⁶³ Klassen, "Vengeance in the Apocalypse of John," 307.

¹⁶⁴ Aune, *Revelation*, 1: 210.

¹⁶⁵ Over against Charles' view that a martyr heavenly host is meant in 2.27, I consider the promise of the verse to be given to the members of the church in Thyatira who remain faithful until the parousia (2.25-26).

¹⁶⁶ Besides these two verses, war image also appears in the urges to conquer (2.7, 11, 17, 26; 3.5, 12, 21), the meaning of which is to be illuminated by the depiction of the Lion as conqueror in 5.5. To the extent that the term "conquer" is integrally linked with war, a leonine method of conquering the enemy in the eschatological battle may well have come to the mind of the reader, though in retrospect.

¹⁶⁷ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 190.

term *parthenoi* as pointing to the cultic purity of the followers of the Lamb.¹⁶⁸ John might have believed that violent retaliation belongs to God.

On the other hand, there does seem to be an allusion to the tradition of holy war in 14.4. Yarbrow Collins suggests that the comment that the 144,000 have not been defiled with women may be explained by the purity regulations relating to holy war, if the group is thought of as participating in the final battle.¹⁶⁹ While admitting the possibility that continence in relation to holy war as understood and practiced by the Essenes, who tried to prepare themselves for the eschatological battle, was familiar to John, who may have been a native of Palestine or lived there for an extended period,¹⁷⁰ she sees in this vision a very stark model of ideal Christianity that involves not only celibacy but also voluntary, violent death, which are intelligible responses in an apocalyptic framework.¹⁷¹ Following the Lamb wherever he goes refers to imitating his death on the cross.¹⁷² Although she admits the likelihood that 14.4 and 17.14 reflect John's awareness of the tradition that the elect would participate in the final battle, Yarbrow Collins finds in these two passages just glimpses of such an idea, not at all emphasized.¹⁷³ Human participation in the eschatological war may not be fully developed in the Apocalypse in the sense that its image is indirect in 14.4 and its language is ambiguous in 17.14. She concludes that humans are excluded from taking part in the eschatological battle.¹⁷⁴

However, insofar as it is associated with holy war, 14.4 may not be read as exhorting voluntary death rather than violent resistance. Martyrdom scarcely matches holy war. Perhaps John here adopts the theme of holy war tradition in line with its previous use in Jewish apocalyptic literature in which human participation in the final battle is more than symbolic. Yet, it is not conclusive that 14.4 justifies violent resistance on the part of the oppressed Christians. It may be noted that the verse does not so much depict as

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Yarbrow Collins, "Political Perspective," 248.

¹⁷⁰ Yarbrow Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 130-31.

¹⁷¹ Yarbrow Collins, *The Apocalypse* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1979), 100.

¹⁷² Yarbrow Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 128.

¹⁷³ Yarbrow Collins, "Political Perspective," 248.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 248.

allude to a holy war, unlike the war waged by the heavenly armies (19.11-21) or the violent ruling by those who receive the returning Jesus over the nations (2.27). Besides, John avoids appearing to be expecting the readers to directly participate in the eschatological battle by deploying the saints in heaven rather than on earth. The 144,000 of 14.4 who sing before the heavenly throne after having been redeemed from the earth (14.3) are less likely to be the same group as the 144,000 of 7.4, which probably refer to God's servants on earth, for they need to be sealed in order to be protected from the catastrophes to come (7.3).¹⁷⁵ Violence, if any, is ascribed to the heavenly counterparts of the earthly saints. The point is that John falls short of openly endorsing human violence but keeps a dialectical tension between passive endurance and active resistance on the part of the followers of the Lamb/Lion, thereby opening the door for readers to carve out their own position on this issue.

I think that Rev 14.4 is closely related to Rev 17.14: "They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him [are] called and chosen and faithful." At stake is the interpretation of the noun phrase that lacks a verbal phrase: καὶ οἱ μετ' αὐτοῦ κλητοὶ καὶ ἐκλεκτοὶ καὶ πιστοί. The NRSV translation is the result of supplying the linking verb "are." It is not still clear what those with the Lamb will do. Following R. Leivestad, who inserts the verb "they will conquer,"¹⁷⁶ Klassen argues that all that the text says is that the followers of the Lamb participate in his victory not in his battle.¹⁷⁷ The followers of the Lamb are not encouraged to directly participate in the battle against the beast of the whore but to overcome by remaining faithful throughout life.¹⁷⁸

However, it is also possible to infer that his followers will fight and win in the same way as the Lamb does. Those who will take part in his victory are presumed to have participated in *his* battle, since there is no other kind of battle mentioned in the immediate context. In terms of grammar, moreover, it seems most natural to suppose that the author omitted the verbal phrase, which could be easily recovered in the

¹⁷⁵ Yarbrow Collins claims that the 144,000 of 14.3 who are called the first fruits in 14.4 are the martyrs, as indicated by the fact that the first fruits refers forward to the first resurrection in 20.4-6 ("Political Perspective," 255).

¹⁷⁶ Ragnar Leivestad, *Christ, the Conqueror: Ideas of Conflict and Victory in the New Testament* (London: SPCK, 1954), 231.

¹⁷⁷ Klassen, "Vengeance in the Apocalypse of John," 306-307.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 305.

immediate context. Just as the Lamb wages war and overcomes, so do those who are with him.

Charles finds in 17.14 a reference to a *martyr* host of warriors, who are described as crushing hostile nations in 2.26-27 and 19.14.¹⁷⁹ However, the called and chosen and faithful of 17.14 are apparently the earthly saints who are confronting Rome. In the first place, there is no hint in the immediate context that the Lamb's followers in 17.14 are the saints in heaven as in 19.14 or that the event happens after the parousia as in 2.25-27. That Revelation 17 condemns the political system of Rome strengthens the probability that those who are with the Lamb are the earthly saints under Roman oppression.

It may also be noted that the depiction of the eschatological war in 17.14 is simply addressed to the faithful, unlike 2.10 in which the Smyrneans are exhorted to be faithful *until death*. This may not be accidental but indicative: whilst some saints win by being faithful unto death, others win via other means, for example, by participating in the eschatological battle.

However, 17.14 stops short of espousing violent resistance. To begin with, the participation of the saints in the eschatological war is indicated ambiguously via ellipsis, as considered above. Besides, the verse lacks any mention of strong violence, as found in the war waged by the heavenly armies (19.11-21) or in the violent rule by those who receive the returning Jesus over the nations (2.27). Violence is expressed in the following verses, which depict the conflict between the ten horns and the beast, on the one hand, and the whore, on the other hand (17.15-18). Again, the point of interest here is that John shies away from giving full endorsement to human violence but keeps a dialectical relationship between passive endurance and active resistance, in so doing opening the door for readers to carve out their own position on this issue.

This reading undermines the contention of Aune that, in distinction from the *War Scroll* in which angelic forces are present with the army of the sons of light (1QM1.10; 7.6; 19.1), there is never a hint in Revelation that human beings and angels fight together in any eschatological battle.¹⁸⁰ On the contrary, Revelation does allude to human participation in the eschatological war, informed by John's imminent

¹⁷⁹ Charles, 2: 74.

¹⁸⁰ David Aune, "Qumran and the Book of Revelation," in *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic in Early Christianity*, 96.

eschatology. I suspect that the eschatological war is envisioned as being proleptically realized in Revelation in a more immediate way than in the Jewish apocalypses. Indeed, the opening verse alerts the reader to prepare for “what must soon take place” (1.1). Revelation may well be more focused on the present and imminent future than the Jewish apocalypses, for the Messiah has already accomplished a crucial act of deliverance,¹⁸¹ which also explains why the absence of an *ex eventu* review of history in Revelation can be attributed to its lack of interest in history prior to Jesus.¹⁸²

Unlike Jewish apocalyptic texts, however, both Rev 14.4 and 17.14 mobilize the faithful in the cosmological battle in ambiguous terms. As addressed in the previous chapter, the Maccabees seemingly inspired later revolutionary initiatives, and the author of Revelation was presumably conscious of the Maccabean revolt, which brought about the independence of Israel. At the same time, John was probably influenced by the defeat of the First Jewish Revolt, which might well have counteracted such a tendency to resort to violence. In addition to the sacrificial image of the historical Jesus, this tragic event accounts for the fact that John’s apocalyptic zeal is expressed in a rather sophisticated, oblique way.

Violent resistance seems to be implied in the witnessing activities of the church depicted in Rev 11.5-6. In particular, 11.5 raises the possibility that the saints act as agents of divine punishment in terms reminiscent of the eschatological war: “If anyone wants to harm them, fire pours from their mouth and consumes their foes; anyone who wants to harm them must be killed in this manner.” The witnessing acts of the eschatological prophets may be read as active and assertive for several reasons. First, the act of the two witnesses in 11.5 cannot be construed as entirely symbolic, insofar as the statement of 11.6 that they are endowed with the power to shut the sky, turn the waters into blood, and strike earth with every kind of plague refers back to the historical events associated with Elijah and Moses. Second, the power of the Christian prophets and witnesses to strike the earth with every plague refers the reader back to the influence of the Christians in bringing about the eschatological plagues (cf. the outcry of the witnesses for justice in

¹⁸¹ Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 278.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 271.

6.10 and the prayer of the saints in 5.8 and 8.2ff.).¹⁸³ Third, the account that the witnesses were a torment to the inhabitants of the earth (11.10) does seem to implicate that their acts caused real sufferings to a greater or lesser extent, though 11.5 may not be taken to mean that they literally incinerate their enemies. Finally, and most importantly, the witnesses from whose mouth fire proceeds are associated with the equestrian whose eyes are likened to a flame of fire in 19.12, which I have above argued depicts the coming Jesus as divine warrior (19.12). Christians not only undergo afflictions but also inflict sufferings on their persecutors.

If 11.5 is interpreted as simply symbolizing the power of the witnesses, it would be difficult to explain why it is directed only to those who desire to oppose them, for their witnessing torments presumably all people who dwell on the earth (11.10). The answer seems to lie in the possibility that as opposed to 11.5, which restricts the “killing” to those who publicly oppose the witnesses, the act in 11.6 of shutting up the sky and turning the waters into blood means universal plagues that affect those inhabiting the earth, recalling what Elijah and Moses did to the people in general in Israel and Egypt respectively.¹⁸⁴ I would argue that 11.5 refers to the witnesses’ punitive and thus more aggressive acts against their public opponents, while 11.6 refers to their preventative and thus less aggressive acts against those who are deceived by such opponents.

Along these lines, those who were terrified and gave glory to God after seven thousand people were killed in a great earthquake (11.13) might well belong to the citizens of the world who had been misled by the witnesses’ avowed enemies. Schüssler Fiorenza argues against the view that since the Apocalypse is permeated with the preaching of wrath on earth-dwellers, the verse suggests not the real repentance but only the fear of the nations. Without any hope for the conversion of the nations as a result of the Christian witness, the Apocalypse would advocate not a theology of justice but a “theology of resentment.”¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Invitation to the Book of Revelation*, 118.

¹⁸⁴ In view of the record that God sets apart the land of Goshen where his people live on the day of the fourth plague (Ex 8.22), the first three plagues, including the water turning to blood, seem to have affected all the land of Egypt, including the children of Israel (Ex 7.21). Likewise, the drought announced by Elijah to Ahab (1 Kgs 17.1) affected the whole land of Israel wherein there were seven thousand people who had not bowed to Baal (1 Kgs 19.18), presumably including the widow at Zarephath (1 Kgs 17.9).

¹⁸⁵ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Invitation to the Book of Revelation*, 119. The expression “to give glory to God” is repeated in 14.7 as the content of the eternal Gospel proclaimed to all the peoples of the earth; besides, 11.13 seems to

Bauckham may be overstating his case when he interprets 11.13 as referring to a mass conversion of the nations in the final period of world history.¹⁸⁶ Yet, the repentant sinners in 11.13 apparently contrast with the persistent sinners who do not repent as in 9.20-21. The cosmic earthquake may account for the penance of the nations (11.13).¹⁸⁷ It is also possible to say that it is the works of the witnesses that eventually result in either the perishing (11.5) or the revival (11.13) of the nations. Whereas some nations irredeemably attack the two witnesses, others are disillusioned and repent at the end of the story. John denies any second chance to his principal enemies, who must be “killed” by the fire pouring from the mouth of the witnesses. Not only does the Christian apocalypse make a clear distinction between the saints and their persecutors, but it also makes an implicit yet significant distinction among the persecutors.

Nevertheless, John stops short of endorsing violent resistance on the part of the followers of the Lamb/Lion. It must be noted that those who afflict the earth-dwellers are still called *witnesses* (11.3). Besides, the two witnesses are described as *prophesying* (11.3). The motif of fire emanating from a person’s mouth may be used as a metaphor for speaking forth God’s powerful word, as in Jer 5.14b (“I am now making my words in your mouth a fire, and this people wood, and the fire shall devour them”).¹⁸⁸ Aune makes much of the “fact” that, though the two witnesses possess the punitive power to incinerate, the text does not explicitly say that they used them, although 11.10 does say that they “tormented” the inhabitants of the earth.¹⁸⁹ Indeed, the statement that the witnesses prophesy and some nations repent makes the prophetic acts of the saints against the nations in Revelation 11 significantly different from the violent acts of the returning Jesus against the nations in Revelation 19, which contains a mere mention of a sharp sword that comes from his mouth (19.15). Again, the author of Revelation shies away from espousing violent resistance but maintains a dialectical tension between passive endurance and active resistance, thereby

foreshadow the pronouncement of 15.3-4 that all nations will come and worship before God whom they fear and glorify (Ibid.). Rev 16.9 saying that people cursed the name of God and did not repent and give him glory may suggest that had they repented they would have given glory to God (Aune, *Revelation*, 2: 628).

¹⁸⁶ Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 278-83. For a counterargument, see Eckhard J. Schnabel, “John and the Future of the Nations,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 12/2 (2002): 251-57.

¹⁸⁷ Some read the verse as referring to the repentance of the Jews (Yarbro Collins, “Political Perspective,” 250).

¹⁸⁸ Aune, *Revelation*, 2: 613.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 614-15.

opening the door for real readers to carve out their own position on this issue.

Ethic of Violent Language

Granted that Revelation employs violent language or imagery, though in an ambiguous and limited way, we have to address the question of whether it reflects Rome's violent ideology. For example, Stratton argues that Revelation's threats of eschatological judgment function to strengthen the solidity of churches of Asia Minor and that its military violence directed against Rome and judicial violence directed against John's opponents mimic strategies of Roman domination and intimidation.¹⁹⁰ In response to the criticism that Revelation reinscribes Roman values, I proposed in chapter 1 a postcolonial reading that foregrounds the author's strategic appropriation of imperial language for anti-imperialist purposes, turning the oppressor's language on its head.¹⁹¹

I see Revelation's violent or military language as an example of John's reappropriation of Roman language to erode the ideological values inscribed therein. In the view of those who are exposed to severe injuries and indignities, the *use* of violent language for the furtherance of justice may not pose an ethical dilemma. Regardless of whether violent language *per se* is permissible, the focus should be on the pragmatics rather than the semantics of apocalyptic language. When Revelation is read as resistance literature, its alleged violent language can be eclipsed by its underlying ideology of peace as informed by the theme of justice. To say the least, a violent language that furthers justice is even more tolerable than a peaceful language that perpetuates injustice.

I find less convincing the suggestion that we can question the very notion of divine judgment and

¹⁹⁰ Stratton, "Eschatological Arena," 62-63. Stratton here makes use of Barr's identification of three types of violence that figure in the Apocalypse, the other being cosmological violence directed against the earth (David L. Barr, "The Lamb Who Looks like a Dragon? Characterizing Jesus in John's Apocalypse," in *The Reality of Apocalypse*, 208).

¹⁹¹ If my reading is an attempt to find decolonizing efforts in the *meaning* of John's language, it has been suggested that John twists the *form* of language to produce a subaltern language: John negotiates a linguistic balancing act between decolonization and intelligibility when he has to be close enough to the language of conventional discourse simply to be understood while coining an idiolect sufficiently deviant to privilege the subaltern voice (Allen Dwight Callahan, "The Language of Apocalypse," *Harvard Theological Review* 88/4 [1995]: 466). In so doing, Revelation's solecistic Greek subverts the imperial bonds of linguistic convention (*Ibid.*, 470).

at the same time open the way to new conceptions of God's justice.¹⁹² To my mind, divine judgment is an essential factor of divine justice. Significantly enough, the martyrs attribute such epithets as "holy" and "true" to an avenging God in Rev 6.10, where they ask how long they have to wait until their blood is avenged. The verse indicates that retribution reflects holiness and trueness. Vengeance must follow if God is the sovereign Lord who is holy and true, because a great wrong has been done.¹⁹³ Klassen asserts that those who have never had to struggle with major injustices are tempted to criticize a longing for vengeance as sub-Christian or a reversion to Judaism.¹⁹⁴ He quotes Wilhelm Bousset as saying, "One attempts in vain to weaken the strong attitude of vengeance found in this prayer. We must get accustomed to the fact that the Apocalypticist, as he views the martyr-band, lives in stronger attitudes of hatred and of hope than we can condone."¹⁹⁵ It is manifest that John considers violent retaliation to be righteous judgment (16.5-6; 19.2), though it is a moot question whether there is a tint of hatred in John's voice, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

As a child of modern Korean history disrupted by Japanese colonialism, I am inclined to see a cry of vengeance as depicted in 6.10 as reinforcing, rather than undermining, divine justice. Those who belong to the colonist camp within the colonial world would not be able to understand John's agony over whether and to what extent violent retaliation can be endorsed in colonial/imperial circumstances.

Imitators of the Author

The Lamb/Lion is not the only persona that the original readers of the Apocalypse might have wanted to imitate. The account that the author was exiled to the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus (1.9) might well have tempted them to interpret the resistance language of the Apocalypse in the light of what the author said and did in the past. If the local governor removed

¹⁹² Stratton, "Eschatological Arena," 76.

¹⁹³ Klassen, "Vengeance in the Apocalypse of John," 302.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 303.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 303. He cites Wilhelm Bousset, *Die Offenbarung Johannis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1906), 271.

John from his circuit of the seven churches to the island of Patmos because he was a potentially politically dangerous dissident,¹⁹⁶ his addressees would have been the first to sense the political danger that John previously posed to Rome's dominant ideology. Imitating John would have meant no less grave results than exile.

Following John's Hidden Transcript

I would argue that the Apocalypse invites the reader not only to imitate the life of the author but also the hidden transcript he devised. Though John does not tell his audience to imitate him, he warns against tolerating the false teachings as of the Nicolaitans (2.15) and of Jezebel (2.20). It is interesting to apply Scott's idea as to how a hidden transcript is cultivated and defended to the relation of John to the other voices within the churches in Asia Minor. According to Scott, tacit or acknowledged coordination and communication within the subordinate group in an insulated social space enables the socialized practices and discourses of resistance; besides, as domains of power relations in their own right, social spaces of relative autonomy serve to discipline as well as to formulate patterns of resistance.¹⁹⁷ Instead of viewing him as repressing the other voices in order to establish his own authority within the churches, I surmise that John was trying to enhance mutuality among church members, a move that Scott believes is essential to the production of a resistant subculture or countermores among subordinates.¹⁹⁸

Scott maintains that the relatively uniform conditions of subordination for large numbers of people elicit a comparable family resemblance in their hidden transcript.¹⁹⁹ It may be noted that Jesus and his movement inherited an already-existing Galilean Israelite hidden transcript in a creative way.²⁰⁰ Paul developed relatively new hidden transcripts, in addition to the Israelite popular tradition, in his new

¹⁹⁶ David A. deSilva, "The Revelation to John: A Case Study in Apocalyptic Propaganda and the Maintenance of Sectarian Identity," *Sociological Analysis* 53/4 (1992): 388.

¹⁹⁷ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 118-19.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 223-24.

²⁰⁰ Horsley, "Leaves from the Notebook of James C. Scott," 15.

communities in Greek cities.²⁰¹ A similar process may have happened in the composition of the Apocalypse: John may have worked on the basis of a shared hidden transcript by his communities, presumably with certain new ideas attached.²⁰² To this extent, it would be correct to say that the Apocalypse affects the readers by not only creating but also *refreshing* hidden transcripts. Probably John's hidden transcript was not strange to his addressees.

If John denounced rival church leaders, he did so not because they did not submit to his authority but because they did not follow the newly codified hidden transcript representing the majority of the subordinates concerned. Better still, if they showed more complicity with the dominant elites than with the dominated Christians, the rival groups of prophets condemned by John might have been threatening the hidden transcript that was being developed in a sequestered social site of suffering Christians. In either case, John is repressing the accommodationist voices that would eventually undermine the interest of the dominated by weakening their transcript, though they might temporarily relieve the tension between state and church. In so doing, he prevents the kind of false consciousness that would have the false prophets who compromise with Rome as speaking for the oppressed Christians. In this sense, the seven letters are not so much reproving burgeoning theologians as resisting thriving politicians. When theological dissents are political ones as well, criticizing Christian collaborators with empire is equal to criticizing imperial authorities themselves, as is illustrated by John's continued attack against Roman authorities.

One might want to argue that John's rival leaders were representing another hidden transcript of subjugated Christians, which was not satisfactory to John's much more severe version. In this case, the two hidden transcripts must vie for recognition among Christians. Judging from John's letters, however, to the extent that they slander those suffering (2.9) and teach the saints to eat food sacrificed to idols (2.14, 20), John's rivals seem to creep into the social space of resistance, corroding the existing hidden transcript, rather than creating a different hidden transcript. Then, John's harsh language against other leaders can be

²⁰¹ Ibid., 16.

²⁰² This amounts to questioning the theory of perceived crisis that holds that the author of Revelation tries to instill a new perception of reality into his readers.

understood as a case of “social pressure among peers . . . [which] is by itself a powerful weapon of subordinates.”²⁰³ However, it is a moot question to what degree John’s stringent language of resistance was shared by his original readers.

Humor and Resistance

One usually finds only scattered references in biblical literature to the comic dimensions of texts, such as Balaam’s talking donkey (Num 22) or Abraham’s negotiations with God over the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18).²⁰⁴ Yet, I take seriously the possibility that the Bible is inscribed with a divine and human laughter that is not only mocking and subversive but also joyous and celebrative.²⁰⁵ If centuries of liturgical and theological use of the Bible have helped to marginalize a vital role for comedy and humor in biblical literature and religion,²⁰⁶ it may be reclaimed by common readers who are no less interested in society and practice than in liturgy and theology. In particular, humor studies is well aware of the possibility that humor and mockery form resistance.²⁰⁷ I would venture that Revelation’s psychological effects do not simply lie in its cathartic effects. Rather, John employs several literary devices to infuse a comic sense into his otherwise solemn resistance language, thereby entertaining marginalized readers. If Jewish humor emerged as a weapon of a subjugated people to help its survival amidst the perilous conditions of exile,²⁰⁸ John’s humor may have served a similar purpose for oppressed Christians in the Roman Empire.

Mimicry/Caricature and Humor (13.11, 16-17)

Homi Bhabha is helpful in reading the Apocalypse in search of a sense of humor. Bhabha’s postcolonial theory of mimicry is a comic approach to colonial discourse, because it mocks and undermines

²⁰³ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 191.

²⁰⁴ J. William Whedbee, *The Bible and the Comic Vision* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 2.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁰⁷ Simon Weaver, *The Rhetoric of Racist Humour: US, UK and Global Race Joking* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), 122.

²⁰⁸ Whedbee, *Bible and the Comic Vision*, 3.

the pretensions of colonialism and empire.²⁰⁹ To take an example, those loyal to the beast are given the mark of the beast, which permits economic activities (13.16-17), apparently as a parody of the sealing of the elect (7.1-8). While the sealing of the elect protects them from the plagues (9.4), the imprint of the beast destines its bearers for God's wrath (14.9-10). Strictly speaking, the mark of the beast may be an example of reverse mimicry, for it is the oppressor who mimics the oppressed, unlike mimicry, which refers to the colonized imitating the colonizer. Upon reflection, I find it hard to say that the beast intentionally mimics the sealing of the elect, which is done by the angels (7.2-3). It is the author that *caricatures* the beast in such a way that its act is interpreted as a mere parody of what God does to the saints. Therefore, neither mimicry nor reverse mimicry fully elucidates the relation of the mark of the beast with the sealing of God.

John earlier caricatured the beast rising out of the earth in the same way. The depiction of the second beast as having two horns like a lamb (13.11) is the authorial interpretation of this figure. The author creates a caricature of the beast as a backdrop against which to highlight the falsehood of its words ("and it spoke like a dragon," 13.11). In both cases, a comic effect is produced, insofar as the caricature of the beast ridiculed as an imperfect imitator of God and the Lamb elicits laughter from its victims, who desire its subversion. Comedy frequently resorts to ridicule in order to bring down the arrogant forces that block the free movement of life and stifle laughter.²¹⁰

Incongruity and Humor (12.13-18)

Not only the features but also the deeds of the antagonist are caricatured as an object of ridicule. I suggest that the account of the dragon pursuing the woman in Rev 12.13-18 is best understood as comic, intended to entertain the readers rather than to give specific information on a battle about to break out. It may be admitted that being rescued by way of eagle's wings is intertextually related to the exodus account, as recorded in Ex 19.4 ("You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself"). One might consider the possibility that Revelation 12 appropriates traditional

²⁰⁹ Huddart, *Homi K. Bhabha*, 57.

²¹⁰ Whedbee, *Bible and the Comic Vision*, 9.

combat myths.²¹¹ At the same time, a mocking laughter may well be in mind here. It should be noted that instead of the superiority theory of humor, according to which we laugh when we feel superiority over others, presupposing a certain *Schadenfreude*, the psychological study of humor is now dominated by the incongruity theory, according to which we enjoy and laugh when we perceive incongruity, i.e., a mismatch between what we expect and what we experience.²¹²

Incongruity accounts for humorous effects produced in 12.13-18.²¹³ For example, the statement that the dragon that has an inborn ability to fly is outflown by the woman with outfitted wings (12.14) pokes fun at his slowness, inasmuch as the result of such racing unexpectedly humiliates the dragon.²¹⁴ The same effect is produced by the picture of the dragon spewing water (12.15),²¹⁵ because the dragon supposedly breathes fire, particularly if it is synonymous with Leviathan, as in Job where it is described as emitting a flame (Job 41.19-21).²¹⁶ The dragon of 12.13-18 is no more the great dragon of 12.3, which is perhaps a fire-breathing dragon,²¹⁷ for it has been thrown down to the earth (12.9). It is also ridiculous that the dragon immediately gives up chasing the woman and instead plans to attack her children, though he is still angry with the woman (12.17). He is no more the great dragon who could fight back against Michael, though in vain (12.7). I would posit that the mythological elements that might be implied in the account of the dragon pursuing the woman are not intended as a *realistic* description of the dragon's persecution but rather that

²¹¹ See Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation*, Harvard Dissertations in Religion (Missoula: Scholars, 1976), esp. chapter 2.

²¹² John Morreall, *Humor Works* (Amherst, MA: HRD Press, 1997), 26. Feeling better than someone else is not the essence of laughter or humor (Ibid., 26).

²¹³ Whilst Yarbro Collins argues for a close similarity between Revelation 12 and both the combat myth concerning Python's pursuit of Leto, the mother of Apollo and Artemis, and the combat between Python and Apollo, several discrepancies have been pointed out between Revelation 12 and the Python myth (Jan Willem van Henten, "Dragon Myth and Imperial Ideology in Revelation 12-13," in *The Reality of Apocalypse*, 185-86). For example, while Leto is rescued from Python by the north wind, the woman in Revelation 12 flies from the dragon with the aid of the two wings of the eagle.

²¹⁴ This effect is not possible with the myth of Leto's rescue from Python by the north wind.

²¹⁵ I find less convincing the view that the aid of the personified earth that swallows the water that the dragon has spewed (12.16) is analogous to the help of Poseidon who hides Leto in a safe island from Python (Yarbro Collins, *Combat Myth*, 67). In my view, John intentionally departs from the Python-Leto-Apollo myth by depicting the dragon spewing water in a humorous way.

²¹⁶ The Hebrew term "Leviathan" is translated in the LXX as "dragon" (Job 40.25).

²¹⁷ The depiction of the dragon in the color of fire (πυρρός, meaning "fiery red") may reflect the concept of a fire-breathing dragon (12.3).

its literary function lies in amusing the oppressed reader by making fun of the antagonist who has been demoted.

Rumor and Humor (17.16)

A sense of humor is also to be found in the destruction of the city of Rome. It is commonly assumed that the Nero *redivivus* legend is implicit in the Apocalypse. In particular, according to 17.16, the whore is hated and destroyed by the beast and the ten horns. The ten horns signify ten kings (17.12) who represent Roman client kings.²¹⁸ Then, 17.16 might predict that the ten horns, i.e., the nations allied with Rome, and the beast, i.e., a Roman emperor, presumably Nero, will turn on the whore, i.e., the city of Rome, and destroy it, perhaps a reflection of the rumor that Nero would return from the east with Parthian allies to conquer Rome.²¹⁹ If the Roman emperors were so sensitive to rumor as to engage an entire cadre of officials—*delatores*—in collecting and reporting it,²²⁰ this kind of rumor might have been an effective method of disguised resistance, which is reminiscent of psychological warfare. Besides, rumor helps subordinates to interpret events in their interest. As to the question of why the oppressed so often read in rumors hopes of their imminent liberation, Scott suggests that a powerful and suppressed desire for relief from the burdens of subordination not only inspires their autonomous religious life but also strongly colors their interpretation of events.²²¹ As Scott puts it, “If oppressed groups misconstrue the world, it is as often to imagine that the liberation they desire is coming as to reify domination.”²²²

I further suggest that 17.16 is to be read as reflecting a rumor redefined in a humorous way, in keeping with the incongruity theory. In my view, the author does not endorse the popular myth that Nero would return after his death. John ascribes the first resurrection to the saints or the martyrs (20.5). The same

²¹⁸ Aune, *Revelation*, 3: 951. Roman generals in the Greek east developed an elaborate system of client kingship as an inexpensive and effective means for controlling provinces (Ibid., 951).

²¹⁹ Ibid., 957.

²²⁰ Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 251.

²²¹ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 147.

²²² Ibid., 148. Moreover, utopian rumors may result in an increase in incidents of insubordination and resistance, hastening revolution (Ibid., 146-47).

conclusion can be drawn from the fact that nowhere in the Apocalypse is the destruction of Rome described as predicted in 17.16.²²³ It may also be noted that the usually positive image of a triumphant messianic figure associated with the Nero myth was transformed in Jewish and Christian tradition into a monstrous incarnation of evil and contributed to the conception of the eschatological antagonist.²²⁴ This entirely negative image seems to be in the background of the eschatological “Nero *redivivus*” who in alliance with Roman vassal kings wages eschatological war against the Lamb (17.13-14). It is unlikely that 17.16 is intended as a realistic expectation of the Nero *redivivus* legend.

I suggest that the author appropriates the Nero legend for another purpose. I interpret the myth implied in 17.16 as meant for a comic effect, to the extent that first-century Christians including the author found it incongruous or unexpected. The focus is on the contrast between the fact that the legend is not trustworthy and the serious manner in which it is accepted by Roman authorities. John employs here rumor as a literary technique by which to ridicule and undermine the Roman imperial propaganda that claims peace and security. The punch line would be that the ideology of the *Pax Romana* is unstable enough to be undercut by a mere rumor associated with a *dead* emperor. The oppressed reader would enjoy and laugh at Rome’s vulnerability as disclosed by its fear of a Nero *redivivus*, who is ridiculed by the author of Revelation as a mere parody of the real messiah (17.11; cf. 1.4). It is significant that the Nero myth is alluded to after the depiction of the doom of the beast and its allies (17.14). I see 17.16 as an explanation of the collapse of Babylon seen from within. The verse is not so much about the way the Roman Empire collapses as about the reason why it must fall.

Conclusion

Boring once commented that revolutionary-minded modern Christians may be disappointed to find that John does not call on his readers to overturn Rome and establish a more just government, for all

²²³ There is an obvious tension between this prophecy and the way Rome is destroyed in Revelation 18, where the kings of the earth are not agents but lamenters of its collapse (Aune, *Revelation*, 3: 957).

²²⁴ Aune, *Revelation* 2: 739.

that Christians need to do is simply resist the values of Babylon for the justice of God (18.4) and rejoice in divine vindication (18.20).²²⁵ This is so because the contemporary audience was practically powerless over against imperial Rome, on the one hand, and because it is God's power that ultimately destroys Babylon in the near future, on the other hand.²²⁶ Indeed, people cannot cause catastrophic disasters, for which they have to depend on the Lamb/Lion. However, this chapter has shown that the Apocalypse aligns with resistance literature in the sense that it is inscribed with discourses of resistance that traditional values such as pacifism and nonviolence can hardly explain.

In order to reconstruct a multidimensional tactic of resistance from the Apocalypse, I have appropriated the theory of Scott about the hidden as well as public transcripts of domination and resistance between oppressors and oppressed. Special attention has been paid to the tension between ideological and pragmatic resistance, on the one hand, and between passive endurance and active resistance, on the other hand, on the presupposition that the subaltern might run the risk of posing no substantial threat to the status quo in underscoring merely one dimension of resistance to the detriment of the other. My overarching goal has been to reconstruct a hermeneutic of resistance that foregrounds the agency of the dominated, thereby opening the door for suffering readers to carve out their own future in defiance of the interpretations that leave the oppressed at the mercy of the oppressors.

After arguing that Revelation can be read as endorsing ideological resistance through the imagination of a reversal of fortune and a conscientized prayer that calls for apocalyptic justice, I have explored the hypothesis that John employs a wide variety of resistance strategies that come short of endorsing violence but strike a dialectical balance between passive endurance and active resistance. The Apocalypse is to be read as a challenge to the oppressed to not only passively endure but also actively counter oppression in consideration of their socioreligious contexts. In particular, I have raised the possibility that the Apocalypse envisions, though in ambiguous terms, Christians taking part in the

²²⁵ Boring, *Revelation*, 188-89. John's apocalyptic theology may not be shared with modern Christians, who may be inclined to resort to force in the effort to establish justice, although such efforts must be examined against the message of the Bible, including the Apocalypse (Ibid.).

²²⁶ Ibid., 188.

eschatological holy war. Resistance is no longer to be considered a herculean task requiring either martyrdom or apostasy, to the degree that failing to be a martyr does not necessarily mean becoming an apostate. The Synoptic Gospels represent Jesus as engaging in all of the varieties of popular political resistance outlined by Scott, even to the point of daring to confront the Jerusalem rulers in the courtyard of the temple, but in the area between quiescence and active peasant revolt.²²⁷ It has been demonstrated, however, that violence is taken more seriously, though expressed in ambiguous terms, in Revelation than in the Gospels.

I have read the Apocalypse as deterring the reader from pursuing assertive resistance, either in military (13.10) or economic terms (13.16-17), when the beast is allowed to hold absolute sway at a certain point in time within the apocalyptic framework. Beyond that turning point, the Apocalypse recommends assertive resistance tactics as informed by the apocalyptic belief that God's imminent judgment of the wicked means the crumbling of the power structures that have prevented active resistance. The concern of the Apocalypse with achieving retributive justice via active modes of resistance is inspired by the critical awareness that the readers are experiencing unwarranted dire suffering under colonialism/imperialism. The ambiguous character of resistance between passive endurance and active resistance has been analyzed as being related to the ambivalent imagery of Jesus between the Lamb and the Lion.

I have also argued that John criticizes his rivals within the churches, because they are threatening not so much his authority as the hidden transcript that is being cultivated among suffering Christians. Finally, this chapter has suggested that the Apocalypse entertains the oppressed reader by caricaturing the antagonist and making fun of the Nero *redivivus* legend. This accounts satisfactorily for some theological difficulties implicit in John's mythical language. It should be clear by now that the Apocalypse alludes to a range of resistance transcripts, hidden or public, through which the downtrodden can undermine oppression. Among other resistance tactics, Revelation 18 foregrounds economic resistance in tandem with Rome's economic sins, both of which contribute to its downfall. This is the topic of the next chapter.

²²⁷ Horsley, "Leaves from the Notebook of James C. Scott," 22.

CHAPTER IV

ECONOMIC RESISTANCE IN REVELATION 18

Over against the reading that the Apocalypse nowhere encourages the followers of the Lamb to fight evil powers on their own terms, i.e., in terms of socio-political activism,¹ I attempted in the previous chapter to reclaim this book as resistance literature, endorsing a spectrum of activist tactics in both religious and nonreligious realms. Read from a cultural studies perspective, the Apocalypse is embedded with resistance tactics that popular culture can retrieve in the interest of the subaltern. Among a variety of nonreligious methods of resistance deployed by the Apocalypse, this chapter foregrounds economic resistance.

The economic language of the Apocalypse has not gone unnoticed. For example, J. Nelson Kraybill presents a thorough analysis of the economy of the Roman Empire and tries to look at the Apocalypse in the light of Rome's economics. While providing valuable information on the way in which the Apocalypse can be read in close link with the economics of the empire, Kraybill seems to underestimate the economic sufferings of Christians when he assumes that only a few Christians in Asia Minor were in trouble, while the majority were functioning well in society.² His reading also shows that a socioeconomic analysis of the Apocalypse does not always explore the theme of economic resistance. Whilst the Apocalypse discourages Christians from engaging in Roman commerce, what is recommended in response to social injustice, he argues, is patient endurance, because the collapse of Rome is utterly God's doing.³ Though admitting that the Apocalypse warns against economic compromise (3.17) and endorses economic endurance (13.16-17), my socioeconomic reading hypothesizes that it also envisions more active economic resistance in chapter

¹ Eller, "How the Kings of the Earth Land in the New Jerusalem," 23.

² J. Nelson Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce in John's Apocalypse* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 32.

³ *Ibid.*, 201.

18. In creating a hermeneutic of economic resistance, the present chapter problematizes the possibility that previous readings of the Apocalypse inflect the economic substructure of its apocalyptic symbols from a colonial point of view.

Revelation's economic resistance takes center stage in chapter 18, where John's apocalyptic prophecy reaches its climax: Rome collapses primarily due to the grave consequences of its economic oppression. Apart from the fact that Revelation 18 is primarily written in economic language, the legitimacy of employing a socioeconomic perspective for its interpretation lies in two facts. Diachronically, on the one hand, while economics is indeed an essential dimension of cultural production throughout history, its importance comes to the fore in the interpretation of Revelation because it was written to undermine the Roman state, known for economic exploitation. Synchronically, on the other hand, a socioeconomic perspective is all the more pertinent to real readers living in the age of globalization, because the world has seen, since the 20th century, a shift in the hegemony of the Northern Hemisphere over the Southern Hemisphere from the sociopolitical to the socioeconomic realm. This ulterior yet firm socioeconomic grip on the part of the West calls on the postcolonial critic to pay attention to its economic as well as political agenda. My overriding concern here is the way in which a socioeconomic reading of Revelation 18 can shed light on the ongoing subjugation of the (ex-)colonized to modern empires by way of neocolonialism. To that end, this chapter will carry out a literary analysis of Revelation 18 with a view to showing that economic resistance is an indispensable element of counter-discourse against imperial ideology.

Previous Interpretations of Revelation 18

Symbolic interpretations of Revelation 18 dilute the economic significance of Rome's economic sins by taking them to signify religious sins, while literal interpretations highlight the existential consequences of Rome's economic crimes. That the hermeneutical tension between literal and symbolic interpretations is a longstanding one is shown by a comment made by the church father Primasius on 18.3: "Merchants are enriched, as it says, by avarice, although some [interpreters] prefer to interpret this to mean

that they are rich in sins rather than in wealth.”⁴ The term “fornication” of the same verse is interpreted by Oecumenius as referring to insatiable greed and love of money: while all nations have been placed in subjection and commanded to pay tribute, the kings are partners with the city in its love of money and the merchants enriched traders in it.⁵ Andrew of Caesarea criticizes Babylon for consumption well beyond its needs and for being careless regarding those in need.⁶ In contrast, Caesarius of Arles takes the term “kings” to refer to those who persecute the church of God,⁷ while interpreting their “fornication” to mean corrupting each other—not preying on others—by a sinful manner of life;⁸ he also takes the enrichment of the merchants from the city (18.15) as referring to the abundance of their sins.⁹

Symbolic Interpretations

In my view, many scholars overly sacralize John’s economic language in chapter 18. If Revelation’s canonical justification for the cosmic and historical context of divine activity was subordinated in mainstream Christian doctrine to the concern for the individual soul,¹⁰ such a move may be seen as coming to a head in the spiritualist interpretation of Revelation 18. Faced with the devotion by this chapter of considerable—disproportionate to the other chapters—space to the economic relations between Rome and its subjects, some spiritualists simply disregard such presence by calling into question the authenticity of the text as we have it. Others foreground the religious meanings of Revelation 18 by overemphasizing its dependence on HB antecedents. For the same purpose, still others downplay the historicity of the chapter in favor of general meanings.

⁴ William C. Weinrich, ed., *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament XII, Revelation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005), 287.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 287.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 288.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 287.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 288.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 293.

¹⁰ Rowland, “Hope, Resistance, and the Revelation of Reality,” 141.

Source Criticism

The extraordinarily materialistic tone of Revelation 18 is often explained away by recourse to source criticism.¹¹ Charles, for instance, ignores the privileged status of the merchants as a reason why God destroys Rome: “for your merchants were the magnates of the earth” (18.23c). The clause itself is meaningless in its present context, he argues, because “there is no ground for saying that God destroyed Rome because its merchants were the great ones of the earth.” The real reason must be the one given in the next clause, i.e., the universal martyrdom of the Christian church: “And all nations were deceived by your sorcery. And in you was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slaughtered on earth.”¹² To account for the presence of 18.23c, Charles moves the clause immediately after “the merchants of the earth” of 18.11 as a mere descriptor of the merchants, thus making it analogous to the descriptive clause added in 18.9 after the phrase “the kings of the earth.”¹³

However, recent scholars have successfully shown that one need not adopt a source critical approach to make sense of the Apocalypse as it stands. Besides, the contention that economic sins do not incur divine judgment simply draws on the theological presupposition that religious sins are even more serious than economic ones. One could argue that John views Rome’s economic crimes as implied in 18.23c as a no less important reason for its divine judgment than its religious sins, as indicated in the following clauses.

Typological Interpretation

Overemphasis on the Jewish tradition behind the Apocalypse often brings into relief the religious

¹¹ Charles proposes that John in chapter 18 has used a Greek translation of a Hebrew source, which oracle in the time of Vespasian dealt with the destruction of Rome; this Jewish oracle then has been adapted by the author to the new context by such additions as 18.20 (esp. the “apostles”), the last clause of 18.23, and 18.24, which should be read in this order (Charles, 2: 87-88). For his arguments, see *Ibid.*, 88-95. However, these arguments simply suggest that Revelation 18 was not composed at the same time as the rest of the book, failing to demonstrate that the author has incorporated a document he has not written into the larger composition (Aune, *Revelation*, 3: 984). As Beale points out, Charles’ interpretation “is based on a literalistic chronology of the Apocalypse, which is insensitive to a cyclic view of the book’s structure” (Beale, *Commentary on the Greek Text*, 897).

¹² Charles, 2: 112-13.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 112.

element to the detriment of the econopolitical. For example, Iain Provan, an OT scholar, highlights the dependence of Revelation 18 on the OT, especially Ezekiel 27, and in so doing rejects the historical-critical reading of the chapter.¹⁴ It is not life under Roman dominion or particular events thereof but the texts of the OT that have shaped the worldview, beliefs, and language of Revelation 18.¹⁵ In other words, the key to understanding the picture of the great city in the Apocalypse is not history but typology.¹⁶ It is extremely difficult to identify particular enemies in the language of Revelation because its intrabiblical sources already have a suprahistorical, stereotypical, and apocalyptic quality that has transcended particularity.¹⁷ What matters are the generalities, rather than the particularities, of the whole book as well as the chapter.¹⁸

Consequently, Rome's spiritual sins are highlighted. John's criticism is about the religious hubris of world powers, one aspect of which is to arrogate to themselves the prerogative of divinity to provide prosperity and good for the peoples of the empire, as illustrated by the OT examples.¹⁹ Insofar as the OT is concerned, economics constitute merely one aspect of idolatry, and economic descriptions are not important in themselves but for what they signify, i.e., what they say about idolatry.²⁰

Surprisingly enough, it is further argued that Revelation 18 does not speak of economic exploitation at all. There is no hint in the passage that Rome enjoys an extravagant lifestyle at the expense of her clients, but there is "much evidence that the clients have been more than happy with the exchange of goods."²¹ Provan tries to undermine Bauckham's argument that John accuses Rome of economic exploitation under

¹⁴ Austin Farrer similarly considers the speech of 18.4-20 to be a mere patchwork: "It is nothing but a cento of ancient prophecies, carefully selected and arranged" (Farrer, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1964], 189).

¹⁵ Iain Provan, "Foul Spirits, Fornication and Finance: Revelation 18 from an Old Testament Perspective," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 64 (1996): 98.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 99.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 96. Yet, Provan considers compelling the view that Babylon refers to Jerusalem rather than Rome (*Ibid.*, 92-96).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 100.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 88-89.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 89. Even the significance of the sea in Revelation 18 does not lie in the historical maritime trade in which Rome was involved, but in the negative connotations of the sea in general in the OT, including the watery chaos as the archetypal enemy of Yahweh (*Ibid.*, 90-91).

²¹ *Ibid.*, 87. The empire, especially under Domitian, was beneficial to both rich and poor provincials (*Ibid.*, 97). The crisis theme is a characteristic of the genre of the book, and tells us nothing about the social and political situation of the author's time, because there is no evidence for there being any political unrest, widespread class conflict or economic crisis in the cities of Asia (*Ibid.*, 97).

the veil of the *Pax Romana*, which reflects the contemporary situation. Such cargoes as wheat, cattle, and sheep in the trade list of 18.12-13 are far from being attacked by Roman writers as extravagances, and only 13 out of the 28 cargoes occur in Pliny's list of the most costly products of nature (*Natural History*, 37.204).²²

First of all, it seems to me that typology would be invoked only when contemporary historical conditions are viewed as analogous to literary antecedents. If the social circumstances behind the Apocalypse had been much more favorable than those behind Ezekiel, original readers would not have been convinced of any typological connections between them; they would have felt, rather, that the author was disconnected from the reality of their lives. Moreover, in the case of the Apocalypse as well as Ezekiel, economic crimes would be associated with religious sins only if the former were seen as real and serious enough to be associated with the latter. If Babylon's economic activities are ethically permissible, how can the reader be expected to understand them as referring to spiritual sins?

Further, the author of Revelation is reduced to a mere transcriber, if "he intends to direct us to Ezekiel 27 itself—not so much to comment on his contemporary situation as to say to his readers 'read Ezekiel if you wish to understand what I am saying here.'"²³ Revelation 18 becomes a mere appendix to Ezekiel 27. Emphasis on interbiblical reference must not overlook the possibility that the author not only depends on but also appropriates typological antecedents for a new socioreligious context. The same apocalyptic *topoi* may take on a new significance depending on where the author stands. Revelation 18 mirrors the social situation of Asia Minor in John's time, even though much of its wording reflects Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel.²⁴

Provan's claim that economic sins in the HB are just one aspect of idolatry is far from conclusive.

²² Ibid., 86.

²³ Ibid., 87. Provan's overemphasis on interbiblical dependence leads him to link the "chariots" in 18.13, which is not present in Ezekiel's list, with 1 Kgs 4.26, where there is mention of Solomon's many horses and chariots (Ibid., 87-88). He comments that of all the royal figures of the OT Solomon is the one most associated with trade with Tyre, which trade is the subject of Ezek 27.12-24, and that Solomon is also a king very much associated with slaves (Ibid., 88).

²⁴ Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 123.

There are not a few economic laws in the HB that show concern for both economic life and economic justice. One has only to look at how HB prophets such as Amos condemn Israel's socioeconomic sins. It is doubtful that economic sins as depicted in Ezekiel 27 refer to religious hubris. Martin Alonso Corral argues that the two oracles in Ezek 28.1-19, which judge Tyre's commercial success as driven by arrogance and haughtiness, confirm the fact that economic motivations were the predominant reasons for the entire series of oracles.²⁵

A number of further comments are in order. Concerning the assertion that Revelation 18 never indicates economic exploitation, it would be enough to point out that Provan's extremely optimistic view even questions Bauckham's reading that John intends a negative comment on the slave trade.²⁶ In addition, insofar as the dirges express the mourning of Babylon's friends, but not of the author or the readers,²⁷ Revelation 18 justifies Rome's downfall by sarcastically condemning the complacency of Rome and its clients over their economic profits, which mean economic losses on the part of the disinherited provincials. Lastly, apart from the possibility that Pliny's list may not be accurate data against which to validate John's list, the objection that not all goods of the cargo list are extravagances is persuasive only on the assumption that John is exclusively interested in sumptuous items. Such inexpensive items as wheat and oil are also representative of Rome's expensive imports, because they were imported in vast quantities.²⁸ Perhaps the

²⁵ Martin Alonso Corral, *Ezekiel's Oracles Against Tyre: Historical Reality and Motivations*, Biblica et Orientalia (Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2002), 156.

²⁶ Provan, "Foul Spirits, Fornication and Finance," 87. His words imply that human beings should not be bought and sold, though he does not directly denounce slavery (Yarbro Collins, *Apocalypse*, 128); Henry Barclay Swete, *Commentary on Revelation* (1911; reprint, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1977), 235; Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 330.

²⁷ Adela Yarbro Collins, "Revelation 18: Taunt-Song or Dirge?" in *L'Apocalypse johannique et l'Apocalyptique dans le Nouveau Testament*, ed. J. Lambrecht (Louvain: Leuven University Press, 1980), 203. Whereas, from the perspective of the speakers, the dirges are real, expressing genuine distress on the part of Rome's friends (Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 118), from the perspective of the author, the dirges announce judgment on an enemy and thus take on a paradoxical or ironic character (Ibid., 120-21). The chosen images for Rome in chapters 17-18 and the reasons given for its demise support the conclusion that the dirges express no sympathy or regret on the part of the author (Ibid., 124).

²⁸ Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 366. It may be noted that fortunes under the Flavians were made from the transportation of grain, which was the major cargo carried by sea (Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 153). An immense import of grain from Africa, Egypt, and around the Black Sea produced grain shortages in the exporting provinces (Wes Howard-Brook and Anthony Gwyther, *Unveiling Empire* [Maryknoll: Orbis, 1999], 99). HB texts also witness how food shortages keep a nation low, because it is a central item of plunder (Mark Bredin, *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace: A Nonviolent Christology in the Book of Revelation* [Carlisle: Paternoster, 2003], 151).

transfer of inexpensive necessities means greater pain than the exploitation of conspicuous luxuries to the subaltern, who strive for nothing but sustenance.

Ahistorical Interpretation

Like Provan, Stephen Smalley suppresses the historicity of Revelation 18 to underscore its general and religious meanings, but without emphasizing interbiblical dependence. According to Smalley, Babylon typifies every secular and oppressive world system,²⁹ and all three groups of mourners are not historical figures but symbolic and eschatological characters that represent the single category of idolaters of any age who worship the beast.³⁰ The real problem presented by the threnodies is the failure of ungodly people throughout the ages to recognize the spiritual judgment and deprivation in store for them.³¹ In one word, Revelation 18 speaks of spiritual conflict and divine justice being exercised against the worldly powers which oppose God.³²

Predictably, Smalley fails to give due consideration to the economic sufferings that Rome may well have imposed on its exploited subjects, although he is not as favorable to Rome's economics as Provan. Even the cargo list of vv.12-13 is viewed as theological rather than historical in the sense that it reveals Rome's luxurious and therefore idolatrous style of living.³³ The wickedness of Rome's commercial system is not indicated by the trade goods, which are not evil in themselves, but by the injustice and inhumanity of slavery that concludes the list.³⁴ Relatedly, since Babylon is seen as representative of corrupt secular institutions in general, what is lamented over is the deprivation of status and power, rather than the loss of

²⁹ Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation to John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005), 465.

³⁰ Ibid., 457. Babylon's sins in 18.4, for instance, are primarily those of idolatry, for "compromise, leading to unfaithfulness and idolatry, is characteristic of the scarlet whore (see 17.1-6; 18.2-3)." This is supported by its background verse, Isa 52.11, where the Jewish exiles are charged to depart from Babylon and to touch nothing "unclean," which refers to Babylon's idols, and which implies Rome's idolatry in Rev 18.2 (Ibid., 446).

³¹ Ibid., 451.

³² Ibid., 466.

³³ Ibid., 454.

³⁴ Ibid. All in the catalogue of 18.11-13 is good and precious in itself, but there is a sting in the tail, i.e., the slave-trade that reveals the mark of the beast in the whole set-up (J. P. M. Sweet, *Revelation* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979], 271).

trade, on the part of all three groups of mourners.³⁵ What is condemned is not so much economic prosperity in itself as the wrong use of power and status conferred by it.³⁶

I find less convincing the idea that Rome's economic sins are either cancelled out or overridden by its alleged religious sins. Again, it is far from obvious how luxurious life-style symbolizes or presupposes idolatry, if wealth accumulation *per se* is not condemned as an economic sin. An association between economic and religious sins is possible only when Rome is accusable of economic as well as religious sins.

Indeed, the wickedness of Rome's commercial system is indicated by the trade goods as well as slavery, for the cargo list is too lengthy and specific to be a mere symbol of spiritual sins. Seen from below, the list of goods is historical rather than theological, to the extent that it is nothing but a reference to the pain that the plunder of merchandise as well as human lives causes on the dispossessed. Not only is Revelation 18 not ultimately concerned with a right use of power, insofar as the chapter accuses Rome of its economic vices, but also such a sharp distinction between political and economic power is meaningless to the author, as indicated by the depiction of the kings as beneficiaries of economic exploitation (18.9). The political and the economic merge in John's accusation against Rome, as will be discussed later in analyzing 18.23c.

Evaluation of Symbolic Interpretations

It bears repeating that Rome's economic sins can be associated with spiritual sins only when the former remind the reader of Rome's actual vices. Instead of slighting Rome's economic sins so as to foreground its alleged spiritual sins, I maintain that the latter presuppose the former. I would claim that just as interbiblical dependence is made possible by analogous socioreligious conditions between the times of biblical writers, so is a transhistorical appropriation of the text feasible when there are similar socioreligious conditions between the times of writing and reading.

³⁵ Smalley, *Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse*, 451. The traders, like the kings, have lost power and status which are derived from their trade and wealth (Ibid., 458).

³⁶ Ibid., 466. In the final analysis, the Apocalypse is all about the right and wrong way to use power (Ibid., 458).

Besides, spiritualist interpretations are based on the reductionist approach that the Bible is essentially about the spiritual rather than the material. Established biblical studies, Horsley notes, tends to reduce Jesus and Paul to their religious dimension as a result of the Western separation of church from state, of religion from politics and economics.³⁷ I think that the same criticism applies to Apocalypse Studies, as illustrated by the above-mentioned readings of Revelation 18. Bauckham correctly comments on the reasons why exegetes are not interested in the details of the cargo list John so deliberately provides: the preference for theology over concrete history and the failure to recognize the contextualized nature of the prophetic message.³⁸ In distilling religious associations from John's socioeconomic language, with little or no consideration of the underlying context in which he was positioned, spiritualists deny the essential relationship between the spiritual and the material. It is ironic that spiritualists often draw on the historical-critical method in taking a positive view of Rome's economics, while they suppress the historicity of the chapter to derive religious connotations.

In my view, theological meanings, if any, are better deemed *inherent in*, rather than extracted from, social issues. For example, as a symbol of imperial power and cult, Babylon/Rome represents the *incarnation* of international exploitation, oppression, and murder.³⁹ The Apocalypse insists that the primeval forces of evil are *embodied* in particular institutions.⁴⁰ Provan himself admits, though *en passant*, that "universals are inevitably particularized by each generation that takes its ancient scriptures seriously."⁴¹ This is possible only when the original particularities of the ancient text are taken seriously. Historical meanings and suprahistorical connotations are not so much mutually exclusive as complementary.

Suprahistorical readings also give short shrift to the historical conditions of later readers, for they intrinsically decontextualize meanings. In spiritualizing the economic aspects of life of later readers, spiritual readings discourage real readers who want to engage Revelation 18 in search of solutions to their

³⁷ Horsley, "Leaves from the Notebook of James C. Scott," 20-21.

³⁸ Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 351.

³⁹ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 7.

⁴⁰ Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 173.

⁴¹ Provan, "Foul Spirits, Fornication and Finance," 99.

contextual problems. For those readers for whom social justice is of great interest, spiritual readings can be a façade for oppressive readings, insofar as they do not problematize social issues and in so doing help to maintain the status quo. Unhistoricized and decontextualized theological propositions are necessarily ideological in the sense that they do not take issue with the way things are, thereby reflecting the ideology of the complacent. It is exactly this ideological compromise that the present chapter endeavors to reveal and refute by reclaiming John's socioeconomic language in Revelation 18. As I read it, Revelation 18 constructs a new ideological rhetoric from the perspective of the disinherited, illustrating the way in which common people can react to official culture, which is an important theme in cultural studies.

Along the lines of Berger, I noted in the previous chapter that the essence of alienation in biblical interpretation lies in the imposition of a fictitious inexorability on a culturally constructed interpretation. When economic alienation, which is attacked in the Apocalypse, ends up becoming hermeneutic alienation, which marginalizes the voices of suffering readers, hermeneutic de-alienation entails giving them back the right to externalize and objectivate their own economic concerns.

Economic Interpretations⁴²

As I read it, economic suffering and resistance are the major rhetorical motivation of Revelation 18. Rome comes under harsh criticism mainly because of its economic sins. Though admitting that Rome's religious sins are not the only reason for its downfall as depicted in Revelation 18, scholars disagree as to the extent to which Rome's economic vices account for its collapse. Some deny Revelation 18 any references to Rome's economic exploitation. Others who find in the chapter John's critique of Rome's economic exploitation are divided between those who foreground Rome's idolatrous confidence in its economic security, those who juxtapose Rome's religious and econopolitical sins, and those who look on its economic sins as the main reason for its punishment.

⁴² Apocalyptic concern with economic issues is found, for example, in 1 Enoch which emphasizes economic exploitations as well as sociopolitical crimes, and in so doing shows Jews' staunch opposition not only to Greek and Roman imperialism, but also to Jewish aristocracy itself (Isaac, "1 [Ethiopic Apocalypse] of Enoch," 9).

David Aune

Aune is aware of the materialistic features of Revelation 18. For example, the metaphor of fornication in 18.3 is not so much applied to Rome's lapses into idolatry, which would make sense on the basis of the marriage relationship between Yahweh and Babylon, as to the commercial trade of the city.⁴³ John also "defly conveys the profound materialism of Rome/Babylon" using a rhetorical device called *polysyndeton* in 18.12-13, which links all luxurious trade goods consumed by Rome/Babylon with the conjunctive particle *καί*.⁴⁴

Yet, the very list of luxury trade goods of 18.12-13, to which Aune ascribes materialistic features of Rome, is regarded as a mere *preface* to the lament of the merchants and therefore a later excursus inserted into an earlier text meant to underscore their extravagant wealth.⁴⁵ Besides, Aune sees no obvious relationship between the mention of 18.23c that the merchants of Babylon were the power brokers of the world and its context.⁴⁶ While admitting that 18.23c condemns Rome for its exploitative economic domination of the Mediterranean world,⁴⁷ strangely enough Aune still follows Provan in believing that the issue of economic exploitation is not at all dealt with in Revelation 18; further, he argues, there is no hint of such an economic reversal as is found in Jewish apocalyptic writings (*Sib. Or.* 3.531-32, 657, 750, 783; *2 Apoc. Bar.* 70:4).⁴⁸ Aune's reading of Revelation 18 would be most annoying to a postcolonial optic when

⁴³ Aune, *Revelation*, 3: 988. Aune (Ibid.) follows K. G. Kuhn's view that the harlotry in Isa 23.15ff and Nah 3.4 denotes the trading activity of the city; this also relates to the whore Babylon in Revelation 17 (cf. 18:11-19) (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964], 1: 515 n. 11).

⁴⁴ Aune, *Revelation*, 3: 981.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 998. Although Aune does not follow Charles' source criticism, he contends that "there are numerous aporias and other compositional features in Revelation 18 that suggest the author has incorporated an existing text into the larger context of 17:1-19:10" (Ibid., 984). Interestingly, 18.20 and 24 are also considered later additions by the author-editor as an attempt to connect this chapter with other themes in Revelation, because these verses are the only explicitly Christian feature in the chapter (Ibid.): 18.20 is an abrupt interjection that does not fit the lament of the seafarers (Ibid., 1006-07); that 18.24 is a redaction is indicated by the change of person from the second to the third, and by the motif of martyrdom, which is not alluded to until this concluding verse (Ibid., 1011). Hence, "the earliest textual unit underlying Revelation 18 in its present form consisted of (1) the summons to flight (vv 4-8), (2) the three songs of lament (vv 9-11, 15, 17-19), and (3) the symbolic destruction of Babylon (vv 21-23)" (Ibid., 984). For further argumentation concerning 18.1-3, 14, 16, see Ibid., 984.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 984.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 1010.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 990.

he says that “the economic infrastructure of the Roman world was the primary reason for the prosperity of much of the Mediterranean world, particularly Roman Asia.”⁴⁹

As noted earlier, the text of Revelation requires no redaction, whether by the author or an editor. If one grants that John was aware of Rome’s economic exploitation, then the *lengthy* list of goods serves better as concrete examples of how Rome was exploiting its subjects than as a preface to the lament of the merchants. More importantly, in denying Rome’s serious economic exploitation, Aune has to fly in the face of the much harsher assessment of the Roman Empire among scholars of ancient economy. Romans as well as Greeks, argues M. I. Finley, “tended to pursue wealth through legal and political channels rather than through what we would call economic avenues . . . ancient cities were consumer rather than producer cities, exploiting the countryside through taxes, tribute, and rent rather than by selling urban goods to rural consumers.”⁵⁰ Whilst the rich few, point out Peter Garnsey and Richard Saller, became richer in the first and second century, “for subsistence farmers the margin of surplus production was narrow and was largely siphoned off by the imperial authorities and city-based landlords in taxes and rents.”⁵¹ Further, over against Aune’s very positive view of the economic infrastructure of the Roman world, they argue that there was little significant development during the Principate in the infrastructure of trade, in technology and commercial institutions.⁵² We may sometimes too easily forget that the stability and prosperity of this vast Mediterranean superstate rested squarely on the reluctant backs of sweating peasants.⁵³ It seems to me that the belief that empire can operate without economic exploitation is merely a naïve, unrealistic interpretation of the fragmented realities of imperialism.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 1010.

⁵⁰ Ian Morris, foreword to *The Ancient Economy*, by M. I. Finley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), xxii-xxiii. “Greeks and Romans imagined ‘the economic’ as a dimension of status relations rather than as a separate sphere of life” (Ibid., xxx).

⁵¹ Peter Garnsey and Richard Saller, *The Roman Empire: Economy, Society, and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 51.

⁵² Ibid., 53. In a word, the Roman economy was underdeveloped (Ibid., 43).

⁵³ Kelly, *Roman Empire*, 113.

Adela Yarbro Collins

According to Yarbro Collins, the Apocalypse views wealth primarily from a sociopolitical perspective.⁵⁴ Not only does John see the theme of wealth as an occasion for Rome's punishment, but the notion of exploitation is an important feature of Rome's economic judgment. The theme of wealth and luxury dominates in Revelation 18, which contains a lengthy list of goods in 18.12-13, most of which are luxury items for only the rich.⁵⁵ Both 18.3 and 18.23 explain that the merchants' wealth is one of the reasons for the judgment of Babylon.⁵⁶ The reason why John sees wealth as one of Rome's faults is because its leaders and allies possess it at the expense of others.⁵⁷ Yarbro Collins sees the unwilling sacrifice of many amidst the splendor of Rome.⁵⁸ She also notes that the extremely negative portrayal of Rome is occasioned by personal experience of a wide gap between rich and poor in the province of Asia which automatically marginalized scrupulous Christians.⁵⁹

However, Yarbro Collins's socioeconomic interpretation of Revelation 18 is somewhat limited in that she foregrounds the sin of arrogance rather than wealth accumulation. That John does not view wealth as evil in itself is indicated by the impressively luxurious and splendid depiction of the New Jerusalem⁶⁰ and by 5.12, which proclaims that the Lamb is worthy to receive power and wealth.⁶¹ A link between wealth and arrogance is implied by the criticism of the Laodicean church, which boasts of her richness (3.17), and by the similarity between Babylon in luxurious attire (17.4; 18.16) and her arrogant speech

⁵⁴ Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 122.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 133.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 122. Both fornication and intoxication (18.3a-b) are synonymous with the accumulation of wealth through trade by the merchants (18.3c) (Yarbro Collins, *Apocalypse*, 126-27).

⁵⁷ Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 134.

⁵⁸ Yarbro Collins, "Persecution and Vengeance," 747.

⁵⁹ Yarbro Collins, "Revelation 18: Taunt-Song or Dirge?," 203. The other reason for such an antagonism against Rome is Roman repression of Jews and Christians, especially the Jewish War of 66-72 C.E. and Nero's execution of Christians in 64 C.E. (*Ibid.*).

⁶⁰ Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 134.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 158. Many scholars take this path. John's admiration for Rome's magnificence echoes Ezekiel's for Tyre, although neither was dazzled (Sweet, *Revelation*, 271); not everything about Babylon is evil but all that is good and valuable will be redeemed in the holy city (21.24-26), and there is some genuine pathos (18.21-23) and admiration (17:6-7) for the great city (Boring, *Revelation*, 188); John does not condemn the civilized world or the commodities of Rome's luxury trade, but with infinite pathos surveys the loss of such wealth, which was misused by the great whore to seduce mankind into utter materialism and will find its proper place in the new Jerusalem (21.26) (Caird, *Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine*, 227).

(18.7-8).⁶² It is arrogance, not wanton luxury itself, that is the most salient crime of Rome. According to Yarbro Collins, Rome's "claim of *aeternitas*, the illusory belief that her prosperity and power would endure forever" is the first crucial sin, which amounts to blasphemy, revolt against God (18.7); after this false sense of security comes the second sin, i.e., the violence done to all who have been slain on earth as well as Christians (v. 24).⁶³ In the meantime, wealth is ambiguous:

Rome is condemned primarily for hubris and murder. The theme of wealth or luxury is also present, but in an ambiguous way. Great wealth evokes both fascination and repulsion. The call, *Come out of her, my people*, implies that at least some of the earliest readers had a share in Roman prosperity. The mourning scenes (vss.9-19) express at least awe and possibly some sorrow at Rome's downfall. The lists of fine wares are so detailed that they imply a certain admiration for the quality and quantity of Roman trade.⁶⁴

John thus does not condemn civilization as such; rather, he calls for an appreciation of the transience of life, the limits of wealth and power.⁶⁵ Yarbro Collins further suggests that the Apocalypse implies the idealization of poverty, which has its origin in the aggressive feeling of envy, and that John presents the possession of riches in the present as evil in order to control the feeling of envy.⁶⁶

One could indeed claim that Rome is condemned for its economic exploitation and at the same time that Rome's primary sin is its arrogant belief in its wealth and power. Yet, the association of wealth with arrogance does not necessarily mean that the latter is a more serious sin than the former. Revelation 18 may inveigh against the richness itself of imperial Rome no less harshly than against the Romans' economic arrogance. It is also possible that John condemns Rome's extravagant riches derived from its exploitive economy, regardless of whether it relies on them.

John's depiction of Rome's riches is negative rather than ambiguous. Above all, they are all burned

⁶² Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 122.

⁶³ Yarbro Collins, *Apocalypse*, 127-28. She presents four reasons for Rome's punishment: (1) idolatrous and blasphemous worship, especially the emperor cult; (2) violence, especially against Jews and Christians; (3) blasphemous self-glorification; and (4) wealth ("Revelation 18: Taunt-Song or Dirge?," 203). While Babylon is judged not only because it refused to acknowledge God's sovereignty (18.7), but also because it contributed to the economic privation of both faithful saints and others (18.20, 24), the central reason for the punishment of Babylon and its associates is their idolatrous trust in the security of wealth (Beale, *Commentary on the Greek Text*, 891, 908).

⁶⁴ Yarbro Collins, *Apocalypse*, 129.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 129.

⁶⁶ Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 158.

and thrown down into the sea,⁶⁷ and this total destruction is an occasion for celebration (18.20). As noted earlier, Yarbro Collins concedes that the mourning of Babylon's allies is not shared by the author or the readers. The sympathetic awe or pathos evoked by the dirges, if any, is intended by the author for dramatic effect.⁶⁸ Granted that the notion of exploitation is inherent in Revelation, the detailed lists of fine wares should be taken to imply a satirical critique of Rome's illegal gains, bemoaned by its associates. The idealization of poverty, if any, has nothing to do with envy, for wealth as such is not coveted but condemned, and with reason. As noted in chapter 1, John's positive view of wealth must be limited to heavenly wealth, the new meaning of which John explores in terms of common-wealth vis-à-vis earthly wealth as a means and result of oppression.

Richard Bauckham, Schüssler Fiorenza, and Grant Osborne

Bauckham gives one of the most thoroughgoing expositions of Revelation 18 from an economic point of view. Bauckham points out that, while Revelation's condemnation of Rome's economic exploitation of her empire is the most unusual aspect of its opposition to Rome, in comparison with other Jewish and Christian apocalyptic attacks on Rome,⁶⁹ the economic element in God's judgment of Rome has received the least attention in previous scholarship.⁷⁰ Bauckham finds a correlation between Rome's econopolitical and religious sins. Rome's economic affluence, idolatrous self-deification, and military and political brutality are interconnected.⁷¹ Roman civilization as a corrupting influence is founded on the imperial, especially military, power of political Rome, which relation is symbolized by the great harlot

⁶⁷ Based on the repetition of "from you" in 18.14, Rossing argues that Babylon's luxury and splendor are not permanently sunk into the sea or burned up, but are taken away from it to be given to someone else, such as the bride of 19.8 (Barbara R. Rossing, *Choice between Two Cities: Whore, Bride, and Empire in the Apocalypse* [Harrisburg: Trinity, 1999], 132). A redistribution of the accumulated wealth of Tyre after its desolation is indicated in Isa 23.18, which dedicates that wealth to those who live in the presence of Lord (Howard-Brook and Gwyther, *Unveiling Empire*, 171). However, the Apocalypse has no parallel to Isa 23.18. Besides, Rome's splendors and radiance, along with the city, are never to be found again (18.14, 21) and the "material" of the New Jerusalem does not come from the old metropolis, but comes down out of heaven from God (21.2).

⁶⁸ Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 123.

⁶⁹ Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 338.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 350.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 349.

sitting on the beast (17.3).⁷² John's use of these two images of Roman power—the beast and the harlot—is assisted by a feature of the state religion which deifies the power of the state.⁷³

Rome is condemned not only for the imperial cult and the persecution of Christians, but also for her economic crimes, which are very prominent in chapter 18. Rome is desolated because of her killing of the innocent in general, including the Christian martyrs (18.24), her idolatrous arrogance (18.8), and her self-indulgent luxury at the expense of her empire (18.7).⁷⁴ In particular, a detailed exposition on the list of cargoes (18.12-13) leads Bauckham to the conclusion that “the wealth Rome squanders on luxuries from all over the world was obtained by conquest, plunder and taxation of the provinces. Rome lives well at her subjects' expense,” although some of her subjects also benefitted from trade with Rome.⁷⁵ Revelation 18 in this regard voices the protest of the exploited as well as the persecuted.⁷⁶ Significantly, Bauckham adds that “the evils of Rome came to a head in her persecution of Christians, because here Rome's self-deification clashed with the lordship of the Lamb . . . what was implicit in all of Rome's imperial policies here became explicit.”⁷⁷

Schüssler Fiorenza likewise takes seriously the theme of economic exploitation in her reading of Revelation 18. This chapter is not to be read as a sign of life's transience⁷⁸ but as reflecting John's attitude toward the rich and the poor:

The author of Revelation sides with the poor and oppressed majority. He not only sharply criticizes the community of Laodicea, which boasts of its riches, but he also repeatedly announces judgment and destruction for the world's rich and powerful (6:12-17; 17:4; 18:3, 15-19, 23). Conversely, the two communities of Smyrna and Philadelphia, which are poor and lacking in power, receive no prophetic censure.⁷⁹

Similar to Bauckham, Schüssler Fiorenza also interprets Revelation 18 as divine vindication of the poor

⁷² Ibid., 343. Since Isa 23.15-18 uses the image of the harlot for Tyre, which was the greatest trading center of the HB period, the primary significance of John's portrayal of Rome as the great harlot should be economic. Tyre is compared to a prostitute because it is economically associated with other nations for the sake of profit (Ibid., 346). On the other hand, Rome is the heir of Babylon in political and religious activity (Ibid.).

⁷³ Ibid., 343.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 349-50.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 370.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 378.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 349-50; Martin Kiddle, *The Revelation of St. John* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1940), 374.

⁷⁸ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Invitation to the Book of Revelation*, 172.

⁷⁹ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Vision of a Just World*, 100.

and powerless, who are oppressed by the unholy union between economics, politics, and religion. Rome's economic exploitation and retaliation forced people to participate in the imperial cult that maintained Rome's political domination.⁸⁰

In a "class-action suit" that takes place in the universal courtroom of 15.5-19.10, God the judge acknowledges the legal complaints filed by the saints against Babylon/Rome on the charge of exploitation and murder in the interest of power and idolatry.⁸¹ The lament of Rome's allies is read against the contemporary economic reality that only a small minority of the Asian cities were reaping the benefits from the international commerce of the Roman Empire, while the great majority of the provincial population lived in dire poverty or slavery (18.13), especially due to a heavy burden of taxation.⁸² Meanwhile, the readers are called to come out of Rome's injustice, idolatry, and murder (18.4).⁸³

In like manner, Grant Osborne sees in Revelation 18 an attack against Rome's economic as well as religious sins. Babylon's πορνεία (18.3a) refers not merely to sexual immorality but also to religious apostasy, especially idolatry, and ἐπόρνευσαν of 18.3b is a symbol for religious apostasy.⁸⁴ In comparison, the sins of the merchants in 18.3c is that of materialistic luxury.⁸⁵ John's enumeration of Babylon's sins at the end of the chapter also speaks of the religious as well as the economic: the description of the merchants as the great men of the earth (18.23c) indicates economic tyranny (summing up all the emphases on wealth, luxury, and greed in the chapter),⁸⁶ whereas the crime of sorcery (18.23d) criticizes Babylon's deception of the nations into idolatry and immorality.⁸⁷

In a more explicit manner than other commentators, Osborne further argues that Revelation 18 is better interpreted in the light of centrality of economics in the chapter,⁸⁸ because "the overarching theme

⁸⁰ Ibid., 100.

⁸¹ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 7.

⁸² Schüssler Fiorenza, *Vision of a Just World*, 100.

⁸³ Ibid., 100.

⁸⁴ Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 637. Πορνεύσαντες of 18.9 also indicates both immorality and idolatry (Ibid., 645).

⁸⁵ Ibid., 637.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 658.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 658.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 657.

of this section is the judgment on Babylon/Rome for its economic oppression.”⁸⁹ As the exact opposite of holiness, a selfish greed breeds both sensuality and materialism (18.7).⁹⁰ The materialistic character of Rome’s judgment is demonstrated by the list of lucrative cargoes in 18.12-13.⁹¹ The fact that Rome depended on other provinces for the trade goods heightens the sense that the list reflects the Romans’ exploitation and plundering of other nations as well as their lust for consumer goods.⁹² As I see it, Osborne’s interpretation of Revelation 18 is most faithful to the materialist language of the chapter in that it treats John’s condemnation of Rome’s economic exploitation as the controlling theme.

For the most part, I find the arguments of Bauckham, Schüssler, and Osborne convincing. They do foreground Rome’s economic sins in one way or another. The fact that Revelation 18, unlike the rest of the book, is dominated by socioeconomic language invites a reading that highlights Rome’s economic sins as much as anything else. In two respects, however, they pay insufficient attention to the socioeconomic dimensions of Revelation 18 and thus fail to fully appropriate the chapter from the perspective of exploited readers.

First, they scarcely reconstruct from the text the muted voices of Rome’s oppressed. The possibility goes unnoticed that Revelation 18 involves not only a divine but also a human *perspective* on Rome’s economic sins. Second, they stop short of deriving from the text practical resistance strategies. The possibility goes unnoticed that Revelation 18 contains not only a divine but also a human *reaction* to Rome’s economic crimes. If, as cultural studies repeatedly contends, common people react to official culture, suffering readers may be able to disturb complacent readers by foregrounding the ways in which the unfortunate not only voice but also reduce their discontent, as illustrated in Revelation 18.

To sum up, I read Revelation 18 as both problematizing and solving Rome’s dysfunctional economic relations through the voice and agency of victims. The next section shows that Revelation 18 envisions conscientized readers making a contribution to the deconstruction of imperial economics.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 631.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 642. For example, ἐστρηνίασεν (18.7) is a term for both immoral and luxurious living (Ibid.).

⁹¹ Ibid., 647.

⁹² Ibid., 650. Asia Minor was a main source of wheat and slaves for Rome (Ibid.).

Suggested Interpretation of Revelation 18⁹³

This section argues for a socioeconomic interpretation of Revelation 18. The climactic judgment of Rome as depicted in this chapter deals with the theme of reversal and resistance, which I defined earlier as a crucial aspect of apocalypse as genre—primarily, if not exclusively, in economic terms. I will show that Revelation 18 condemns Rome’s economic exploitation of the provinces more than any other aspect of the empire.⁹⁴ Among other things, I will give a detailed analysis of the role that the suffering Christians are commanded to play as agents of economic punishment against Rome for its economic crimes (18.6-7) and of the submerged voice of resistance implied in the lament of the seafarers (18.17b-20).

Before exploring the significance of Revelation 18’s economic language, I want to pay attention to its structural focus on economic critique. Together with the fact that such language is prevalent in Revelation 18, the central position given to economic language shows that the condemnation of Rome’s imperial economy is the major concern of the chapter. In order to give the center stage of Revelation 18 to economic critique, the author places indictments of the merchants at both the beginning and the end of the chapter, with an adaptation of Ezekiel’s oracles against Tyre’s maritime trade at its center.⁹⁵ In addition,

⁹³ I agree with most critics that Babylon in Revelation 18 refers to Rome. It is still often argued that Babylon is a reference not to Rome but to Jerusalem. (Lupieri, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, 281-95; Malina and Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary*, 219-20). Then, Revelation 18 would deal with the economic corruption of the Jerusalem temple. A couple of observations suffice to contradict this assertion. The use of “Babylon” for Rome was too prevalent in the early church (Osborne, *Revelation*, 635 n. 2). Besides, the description of Revelation 18 about an economic power that controls the world does not fit the historical fact that the temple’s economic activities did not dominate the Mediterranean world in the first century or thereafter (Beale, *Commentary on the Greek Text*, 925). Relatedly, Babylon’s accountability for all the murdered on earth could not have been attributed to Jerusalem (Bredin, *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace*, 144), though Lupieri, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, 295, sees Rev 18.24 as a parallel to Jesus’s words in Matt 23.35, according to which the Jews will be liable for “all the righteous bloodshed on earth.”

⁹⁴ John’s failure to use military imagery may not be accidental in this regard. Rossing’s observation is noteworthy: despite its anticipation in 17.14-16, “Revelation skips over military steps such as construction of siegeworks, shooting of catapults and arrows, and the rally cries to war that characterize Jeremiah 50-51, a principal model for Revelation 18” (Rossing, *Choice between Two Cities*, 115). This departure from HB tradition, along with the absence of walls in Revelation 18, focuses its attack not on Babylon’s architectural layout but on its trade and alliances (Ibid., 116). Yet, Wilfrid J. Harrington, *Revelation, Sacra Pagina* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1993), 178, finds a reference to war by an invading army (17.16) in “burnt with fire” in 18.8 and “the smoke of her burning” in 18.18; then, these references disprove Rome’s claim that she is not a widow (18.7), which, according to Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 326, indicates that her warfare has been successful and her men have not died on the battlefields; cf. Yarbrow Collins, who finds in the reference to Babylon mixing a cup for others (18.6) an allusion to Rome’s military victories and related violent deeds (*Crisis and Catharsis*, 122).

⁹⁵ Rossing, *Choice between Two Cities*, 100. Rossing’s analysis is largely based on Schüssler Fiorenza’s view of Revelation 18 as a triptych within a triptych: two proclamations of judgment (18.1-8 and 21-24) frame the series of

the merchants' long dirge and cargo list (18.11-16) are positioned at the center of the Ezekiel-based threefold dirges of 18.9-19, which comprise the center of the entire chapter.⁹⁶

Another Angel's Prophetic Judgment (18.1-8)

Two angels present charges against Babylon: another angel at the outset of the chapter (18.3) and a mighty angel at the end (18.23c-24). Two lines of interpretation may be found. Some take "fornication" (18.3, 9) as referring to Rome's idolatries or emperor worship.⁹⁷ While the *σπρήνους* of 18.3 refers to excessive luxury and accompanying arrogance, the accumulation of wealth in itself is not a ground for indictment here.⁹⁸ Although Babylon stands condemned socially, politically, and commercially (18.3),⁹⁹ the essential sin of the great city is its self-sufficient vaunting, which denies its creator (18.7).¹⁰⁰ The direct cause of Babylon's sudden and utter ruin is its elation and self-confidence, induced by luxury in 18.7-8.¹⁰¹ Others emphasize the economic sins of Babylon. Rome's real crime in 18.3 is not its drunkenness and sexual immorality, but its accumulation of wealth and luxury through trade and economic alliances with a multitude of client states and cities in economic imperialism; the former are merely metaphors for the latter.¹⁰² The growth of a vast luxury trade and its attendant widespread prosperity betray the precise nature of the dangers of idolatry indicated by "fornication" (18.3), including the kings who are also economically guilty of idolatrously worshipping of Mammon.¹⁰³

OT antecedents help to decide between these two possibilities. For example, Isa 23.15-18 sees Tyre's commercial sins as prostitution. Besides, as noted above, the metaphor of fornication is a better fit

dirges (18.9-19), in which the lament of the kings (18.9-10) and that of the shipowners (18.17-19) again bracket the central lament of the merchants (18:11-16) (*Vision of a Just World*, 98-99).

⁹⁶ Rossing, *Choice between Two Cities*, 101.

⁹⁷ G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation* (London: Oliphants, 1974), 265-66.

⁹⁸ Isbon T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John: Studies in Introduction with a Critical and Exegetical Commentary* (New York: MacMillan, 1919), 713.

⁹⁹ Kiddle, *Revelation of St. John*, 362.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 367.

¹⁰¹ Swete, *Commentary on Revelation*, 230-31.

¹⁰² J. Ramsey Michaels, *Revelation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997), 202-203.

¹⁰³ Caird, *Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine*, 223.

for Rome's commercial trade than for its idolatries, because the latter would be intelligible on the basis of the marriage relationship between Yahweh and Rome.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, Revelation's opposition to the Roman Empire cannot be reduced to a critique of the imperial cult, because the inseparability of religion and politics in antiquity would have probably made John confront not only Rome's imperial hubris but also its economic exploitations, its politics of seduction, and its violence.¹⁰⁵ It may be noted that Rome's enticement of the nations through its wealth and luxurious lifestyle incorporated them into the Roman fold in a more willing and secure way than its military could.¹⁰⁶

Literary Analysis of 18.6-7

A close textual analysis of 18.6-7 shows a similar result. These verses are of special importance to my theory that the Apocalypse regards those who suffer as agents of God's economic judgment of Babylon: "Render to her as she herself has rendered, and repay her double for her deeds; mix a double draught for her in the cup she mixed. As she glorified herself and lived luxuriously, so give her a like measure of torment and grief." Significantly enough, the agents of Rome's punishment in 18.6 are the people of God, who are urged to leave Babylon in 18.4.¹⁰⁷ Without any noun phrases between 18.4 and 18.6, the null subject of the imperative "come out of her" in 18.4, i.e., God's people, may very well be the addressees of the imperatives ("render," "repay," and "mix") in 18.6 as well.¹⁰⁸ It has been suggested that comparison with Ezekiel (9.1,

¹⁰⁴ Aune, *Revelation*, 3: 988.

¹⁰⁵ Howard-Brook and Gwyther, *Unveiling Empire*, 116. For the same reason, even some scholars who take Babylon as Jerusalem understand idolatry (18.3) as revealed in social relations with the elites of the city, i.e., merchants and kings (Malina and Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary*, 218-19). In antiquity, unlike the modern world, politics, economics, and religion did not exist as distinct social institutions, and so it was a "political economy" in the sense that "the political entity controlled the flow and distribution of certain goods to and from the city, especially for the city's central features," i.e., the palace, the temple, and the aristocracy (Ibid., 221).

¹⁰⁶ Osborne, *Revelation*, 638.

¹⁰⁷ Some hold that the command to leave Rome in 18.4 is addressed not to the faithful but to those who have obdurately refused to repent through all the premonitory plagues, because the living faithful members of the church have long since been carried to the secured desert on the wings of the eagle (Caird, *Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine*, 223-24). However, "my people" undermines this view.

¹⁰⁸ Aune, *Revelation*, 3: 994; Leonard L. Thompson, *Revelation*, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 168. The tense, voice, person, and number of these imperatives is the same as that of the imperative in 18.4 (Rossing, *Choice between Two Cities*, 122). Yet, many disagree. Beale, *Commentary on the Greek Text*, 900, opts for an imperative of entreaty (as in Lk 17.5), which in the light of Jer 28.24 LXX includes God himself, since he is the ultimate dispenser of Babylon's judgment. Michaels, *Revelation*, 204, views the injunction as addressed

5-6) favors heavenly beings as the addressees of Rev 18.6-8.¹⁰⁹ However, unlike the parallels in Ezekiel, Rev 18.6-8 is preceded by another command issued to the people of God (18.4-5).¹¹⁰ Thus read, 18.6-7 seems to be the only place where assertive resistance is expressed in an unambiguous way in the Book of Revelation.

The argument at play here is the same as that used for or against attributing violent resistance to the Apocalypse. The NT teaching on love for enemies and nonretaliation is adduced as evidence against Christians as agents of divine retribution.¹¹¹ One objects that this is not so much based on the exegesis of the text as on a theological norm that may not have been uniformly espoused in early Christianity.¹¹² The idea here that Christians act as agents of divine retribution may go back to Jewish apocalyptic literature, even to a legacy of the holy war tradition.¹¹³ One might agree with Isbon Beckwith that the commands in 18.6-8 are “rhetorical in form, proclaiming the certainty of vengeance and its cause.”¹¹⁴ Again, Revelation 18 is written in such an explicitly economic language that those commands can be construed as something more than rhetorical. Aggressive resistance as implied in 18.6-7 reinforces the argument of this study that the Apocalypse alludes to other-than-nonviolent resistance tactics as informed by John’s imminent

rhetorically to Christians, yet referring to what God will do to Rome rather than to what believers are invited to do. However, its imperative tone is too strong to express God’s own will to punish Rome. Besides, the command is variously attributed to the angelic agents of retribution (Caird, *Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine*, 224; Smalley, *Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse*, 448; William Barclay, *The Revelation of John* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 2: 173; “heavenly beings” as in Ezek. 9.1, 5-6 (Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 117); “the angels of the plagues and the unsuspecting instruments of 17:16-17” (Harrington, *Revelation*, 177-78); the internal worldly powers and groups who act unwittingly as God’s instruments (cf. 16.14, 16; 17.16-17) (Jürgen Roloff, *The Revelation of John*, trans. John E. Alsup, A Continental Commentary [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993], 205-06); “the Antichrist and his helpers” (Beasley-Murray, *Book of Revelation*, 265); “undesigned agents of divine vengeance” (Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 325). Moreover, some see in 18.6 the idea of Nero *redivivus* (Charles, 2: 98); 18.8 depicts the results of “the approach of the Parthians from the East under Nero” (Ibid., 100); “at His direction the Parthians come from afar to burn the cities of earth with fire” (18.8) (Kiddle, *Revelation of St. John*, 367).

¹⁰⁹ Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 117.

¹¹⁰ It is also noteworthy that some manuscripts add ὑμῖν after ἀπέδωκεν (so KJV, “Reward her even as she rewarded you”), according to which the Christians who suffered under Rome must act as agents of retribution onto the city.

¹¹¹ Smalley, *Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse*, 448. The saints can victoriously participate in the judgment against Rome only by becoming victims (Ibid., 204-05).

¹¹² Aune, *Revelation*, 3: 994. Likewise, the other candidates mentioned in n. 108 are based on theological considerations rather than textual support. Revelation 18 is not providing an ethical guide for Christians living under normal circumstances, but portraying “the ultimate collapse of a monstrous antichristian world,” and what is at stake is not personal vindictiveness but loyalty to God (Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 321).

¹¹³ Aune, *Revelation*, 3: 994: e.g., *1 Enoch* 90.19; 91.12; 95.3, 7; 96.1; 98.12; *Jub.* 23.30; *Apoc. Abr.* 29.17-20.

¹¹⁴ Beckwith, *Apocalypse of John*, 714.

eschatology, which is also responsible for the image of the Lion.

A literary analysis of 18.6 shows that God’s people are commanded to punish Rome in economic terms. I argue that “render to her ὡς she herself has rendered” (18.6a) refers not to punishment commensurate with her crime but to punishment in *kind*. Likewise, διπλώσατε τὰ διπλᾶ (literally, “double the doubles”) κατὰ her deeds” in 18.6b means “repay her double (in kind) for her deeds.”¹¹⁵ It is in this sense that those who are to punish are commanded to mix a double draught (διπλοῦν) in the same cup that Babylon used (18.6c).¹¹⁶ The point here is that the punishment fit the crime in kind. That the *lex talionis* of Lev 24.17-22 is understood in kind rather than in quantity is not unknown to the author of Revelation: those who poured out the blood of the faithful have to drink blood (16.6). The same motif may be found in the way in which Rome’s riches are laid waste. Just as Rome has plundered others (cf. 18.7), through the importing of goods rather than military invasion, so will its wealth be plundered (ἀπόλετο, 18.14; ἡρημώθη, 18.17, 19).¹¹⁷

Otherwise, 18.6 represents a problem for many scholars who take the above-mentioned particles as referring to the *lex talionis* in degree. Because this principle is maintained in 18.6a—and 18.7 as well—but not in 18.6b and 6c, which *prima facie* require a double penalty, they have to somewhat unnaturally translate “διπλώσατε τὰ διπλᾶ” as “give the very equivalent” and “κεράσατε αὐτῇ διπλοῦν” as “mix for her the equivalent.”¹¹⁸ If it is admitted that Rome courts retaliation by the hands of righteous people and is punished in the same way as it afflicted others, then symbolic interpretations of Revelation 18 hardly make sense, because they demand that human agents execute a spiritual punishment on Rome for its spiritual sins.

¹¹⁵ Compare Mounce’s view that Babylon here receives in kind the reward for her cruel bloodshedding of prophets and saints in 18.24 (*Book of Revelation*, 325).

¹¹⁶ There is no arbitrary connection between crime and punishment, and thus only God’s ratifying wrath is added to the cup (Caird, *Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine*, 224); yet, Caird does not explore the exact way of punishment.

¹¹⁷ Bredin, *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace*, 141.

¹¹⁸ Beale, *Commentary on the Greek Text*, 901, which follows Meredith G. Kline, “Double Trouble,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 32/2 (1989): 177-78. The term “double” means “an exact equivalent, in the same way as a person who looks exactly like someone else is called his double” (Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *The Book of the Revelation: A Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990], 191); “διπλώσατε τὰ διπλᾶ” is a conventional expression for full requital, not double measure (Beckwith, *Apocalypse of John*, 715; Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 325).

According to economic readings, in contrast, God's people are invited to impose an economic penalty on Rome, just as it inflicted economic oppression on its subjects, including believers.

The idea of double punishment is not strange to the HB (Isa 40.2; Jer 16.18). The double penalty for theft in Ex 22.4, 6, 9 is especially relevant to Revelation 18 in the light of the economic exploitation that is central in the chapter.¹¹⁹ The easier meaning of “διπλώσατε τὰ διπλᾶ” need not be abandoned, if “κατὰ her deeds” is taken to mean “a manner of punishment matching the manner of sin,” rather than “a degree of punishment matching the degree of sin.”¹²⁰ That the HB is flexible concerning the degree of the *lex talionis* is also indicated in Ps 79.12, which speaks of a sevenfold retribution: “Return sevenfold into the bosom of our neighbors the taunts with which they taunted you, O Lord!” “Ye have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye . . .’ But the heavenly voice cries out for two eyes for every eye.”¹²¹

The Apocalypse is taken as keeping a dialectical tension between passive and active economic resistance, if my previous reading of 13.16-17 as deterring active economic resistance under harsh socioreligious circumstances is considered complementary to my reading of 18.6-7 as endorsing assertive economic resistance as part of the eschatological judgment. While recognizing the role of the saints,¹²² Barbara Rossing links the imperatives of 18.6-7 with the future role of the readers who will sit on thrones and judge (3.21; 20.4).¹²³ Yet, it seems more likely that the punitive role of the saints in 18.6-7 is applied to the present time in view of its close relation to 18.4. Insofar as the same faithful are urged to leave Rome *now* (18.4), they are also exhorted to take part in Rome's economic punishment at present.

¹¹⁹ Osborne, *Revelation*, 641; Barclay, *Revelation of John*, 173.

¹²⁰ Beale, *Commentary on the Greek Text*, 901

¹²¹ Kiddle, *Revelation of St. John*, 366. A like manner, rather than a like measure or degree, of punishment, seems to be meant in 18.7 (“As she glorified herself and lived luxuriously, so give her a like measure of torment and grief”). This principle can be further applied to the depopulation of Rome's artisans in 18.22-23: just as Rome persecuted Christian artisans by ostracizing them from the various trade guilds, so will God remove her own loyal workers (Beale, *Commentary on the Greek Text*, 919).

¹²² The saints are assigned a role of “‘serving notice’ in a legal or forensic sense,” i.e., administering the cup of wrath to Babylon as in Jer 25.15-17 (Rossing, *Choice between Two Cities*, 124). In Revelation the language and pattern of divine warfare are subordinated to the judicial language and pattern of prophetic judgment (Schüssler Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 169).

¹²³ Rossing, *Choice between Two Cities*, 124 n. 76.

Socioeconomic Separation (18.4)

The above reading of 18.6-7, which views suffering Christians as agents of God's economic punishment, provides a hint as to the meaning of the preceding command to withdraw from the capital of the empire in 18.4: "Come out of her, my people, so that you do not take part in her sins, and so that you do not share in her plagues." Beale argues that, whereas the exhortation to separate in Jer.51.45, Isa.52.11, and that of Abraham and Lot involve both physical and moral escape, the escape of Rev 18.4 is moral one, because Christian calling to witness to the world presupposes physical presence in the world. The Christians are not called to withdraw from economic life, even though their refusal to compromise may ostracize them from economic society.¹²⁴

In the first place, I want to stress that Revelation 18 as a whole is about the judgment rather than the edification of Rome. Christians may have to be present in the world, but they need not be part of its economic life to witness to the world.¹²⁵ If God's people are commanded to participate in the punishment of Rome's economics in 18.6-7, 18.4 summons them to separate from Rome's economic society in order to be qualified as dispensers of its judgment, presumably because some of them are neither cold nor hot (3.15). God's suffering people are asked to leave Rome's economic world not simply because its fall is imminent but because they have to punish it. That the author of Revelation calls for withdrawal from the economic life of the cities of Asia is also implied, first, by the contrast between the Smyrnan church that is poor and threatened by persecution (2.8-11) and the Laodicean church that is wealthy and free of persecution (3.14-22) and, second, by the possibility that economic boycott is implied in 13.16-17, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Over against the view that exhortation appears very little in Rev 4.1-22.5,¹²⁶ chapter 18 alone contains at least two exhortations. Instead of viewing God's people or their responsibilities as being

¹²⁴ Beale, *Commentary on the Greek Text*, 898. The summons to come out is for "inner reorientations" rather than geographical relocation (Boring, *Revelation*, 189).

¹²⁵ To some, the flight is not only a spiritual withdrawal from Vanity Fair, but also a literal flight from the doomed city to a safe place (Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 324; Kiddle, *Revelation of St. John*, 364); the call to separation is "sometimes physical, always ideological" (Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 324).

¹²⁶ Aune, *Revelation*, 1: lxxxvii.

overshadowed by the oracle's primary purpose of mourning and ironically celebrating Rome's downfall,¹²⁷ I suggest that the author of Revelation constructs a socioeconomically pregnant text that stresses human agency in Rome's judgment in addition to God's eschatological intervention.

The Lament of the Kings (18.9-10)¹²⁸

The materialistic character of the kings' sins is clearly revealed by the statement that they lived in luxury with Rome (στρηνιάσαντες, 18.9; cf. στρήνους of 18.3). The other charge is their involvement in fornication (18.9), which has been construed above as suggestive of Rome's economic sins in 18.3. Then, 18.9 as a whole can be understood as a critique of the economic sins of the kings of the earth.

There have been attempts to distinguish between the threnody of the kings and that of the merchants by giving the former a more political than economic character. This position runs as follows. The kings of 18.10 mourn Babylon's loss of power.¹²⁹ They lament because there is nothing now for them to rule.¹³⁰ Whereas the kings describe the city in terms of power (ἰσχυρά, 18.10), the merchants measure it by opulence and splendor (18.16).¹³¹ The mercantile class mourns over their lost market in a more outspoken, self-interested way than the kings (esp. 18.11).¹³²

However, that the kings bemoan the mighty city and the merchants the wealthy city, as Caird rightly observes, is a distinction without a difference, because the kings shared not only Rome's fornication but also its mercantile prosperity, on which their sovereignty has been based (18.9).¹³³ Rome's power is

¹²⁷ Michaels, *Revelation*, 205.

¹²⁸ The kings of the earth in 18.3 and 9 are often identified with the ten kings in 17.12-17 (Smalley, *Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse*, 451). More likely, the kings of 17.16, who turn on Rome and destroy her, are different from the kings of 18.3 and 9, who have entered into illicit trade with Babylon (Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 328). According to Yarbrow Collins, the kings of the earth (18.9-10) are the minor kings who depended on Roman favor for ruling, including several monarchs in Asia Minor in John's time (*Apocalypse*, 128). Bauckham includes not only the client kings, but also the local aristocracy among the kings of the earth in 18.9 (*Climax of Prophecy*, 372).

¹²⁹ Osborne, *Revelation*, 651; Roloff, *Revelation of John*, 206; Beale, *Commentary on the Greek Text*, 907.

¹³⁰ Kiddle, *Revelation of St. John*, 369.

¹³¹ Swete, *Commentary on Revelation*, 236.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 232.

¹³³ Caird, *Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine*, 225.

tinctured with economic advantages, which are alluded to by σπρηνιάσαντες (18.9), which is suggestive of the luxury of material wealth.¹³⁴ The kings lament because the destruction of such a widespread economic power base as Babylon also means their own loss of economic standing and power.¹³⁵ This close relation is explicitly stated in Ezek 27.33, where mariners lament over the destruction of Tyre, which *enriched* the kings of the earth.

At the same time, the first dirge is different from the others in two respects. First, the kings' complacency seems to be reflected in their view of Rome's fall as "your judgment" (18.10). Second, their lament is the shortest and most impersonal. Perchance these characteristics reveal their privileged political status, which they believe exempts them from further misery. That Revelation 18 is largely devoted to commercial loss may relate to the reality that the mercantile class would be more severely affected than the kings.¹³⁶

The Lament of the Merchants (18.11-17a)¹³⁷

Few commentators seem to doubt that the merchants of the earth bemoan the fallen economy of Babylon, which is explicitly shown by the statement that they weep and mourn for Rome because there is no one to buy their cargo anymore (18.11). Still, attempts have been made to dilute the predominantly materialistic features of the second lamentation. As we have seen, Aune treats the list of luxury trade goods in 18.12-13 as a preface to the lament of the merchants and thus as a later excursus. Mounce considers it a "parenthetical listing of imports to Rome,"¹³⁸ although he admits that it achieves the purpose of impressing

¹³⁴ Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 372.

¹³⁵ Beale, *Commentary on the Greek Text*, 905.

¹³⁶ Swete, *Commentary on Revelation*, 228. It is also possible that the author gives a fuller description of the merchants' loss than that of the kings' so as to get the attention of the churches of Asia Minor, which were tempted to cooperate with the idolatrous trade system (Beale, *Commentary on the Greek Text*, 910).

¹³⁷ According to Yarbro Collins, the *merchants* are "wholesalers who suddenly became very wealthy toward the end of the first century A.D. by providing for the city of Rome and the army, through trade with the Far East and Africa, and by trade among the provinces" (*Apocalypse*, 126-27).

¹³⁸ Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 331.

the reader with the tremendous flow of trade goods into Rome for its luxurious life.¹³⁹

Most likely, as Bauckham observes, the writer of Revelation 18 gives a special prominence to the merchants' cargo. On the one hand, John frames the longer account of the merchants (18.11-17a) with the two shorter accounts of the kings (18.9-10) and the sailors (18.17b-19).¹⁴⁰ Within the merchants' doom-song, on the other hand, the merchandise is listed at length in 18.12-13, is the topic of 18.14,¹⁴¹ is mentioned again in 18.15, and is symbolically portrayed as the adornments of Babylon in 18.16.¹⁴² Enumeration makes for emphasis. The *extended* list of goods serves no other purpose than to condemn the flowing of such a vast amount of merchandise into one city. One could even argue that the lengthy list of trade goods is the main body of the merchants' lament, and indeed of the whole chapter, inasmuch as the author's critique of Rome's materialism is most palpable at this point.

We have noted earlier that an economic interpretation of the cargo list in 18.12-13 need not be focused on the luxurious items only. John is aware of how the Roman Empire impoverishes its subjects by plundering vast amounts of necessities as well as rare extravagances. It is likely that not only luxury goods but also the staples of life are included to depict Babylon as appropriating *everything* from the entire earth.¹⁴³ Hence, the assumption must be challenged that it was never argued by the early Christians that "wealth possessed legitimately was the product of institutionalized oppression or exploitation of slaves, serfs, peasants, or wage earners . . . wealth was not seen as the product of exploitation but was very often thought to be the cause of oppression."¹⁴⁴ John denounces extravagant wealth or wanton luxury *per se* because it is seen, though legal, as the product of imperial exploitation. A critique of wealth accumulation presupposes a concern for its victims. It is not surprising, therefore, that Rome's universal extortion was exercised over

¹³⁹ Ibid., 329.

¹⁴⁰ Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 342.

¹⁴¹ Rev 18.14 lacks a verb of saying. As is the case with 18.20, it seems best to recover the subject which, but for the traded goods in 18.12-13, immediately precedes 18.14, i.e., "the merchants of the earth" (18.11).

¹⁴² Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 342-43. Rome's luxurious imports are like the extravagant lifestyle of a rich courtesan maintained at the expense of her clients (Ibid., 369).

¹⁴³ Howard-Brook and Gwyther, *Unveiling Empire*, 173.

¹⁴⁴ Dimitris J. Kyrtatas, "Modes and Relations of Production," in *Handbook of Early Christianity: Social Science Approaches*, ed. Anthony J. Blasi, Jean Duhaime, and Paul-André Turcotte (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira, 2002), 550.

“slaves—and human lives” as well as goods (18.13), both of which were traded.¹⁴⁵

The Lament of the Mariners (18.17b-20)

The materialistic tone of the third dirge is widely admitted. The consensus reading is that the kings, merchants, and seafarers all have greatly profited from Rome and thus express sincere grief over the desolation of Rome. The three groups of funeral lamenters earned the greatest profits from the largesse of Babylon/Rome.¹⁴⁶ They all have a vested interest in the power and economic dominance of Rome.¹⁴⁷ In particular, the similarity between the merchants and the mariners is assumed. The lamentation of the merchants and that of the mariners are alike because both emphasize the wealth of Rome, which benefited certain groups.¹⁴⁸ Both the merchants and the seafolk mourn Babylon’s loss of wealth, which has provided them with an economic power base.¹⁴⁹

In what follows I argue that Revelation 18 alludes to socioeconomic tensions between characters and that the voice of the economically marginalized lies submerged in the text in “coded” language. Seeing no reason why he lists essentially the same two laments, I shall venture that John deliberately presents a nuanced distinction between the merchants and the sea mariners: whereas the songs of the merchants and seamen illustrate the kind of “gross materialism and mammon-worship” that Babylon seduced mankind to adopt by means of trade commodities,¹⁵⁰ the former represents the voice of the beneficiaries of Rome’s economic machinery and the latter reflects the voice of the instruments of the same system. Besides, no commentator has raised the possibility that the third lament does not only concern the doom of its speakers. I argue that the function of the third dirge is twofold: to bewail the misfortune of the speakers who are

¹⁴⁵ This observation also weakens Royalty’s objection that Rome is not condemned for its oppression of the poor but for its wealth and love of luxury (Royalty, *Streets of Heaven*, 71).

¹⁴⁶ Osborne, *Revelation*, 644.

¹⁴⁷ Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 347.

¹⁴⁸ Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 119. The words and actions of the shipmasters and seafaring men, sailors and all whose trade is on the sea are very similar to those of the kings and merchants (Yarbro Collins, *Apocalypse*, 128).

¹⁴⁹ Beale, *Commentary on the Greek Text*, 907. Rome expanded the seamen’s trade as well as the merchants,’ as a result of which they became wealthy (cf. 18.19) (Osborne, *Revelation*, 653).

¹⁵⁰ Beasley-Murray, *Book of Revelation*, 268.

mariners, on the one hand, and to lament by way of satire the doom of the shipowners, who are not technically mariners, on the other hand.

Satirical Lamentation

It is important to note that whereas the kings bemoan the mighty city (18.10) and the merchants mourn over the lost fine wares (18.16), “all shipmasters and seafarers, sailors and all whose trade is on the sea” (18.17) lament over the doom of “all who had ships at sea” who grew rich by Rome’s wealth (18.19). I suggest that the shipowners of 18.19 do not belong with the mariners of 18.17. The account of the mariners mourning the misfortune of others is overlooked by various interpretations. Some simply interchangeably use the “shipowners” and the “seafarers” as the speakers of the lament in 18.17-19.¹⁵¹ Others regard the third dirge as uttered by shipowners as well as sailors.¹⁵² The emphasis of the third dirge falls on wealthy maritime merchants, i.e., the shipowners of 18.19, who are included among the various kinds of maritime agents carrying the merchants’ commodities (18.17b).¹⁵³ Still others include those involved with seafaring among the merchants of the earth (18.3).¹⁵⁴

In contrast, John’s apparent distinction between the mariners of 18.17 and the shipowners of 18.19 may reflect the historical fact that they enjoyed a different status. There are commentators who recognize that the shipowners but not the seafarers may have belonged to the mercantile class. The merchants of the earth were mostly provincials, citizens of the exporting cities, and included the independent shipowners (ναύκληροι) who bought and sold their cargoes at the ports.¹⁵⁵ The reason why the shipowners are not included among the seafarers of 18.17 is because the latter are the former’s employees.¹⁵⁶ I would undergird

¹⁵¹ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Vision of a Just World*, 99.

¹⁵² Aune, *Revelation*, 3: 1007; Hughes, *Commentary*, 194; Harrington, *Revelation*, 181.

¹⁵³ Beale, *Commentary on the Greek Text*, 914. Thus, the second dirge is ascribed to the land merchants and the third to the sea merchants (Ibid., 910; Michaels, *Revelation*, 207).

¹⁵⁴ Aune, *Revelation*, 3: 988. Seafaring was the primary means for transporting merchandise from east to west (Ibid.); Smalley, *Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse*, 445.

¹⁵⁵ Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 373; Osborne, *Revelation*, 647; Smalley, *Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse*, 453.

¹⁵⁶ Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 373; Smalley, *Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse*, 453.

this claim by arguing that John implies that the shipowners are merchants by using the same word, ἐπλούτησαν, for both the merchants of the earth (18.3, 15) and the shipowners (18.19).

Not only historical but also textual evidence favors my suggestion that the mariners are to be distinguished from the shipowners in Revelation 18. Close study of the four subgroups who utter the third dirge helps: Καὶ πᾶς κυβερνήτης καὶ πᾶς ὁ ἐπὶ τόπον πλέων καὶ ναῦται καὶ ὅσοι τὴν θάλασσαν ἐργάζονται (18.17b). I postulate that John took great pains to make this list, which brings together less fortunate maritime occupations than the shipowners, who belong to the mercantile class (18.19). The meaning of each phrase is not clear, except for ναῦται which means “sailors.”

First, Πᾶς κυβερνήτης, meaning “all shipmasters,” must be distinguished from the πάντες οἱ ἔχοντες τὰ πλοῖα ἐν τῇ θαλάσσει of 18.19b, which means “all who had ships at sea,” referring to shipowners (ναύκληροι). Both κυβερνήτης and ναύκληρος appear side by side in Ac 27.11. Although it may not be certain that, as Bauckham argues, all seafarers of 18.17 were employees of the shipowners, the shipmasters most likely worked for the shipowners in view of their separate works: “A shipmaster selects a crew, and a shipowner a shipmaster” (Plutarch’s *Moralia* 807b).¹⁵⁷

Second, the expression Πᾶς ὁ ἐπὶ τόπον πλέων (literally, “all who sail on the place”) is often taken to refer to merchants.¹⁵⁸ Against this translation, Aune reasonably conjectures that the author would have used a specific term for port or harbor instead of τόπον, had he intended merchants.¹⁵⁹ It seems unlikely to me that John wanted to designate any subgroup of the merchants to whom he had already assigned a doom-song. I find convincing neither “passengers”¹⁶⁰ nor “coastal travelers,”¹⁶¹ for they hardly relate to Rome’s economy, which is being condemned throughout the chapter. If they earned money by moving on the sea but were not rich enough to be called merchants, the most appropriate translation for πᾶς ὁ ἐπὶ τόπον πλέων

¹⁵⁷ *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., ed. Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v. “Κυβερνήτης.”

¹⁵⁸ Osborne, *Revelation*, 653. “Place” would refer to a port, harbor, or city in this context (Ibid., 652 n. 18). The phrase refers to the merchants who land with their goods, because it is part of a list of mercantile people (Farrer, *Revelation of St. John the Divine*, 190).

¹⁵⁹ Aune, *Revelation*, 3: 1005.

¹⁶⁰ Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 331.

¹⁶¹ Aune, *Revelation*, 3: 1005-06.

would be “seafaring peddlers,” who moved from place to place by ship, carrying on retail trade. This translation has the advantage of maintaining the normal meaning of τόπον.

Third, some render ὅσοι τὴν θάλασσαν ἐργάζονται (literally, “all who work [on] the sea) as “fishermen.”¹⁶² However, because of the context, which is occupied with Rome’s commerce, fishers may not be included in that designation.¹⁶³ The phrase probably refers to all who make a living by the sea.¹⁶⁴ It may be that John employs such a blanket term at the end of the list in order to not only summarize the preceding jobs but also include others not covered by them. In any case, there is no textual hint that allows its association with wealthy maritime merchants.

Thus, no subgroup of those who utter the third dirge is characterized as wealthy merchants. Whether the shipowners are merchants of the earth or maritime merchants we cannot be certain. What is important is that in 18.19 the less fortunate mariners relate the downfall of Rome to the wealthy shipowners who hired them. While Bauckham correctly points out that the employees in the maritime transport industry refer in their lamentation to their employers, i.e., the shipowners, he still regards the mariners as Rome’s beneficiaries. Although they did not make a fortune from the trade with Rome, he argues, they had a sense of indebtedness to Rome for their livelihood.¹⁶⁵

Over against the consensus reading that the mariners, along with the kings and the merchants, comprise Rome’s faithful allies, who enjoy invested interests, I present an alternative interpretation that views them as low-wage workers who are exploited by Rome’s economic system. I see here an allusion to economic inequalities between social classes. In other words, the list of 18.17 refers to the marine working class, i.e., the proletariat in ancient Rome. They were just forced to cooperate with Rome for their livelihood. In ascribing Rome’s overthrow to its favoring of their employers, the mariners implicitly pronounces judgment on Rome’s economics, which favors the merchants, including the shipowners. To the extent that

¹⁶² Ibid., 1005; Osborne, *Revelation*, 652.

¹⁶³ Beckwith, *Apocalypse of John*, 718; yet, the phrase in itself would include fishers (Ibid.).

¹⁶⁴ Swete, *Commentary on Revelation*, 237.

¹⁶⁵ Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 374. The mariners are included among those who enjoyed a vested interest in the Roman Empire (Ibid., 347).

the mariners as the merchants' hireling are not so much Rome's associates as its instruments, their lament is to be understood as a *satire*, reproaching the capital and its associates rather than sincerely grieving over its downfall.¹⁶⁶ In chapter 3 I ventured to read the Book of Revelation, which is otherwise a solemn apocalypse, as being infused with a comic sense, insofar as it mocks empire in a subversive way. In like manner, the mariners make fun of the collapse of their antagonist as an object of ridicule.

Some textual observations support my argument that the third dirge of the mariners reflects their discontent with Rome's economic system, upon which their employers capitalized, and that the author of Revelation perceives economic inequalities in their relations. First, as noted above, while the previous dirges are simply ascribed to the kings of the earth and the merchants of the earth, John is going to great lengths to cover as many manual workers as possible. This is accomplished by the extensive list comprising three distinctive occupations, i.e., καὶ πᾶς κυβερνήτης καὶ πᾶς ὁ ἐπὶ τόπον πλέων καὶ ναῦται, to which the umbrella expression, ὅσοι τὴν θάλασσαν ἐργάζονται is added as a way of subsuming the other related occupations theoretically *ad infinitum*. This implies that the mariners do not belong to the privileged, which are usually exclusive.

Second, the text does not say that the mariners weep and mourn *for Rome* (18.19), while the kings weep and wail over Rome (18.9) and the merchants weep and mourn for Rome (18.11). Third, the text is silent about why the third group of mourners stood at a distance (18.17), whereas the kings and the merchants of the earth did so for the exact same reason, "in fear of her torment" (διὰ τὸν φόβον τοῦ βασιανισμοῦ αὐτῆς, 18.10 and 15). The seafarers may not be terrified at the destruction of the city, because they are not so directly responsible for Rome's downfall as the other mourners. Fourth, few commentators have paid attention to the fact that the mariners are not mentioned in 18.3 and 23, which enumerate Rome's

¹⁶⁶ Attempts to undermine hegemonic discourses by means of a variety of types of discourse are well handled by the term of "corrosive discourse," described by Bruce Lincoln's as including "all those sorts of speech which are not only nonauthoritative, but downright antithetical to the construction of authority, given their capacity to eat away at the claims and pretensions of discourses and speakers who try to arrogate authority for themselves: gossip, rumor, jokes, invective; curses, catcalls, nicknames, taunts; caricatures, graffiti, lampoon, satire; sarcasm, mockery, rude noises, obscene gestures, and everything else that deflates puffery and degrades the exalted" (Bruce Lincoln, *Authority: Construction and Corrosion* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994], 78).

crimes. Of the mourners, only the kings (18.3) and the merchants (18.3, 23) are mentioned.¹⁶⁷ This, I believe, is a hint of the social standing of the mariners: they are not a privileged class that has profited from Rome's oppressive economy to such an extent as to be held accountable for the judgment of the capital.

Last but not least, there is no description of the econopolitical relation of the mariners to Babylon, while the doomed city is the mighty city (18.10) to the kings, and she is arrayed in luxury and adorned with precious stones to the eyes of the merchants (18.16). The third mourners use the adjective "great" (μεγάλη, 18.18, 19), which is uttered by the other mourners and the angels as well (18.2, 10, 16, 21). This seems to be an objective rather than subjective evaluation.¹⁶⁸ The lack of any mention of direct econopolitical relations between Rome and the mariners seems to presuppose that they are not beneficiaries of the capital's econopolitical system.

To sum up, the motives for the mariners' lamentation, like the others, are economic. Yet, their dirge presages the judgment of the shipowners who hired them.¹⁶⁹ From the standpoint of the mariners, the capital falls because of its favoritism toward the rich, such as the merchants, including the shipowners. This does seem to reflect the dark side of Rome's economic system. If the mariners were indeed employees of the shipowners, there may well have been economic exploitation or unequal exchange through wages, which are a more legitimated mode of extracting surplus from the immediate producers than rent, taxes, customs, and tribute.¹⁷⁰ The third group represents Rome's dissident subjects who are conscious of their sacrifice, which sustains the political and economic prosperity of the first two groups. Thus read, the third lamentation belongs to the hidden transcript employed by people on periphery, insofar as it is a discourse that critiques powerholders behind the scenes. The lament of the mariners illustrates the assertion of this

¹⁶⁷ Though the nations are also mentioned (18. 3, 23), the statement that they were deceived by Rome (18.23) hardly makes them directly responsible for Rome's fall.

¹⁶⁸ It is suggested that Rome's wealth and splendor evoke admiration in 18.18 ("What city was like the great city?"), just as her military might have evoked worship in 13.4 (Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 344). If any subjective evaluation were implied, it could be better construed as a satirical expression: the seafarers contrast their marginalized status with Rome's grandeur that eludes all attempts at imitation.

¹⁶⁹ It may be noted that an ancient writer, Primasius, observes that the seafarers' throwing dust on their heads "means that they reproached their leaders by whom they were led astray and so were lost" (Weinrich, *Ancient Christian Commentary*, 293).

¹⁷⁰ Kyrtatas, "Modes and Relations of Production," 534.

study that only the conscientized subaltern can perceive the satanic nature of empire. On the other hand, this reading itself is possible only when the reader engages the text of Revelation 18 through an interaction of experience and conscientization, just as the chapter was written through a similar process on the part of the author.

Genuine Lamentation

The second function of the third lament is to sincerely mourn over the misfortune of the speakers. The mariners not only criticize Rome's economic system, which has enriched their employers, but also lament their own economic sufferings due to the economic failure of their employers. It is interesting to note that the third group of mourners not only weep and mourn (18.19) but also cry out (18.18-19), whereas the first weep and wail (18.9) and the second weep and mourn (18.11, 15). More significantly, only the third group of mourners show the custom of throwing dust on their heads (18.19). This is an act of sorrow (Josh 7.6; Job 2.12; Lam 2.10) or repentance (Job 42.6).¹⁷¹

I would argue that this act means violent grief, caused by the realization that those who are at the periphery of power and wealth are more vulnerable to the impact of the collapse of Roman society than those at the center. The kings and the merchants have much more to lose, yet at the same time they have much more remaining to live on than the mariners. Even famine, which is one of the plagues the fallen Rome has to face (18.8), might be more difficult for the mariners to overcome than for the kings and the merchants. Inasmuch as the mariners are low-wage workers who are not only exploited by Rome's economics but also dependent for a living on the same system, they have good reason to genuinely lament the fall of Rome. Until the Lamb/Lion comes again, the satanic economic system of the empire favors the powerful and rich even after an interim judgment.¹⁷²

¹⁷¹ Aune, *Revelation*, 3: 1006.

¹⁷² Despite the overthrow of Babylon, the dragon's agent, the defeat of Satan, or the consummation of the old world, has yet to come in the next chapters. The privilege that the rich enjoy even amidst eschatological plagues might be alluded to in the vision of the black horse rider who has a balance in his hand (6.5-6): "A quart of wheat for a day's pay, and three quarts of barley for a day's pay, but do not damage the olive oil and the wine!" These verses are interpreted to reflect a situation in which the necessities are scarce and expensive, while luxury items are plentiful and

I further suggest that the traditional meaning of repentance may also be indicated by the act of throwing dust on their heads, if it is admitted that the mariners' declaration of 18.20 vindicates the faithful: "Rejoice over her, O heaven, you saints and apostles and prophets! For God has given judgment for you against her."¹⁷³ The sudden collapse of Rome may have led them to recognize the hand of God behind such a punishment.¹⁷⁴ At the least, the act seems to entail remorse in the sense that the mariners regret having served their employers in vain. A literary analysis of 18.20 is in order.

I contend that the call of 18.20 to rejoice over Rome's doom is uttered by the mariners who have good reason to be glad at the fall of their oppressors. A variety of explanations fail to connect the verse with the preceding. They argue as follows. It is a call for rejoicing that follows abruptly.¹⁷⁵ The call to rejoice of 18.20, together with 18.24, are very probably later interpolations of clearly Jewish-Christian character.¹⁷⁶ Structurally, 18.20 is the introduction to the following paragraph, though superficially it belongs with what precedes.¹⁷⁷ The injunction may be issued by the voice from heaven (18.4), as a parenthetical, final comment on the preceding dirges.¹⁷⁸ The speaker may be still the angel introduced in 18.1.¹⁷⁹ The narrator adds another interjection after the fashion of 13.9-10 and 14.12.¹⁸⁰

However, there is no syntactic indication of a shift in the speaker between 18.19 and 20. The attribution of 18.20 to the heavenly voice is less persuasive, because the heavenly voice is introduced in the other places with the specification of a change of speaker. One need not posit a later insertion or an authorial

cheap, for a denarius could usually buy eight to sixteen times more wheat and eight times more barley than the amounts mentioned (Yarbro Collins, *Apocalypse*, 45-46, 127). While this might reflect the actual conditions under the emperor Domitian when the great landowners were more engaged in lucrative olives and vineyards than grain, as a result of which the poor had to suffer from the inflation of subsistence items such as wheat and barley (Ibid., 46), it seems more likely that John implicitly reproaches Rome's persistent favoritism toward the rich amidst the eschatological judgment.

¹⁷³ By comparison, it is not clear whether *in one hour* (18.10, 17, 19), which expresses the suddenness of Rome's punishment, reflects the mourners' recognition of God's hand behind the utter desolation of Rome, although the term "judgment" used by the kings (18.10) may indicate that they see Rome's destruction as an act of God.

¹⁷⁴ Primasius observes that the seafarers stand afar off weeping over *others* who are perishing and that this indicates they are making a fruitful penance and conversion (Weinrich, *Ancient Christian Commentary*, 293).

¹⁷⁵ Yarbro Collins, *Apocalypse*, 128.

¹⁷⁶ Aune, *Revelation*, 3: 1007.

¹⁷⁷ Caird, *Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine*, 228.

¹⁷⁸ Smalley, *Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse*, 460; Michaels, *Revelation*, 207.

¹⁷⁹ Beale, *Commentary on the Greek Text*, 915.

¹⁸⁰ Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon*, 375. John in very few places (cf. 14.4-5) adds his own commentary to what is seen (Roloff, *Revelation of John*, 207).

comment, if this verse is taken to be part of the third lament.

That 18.20 comes from the mariners may be striking, if one expects them to be more concerned with their own misfortune than with the vindication of the believers.¹⁸¹ It may seem incongruous that the mariners, after lamenting the loss of their own livelihood through the fall of Babylon, continue by calling on the inhabitants of heaven to rejoice because of it.¹⁸² However, if the mariners were indeed victims of Rome's exploitative economic system, then they would have good reason not only to gloat over Rome's desolation but also to invite the believers, who they know have been likewise exploited, to join the celebration.¹⁸³ The pronouncement that Babylon has become a dwelling place of unclean spirits and unclean birds (18.2) implies that the remaining earth is cleared of all such defiled things and the stage is set for rejoicing (18.20; 19.1-2).¹⁸⁴

Again, it is objected that 18.20 does not follow Jesus's teaching on love and that the real Christian victory must be won through the power of love that Jesus showed on the cross.¹⁸⁵ Yet, rejoicing over the misfortune of the wicked could be considered legitimate, along the lines of John's positive view of a prayer for vengeance, as discussed in relation to 6.10 in the previous chapter. Besides, any theological qualms would disappear if 18.20 is attributed to the mariners as representing the voice of the economically oppressed rather than of the religiously persecuted. This is where John's literary genius comes through: he puts the interjection on the lips of pagans to give vent to anger and thus create catharsis, thereby weakening any possible offense that could arise were it to be uttered by the living faithful. John might agree that the

¹⁸¹ Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon*, 375.

¹⁸² Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 341.

¹⁸³ Hence, the call for rejoicing is better addressed not merely to the glorified in heaven but to the faithful who are suffering on earth (Michaels, *Revelation*, 207-08). Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 332, holds that *saints and apostles and prophets* of 18.20 may refer to the church glorified, if it is interpreted in the light of its parallel in 12.12 ("Rejoice then, you heavens and those who dwell in them! But woe to the earth . . ."). Yet, 12.12's geographical dichotomy between heaven and earth is lacking in 18.20. It seems more likely that, whereas 12.12 invites the heavenly faithful to rejoice and warns the earthly believers against the coming persecution, 18.20 calls all the faithful, both in heaven and on earth, to rejoice.

¹⁸⁴ Michaels, *Revelation*, 202.

¹⁸⁵ Barclay, *Revelation of John*, 186. Similarly, the Christian doctrine of forgiveness is not reflected in 18.1-3 (Ibid., 170). At the same time, Barclay attempts to justify the text: 18.20, despite its unchristian language, is nonetheless the voice of faith in the ultimate victory of the faithful, and there is little personal bitterness in the voice of vengeance, because the doomed are not so much personal enemies as the enemies of God (Ibid., 186).

wretched of the earth have a reason to feel bitter about the imperial/colonial contradictions. Aune holds that 18.1-3, which is led by an angel, is a taunt song characterized by derision and joy over the misfortunes of others.¹⁸⁶ I see in 18.20 an artful indication of the theme of reversal, shy of *Schadenfreude*, uttered by pagans in a shade of gray, neither religiously acknowledged by the church community nor sociopolitically privileged by Roman society.

To the extent that the mariners view Rome's desolation as an occasion for celebration (18.20), their previous lament cannot be completely serious (18.19). It would be incongruous for the mariners, who rejoice over the collapse of the city that obliged the wealthy, to have been sincerely concerned about the ruin of the shipowners who were its allies.

Segovia calls attention to the possibility that a text contains within itself "dissenting voices, suppressed voices, or contradictory voices."¹⁸⁷ Revelation 18 is a case in point. Perhaps John deliberately put the mariners' conscientized lament at the end of the series of dirges to contradict the previous "illegitimate" dirges. The overruling of the dominant voice by the suppressed voice illustrates the theme of reversal that dominates the Apocalypse. The voice of the oppressed mariners, which is so ambiguously submerged in the text as to elude the eyes of previous scholars, is a good example of the diversity within a text that preserves "echoes or hints of different or discordant voices—suppressed voices now largely bypassed and present only as telling silences in the text."¹⁸⁸ In answer to the mendacity of the colonial situation, the behavior of the colonized subject, while open and honest toward fellow nationalists, is strained and indecipherable toward the colonists.¹⁸⁹ In like manner, the text written by a marginalized author, I suggest, is more decipherable to a marginalized reader than to a complacent reader. The "apocalyptists" who are living through apocalyptic moments are able to detect a wealth of resistance tactics inscribed in the Apocalypse that are more active and assertive than assumed in traditional readings.

¹⁸⁶ Aune, *Revelation*, 3: 976. However, Aune thinks that there is no element of mockery at all in the three ritual laments in 18.9-20 (*Ibid.*, 978).

¹⁸⁷ Segovia, "Toward a Contextual Biblical Pedagogy," 95.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 96.

¹⁸⁹ Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 14.

To sum up, John's description of the three dirges not only exposes Rome's sins but also invites the readers to evaluate them in terms of intergroup relations: between those who have power yet need wealth to sustain it, those who have wealth but need power to protect it, and those who merely need sustenance.¹⁹⁰ If 13.16-17 characterizes Rome's economy as satanic in terms of the mark of the beast, Revelation 18 shows how Rome's satanic economic system operates differently, depending on the social standing of its subjects: it is rejected by the people of God, welcomed and made use of by its advocates, such as the kings and merchants, or acquiesced to by the marginalized, such as the mariners who have to grin and bear it.

The Prophetic Pronouncement of the Mighty Angel (18.21-24)

The mighty angel's announcement against Rome in 18.21-23b is also infused with economic connotations. The aspects of a flourishing lifestyle listed in 18.21b-23a represent economic means of livelihood that are now being removed, thereby elaborating the summary statement of 18.14b that Rome's dainties and splendor are lost forever.¹⁹¹ Not only luxury activities including music but also sustenance activities like food production are no more (18.22).¹⁹² The disappearance of craftsmen means the abrupt cessation of the entire economy.¹⁹³ Desolated Rome without any lights is contrasted with the busy city that was accustomed to lights, which craftsmen needed in order to work by night to fill their orders.¹⁹⁴

On the other hand, the meaning of the charges presented by the mighty angel against Babylon in 18.23c-24 is not clear at first sight: "For your merchants were the magnates of the earth, and all nations were deceived by your sorcery. And in you was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slaughtered on earth." Some commentators foreground Rome's religious sins. The merchants are

¹⁹⁰ Just as the merchants depend for their economic profits on the political stability secured by the association between Rome and the kings of the earth, the mariners rely for their sustenance on the economic security procured by the alliances between the kings and the merchants.

¹⁹¹ Beale, *Commentary on the Greek Text*, 920.

¹⁹² The metropolis is even deprived of its sustenance, whether *μύλος* (18.22) refers to the handmill used by slaves or women and thus to the normal affairs of the home (Aune, *Revelation*, 3: 1009), or to the large millstone mentioned in 18.21 and so to the business of food production for the populace (Osborne, *Revelation*, 657).

¹⁹³ Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 334.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.* People had to watch an entourage of slaves carrying torches as they escorted the wealthy home from festivals, though it is not certain whether Rome had street lights (*Ibid.*)

singled out because they were part and parcel of Rome's deception of the world through her sorcery, which bewitched people to adopt a false religion.¹⁹⁵ While the merchants were effective propagandists of the "sorcery" of 18.23, which refers to not only idolatry but also wanton luxury,¹⁹⁶ the reason for Babylon's desolation is idolatry, in the first place, and the luxury of the city, in the second place.¹⁹⁷

The materialistic note of Revelation 18 allows neither for the spiritualizing of the charge in 18.23c that the merchants were the magnates of the earth nor for the subordination of its economic meaning to any religious meanings in the immediate context. At the very least, 18.23c presents *one* reason for Rome's desolation, i.e., its worshipping of wealth and luxury and its wanton lifestyle, which finds no pleasure except in material things.¹⁹⁸ While 18.23c clearly explains that Rome's doom is imminent because of the economic crimes perpetrated by the merchants, less clear is the way in which the merchants are considered the magnates of the earth.

Along the lines of symbolic interpretations as mentioned above, it is often proposed that the epithet "magnates" (μεγιστᾶνες) refers to the merchants' arrogant and self-glorifying *attitude* of regarding themselves as great ones instead of giving the glory to God (cf. 18.7).¹⁹⁹ What is being condemned is the merchants' overweening pride and self-exaltation, induced by their wealth.²⁰⁰ Again, these readings are weakened by the materialistic tone of Revelation 18. It is more likely that the equation of the merchants with the magnates indicates Revelation's bias against wealth and prestige.²⁰¹ The merchants were the traders who could make Rome their market and thus rose to the first rank and became merchant princes.²⁰² Even if the merchants were not of high social status, despite their considerable economic power as well as

¹⁹⁵ Beasley-Murray, *Book of Revelation*, 269. Babylon's greatest and ultimate sin is to lead the nations astray to a false religion that elicits admiration for an Antichrist and persecutes prophets and saints (Ibid., 269-70).

¹⁹⁶ Harrington, *Revelation*, 183.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 178. Rome's doom is chiefly due to its guilt for the blood of God's people not only in Rome but also throughout the empire (18.24) (Ibid., 183-84).

¹⁹⁸ Barclay, *Revelation of John*, 188.

¹⁹⁹ Smalley, *Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse*, 464-65; Beckwith, *Apocalypse of John*, 719.

²⁰⁰ George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 243.

²⁰¹ Thompson, *Revelation*, 171.

²⁰² Swete, *Commentary on Revelation*, 241.

wealth,²⁰³ the political connotations of the Greek *μεγιστάν* could not have been completely lost.

Charles identifies the same word used in Rev 6.15 for the Parthian princes and observes that the word is used six times by Theodotion to translate the term *גְּבֻרָה* in Daniel, who were great nobles and court officials under Belshazzar and Darius.²⁰⁴ They may be the civil officials, e.g., persecuting proconsuls,²⁰⁵ courtiers,²⁰⁶ magistrates,²⁰⁷ or princes.²⁰⁸ Further, the coappearance of *οἱ μεγιστᾶνες* and *οἱ πλούσιοι* (“the rich”) in the same verse (6.15) apparently presupposes distinct social standings. The merchants who have grown rich from the power of Rome’s luxury in 18.3 are now equipped with political influence in 18.23c. The merchants and the kings of the earth separately lamented over the desolation of Rome in the previous passage (18.9-17a). To the eye of the apocalypticist, who is aware of the contemporary econopolitical reality, the ruling class and the mercantile class are now merged and become indistinguishable.

This reading obviates a postulation of later interpolations in 18.23c-d. According to Aune, as noted earlier, there is no obvious relationship with the statement of 18.23c that the merchants of Babylon were the power brokers of the world and its context;²⁰⁹ nor is it clear why the statement that all the nations were deceived by Rome’s magic is included in 18.23d,²¹⁰ which he takes to indicate Rome’s control over the Mediterranean world with such magical power and success.²¹¹ The way I see it, 18.23c-d serves to blame Rome’s economy for its ideological as well as political domination: while 18.23c accuses the political power of the merchants, 18.23d exposes the ideological hegemony of Rome’s economy. The capital is condemned not only because its political system privileged the rich but also because its subjects were enthralled by the illusion of its economic—and political, as implied by the political characterization of the

²⁰³ Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 373; Osborne, *Revelation*, 647.

²⁰⁴ Charles, 1: 182.

²⁰⁵ Swete, *Commentary on Revelation*, 94.

²⁰⁶ Smalley, *Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse*, 169.

²⁰⁷ Harrington, *Revelation*, 96.

²⁰⁸ Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 162.

²⁰⁹ Aune, *Revelation*, 3: 984.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 984.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 1010.

merchants in 18.23c—ideology.

In particular, I view 18.23d as referring to Rome's dependence on the *Pax Romana* as an ideological construct. The *Pax Romana* is an ideology that, according to Dimitris Kyrtatas, is a vaguely formulated notion of "legitimation of exploitation."²¹² Bauckham provides a helpful suggestion concerning Rome's deceitful wiles: many of Rome's subjects, i.e., the ordinary people, excluding the ruling classes, were in fact exploited by the city, yet failed to see it, because they were deceived by the promised benefits of the *Pax Romana*, such as unity, security, and prosperity, which were in fact purchased at an unfairly high price. This delusion John portrays by the metaphor of the intoxication of all the nations (18.3) and the deception of all the nations (18.23d).²¹³ Such a deceptive propaganda is part of cultural hegemony, insofar as it prevents the oppressed from being conscious of the exploitative system of imperialism or colonialism. Unlike the mariners or the repentant nations in 11.13, the nations in chapter 18 are depicted as not conscientized enough to perceive the satanic nature of Rome's ideology.

The connection between ideology and myth must not go unnoticed in this regard: an ideology, which is conveyed through *myth* in all cultures, ancient and modern, binds together the visible structures and relationships that exist between the member parts of culture and lends legitimacy to the culture as a whole.²¹⁴ The foundational myth of the Roman Empire was the myth of Augustus and the "Golden Age," which Virgil created.²¹⁵ The Apocalypse reveals the dark side of Rome's mythic ideology, which can be seen only from the place where its purported benefits do not reach. Rev 18.23d indicates that Rome's economics—and politics—ride on its mythic ideology. The *Pax Romana* as an essential element of Rome's sorcery manipulated the minds of its subjects by irresponsibly promising them the benefits that were in

²¹² Kyrtatas, "Modes and Relations of Production," 535. The other form of legitimation of exploitation is legislation, i.e., clearly defined rules (Ibid.).

²¹³ Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 347. This contrasts with the view that "all the nations" in 18.3 and 18.23 are opponents of God, on one hand (Smalley, *Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse*, 444 and 465), and with the position that Babylon's seduction affects especially the political and the economic leaders, on the other hand (Ladd, *Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 236).

²¹⁴ Howard-Brook and Gwyther, *Unveiling Empire*, 113. The word *myth* means neither a fallacious, naïve, or untrue story, nor a tribal or primitive mode of communication. *Myth* is used in the sense of "symbolic communication within a given cultural and political system" (Ibid.).

²¹⁵ Ibid., 114.

effect enjoyed by the rich and powerful.

Rome's religious sin of shedding the blood of prophets and saints (18.24a) may seem to counterbalance the political critique of the merchants' sins (18.23c) and the ideological critique of Rome's econopolitical crimes (18.23d). Yet, Rome's religious and nonreligious sins are better construed as supplementing rather than replacing each other. A separation of the religious from the nonreligious may not have been as accepted in antiquity as in modern times, as noted earlier. I read 18.24 as expanding Rome's sins, viewed from an econopolitical and ideological perspective, to a religious dimension.

The meaning of the blood "of all who have been slaughtered on earth" (18.24b) is ambiguous. John might be referring to the universal martyrdom of the Christian church as a fact already accomplished.²¹⁶ Interpreted in a more literal way, however, the verse may well express John's socioreligious concern about Rome's maltreatment of nonbelievers as well as believers. Rome is held responsible for unlawfully killing many other people as well as persecuting Christians.²¹⁷ Rome is being indicted for the slaughter of all the innocent victims of its murderous policies, required for its acquisition and maintenance of power.²¹⁸ Rome is thus blamed for tragedies both inside and outside the church.

In short, doom has fallen on Rome because of the merchants' extravagant desire for political power, Rome's ideological legitimation of its econopolitical oppression, and Rome's violent suppression of nonbelievers as well as believers. Just as economics and politics are fused into one (18.23c), in tandem with ideological legitimation (18.23d), so are religion and econopolitics merged into one (18.24). Thus,

²¹⁶ Charles, 2: 113. The use of $\sigma\phi\acute{\alpha}\zeta\omega$ shows that John is thinking of the martyrs, for the Greek has the connotation of martyrdom in the author's language, except for 6.4 (Ibid.). Beale, *Commentary on the Greek Text*, 924, also contends that John points to a universal reference of persecution, for by John's time Christians were subjected to persecution not only in Israel but also through the empire. *Earth* includes the empire and probably the entire world (Ibid.). In comparison, Ladd, *Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 243, holds that what is being portrayed is eschatological Babylon because no historical equivalent to the global persecution described here is known in the first century.

²¹⁷ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Vision of a Just World*, 95; Aune, *Revelation*, 3: 1011; Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 122; Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 335. Osborne, *Revelation*, 659, thinks that although Babylon stands condemned for murdering believers and unbelievers alike, the author *hyperbolically* ascribes the murder of every human being in history to Rome.

²¹⁸ Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 349. Bauckham relies on the exceptional usage of the Greek $\sigma\phi\acute{\alpha}\zeta\omega$, which is used of general slaughter in 6.4 (Ibid., n. 22). Yarbro Collins finds in 18.6 an allusion to Rome's military victories over peoples, including the repression of the Jewish revolt of 66-72 C.E. (*Crisis and Catharsis*, 122).

economics, politics, ideology, and religion become inseparable and indistinguishable when it comes to Rome's crimes and judgment.

Then again, this unholy union is based on Rome's economics as its cornerstone. John in chapter 18 critiques Rome's economics, for which its mythic ideology existed, as a pedestal on which both the imperial cult and political domination stood. Apart from the predominantly materialistic tone of Revelation 18, it may be reemphasized that economic exploitation was one of the beast's deadly weapons for inducing people to participate in the imperial religion that reinforced Rome's political domination.²¹⁹ The possibility should also be considered that Rome's economic pressure, in association with pagan culture, on Christians was far more prevalent than the use of actual violence against them, which was still rare in John's time.²²⁰ Revelation 18 invites human participation in Rome's economic judgment, whereas 13.16-17 warns against active economic resistance when such a judgment is hardly in the offing. The author of Revelation constructs a socioeconomically pregnant text that highlights Rome's economic vices, in addition to its political, ideological, and religious sins.

John's Adaptation of Prophetic Antecedents

This section considers whether and to what degree John adapts prophetic tradition. Over against the consensus reading, which assumes the dependence of Revelation 18 on Ezekiel 27, I argue that John deliberately transforms traditional elements to reflect and refracts contemporary social conditions.²²¹ He changes the order of mourning, the tenses, and the speakers of a taunt song in the text of Ezekiel.

First, John rearranges the mourning order to indicate the unequal social relations among the mourners. According to Ezekiel 27, Tyre is lamented over first by the mariners (v. 29), then by the kings (v. 35), and last by the merchants (v. 36). By way of contrast, Revelation's Rome is bemoaned first by the

²¹⁹ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Vision of a Just World*, 100.

²²⁰ Boring, *Revelation*, 187; cf. Rev 13.16-17. Yet, the same scholar holds that Revelation 18 condemns Rome's economic policies of living in luxury at the expense of the poor, apart from her economic pressure on Christians (Ibid., 187-88).

²²¹ For John's creative unification of the HB traditions, see Yarbrow Collins, "Revelation 18: Taunt-Song or Dirge?," 198-99.

kings, then by the merchants, and finally by the mariners. This mourning order, I submit, mirrors Rome's pecking order. John moved the mariners after the merchants, to whom they were subordinated as employees. The order of lament also implies that John is more concerned with the judgment of those at the center of centripetal Roman society than with those on the periphery.

Second, John adapts the tenses of the Septuagint of Ezekiel 27. Revelation 18 changes Ezekiel 27 as follows: from the future to the imperfect in the lament of the mariners; from the aorist to the future in the dirge of the kings; and from the aorist to the present in the lamentation of the merchants. The mariners *will wail. . . and cry out* (Ezek 27.30), to *were crying out* (Rev 18.18); the kings *were amazed and wept* (Ezek 27.35), to *will weep and wail* (Rev 18.9); and the merchants *hissed* (Ezek 27.36), to *weep and mourn* (Rev 18.11).²²²

Various suggestions have been adduced. The medley of tenses in Revelation 18 attests to John's imaginative journeys into a visionary future and back to the present, while this temporal inconsistency comes from the certainty that the course of events is unquestionably fixed.²²³ The present tense is a literary device by which to make the visionary material vivid and immediate.²²⁴ The present and past tenses (18.11, 14, 17-19) deliver vividness, while prediction accounts for the future tense (18.9-10, 15).²²⁵ The lack of consistency in tense shows that John is not particularly concerned with chronology.²²⁶ It is even suggested that John's hesitation between the past and the future indicates an eschatological tension, which reflects the victory of Christ that transcends human, temporal categories.²²⁷

These explanations are mostly concerned with literary or theological aspects of the problem; none takes into account the realities of the Mediterranean world in the first century. Instead, I posit that the

²²² Compare the future tense of *στήσουνται* ("will stand") for the merchants (18.15); yet, this is not representative of the merchants' inner feelings.

²²³ Kiddle, *Revelation of St. John*, 361.

²²⁴ Smalley, *Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse*, 453. The visions that the author saw in the past predict future events yet are narrated as if they were still present (Beale, *Commentary on the Greek Text*, 909).

²²⁵ Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 341.

²²⁶ Yarbrow Collins, *Apocalypse*, 126. Yet, the variation in tense is partly because John is relating what he saw and heard, the content of which is about the future (Ibid.).

²²⁷ Smalley, *Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse*, 467.

simultaneous actions are depicted in distinct tenses in order to reflect on the tiered social locations of the mourners. It is not coincidental that the future tense is applied to the kings who are at the center of the Roman Empire, the past tense to the mariners who are at the periphery, and the present tense to the merchants who are positioned between them. The closer to the center of Rome's econopolitical system the mourners are situated, the later on—and indeed to a lesser extent as well—they are affected by its destruction. In other words, John depicts the impact of Rome's overthrow on the mourners in crescendo fashion: the *real* lament of the kings has in reality yet to come; that of the merchants is beginning; and that of the low-wage sea workers has already begun.²²⁸ Until the Lamb/Lion comes again, the economic injustice of the satanic empire privileges the powerful and rich even after an interim judgment. The New Jerusalem, an economic as well as religious utopia, must come down so that another Babylon may not reappear. This is why the Apocalypse is not only prophetic but also apocalyptic.

Third, the underprivileged in Ezekiel and Revelation satirically mourn over the doom of those who exploited them. The difference lies in that, whereas Ezekiel ascribes a taunt song to the merchants, John assigns one to the mariners. In Ezek 27.28-31 the sailors genuinely lament for their colleague sailors, but in Rev 18.19 the mariners sardonically mourn for the shipowners who were their employers. The merchants of Ezekiel “hissed” (27.36), while the merchants of Revelation weep and mourn for her (18.11). Ronald Clements' observation on Ezekiel 27 is noteworthy in this regard:

Whereas those on shore who witness the sinking can cry out in an agony of fellow feeling for the doomed mariners (vv. 29-31), those merchants who had dealt with Tyre could hiss and whistle in derision at the downfall of those who they believed had greatly exploited them (v. 36). What we have in this lament, therefore, is a third-world reaction when disaster strikes a first-world nation. The sentiments expressed are unpleasant and more than a little shocking, but they are wholly understandable.²²⁹

The mariners' satirical dirge in Revelation 18 may be understood along these lines. It is not so much

²²⁸ In particular, this view nicely accounts for the unexpected past tense of the mariners' lament. Yarbro Collins suggests that it is influenced by the form of the vision account (e.g., 18.1), which uses the past tense to report what was seen in the past, and thus the third lament is given a more descriptive and narrative impression than an oracular and predictive character (*Crisis and Catharsis*, 119). However, this explanation does not discuss the reason why the mariners require such a distinct treatment.

²²⁹ Ronald E. Clements, *Ezekiel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 125. The merchants' hissing may contain “elements of scorn, dismay at the calamity and even malicious joy” (Charles Lee Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel: The Glory of the Lord* [Chicago: Moody, 1969], 157).

incidental as reflective of the social reality that John takes over the sarcastic language of Ezekiel's tradition but puts it on the mouth of the mariners instead of the merchants. In John's view, the mariners represent the exploited class in his time, not the merchants, who were exploited workers in Ezekiel's time. A mocking remark, therefore, cannot be made by the merchants, who are beneficiaries of Rome's economy, but only by the mariners at the shipowners, who are their employers. Faithful to his own social agenda, John inherits the theme of mockery from the literary antecedent but not its social relations.

Beyond Economics

On the assumption that the reversal of fortune is the main theme of apocalyptic literature including Revelation, this chapter has shown that the economic judgment depicted in Revelation 18 does not merely vindicate the victims of Rome's economics but also invites the readers to acts as well as words that undermine it. I view this resistance language as mainly motivated by the theme of justice rather than revenge. In sharp contrast, Lawrence reads Revelation's critique of Rome's wealth and luxury in terms of a class feud, an expression of middle-class Christians' envy of more riches. Thus, the hideous self-righteousness, self-conceit, self-importance, and secret *envy* of the Christianity of the middling masses underlie the all-compassing destruction of the Apocalypse.²³⁰ All the lower classes and mediocre people, who realized that they could never enjoy the luxuries of Rome, would have their revenge by destroying it all;²³¹ the saints gloat over fallen Rome.²³² There is Christian love, on the one hand, which is advocated by Jesus and which would save the world, but there is also Christian envy, on the other, which is represented by John's Revelation and which would out of spite destroy the world.²³³

However, the Apocalypse was not written by and for the "have-nots" out of spite and envy of the

²³⁰ D. H. Lawrence, "The Apocalypse," in *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea, 1988), 48.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 48.

²³² *Ibid.*, 47.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 48. The Christian depicted in the Apocalypse is in mad hostility to the State, the world, and the cosmos, and wills the destruction of them all (*Ibid.*, 52). Lawrence even compares the status of the Book of Revelation in the canon with that of Judas among Jesus's disciples (*Ibid.*, 48). It is understandable that the Fathers of the Church in the East wanted the Apocalypse left out of the NT (*Ibid.*).

“haves.” As Yarbro Collins notes, the Apocalypse’s abrasive language against Rome may well reveal not only a critical awareness of the Jewish War of 66-72 C.E. and Nero’s persecution of Christians in 64 C.E. but also a personal experience of economic marginalization. What Christians await is economic justice rather than the desolation of the riches of others, and this desire derives not so much from envy and spite as from intolerable suffering due to economic injustice. If Rome’s riches are denounced, it is not because they are out of reach for Christians, but because they are acquired by means of exploitation. One might say that Revelation 18’s underlying motivation is John’s hatred of Rome for its plundering.²³⁴ Perhaps Lawrence “had internalized the attitude of empire and had neither empathy nor sympathy with the subjects of Rome (or of the British empire of his day).”²³⁵ At the least, Lawrence gives short shrift to the meaning of economic suffering under imperialism/colonialism, which deserves attention in devising an ethic of resistance.

However, my socioeconomic reading of Revelation 18 does not take John as critiquing Rome’s economy simply because it benefits the rich and powerful. While economic exploitation is indeed an essential element of colonial/imperial oppression, it is important to note that the socioeconomic can also be misappropriated, consciously or unconsciously, as a dimension that is positively affected by colonial/imperial policies. Drawing on my personal experience in postcolonial Korea, for example, I find very disturbing what a noted postcolonial scholar writes, though by way of quotations, concerning the relation of Japanese colonialism with the alleged economic development of Korea and Taiwan:

Much of the ‘economic miracle’ of Southeast Asian countries was the long-term result of the fact that Japan was the only imperial power to industrialize its colonies. The dynamic economic development of Korea and Taiwan under Japanese colonial rule provides a significant counterfactual example to Baran’s dependency thesis (Myers and Peattie 1984: 347-452).²³⁶

Samuel Pao-San Ho, author quoted above, claims that although the gains from development may not have been shared equitably, economic benefits were brought to both the Japanese and the natives.²³⁷ Surprisingly

²³⁴ Bredin, *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace*, 139.

²³⁵ Collins, “Temporality and Politics,” 41.

²³⁶ Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, 52.

²³⁷ Samuel Pao-San Ho, “Colonialism and Development: Korea, Taiwan, and Kwantung,” in *The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1895-1945*, ed. Ramon H. Myers and Mark R. Peattie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 377.

enough, the colonial record is analyzed as showing the same twofold character even from *the natives'* viewpoint.²³⁸ In fact, this position is along the lines of the argument that I frequently hear from those who view the history of Japanese colonialism in Korea from a colonial perspective. Regardless of whether Japanese colonizers ever generated any economic benefit whatsoever, ex-colonized Koreans question why a postcolonial account ever needs to consider any uninvited side effects that colonialism might have accidentally produced in the process of exploiting a sovereign country. From the point of view of the (ex-)colonized, any positive evaluations of colonialism are meaningless and worthless, not only because they have lost more than they have allegedly gained under colonialism, but also because the notion itself of economic development reflects the cultural discourse of the colonizer rather than of the colonized subject.

I reject any colonial and postcolonial analyses that marginalize the (ex-)colonized in the reconstruction of colonial history.²³⁹ As noted earlier, Scott makes a case that in contrast to traditional Marxist analysis, which privileges the appropriation of surplus value as the social site of exploitation and resistance, we can privilege the social experience of indignities, control, submission, humiliation, forced deference, and punishment, because the very process of appropriation unavoidably results in imposing indignities of one kind or another on the weak.²⁴⁰ I read Revelation 18 as problematizing Rome's economics not only because it is exploitative but also because it is related to other social experiences of injuries and insults it entails.

Conclusion

After considering in chapter 3 how suppressed people resort to a wide variety of resistance transcripts, overt or covert, through which they undermine the power and authority of their suppressors, I have foregrounded in this chapter active economic resistance as implied in Revelation 18, where Rome is

²³⁸ Ibid., 386.

²³⁹ Ho seems to admit the partiality of his analysis when he adds at the end of the article that he has not dealt with many intangible costs that colonialism burdened the native populations, and suggests that a general assessment of the colonial period must take into account such intangibles as the humiliation of being second class citizens, deprived of freedom and opportunity in political, social, and personal dimensions (Ibid., 386.)

²⁴⁰ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 111.

not only overthrown by God but also undercut from within by its oppressed subjects. This reading of Revelation 18 is complementary to my reading in the previous chapter of 13.16-17 as inviting the readers to passive economic endurance. The thesis of this study that the Apocalypse keeps a dialectical tension between passive and active resistance extends to the economic dimension of Christian life.

Over against the popular readings that soften the apparently economic language of Revelation 18 by spiritualizing or unhistoricizing it, I have read it in a more literal way in order to be receptive to the socioreligious agenda of those living in reduced circumstances. Above all, the spiritualists who deny historical context as an essential element of biblical interpretation overlook the fact that economic sins can be associated with religious sins insofar as they are both real and serious in the view of the reader as well as the author. It also bears repeating that symbolic readings pay scanty attention to such social issues as the unfair suffering of the subaltern, and in so doing they may help to perpetuate the status quo. In contrast, my socioeconomic reading of Revelation 18 takes seriously its economic language as reflecting not so much religious oppression as economic incongruities inherent in Rome's imperialism.

My interpretation goes beyond traditional socioeconomic readings in that it reconstructs resistance strategies from the text in concrete terms. The people of God are entrusted with the practical duty of undermining Rome's economic domination by executing the sentence that God the judge pronounced on it (18.6-7). Rome's economy must collapse due to its economic sins according to the principle of *lex talionis*, which is taken to mean that the punishment corresponds to the crime in kind rather than in degree. Withdrawal from Rome's economic system (18.4) is to be construed as a precondition for executing such an economic judgment. Instead of the consensus view that all three dirges come from Rome's allies, I have argued that the third dirge involves a voice of discontent on the part of the disprivileged mariners with Rome's economics, which, seen from below, favors the rich (18.17b-20). Despite his stringent judgment of Rome's economy, John avoids endorsing Christian *Schadenfreude* when he borrows the lips of the pagan mariners to celebrate Rome's desolation (18.20). This submerged voice in the text is audible to the conscientized reader, for it represents a perspective of conscientized subordinates. In brief, Rome must fall because of its sins, which encompass not only religion but also economics and politics, all of which ride on

its mythic ideology (18.23c-24), though its economic crimes dominate in Revelation 18.

These in-depth analyses of Revelation 18 confirm the assertion of this study that the Apocalypse envisions a just society as a result of human resistance as well as divine judgment. It is now clear that John envisions economic resistance not only in nonviolent language as in 13.16-17 but also in more aggressive language as in chapter 18. Indeed, circumspection and artfulness enable a rather safe declaration of the hidden transcript, as Scott demonstrates. Though developed and shared in a sequestered social site, John's hidden transcript can be restored by the conscientized (ex-)colonized who have experienced analogous experiences. A theoretical foundation underlies these observations: interpretations of Revelation 18 that are informed by the culture and ideology of the reader may promote the interest of either those who are at the center or those who are at the margin of power structures. The former legitimates economic oppression and the latter economic justice. This chapter has been an attempt to speak with the poor and powerless in suggesting a sociocritical hermeneutic that views economic justice as a most urgent goal of biblical interpretation.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

On the assumption that both suffering and resistance are part and parcel of living with imperialism/colonialism, the present work has argued that the Apocalypse is inscribed with a variety of resistance tactics, informed by a dialectical relationship between ideological and pragmatic resistance, on the one hand, and passive endurance and active resistance, on the other hand. In so doing, this study has sought to reclaim the Apocalypse as resistance literature over and against two major interpretations: first, the popular reading, which views the Apocalypse as providing divine comfort for the Christians under culminating persecution, rather than inviting them to participate in God's operation against the evil forces; second, the violent reading, which problematizes the Apocalypse's alleged reflection of imperial language, thereby overlooking its illocutionary liberation ethic. In generating a hermeneutic of liberation that foregrounds a hermeneutic of resistance, this study critiques both the pacifist and violent readings of the Apocalypse for failing to consider its complicated approach to resistance, which is seen as inevitable given Rome's likewise convoluted way of domination. It should now be clear that reading the Apocalypse as simply peace or war literature would scarcely do justice to the richness and complexity of its resistance language. Qoheleth says that there is a time to love and a time to hate, a time for peace and a time for war (Eccl 3.8). John might say that there is a time to comply and a time to resist, a time for passive endurance and a time for active resistance.

Summary of Findings and Insights

I developed in chapter 1 a theoretical foundation for the construction of a hermeneutic of resistance, informed by postcolonial studies within the interpretive paradigm of cultural studies. This approach enables suffering readers to reclaim the Apocalypse as resistance literature in the interest of justice and liberation,

ideals that are often marginalized in previous studies. After tracing the theme of violent as well as nonviolent resistance in ancient apocalyptic literature, I suggested in chapter 2 a new definition of the apocalyptic genre for a reading of the Apocalypse that views justice and anthropodicy as complementing love and theodicy. The Apocalypse foregrounds the theme of reversal of fortune in terms of human resistance as well as divine punishment. On the assumption that John's perception of contemporary circumstances as a crisis situation stems from both his experience of real sufferings and his conscientized perspective on reality, I viewed human contributions to apocalyptic solutions as likewise based on practical as well as imaginative or ideological resistance on the part of readers.

Primarily drawing on Scott's theory of resistance in terms of public and hidden transcript, I demonstrated in chapter 3 that the Apocalypse is imbedded with multi-tiered resistance tactics that subordinates can employ over against multiform strategies of dominance. Still and all, the Apocalypse comes short of endorsing violent resistance even under apocalyptic circumstances. More passive methods of resistance are commended when the social conditions are diagnosed as lethal to those who resist. The ambivalent image of the followers of Jesus between nonviolent and violent resistance is informed by the ambivalent image of Jesus between Lamb and Lion. I argued further that John instills a comic sense into his otherwise solemn apocalypse in order to entertain the oppressed readers by caricaturing the antagonist and making fun of some beliefs of the oppressors.

Chapter 4 addressed the theme of economic resistance, among other resistance tactics. Over against the spiritualist readings that unhistoricize the economic language of Revelation 18 in search of religious meanings, thereby disregarding social issues such as economic exploitation behind the text, I read this chapter from a socioeconomic perspective as problematizing unjust inequality in wealth and foregrounding active resistance against economic injustice, including a conscientized perspective on imperial economics. Economic justice is essential to a holistic liberation of subordinates.

I want to highlight some findings more emphatically than others. In seeking to problematize its language, previous ideological interpretations stop short of appropriating the Apocalypse as a liberating text, insofar as they fail to create a constructive discourse of resistance that helps to put an end to unjust

suffering. In comparison, allegedly non-ideological readings of the Apocalypse reduce the book to peace literature by overemphasizing such traditional values as pacifism or passivism, a move that may ultimately result in sustaining the dominant discourse. In reclaiming the Apocalypse as resistance literature, I see resistance as a Christian virtue. In lieu of attempting to mollify the violent language of the Apocalypse in one way or another, I admit that the way to the end of suffering is often described as rugged in the book, though it is limited within an apocalyptic framework and falls short of human violence.

Understanding becomes an essential part of strategies that facilitate resistance. The Apocalypse seeks to conscientize the readers about the need to resist dominance in terms of both thought and action. If the wise teachers in Daniel made the faithful Jews understand the predestined results of events, thereby enabling them to endure persecutions, the author of the Apocalypse helps the faithful Christians to perceive the satanic nature of Rome's ideological as well as material domination, thereby empowering them not only to endure but also to resist such twofold dominance. This reading undermines the traditional assumption that the Apocalypse is primarily concerned with affecting the way in which the Christians foresee the eschatological punishment in store for the evil powers and encouraging them, therefore, not to take any assertive actions against oppressive power structures. Instead of settling for the continued existence of injustice, the victims of persecution can appropriate the Apocalypse for the construction of conscious and concrete resistance tactics by which to decide their own future, in defiance of the interpretations that leave them at the mercy of their persecutors.

The theme of reversal of fortune plays an important role. John applies it to the present world as well as to the coming world, insofar as he shows a high interest in shortening the days of suffering through human activism as well as in awaiting the days of rejoicing in hopes of divine judgment. In this regard, this study takes seriously the theme of justice as it reflects the existential problems of real readers living under reduced circumstances. This it does over against pseudo-apocalyptic readings that fail to generate an alternative universe of justice and in effect end up exploiting the liberating text for an ideology that perpetuates the status quo.

Some people might feel offended by the idea that a NT book can be read as preferring judgment

and resistance to love and forgiveness. Others may find disturbing the view that apocalyptic resistance goes beyond passive endurance. In my view, official culture may be responsible, at least in part, for these theological qualms, which may be ideological constructs imposed from without. Cultural studies highlights the fact that common readings can react to official readings, though the historical fact that apocalyptic literature was a scribal phenomenon²⁴¹ may have helped to alienate the book from ordinary readers. Although the production of an apocalypse sometimes requires in-depth knowledge of previous literature, plebeian readers can recover meanings that best reflect their contextual concerns, inasmuch as an apocalyptic perspective is one from below that opts for the marginalized. In underscoring the contextual interest of the subaltern subjects, my reading of Revelation incidentally problematizes the social agenda of the public, but not popular in its cultural studies sense, reading of the book as peace literature, which ultimately sustains the dominant discourse by fomenting a discourse of endurance that treats resistance as a threat to Christian culture. The present work should come as no surprise when viewed as written from a cultural studies perspective to illustrate how the subaltern can engage a biblical text, a terrain of struggle over meaning, in order to generate a meaning in opposition to the ones imposed by the dominant ideology. Subordinates should be mindful of the possibility that the dominant ideology reappropriates and neutralizes the expressions of subordinate groups.²⁴² In one way or another, the subaltern underline “the shadow of empire in the production of modern readings of the ancient texts,” thereby foregrounding geopolitical relations of power in certain biblical interpretations.²⁴³

This work must not be taken to suggest that the Apocalypse should be read in the same way from the point of view of subordinates. Though reconstructed from a subaltern perspective, each element of the suggested resistance strategies cannot be hastily considered a viable option for the other marginalized who are living in different life conditions. The value of a spectrum of resistance tactics I derive from the

²⁴¹ J. Z. Smith, “Wisdom and Apocalyptic,” in *Religious Syncretism in Antiquity: Essays in Conversation with Geo Widengren*, ed. B. A. Pearson (Missoula: Scholars, 1975), 140.

²⁴² Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981), 86. The slave religion of Christianity was transformed into the hegemonic ideological apparatus of the medieval system (Ibid.).

²⁴³ Segovia, “Toward a Postcolonial Optic,” 128-29.

Apocalypse lies in showing that such a process is hermeneutically legitimate. The subjected are encouraged to exert agency in reconstructing the meanings of resistance in consideration of their socioreligious contexts. In this sense, I read the Apocalypse with others rather than for them.

From the point of view of postcolonialism, it is also imperative that the oppressed find ways in which they join forces with each other. We are encouraged by two comforting observations: first, any subordinate group has tremendous desire and will to express publicly what is in the hidden transcript, though in safe ways that would skirt danger;²⁴⁴ second, when aggregated in huge numbers, petty acts of resistance may produce dramatic economic and political effects.²⁴⁵ A coordinated strategy of resistance is demanded. On the presupposition that the oppressed can resist in diverse ways, this study broadens the path that leads to immediate liberation, with which the least privileged are concerned. I view the reality of suffering not only as a prerequisite, in its religious sense, but also as an obstacle, in its social sense, to future redemption. Understanding suffering and resistance from a religious perspective, but not from a social perspective, may deprive the Apocalypse of its social implications. A range of resistance tactics that lead toward liberation in social as well as religious realms should come to surface. The contribution of this study lies in equipping subjugated readers with an ideology of resistance informed by biblical discourse. The subaltern can then speak back by rewriting the language of apocalyptic resistance.

Root Problem of Violence

In attempting to read the Apocalypse from a subaltern perspective, this study distinguishes between real evil and imaginary evil. In my view, many underestimate the importance of the Apocalypse as resistance literature because they question not so much the reality behind or in front of the text as the way in which the text is written or read. For example, as noted in the previous chapter, Lawrence fails to retrieve John's resistance language by viewing it as motivated by a sense of revenge. I do not accept that a hermeneutic of suspicion must recognize that the children of light themselves cannot but be infected with

²⁴⁴ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 164.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 192.

the reign of darkness and, therefore, that confronting the powers and naming the antichrist necessarily involve the reality of the demonic within ourselves.²⁴⁶ Though there may be a need for full knowledge of our fallibility and a suspicion of our own motives,²⁴⁷ this hermeneutical reservation must be primarily, though not exclusively, applied to the agents of the beast among the oppressed rather than the oppressed themselves.

Collins argues that the root of religious violence in the Jewish and Christian traditions lies in the construction of a sharp antithesis with the Other, guaranteed by divine revelation, whether group identities are tied to ethnicity, as in Deuteronomy, or not, as in the NT.²⁴⁸ The root problem of violence is, thus, absolute certitude about the Bible, which is no infallible guide on ethical matters; consequently, the task of a biblical critic is to show that such certitude is an illusion that requires human discussion and argumentation.²⁴⁹

I am of the opinion that, even if the violent language of the Apocalypse were to be considered problematic, it is the socioreligious reality of injustice behind it that should be called into question, not the text itself. I would argue that the root of violence as found in the Apocalypse lies in the fragmented reality of human society, as exemplified in the Manichaean world between the colonizer and the colonized, which is characterized by persecution and oppression. Religious violence, if any, is reflective of social conflict, but not vice versa. An element of cosmic dualism in the Apocalypse is not so much divinely or supernaturally revealed as historically or socially constructed. The root of the problem lies in the subjugation of others for econo-socio-political gains. As a corollary, the root problem of violent resistance does not consist in the violence of the dominated but in the fact that the dominators are not interested in peaceful solutions to the violent oppression that makes dominance possible. One should remember how Fanon criticizes the colonists for preferring violence to reason. Divine revelation simply concerns the ways

²⁴⁶ Christopher Rowland and Mark Corner, *Liberating Exegesis: The Challenge of Liberation Theology to Biblical Studies* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1989), 137.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 138.

²⁴⁸ Collins, *Does the Bible Justify Violence?*, 26- 27.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 32-33.

to resist such illicit human relations. Hopes fade for a change of society not only because of the lack of mercy on the part of the oppressor but also because of the lack of resistance tactics on the part of the oppressed.

Apocalypse Then

Suffering, Resistance, and Identity Formation

It may be that John, in order to overcome the crisis of Christian identity caused or intensified by the imperial cult, challenges his undisturbed readers to adhere to the sect's principles, running the risk of being disenfranchised from Roman society.²⁵⁰ John, however, may be taken to regard such segregation not so much as an unwelcome concomitant of Christian faith but rather as an essential marker of Christianity. It has been argued that religiosity and ethnicity were associated with each other in the Roman world.²⁵¹ In my view, the Apocalypse redefines such religious-ethnic identity in terms of social practices in addition to religious faith. John's language of suffering and resistance does not only serve to vindicate suffering people and to empower them amidst imperial incongruities. I believe that such language also contributes to the formation of identity of the first-century Christian community in religio-ethnic terms within the imperial system.

I posit that suffering is constructed by the Apocalypse as an identity marker in various ways: between the author and his rivals, who were accommodationist church leaders; between the Christians and the Jews, who would have been less alienated insofar as Judaism was a *religio licita* ("legal religion"); and between the Christians and the pagans, who could avoid more severe exploitation by participating in the imperial cult. John condemns the complacent subjects of Rome, whether they be Jews or pagans, who adapt to the imperial system, which means suffering for the faithful Christians. Rome's econopolitics and imperial cult are condemned because they entail undue suffering on the part of the uncompromising Christians.

²⁵⁰ deSilva, "A Case Study in Apocalyptic Propaganda and the Maintenance of Sectarian Identity," 376, 393.

²⁵¹ Denise Kimber Buell, "Rethinking the Relevance of Race for Early Christian Self-Definition," *Harvard Theological Review* 94 (2001): 458.

As a corollary, I suggest that resistance is construed as an identity factor that distinguishes the Christians from both the pseudo-Christians, including the Judaized Christians, and the pagans, who needed not resist because they were complicit with Rome to a greater or lesser extent. Perhaps John views resistance as a qualification for entering the New Jerusalem, beyond a means for undermining Rome. If he commends martyrdom as a prerequisite for entering the new city, it is not surprising that John treats other forms of resistance in a similar manner. This reading is not implausible in view of the fact that John vindicates suffering Christians and encourages them to resist unjust suffering, as demonstrated in this study.

Third Camp: New Ideology in the New Order

This study is mindful of the assumption of liberation theology that the exodus is the paradigmatic event of God's concern for the oppressed. It is not coincidental that the Apocalypse of John alludes in many places to the exodus event in the OT. In particular, a number of the eschatological plagues are depicted on the model of plagues recorded in the Book of Exodus.²⁵² Along the lines of liberation theology, John's references to the exodus account is to be construed as reflective of God's concern for the oppressed Christians. If Revelation views liberation as a new exodus, the text serves as a call to boundary-crossing through active human involvement in society as well as divine intervention in history. In contrast, according to previous interpretations that view the endurance of suffering as the way to victory, Revelation functions as a means of comforting the oppressed, ultimately contributing to boundary maintenance, a stance that turns a blind eye to social mobilization. This study undermines this "non-liberationist" reading of the

²⁵² For example, the plague of turning the Nile into blood (Ex 7.20) is reflected in the second trumpet (8.8-9) and the second and third bowls (16.3-4). The plague of hail and fire started by the first trumpet (8.7) refers back to Ex 9.23, and the plague of darkness caused by the fourth trumpet (8.12) to Ex 10.22. As noted above, the two witnesses turn the waters into blood and strike earth with every kind of plague after the fashion of the exodus narrative. The new exodus imagery is also reflected in the song of Moses sung by the conquerors (15.3), which corresponds with the original song of Moses in Exodus 15. In ascribing the theme of *eschatological exodus* to the Apocalypse, Bauckham finds allusions to the exodus narratives in 11.8, where one of the prophetic names of the great city where the dead bodies of the witnesses lie is Egypt, and in 2.14, where the false teachers who entice Christians into compromising with paganism are compared with Balaam, the false prophet who impeded the journey of the Israelites into the promised land by seducing them into idolatry (*The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, New Testament Theology [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993], 70-72). Moreover, since manna was given to the Israelites in the desert after liberation from Egypt, it seems probable that the promise to give manna to those who conquer (2.17) is intertextually related to the theme of liberation as found in Exodus.

Christian apocalypse. The Apocalypse undermines the social boundary, though not the religious boundary, of the Christian community.

The Apocalypse, which envisions the liberation of God's people from the oppression of Rome in a way reminiscent of the liberation of the Israelites from the oppression of Egypt, deviates significantly from the story of Exodus in one important respect: unlike the Exodus account, where the Israelites destroy the Canaanites, John's New Jerusalem vision presents an unexpected appearance of the nations (21.24). In other words, John's group identities are less sharp than those of Deuteronomy. I suggest that John pictures a new social order requiring new human relations that disrupt Rome's power relations.

The Apocalypse, however, is usually read in the light of an apocalyptic binary worldview. Thompson, for example, comments on 18.23d, "By indicating the 'other' as one who beguiles by magical potions, a sharp differentiation is made between 'them' and 'us,' between Babylon/Rome and the saints of God."²⁵³ Likewise, Yarbrow Collins argues that John's "dualistic portray of reality and violent imagery must be recognized as potentially falsifying and dangerous."²⁵⁴ Revelation's dualistic division of humanity into those with the mark of the beast and those with the seal of God, she states, is not only an oversimplification that eliminates both the possibility of neutrality and the complexities of life which always contains shades of gray, but also, more importantly, a failure in love because it demonizes one's enemies in a dehumanizing manner.²⁵⁵

The Apocalypse might seem to lean towards such an apocalyptic dualism ("Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy," 22.11). However, over against the consensus reading that the Apocalypse presupposes a clear demarcation between insiders and outsiders, I argue that John's anthropology includes at least three types of people living in the Roman

²⁵³ Thompson, *Revelation*, 172.

²⁵⁴ Yarbrow Collins, "Revelation 18: Taunt-Song or Dirge?," 204. The Apocalypse shows the conviction that the lines have been drawn between the elect and the wicked (2.25; 9.20-21; 22.11) (Yarbrow Collins, "Political Perspective," 250).

²⁵⁵ Yarbrow Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 170. One important reason for the call to rejoice in 18.20 is "the feeling of being an outsider, the lack of any feeling of identification with or sympathy for the provincial elite or even the cities that they led," which cooperated with the Roman authorities (Ibid., 123).

Empire. Between God's people and Rome's faithful allies, the Apocalypse alludes to a third camp living in an ambiguous state, who neither belong to the group of saints nor exactly qualify as their oppressors. Both lukewarm Christians and disillusioned or repentant pagans belong to this interstice. John takes pains to make a nuanced distinction not simply between outsiders and insiders but also among outsiders and insiders. This twofold third camp undermines John's otherwise apocalyptic dualism, which is predicated on the predetermined fate of the followers of the Lamb/Lion as well as the allies of the beast.

In chapter 3 I read Rev 11.13 as depicting the penance of the nations. They are barely acknowledged by the church community. In chapter 4 I viewed the pagan mariners who utter the third dirge as representing the disenchanting pagans (18.17b-20). They are barely privileged by Rome. These observations undermine the assumption that the apocalypticist in general naively dichotomizes between the righteous and the wicked, so that we do not hear of the reclamation of the wicked.²⁵⁶ When read as suggesting the remorse of the pagans who move from the camp of the beast to that of the Lamb/Lion, these verses may be taken to posit a third camp composed of disillusioned earth-dwellers who were previously complicit with Babylon in one way or another. They hated the witnesses (11.8), though they were not deeply involved in the public hostilities against them (11.5). Indeed, the mariners were exploited by the shipowners but in a less severe way than the saints, because they compromised to such an extent that they engaged in Rome's maritime industry, which was impossible without the mark of the beast (13.16-17). The Apocalypse is aware of those who belong to the liminal zone between the camp of the Lamb/Lion and that of the beast. At a certain point in time, they refuse to belong any longer to the satanic camp, because they become conscientized enough (11.13), unlike the intoxicated (18.3) and deceived nations (18.23d). The Apocalypse represents a call on them to repent and leave the camp of the beast, to which the oppressors belong.

I suggest that not only some of the nations but also some church members belong to the third camp that scarcely fits in with the camp of the Lamb/Lion or that of the beast. For example, the Laodiceans are criticized for being loyal neither to the Lamb/Lion nor to the beast (3.15-16). They are superficial Christians

²⁵⁶ Barrett, *New Testament Background*, 330.

who are so complicit with Rome's ideology as to become a nuisance to the Lamb/Lion (3.16). They are urged to repent (3.19), which presupposes that their salvation is not fixed but fluid. Though some members of the church in Thyatira are given credit for not knowing "the deep things of Satan" (2.24), the probable presupposition that they do know the shallow things of Satan puts them somewhere in between the camp of the Lamb/Lion and the camp of the beast. They are not as faithful to God as the martyrs. The Apocalypse is a call on the people of God who are neither cold nor hot (3.15) to come out of the oppressive city of Rome (18.4).

The Apocalypse urges those who are not fully incorporated into the camp of the Lamb/Lion or that of the beast to make a subjective decision in light of the eschatological judgment. In order to challenge the in-betweens to opt for the camp of the Lion/Lamb, John presents the grave consequences that Rome's marginalized subjects complicit with her faithful allies face unless they stop believing or acting as if they were oppressors. In contrast with the fixed fate of those who are loyal to the satanic empire, such as the kings and merchants, the hostile enemies of the witnesses, and the false teachers, including Jezebel and the Nicolaitans, the fate of those who are vulnerable to being seduced by them is fluid, contingent on whether they instead choose to be persuaded by John and repent.²⁵⁷

John and Bhabha

One should recall here the process of hybridity or hybridization in conjunction with mimicry, as advanced by Bhabha. Bhabha thinks of mimicry as a process that mimics no fixed, final identity. Not only does the colonizer have no absolute pre-existent identity that can be mimicked, but the colonized likewise has no real identity that he or she betrays through mimicry.²⁵⁸ A particularly noteworthy concept is that of "Third Space," by means of which "Bhabha joins a group of thinkers who feel uncomfortable with the reductionism of dialectical systems that create a 'politics of polarity,' that is, oppositions such as self/other,

²⁵⁷ Note the subtle and nuanced difference between the pronouncement of punishment against the false teachers and the call for their followers to repent (2.16, 22).

²⁵⁸ Huddart, *Homi K. Bhabha*, 71.

centre/periphery, colonised/coloniser, and the like.” If “hybridity” is an attempt to locate culture in an in-between situation where it continually transforms itself according to the dynamics of cultural interaction, the Third Space is an attempt to *spatialize* the liminal position it represents by giving a certain tangibility to the in-between space where hybridization occurs.²⁵⁹

At the same time, there is an important difference between Bhabha and John: while Bhabha’s concept of Third Space in terms of hybridity means “neither the one nor the other,” John’s counterpart would mean “from the one to the other.” As argued in chapter 1, the idea of hybridity that foregrounds interdependence between colonizer and colonized runs the risk of necessarily downplaying oppositionality between them, thereby falling short of problematizing the underlying unbalanced power relations. Insofar as the Apocalypse speaks about constant oppositions between the followers of the Lamb/Lion and the followers of the beast, the concept of hybridity does not fully capture the dimension of resistance. In contrast, the idea of a third camp stresses not so much mutuality as antithesis between the camp of the Lamb/Lion and that of the beast. They represent examples of either the last becoming the first or the first becoming the last, both of which illustrate the theme of reversal of fortune. Reversal of fortune is to be considered a result of repentance or apostasy, while this study regards it primarily as a consequence of apocalyptic resistance.

This reading does not problematize a punitive God but impenitent people. In citing a midrash on the Cain and Abel story in Genesis (Genesis Rabbah 22.9), which is read as blaming God for not preventing Abel’s murder, Stratton problematizes a divine judgment that is prolonged until the ultimate moment in order to wreak utmost vengeance on the perpetrators, something that could be avoided if God would intervene to prevent evils.²⁶⁰ I would argue otherwise. Instead of viewing God as bearing with human sins a little longer to build a most dramatic eschatological judgment, I see the delay of the final consummation as fulfilling a two-fold purpose: on the one hand, it provides the persecuted church with opportunities to fight back against the persecutors, as this study underscores; on the other hand, it gives chances to repent to those who belong to the third camp.

²⁵⁹ Felipe Hernández, *Bhabha for Architects* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 89-90.

²⁶⁰ Stratton, “Eschatological Arena,” 75-76.

Klassen, however, goes too far when he argues that, throughout the fulfillment of the prayer of the souls under the altar for vengeance, the purpose is always to bring human beings to repentance through the tragedies of history (Rev 9.20, 21).²⁶¹ Between Klassen and the above-mentioned scholars who find in the Apocalypse a stringent apocalyptic dualism, I see a dialectical tension between punitive and therapeutic effects intended in the unfolding of the eschatological events including the catastrophes.

Two Peoples in the New Jerusalem

I should like to turn now to the position that Rev 11.13—and 18.17b-20 as well—foreshadows the unexpected reappearance of the nations and kings in 21.24: “The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it.” The ongoing presence of the nations in the New Jerusalem is most striking, considering that they were not just a victim to the deception of imperial ideology (18.23) but also an object of divine wrath to be struck down by the coming Jesus (19.15).²⁶² No matter how one interprets the verse, one thing seems certain, citing David Mathewson: “John’s mention of nations and kings recalls the same groups which were previously associated with and compliant with the beast and Babylon, and who were enemies of God, but have now become the people of God (cf. 21.3).”²⁶³

Concerning the use of *the nations* in the Book of Revelation, Aune observes, “All but four of these references are negative (15:4; 21:24, 26; 22:2).”²⁶⁴ In some places, however, the term appears to be used in a neutral sense to refer to the whole world, out of which both God’s people as well as God’s opponents

²⁶¹ Klassen, “Vengeance in the Apocalypse of John,” 304. Klassen compares the Mechilta Exod 15.5 which provides examples of how God gives the sinner additional time to repent (Ibid., n. 18).

²⁶² Universal resistance by pagan humanity to God is also implied in 11.9, where the nations refuse to bury the dead bodies of the two witnesses, in 13.7, according to which the nations worship the beast from the sea, and in 17.15, which depicts the nations under the control of the great whore.

²⁶³ David Mathewson, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: The Meaning and Function of the Old Testament in Revelation 21.1-22.5* (London: Sheffield Academic, 2003), 172.

²⁶⁴ Aune, *Revelation*, 1: 212. “The term ‘the nations’ occurs some twenty-three times in Revelation (2:26; 11:2, 18; 15:3; 16:19; 18:23; 19:15; 20:3, 8; 21:24, 26; 22:2), including five times in the phrase ‘all the nations’ (12:5; 14:8; 15:4; 18:3, 23), and seven times in the varied lists, which include ‘every tribe, language, people, and nation’ (5:9; 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15)” (Ibid.). “This polysyndetic list of *four* ethnic units, which cumulatively emphasize universality, is probably based on the frequent mention of the *three* ethnic groups of ‘peoples, nations, and languages’ in Daniel (3:4 [LXX has *four* ethnic units], 7, 29 [LXX v 96]; 5:19; 6:25 [LXX v 26]; 7:14; cf. Jdt 3:8, ‘nations, languages, and tribes’)” (Ibid., 361).

come.²⁶⁵ On the one hand, the focus is on those who need to respond to the gospel of Revelation. According to 10.11, “many peoples and nations and languages and kings” are the groups with regard to which—as conveyed by the preposition ἐπι (“about” [NRSV], “before” [KJV], or “over” [ASV])—John must prophesy. In 14.6-7 an angel flying in midheaven proclaims an eternal gospel that requires repentance from “every nation and tribe and language and people.” A call to repentance presupposes an ability to repent. The idiomatic phrase seems to refer to the whole populace of the world, with special reference to those who neither decidedly oppose nor faithfully obey God. On the other hand, it is God’s people coming from the same groups that is highlighted: “You were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation” (5.9); also, “There was a great multitude . . . from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands” (7.9).

In distinction to the nations and the kings of the earth, on whom the wrath of the Lamb/Lion falls (19.15; 6.15), the Apocalypse opens the door to some nations—and presumably some kings as well—whether they are considered potential or active believers. It seems to me that the pagans whose fate is depicted as fluid rather than fixed are the best candidate to account for the influx of visitors to the New Jerusalem in 21.24. The contingent fate of the nations is indicated by the statement that some of the pagans repent explicitly (11.13) or implicitly (18.19-20). Perhaps these verses foreshadow the unexpected reappearance of the nations and the kings of the earth in 21.24. The surprising reintroduction of the nations in the New Jerusalem implies the inclusiveness of the new salvation community.

While envisioning the possible repentance and redemption of the nations, John does not forget to reveal his awareness of apocalyptic justice by giving them a marginalized status in the New Jerusalem. There is evidence in the text suggesting that the nations are granted a marginalized status in the New

²⁶⁵ Rev 15.4 might be the single example of the nations being used in a positive sense before the introduction of the New Jerusalem: “All nations will come and worship before you, for your judgments have been revealed.” However, this verse seems to be a prediction about what will be realized in the New Jerusalem after the eschatological judgment is executed (21.24, 26).

Jerusalem. To begin with, the fact that the nations are given the right of entry into the new city seems to imply that they are considered as *visitors* rather than permanent residents. Bauckham holds that the seer envisions a full rather than partial inclusion of the nations in the blessings of the covenant. If the nations and the kings of the earth enter the New Jerusalem by its gates, he argues, so do the Christian martyrs (“Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they will have the right to the tree of life and may enter the city by the gates,” 22.14.).²⁶⁶ Yet, it is not certain whether 22.14 refers to the martyrs. I read the verse as a call on the third camp to repent. In the first place, the declaration that they will enter the city by the gates does recall the pilgrimage of the nations described in 21.24-26. In the second place, in parallel with 21.24 (“But nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life,” 21.27), 22.14 is followed by an account of the fate of the unrepentant (“Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood,” 22.15).²⁶⁷ These considerations provide evidence that the act of washing robes in 22.14, despite its use in 7.14 to refer to persecution, may indicate conversion rather than persecution. Whereas the former refers to the third camp who repent, the latter refers to the camp of the Lamb/Lion who come out of the great tribulation. The repentant third camp have to enter the New Jerusalem by the gates to walk by the light of the city (21.24), while God’s servants do not need to migrate to serve and see his face (22.3-4). A better benefit is promised to God’s servants, who are the persecuted Christians marked with a seal on their foreheads (7.3), which turns out to be the name of God (22.4).

Second, that the nations are not given full civic rights in the new salvation community is manifested in the account that they are entitled to the *leaves* of the tree of life (“On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations,” 22.2). Despite its probable symbolic meaning, this statement seems to presuppose that they are denied the fruit of the tree. The unspecified beneficiaries of the fruit of the tree in the verse are

²⁶⁶ Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 312-13.

²⁶⁷ The clause “they will have the right to the tree of life” (22.14) is not helpful, because it may indicate the right either to the fruit or to the leaves of the tree of life, as will be shortly discussed.

presumably God's servants mentioned in the next verse ("Nothing accursed will be found there any more. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him," 22.3). Besides, the leaves of the tree of life are for the *healing* of the nations, which seems to presuppose their vulnerability to sickness, despite the proclamation that there will be no more death or pain (21.4). While the fruit of the tree provides nourishment for the servants of God, its leaves serve as elixir for the healing of the nations. The writer of Revelation, argues Lupieri, "interprets the distinction between food and medicine as a prefiguration of the two categories of the saved who are destined to enter the New Jerusalem."²⁶⁸ It must be noted that John adds *of the nations* to Ezek 47.12, which makes no distinction between the Jews and the nations in terms of benefits from the trees ("Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing"). This fits in well with the promise that Jesus will give everyone who conquers permission to *eat* from the tree of life which is in the paradise of God (2.7). John seems to be reluctant to treat the nations once complicit with Babylon and its oppressed in exactly the same way.

Third, the fact that there are *peoples* of God in the New Jerusalem is nicely addressed by my suggestion that the Apocalypse makes a distinction between the conquerors and the third camp composed of the repentant. I postulate that the term "peoples (*λαοί*)" has a specific semantic meaning, distinct from the variant, God's "people (*λαός*)" ("See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them," 21.3). The plural *λαοί* is more likely to be the original reading than the singular *λαός*. One important rule of textual criticism is that generally the more difficult reading is to be preferred, especially when the superficially erroneous meaning makes sense on more mature consideration.²⁶⁹ The plural form is a more difficult reading in view of the prophetic writings that consistently speak of the one people of God (e.g., Jer 31.33 [LXX 38.33]; Ezek 37.27; Zech 8.8).²⁷⁰ It is probable that the singular form comes from the hand of the emendator, who wanted to conform the reading to the imagery of the HB.²⁷¹ Less likely, the plural was introduced by copyists who pedantically

²⁶⁸ Lupieri, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, 354.

²⁶⁹ Metzger, *Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 12*-13*.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 688.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*

conformed the singular noun to the preceding plural subject in the same verse (“*they* [αὐτοῖ] will be his peoples”), whereas the author was following the prophetic scriptures.²⁷² Moreover, the plural form is favored by slightly superior manuscript evidence.²⁷³ The problem then arises as to why the author deliberately revised the traditional notion of one redeemed people.

It has been suggested that John’s international perception of God’s new covenant with Israel is reflected in the alteration of the singular *people* of Ezek 37.27 into the plural *peoples* (Rev 21.3) as well as in the free entry of the nations into the New Jerusalem as heirs of the redemption purchased by the Lamb (21.7, 26).²⁷⁴ Since the redeemed are composed of those from every nation (5.9; 7.9), including both Jews and Gentiles, the people of God are now the people of the nations.²⁷⁵ Not only the statement that the nations will enter the New Jerusalem with their glory and honor (21.24, 26) but also the change of Ezekiel’s “leaves for healing” to “leaves . . . for the healing of the nations” in 22.2 indicate the full access of the nations to the throne of God.²⁷⁶ Bauckham finds in 21.3 a universalistic tone that attributes the blessings in store for God’s covenant people to the nations.²⁷⁷

These explanations are not convincing in view of the less privileged status of the nations in the New Jerusalem, as analyzed above. I would suggest that John deliberately modifies the conventional singular concept of God’s people in order to signal the presence of *two* subgroups in the new order: God’s servants as the central people of the new city and the nations as its peripheral dwellers. According to this analysis, God’s *peoples* does not refer to the former various nationalities of the many peoples of redeemed humanity but to different citizenships among the redeemed, which entail distinct benefits. The previous complicity of the nations with Babylon qualifies their benefits in the New Jerusalem, though their

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Ibid. The reading λαοί is supported by κ A 046 2053 and twelve other minuscules it^{ar} Irenaeus^{lat}, and the reading λαός is supported by E P almost all minuscules and versions and many Fathers (Ibid.).

²⁷⁴ Philip L. Mayo, “*Those Who Call Themselves Jews*”: *The Church and Judaism in the Apocalypse of John*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series 60 (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 202.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 194.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 178.

²⁷⁷ Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 310-13.

repentance grants them the right to enter the city.²⁷⁸ While John is somewhat lenient to the nations that do not oppose the Lamb to the bitter end, his repeated emphasis on persecution or martyrdom makes it necessary to make their position in the New Jerusalem different from that of those who oppose the beast to the bitter end.

In my view, the marginalized status of the nations satisfies the demands of apocalyptic justice.²⁷⁹ It may be objected from a postcolonial perspective that the marginalized status of the nations in the New Jerusalem reflects or reinscribes the center-periphery relations of colonialism or imperialism belonging to the old order. However, if the Apocalypse does not transcend hierarchical relations, it does not replicate imperial power relations either. The Apocalypse undermines unequal and unjust relations based on alienation and oppression by picturing unequal yet just relations based on symbiosis and tolerance.²⁸⁰ It is far from self-evident that utopia should realize absolute equality among its members. The marginalized status of the nations in the New Jerusalem is just insofar as it reflects the twofold character of the third camp that straddled the fence between the camp of Lion/Lamb and that of the beast until the last-minute repentance. In theory, if not in practice, justice requires judgment and exclusion, while repentance grants forgiveness and inclusion. John's solution is to partially, not fully, integrate the nations into the New Jerusalem. Justice is an important theme even in John's description of the New Jerusalem.

²⁷⁸ Interestingly enough, Aune takes the plural form λαοί, and translates it as "people" (Aune, *Revelation*, 3: 1122).

²⁷⁹ David Mathewson claims that the interpreter must give equal weight to both perspectives of universal judgment and salvation. The tension created by the statement of universal judgment as stated in the depiction of the parousia (19.17-21) and the final battle (20.7-10) and the statement of universal salvation as assumed in the description of the New Jerusalem (21.24-26; 22.2) functions in a rhetorical manner to present the opposing options available to the nations ("The Destiny of the Nations in Revelation 21:1-22:5: a Reconsideration," *Tyndale Bulletin* 53 [2002]: 141-42). However, the same rhetorical function is also possible with my reading, which contrasts the "us" composed of both God's servants and the nations who dwell with God (21.3) with the "them" who are eternally punished in the lake of fire outside of the New Jerusalem (21.8; 22.15). John invites the nations belonging to the third camp to repentance when he anticipates their participation in eschatological salvation, as informed by apocalyptic justice.

²⁸⁰ One might here recall the goal of black theology, as understood by Cone, to remove, rather than reverse, the master-servant relationship between white and black through black power (James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* [New York: Seabury, 1969], 14).

Apocalypse Now

Liberation Theology

Rather than viewing the canon as accidentally containing minority opposition ideas in the very process of domestication of deviant ideas,²⁸¹ I see the canon primarily as showing a preferential option for the subaltern through giving voice to marginal ideas on their behalf. This tendency reaches its climax in the Apocalypse, which is read as a reversal of fortune narrative that foregrounds the theme of justice and judgment. I read the Apocalypse as completing the protocol of liberation represented by Jesus in the Gospels (“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free,” Lk 4.18). In reading Revelation as essentially an attempt to counter cultural hegemony and socioreligious oppression, this study reveals the liberating ideology of the text and, in so doing, counteracts the contextual nature of oppressive readings of the liberating text.

John’s liberative voice stems from his prophetic concern. In discussing the theological significance of apocalypticism, P. D. Hanson emphasizes the role that a prophetic point of view plays in the operation of apocalyptic movements and in the evaluation of all myths of salvation.²⁸² The prophetic character of apocalyptic literature fits in well with its origin in prophetic writings. Jewish and Christian apocalyptic are rooted in HB prophecy.²⁸³ In particular, Jewish apocalyptic thought grew out of post-exilic prophecy within Israel.²⁸⁴ It is interesting to note that Judaism witnessed the shift from prophetic eschatology, which envisioned the accomplishment of divine plans within the bounds of human history and through ordinary, human means, to apocalyptic eschatology, which looked for supernatural forces to create a new world or bring about retribution after death, both in the future.²⁸⁵ If apocalyptists saw the future as essentially discontinuous with the present, whereas prophets saw the future developing continuously out of the

²⁸¹ Rowland and Corner, *Liberating Exegesis*, 145.

²⁸² *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, s.v. “Apocalypticism.”

²⁸³ Barrett, *New Testament Background*, 316.

²⁸⁴ Reddish, *Apocalyptic Literature*, 33.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

present,²⁸⁶ John can hardly be classified exclusively as an apocalypticist, insofar as his apocalyptic work is concerned with the immediate transformation of society as well as the final judgment. In reading the Apocalypse via Scott's theory about the relation between domination and resistance, chapter 3 has reinforced my claim in chapter 2 that John's apocalypticism is predicated on human as well as supernatural agency in the transformation of the status quo. In this sense, the Apocalypse is better understood as a dialectical mixture of apocalyptic eschatology and prophetic eschatology, though the balance may be tilted toward the former by John's imminent eschatology, which anticipates an impending judgment of the "not yet" reality for a fuller realization of the "already." I view the composition of the Apocalypse as a convergence of prophecy and apocalypticism, which may illustrate the fact that "in NT times Jewish apocalyptic writers understood themselves as prophets."²⁸⁷

Meanwhile, Revelation's prophetic eschatology is different from Jewish counterparts in that the latter describes God as acting within political events and through world leaders,²⁸⁸ while the former envisions the agency of ordinary people within the context of their ordinary lives, as chapters 3 and 4 have shown. This position may have been compatible with the apocalyptic worldview in vogue some twenty-five years after the destruction of the temple. P. Alexander suggests not only that the war against Rome dampened eschatological fervor or messianic hopes but also that the destruction of the temple in 70 C.E. removed a powerful, visible symbol of the divine presence and instead fostered the transcendent view of God found in the Merkabah texts.²⁸⁹ The Apocalypse of John may serve as a counterexample to the claim that less interest in apocalyptic hopes resulted in more interest in the lore concerning the heavenly world along the lines of Merkabah mysticism. I submit that John may have wanted to fill the apocalyptic void created by the war against Rome and the destruction of the temple with a renewed traditional prophetic expectation that foregrounds the role of ordinary people. Thus read, the Apocalypse provides resources for the subordinate masses rather than subordinate elites.

²⁸⁶ Barrett, *New Testament Background*, 316.

²⁸⁷ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 137.

²⁸⁸ Reddish, *Apocalyptic Literature*, 20.

²⁸⁹ Alexander, "3 (Hebrew Apocalypse of) Enoch," 235.

This study has demonstrated that the Apocalypse has a high view of orthopraxy as well as orthodoxy. There are voices to the contrary. Although he admits that apocalyptic literature is more congenial to the pragmatic tendency of liberation theology than to the ontological and objectivist concerns of systematic theology,²⁹⁰ Collins sees enormous differences between them in terms of worldview. While the apocalypses often address the issues of sociopolitical liberation, he argues, they lack a program for effective action, because the visionaries envisioned a revolution only in the imagination, due to the strong conviction that human affairs are controlled by higher powers.²⁹¹ Similarly, Albertz identifies in the Hellenistic era a development of Yahweh religion from a historical religion of liberation to an eschatological religion of redemption.²⁹² Further, Wayne Meeks argues that the Apocalypse does not call for revolutionary action but for disengagement and quietism.²⁹³

Whereas the Apocalypse has been either ignored or read as having to do with the end of the world and opting out of history, particularly in some conservative Christian circles in North America and Europe, liberation theology has inspired many people to see the same book as a bedrock of the struggle for justice, peace, and the hope for God's intervention in the world of flesh and blood.²⁹⁴ In particular, the hope for a messianic kingdom on earth inspired by Revelation 20, which was a dominant eschatological belief among first-century Christians, is preserved in many liberation theologians' eschatology and gives a positive significance to action for social change.²⁹⁵ As sociologists suggest, millenarian movements critique social, political, and economic institutions.²⁹⁶ Though apocalypses predict the future, such information is primarily about the present in that they tell the audience whether things to do today correspond to the will of heaven.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁰ Collins here refers to Rowland and Corner, *Liberating Exegesis*.

²⁹¹ Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 283.

²⁹² Rainer Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period*, vol. 2, *From the Exile to the Maccabees*, trans. John Bowden, Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 564.

²⁹³ Wayne A. Meeks, *The Moral World of the First Christians* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), 146.

²⁹⁴ Christopher Rowland, "Revelation," in *Global Bible Commentary*, ed. Daniel Patte (Nashville: Abingdon, 2004): 559.

²⁹⁵ Rowland and Corner, *Liberating Exegesis*, 135.

²⁹⁶ J. R. Mueller and G. A. Robbins, "Vision of Ezra," in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 584.

²⁹⁷ Barr, "Beyond Genre," 86-87. The audience expect to see in an apocalypse a more real world that controls both

I demonstrated in chapters 3 and 4 that the Apocalypse calls on the saints to confront persecution and oppression by means of a variety of resistance tactics, including nonrevolutionary action that does not necessarily mean disengagement or quietism. The Apocalypse encourages not so much withdrawal or spiritualism as orthopraxy, as indicated in the statement that all will be judged according to their works (20.12-13). The Apocalypse can be reclaimed as resistance literature only when its resistance language is not only perceived but also practiced. Apocalyptic solutions as well as crises are not merely literary conventions but realities experienced and perceived by the author and readers. If subaltern Christians bring their contextual concerns to the text yet refuse econo-socio-political involvement, they might incur the same criticism as privileged Christians, whose contextual interests hinder them from econo-socio-political engagement with the text.

However, liberation theology may need to abandon the homogeneous concept of the poor in favor of the multiple subject positions of each agent in the struggle.²⁹⁸ The present work highlights the need to diversify the concept of resistance, not only in terms of subjectivity but also in other-than-economic dimensions, including sociopolitics, psychology, religion, etc. The existential problems of any subject cannot be reduced to economic issues, though economic injustice is the major theme of Revelation 18. The Apocalypse shows a preferential option for the marginalized subjects in various spheres of life.

Liberation theology often abandons its own pragmatic tendency for the construction of Christian apocalypticism, presumably influenced by the mainstream reading that underestimates Revelation's activism. This study undermines a liberating interpretation that would see Revelation as insisting that the reader above all continue the paradigm of Jesus's prophetic witness.²⁹⁹ If the retrieval of subversive memories submerged by dominant ideologies is a significant component of liberation theology,³⁰⁰ that process cannot be restricted to testimony, which is one important resistance tactic envisioned in the

the future and the present (Ibid., 88).

²⁹⁸ Elina Vuola, *Limits of Liberation: Praxis as Method in Latin American Liberation Theology and Feminist Theology* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1997), 79.

²⁹⁹ Rowland and Corner, *Liberating Exegesis*, 151.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 145.

Apocalypse. The Apocalypse can be read as envisioning diverse methods of achieving liberation, all of which the subaltern can employ as prophetic participants as well as prophetic witnesses.

Global Capitalism

The present study has demonstrated that resistance, which is more than passive endurance yet less than active violence, comes to the aid of the oppressed. The Apocalypse is a helpful text to suffering readers when it is understood as an invitation to take part in the undermining of oppressive human society and the introduction of humanitarian society. If Revelation makes sense in the modern world as it did in the ancient world, it is not simply because the end of the world is considered to be imminent but also because Babylon is seen as reappearing. Revelation's vision of salvation centers on the earth, as is indicated by John's departure from Paul, who envisions Christians being caught up in the clouds at the last day (1 Thess 4.17), and from Daniel, who hopes that the righteous will shine like stars in heaven (Dan 12.3) as well.³⁰¹ The apocalyptic insight is that the New Jerusalem exists *now* for those who refuse to be beguiled by the blandishments of Babylon and live with "Yahweh alone" as the center of reality.³⁰² John's prophetic voice can be taken to demand the construction of the New Jerusalem as well as the destruction of Babylon, inasmuch as both cities are considered ever-present.

As long as the shadow of empire lingers in the lives of modern as well as contemporary readers,³⁰³ the church must unmask the pretensions of ideologies and name the beast.³⁰⁴ The church must name the first beast, i.e., empire, but also the second beast, i.e., the agents of empire who delude its subjects. In other words, a new rhetoric of resistance against modern Babylon should be formulated in consideration of the world in front of the reader, which encompasses not only socioreligious conditions but also the underlying dominant ideology, just as John created his own resistance rhetoric, which reinterpreted contemporary

³⁰¹ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Vision of a Just World*, 109.

³⁰² Howard-Brook, "Revelation's Call to Resistance," 22.

³⁰³ Segovia, "Toward a Postcolonial Optic," 130.

³⁰⁴ Yarbrow Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 175. This statement is based on what Johannes Metz argues in *Theology of the World* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1969).

socioreligious situations sustained by Rome's ideology. An essential part of the Christian vocation is to name and resist the illusionary and harmful power of empire.³⁰⁵

However, naming the beast of the day may not be an easy task. Both naming the beast and naming the sorcerous ideology that feeds it require a revealed knowledge of and a conscientized perspective on the throes of injustice. Honest to modern econopolitical practices, some critics attempt to name the beast. The first world controls the great bulk of the earth's resources, as Rome was manipulating world trade, with a minority of people enjoying a lifestyle denied the rest, who are suffering grinding poverty.³⁰⁶ The merchants of Revelation 18 are the equivalent of those who in our day accumulate millions by unethical means including the exploitation of the weak.³⁰⁷ Behind the veil of what the Apocalypse calls Babylon is another empire, i.e., today's global corporate capitalism.³⁰⁸ Economic injustice is thus named as the modern beast.

In issuing a challenge for modern Christians living in the world of mighty global capitalism, Wes Howard-Brook and Anthony Gwyther argue that many of the ideological propositions that undergird Western capitalist culture and the global economic culture, regardless of their validity, belong to the realm of myth.³⁰⁹ One recalls John's critique in 18.23 of Rome's econopolitical conditions in relation to its ideology of *Pax Romana*. Modern readers on the periphery who are being made Other in the world of globalization might well want to draw strategically on the way in which John exposes and undercuts Rome's economic ideology, in order to deconstruct modern versions of *Pax Romana* via a counter-discourse.

If Rome's imperial economy was a background factor in the genesis of Revelation, global

³⁰⁵ Howard-Brook and Gwyther, *Unveiling Empire*, 254.

³⁰⁶ Harrington, *Revelation*, 184. Those of us living in the United States must give special attention to the cargo list, because the first world not only fits this picture closely but also contrasts with most of the rest of the world that starves (Osborne, *Revelation*, 660).

³⁰⁷ Hughes, *Commentary*, 189.

³⁰⁸ Howard-Brook, "Revelation's Call to Resistance," 20. Though Howard-Brook believes that the empire of global corporate capital has been replacing city/nation-state empires (Ibid., 23), I think that more stress needs to be laid on the possibility that global corporations exist in the service of particular nations.

³⁰⁹ Howard-Brook and Gwyther, *Unveiling Empire*, 113. Economics operates in mythic dimensions, without which capitalism and communism, the most potent economic ideologies of our day, could not have operated; thus, beliefs not just in an "invisible hand" and a "free market" but in the "dictatorship of the proletariat" are myths (Ibid., 114).

capitalism invites a postcolonial reading of the book that unveils the quasi-religious status that economics enjoys in biblical interpretation. The inclusiveness of Rev 13.16, David deSilva argues, suggests that the mark of the beast, which is the key to this world's economy, is meant to unify a diversity of people.³¹⁰ Global capitalism seems to achieve a similar purpose. In my view, an economics that rides on global capitalism as a quasi-religion—and indeed as a quasi-science³¹¹—appears to be the modern counterpart of Rome's imperial cult in its far-reaching influence as a hegemonic discourse on the dominated as well as on the dominant.

I find less convincing the view that the postcolonial lens is not helpful in the case of the Apocalypse, because the chief object of John's attack is not the notion of empire, which is used as a positive image of God's own rule in 21.24-26, but idolatry, i.e., the *worship* of emperor and empire.³¹² This reading may be nothing but an ideological rhetoric of the complacent, which the complaining others may well want to deconstruct via a counter-rhetoric. Some might even argue that the appropriation of the Apocalypse by comfortable middle and upper class western Christians, who long ago compromised with the "empire," might be a more disturbing aspect of the misuse of the Apocalypse than its misappropriation as a warrant for hateful vengeance.³¹³ At the least, the postcolonial optic is useful for the reading of the Apocalypse inasmuch as John reproves the notion of imperial economics, which is hardly used as a positive image of God's economics, because it is satanic to such an extent that being part of it is tantamount to receiving the mark of the beast. By analogy, the claim that the worship of global capitalism, but not global capitalism as such, is dangerous would make sense only from the perspective of those basking in its benefits. It is a distinction without a difference in the eyes of apocalyptists, who identify with those to whom global capitalism means exploitation. For some, simply being part of a sinful economic system equals receiving

³¹⁰ deSilva, "A Case Study in Apocalyptic Propaganda and the Maintenance of Sectarian Identity," 391.

³¹¹ "Although economics purports to be an empirical science, one could easily get the impression from paging through modern economics journals that its sole focus is either theory or highly theoretical empirical estimations" (John J. Piderit, *The Ethical Foundations of Economics* [Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1993], 27).

³¹² Christopher Bryan, *Render to Caesar: Jesus, the Early Church, and the Roman Superpower* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 107.

³¹³ Phelan, "Revelation, Empire, and the Violence of God," 66-67.

the mark of the beast.

While both the beast and its ideological weapon are stressed, less attention is paid to how to deconstruct their power from an apocalyptic perspective. A discourse of resistance is more meaningful to suffering readers when they become equipped with effective strategies to fight against economic domination as well as ideological hegemony. While they critique the characterization of free-market ideology as “religion,”³¹⁴ Howard-Brook and Gwyther, following most commentators, fail to give a practical role to suffering readers when they assume that vengeance belongs to God.³¹⁵ It is virtually impossible, they claim, for ordinary folks to impede global capital’s increasing control over national governments, just as the Christians in Asia could not oppose Rome’s hegemony.³¹⁶ Consequently, the gloomy reality that global capitalism is unstoppable is not cause for despair but a challenge to face the reality and to “seek not that empire stop being empire, but that Christians leave Babylon and become citizens of New Jerusalem.”³¹⁷ Howard-Brook seems to take a somewhat naïve posture toward the overwhelming reality of imperial oppression when he says that we can not only resist empire in our everyday lives, e.g., through turning off the TV and making informed choices about our purchases, but also find the New Jerusalem in our midst, e.g., in the presence of sustainable agriculture and renewable energy, and in our choice of forgiveness over vengeance.³¹⁸

One may not be satisfied with these rather passive acts of resistance, because they hardly affect the reality of massive injustice. What we need is not so much apocalyptic eyes to detect new pseudo-Jeruselems as apocalyptic resistance necessary to remove the obstacles to the New Jerusalem. It rests in the hands of modern Christians to devise multi-tiered resistance strategies that would make modern Babylon precarious. Indeed, there is a time when the marginalized need to keep a low profile, because the beast is allowed to hold absolute sway. Yet, there are also times when they can employ assertive resistance tactics that go

³¹⁴ Howard-Brook and Gwyther, *Unveiling Empire*, 238-39.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 155.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 242.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 242.

³¹⁸ Howard-Brook, “Revelation’s Call to Resistance,” 24.

beyond passive endurance yet stop short of violent resistance, with the belief that the crumbling of the oppressive power structures is divinely willed. The apocalyptic conviction that an eschatological denouement is inevitable needs to be complemented by the prophetic urgency that it can be facilitated by active resistance, which brings about immediate effects on reality. The Babylon that is overthrown by God is presently undercut from within by its resistant subjects.

Instead of overstraining the meaning of resistance and of the New Jerusalem, this study has sought to elicit resistance strategies proper from the Book of Revelation. First of all, Christian testimony plays an important role. If global capitalism, in parallel with Roman propaganda, claims that they serve others whom they in reality systematically impoverish,³¹⁹ and controls media to produce a false version of reality in the minds of ordinary folks,³²⁰ the first and foremost thing modern prophets and saints should be doing is revealing the sorcery that deceives all the nations (Rev 18.23d). Other than ideological resistance, modern readers may have to pursue a different roadmap than that of the Apocalypse in opposing the beast. We may have to be careful in constructing a discourse on suffering and resistance from apocalyptic writings that show different levels of social contradictions than ours. This suggestion has two implications: on the one hand, a discourse of resistance derived from the Apocalypse should be applied to modern readers only in analogous circumstances; on the other hand, the subaltern must not only take into account the legitimacy of resistance tactics as informed by eschatological imminence but also adjust them according to dominance strategies.

Granted, however, that global capitalism engenders economic injustice, the possibility must be considered that modern Babylon is not as oppressive as Rome and, therefore, that the eschatological expectations related to its downfall are less imminent than in the first century. Perhaps modern Babylon is not so much doomed as redeemable. While admitting that both suffering and resistance are ever-present, I think that it is important to make a distinction between Babylons in cultivating a discourse of resistance. It

³¹⁹ Howard-Brook and Gwyther, *Unveiling Empire*, 245.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, 252. Modern empire takes advantage of marketing and advertising, whereas ancient Rome used public processions, statuary and temples, and coins (*Ibid.*); as a result, we are not told by global capital of the terrible conditions of the sweatshops where our toys and clothes are produced (*Ibid.*, 256).

may be noted that the different socioreligious context of each church in Asia Minor demanded a distinct message. Depending on the extent to which the existing socioreligious conditions are diagnosed as apocalyptic crisis, different methods are needed for solving the problems.

Last but not least, economic reductionism cannot account for the sway of global capitalism. While reading Revelation 18 in terms of socioeconomics, I pointed out that other forms of injuries and insults should be taken into account in tandem with economic exploitation. Not only material but also psychological impacts in various socio-religious realms must be examined in the rewriting of such ideological constructs as economic suffering and economic resistance as a consequence of global capitalism and global postcolonialism, respectively.

Suggestions for Further Studies

Extent of Aggressive Resistance

I suggest a couple of desiderata for further studies. The main question I have had in mind throughout this study is how biblical criticism can help to liberate the marginalized grassroots in an ethically sound way from oppressive readings as well as oppressive realities. I think that Revelation's resistance language, which subsumes nonviolence but not violence, reflects the author's agony over the extent to which the apocalyptic need to end unjust suffering offsets any ethical issues that might arise from an endorsement of violent resistance. While this study argues that the Apocalypse encourages suffering Christians to resist in not only passive but also active ways, what is not clear yet is to what extent they can perform aggressive resistance.

Indeed, the Book of Revelation describes a violent God, though it would not do justice to John's sophisticated discourse on resistance to claim that oppressed Christians can carry out the same level of violence against their oppressors as the Lion/Lamb does to his enemies. Nonetheless, some might attempt to draw out implications that divine violence may have for human resistance. Others might want to circumscribe the kind and extent of violence that the downtrodden may legitimately employ for resistance. Still others might argue that even minimal violence is too violent to be considered a Christian virtue. The

problem becomes more convoluted by the argument that nonviolent or passive resistance and violent resistance are equally far removed from Jesus's strenuous ethic of nonresistance.³²¹ "Resistance," argues Paul Ramsey, "does not become more Christian by becoming nonviolent, neither is armed resistance unchristian by virtue of its being armed but by virtue of being *resistant*."³²²

As a child of modern Korean history disrupted by Japanese colonialism, I do not take issue with the violent ways in which Koreans fought against Japanese colonial rule, insofar as I am reluctant to argue that violence should be completely ruled out as a means for struggling against intolerable injustice. The claim that violent resistance is not unambiguously espoused in Revelation may not be taken to mean that it is absolutely forbidden under any circumstances. Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. In my view, this issue cannot be easily resolved, because it demands not only exegetical or hermeneutical but also ethical or theological considerations. However, the reclamation of the Apocalypse as resistance literature might not be complete until this theme is explored in more detail in such a way as to take seriously not only passive but also aggressive resistance, though limited, as a legitimate means of resistance.

Role of Intellectuals

Given that Revelation endorses a variety of resistance tactics, the text remains silent about who can cultivate an anti-hegemonic discourse whereby to name and deconstruct the beast. However, insofar as he served as prophetic interpreter of events for his congregations,³²³ it seems clear that John was not only a charismatic apocalypticist but also an intellectual leader. Similarly, modern intellectuals may be able to play the crucial role of mobilizing random and isolated resistance, which as such is not effective, into a praxis that has political impact.³²⁴ Several possibilities have been suggested.

³²¹ Paul Ramsey, *Basic Christian Ethics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1950), 69. Jesus' injunctions never to resist one who is evil but to do him some positive good instead is typically expressed in the command to turn the other cheek, give the cloak as well, and go a second mile (Mt 5.38-42) (Ibid., 66). "Non-resisting love renounces all claims on behalf of self" (Ibid., 68).

³²² Ibid., 69.

³²³ Boring, *Revelation*, 26.

³²⁴ Henry A. Giroux, *Teachers as Intellectuals: toward a Critical Pedagogy of Learning*, Critical Studies in Education Series (Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey, 1988), 151.

First, in emphasizing the role of human agents who create and disseminate a dissident subculture, Scott calls attention to the role of what Max Weber has termed the *pariah-intelligentsia*, assuming that much of the resistance to the dominant culture takes the form of religious heterodoxy and heresy.³²⁵ These groups, which are at the lower end of or altogether outside of the social hierarchy, are capable of an original attitude toward the meaning of the cosmos and of intense ethical and religious emotion, because they are neither bound by the social conventions nor impeded by any material considerations.³²⁶ Second, one might also recall the *organic intellectuals* of Antonio Gramsci, who articulate the interests of the working class. One could argue that organic intellectuals are after all pariah-intelligentsia in the sense that they are socially marginalized and work in the interest of the subaltern.

Third, while Gramsci sees organic intellectuals as fulfilling a function within economic production, one may want to apply this observation to other movements in order to encompass intellectuals working for black identity, women's liberation, etc.³²⁷ In distinction to Gramsci's *radical organic intellectuals*, who raise political awareness in the working class by providing necessary pedagogical and political skills to help it develop leadership and engage in collective struggle, one of the central goals of cultural studies is to create *transformative intellectuals*, who can emerge from and work with any number of groups that take as their starting point the transformative critique of the conditions of oppression.³²⁸

So does the subordinated group need an intellectual element? Gramsci seems to be aware of the danger as well as the benefit of the role that intellectuals can play within the struggling group. He believed that it is necessary to have a strongly centralized party to acquire democracy,³²⁹ although he denounced the risks of bureaucratic and authoritarian abuses present in such a party.³³⁰ One could make the question even

³²⁵ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 123-24.

³²⁶ Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, trans. Ephraim Fischoff (Boston: Beacon, 1993), 126.

³²⁷ Steve Jones, *Antonio Gramsci*, Routledge Critical Thinkers (New York: Routledge, 2006), 84.

³²⁸ Giroux, *Teachers as Intellectuals*, 151-52. In contrast with *radical organic intellectuals*, according to Gramsci, *conservative organic intellectuals* provide the dominant classes with forms of moral and intellectual leadership (Ibid., 151).

³²⁹ Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, ed. Joseph A. Buttigieg (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 1: 323.

³³⁰ Santucci, *Antonio Gramsci*, 157-58.

more complex by objecting that the division of any sort of center from the periphery is a characteristic of colonialism or imperialism.

More importantly, one might suspect that intellectuals would end up practically opting for incorporation into political security, even though they refuse to make ideological adjustments. Henry Giroux argues that cultural studies needs to define the role of the intellectual as a counter-hegemonic practice that not only avoids but also challenges academic and political incorporation, even to the point of developing and working with “movements outside of the limiting contours of the disciplines, symposia, and reward systems that have become the sole referents for intellectual activity.”³³¹ Bourdieu argues, while all practices—including intellectual practices—are interested and social scientists unwittingly translate into their “explanations” of social phenomena particular epistemological assumptions and intellectual field interests, one can hope to gain a measure of freedom from the social determinants of intellectual practice only by doing a sociology of sociology, applying sociological methods to the practice of sociology itself.³³² In my opinion, this “reflexive sociology” is not an easy task on the part of the intellectuals. Or, more accurately, the concept of reflexive sociology may be a contradiction in terms in view of his own idea that *all* intellectual practices are interested. In consideration of these two observations, the readers are asked to formulate the role of intellectuals not only in reading the Apocalypse as resistance literature but also in applying any reclaimed resistance tactics to their own lives.

Concluding Remarks

In reclaiming the Apocalypse as resistance literature, this study refuses to read this book as peace literature or violent literature. I have attempted to voice my own reading of the Apocalypse, one that is neither violent nor soft enough to be misappropriated in either direction. If reading the Apocalypse as peace literature may prolong unjust relations insofar as it satisfies an ethic of peace at the expense of justice,

³³¹ Giroux, *Teachers as Intellectuals*, 152-53.

³³² Swartz, *Culture and Power*, 270-71.

reading the book as violent literature may perpetuate violent relations inasmuch as it meets a politic of resistance at the cost of peace. The Apocalypse is to be read as commending the will to resist as a means to an end, the end being putting a stop to both undue suffering and using violence in that process.

Despite some significant merits derived from the Apocalypse when read as resistance literature, I have to admit the possibility that real readers might feel frustrated when the suggested resistance tactics do not seem to directly affect their existential problems. I do believe, however, that human beings feel more secured than anxious when they find themselves controlling things in one way or another, instead of becoming passive spectators. If it is objected that this study on the Apocalypse asks as many questions as it gives answers, my reply is that such disturbing voices should not be silenced but acknowledged in biblical interpretation. At the very least, the present work has shown that Christian apocalypticism can be reconstructed in such a way that it regards the subaltern as a subject of history rather than an object of history. In my view, Apocalypse Studies ceaselessly highlights divine, apocalyptic solutions to the problems of human relations to the detriment of human, prophetic contributions. This study flies in the face of this theological orientation in reclaiming the Apocalypse as a resistance literature that takes seriously the role of human agency as well as divine intervention in the realization of God's will on earth as in heaven.

The heart of the present work is the claim that the Christian apocalypse envisions suffering readers as making a contribution to the fostering of justice and liberation, over against ideological hegemony and material domination, by means of not only peaceful but also assertive resistance tactics. Gandhi is known for saying, "The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong." There might be a sense in which subordinate people act strongly when they forgive their oppressors. However, this study takes issue with such an ironic truth by constructing a more assertive cultural discourse that subordinates may want to produce in distinction to those imposed from without: the strong can never resist, for resistance is the attribute of the weak.

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