

**LAND IS HEAVEN AND EARTH:
TOWARD AN ETHICS OF LAND FOR SOUTH AFRICA:
AN EXEGETICAL STUDY OF REVELATION 21:1-8**

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ABSTRACT

This is an exegetical-hermeneutical study of Rev. 21:1-8. The purpose of the present study is to develop an ethics of land for South Africa. Land is a hermeneutical key to understanding Rev. 21:1-8. One of the concerns in this study is that, although models have been proposed to deal with the land problem [be they legal, political, economic, agricultural], they have failed to deal with the ethical dimension. In this study a sociolinguistic methodology, particularly anti-language, has been adopted. Sociolinguistics looks at connections between language and society. Language is a social and cultural phenomenon shaped by the values and norms of society and is used to construct social reality.

Anti-language is the language generated by a group of people who do not see themselves as part of the mainstream social order. This language is anti-status quo. The African understanding of land is anti-language because it negates the mainstream Western understanding of land. To Africans land is not simply real estate but it has surplus value, and the surplus value is that which connects people to the land. It is this surplus value which many a model has failed to address.

The idea of Newness in Revelation 21:1-8, is a classic case of the use of anti-language. It negates the present

order of things. It shows a complete break with the past and the creation of the new reality which will serve the interests of the anti-social group. Despite the hardships experienced by the Johannine group, John is able to see the creation of a new order. This is the language of resistance to an oppressive system. There will be a qualitative difference between the Old and the New. God, in the new reality, is not transcendent or removed from the people, but He resides among His people. There is hope for the future.

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0. INTRODUCTION

0.1 The Purpose of the Present Study

The present study is aimed at developing an ethic of land for South Africa by looking at Revelation 21:1-8, particularly the theme of newness and renewal or restoration. Land is a very contentious and sensitive issue in South Africa and elsewhere in the world¹. It is not only a socio-economic, political, and legal concern but an ethical issue as well. The 1983 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa begins with a statement which says,

In humble submission to Almighty God, Who controls the destinies of peoples and nations, Who gathered our forebears together from many lands and gave them this their own, Who has guided them from generation to generation, Who has wondrously delivered them from the dangers that beset them,

We declare that we

Are conscious of our responsibility towards God and man;

Are convinced of the necessity of standing united and of pursuing the following national goals:

To uphold Christian values and civilised norms, with recognition and protection of faith and worship,

To uphold the independence of the judiciary and the equality of all under the law,

To secure the maintenance of law and order,

¹The cases of the American Indians and the Australian Aborigines comes to mind. In both instances Europeans colonized their countries in the name of Christianity, civilization and progress. Indigenous populations were pushed off all land. Racist theories like social Darwinism were used as justification for dispossessing these communities. The same thing happened in South Africa.

To further the contentment and the spiritual and material welfare of all,
To respect and to protect the human dignity, life liberty and property of all in our midst,
To respect, to further and protect the self-determination of population groups and peoples,
To further private initiative and effective competition;
Are prepared to accept our duty to seek world peace in association with all peace-loving peoples and nations;
Are desirous of giving the REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA a constitution which provides for elected and responsible forms of government and which is best suited to the traditions, history and circumstances of our land (1983:2).

This preamble to the constitution uses God as a moral justification for dispossessing Africans of their land. It is very clear that it has a theological-ethical dimension. Therefore, it is imperative that an ethical solution is sought to deal with this problem. Therefore, a post-Apartheid government would have to address the land question as a matter of urgency, since it carries with it lots of emotions². This study will, therefore, investigate ways in which Revelation 21:1-8 together with an African understanding of land can be used as an

²Black people feel that the land of their birth was stolen from them, while on the other hand white people, and mostly the Afrikaners argue that their forefathers fought and died for this land and are unwilling to part with it. They have also invested a lot of money and energy in developing their farms into viable agricultural units. Eugene Tereblanche (leader of the Afriker Weerstandsbeweging) said in a television interview that his forefathers paid for South Africa or part of it in instalments of blood, this demonstrates the seriousness of the issue. Therefore, the right values have to be found with which to lay the foundation for a new society (Dwane, 1991:7).

ethical model in dealing with the South African land problem.

0.2 Method to be used

This study will employ the sociolinguistic tools of analysis, and anti-language in particular in its endeavour to develop an ethics of land for South Africa. Sociolinguistics is part of the social scientific methodology which has made a profound impact on Biblical Studies research. Social scientific methods are a departure from the positivist empiricism of the historical critical method (Mosala, 1989:55). The historical critical method was very useful in demythologising the Bible but was always historicist; that is, it concentrated on the history and religion of Ancient Israel, New Testament, and the early church. The twentieth century saw the emergence of the social scientific tools which were quickly adopted by some Biblical scholars in their work. They proved to be useful because they threw new light on some aspects of the Bible. Scholars started looking at culture, society, economics, and politics around which the Bible was written. Models from anthropology, sociology, psychology, linguistics and others were adopted. Botha (1991) aptly says that social scientific methods emerged amidst the need for some form of relevance for Biblical Studies. The Bible as the source for Christians had to speak to their situation of poverty, landlessness,

oppression, colonialism, suffering, disease, war, violence and hunger. Social scientific methods, therefore, provide one with a variety of tools to unearth some information from the biblical and other related texts, of which sociolinguistics is one.

0.2.1 Sociolinguistics

Sociolinguistics, according to Lategan (1984), is a development within linguistics which has relations with her various other literary and social disciplines. Wardhaugh (1986) says that in practice, sociolinguistics is more than a simple mixing of linguistics and sociology. Sociolinguistics should look at the connections between language and society and then relate them to theories that throw light on the interaction of linguistics and social structures.

The relationship between language and society is a major focus of sociolinguistics. Trudgill (1983:13) maintains that language has a dual function, that is, (a) it can be used as a means of communicating information, and (b) a means of maintaining relationships with other people. In conversation with a stranger the use of language can serve as a clue as to where the person comes from and his/her social status. One can easily determine the social class of that particular stranger. In other words, the choice of words and the manner in which a

person speaks gives a listener a clue as to how to behave in the company of a particular stranger.

For Trudgill (1983) language is a social and cultural phenomenon shaped and informed by values and norms of society; it is used to construct social reality. The powerful or the upper classes decide on what standard language should be. Marx and Engels in The Communist Manifesto say that in every epoch the dominant ideas in society are the ideas of the ruling class (1968:51)³. Standard language is therefore used in government circulars, the media (printed and electronic), in writing and at educational institutions. (Gandy, 1979:138) This does not mean that the language of ordinary people dies, but the dominant culture of society revolves around standard language. Trudgill (1983:21) points out that under-class dialects are used in theatre as a way of entertainment and ridiculing the under-classes.

For sociolinguistics to be effective in Biblical interpretation, it has to help discover the language of the under-classes. It is a known fact that the language of some Biblical passages is upper-class language, and it is important for interpreters to read behind the text, namely, looking for that which is excluded from the text. In the case of the Apocalypse one needs to expose the social background, class position, its

³Marx, Karl and Engels, Frederick *Marx and Engels: Selected Works*.

audience, and its social function, in order to uncover that which is excluded from the text.

0.2.2 Anti-language

Anti-language arises among a group of people who constitute an anti-society. This is a group at the margins of society, for some socio-political or religious reasons they find themselves at the opposite end of the status quo. This group sees itself as an alternative to mainstream social order. It is anti-social in as far as it is a negation of the present social order. The anti-social group possesses knowledge which is counter to that of mainstream society. Thompson (1990:193) calls it "deviant knowledge". This knowledge negates normativity or knowledge out of the mainstream. Thompson calls this group a "cognitive minority" because it has subversive knowledge in its possession. Since language is crucial in constructing social reality, this group has a particular kind of language which it uses to draw a distinction between itself and other social groups. In most instances the status quo is vilified and in the process the group is defined. It is defined not about what it is but what it is not. The use of vilification against the status quo is always aimed at strengthening the bonds between members and at the same time drawing those who are frustrated by the present social system into their fold.

Since anti-language provides an alternative perception of reality, it calls for the renewal of the present order. In this case old values are replaced by new ones. In its rhetoric the old values are proved to be evil and undesirable.

Anti-language is crucial in socialising new members into the group and also to ensure solidarity among those who share the same vision but are not in the group yet. It appeals to noble values which the course established by the group would help to achieve. In other words, a new member's social reality is constructed to be in line with that of the group. This process of resocialisation appeals to morality, the present system is condemned or is deemed immoral. Proponents of deviant knowledge always try to earn and maintain the moral high ground. They project a pure image of themselves, their group, and their alternative world view.

John in the Book of Revelation uses anti-language to project an alternative world view to that of the dominant classes. He speaks symbolically about social change and renewal while at the same time vilifying the status quo. Rowland (1990:135) points out that the grandeur of Rome is exposed as a bombastic sham which is vicious and has condemned millions to poverty while a tiny minority enjoys the fruits of the earth. For him such a system had to be changed in a fundamental way. He does not seem to be advocating any reform but total

transformation. John does not pretend that it would be easy to get rid of the dominant system, in fact, ^(its) his readers are made to understand that they will have to make sacrifices and endure suffering in order to see the birth of the new social order, which will have their interests as a priority.

In other words, John uses anti-language to project an alternative ethics. This alternative ethics is based on moral principles which emanate from God who is among His people. Anti-language will enable us to study and understand the language of the underclasses and what they say about land. The next section will look at the historical dimension of the land in South Africa and demonstrate that land is anti-language.

0.3 Land as Anti-language: History of Landlessness in S.A

Landlessness is not only a South African problem but a world-wide phenomenon. Brueggemann (1977) points out that there is a quest among urban communities to belong, notwithstanding the promise of anonymity and freedom in the urban areas. There are socio-political dynamics induced by capitalism which have rendered millions of people landless and homeless. The state of landlessness is equal to being rootless because people derive their identity and meaning from a particular piece of ground.

The loss of land to Africans was due to wars fought against white settlers. Africans were conquered because whites had superior weaponry and the backing from the mother country. These wars, according to Harsch (1986) were fought over a period of 200 years and in the process Africans lost their economic base which was their land and cattle. The gradual and bloody encroachment of white settlers into the interior and land grabbing after 1652 deprived the San of their hunting land and many of the Khoikhoi's cattle⁴ were taken away. Magubane points out that:

Behind the wars of conquest and the "setting aside" of areas for African occupation lay more pervasive and sinister aspect of capitalist society- the need for an exploitable class of labourers. Africans were not just to be conquered and decimated: they were to be dependent on their conquerors for every aspect of their livelihood (1979:72).

Harsch airs the same sentiments when he argues that:

From the very beginning, European settlers' land grabbing was intertwined with their desire for cheap subservient labour. They not only wanted the Africans' land, they also wanted Africans to work the land for them. Khoikhoi and San captives were initially reduced to slavery. When they were decimated by a smallpox epidemic, slaves from other African countries and Dutch colonies in Asia were brought in (1986:7).

⁴Settlers used all sorts of ways to rob the Khoikhoi of their cattle, this is evidenced by one of Jan van Riebeeck's diary entries (Magubane, 1979:27-29).

In Natal the acute shortage of labour necessitated the importation of Indians to work in the sugar-cane plantations, because whites could not get Africans to work in their farms. The reserves had failed to provide a pool of cheap and subservient labour force.

The mineral discovery in Kimberly and the Witwatersrand in the last quarter of the nineteenth century made the need for more labour to be more serious. Mine owners were aware that they needed cheap labour in order for their mines to be profitable. The difficulty of getting Africans to sell their labour was due to self-sufficiency due to having access to farming land. Some of them were very successful peasant farmers who sold their surplus produce to the market (cf. Maylam, 1989:86-132). There was no incentive for them to go and work in the mines or to seek employment anywhere. This is aptly stated by Magubane:

Before they were physically subdued, traditional African societies with plenty of land had posed difficult problems for the requirements of capitalism. The needs of an African living by subsistence agriculture and cultivating *mealies* ("corn") were confined to *karos* ("skin cloak") and some pieces of home-made cotton cloth. The prospects of leaving their families to work on other people's farms in order to earn wages to buy things they had no use for did not appeal to Africans (1979:74).

This free African peasantry bought farming land from white farmers and benefited from the expansion of the domestic market, especially with the mineral discovery in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Settlers saw this as a dangerous move because there was a likelihood that Africans would end up buying all the land they lost during the wars of conquest. Measures were introduced to prevent this from happening but its final form was in the 1913 Land Act. This Act provided for (i) white expropriation of most of the African people's land, putting about 90% of land in South Africa under white ownership and control. All areas with wealth and potential wealth were put under white control. No African was allowed to purchase land in these parts. This was a blow to the emerging African commercial farmers. (ii) It prohibited squatting and *Kaffir* farming on white owned lands. Sharecroppers were turned into labour tenants and others into urban and rural wage workers, while the rest were condemned to poverty in the reserves.

In 1922 the Native Taxation and Development Act was enacted providing for (i) levying a poll tax of one pound per annum on all African males aged between sixteen and sixty-five; (ii) in the reserves every male occupant of a hut had to pay a hut tax of ten shillings per annum. This measure forced many Africans to wage labour.

In 1923 an Urban Areas Act was passed. This Act effectively abolished all rights to land in all urban areas to Africans. This was a pointer that the future of Africans was in the reserves. They were allowed to be in the urban areas if they were going to give some service to the needs of the whites. The reserves had become (i) reservoirs of cheap labour and (ii) "dumping ground for human waste discarded by the urban and mining industries (Magubane, 1979:86). In the words of Karrim Essack:

The whole strategy worked out by Imperialism WAS THAT THE PEASANT WAS TO BECOME LANDLESS BUT NOT A PERMANENTLY URBANIZED WORKING CLASS, which is the normal process of capitalist development. The mines sought to prevent the permanent working class which could be proletarianised, that is conscious of its own interests as a class (1989:72).

In 1936 parliament passed what is known as the Hertzorg Bills, that is, the Representation of Natives Act and the Native Trust and Land Acts. The Representation of Natives Act took away African franchise in the Cape and provided for the appointment of three white representatives. The Native Trust and Land Acts devised a machinery for the acquisition of land provided for in the 1913 Land Act. The land conquered by the settlers could not be acquired by Africans either commercially or politically. In Benard Magubane's words:

The struggle for land, which had lasted for three centuries was now drawing to a close. The white settler

had won. The victims of conquest were dispossessed and reduced to permanent "hewers of wood and drawers of water" (1979:85).

From the 1960s the government started a forced removal system of Africans and other racial groups from what the state saw as "black spots" within white areas, this was a racial cleansing of some sort. Between 1960 and 1970 about three and a half million people have been forcibly removed from their land (Claassens, 1989:4; Magubane, 1979:90).

The displacement of Africans from their ancestral lands and relocated to land that is not good for agriculture resulted in the mass migration to the metropolitan centres to look for jobs and access to better facilities, and thus have better living standards.

This section has dealt with some ways in which Africans were dispossessed of their land. It should, however, be said that land has a deeper meaning to Africans than merely being an economic entity. Land gives meaning to their being and who they are, because it is where ancestors are, thus the Zulu term *abaphansi*. The following part deals with some of the ways in which Africans understand the reality of land.

0.4 Land as Religion

African Religion can be defined as anti-language because it is not regarded as part of the normative. It is the religion of an anti-society. It provides Africans with the terminology to express themselves about land. Traditionally Africans have respect for land. According to Setiloane (1991) land is holy property. It did not belong to any individual but to God. Even chiefs did not own it but were trustees who distributed it to people in order for them to be able to make a living (1991:32). It was also not seen as wealth like livestock, since no one could possess it and exclude others from benefiting from its fruit. This view is also held by the native Australians, and is aptly stated by Mattingley when he states that:

Our traditional view of the land is spiritual. The Goonya view is commercial. To our people land is the life force to be revered, maintained with sacred rituals and held in trust from one generation to the next (1988:71).

According to Mazamisa the African understanding of land is similar to that of the Bible in some respects because it has both literal and symbolic intentions. The land is not only earthly turf but "it bears surpluses of meaning known only to those who lose and yearn for it" (1993:5). He goes on to say that this is all encapsulated in the idea of ubuntu-botho which "is essentially about historical placement in the earth, but that historical

placement subsumes surplus meanings both rooted in and transcending literalism" (1993:5).

In some parts of Africa land is understood as the mother. Some creation myths, particularly the Sotho-Tswana, say that people originated from a hole in the ground somewhere in Central Africa. The fact that people are buried in the ground makes it much more important because it shows that people like anything else are rooted on the land. These sentiments are captured in Petros Nkosi's statement that;

The land, our purpose in the land, that is what we must achieve. The land is our whole lives, we plough it for food, we build our homes from the soil, we are buried in it. When the Whites took our land away from us we lost the dignity of our lives, we could no longer feed our children. We were forced to be servants, we are treated like animals. But in everything we do we must remember that there is only one aim, one solution, and that is the land, the soil, our world (Claassens, 1991:50).

Forcefully removing people from their ancestral lands is an act of violence. It means taking away people's inheritance. In fact, "to remove and separate people from their ancestral land is to rapture their soul, to cut off their instrument of life support" (Setiloane, 1991:33). The example from the Bible is [1 Kings 21] when King Ahab violently took Naboth's vineyard after his wife had instigated that he be falsely accused.

Naboth refused to sell his land to the King saying *The Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers* [1 Kings 21:3] because it did not belong to him but to the family (the living, the dead and those to come). When he refused to sell he did not think of himself but generations to come after him who would need to use it or use it to make a living. In South Africa generations of Africans have no way of making a living since their land was taken from them. Thousands of Africans have been driven to poverty through landlessness. Some of the crime that is prevalent in the urban areas could be traced to landlessness⁵.

0.5 Revelation 21: an ethical model

The Book of Revelation provides us with a very interesting ethical model where the author speaks metaphorically about social change and renewal. In fact,

Revelation is for a variety of reasons the biblical book which enables millions of the poor to work out a different understanding of their reality as compared to what they are usually asked to accept. It offers hope but also stimulates resistance and sees the inevitable suffering of the poor and marginalized as an important component of an active witness to Jesus (Rowland, 1990:133).

⁵Gangs always fight over turf or space, each gang has an area of operation and is offended by the encroachment into its territory by another one [cf. Ramphele, 1991].

The author criticises the Roman Empire and its allies [Rev. 13:1-8; 17:1-18; 18:1-24], the Jewish community [Rev. 2:9; 3:9], and those Christians whom he felt were betraying the message of the Lamb or simply his Christian rivals [Rev. 2:6, 14-15, 20-23]. Revelation 21:1-8 is particularly interesting, in that it is here where he introduces a revolutionary ethical theme of newness and renewal. The old earth and heaven are removed and replaced by new ones. The old heaven is condemned because Satan had a seat in it. The city of God comes down. It is not a city built by human hand, the temple is no more because God is among his people, since his dwelling or tabernacle is the people. God speaks directly for the first time from his throne and He says; "I make all things new" [Rev 21:3]. Certain categories of people are not welcome in the Kingdom of God because they do not comply with its values. This chapter suggests a radical alternative to the system which had been criticised in the other chapters, which is a total transformation of the present order. Justice, peace, and reconciliation are the cornerstones of the new order.

Change or social renewal implies that property relations would change. Laws that had allowed the rich, government officials, senators, and other large landowners in the Roman Empire to accumulate more and more land for themselves at the expense of the peasants and the poor would be changed. A new ethic would be applied. This

ethic would allow peasants and the poor access to land in order to live fulfilling lives. The same can be said for South Africa where the majority of people have been denied access to land because of the colour of their skin.

0.6 Delimitations

As indicated above this study does not pretend to provide a political or legal⁶ solution to the enormous land problems in South Africa, but its contribution is ethical. It poses a challenge to the present system which has a perverted moral justification⁷. Legal and economic justice are prerequisites for peace and stability in South Africa; giving Black people a vote would not solve the enormous socio-economic problems created by Apartheid.

This study will look at the Social setting of Revelation in Chapter 1, which is a social background and its social function as a document. Questions like the use of metaphoric language and vilification are dealt with in this chapter. In fact, it locates Revelation 21 within the context of the Book of Revelation and that of the late first and early second centuries in Roman Empire. Chapter 2 looks at the major themes in Revelation 21,

⁶A number of studies have been done in these areas but they have come short of dealing with the ethical aspect [cf. Sachs, 1990; ANC Policy Guidelines, 1992; The Government White Paper on Land Reform; Letsoalo, 1987, De Klerk, 1991; Magubane, 1979].

⁷cf. The preamble to the 1983 South African Constitution.

that is, the new creation, the new Jerusalem, the holy city and God speaking for the first time from His throne among His people. Chapter 3 is the exegesis of Revelation 21:1-8. Chapter 4 deals with hermeneutical considerations and the development of the ethic of land for South Africa by looking at what Revelation 21:1-8 says about land and also the African ethics of land. The final chapter deals with the conclusions.

0.7 Summary

The way in which Africans express themselves about land is anti-language because it is not part of the "accepted" ways of speaking about land. This because Africans are an anti-society. The development of an ethics of land for South Africa will, as it were, enrich the debate on land issues. It has to be realised that for Africans land is not simple real estate or a means of livelihood but the meaning of who they are. The fact that their ancestors (*abaphansi*) are buried on land makes it very important.

CHAPTER 1

SOCIAL SETTING OF REVELATION

1.0 Introduction

The discussion of the social setting within which the book of Revelation was written is significant in that it exposes social stratification and power relations between the dominant and the dominated groups. It demythologises the book of Revelation.

The Apocalypse of John is understood as a literary production belonging to the body of literature called the Apocalyptic. Any form of literature emerges out of a social context and always has some social implications or a social function. It makes a statement about something which affects the writer and the community which he claims to represent in society. In Marxist⁸ terms in every epoch the dominant ideas are the ideas of the dominant class- the class that has the power; political and economic (Gandy, 1979:138). This class is able to control the flow of information through its organs like libraries, the media and others. This tendency helps to perpetuate the status quo and to make the ideas of the dominant class standard ideas. On the other hand the subjugated classes produce ideas that stand in stark opposition to those of the ruling class.

⁸cf. The Communist Manifesto

Champions of the alternative ideas always vilify⁹ the ruling class.

The book of Revelation was not written to predict the future. It was written to interpret conditions in the Roman empire toward the end of the first century and the beginning of the second. If it was a prediction of events in the 20th century, it would not make any sense to its original audience whose mindset was that of the late first and early second centuries CE.

The social function of the book was to define the identity of the Christian community. A community which was an anti-society. The identity of the group is defined using anti-language¹⁰. It also indicates to the readers that they will have to endure suffering¹¹ in order to realise the kingdom of God, suffering is made a virtue (Rev. 1:9). In Rowland's words,

The readers are not allowed to dream about millennial bliss without being brought face to face with the

⁹Vilification is a very important part of the attempt by those at the fringes of society to bring their message across and those in power use it to entrench their positions of authority. South Africa has experienced the use of vilification from the side of the liberation movement which declared the Nationalist Party government as illegitimate, while the government was warning the country (white people in particular) about the pending communist danger represented by the liberation movement.

¹⁰The structure of this language is such that it subverts what is known as standard language and gives new or different meaning to some of the concepts used in standard language. It does not operate along the same conventions as standard language.

¹¹The endurance of suffering is an acknowledgement of the power of those in power, but at the same time having hope that in the final analysis their course would triumph.

obstacles which stand in the way of its fulfilment and the costly part to be played by them in the process (1988:80).

This view was shared by the liberation movement in South Africa during the dark years of Apartheid. Some people went as far as making the supreme sacrifice, that is, being killed or hanged by the state because of their desire for freedom and human dignity.

The author and the audience of the book of Revelation understood the context in which the book was written. The audience knew what was going on around them and most probably they understood all the symbolism used by the author because it was about their world. The problem for the contemporary reader might stem from trying to see what the book has to say about the Gulf war, violence in South Africa, and many other examples. One helpful way of dealing with this complex and often confusing text is to understand it as a message to church communities in Asia Minor, and then draw parallels with our own situation. In a sense, trying to manipulate the text to deal with some of the burning issues of our day like violence, peace, reconciliation, justice, human rights, racism, abortion, poverty, land in South Africa, and other examples.

The aim of this chapter is to set the stage for the analysis of Revelation 21:1-8. This will be done by

looking at the social and political context under which the Book of Revelation was written. Such an investigation is significant in that the Book of Revelation is the only one of its kind in the New Testament and it is the only one that explicitly expresses anti-Roman sentiments. It will look at (i) the socio-economic context; (ii) the author's profile: this will try to uncover the identity of the author in terms of his social status and role within early Christianity; (iii) his audience: a group of people to whom the book was addressed; and (iv) the social function of the book of Revelation: what the author wanted to achieve, that is, encouraging and offering hope to his readers that the future will be better than the present because shortly the Lamb would triumph over the Beast and will establish his Kingdom in which there will be no sorrow, death and all forms of suffering [Rev. 21:4].

1.1 Socio-Economic Orientation

The Roman Empire was the dominant power in the Mediterranean region and the Near East in the first and second centuries. It controlled Italy, Dalmatia, Greece with Macedonia, Asia Minor, Cyrenaica and part of Northern Africa, and more areas were added during the first and second centuries (Petit, 1976:13). And

... colonies of Roman citizens were planted in the provinces in considerable numbers from Caesar's time onwards, and the native inhabitants of the communities in

which they were settled were assimilated in status to colonists (Jones, 1974:7).

During the first century there was a trend toward urbanisation in the Roman Empire. This trend was aimed at upgrading the more backward areas. "Agricola encouraged the Britons to build temples, markets, and houses in their tribal capitals as a way of luring them from their warlike barbarism" (Jones, 1974:5).

Cities became very important administrative and commercial centres in the Empire. In fact,

The normal city served, of course, as a market for the surrounding country, and a distributive centre for such imported or locally manufactured articles as the neighbouring peasantry required (Jones, 1974:30).

It should, however, be mentioned that trade and manufacture played a very small part of the economy of the Empire, but agriculture was the basic industry. The majority of people in the Empire were peasants, which means that they were dependant on land for their survival.

The economy of the cities was fuelled by the fact that large land owners resided in them. Land was seen as the only stable form of capital. Therefore,

[t]here was thus built up a great demand for land, primarily Italian land, which was probably the most cause

of the growth of latifundia at the expense of the small holdings of the peasantry (Jones, 1974:121).

There were two forms of land ownership in the Empire, namely, (i) large-scale land ownership and (ii) small-scale land ownership. Large-scale land ownership: those who took part in this form of land ownership were the rich and those who held high government positions in the cities and the provinces [senators, knights, businessmen and top civil servants]. The throne was also a large landowner and in some cases land was confiscated and put under the direct control of the Emperor. Petit (1976) says that Nero put to death several large landowners in Egypt and their land was taken over by the Emperor. Some large landowners resided in the cities next to their properties and made money through rent. During the first century it became extremely difficult for land owners to supervise their land effectively to produce good harvests. A process of giving the land to tenant farmers then began. Tenant farmers were expected to pay rent to the owner in cash or in kind. The rents were high to such an extent that there was very little left after paying the taxes. During famines peasants would flock into the cities for relief and would find grain stored in granaries.

Small-scale land ownership was on the decline in the first century. Because of the high taxes that the middle and lower classes were subjected to, most of them had

huge debts which they could not settle, and were therefore forced to forfeit their land. Another factor according to Jones (1974) is the long term military service for the peasantry. This kept them away from their land for long periods of time and thus weakening their productive and economic potential. They were at the same time expected to pay taxes. Jones goes on to say that attempts by the authorities to resettle peasants on the land were met with fierce resistance by propertied class¹².

There was no uniform style of city government in the empire. Even though there was diversity, there were two basic principles which all had to adhere to: (i) there were property qualifications for magistrates and membership of council, and (ii) the council was a permanent body whose members sat for life unless disqualified by loss of their property or misconduct (Jones, 1974:11). These two principles ensured the propertied class of political power in the cities. In other words, the system of government in the cities served the interests of the rich and cared less about the poor and destitute¹³.

¹²Such an attempt to redistribute wealth in South Africa is met with fierce opposition from the propertied classes, the white farmers in particular, who got land very cheaply from the government

¹³The voice of the poor was not heard or simply they were ignored. The Apocalypse of John uses anti-language to put across the feelings of the marginalised.

Cities were responsible for public worship and the celebration of numerous festivals and games in the honour of city gods. There was intense competition among the cities for imperial honours. Cities erected temples and statues to honour the present or past emperors with a view that they might get recognition for their efforts. Participation in the imperial cult was part of this effort to get recognition and can in a sense explain why local communities resented Christians for not participating in the event.

According to Thompson (1990:148) the seven cities mentioned in the Apocalypse are among the major cities in Asia except Philadelphia. They were connected by a network of roadways. They were strategically located on roadways connecting hundreds of other cities in Asia. These cities were significant in the empire. The road network was useful in that it was used by travellers and small caravan operators who transported textiles, precious metals, ointments, and other valuable items. In short, the seven cities of the Apocalypse were part of hundreds of other cities in Asia and in the Empire. The behaviour of the aristocracy is the same as any other city in the empire, and the influence of the policies of the empire were felt the same way. Peasants also experienced the pain of dispossession of their land through being indebted.

Land was a very important economic entity during the first century. It was the most important capital investment there was. The rich and the powerful aided by the policies of the Roman Empire managed to accumulate large tracts of land for themselves at the expense of the peasants. Cities became places where the wealthy lived in splendour as a result of high rents they charged their tenant farmers. There was very little left for the peasants to survive on after paying their taxes. The system of government in the cities, though giving room for elections, was rigged by property provisions for those who held public office. These provisions shut all the poor out of political power. There was no way in which their voice could be heard. It is within this context of unequal distribution of wealth and systematic impoverishment of the peasantry that the book of Revelation was written.

1.2 Author's Profile

The author of the Book of Revelation identifies himself as John [this is done in four places, namely, Rev. 1:1, 4, 9; 22:8] who probably lived in exile on the island of Patmos, in the Asia Minor province of the Roman Empire (Nogwina, 1993). Ford (1975) says that Roman Historians Tacitus and Pliny identified Patmos as a place of banishment for all political offenders. There is a possibility that John was either imprisoned for his faith in Jesus Christ [Rev. 1.9], or for being an

agitator against the Roman Empire. That is, he may have refused to take part in civic affairs, especially those that implied imperial worship.

The text, because of its language (the use of symbolism), makes it difficult for the reader to decipher information about the identity of the author as well as his socio-political surroundings. This is made particularly difficult by the fact that the author "does not refer to civic political offices and organisations by name nor to trade associations or to festivals and celebrations of local deities or the imperial government" (Thompson, 1990:6). There is no evidence in the text about the identity of the author, except that he refers to himself as John. He does not refer to himself as an apostle or a disciple of Jesus, rather calls himself the elder John and a brother in tribulation [Rev. 1:9]. This poses the problem of whether he was referring to his identity in some way or to a church office which he held.

Attempts to find or discover the flesh and blood author or to link the book to some historical figures have proved to be futile because of the lack of supporting evidence. An attempt was made to link this book to John the son of Zebedee, who is said to have authored the fourth Gospel. There are two main reasons why this attempt is not acceptable. The first one has to do with dating. John died or was martyred probably before 70 CE.

Since there is a wide consensus that it was written after 70 CE during the last years of Domitian's reign probably about 95/96 CE, therefore, it is impossible that he could have written it. In a recently completed study Nogwina (1993) argues that there is not sufficient evidence to say that it was written in the last years of Domitian's rule because Thompson and Collins have shown that there was no turbulence and empire wide persecution of Christians. In fact, he suggests that it was written during Trajan's rule because at least there is a documentation of Christian persecution in Pliny the Younger's communiqué with Trajan although it was not sanctioned by the Empire.

The second problem has to do with the language and the style of writing. It is very difficult to conclude that the two works [namely, the Apocalypse and the Gospel of John] came from the pen of one person because of the difference in genre, language, and theology. Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria in Egypt in the second half of the third century CE, pointed out that "the Greek of the Gospel and the first epistle is correct and elegant, while that of the Apocalypse is inaccurate and even barbarous" (Collins, 1984:28). This is enough ground to say that the two books were written by different people.

After having realised the difficulty of finding the flesh and blood author of Revelation, the only fruitful way forward as proposed by Collins (1984) is to

investigate his social identity. Since all that we have is that the author's name is John one has to look at his social position within the early Christian community, that is, what position did he hold in the church. Such an act would help to shed light on why he uses the kind of language and the imagery in the book. One can probably try to understand some of his aims and motives.

1.2.1 John the prophet

John belonged to a phenomenon of early Christian prophecy, and more specifically, he was an itinerant or wandering prophet. He was a Jew by birth and probably lived in Palestine for a long time. He knew one or two Semitic languages as well as Greek (Nogwina, 1993). In writing the Apocalypse he was influenced by written records and oral traditions about classical prophets of ancient Israel (Collins, 1984a; Hill, 1971/2; Nogwina, 1993).

John does not refer to himself as an apostle or a disciple of Jesus but introduces himself as a companion in tribulation and brother [Rev. 1:9], and the one who prophesises [Rev. 1:3]. His authority as a mouthpiece of God and the Lamb is not derived from any ecclesiastical office but from the conviction that the Spirit of God is speaking through him (Rowland, 1982:424). He received his message directly from the risen Lord to speak to the people. The risen Lord appeared to him and commanded him

to reveal what he had seen and heard (Rowland, 1982:424). In other words, John does not speak on his behalf or any other authority's behalf but that of the Lord.

According to Hill early Christian prophets claimed divine calling, received authoritative and intelligible revelations, were compelled by the power of the Spirit to deliver these messages to individuals and communities (1979:8). They spoke with authority because in some sense they operated outside the boundaries of religious establishment (Aune, 1983:203). One can draw some parallels with prophecy in Ancient Israel where some prophets, especially the so-called classical prophets, operated independently of the religious establishment although they adhered to the main tenants of the religion of Ancient Israel. They criticised those in power and the religious establishment. One can therefore argue that there was a continuity between the two forms of prophecy, hence the claim by many New Testament writers (including the Apocalypse of John) of the heritage of Ancient Israel.

Early Christian prophets were not seen as a special class or an institutional order, since all church members were all, in principle, potential prophets (Hill, 1971/2:414; 1979:195). The only difference is that prophets had insight into some divine mysteries. There were two types of prophets within the phenomenon

of early Christian prophecy, and they were, the resident and the wandering or itinerant prophets. Resident prophets were resident in local congregations and their ministry was confined to local congregations. The wandering or itinerant prophets, on the other hand, were the missionary type. They ministered to various congregations, sometimes forming new ones like Paul did. As a way of communicating with congregations that were not easy to reach, they wrote letters. Letters communicated the message of the Gospel, responded to various questions that were of interest to a particular congregation, for example, Paul in I Corinthians, spends much of his time dealing with ethical questions unique to the community of Corinth (Tidball, 1983:105), and also gave advice and messages of encouragement. These letters were meant to be read in church during the time of worship. It is possible that the apocalypse was meant to be read during the time of worship as part of the liturgy [Rev. 1:3].

This study would not be drawn into the debate about whether or not the Book of Revelation is an apocalypse or a prophecy. It moves from the premise that the book is apocalyptic but the author plays the role of a prophet. The book of Revelation bears testimony to the fact that John was a prophetic figure in that "the opening sentence of the book recall at a number of points the first words of the prophetic books, and the writers, in his address to the churches casts himself in

the role of a prophet through whom the Spirit speaks" (Hill, 1971/2:403).

John wrote to communicate his message to Christians in the seven churches mentioned in the apocalypse [Rev. 1:11]. In the apocalypse he comes across very strongly as (a) against the Roman empire, which he calls "Babylon" [Rev 13]- since it was the second destroyer of Jerusalem and the temple; (b) anti-Jewish, yet he passionately claims the Jewish identity for himself and his group [Rev. 2:9]; and (c) against those Christian leaders who did not share the same views with him. These include the Nicolaitans, and the followers of Jezebel and Balaam. These groups are accused of eating meat sacrificed to the idols. Collins (1981) says that John takes this issue more seriously than Paul. He equated this kind of action to being a harlot, that is, being unfaithful to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Lamb.

Schussler Fiorenza (1985) argues that the polemic against the Nicolaitans, Balaam, and Jezebel, in which some scholars have read as meaning a struggle against an Episcopal church order, indicates the rivalry between different prophetic groupings within early Christianity. The negative reaction against their teaching is, in a sense, giving more credibility to his brand of prophecy. He depicts himself as someone who has the authentic message from God and the Lamb and he "speaks in Spirit".

Therefore, all other prophetic figures who preach something different from his are not true prophets.

Thus far it has been established that John was part of the phenomenon of early Christian prophecy and that he operated as an itinerant prophet. The fact that he mentions seven churches in the apocalypse [Rev. 2-3] indicates that he must have had some contact with them. He shows a clear understanding of the conditions and problems in each of the seven churches. Advice and instruction given deal with specific problems in each of the churches.

The criticism of other Christian leaders like the Nicolaitans, Balaam, and Jezebel is an indication that there were a number of leaders with whom John was in competition, and that there were a number of Christian factions. Aune says that "early Christianity, however, appears to have splintered into several parallel movements quite early in its history, a fact imperfectly and indistinctly revealed in our sources [cf. Acts 6:1-6]" (1983:194).

The author himself is a Jew who probably grew up in Palestine and was influenced by Jewish apocalypticism. John was a Christian prophetic figure who displayed anti-status quo sentiments. He comes across as someone who believes that what he and other Christians in his

movement were doing is correct. Victory over evil is seen as something certain.

1.3 John's audience

John addresses his message to a group of established Christian communities, whose theological world view had been shaped by the teachings of Paul. Schussler Fiorenza (1985) suggests that Christians in Asia Minor should at least have been familiar with the apocalyptic theological language in Revelation from the teachings of Paul. This is so because one can see a connection between John and Paul, since they both belonged to the phenomenon of early Christian prophecy. Paul had carried his missionary work in the province of Asia Minor [I Cor. 16:19] in the fifties of the first century (Thompson, 1990:11).

These communities are predominated by Gentiles and a few influential and powerful Jews. Within these communities there are problems, as far as John is concerned. He conducts an ideological warfare against his rivals; the Nicolaitans, Balaam, and Jezebel. These groups are seen to be a danger to the Christian community (in this case John's community) because of their laxity on issues like eating meat sacrificed to the idols. Syncretism is unacceptable to John because it is tantamount to being unfaithful to the Lamb or betrayal of the Lamb, hence the use of the harlot imagery [Rev. 17:1-18].

Nogwina (1993) points out that from the text one cannot find any generalised conclusion regarding the status of the audience. Rev. 1:3 implies that it was meant to be read aloud to the congregation during the time of worship, which in itself indicated that not many in the audience were literate. The problem with this line of argument is that it ignores that it is standard practice that liturgy is read aloud for all in the congregation during time of worship. It has nothing to do with how educated the group is.

The idea of early Christianity as a proletarian movement which appealed to some Marxist historians and bourgeois writers who romanticise poverty (Meeks, 1983:51) is problematic, because one cannot describe the identity or status of the Christian community in terms a single general category. The group of early Christians was reflective of the structure of the Roman society, which explains the conflicts that ensued. Although it was dominated by those who came from the lower classes including slaves and former slaves, it had representatives from the elite and the middle class both Jewish and Gentile.

It is true that Christianity had a special appeal to the poor and marginalized, especially in its earliest stages which is demonstrated by the attitude of Luke's Jesus to the rich [Luke 6:24] (Meeks, 1983:51), but in the

churches of Asia Minor there was widespread heterogeneity. In other words, there were rich and poor people. In most cases the rich assumed leadership, not because they had the education and skills, but because they had the resources and property on which to hold church meetings. There are indications that there were elite and middle class in the church even prior to Paul's ministry- this is well documented in the Acts [cf. Acts, 5:1; 9:36]; 10:1ff; 13:1-3].

Tidball (1983), in his study of the sociology of the New Testament, points out that Roman society was rigidly hierarchical and one's status was determined not by wealth but birth and legal status. It follows logically then, that early Christian communities followed the same precedent.

John's audience is a community of Christians who are beset by problems both from within and without. The author alludes to tribulation [Rev. 1:9; 2:9,10; 7:14] and he, in fact, makes suffering a virtue that his followers need to be prepared to suffer in order to realise the kingdom of God. Allusion to tribulation points to a threat from outside the community which in some sense would be in a position to affect the growth and development of the community. It is this threat from outside which will try to prevent them from realising their objectives. On the other hand there was an internal problem coming from a sector that advocates

assimilation into the Greco-Roman culture. The identity of this is derived from its opposition to the Roman empire and its allies, the Jews and other Christian formations which differed with it ideologically.

1.4 The Social Function of Revelation

The function of the book of Revelation was to communicate the message of salvation to the Christian communities in Asia Minor. The author gives an analysis of the situation in the Roman empire and then concludes that the situation had reached crisis proportions and he thus offers solutions to Christians. The author alludes to tribulation- allusion to tribulation has a potential of leading to a conclusion that there was probably a social crisis or intense persecution of Christians during the time when the book was written. It has been a widely held view in scholarship that it was written during the last years of the reign of emperor Domitian (Thompson, 1990:15-17). The Apocalypse was, therefore, seen as a response to an evil socio-economic dispensation under the emperor Domitian. However, it has since been proven that there was no systematic state sponsored persecution during the reign of Domitian (cf. Thompson, 1986, 1990; Collins, 1984a, Nogwina, 1993).

Domitian was the last of the Flavian dynasty, he ruled the Empire from 81 to 96 CE. The standard sources of Roman Historiography, namely, Pliny the Younger,

Tacitus, and Suetonius, describe Domitian as evil without qualification. The latter years of his rule are said to have been an object of terror and hatred to all. There was confusion, slaughter, and disorder. The Empire was plunged into economic disarray as the emperor funded grand and often costly entertainment. Domitian was a mad tyrant who engaged in excessive sexual activities.

Thompson (1986; 1990) is very critical of the way these standard sources have dealt with Domitian. The neutrality of these sources is being questioned because they "distort virtually every area of Domitian's public and state activities during the time of his emperorship" (Thompson, 1990:101). There is no mention in these sources of the prosperity of the provinces of Asia Minor under the Flavians, especially Ephesus under Domitian. In fact, "Domitian provided economic and political stability for the whole empire at least as well as did other emperors at the end of the first century and the beginning of the second" (Thompson, 1990:116).

Another charge against Domitian is that he claimed more honours for himself and enforced the imperial cult. He is said to have demanded the title "Our Lord and God" (*dominus et deus noster*), which is supposed to have drawn a lot of criticism from Christians who regarded Christ as the only "Lord"

In fact, Thompson (1990) questions the neutrality of the standard sources from which a lot of the anti-Domitian sentiments emanate. In these sources there is a systematic attempt to discredit him by playing down his achievements and separating his rule from that of the other Flavians. This could be because he was the last of the Flavians and authors of the standard sources wanted favours from the new dynasty. Thompson also mentions the fact that Trajan advocated an ideology of newness, which means that he had to make a complete break with the past. The past has to be castigated in order to justify the insistence on change (cf. Thompson, 1990:111-115)

The question that comes to mind is, if there was no social crisis or persecution of Christians in the last years of Domitian's rule, when was the book written and why? Nogwina (1993) pushes the date into the reign of Trajan because here there is evidence that Christians were brought to trial and charged for being Christians. Pliny the Younger in his communiqué to Trajan¹⁴ asks for directives from the emperor as to how to adjudicate over such cases because he had never heard of them before. Trajan in his response discourages any witch-hunt against Christians. Even this date is not satisfactory.

Barr (1984) points out that the book of Revelation is the only one that is openly against the Roman empire in

¹⁴For all the information on the communication between Pliny the Younger and Trajan, I relied heavily on the works of Downing (1988) and Nogwina (1993).

the canon. It was "written to give courage and comfort to Christians in Asia Minor in a time of trouble" (Barr, 1984:138). In the absence of conclusive evidence of widespread persecution of Christians and social crisis during the reign of Domitian, Collins (1981, 1984) argues that there was relative deprivation and a perceived crisis. Relative deprivation is the common precondition of millenarian movements. The author alludes to some massive social crisis which may not necessarily have been recognised by all Christians. As a person who is trying to curve up an identity for a movement in an unfavourable environment, this crisis might be a result of the effect of the forces from within and without the broader Christian movement. Thompson (1990) argues that the strong anti-Roman rhetoric coming out of the apocalypse should not presuppose oppression or persecution. However, "it should be noted that the crisis stems from the deviant knowledge, rather than vice-versa; that is, because of the character of revealed knowledge, those committed to that knowledge are located socially in a cognitive minority and, therefore in crisis" (1990:194).

The apocalypse of John is characterised by a strong dualism, that is, good and evil, the Lamb and the Beast, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Caesar, "the above" and "the below". What is striking is that at no stage will the two kingdoms be compatible. Above and below are the most important paradigms in the book of

Revelation. The "above" is a world where God is and where the redeemed will ascend to after death, where Jesus came from, and most probably where the martyrs ascend to. The "below" is the world of first century Asia Minor, with little or no goodness in it. Even though the physical world is evil or polluted there is hope for it in that it can be righted by the establishment of a new world different from this one. In other words, the renewal of this world would save it from destruction, self-destruction.

Barr (1984) raises a very interesting point about symbolic transformation in the apocalypse. There appears here a systematic eschatological reversal. Symbols of power and status are transformed into images of weakness and suffering, while symbols of powerlessness and nothingness are transformed into symbols of power and prestige. The victors or powerful nations become weak. The Lamb is victorious, not because of military might, but because of meekness and weakness. The fact that He willingly submitted to the wishes of those who crucified Him and did not hold any grudge against them was victory over evil. The author goes as far as to make suffering a virtue and a prerequisite for acceptance in the kingdom of God.

Jesus or the Lamb is seen as a victor because He endured suffering [Rev. 5:12; 12:11; 17:14]. Followers are encouraged to endure hardships because in every cloud

there is a silver lining. There is victory on the other side of suffering. Evil only reigns temporarily and God alone would bring victory for the elect. In difficult times people are encouraged to wait and be prepared to be martyred because their blood will bring the kingdom closer and much faster. There is hope that the status quo would not remain intact for long [Rev. 22:1, 3].

1.4.1 Vilification as self-definition

Vilification comes up as another theme in the apocalypse. It is an act of demonizing one's opponents or an act of projecting a negative image of one's opponents. This presupposes superior morality for the one who vilifies. Vilification makes a statement about what a person is not. During the 1992 United States of America presidential election campaign, candidates made some denigrating comments about each other. At some point there was conflict over "the family values" and who should rightfully embrace them. All the candidates painted a gloomy picture of the US economy and how their opponents were going to make the situation even worse. The Apocalypse does the same thing with regard to the Roman Empire, and all other enemies of John's movement.

In the ancient world social conflict was expressed in oral and written compositions by means of established vituperation (Collins, 1986:313). The seer in the book of Revelation vilifies all his opponents, that is, the

Jews, the Roman Empire and its allies, and other Christian leaders, like the Nicolaitans, "Balaam", and "Jezebel". In doing this the seer wanted to show who the true Christians and legitimate heirs of the ancient Israelite heritage and its promises are. He associates all his enemies with evil and ungodliness, thus claiming moral superiority. In fact, he draws boundaries between "outsiders" and "insiders".

1.4.1.1 Conflict with the Jews

In this case the battle is about the definition and meaning of being Jewish. The author of Revelation sets out a criterion of his own. In a sense, he rigidifies the boundaries between his group or community of faith with other social groups. All other people who are Jewish by birth but do not share in the same faith with John are said to belong to the synagogue of Satan, particularly those at Smyrna and Philadelphia [Rev 2:9 and 3:9]. This is, in fact, a challenge to the Empire's recognition of Judaism as the only and true religion of the Jewish people, and "the recognition of Jews by city governments and Roman legal precedents as resident aliens with their own self-government and privileges" (Collins, 1986:314). This privileged status exempted the Jews from the imperial cult, "in which prominent local citizens would normally be expected to take part" (Bowersock, 1982:174). Jews, because of their strong monotheism entered into an agreement with the emperor

that they would pray for the emperor and not to him (Boring, 1989:12).

The term "Jew" is appropriated by the author for himself and his community of faith. Here develops a very interesting paradox, where John wants to maintain his Jewish identity yet at the same time wanting to adhere to the new faith. In fact, he is at pains to demonstrate that Christianity was not a new faith or religion but the legitimate heir of the Israelite heritage and its promises. He uses the term *Ioudaioi* for Christians, that is an indicator that there is a continuity with ancient Israel.

The polemic against 'the synagogue of Satan' in Rev 2:9 must be seen not as a rejection of religious and ethnic Judaism viewed from a distance, but a passionate polemic against a sibling or parent faith, like the attacks of the Qumran community on all other Jews as virtual apostates" (Collins, 1985:208).

Collins points out that Christians and Jews competed for legitimacy in the eyes of Roman authorities. This competition was for space. They both made legitimate claims to the heritage of Israel. The struggle was over values, they shared common scriptures and the Messianic traditions but sharply disagreed on the application and interpretation (Collins, 1986:313). It is this disagreement or difference which draws a line of demarcation between the two groups. From the book of Revelation one sees the seer claiming moral superiority

over the Jews. The seer by vilifying the Jews, saying that they were not true Jews but a synagogue of Satan, was aimed at getting and consolidating the support of those who were not in the group and those who were in the group.

The city of Jerusalem, which is a very important religious symbol among the Jews, is seen in a very interesting light. At one level, it is the "Sodom" and "Egypt"- which means that it was evil. The destruction suffered by the city at the hands of the Romans is seen as deserved punishment from God for having rejected the Messiah, in fact, for having crucified him like a criminal. At another level, it is the symbolism of salvation. Collins (1981) feels that this attitude is motivated by the author's concern about the Jews who had not converted, and his optimism that Jews would come around and convert. There is hope that the city will repent and be rehabilitated, thus taking its rightful place as a symbol of salvation¹⁵.

From the information discussed above one can confirm that vilification of the Jews in the apocalypse has an important social function. It serves to define who Christians are; by demonstrating that they were the true Jews, that is, those who believe that Jesus is the anointed of God, and thus heirs to the promises of

¹⁵It is most probably the reason why he uses the symbol of Jerusalem [Rev. 21:2] to introduce the new reality.

ancient Israel. The "synagogue of Satan" on the other hand are those who claim to be Jews but fail to confess the Lordship of Jesus and harass and accuse those who follow the Christian way. Boundaries between Christians and Jews are clearly drawn. This group, therefore, is the only one that can claim the promises of ancient Israel and their interpretations and applications of these are "authentic".

1.4.1.2 Hostility toward Rome and its Allies

The negative attitude toward Roman leaders and its allies prevalent in the book of Revelation was inherited from the Jews. Collins (1981, 1988) points out that for sometime Jews had good relations with Rome, especially after defeating the Syrians. This cosy relationship changed after Pompey conquered the Judean region and put it under direct Roman control. It is said that he insulted the Jewish faith by entering the Holy of Holies in the temple, a place that was the sole reserve of the High Priest on the day of Atonement. Most, if not all, Jewish people saw this act as an insult on their God and their integrity as a nation.

During the first century CE, Jews wanted to return to their golden years, when they were an independent nation with their own political structures. This desire for autonomy or self-rule or self-determination was enhanced by "... a variety of reasons- religious, social, and

economic" (Collins, 1988:67). They would have preferred to be led by an anointed king of the Davidic line. During this time poor Jewish people had a heavy tax burden laid upon them by the Jewish elite in Jerusalem as well as the Roman empire. In 66 until 70 CE, a war broke out between the Jews and Rome and the end-result was the destruction of the temple and the city of Jerusalem.

In the book of Revelation Rome is referred to as "Babylon".

The use of this name probably had a variety of connotations, but the major reason for its use is surely the correspondence of the two cities as the first and second destroyer of Jerusalem and the temple (Collins, 1981:6).

Even though the author of Revelation saw the destruction of the temple as punishment from God, he insists that Rome deserves and will receive greater punishment for her sin.

Revelation 13 has more to do with the imperial cult than with persecution. The imperial cult was a form of honour given to emperors, magistrates, and other officials "not because of what they were but what they did" (Hendrix, 1986:302). It was not the worship of the emperor because a clear distinction was drawn between the gods and the emperor. In fact, they were seen as human manifestations of divine *providentia*. An emperor could not become a

complete god, "even if he was considered a god, because he was not requested to produce miracles, even for supposed deliverance from peril" (Momigliano, 1987:464).

Botha (1988) argues that emperor worship was not enforced by the throne, but it was a voluntary institution and cities competed for the honour of creating imperial temples. He goes on to say that the cult was incorporated in the architecture of the temples dedicated in honour of the emperor. This is evidence to the fact that the cult had some diplomatic value, that is, it was a means of representing the emperor to those in the provinces, especially in the east. "Most persons in the empire of Rome could only have known their emperor from his bust or statue, and it was this which dominated the celebration of his cult" (Bowerstock, 1982:173).

Price (1984:1) says that the imperial cult was "a permanent institution, created and organised by the subjects of a great empire in order to represent to themselves the ruling power". He goes on to say that it is generally accepted by many scholars that the cult was "more a matter of practical politics than religion" (1984:16). It was used by cities to make representations to the emperor concerning privileges and other matters that concerned the cities in anticipation for favourable treatment (Bowerstock, 1982:171; Price, 1984:243). To underline the importance of the cult for the people in

the Roman empire, especially the Greeks on the Eastern part of the empire, local elites knew that they had to spend some money for the cult. Part of the cult, especially festivals, became so important in the life of the cities that they became issues of conflict, within and between cities. Balsdon (1974:94) maintains that "[t]he emperor was the unifying bond of his various dominions and loyalty to him on the part of his subjects was visibly expressed in cult, the ruler cult". It formed a link between the emperor and his subjects, in fact, it brought imperial authority closer to the people, especially since many people only knew the emperor from these statues.

The cult was not universally accepted - there were objections from some quarters. "Seneca ridiculed the cult of Claudius, and Tacitus spoke of the cult in general as a Greek adulation" (Momigliano, 1987:465). Jews and Christians did not approve the cult because for them there was only one Lord and not those of the Greeks and Romans. To them the imperial cult was some form of idolatry. The seer comes in as a Christian who abhors the practices of honouring the emperor with the empire which took away his Jewishness and his independence.

Christians were also an unknown quantity in the empire and their religion was not recognised. They were not regarded as part of the Jewish faith. They were therefore regarded as atheists which was some crime.

There were many misconceptions about them and that raised a lot of suspicion among local pagan citizens who disliked their holier-than-thou attitude which looked down upon the religious life and practices that went along with it. It is the ordinary people who began to lay charges against Christians. They were suspected of cannibalism (they were heard talking about eating the flesh and drinking the blood), incest and being out rightly unpatriotic (Boring, 1989:11).

Another point of conflict with Rome was the disparity of wealth between the poor and the rich. Collins (1981) points out that conflict was appreciated by Rome's involvement in the east, which created many opportunities for economic growth. This venture into the east benefited the provincial elite and Italian immigrants who became prosperous. Another problem was taxation. The heavy tax burden fell on the shoulders of the middle and lower classes. These classes, in most cities, had moderate incomes or even less, and the tax burden was too much for them. Collins (1985:206) says that "Domitian insisted on the collection of the Jewish tax but that does not amount to persecution". All Jews were subjected to this tax. This affected even the Jewish Christians.

Cities of western Asia Minor were splendid, but that splendour was only enjoyed by a tiny privileged minority. The book of Revelation comes up against the

disparity of wealth, and the tastes and lifestyles of the rich. Rome is referred to as the harlot Babylon clothed in luxurious garments and adorned with Jewels. "The implied condemnation of Roman wealth probably reflects a sense of injustice at the wide disparity between the rich and the poor in the Roman Empire at the end of the first century" (Collins, 1977:71). Rome will surely be punished for her lavishness. In fact, the tastes and the lifestyles of the rich are despicable and repugnant. They spend a lot of money on meaningless items while the poor die of hunger or are without basic necessities.

1.4.1.3 Attitude to other Christian leaders

John is confronted with a conflict within the broader Christian movement. It is clear from the discussion above that the Christian movement was composed of people from different ethnic and social class backgrounds which maximised the possibility for conflict. In other words, there were ideological strands within the movement and competition was prevalent among them. Each group wanted its theological position to be a dominant one. The major bone of contention was over values and what it meant to be Christian within the context of Graeco-Roman culture and society. The conflict was between the liberals or assimilationists and the hard-liners or non-collaborators.

Liberals are those who had a liberal attitude toward eating food sacrificed to the idols and participating in the Graeco-Roman culture. Their argument is that because they had the knowledge (gnosis) eating food sacrificed to the idols would not hurt them in any way. Paul's response to the Corinthians, where this debate was intense, warned those who saw themselves as strong not to lead to the downfall of the weak. John takes a very firm stance against participation in Graeco-Roman or pagan culture.

John deliberately uses symbolic language to define his movement. He draws very clear boundaries between his group, which holds the true faith and other social groups and other sects within the Christian movement. He does this by claiming divine authority. Anyone who opposes what he says is automatically presumed to be outside of the group. John defines true faith in his own terms, and in this process he lashes out against those groupings within the Christian movement which he sees as advocating participation in the Graeco-Roman culture. There is imminent danger in participating in pagan culture because there will no longer be clear differences between Christians and pagans, and that would be the betrayal of the Gospel. The difference is very important because it determines who is "in" and who is "out".

There are three particular groups which John is opposed to, that is, the Nicolaitans, and the followers of Balaam and Jezebel. The three probably belonged to the same group ideologically. The term "Balaam" is used symbolically in the apocalypse, he is the prophet in the Old Testament and Jewish tradition who understood the will of God but elected to instigate the people of Israel against it. He is understood to have instructed Moabite harlots to persuade the Israelite men to commit acts of idolatry in their tents [Numbers 25:1ff] (Beasley-Murray, 1974:85). "Jezebel" symbolises a prophetess who worked with the church in Thyatira. Her teachings contradicted those of John, and she is likened to a queen by the same name in the Old Testament tradition who led Israel to idolatry [2 Kings 22]. The use of this kind of symbolism has a very important role in defining what is acceptable and what is not. These symbols are used deliberately to demonstrate the danger of the teachings of his rivals. Since his group are the heirs to the heritage of ancient Israel, the use of such symbols has a lot of effect. In other words, the teachings of these leaders would in a long run lead to the fall of the Christian movement. In a sense he draws a boundary which excludes them from the movement according to the criteria that he had set up.

In order for Christians to be clearly identifiable John encourages his followers not to partake in local associations because incorporated in them are practices

that pay homage to local gods. This withdrawal from local associations will save Christians from falling or being consumed into the Greaco-Roman cultural set-up.

1.5 Summary

This chapter provided the socio-political context and the social function of the book of Revelation. The information on the preceding pages is a demonstration that John uses anti-language to put his message across. He is clearly not part of what might be called mainstream society because he does not share some of its beliefs and practices. While acknowledging his place at the fringes of Graeco-Roman society, John distinguishes his group from other groups who are at the fringe as well.

CHAPTER 2

REVELATION 21

2.1 Literary Context

It has already been said in the previous chapter that John was writing an apocalypse.

...John chose a rather special means, the apocalyptic literary genre, which he understood as a continuation of Hebrew prophetism, especially Hebrew prophecy. ...One of the main features of Hebrew Messianic prophecy, especially after the Babylonian exile, was the return and the restoration of Israel, the reconstruction of Jerusalem and of its Temple (Corsini, 1983:388).

His work was directed at congregations in seven cities on the eastern side of the empire, to whom he identifies himself as a brother in tribulation.

Throughout the book of Revelation the plot of the author is to expose the weakness and shortcomings of Rome- a strong military power. Even though Rome was strong militarily there was another power which was more powerful. The book demonstrates that there are two forms of power, the good and the evil.

One form of power aims at liberation while the other aims at domination and oppression. Consequently, one form of power strives for freedom and justice while the other

form enforces human exploitation and degradation. For this reason, these forms of power cannot be both rooted in justice. Liberation almost always aims at the actualisation of a just social life while domination and oppression result in social disintegration and human suffering (Mosoma, 1992:33).

Through vilification the author manages to demonstrate the evil nature of Rome. Rome is depicted as the power whose aim is domination and exploitation, while on the other hand the alternative power aims at the "actualisation of a just social life" (Mosoma 1992:33). The theme of tribulation is one of the elements which the author uses to show the cruelty of Rome. John, as well as some of the congregations he writes to, experienced persecution, be it in the hands of the authorities or other citizens. Members are encouraged to withstand suffering because it has its reward [21:7]. The underlying sentiment is the certainty of victory for those who suffer and still hold on to their faith in the Lamb. Accordingly, Rome has all the signs of an evil power and thus it becomes very urgent to find an alternative power.

Chapter 20 is about the final defeat of Satan, a thousand year reign, and the final judgement. Satan occupies the central stage of the chapter as a negative hero who is destined for defeat at the hands of the forces of goodness and life. The defeat of Satan is presented in two phases, Corsini (1983) argues. The

first phase is when the angel comes down, binds, and throws him into a bottomless pit for a thousand years, during which there is a rule of Christ. The thousand year reign would be preceded by the return of Christ who together with the martyrs would reign on earth. Gourgues believes that this time is a symbolic representation of the time "when all believers are already taking part in the life and lordship of the risen Christ and are awaiting for the full eschatological participation" (1985:677). The second phase is when Satan comes out of the pit and organises an assault against the forces of goodness and life. In this case Satan suffers a crushing defeat and is thrown into a lake of fire and brimstone forever. This defeat coincides with the beginning of another rule which is graphically portrayed in Rev. 21.

Rev. 22:6-21 is the Epilogue in which two major themes are set forth; (a) the authenticity of the book as a divine revelation , and (b) the immanence of the end. God is drawn into the picture in order to clearly demonstrate that it is a divine revelation, that is, it comes down from God and the Lamb. The idea of the end being at hand comes out very clearly, and believers are encouraged to hold on to what they have (which is their faith in Jesus Christ). This point is not peculiar to the Apocalypse but Paul in his letter to the Thessalonians points out that he would be among the people who would witness the second coming of Jesus, in

other words, Jesus would return during his lifetime [I Thess 4:15].

Chapter 21 is placed in such a critical part in the development of the author's plot. In fact, it is the climax of the book of Revelation. Satan the source of all evil has been defeated and all his power taken away. The author then describes an alternative reality where there is no suffering, persecution, death, sorrow, or tears. This new reality has more splendour and power than that of Rome because it is rooted in justice. The reason why there is such splendour is that all light is radiated by God and the Lamb. The values of justice, peace, and reconciliation reign supreme since they are embodied in God who is tabernacled among humans. This experience is qualitatively different to that of his contemporary cities. God at the centre of the new city declares that He "makes all things new" [21:6]. This meaning that people's human dignity would be restored, and everything else will be renewed.

2.2 New Heaven and New Earth

The word "new" in Greek *kainos* means new in kind not just another but a radical transformation or renewal (Sweet, 1990:296). The question that arises is why does the author of Revelation use the terms "new heaven and new earth" at this point in the book. For twenty chapters John is vilifying the Roman empire and all its

allies, he actually exposes the corruption used in order to sustain splendid lives for a minority. John becomes sarcastic about the power and splendour of the present order. He quickly points out that the present order would not last in the wake of the new one. The new order (new heaven and new earth) is a radical alternative to the present one. It is very interesting that he does not in any way talk about the destruction of the present physical earth- as it was pointed out earlier that the battle between John and his adversaries was over values- the values of the old order shall be destroyed because they are not rooted in justice and thus not compatible with those of the new order embodied in Jesus Christ, the Lamb.

The old heaven or present heaven is the dwelling of place of God but it is not perfect and eternal because in it Satan had a place (Sweet, 1990:296).

The sea will be no more in the new order. Boring (1989) argues that it is a representation of chaos and uncreation- it is possible that John in this instance was referring to all anti-social and ungodly elements that would no longer have any role in the new age. One can argue that John was talking about his own experience of the sea, since it had disrupted his human relationships, it stood on his way from communicating directly to his congregations and thus resort to writing the book.

2.3 New Jerusalem

The idea of an eschatological or restored Jerusalem is not new in the book of Revelation. Jerusalem and the temple were a religious focus of Jewish people in Palestine and in the diaspora (monarchic, exilic and post-exilic periods). To them it was a symbol of religious and political autonomy. This memory of Jerusalem lived on, even after its destruction during the Jewish war (66-70 CE) by the Roman empire. In the Old Testament, especially among the prophets during the exilic and post-exilic periods there was a strong idea of the physical restoration of Jerusalem. Central to the restoration of Jerusalem and the temple is the Messiah, who would lead a military offensive against the occupying forces.

The rebuilding of the city and the temple would mean that God is back to Israel because His house has been restored. This, in a sense, was a dream about their return to a powerful monarchy- probably under the Davidic king. It is from this place that Yahweh deals with the nations. Israel would only be a restored people if their land is restored on which to exercise their political authority. Land means that they would be self-sufficient and not beggars.

John as a prophetic figure and having had some access to the writings of classical prophets, uses this idea as well. According to Chance (1990:5) it is the prophet Ezekiel who articulates the restoration of Jerusalem as "a miraculous restoration to the land". One of the most important aspects of this is the restoration of people—a community whose lives would be impacted by the temple. This would then bring glory to Yahweh who dwells in the city.

John's idea of a new Jerusalem is a city not built by human hands but a city seen descending (coming down) from God. All the lighters like the sun and the moon are no more a necessity, because God and the Lamb radiate all the light. The temple is no more or not at the centre of the city because God has made his dwelling place among his people. He sits on his throne and speaks directly to the people for the first time. There is no need of priests and other mediators because God is among his people, he is actually tarbanacled among them [Rev. 21:5, John 1:14].

2.4 The Holy City

Boring argues that the reason why John uses the imagery of a city in this instance is that;

Early Christianity became an urban religion, a faith that had to do with establishing justice in the gates and

witnessing to the faith in the marketplace amid complexities of social, economic, political life. John does not write to individual Christians who have withdrawn from public life, or to groups of Christians in retreat centers, but to churches in seven large cities (1989:219).

The imagery of a city would have been meaningful to his audience who were the inhabitants of the city rather than the Garden of Eden. It is rather ironic for such an imagery to be used as the fulfilment of the story of salvation because cities were regarded as places where there is moral laxity and crime.

Ancient cities had very strong walls surrounding them as a protective measure against enemies. There were gates which were opened and closed according to the dictates of those in power. It was also a clear separation between that which is in and that which is out. Furthermore, Boring says that;

As community, a city is not streets and buildings but people. Beneath John's imagery of pillars, gates, walls, and foundations is the conviction that God's final dwelling place is in and with his people (1989:219).

The city, in John's vision, comes down from God prepared and ready like a bride adorned for her groom, which can safely be said that it was the Lamb. The author builds on the Old Testament tradition where the relationship between God and His faithful people is described as a

marriage (Fekkes, 1990:269). The use of the imagery of the bride is only found in the book of Revelation although the same idea is found somewhere else in the New Testament [2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:22-33]. In this instance one sees John making a very clear distinction between this city and the harlot (Rome or Babylon) which is dressed in "purple and scarlet" and adorned with "gold and jewels and pearls" [cf. 17:4] In fact,

The bride was even more gloriously adorned; indeed, to change the figure, the city was actually composed of gold and all kinds of precious stones with single pearls for gates (cf. 19:8) (Interpreter's Bible, 536).

This is to show the power, beauty, and splendour of the alternative city more than there is in either Rome or Babylon.

The streets of the city, like the city itself, are made of pure gold which is transparent as glass. It is surrounded by a high wall which is interspersed by twelve gates, three on each side. Each of the gates is inscribed the name of one of the twelve tribes of Israel [Ezek., 48:31-34; 42:16-19], and at each gate there is a guardian angel (a Johannine addition).

The holy city is cubic in shape: all four sides are of equal length: 12000 stadia. The question that arises is: why is the city cube shaped? Since God's dwelling used to be in the temple's holy of holies which was cube shaped [I Kings, 6:20], it is logical that the new

dwelling of God should resemble the old one (John again is claiming the heritage of \ncient Israel for himself and his movement). "Thus the whole of the city has the glory of God because the whole city is the holy of holies, filled with the glory of his presence" (Gundry, 1987:261).

The wall is built of jasper stones [Rev. 21:18]. This is in line with ancient cities which had high walls around them as a defence mechanism against enemies. Walls were a means of drawing a boundary between what is "in" and what is "out", a sign of separation. It is difficult to understand how John could use a city as a model of salvation without modifying it. The existence of a wall around the city implies that there is another reality outside the city which poses a danger to its inhabitants. Nevertheless, Rissi points out that the wall

does not serve as a menacing defence against enemies, but as an announcement to the world of condemnation outside the city of radiant glory of God's community in the new Jerusalem. Its message is not of rejection and death, but one which, with its glowing promise, awakens longing for the miracle of the encounter with God (1972:71).

The number "twelve" is an important symbol in the description of the holy city. In the Old Testament one finds the twelve tribes of Israel which were the main characteristic of their identity as a nation. The

restoration of the twelve tribes would mean the restoration of the nation of Israel. On the other hand, in the New Testament one finds the twelve apostles who formed the foundation of early Christianity. The two are used in this chapter to show continuity with the past, the twelve tribes: each one has its name inscribed on one of the gates; twelve apostles (referred to for the first time in the book): each one has his name inscribed on the foundation of the wall. The twelve tribes of Israel symbolise "a company of Christian martyrs" (Interpreters Bible, 534). When John drew together these images he was trying to demonstrate to his adversaries or opponents that he and his movement were the legitimate heirs to the heritage of ancient Israel. The twelve apostles may be a rebirth of the twelve tribes of Israel including the ten lost ones- fulfilment of the story of salvation. After the death of Judas Iscariot the apostles came together to elect someone to replace him [Acts 1:15-22]. This underscores the importance of twelve in the story of salvation.

The gates, had each a single pearl. This is probably taken from the tradition professed in the Talmuḡ that "the gates of New Jerusalem would be composed of a single precious stones and pearls each thirty cubits" (Interpreters Bible, 537). Gates shall remain open throughout, since there would not be any night. This will enable the nations to bring their glory into the holy city and worship the Almighty Lord God and the

Lamb. It is also interesting to note that the gates are only open to those who come into the city and not those who go out.

At the centre of the Old Jerusalem was the temple, a house in which Yahweh resided. People from all walks of life came here to worship and offer their sacrifices. The New Jerusalem is characterised by the absence of the temple. This is due to the fact that God and the Lamb dwell in and among his people and the temple had become unnecessary. The Lord and the Lamb are the temple. There is no longer a need for mediators, for God speaks directly to his people. In fact, "instead of a divine presence mediated by the cult in a geographic holy location, the New Jerusalem as a whole and all its is the temple of God and the Lamb" (Krodel, 1989:362). The city glows with the glory of God. All splendour that is graphically portrayed in Rev. 21 is an indication of the glory and holiness of God. There is no longer a need for the temple since the sacrifice, "Christ was made once and for all and has done away with all other sacrifices" [Heb. 9:23-28] and also the "slain Passover lamb by whose blood the martyrs are redeemed" [Rev. 1:5; 5:9] (Interpreters Bible, 538).

The gap between heaven and earth has been bridged; all the obstacles that prevented God from speaking directly to his people are clearly removed. There is no sun or moon in the new city because "the glory of God is its

light, and its lamp is the Lamb" (Interpreters Bible, 538). God and the Lamb would radiate enough light to render the other lighters useless.

It was common belief of Jewish messianism and apocalypticism that Gentiles would be converted to Judaism and worship Yahweh. In [I Enoch, 10:21] it is said that "and all the children of men shall become righteous, and all nations shall offer adoration and praise me and shall worship me" (Interpreters Bible, 539). The wicked shall be punished although the holy city would remain open for everyone. It is open for all people from all nations, but there are those who would not enter because they still hold onto values that are contrary to those of the city [Rev. 20:11-15; 21:8,27].

2.5 God Speaks

Throughout the Old and New Testaments, God's message to the people has often been mediated by prophets, priests and other agents. For the first time in human history God speaks directly to his people from his throne. This implies the breaking down of the distance between heaven and earth and the fact that all the obstacles to the communication and doing of the will of God are removed. The will of God will be done on earth as it is done in heaven [Luke, 11:2; Matt, 6:9]. In chapter 20 Satan and all forces of evil are defeated and can no longer

inhibit the will of God. They can no longer stand in the way of peace and justice.

The first thing which God says from His throne is "Behold, I make all things new" [21:5]. This does not in any way imply the destruction of any other thing but that all things would be renewed and restored. In fact,

Like apocalyptic thought in general, John affirms this world and its value and thus pictures eternal salvation of the world and history itself. Salvation does not, according to John, offer escape from the tragedy of historical existence (Boring, 1989:220).

It is an admission that the old order had stifled progress, and retarded human potential. Disillusioned and hopeless people are promised restoration of their humanity. This is a promise that God would create a new Israel out of them and other martyrs. This would be a new humanity which can fulfil its true potential. The new people would transcend all ethnic exclusivity, in other words its character would be international and under God's control.

God goes on to say that "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end" [21:6]. It is done [21:6a]; Jesus said the same words on the cross; meaning the work of salvation is complete. Satan and all forces of evil have been pushed aside and the salvation of all humanity is assured.

God identifies himself as the Alpha and the Omega the beginning and the end [21:6b], that is, all things begin and end in Him, that is, all of human history, including that of salvation, began in Him at Eden and through the cross to the new city. All life is in His hands.

He then promises that "to the thirsty I will give water without price from the fountain of the water of life" [21:6c]- all those who are eager to have life in its fullness would be given it freely while certain categories of people would not get it. There would be no inhibitions to having a good and descent life.

The reward for those who held steadfastly to the faith in Jesus Christ despite all forms of persecutions is captured in the words that "He who conquers shall have this heritage, and I will be his God and he shall be my son" [21:7]. Who are the conquerors? It is those who despite persecution held on to their faith in Jesus (including those who died at the hands of the beast). These are people whom John encouraged and comforted. Suffering or tribulation was made a virtue by John, this is also evident in Pauline theology [Rom., 8:18-30]. Members of his congregations were made aware of the fact that they had to suffer and they should also expect it. Through their blood, the martyrs brought the kingdom of God much faster. They are now invited by God to inherit His kingdom and be His children and He their God. This a

reward for having persevered through all the hardships which the beast had brought to them, that is why they are called the conquerors.

After this invitation John portrays God as uttering a statement of condemnation, a statement which excludes certain people from being part of the new creation. An alternative to the new creation is the lake of fire where all those excluded from the kingdom will be, they will experience the second death. This group includes those who persecuted Christians, those who denied Christ, and those who took part in pagan activities, like the imperial cult. Most of them are those whom he had violently vilified.

When God finally spoke he made two statements: (i) comforted and invited all those who suffered because of their faith in Jesus Christ, the Lamb to be his children- being heirs to the Kingdom of God, which is a fulfilment of a prophecy in Rom. 8:18-30, (ii) condemnation of those who held values contrary to those of the Kingdom of God, to a lake of fire.

2.6 Summary

Revelation 21 is the climax of the book of Revelation. The seer sarcastically introduces the theme of a new creation and a city more splendid and more beautiful than Rome. The idea of the new creation does not mean

the destruction of the present world but its renewal or renovation. John uses symbolic language to paint the picture of an alternative reality to the status quo for his audience. It exposes the emptiness of statements made by the powerful in order to appease the poor- to fool them about their real intentions. He uses anti-language to portray anti-society, and God is brought into the picture, in other words, profane language is sacralized. This language is used to send a message to those who experience suffering at the hands of Rome and its allies, and is aimed at comforting them. This gives them assurances that they should not lose hope, for they shall be rewarded if they hold fast to their belief in God and the Lamb. This signals God's victory over all forces of darkness and the establishment of a new order where their needs would be catered for. The transformation of symbols of power into symbols of weakness is one of the traits of anti-language.

CHAPTER 3

EXEGESIS REVELATION 21:1-8

3.0 Introductory

The book of Revelation employs symbolic and metaphoric language to put across a message of the victory of Christ over the forces of Darkness. In Revelation 21 there is a shift of power from the throne in Rome to that in the New Jerusalem where God is. One of the traits of anti-language in the Apocalypse is the transformation of symbols, symbols of meekness and weakness are transformed into symbols of victory and power. The Lamb is seen victorious over the Beast and then a new reality is ushered in, where all those who suffered at the hands of the Beast and its agents are comforted and rewarded [Rev. 21:1-8]. The new creation is characterised by the presence of God and the absence of all suffering and that which causes it. In other words, in describing the new reality the Seer says what it is not, not what it is.

3.1 Structure

Revelation 21 is the high point of the book of Revelation. It is here where the author's plot unfolds. After spending twenty chapters describing the battles against the forces of evil and the final defeat of the

anti-Christ, John finally introduces the theme of the new creation. Newness, in this instance, means a total transformation of the old order. This implies radically changed social relations in line with the values of the kingdom of God. The first eight verses [1-8] are about new creation and God's eternal age. The second section [9-14] is the description of the external appearance of the city. The third section [15-17] are the measurements of the city. The fourth section [18-21] is the composition of the city. The last section [22-27] is the divine glory of the city.

3.1.1. The Colometric Structure

In the structural analysis of Rev. 21:1-8 we use the colometric approach which is normally used in the analysis of Ancient West Semitic poetry, developed by a team of researchers under J. de Moor¹⁶. However, this approach can also be used to analyse narrative texts. J.P. Fokkelman (1981:468-517) applies colometry successfully in the analysis of II Samuel 9-20 and I Kings 1-2, which are basically narrative texts. Rev 21:1-8 is a narrative text. This text can be demarcated into a regular stropical structure with a substanza and stanza division.

¹⁶De Moor (1978:119-139).

A.I.1 Then I saw
 a new heaven and a new earth
The first heaven and the first earth
 disappeared,
 and the sea vanished.

A.I.2. And I saw
 the Holy City,
 the new Jerusalem,
coming down out of heaven from God
 prepared and ready,
 like a bride dressed to meet her
husband.

A.II.1 I heard a loud voice
 speaking from the throne,
"Now God's home is with humans,
 He will live with them,
 and they shall be his people.
God himself
 will be with them,
and he will be their God.

A.II.2. He will wipe away
all tears from their eyes.
There will be
no more death,
no more grief, crying, or pain.
The old things
have disappeared.

B.I.1. Then the one
who sits on the throne
said,
"and now I make all things new".
He also said to me,
"Write this,
because these words
are true
and can be trusted".

B.I.2. And he said,
"It is done!"
I am the Alpha
and the Omega,
the beginning
and the end.

To anyone
 who is thirsty
I will give a free drink
 of water
 from the spring of the water of
life.

B.I.3a Whoever wins the victory
 will receive this from me:
 I will be his God,
 and he will be my Son.

B.I.3b But the cowards,
 the traitors,
 and the perverts,
 the murderers
 and the immoral,
those who practice magic
 and those who worship idols,
 and all liars-
the place for them
 is the lake burning
 with fire
 and sulphur,
which is the second death.

3.1.2. The Macro-Structure

The macro-structure of Rev. 21:1-8 is fairly predictable. This pericope is characterized by a narrative picture.

A.I.1. The vision (see) of a new heaven and new earth.

1. John sees:

1.1. a new heaven and a new earth

1.2. disappearance of the first heaven and first earth

A.I.2. Second vision

1.1. The Holy city, the new Jerusalem

1.2. Coming down out of heaven from God

1.3. Prepared like a bride

A.II.1 What John hears

1.1. A loud voice

1.2. Speaking from the throne

1.3. Establishing God's home among humans

A.II.2 What God does

2.1. He comforts his own

2.2. He destroys death

2.3. He introduces a new dispensation

B.I.1. God's subjective actions

1.1. "I make all things new"

1.2 "Write this"

B.I.2. God's self-definition

1.1. "It is done"

1.2. "I am the Alpha and the Omega"

1.3. I will give a free drink"

B.I.3a God's promises

3.1. The winner will receive

3.1.1. God as present

3.1.1. He will be his son/daughter

B.I.3b God's punishment

3.1. Hell

3.2 Second death

3.2 Exegesis

A.I.1. Then I saw,- *kai eidon*

What John "sees", magnificently elaborates the visionary symbolisation of eschatological liberation/salvation in Rev. 21:1-8. The derivatives of *eidon* are *eidolon*, from *eid-*, *videre*, "to see" (cf. *eidos*, "figure") means "picture" or "copy" whether artificially made, self-produced or simply present. John's vision is picturesque, it is a copy of the new heaven and the new earth. He sees beyond the present aeon of oppression,

bloodshed and strife. The derivative *eidolon* might also mean "figure of a man" in the sense of a copy of the man depicted, but not the man himself. This term can also be used for images of Gods. The image of the Emperor was so inflated during the Pax Romana, that it was fairly difficult to see beyond the figure of this man. Yet, John sees through the bulging image of the Emperor and his colonised earth. What he sees is new heaven and new earth.

The opening words of this chapter "then I saw" have prophetic-eschatological implications. John does not literally see a new heaven and a new earth but he envisioned a new reality. Conditions in the new reality are the extreme opposite of those under the Roman empire. The same could be said of Nelson Mandela's statement from the dock during the Rivonia Trial in 1964 that:

During my lifetime I have dedicated myself to the struggle of the African people. I have fought against White domination, and have fought against Black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die¹⁷ (Mandela, 1988:33).

¹⁷Mandela in this case looked beyond all the difficulties which the oppressed faced and were likely to face, he even looked beyond his own imprisonment. To him it is clear that these kinds of ideals could not be suppressed by any government action because they are about the freedom of all South Africans from the shackles of racism

In other words, John looks beyond tribulation and persecution and sees the promised land, where the landless majority will have their land back. For him the situation is very much unbearable to such an extent that he cannot see the situation being reformed but being totally transformed. Total transformation of the order of things would mean that property laws would change and other measures ensuring that the landless have access to land will be introduced.

A.I.2. New heaven and new earth

The author of Revelation writes about a new heaven and a new earth, and compares a new heaven and a new earth with the first heaven and the first earth which are passing away.

The Old Testament oriental description of the world in terms of heaven and earth persists in the New Testament, namely as Kosmos. The terms heaven and earth constitute the world. In various parts of the New Testament, eg., [Mk.13:31; Mt.5:18; Lk.16:17; Heb.1:10], the sentiment of the passing away of the first heaven and the first earth is echoed. According to the Old Testament view [Ex.20:11] the sea is a third constituent part of the world, but the sea as a single unit, surrounds the solid

and all other forms of domination. The desire for freedom is a feeling which no one can ever suppress.

land [Acts 4:24; 14:15; Rev.10:6; 14:17]. However, the earth is the centre of the cosmos [cf. Rev. 5:3]. The New Testament, especially in eschatological sections, presupposes eschatological conceptions. In contrast to Jewish apocalyptic [eg. the books of Enoch], it does not embrace any true cosmological teaching. The dominant paradigm is the theological and the eschatological.

The New Testament conception of land focuses on an apocalyptic perspective because of the imminent parousia. The Jesus movement believed that a breaking of ages, namely, a turning of the ages was about to occur. John's congregation is patiently and faithfully waiting to receive the inheritance of the new age "even as those who now held the land according to the norms of old age, would lose it" (Brueggemann, 1977:168).

With the passing away of the old heaven and old earth [Rev. 20:11], the stage is set for the advent of the new heaven and the new earth. The sentence which introduces the new reality begins with a continuation connector "then". "Then" implies continuation with a previous action. After the demise of Satan and all that he represents, John saw the appearance of a new heaven and a new earth [Isaiah 65:17], signalling the birth of a new reality or creation.

The coming of the new creation is dependent upon the demise of the forces of darkness, uncreation and chaos.

This is a classic case of the use of anti-language where he sarcastically talks of an alternative reality to Rome. The corruption in the administration of the empire is such that the system cannot be reformed but totally revamped in order to be sensitive to the needs of the landless and the poor.

The question is, what is John's understanding of the concept of new creation? Is he talking of a this-worldly or other-worldly reality? Can one interpret it as literally meaning the destruction of the "old" and introduction of the "new"? The idea of a new reality in John was inspired by Isaiah 65:17ff. According to Beasley-Murray (1974:306) the prophet Isaiah interpreted the new reality in terms of the present order of things. In this case the earth shall be freed from sin. In other words, the Isaianic passage only talks about the renovation of the earth. However, Mounce (1977:368) points out that the idea of the renovation of the old order belongs to a common stock of apocalyptic tradition. He goes on to say that in I Enoch 45:4-5 the heaven and the earth are to be transformed into a place for the elect ["I will transform the heaven and earth and make it a blessing"]; in II Esdras 7:75 there is speculation about a future time when God will renew the creation. The idea of the new heaven and new earth is also echoed by the author of [2 Peter 3:13] as the home of righteousness. Paul in a graphic way shows how

creation groans while awaiting liberation from decay [Rom. 8:19-22].

The word "new" *kainos* which is the opposite of *palainos*, suggests fresh life rising from the decay and wreck of the old world. Irenaeus (Swete, 1908:275) contends that the new heaven and earth correspond to the new human, whose renovation has now been completed by the resurrection. Minear argues that:

The term "new" negates the idea of a continuing and perhaps endless series of heavens and earths. The new heaven and earth is not a thing that can become old and pass away. The accent therefore falls not upon its temporal novelty, but upon its qualitative newness. Throughout the New Testament *kaine* is an eschatological term related to an eternal life in a kingdom which has no evil (1968:272).

Since John uses symbolic language one can say that the new heaven and the new earth symbolise the new situation, in a this-worldly context. This new situation comes in, **for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and the sea was no more.** The first heaven was not perfect and eternal because it was far removed from the people and Satan had a seat as well. The first earth was plagued by sin which manifested itself in human greed, disease, war, pain, violence, injustice, and exploitation. For John this is enough reason for it to be transformed. The sea represents uncreation and chaos. The Beast which blasphemed God and made war with

the saints emerged from the sea [Rev. 13:1, 6-7]. John is emphatic that uncreation and chaos would be eliminated in the New order. This new reality would be morally superior to the old one.

A.I.2. Second Vision

John's imagery about the holy city, the new Jerusalem is powerful and credible. In the Old Testament, Jerusalem is Israel's capital, a meeting place between God and his people, in short, where heaven meets earth. After the exile, God leads his people back to Jerusalem. He wants Jerusalem to be kept and claimed for his exclusive purpose. It is a symbolic place [Zech. 1:14-17; 8:2-3]. Yahweh is described as jealous for Zion/Jerusalem. Since it is land under covenant.

In the New Testament the Palestine Jerusalem is described as a worldly city that is commercialised and industrialised. Crafts were some of the common industries in Jerusalem, and were held in high esteem in Judaism, while weaving belonged to the category of despised trades (Jeremias, 1969:3). Taxation was one single commodity that was ruthlessly extracted. Due to taxation the people of Jerusalem became extremely poor. The temple was the taxation centre for the Jewish people. It could be the reason why Jesus cleansed the temple when he entered Jerusalem [Mat. 21:12-13]. However, the Jewish war of 70 CE destroyed Jerusalem and

One sees another case of anti-language in the use of New Jerusalem for the Holy City. Jerusalem had both the historical and religious significance for Jewish people. Mounce (1977:370) writes that the idea of a New Jerusalem was part of the Jewish apocalyptic and it came to prominence at the advent of the Messiah; the earliest reference to it was in late second century BCE in the Testament of Dan [5:12], where it is described as a place where the saints rejoice and enjoy the glory of God forever. He goes on to quote II Baruch [32:2-4] which describes it as renewed in glory and perfected forevermore, it is more than a simple rebuilding but a radical renewal. John draws on the tradition of Ancient Israel and gives it his own Christological interpretation. The idea of a New Jerusalem may have confused his audience, some of whom were still waiting for the restoration of the people of Israel on their land.

A.II.1. What John hears

It is customary for a figure of authority to be introduced before an audience. A great voice is heard from the throne declaring that **Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God** [cf. Ezek. 37:27; Lev. 26:11, 12]. This is a very significant episode in the reality of the new creation where it is announced that God dwells among his

people. In the Old Testament tradition a tent called the tabernacle was held in very high esteem during the period of wandering in the wilderness because it symbolised the presence of God among the people. This is a wonderful spectacle because people can enjoy divine fellowship with God. There is no longer a need for the temple [Rev. 21:22] or mediators because God is resident among His people, and no longer far removed. The whole of the city had now become a divine sanctuary because it is filled with the glory and majesty of God. The implication is that He will understand and learn to appreciate the problems of humanity, as in the Gospel of John when the Word became flesh and dwelt among the people [John 1:14] and will walk among them [Lev. 26:12]. Beasley-Murray points out that "*his people* no longer means chosen people in a restricted sense of one nation, for the elect are renewed humanity" (1974:311). The character of the new humanity reflects the nature of God, all will be one in Christ [Gal. 3:28; 1 Cor. 12:13]. A new humanity which lives up to its potential and does the will of the Almighty God. Landlessness is one of the factors which dehumanise people, as one of the ways of restoring humanity to people land would be made available to them or they would be restored to their land.

The barriers between God and humanity are broken down, He is then reconciled with humanity and thus a beginning of a new relationship. Humanity is not just part of

creation but this new relationship brings it much closer to God, humans have become sons/daughters of God. This makes them potential heirs to the Kingdom of God [cf. Gal. 4:7]. Land is part of the Kingdom of God and being heirs to the Kingdom means being able to use land and its resources without any hinderances.

A.II.2. What God does

Since God the great comforter is present among his people, **He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away** [cf. Isaiah 25:8; 35:10; 65:19]. The divine presence with all joy and fellowship it brings will eradicate the source of evil. In fact, the source of evil had already been eradicated and thus all forms of suffering are no more, because they belong to the kingdom of the devil. God and the Lamb had triumphed over the source of all suffering, Satan. Pain, sorrow, mourning, death, and tears¹⁸ are some of the features of the old world, they were brought upon it by sin [Gen. 3:1ff]. The Seer says that the new reality will be without the above features. This does not even begin to explain how the new reality would be like, but what it will not be, except that there will be eternal joy.

¹⁸Apartheid created such harsh conditions that these were a common feature of Black people's lives. Forced removals resulted in pain and tears for parents who lost their children after having been moved to barren land with no facilities to make life easier.

Death was conquered by Christ after crucifixion. The former things have disappeared from the scene because of the awesome presence of God. Since God is the light [John 8:12] all forms of darkness vanish.

B.I.1 God's subjective actions

A throne is a seat of power in any empire. This is an alternative centre of power to that of the Roman empire. In many instances the emperor sits on the throne when making declarations and rulings. The Holy city is no exception because God seated on His throne declares that **Behold, I make all things new.** This alludes to the promises of Isaiah to the exiles [Isaiah 43:19] (Krodel, 1989:348). The use of present tense is interesting because it means that God's creative power is in operation and it perpetually transforms all things. God speaks to his people from his throne for the first time, telling them that He is the creative spirit capable of refurnishing all things or making them anew. He does not make all new things but all things new (Boring, 1989).

The barriers of communication between God and humanity have been broken down in order for Him to communicate directly with his people. The statement which came from the throne is that of hope. There is hope that the wounds and hurt of the past would be healed and new relations be established. The presence of God breathes

new life to all those structures that were rendered ineffective by the power of sin¹⁹.

After making that important announcement God reminds the Seer that **these words are true and can be trusted**. This statement is very important for John's project because his message is not only legitimated by the Angel but by God Himself (Krodel, 1989:348). All things are made anew because the power of uncreation and chaos had distorted the potential of all creation. The present world is implied to be in a bad shape hence it needs renewal and restoration.

B.I.2. God's self-definition

The voice from the throne continues to say that **It is done! or It is finished!** This echoes the words said by Jesus on the cross [John 19:30]. On the cross Jesus declared that the work of salvation is completed, and in this instance the work of making all things anew is completed. God is then declared **the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end**. These are two of the "three formulas which function as divine predicates" (Aune, 1987b:489). Alpha and Omega are the first and the last of the Greek alphabets. Therefore, God is the source, sustainer and end of all being. All of human history,

¹⁹Structures like the police and the security forces are going to be viewed differently in the new order, because they will not be serving the interests of a minority but that of the majority. Their function would be to protect all citizens and promote the spirit of unity and reconciliation.

including that of salvation, begins and ends in Him. In other words, God is a supra-historical figure who acts in human history. This statement should be aimed at assuring the audience that this God can be trusted because of his power and creative abilities. God had earlier in the narrative been identified with this title the only addition here is the beginning and the end [Rev. 1:8], and these titles are assumed by Christ in [Rev. 22:13] (Interpreters Bible, p.532), which adds a Christological dimension.

B.I.3a. God's promise

After the introduction of the powerful God, comes a promise to give to the thirsty water from the fountain of the water of life [cf. Isaiah 55:1; Rev. 7:17]. This might be the same water alluded to in the Gospel of John when Jesus is depicted as saying

But whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life [John 4:14].

Water mentioned in the two instances seem to have the same effect on those who drink it. God promises to give without any charge to those who are thirsty. Those who want life in its abundance would get that without any charge because all obstacles to having it have been removed. The reign of God is on. God radiates all the light and darkness has no chance to engulf any area of

people's lives. Since God is the source of all being he is also the fountain of the water of life. Having life in its abundance means being able enjoy the security of having a home and being able to support one's family.

The theme of tribulation and its reward is invoked when God says **He who conquers shall have this heritage.** Conquerors [Rev. 14:3-5, 13] are the martyrs (people who died because of their faith in Jesus Christ), those who experienced persecution (be it state sponsored or otherwise), but remained firmly adherent to their faith in Jesus. Their reward is a place in the Kingdom of God. They are conquerors because they managed to withstand any form of pain caused on them by the forces of darkness²⁰. The most important part of the reward is that **I will be his God and he shall be my son.** Being a son/daughter of God brings one very close to Him and an heir to His Kingdom, this is a new status for humans. This is summed up in the words of Krodel that:

What the French revolution had hoped to accomplish, Liberty, Equality, Brotherhood and Sisterhood, a dream so shamefully betrayed and drowned in blood, will come true according to God's promise. Then there will no longer be ecclesiastical hierarchies, no more officeholders with fancy titles manipulating "subordinates" under the guise of "service" and ripping off the people of God for their own self-aggrandizement. All shall be kings and queens, coagents with the Son-Messiah, and the equality of God's creatures shall at least be realized (1989:349-50).

²⁰Black South Africans experienced all forms of persecution from Whites.

B.I.3b. God's punishment

After the invitation to share in the splendour of the Kingdom there are the followers of Satan whose inheritance would be the lake of fire and brimstone. The lake of fire is an alternative to the New Jerusalem. The characteristic feature of this reality is pain and suffering. This verse demonstrate that there is a possibility of exclusion from the Kingdom of God. The list of those excluded begins with the **cowardly** and ends with the **liars**, this is to underscore the importance of these two groups. The cowardly are those who chose not to be faithful to the faith in Jesus, they bowed to the pressures of the evil most probably not to be persecuted. In this case persecution is not condemned but the lack of endurance on the side of a Christian (Krodel, 1989:351). There are also Christian leaders who taught something contrary to that taught by John and they too fall under the group of the liars because what they teach is regarded as false religion. Those who were responsible for the persecution of Christians, those who denied Christ, and those who participated in pagan activities like the emperor cult celebrations, fall within the ambit of those who will burn in the lake of fire, which will be their second death. These are the people who refused to drink from the fountain of the water of life. What this means is that in the new reality practices like racism and all other forms of

human greed at the expense of others are not going to be tolerated.

3.4 Summary

Rev. 21:1-8 is an important part of the Seer's last vision. It is the description of how the new reality comes down. The Seer uses ideas that are part of the Jewish apocalypse to further his cause. He interprets these ideas Christologically. The idea of the Messiah is taken to mean Jesus Christ, who is portrayed as victorious over evil. The idea of a new creation, as presented in the book of Revelation, has an ethical message for South Africa and the rest of the world. God is portrayed as the creative spirit who creates and recreates. This is a message of hope for South Africa that after all the destruction of families and property, bloodshed, strife, racism, tribalism and all forms discrimination, a new nation will be born. This new nation will have justice, human dignity, peace, and equality of all people as its central values.

CHAPTER 4

HERMENETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

4.1 Revelation 21:1-8 in South Africa

It is clear from the previous chapter that Revelation 21:1-8 provides an ethical model for the distribution of land in South Africa. The talk of newness implies that in the South African context since land was taken from people unjustly it is the ethical responsibility of those in power to distribute land in a way that would be pleasing to those who were deprived of their land. Parallels can be drawn between the situation in the late first century Palestine and that in South Africa since 1652, for Black people in particular, who have suffered grave injustices under successive white governments in the name of Christianity and Western civilisation. In the process they were deprived of their land occupation and ownership rights²¹.

Black people in South Africa have been victimised because of their skin colour; a person's skin pigmentation has been used as a determinant of their destiny, that is, where they can live, what kind of education they can get, and what kinds of jobs they can

²¹And furthermore they were degraded and humiliated. The white conquerers saw them to be less than human and all their religious and social practices were undermined or simply relegated to superstition and magic.

have. This is aptly put by Manas Buthelezi in Mosoma that;

Blackness is an anthropological reality that embraces the totality of my existence. It daily determines where I live, with whom I can associate and share my daily experience of life. Life, as it were, unfolds to me daily within the limits and range of black situational possibilities (1992:32).

Through being Black, millions of people have been condemned to inferior education, poverty and poor living conditions. Some have also been stripped of their South African citizenship through the homeland policy, in fact, they have been turned into aliens in the land of their birth. Winkler (1992) points out that between 1960 and 1982 over 614 000 Black people were removed from "black spots" in terms of the homeland consolidation policy. Turning Blacks into aliens is a good strategy because it means they have no rights in the country of their birth.

The migrant labour system came as a result of the need for labour in big cities. Since these were "white areas" Black men could only be housed in single-sex hostels for the duration of their contract, and afterward they would return to the rural areas where their families lived. This was an evil concept because it denied Black people a normal family life. Tutu points out that women who due to the fact their husbands could not return home went to

the cities and started building shacks on unoccupied land in order to be close to their husbands. More often these shacks were destroyed by the police because

Unfortunately, in the land of their birth, it is a crime to live happily with their husbands and fathers of their children. Black family life is thus being undermined, not accidentally, but by deliberate government policy (Tutu, 1986:32).

Coupled with this has been the miseducation and underdevelopment of Black communities with an aim of excluding them from meaningful economic and political participation (Mosoma, 1992:15).

4.2 Revelation 21:1-8 and the land problem

For Africans, land is not simple real estate that could be bought and sold at will, it had no market value (Silitsena, 1990:151). It has a much deeper meaning. It is the source of being for people, the basis on which people derive their identity because it is where their ancestors are buried. In the Natal townships a person when asked where they come from they would say for example; *Ngokuhlala ngiseMlazi, kodwa inkaba yami iseNkadla*, which means; "I live at Umlazi, but my umbilical cord is at Nkadla". At Nkadla is where his roots are. The umbilical cord which had united the baby to its mother now symbolically unites or binds a person to a piece of ground. If this particular piece of land

was to be sold it means people would be rootless. Consequently, it is imperative that the land problem be resolved as a matter of urgency because there cannot be a stable political settlement without addressing this fundamental issue.

Clearly, Black people's discourse about land is anti-language. It negates the fundamentals of the mainstream understanding of land as real estate with no surplus value attached to it. The fact that land is a haven and heaven for the ancestors is very important. It is their haven because it covers their shame and a heaven because it is where they live and influence the lives of the living.

The colonial period altered resource management patterns in the African communities. Access to land was a right of every individual since "land was communally owned by the Nguni, the Sotho, and the other groups in the area. Individuals had usufruct rights to it, though it was often held by the chief as a trust for the entire community" (Silitsena, 1990:150). Likewise, Shipton (1992) points out that among the Luo of Kenya access to arable farmland was through membership of a kin group and the broader community. This means that an individual member of the community has a piece of ground where to grow crops and has grazing rights. Rights to arable land means being custodians for members of past and future generations. Land as inheritance cannot be given away

because future generations would need it to make a living and the memory of past generations would remain intact. It is an acknowledgement that people derive their identity from the piece of ground which their family occupied for generations.

4.3 Towards an ethic of land for South Africa

In developing an ethics of land for South Africa it has to be recognised that the earth belongs to God, and all people regardless of who they are, have an inalienable right to have access to a piece of land and enjoy its fruit. The new heaven-new earth paradigm is very useful in this regard because it implies that land holding rights would have to be altered radically in order to be in line with the values of the new creation. The principal value of the new creation is justice and regard for human rights because all people are created in the image of God. The injustices of the past would have to be addressed as a matter of urgency because there cannot be a democratic dispensation and healing without re-visiting the ills of the past. Justice, according to Mosoma, "provides the necessary conditions for the restoration of Black self-worth, eroded under the oppressive yoke of apartheid" (1992:12). It would help to restore the humanity of Black people.

When one reads the creation story in Genesis 1, it comes out very clearly that after all creation God said "it was Good". Humanity was given a special role to play, that is, to be stewards over creation. Stewardship does not mean that one has a right to exploit and mutilate but that one has to look after creation in such a way that it is preserved or its original goodness is preserved. Creation would thus be able to sustain life in a meaningful way.

Due to human greed, technology has been used to destroy the environment in order to maintain posh lifestyles of certain people. And as a result, in South Africa, in the Reef in particular, there are many mine dumps and nothing is done to revegetate the area- and as such it is causing a health hazard to communities in the vicinity. Big multinational corporations do not care about what they do in order to accumulate their profits. This has caused a lot of strife in many countries because power is protected by weapons- the defence spendings of mostly developing and underdeveloped countries are very high. Less and less money is spent on projects that are of necessity to the community. Thus, for the past thirty years, South Africa has spent billions of rands fighting its own citizenry.

Moreover, human greed and the urge to be on top has done a lot of damage in our society

The ethic of competitiveness and technological mastery has created a world divided by penis-missiles and counter missiles that could destroy all humanity a hundred times over. Yet the ethic of reconciliation with the earth has yet to break out its snug corners of affluence and fine meaningful with the revolutions of insurgent people (Reuther, 1979:51)

Humanity will have to reconcile with the earth and the rest of creation. The best way of doing this is building a new social order, where male domination, sexism, racism, and capitalism are eliminated. The ethic of competitiveness enshrined in capitalism²² has proved to be very dangerous. Since it has managed to reduce certain people to mere labourers who could be exploited in such a way that they produce as much product as possible at low cost.

The new earth must be one where people are reconciled with their labour, abolishing the alienation of the megamachine while inheriting its productive power to free men for unalienating creativity. ... The new humanity is not the will to power of a monolithic empire, obliterating all other identities before the one identity of the master race, but a polylinguistic appreciativeness that can redeem local space, time, and identity (Reuther, 1979:52).

A theology of the land should stress that God is in creation and all forms of exploitation of the environment without giving it any chance to recover

²²It is very sad that some politicians and the media associate capitalism with freedom and economic growth, while the working people on the other hand understand it to be exploitative.

would lead to the destruction of humanity. The current drought²³ in South Africa is a clear pointer that the misuse of natural resources can lead to our destruction. The kingdom of God is not only reconciliation among humans, but also between humanity and creation. In order for life to be meaningful, the earth has to produce food and humanity is entrusted with the responsibility to look after it. The way people exploit the earth- soon it will not be able to maintain and sustain life in a meaningful way.

The new earth will only come about when humanity starts to respect the land as divine. There has to be change in agricultural practices and vegetation should not be destroyed anymore, in fact, attempts should be made to restore lost vegetation.

Our understanding of the kingdom of God as a this-worldly phenomenon, from the seer's vision [Rev. 21:1-2], should influence us to think of creation as part of us or humanity as part of creation. Humanity should then realise that it is of no benefit to exploit creation for short-lived gains. The kingdom of God cannot be in a vacuum but on earth and the earth should be ready to host it. Traditional theology has often taught of a Kingdom that would be in heaven- this has made some people to be insensitive to nature and land.

²³The 1991/92 drought.

In South Africa the problem has been the 1913 and 1936 Land Acts which have denied Africans access to land in certain areas. In order to solve this problem all the Land Acts would have to be repealed and a deliberate intervention by the government to make land available to Africans. Mosoma (1992:15) criticises the government White Paper on Land Reform of 1991 because (i) it rejects land restitution as unfair and impracticable. It goes on to say that restoring land that was taken from people through the policies of the past has a potential for conflict. In other words, the status quo must remain intact because the state would secure the present title deeds. Furthermore it states that, "an attempt to return to the previous order will only disrupt the country's pace of development to the detriment of all" (SAPRA, 1993:14); (ii) it does not provide a sense of hope to the poor and landless people of our country; and (iii) it ensures that land remains in the hands of rich whites, in fact, it guarantees the existing white title deeds.

The African National Congress is sharply criticised by Winkler (1992) for showing a lack of interest on the land question. In its May 1991 policy guidelines much concentration is on urban industrial growth and the rural areas where the land question is the most important issue takes the back seat. Its proposed Bill of Rights entrenches property rights, the problem is that it would freeze or legitimise the present ownership

patterns. It would give legitimacy to a system that has operated at the detriment of others.

Sachs (1990) and Claassens (1991) suggest that in order to effectively solve the land problem land law and property rights would have to be deracialized. The racist connotations of the Land Acts undermined the basic human rights of Black people, in fact, it denied them their inalienable right to have access to land and its resources. This meant that Black people do not have property rights, only white people had them. Claassens describes the system of private property rights as "built on racial dispossession and racial exclusion; the primacy of race over contractual considerations has been asserted by the state in a blatant and unashamed way for centuries (1991:50). She goes on to say that the system of private property rights has been used to evict African tenant farmers from the land they had occupied and cultivated for generations. Deracializing this system would mean that Africans would also be in a position to seek recourse in a court of law without being prejudiced.

As a matter of fact, there are people who were forcibly removed from their ancestral lands because of the Group Areas Act and attempts should be made to return them to these lands or be given due financial compensation. The case of the Mfengu tribe whose land in the Tsitsikama region in the Eastern Cape was confiscated by the

government in 1977 and later sold to white farmers at prices far below the market price comes to mind. The *Sunday Times* (November 28 1993:42) reported that the farmers are feeling more and more insecure on this land and are willing to sell their 5 857 ha to the government for R39-million. The Mfengu tribe whose claim to the land goes as far back as 1837 when Queen Victoria gave them the 8 000 ha, want compensation for the loss of their land and the suffering they incurred in the process. The whole package amounts to R78-million because they only received R429 each as compensation for their homes.

Farmers at Tsitsikama complain that the government gave them a false sense of security that they were not going to forfeit their farms. Some claim that they spent a lot of money developing their farms to productive capacity. One is faced with a moral dilemma here where the rightful owners of the land were removed at gun point without any compensation, and their land is sold to another group because they had a particular skin colour, a characteristic of Apartheid private property rights. It is now incumbent upon the state to act in such a way that both communities are satisfied.

The Mfengu lived on that land for over a century, they have buried their people and without this land they are rootless. Their investment in the land is far deeper than money. It would be a mistake on the part of the

state to even contemplate asking the Mfengu to buy their land back because they never sold it but were evicted in order to serve the interests of the ideology of Apartheid.

A Land Claims Court²⁴ should be set up to deal with all claims that people have on particular pieces of land. This idea is also rejected in the government White Paper on Land Reform. The reason being that the present white title deeds are legal. Since the land law would have been deracialized this court would be, in a sense, impartial and would hear all the claims fairly because

{c}laims to land are informed by the values and de facto practices which exist in different areas. Thus there are claims on birthright, on the fact that people have lived on land for generations, on the fact that age-old contracts and agreements have been in operation for generations, on inheritance, on ownership of title deeds or trust documents, and on fact that people have spent labour and resources in developing land and making it productive (Claassens, 1991:59).

It has already been established that there is a need for a truly non-racial land law. The present system of property rights has flaws and cannot be used in this process because it was the primary mechanism for dispossessing Black people. The Land Claims Court should be both accessible and affordable, because there is a

²⁴cf. The African National Congress Policy Guidelines 1992, Claassens, 1991, Sachs, 1990

danger of poor and illiterate people being disadvantaged by a complicated process. It should also be the state's prerogative to offer financial assistance to those with limited resources.

4.3.1 Prospects for Redistribution of Wealth

Redistribution, reparation, and restitution are terms which the privileged minority do not favour. However, there is no other way around them to attaining a stable and prosperous South Africa. The three terms form the core of a healing process which will bring all South Africans together. Those opposed to redistribution have often argued that it would hamper productivity in the agricultural sector. This is problematic because

[t]o counterpose productivity with redistribution is to rely on the ideological equation of white with productive and black with inefficient. ...The empirical data already points to increased productivity and redistribution as processes which are inextricably bound up with each other rather than either/ or options (Claassens, 1991:44).

When two rural communities of Cornfields and Tembalihle near Escourt in the Natal midlands sealed a deal with white farmers to buy prime cattle country, those opposed to this deal complain that this land would be overgrazed and neglected. The state has subsidised these communities with 80% of the total price, with 5% being the down payment and the remaining 15% is payable over 5

years (*Sunday Times*, November 28, 1993:43). This step was hailed by members of these communities as more communal grazing land would become available. Mr Empanel Mbhele, the chairman of the Cornfields Residents Association described this as a "dream come true. Our problems are over. We have been crowded for many years. In the past there was also trouble between the white farmers and us and now the relationship has improved. It is good to know that everything will be sorted out legally"(Sunday Times, November 28, 1993:43). There are plans underway to make sure that the land does not get denuded while it continues to provide the communities with grazing and thatching grass.

It was easy prior to the negotiation era to talk about a simple taking away of land from the settler group to the indigenous people. Since the beginning of the process of negotiation, it has become imperative that people should come up with plans that would ensure that indigenous people have access to land and at the same time food production is not disturbed. Michael de Klerk says that there are four options for opening access to agricultural land in the present commercial farming or "white rural areas", that is, (i) The free market approach, (ii) "affirmative action" options, (iii) limited state expropriation, and (iv) nationalisation by land tax.

The Free Market Approach

This approach would remove all the restrictions of the 1913 and 1936 Land Acts and then leave it to the market. People who need land should obtain it on an open market. One immediately sees a problem with this approach because after years of dispossession Black people cannot be expected to have money to buy land in an open market. De Klerk suggests that "to become a credible political option, the free market approach will need to offer concrete gains in respect of land access to the resource-poor majority" (1991:260).

The first option would be for Black farmers to purchase land on an open market. This practice was common in the past prior to restrictions- Black people usually clubbed together and raised money to buy land. Black buyers used to offer the best prices. The second option would be tenancy. Tenancy has at some point been practised or be share-croppers, or be labour tenants. This form of land redistribution is the likely form because of limited resources at the disposal of the state.

Another option in this section is that of tenancy, which was prevalent in South Africa prior to the economic boom of the 1960s and 1970s. Black farmers were tenants on white farms. There are three forms of tenancy; (i) fixed rent payment, this where a Black farmer would hire a piece of land from the white farmer who cannot afford to use it. The Black farmer would cultivate and market all

the produce and only pay rent to the owner of the land. This is not full ownership of the land but one is afforded an opportunity to use it. (ii) Share-cropping, a situation where the owner of the farm and the tenant farmer share in the produce. The percentages of how much each gets would be negotiated between the two parties. The problem with this alternative is that it is possible that Black farmers would get a raw deal unless there are legal contracts that are entered into which will protect Black farmers from abuse. (iii) Labour tenancy, a person would be given a piece of land in return they will work for the landowner for a specified time in a year. This kind of practice was abuse by white farmers in the past and there need to be some legal protection for both parties who enter into such an agreement.

The problem with this approach is that one cannot leave such an acute economic problem to unpredictable market forces. The state will have to intervene somehow through legislation and financial assistance to make sure that the past injustices are redressed in a way that does not jeopardise food production. There is a danger that this approach might entrench the racist property relations.

"Affirmative Action"

Affirmative action should not be seen as reverse discrimination but as a conscious effort by the state to correct the imbalances of the past. In a sense, it is

the levelling of a playing field so that all can compete freely and fairly. This option calls for the direct state intervention. Firstly, the state can relocate the 1.5 billion hectares that it owns outside the homelands to the resource-poor individual farmers. Secondly, the state would need to supply these farmers with a credit facility that would help them make a start. In areas where there is no infrastructure the state could undertake to assist in providing some, for instance, irrigation facilities. Thirdly, up and coming farmers should be given first preference when it comes to state aid.

Limited State Expropriation

Under-utilised land, land occupied by absentee landlords, and land on farming units over a certain size could be expropriated by the state and be given to resource poor farmers. In this case the state can sell this land to those in need at subsidised prices. Again in this instance the state would have to aid these farmers to develop the infrastructure that would enhance agricultural production.

Nationalisation by Land Tax

Farmers would retain private title to land but the state would introduce land tax, that would make all farmers to be tenants of the state. This would relieve the state of

the responsibility financing unproductive farmers²⁵. De Klerk (1991) reckons that this tax would produce a significant revenue for the national economy. It can thus be used in development programmes. The policy would also ensure high levels of productivity in the agricultural sector.

4.4 Summary

The problem that one faces when it comes to the land issue in South Africa is the tension between the Western capitalist and African Communal systems of land ownership. In Western capitalist thought land could be owned by an individual and access to natural resources within its borders is controlled, in other words other people who live in the same area can not use them. Contrary to that in African thought land is communally owned and the chief is the trustee who distributes it according to need. All people are entitled to use natural resources in their vicinity.

In spite of the fact that the racist laws that prevented Africans from owning land in certain areas could be repealed, but the harsh reality is that Apartheid had economically disabled Africans, and as such, they would not be in a position to compete with their white counterparts in an open market. The state would have to

²⁵This is the National Party policy, they have spent billions of tax-payer's money supporting unproductive white farmers.

play an active role in addressing the imbalances of the past, thus making sure that African aspirations of land ownership are satisfied while at the same time agricultural productivity is not jeopardised. This should not be interpreted to mean that African farmers are less productive because there is historical evidence to the contrary. In fact, there are white farmers who are still on their farms because of massive state subsidies.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

The book of Revelation, the most controversial book in the New Testament canon, has an ethical message which the author expresses in anti-language. Long (1993) argues that this ethical message is directed to only one group in society, but to both the oppressor and the oppressed. On the one hand, the oppressor is warned about the imminent judgement if the will of God is not adhered to. On the other hand, to the oppressed, it gives hope and promises victory over the forces of oppression. It also encourages endurance and perseverance while resisting all forms of evil metered out by the evil government. Eventually, goodness is said to prevail over evil. This ethical message can be appropriated by South Africans in their quest to solve their deep-seated socio-econo-political problems. The message implies that change is inevitable if South Africa were to survive economically and otherwise, this has to be understood by the oppressor group, on the other hand the oppressed group need to understand that they will have to put a lot of effort in making change a reality and they also have to provide equitable alternatives to the status quo. The imminent judgement for South Africa would come in the form of a full scale civil war or a racial war due to economic decline and breakdown of social structures. This is a message which those in the leadership of the National Party have read

and understood, hence their desire to change. The question is how much they are willing to change.

The problems which South Africa faces are rooted in racial hatred which was crystallised in the system of Apartheid. Apartheid is a beast which ate up and destroyed people's livelihood, it destroyed normal family life for millions of Black people through the migrant labour system and was responsible for uprooting thousands of them from their ancestral lands through relocation and resettlement programmes. It thus created a situation of insecurity and suspicion among all citizens. Hurt, sorrow, pain, death, poverty, hatred, and suspicion are common features of life under a repressive system of Apartheid.

The idea of the new creation from the book of Revelation becomes very useful in dealing with the problems of South Africa. The implications of a new creation is firstly, that the evils of the past will have to be confronted- South Africans will have to come to terms with the fact that in the past there were mistakes made. Secondly, justice and human dignity should be made the fundamental pillars of the new socio-econo-political order. This emanates from the understanding that all people are created in the image of God and they should enjoy all the benefits of God's creation. Thirdly, a comprehensive and well orchestrated social upliftment

programme should be embarked upon in order to make sure that everybody feels the change.

Reconciliation can only be achieved once the two forces in conflict come to some understanding guided by the principles of reparation and restitution. Those who committed atrocities should confess their guilt-admitting that they were wrong and are willing to face the consequences of their wrong doings. This means that they would agree that some form of restitution would have to take place. Those who were wronged would have to forgive their brothers and sisters guided by the Gospel of Jesus Christ and then make a fresh start. This will be the new beginning for all. South Africa would then be on its way to economic recovery and lasting peace.

The land question is one of the most contentious and sensitive of all issues that negotiators have to deal with. It is so because land is a source of livelihood and from it people derive their sense of identity. It has been mentioned a number of times in this study that the land issue would have to be resolved amicably in order to enhance the healing process which would guarantee lasting peace.

The de-racialisation of land law would be of no use if there is no conscious effort on the side of the state to aid those who were victims of Apartheid to be able to have access to the land. It should go beyond having

access to land but also facilities that would make their land productive. The land Bank, which has been the sole reserve of white farmers, should be opened up for the use of up and coming Black farmers. Measures should also be taken to educate all farmers about ways of nature conservation in order to prevent tons of fertile top soil from being eroded every year. This would be living up to being the stewards of the earth because creation would be preserved.

Newness, in as far as the land question is concerned, means a total transformation of the present property regulations, making it possible for poor people to have access to land. It does not mean creating more squatter camps because they are not viable places for people to live in peace. Squatter camps because of their crowdedness create a conducive atmosphere for crime, violence and other acts of unlawfulness. A new government would not be enough without embarking upon an extensive programme of social upliftment.

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