

The nations between the Angel and the Beast in the Book of Revelation

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Introduction

In the great drama that is the book of Revelation we find several characters, several actors, from a literary point of view. Among them we find the literary extras of the nations, the Angel (and the angels), and the extras of the Beasts. They are part of the literary plot of the second part of the book (Rev 4:1-22:5), distributed by the great septenaries of the Apocalypse: the seven seals (cf. 6:1-8,5), the seven trumpets (cf. 8:6-11:19), the seven signs (cf. 12:1-14:4) and the seven cups (cf. however, there and through this literary web and this scenic presence, the listener is transported by this theatrical plot to read and to interpret an apocalypse (an unveiling message), is led to accede to a revelation, as does the recipient of this manifestation (cf. 1:1.9-10), the seer of Patmos, because it is not only about extras characters on stage. Their performance is enriched by the scriptural re-reading of the message they enact and convey. This apocalypse thus implies a hermeneutic task with political and social implications, that is, the listener decodes in these characters other characters both in the author's story and in the reader's story. Without losing ourselves in the *Wirkungsgeschichte*

of this symbolically rich text, for this is a task that goes beyond the limits of this exercise, we intend only to confront these great actors: the Angel, the nations, and the beast. This means that it is assumed that the primary place is occupied by the Lamb. Before the Lamb the reactions and the intentions of these three actors do not coincide, because the words they hear or refuse do not coincide either. The listener is left with the hermeneutic task of reading and interpreting what these actors hear or refuse to be there to stand with them before their angels and their beasts, before the angels of the world and the beasts of history.

1. The peoples

Unlike Paul who avoids the concept of *laos* (people), and unlike the fourth gospel which gives this category an ethnic Jewish meaning, the Apocalypse extends this meaning. *Laos* does not correspond in the Apocalypse to the Jewish ethnicity; means any people, any nation, including the Jewish people. It has an universal reach, so people appear literally and scenically associated with the nations. It is all peoples and nations that hear the four living ones and the four elders chanting a “new ode” before the throne of the Lamb, after the septenary of the Churches: “You are worthy to receive the Book and to open its seals, because thou hast been slain, and hast redeemed unto God in thy blood, and all the tribe, and all the tongue, and all the people, and all the nation” (5: 9). These people and these nations attend the great liturgy in which the Angel (*an* angel) carries the Book. These are the same peoples and nations, because they have been redeemed but cannot be counted, who form a multitude in the septenary of the seals, but which are not all peoples or all nations. This crowd, impossible to be told, came from “all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues. They were standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white stoles and with branches of palm trees in their hands” (7: 9). Thus, all nations and all peoples are placed before the Angel who holds the Book of life, this one angel one of the many that swarm the Apocalypse. This multitude is constituted in a kingdom that will reign on earth (cf. v.10). The multitude lives the kingdom, it comes from all peoples and from all nations. It is therefore universal, and it is a seed, just as the kingdom of God is in the midst of all

peoples and of all nations. The reader thus begins to understand that the kingdom of the saints lives in the world but is not of the world (cf. Jn 17), it is like a seed in the midst of the world. The kingdom of the saints lives in the midst of all peoples and of all nations, ethnicities, races, latitudes, cultures. Whether the multitude of saints or all peoples and all nations are thus placed before the Angel who adores the Lamb, they are challenged to worship, to take part in the great liturgy. But it is this difference between the multitude and the nations of peoples that begins to alert the reader to the need to distinguish the kingdom from the saints, the multitude of the redeemed among all peoples and all nations. If there is difference, it will mean that many peoples and many nations do not integrate the multitude of saints nor are they sign of the kingdom, they will not reign on earth. People and nations are so confronted with this angel. Besides the peoples and nations come the other extras: the saints who form the multitude of the kingdom. After all, not all peoples or all nations worship the Lamb or listen to the angel, not all have converted (see Rev 9:20).

After the last seal in Rev 8:1 and the sixth angel of the sixth trumpet, there arises another angel, another emissary of the Lamb, bearing the Book of prophecy. In the background, it is the herald of the word of God that announces the necessity of the conversion, in a prophetic manner back grounded in Jer 33:9; Ezek 2:8; 3:1-3, for all peoples and for all nations: “it is necessary that you prophesy in all peoples, nations, languages and many kings” (Rev 10:11). And what does it advertise? That this conversion passes through the purifying bitterness of the word of God: “I took the little book out of the angel’s hand and ate it; it was as sweet as honey in my mouth; but when I ate it, my stomach became bitter”. Before this angel many peoples and many nations have yet to taste the word of God, to read a word that can cause displeasure or bitterness (v.10). At the end of this septenary of the trumpets, this bitterness will be increased for all peoples and nations when they see the consequence of their sins. When confronted with the word of the Book of the Angel, nations and peoples will be equated with corpses (*ptôma*):

“Their corpses will be exposed in the square of the great city which is symbolically called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified; of all peoples [*laôn*], tribes [*fulôn*], tongues [*glôssôn*] and nations [*ethnôn*] will see

their body [*ptôma*] for three and a half days and their bodies [*ptômata*] will not be allowed to be buried” (11:8-9).

Before the book of the angel, the nations and peoples will be bitter for an incomplete time (half of seven days). Therefore, many peoples and nations live in the time of incompleteness, they know that they live in an curtailed time, without finishing, that is, without eschatology. This is only recognized because the angel announces prophetically to them and because the word of God mirrors it.

In the septenary of the signs, after the second sign (that of the dragon: 12:3), another opponent of God arises – the first beast (cf. 13:1): “He was granted to make war against the saints, and the power was given over all the tribe, people, tongue, and nation; And all the inhabitants of the earth worshiped her, whose name is not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (vv.7-8). The great struggle between good and evil continues here. The peoples and nations are placed between the Lamb and the Beast. This is the play of human freedom placed between grace and sin, between life and death, worship and idolatry, liturgy and witchcraft, salvation and perdition, paradise and hell, beauty and ugliness, love and hate, God and his adversary (*satan*) “the seducer of the whole world” (12:9)¹. This confrontation continues in this septenary of signs in 14:6: “I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having an everlasting gospel to preach to them that dwell on the earth, throughout the whole nation, in all the tongue and in all the people [*laon*]”. This is the only gospel angel in the Apocalypse. Before him tremble and fear the peoples and nations “for the hour of judgment has come” (v.7). The author of Revelation challenges the listener to accompany him in this hermeneutical task, for through it every listening reader can help himself in the cooperation of salvation. In this way the author shows the listener that Revelation, the unveiling of God does not consist in the announcement of a tragedy or a cataclysm (in the common reductive conception that the term apocalypse usually assumes). Rather, it leaves the listener in his own freedom by announcing to him the future and the design of God’s

¹ To KLAUS BERGER, *Die Apokalypse des Johannes Kommentar* Teilband 2 *Apk 11-22*, Freiburg – Basel – Wien 2017, 956 these characters are identical, for all stand in opposition to the Lamb.

salvation. In this design takes part the cooperation of human freedom, for grace supposes nature. In this sense, through a very rich and symbolically diverse literary construction, the author of Revelation leaves the reader of any people and any nation between the Angel and the Beast, nor does he excludes from salvation any nation or kingdom (in the fatalistic and deterministic manner), nor does he presents the human condition in a pelagian way. The human condition in Revelation continues to be etymologically *ethnic* (in the midst of *nations*) and *popular* (in the midst of the world and the people of God).

After the seventh cup (Rev 16:17), one of the angels of this septenary introduces another character: this time the female extra of a *pornê* (a prostitute, a picture of promiscuity and immorality). It is in the city and is part of the city, it is part of the people and of the nations, it is ethnic and popular, it is known: “the waters that you saw, where the prostitute is seated, are [*laoi*] people and multitudes [*ochloi*] and nations [*ethnê*] and languages [*glôssai*]” (Rev 17:15). As we can see, this female character is not singular, only grammatically it is. It is part of a city (Babylon) which, like the aforementioned cities of Sodom and Egypt in Rev 11:8, is a city emblematic of the bestiality of sin. Therefore, together with these places, it is denounced by another angel in Rev 18:4 in the great “dirge”², in that

² Cf. BARBARA ROSSING, *The Choice Between Two Cities Whore, Bride and empire in the Apocalypse*, [= HThS 48], Pennsylvania 1999, 102; RICHARD L. JESKE, *Revelation for Today Images of Hope*, Philadelphia 1983, 105; GEORG ELTON LADD, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, Michigan 1972, 235; HARRY O. MAIER, *Apocalypse Recalled The Book of Revelation after Christendom*, Minneapolis 2002, 136.179; JOHN R. YEATTS, *Revelation*, Scottdale Pennsylvania, Ontario 2003, 329; RICHARD CHARLES HENRY LENSKI, *The Interpretation of St. John's Revelation (1943)*, Minneapolis 1951, 523; GIANCARLO BIGUZZI, *Apocalisse, nuova versione introduzione e commento*, [= LBNT 20], Milano 2005, 322; AUSTIN FARRER, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine A Commentary on the English Text*, Oxford 1964, 189-190; SUZANNE LEWIS, *Reading Images Narrative discourse and reception in the thirteenth-century illuminated Apocalypse*, Cambridge 1995, 170; HARVEY J. S. BLANEY, *Revelation (1966)*, [= WesBC 6], Massachusetts 1986, 497; GERHARD A. KRODEL, *Revelation*, Minneapolis 1989, 301; CRAIG S. KEENER, *Revelation*, Michigan 2000, 436; EDWARD HUNTINGFORD, *Apocalypse*, London 1881, 236; STEPHEN PATTEMORE, *The People of God in the Apocalypse Discourse, structure and exegesis*, [= MSSNTS 128], Cambridge 2004, 224; S. MACLEAN GILMOUR, *Revelation to John*, ICB, 965; DAVID L. BARR, “Towards an Ethical Reading of the Apocalypse Reflections on John's Use of Power, Violence, and Misogyny”, *SBLSP* (1997), 369; JOSÉ CAMON AZNAR, *Habla el Aguila Versión poética del Apocalipsis*, [= BAC minor 32], Madrid 1974, 118; HENRY BARCLAY SWETE, *The Apocalypse of John / the greek text with Introduction, notes and indices (London 1906)*, London 31909, 226; H. C. O. LANCHESTER, “The Sibylline Oracles”, *APOT* II, 400; HENRI STIERLIN, *La Verité sur l'Apocalypse Essai de reconstruction des textes originels*, Paris 1972, 212; DANIEL HARRINGTON, *Revelation The Book of the Risen Christ*, New York 1999, 137; J. NELSON KRAYBILL, *Imperial*

great “Klagelied”³ (lamentation song) on the great icon city of sin that is the urban extra of Babylon: “And I heard another voice from heaven saying ‘Come out of it, my people [*laos*], that you may not take part in their sins and receive not part of their scourges”. In this censure the people are placed before two paths: that of the angel who invites to go through an exodus experience⁴, or the road of the beast that invites us to stay and

Cult and Commerce in John's Apocalypse, [= JSNTSS 132], Sheffield 1996, 15; D. BARSOTTI, *El Apocalipsis una respuesta al tiempo (Meditazione sull'Apocalisse, Brescia 1966)*, [= NA 27], Salamanca 1967, 225; E.-B. ALLO, *Saint Jean L'Apocalypse (1921)*, [= EB], Paris 31933, ciii; CHARLES HOMER GIBLIN, *Apocalisse (The Book of Revelation: the open book of prophecy, [= GNS 34], Collegeville/MN 1991)*, [= CLPB 26], Bologna 1993, 14; EDITH M. HUMPHREY, *A Tale of Two Cities and (At Least) Three Women Transformation, Continuity, and Contrast in the Apocalypse*. In DAVID L. BARR (ed.), *Reading the Book of Revelation A Resource for Students*, [= SBLRBS 44], Atlanta 2003, 89; MITCHELL G. REDDISH, *Revelation*, Macon Georgia 2001, 339; TINA PIPPIN, *Great Whore (Rev 17:3-18,24)*. In CAROL MEYERS – TONI CRAVEN – ROSS S. KRAEMER (eds.), *Women in Scripture. A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal / Deuterocanonical Books and the New Testament*, Boston-New York 2000, 529; G. B. CAIRD, *A Commentary on the Revelation (1966)*, London 1987, 222; ROBERT MOUNCE, *The Book of Revelation (1977 NLC)*, [= NICNT 17], Michigan 1998, 322; GRANT R. OSBORNE, *Revelation*, Michigan 2002, 603; JOSÉ FALCÃO, *O Novo Testamento Tradução do Grego Introduções e Notas II Da Primeira Epístola a Timóteo ao Apocalipse*, Lisboa 1965, 360; ADELA YARBRO COLLINS, “The Apocalypse (Revelation)”, *NJBC*, London 1997, 1013; MARTIN KIDDLE, *The Revelation of St. John*, London 1940, xlvii.358; UGO VANNI, “La riflessione sapienziale come atteggiamento ermeneutico costante dell'Apocalisse”, *RivB* 24 (1976) 193; IDEM, “Gli apporti specifici dell'analisi letteraria per l'esegesi e l'attualizzazione ermeneutica dell'Apocalisse”, *RivB* 28 (1980) 331.

³ Cf. BEATE KOWALSKI, *Die Rezeption des Propheten Ezechiel in der Offenbarung des Johannes*, [= SBB 52], Stuttgart 2004, 369.471; JOHANN PETER LANGE, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes theologisch-homiletisch bearbeitet (1871)*, [= THB 16], Bielefeld-Leipzig 21878, 210; WOLFGANG PÖHLMANN, *Die heidnische, jüdische und christliche Opposition gegen Domitian Studien zur neutestamentlichen Zeitgeschichte*, Nürnberg 1966, 453; PETER KETTER, “Der römische Staat in der Apokalypse”, *TThSt* 1 (1941) 80; FRANCESCO SALES TIEFENTHAL, *Die Apokalypse des hl. Johannes erklärt für Theologiestudierende und Theologen*, Paderbon 1892, 680; W. ULLRICH, *Die Grosse Abrechnung Offenbarung 17,1-19,10*. In *Ermütigung zum Christsein Offenbarung* [= BiAuPr 27], Stuttgart 1992, 111; HEINZ GIESEN, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes (1997)*, [= RNT], Regensburg 1997, 390; A. TRICOT, *L'Église naissante de l'an 30 à l'an 100: actes des apôtres-apocalypse Introduction et annotations*, [= VDei 6], Paris – Tournai – Rome 1946, 465; GEORG KRETSCHMAR, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes. Die Geschichte ihrer Auslegung im 1. Jahrtausend* [= CThM.ST 9], Stuttgart 1985, 53; KLAUS BERGER, *Formen und Gattungen im Neuen Testament*, [= UTB 2532], Tübingen 2005, 264.361; BERNHARD PHILBERTH, *Christliche Prophetie und Nuklearenergie (1962)*, Wuppertal ³1965, 249; D. WILHELM HADORN, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, [= THKNT 18], Leipzig 1928, 177.181; HELMUT FREY, *Das Ziel aller Dinge Das letzte Wort des Erhöhten an seine angefochtene Gemeinde Seelsorgerliche Auslegung der Offenbarung Johannes (Stuttgart 1951)*, überarbeitete Auflage, Bad Liebenzell 41977, 188-189; KUNO FÜSSEL, *Im Zeichen des Monstrums Zur Staatskritik der Johannes-Apokalypse*, Freiburg 1986, 67 (“Weheklage”); KONSTANTIN RÖSCH, *Das Neue Testament übersetzt und erklärt*, Paderborn 1947, 503 (“Klagegesang”).

⁴ In order to check the quotations of the Old Testament on this exodus experience reworked

finish in the horizons of the city. This exodus experience of departure and entrance allows people to contemplate in Rev 21:3 the revival of the prophecy of Is 7:14 which announces another city in which they can enter – the new Jerusalem: “I heard a loud voice coming from the throne, saying, ‘This is the tabernacle of God among men; He will dwell with them; and they shall be their [*laoi*] people, and He, God with them, shall be their God’”. The Apocalypse thus ends promising the possibility of a future with God as people accept the challenge of God and his messengers who are the various angels of this great play that is the Apocalypse. This makes Apocalypse a word of hope.

2. The Nations

As we have come to see, next to the peoples arise the nations (*ethnê*). This category always appears in the plural and when it appears in the singular it is universalized, because it is preceded by the indefinite adjective “panta” (everything / all / all). It means in the Apocalypse the non-jews, all other peoples, all other ethnicities. It is another concept with universal and encompassing meaning, although it is presented with a more negative coloration than the concept of “people” (*laos*). The nations therefore appear, usually, in a (literary) context of opposition to the Lamb or to God:

“The alliance of jew and gentile against the followers of Jesus is a prominent theme in the book of Acts (12,1-5; 14,2; 16:10-24; cf. 2 Cor 11:26). Similarly, suffering at the hands of the nations is central in 1 Peter and Revelation, where the nations play a major role in the apocalyptic drama as the enemies of God who trample the Holy City for 42 months (Rev 11:2). Nonetheless, the time has come to destroy the destroyers (Rev 11:18; 14:8; 18:3 23; cf. Jer 51:7), will be broken and the nations defeated (16:19). Satan, the deceiver of the nations, will be bound during the reign of the saints (20:3) and then released to deceive the nations once again, prior to the great apocalyptic battle before the ‘camp of saints’ and the ‘beloved city’ (20:7-9). In the end,

in this chapter of the Book of Revelation, see our work: *Experiência e Resistência em tempos de desencanto. Estudo exegético-teológico da simbologia babilônica de Ap 18*, Porto 2009, 294-300.

the nations are destroyed, Satan is cast into the lake of fire, and the dead are raised for judgment. This marks the end of the nations as enemies of God and the ultimate fulfillment of the OT prophetic vision which foresaw the ingathering of the nations within the kingdom of God”⁵.

As we have seen, nations rise up beside the people to worship the Lamb in Rev 5:9, they participate with the people in the heavenly liturgy in 7:9. *Ethnê* are also present in the realm of true worshipers in the midst of the peoples, but many nations need, like the peoples, conversion (cf. 10:11), since they are like corpses, they are morally deceased (cf. 11:8-9) already at the end of the septenary of trumpets. They let themselves be dominated by the first beast in 13:1.7-8. Because of this condition, nations and peoples are subject to the kerygma by the angel carrying the gospel in 14:6-8 for all to judge. It is upon the nations and upon the peoples that the great prostitute sits (cf. 17:15). The nations leave immorality and promiscuity in them.

In the septenary of trumpets, nations are accused of remaining in the outer court of the temple on the fourth level of Jewish separation⁶ until they reach the Holy of Holies in the temple at Jerusalem (see *Kelim* 1:5-9). They remain there, for “they shall lay their hands on the holy city for forty-two months” (Rev 11:2), that is, for three and a half years, that is, for half a full time of a week of years, unfinished and without fullness. So after the seventh trumpet they continued to live unmoved: “the *ethnê* were angry, and your wrath came, the time to judge the dead and to give your reward ...” (11:18). The *ethnê* need the great sign of the one who gave birth to the Son of God, for it is he who “is about to feed all *ethnê*” (12:5). The nations need this pastoral service, for they are placed between the angel and his disfigurement, between the Child and his own drama. It is in this condition that they anticipate the fall of the great sinful city symbolized in Babylon in Rev 14: 8 and already prophesied in Is 21: 9; Jer 51.7.8; Dan 4:27: “And a second angel went on to say, ‘Babylon the great is fallen, fallen from the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and made all the nations drink [*ethnê*].’” Nations cannot free themselves from the influence

⁵ DUANE L. CHRISTENSEN, “Nations”, *ABD* IV (1992) 1048.

⁶ Cf. JACOB NEUSNER, *Theological and Philosophical Premises of Judaism*, Boston 2008, 60-61.

of the immorality of the urban world in which they live. They, therefore, need to be liberated, that is, nations are not free and live not freely, they are subjugated to sin in their different ideological manifestations, translated here with the concept of *porneia* (immorality, promiscuity, prostitution).

Those who listen to the angels of God and worship the Lamb, they separate themselves from the nations, play harps, and sing the song of Moses from Exodus 15:1; 34:10; Nm 12:7; Dt 32:4; 34:5; Jos 1:2.7; 14:7 because the wrath of God was revealed over the nations, they were defeated by the great king who is God, even before the seven bowls of plagues:

“Your works are admirable, O Lord God Almighty [*pantokrátôr*], righteous and true (are) your ways, O king of nations [*ethnôn*]; Who does not fear You, Lord, and who will praise Your name? For you alone are holy, for all the nations [*ethnôn*] will come and bow before you, for your righteous actions have been manifested” (Rev 15:3).

But, if on the one hand, the nations will have God as king, on the other hand they will also fall victim to the judgment of the Most High and will end up falling with Babylon, the great city of sin, when the seventh cup is poured out: “and it happened that the great city broke in three parts and fell the cities of the nations [*ethnôn*]; and Babylon the great was remembered before God, to give him the cup of the wine of his wrath” (Rev 16:19). Once again, it is anticipated in Rev 18 that the great emblematic city of sin, which is Babylon, will fall, just as it had already been in 14:6-8. Nations are now again placed between the voices of the angels of God and the judgment of God upon the beast and upon this sinful city that feeds many nations. Babylon gives an urban form to idolatry and to the beast: “from the wine of the wrath of his *porneia* drank all nations [*ethnê*], and the kings of the earth committed immorality [*epórneusan*], and empires / traders [*émporoi*] of the land enriched from the power of his opulence” (Rev 18:3). In this lament the nations are deployed in some of its most important members at the social and political level: kings, empires and merchants. In them and for them the nations did not resist a plutocratic system and the charms of consumption and wealth. This city infected the nations, inebriated them with its *porneia*. The angel of v.1 announces the fall of this city and its members, as well as of the nations which it has infected.

The nations are left between this angel (another angel, another emissary of the Lamb) and the bestiality of a plutocratic system where life is reduced to commodity, an object of consumption or exchange (cf. Rev 18:13). At the end of this judgment upon this great city, to which nations are drawn fascinated by their splendor, these same nations are lamented and judged to be intoxicated by Babylonian pharmacology, by the socio-political system which favors only a few classes of society economically⁷: merchants, the kings of the earth, the great ones of the earth, the sailors, those who work at sea, those whom Cardinal Ravasi calls the tertiary sector: “il terziario, sono tutti i funzionari, gli impiegati, tutta quella ruota attorno alle strutture pubbliche”⁸:

“the light of the lantern will no longer shine on you; and the voice of the bridegroom and the bride shall no more be heard in thee, for thy merchants [*emporoi*] were the great ones of the earth, because in thy magic [*pharmakeia*] all the nations [*ethnē*] were enriched” (Rev 18:23).

The nations were then bewitched and allowed themselves to be attracted by this plutocratic system. Hence, after the alleluia chants of Rev 19:1-3, the nations are again faced with an option: they are placed before a combat between the white horse “which gives his mouth draws a sharp sword to strike the nations” (v.15) and “the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies assembled to fight against him who was riding on the horse and against his army” (v.19). The nations thus stand between the white horse of the Lamb (Risen Christ) and the beast, between the invitation to “the feast of God” (v.17) and “those who had received the mark of the beast” (v.20). This dilemma, this experience of freedom continues to follow in Rev 20:3 when another angel, who holds the keys of the abyss, defends the nations of the influence of the accuser – *satan* – so that “he would no longer deceive the *ethnē*”. Nations may follow the angel,

⁷To an overview of this plutocratic system in Rev 18, which attracted all the nations, see our work *Experiência e Resistência em tempos de desencanto*, 468-479.

⁸See GIANFRANCO RAVASI, *Il libro dell'Apocalisse* (1991), Bologna 1997, 99. In the same way JACQUES DESCREUX, *L'ivresse des nations Les figures du mal dans l'Apocalypse de Jean*, [= BibTS 17], Leuven – Paris – Walpole, MA 2013, 521 and FRANCO MANSI, “Il grande drago fu precipitato sulla terra. Vittoria di Cristo e della Chiesa su Satana nell'Apocalisse”, *ScCatt* 135 (2007) 224.

accept their intercession, or continue to be seduced by the opponents of the Lamb – the dragon, the ancient serpent. But this is still the first combat. The second combat, “when a thousand years are completed” (20:7) will be an experience of persecution in which nations will not be able to resist their seduction (cf. v.8). Therefore, at that time the beasts will come again to “deceive / mislead” the nations [*ethnê*]” (Rev 20:8).

In this way nations will continue to be divided between the angel’s proposal and the beast’s proposal. However, the scales are made to fall to the side of the Lamb through his angels, because in the final part of the Apocalypse, and after the nuptial song about the future Jerusalem from above (the antipodal character of Babylon of the lower nations, the horizons of immanence), it is promised the fulfillment of the prophecy of Ps 68:30; 72.10; Isa 60:3-5 on the new Jerusalem: “and the nations [*ethnê*] shall walk in its light ... and bring to it the glory and honor of the nations [*ethnê*]” (Rev 21:24-26). This description is the sign of the angel’s victory over the beast, saving the nations from this evil influence. Therefore, the book of recapitulations (which is the book of Revelation)⁹ concludes the Sacred Scripture by returning and recapitulating the Paradise of Genesis in the last chapter. The nations will again be *healed* by the tree of life of Gen 2:9-10. This tree will be for them a *therapy* that will *heal* them from the beast. Whoever shows and gives this possibility to the nations is the angel who announces in 21:9 the Bride of the Lamb:

“And he showed me a river of living water, clear as crystal, that came forth from the throne of God and of the Lamb; in the middle of its square, and on the other side of the river, there is a Tree of Life that produces twelve fruits, producing each month its fruit; and the leaves of the tree (are) for the *therapy* of the nations [*ethnôn*]” (Ap 22:1-2).

⁹ In this sense see NORTHROP FRYE, *El Gran Código (The Great Code 1981)*, Barcelona 2001, 163.198.227; IDEM, *Fearful Symmetry A Study of William Blake (1969)*, Princeton NJ 31972, 139.317.345.389; STEPHEN O’LEARY, *Arguing the Apocalypse A Theory of Millennial Rhetoric*, New York – Oxford 1994, 28; DAVID E. AUNE, *Stories of Jesus in the Apocalypse of John*. In RICHARD N. LONGENECKER (ed.), *Contours of Christology in the New Testament*, [= MNTS 7], Michigan 2005, 295; D. H. LAWRENCE, *Apocalypse (London 1929)*, Lisboa 1993, 57; JOHANN PETER LANGE, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 41.

3. The Beast(s)

The author of the Apocalypse recovered the apocalyptic image of the four beasts of Dan 7:1-28, so he also ended up presenting more than a beast, more than a wild animal, ugly, hideous, terrible, inhuman and blasphemous. In the apocalyptic text of the prophet Daniel the four beasts most likely represent four empires: the Babylonian, the Medes (or the Parthians), the Persians, and the Hellenic of the Greeks. In the text of the Apocalypse it is multiplied in extra characters of kings, in governments, in empires, that is, in autophagic and antireligious powers that destroy everything around them. Therefore, in the apocalyptic scenario revealed to the seer of Patmos we find one of the great opposing characters of the Lamb and that torments the peoples and nations. Before this enemy the Lamb presents his angels. In the midst of this struggle lie the peoples and the nations.

The beast (*therion*) appears in the second part of the Apocalypse. It always appears in the singular, except in Revelation 6:8, but not there with the scenic, literary and theological function it will assume from the septenary of the trumpets when it first appears in Rev 11:7 before the seventh: “when they have completed his testimony [*marturian*], the Beast [*therion*] that rises from the Abyss will make war with them, will overcome them and kill them”. The beast appears in the Apocalypse rising from the abyss, that region far from God in the Old Testament. This creature lives far from God, is estranged from God and wants to drive away all nations that try to approach the Lamb. It begins by annihilating the two witnesses of God, and then in chapter 12 it will appear in the form of a dragon to try to annihilate the Son of God. The dragon of Rev 12 is a mythical beast, known in the babylonian tradition and in the Canaanite myths (see *ANET* 138). After the dragon’s fight against the archangel Michael, then the beast emerges as the great opposing sign of the Lamb in the midst of the world and in the history of nations and peoples. This enemy extra, sinister, has a name – blasphemous. It’s so hideous that it’s not even pronounceable. It fights against the archangel Michael to try to deceive and mislead the peoples, all languages, all nations and all tribes:

“And I saw a Beast [*therion*] coming up out of the sea. It had ten horns and seven heads; upon their horns ten crowns, and upon their heads a blasphe-

mous name. The beast [*therion*] I saw was like a panther; his feet were like a bear's, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. The Dragon gave him his strength, his throne and great power. One of their heads seemed to be deadly wounded, but the deadly wound was healed. All the earth, astonished, followed the Beast [*therion*]. They worshiped the Dragon who had given power to the Beast [*therion*] and worshiped the Beast [*therion*], saying, 'Who is like the Beast [*therion*] and who can fight against it?' A mouth was given to him to speak arrogance and blasphemy. And he was given power to act for forty-two months. And she opened her mouth to speak blasphemies against God, to blaspheme against his name, against his tent, and against them that dwell in heaven" (Rev 13:1-6).

The beast fights on the great stage of history against God's friends for forty-two months. This is a message of hope, because it indicates already in this septenary of the signs that this savage life lasts only three and a half years, it is not forever, it is not eternal, it will be provisional, temporal, it will last a period that is half of seven years, this one rather a period of fullness. The nations, the peoples and the listener (s) are thus to know that this evil creature, despite all its violence, cannot overcome neither the archangel Michael nor the Lamb nor "those who have an abode in heaven". This scenic enactment puts in evidence that the author of the Apocalypse knew the tendency of the apocalyptic and apocryphal literature and of the Jewish diaspora to concentrate in an entity the evil and the opposition to God. In staging this struggle between good and evil he approached this tendency, but it never comes, as this literature has shown, to give it a consistency and a personification in the manichaean or dualistic gnostic way¹⁰. The hope message of the Apocalypse results in a victory of the Lamb in the final chapters over the diabolos, the adversary (satan), over the dragon and over the beast. The latter comes from the abyss and frequents a region – the sea – which in the Old Testament is on the opposite side of the east, east from where the light comes. The beast is part of the past and a region that has always been unfavorable and little known to the Jewish people. The beast

¹⁰ Unfortunately, this one turns out to be an interpretation of FERDINAND CHRISTIAN BAUR, *Vorlesungen über neutestamentlichen Theologie*, Band II, Gotha 1892, 22.25.

comes from a region that only God can dominate. The sea is an opponent of Yahweh (cf. Ps. 74:13), just as *yam* was the opponent of the baal god (the divinity of fertility and rain) in the canaanite myths¹¹. This beast is thus analogous to the false prophet of Matthew 7:15. Then in Revelation 13:13-14 the signs of this beast, of this enemy character of God, deceive and divert the faithful of the Lamb and the friends of God. Here the author of the Apocalypse finds the apocalyptic theme of the end-time danger when false messiahs and false prophets arise (cf. Mt 24:24, Mk 13:22, 2 Tes 2:9). During the time of Emperor Trajan (98-117), Christians were subjected to the test of abjuring their faith by being obliged to worship the image of the emperor, as Pliny shows in one of his letters to the emperor (*Ep* 10,96). However, this practice cannot be localized only at this time. Most likely, this practice may have been scattered throughout the empire's provinces, though not systematically documented.

Being one beast not enough, a second beast soon follows. It wants to be worshiped as the first and annihilates those who do not worship her. Thus, also by this extra, nations continue between the announcement of salvation by the angel and the illusion of idolatry represented by this creature:

"I saw another Beast [*therion*] coming up out of the earth; had two horns similar to those of the Lamb but spoke like a Dragon. She exercises all the power of the first Beast [*therion*] in her presence, and causes the earth and those in it to worship the first Beast [*therion*], whose mortal wound had been healed. And he maketh great prodigies, even to cause fire to come down from heaven upon the earth, before men. And he seduced the inhabitants of the earth by the wonders that he was given to do before the beast [*therion*], and told the inhabitants of the earth to make an image of the beast that had been wounded by the sword and revived. He was also granted to give life to the image of the Beast [*therion*], so that the image of the Beast [*therion*] would speak and cause those who did not worship the image of the Beast [*therion*] to be killed. And he causeth all, small and great, rich and poor, free

¹¹ ADELA YARBRO COLLINS, "The Apocalypse (Revelation)", *NJBC*, London 1997, 1009 and KLAUS BERGER, *Die Apokalypse des Johannes*, 961, present a very common reading, identifying the beast with emperor Nero and the prostitute with the city of Rome.

and slaves, to receive a mark in their right hand or in their forehead, and that no man can buy or sell unless he bears the mark, the name of the Beast [*therion*] or the number of its name. Here is the wisdom: he that hath understanding calculate the number of the Beast [*therion*]; in fact, it is the number of man: his number is 666” (Rev 13:11-18).

To demonstrate his power and his apparent prestige requires everyone to know and call her name. By wanting and demanding to be worshiped by all nations, this creature becomes a kind of voucher. Only the one who knows and accepts the password of the system that this creature advocates survives in the system of the beast: a system based on buying and selling, on trade similar to the plutocratic system of the great sinful city of Babylon, to which the only thing that matters is that money makes the world go around. Whoever does not know or is not acquainted with this essential information becomes excluded, to the point of being killed. This is a brutal system that does not care about collateral damage. But despite the harmful nature of this social and political system, hope persists, for the password everyone has to present to participate in this system is a number that presents three times a numeral of non-fullness. Its identifying number says that this beastly creature is not full, it is not fullness. Rather, it deceives many nations, its action does not reach the triple number seven. The hope that it is not the last word on the nations comes to the top in the judgment of the angel who anticipates the judgment of the great Babylon. As for this sinful city, condemnation on the part of the angel of God will be unremitting, cannot be lacking in the truth, it will become relentless. This ruthlessness is immediately visible when the first cup is poured out in Revelation 16:2 and inexorably strikes the adored nations of the beast and its image, but not only:

“A third angel followed them, saying in a loud voice, ‘If any man worship the beast and his image, and accept the mark on his forehead or his hand, and he shall drink the wine of the wrath of God, prepared unmixed in the cup of his anger, and shall be tormented with fire and brimstone, of the holy Angels and before the Lamb. The smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and those who worship the beast and his image will not have rest, day and night, and whoever receives the mark of his name”’ (Rev 14: 9-11).

Nations are thus warned by the angel that they may be struck by its tragedy that will strike this character / enemy creature of the Lamb. If they are warned, they may, in their liberty, join the harpers. As noted above, before the septenary of the cups in Revelation 15:2, nations have one more opportunity to accept salvation: “And I saw it as a sea of glass mixed with fire; those who had overcome the beast and his image and the number of his name were standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God”. This warning continues in Rev 16,10 with the fifth cup: “The fifth angel poured out his bowl upon the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was in darkness, while men biting their tongues with pain”. The final defeat will take place after the end-time battle that will occur on the “mountain of Meggido” (Harmageddon) in Rev 16:16. As the name implies, it is a mountain near Mount Carmel in Galilee, and remembered in Israel as the place where the great king Josiah in 609 BC was defeated. This is not a good omen for the nations or for the beast, for this place evokes crush.

The intervention of the beast proceeds in chapter 17 alongside another opposing character to the Lamb and to those who follow the Lamb: the immoral and promiscuous woman of Rev 17. She is accompanied by the beast during this whole scene after the seventh cup. Whoever allows the nations to see what they do not see is again another angel, “one of the seven angels who have the seven bowls” (Rev 17:1). It is this same angel who interprets to the listener and to the nations what they do and who the woman and the beast are: “I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the Beast that carries her and has seven heads and ten horns” (v.7). Between verses 8 and 15 the angel indicates to the listener that the beast represents all the kings of the earth who have allied themselves to subdue the nations and to fight the Lamb. The beast assumes socio-political and economic outlines. In the background, it takes the cover of power. However, the angel announces that, despite its power, the beast “walks towards doom” (v.11), it will not be able to completely destroy the nations nor defeat the Lamb, the great knight of God accompanied by the army of his angels. Until that final victory, the beast will gather its power and its armies. The grand finale of the Apocalypse approaches:

“And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to fight against him that sat on the horse, and against his host. But

the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who had done wonders before her, with whom it seduced those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. Both were cast alive in the lake of fire with burning sulfur” (Rev 19:19-20).

Instead, “those who had not worshiped the beast and his image, and received not the mark on their foreheads and in their hand, they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years” (20:4). Once again, nations are among two groups of extras: now among those who worship the beast and those who do not worship it. The latter will triumph and live in the time of fullness, as the figure *thousand* indicates.

4. The Angel(s)

The outline of the angel, these mediators and helpers of God, servants of the Lamb, help nations hear a different message, which at least know that another future, another story is possible. Therefore, these messengers of God, these Lamb co-workers (Mitwirken)¹² cross the whole stage of the Apocalypse, that is to say, they are present throughout the whole play, because the seer of Patmos wants to show that they are present throughout the history of salvation. They, therefore, issue condemnation judgments upon the nations when they identify themselves with the beast represented in the unclean figure of unclean spirits in the form of a frog (cf. Ap 16:12). They do so by a “judgment doxology or an eschatological vindication formula”¹³, opposing the kings of the east and all the land of vv.12-14. This image of the holy war and the confrontation between two factions is also often found in the ancient world (cf. Jdg 5:20; Dan 10:13-11,1; 1QM 1).

Many times, God’s revelation comes through the powerful voice of one of his angels, as in Rev 18:1 a voice of glory and power¹⁴. The unveiling of

¹² ULRICH MANN, “Engel VI. Dogmatisch”, *TRE* 9 (1982) 612.

¹³ ADELA YARBRO COLLINS, “The Apocalypse (Revelation)”, *NJBC*, London 1997, 63:51, 1011.

¹⁴ It might be viewed as a divine personification: cf. JOSÉ PABLO GUSMAN RICHARD, *L’Apocalypse Reconstruction de l’espérance* (“Apocalipsis. Reconstrucción de la esperanza”, San José, Costa Rica 1994), Paulines 2001, 184.

the Apocalypse begins being given by a servant of God, an angel (cf. Rev 1:1). This Revelation is addressed in the first part (cf. Rev 1:20) to each of the seven angels (of the seven messengers) of the seven Churches of the Apocalypse, whatever their function or status (probably some leader of each of these communities) might be. Then, a mighty angel appears in 5:2 with the great Book in the hands. Around the throne in verse 11 are “myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands”. These are different from the previous angels of the first part. In chapter 7 there are four other great angels who protect the earth from the winds. In 7:2 there appears another in addition to these four to shout with a loud voice that had received the power to punish the earth. But they knelt down to worship the Lord God. Then, in this great play, there are seven more who begin the septenary of the trumpets (cf. 8:2). They are accompanied by another with incense for the great liturgy (v.3). Just as in the OT, another opposing angel whose name is “destruction” comes into the scene (cf. 9:11). The sixth angel frees four others who are trapped and destined to kill a third of humanity (cf. v.15). Then comes the angel of the Book, clothed with the rainbow on his head (cf. 10:1). At the sound of the trumpet by the seventh angel is the great song of praise in the celestial liturgy^{Top of Form} (cf. 11:15). In the septenary of the signs another sign appears – another angel (cf. 14:6) who “had with him a good news of eternal value to announce to the inhabitants of the earth: to all nations, races, tongues, and peoples”. It is followed by another angel, beginning in v.8 to herald the fall of the great emblematic city of sin – Babylon. Then, comes a third one who warns to give no worship to the beast (v.9). A fourth angel appears in verse 15 to reap the land ready for harvest. Another one leaves the sky to bring him the sickle for this task (cf. v.17). Another angel in v.18 gives the order to be performed. Then, there appears another group of seven angels who begin to execute punishments with the seven bowls (cf. 15:5). There seems to be one of them (cf. 17:7) who interprets to the seer of Patmos the meaning of the prostitute and the beast.

Among these angels, and after the announcement of the nuptials of the Lamb in 19:1-9, another heavenly messenger appears in 19:7, this time inviting to the great eschatological banquet. Before being definitively celebrated in chap. 21, there is another angel responsible for the keys of the abyss in 20:1. One of the seven angels of the group carrying the bowls

comes to show the bride of the Lamb almost at the end of this play, at 21:12. In 22:6 there appears one of the last celestial messengers announcing what will happen soon. And the NT text ends with the angel who began the unveiling to John in Rev 22:8-16. These are the emissaries of the Lamb, sometimes to interpret, sometimes to condemn, sometimes to worship, sometimes to praise, sometimes to punish the angels who rebelled: the devil, the demons, the beast, and satan¹⁵. In the ethiopic Apocalypse of Peter, the angel Urael is instituted by God to carry out the final judgment in the resurrection of the dead. In AssMoi 10:2 the archangel Michael will make the devil disappear when he overcomes the dragon of Revelation 12. It is He who also appears in the end of time in the Apocalypse along with the remaining angelology to establish the definitive kingdom of the Lamb¹⁶. With this many-sided presence, nations are assured of hope and salvation, learn from the angelic mirrors, see themselves in these mirrors, reveal themselves in those mirrors, interpret and are interpreted in these angelic mirrors.

Synthesis

The nations realize that they can follow the two paths that God, through Moses, had already offered to Israel: the way of good or the path of evil (Deuteronomy 30:15). Now, nations find themselves between the Angel and the trinity of hell (“höllische Trinität”)¹⁷ of which the character of the beast is part. The nations are seen between the seal [*sfragis*] of the woman’s son (see Rev 12:1) and the mark [*cháragma*] of the beast, among those who have the Lamb’s name on the forehead (7:3; 22:4) and those who have the name of the beast (13:17) tattooed in the hand, between the hymns to God (15:1-3) and blasphemy (13:1-5), between praise and insult, between the slaughtered Lamb and the dragon, between Christ (19:13) and the beast (17:8). Literally, nations are placed in an antithetical

¹⁵ Cf. KLAUS BERGER, *Die Apokalypse des Johannes Kommentar* Teilband 2, 858-865.963.

¹⁶ Cf. KLAUS BERGER, *Die Apokalypse des Johannes Kommentar* Teilband 2, 907.

¹⁷ KLAUS BERGER, *Die Apokalypse des Johannes Kommentar* Teilband 2, 957.

parallelism¹⁸ between God, the Lamb and his angels on the one hand, and the two beasts and Satan on the other hand. But the latter are not the last of God's opponents. After the septenaries, the character of the beast itself unfolds in the players of the prostitute woman, the sinful city, satan, the second beast¹⁹. Of all of them, the angels try to get the nations away, either announcing the punishment either challenging them.

¹⁸ See KLAUS BERGER, *Die Apokalypse des Johannes Kommentar* Teilband 2, 995.

¹⁹ See a very fine comparison presented by ROLAND BERGMEIER, "Die Erzähure und das Tier: Apk 12,18-13,18 und 17f: Eine quellen-und redaktionskritische Analyse", *ANRW* II.25.5 (1988) 3903.