

Revelations from St John the Divine*

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Introduction

To use the Book of Revelation to show how theology might be done in a local context might initially raise a few eyebrows to say the least. By the end of this paper, I hope that you will have cause to find an alternative form of exercise. For, it will be my contention that the text of Revelation lends itself to theological reflection in a local context. If Wesley Carr is correct that 'theological reflection is a constructed, ordered, reflective enquiry on the interaction of one's self and one's context', then John's apocalypse provides us with ample place for such treasures to be mined.¹ The Revelation to St John the Divine is a product of reflection on scripture, context and, I suggest, experience. This experience, for me, involves reflection on the world in which Patmos man lived, and also something close to what might be termed *merkabah* experiences. Scripture, tradition, context and experience are the basic ingredients of theological reflection.

This paper then straddles two particular furrows of theology: biblical studies and pastoral theology. I intend to do this by interacting with the text of the Revelation to St John the Divine in two ways. First, by engaging with the text by using some of the tools of biblical scholarship, for example historical-critical methods, as well as sociological context: and second, by re-telling the story of the Apocalypse through the eyes of local congregations, from the Parish of Matson, a large outer council estate, in Gloucester and the Parishes of Flimby, Netherton and Maryport on the west coast of Cumbria. In straddling these two furrows, we trust that we will see some Revelations from St John the Divine that are appropriate for our context and yet consonant with the time in which they were written.

However, to begin with, we need to say a little more about the nature of the text and how we might understand it in general. This is important as a number of misconceptions about the Revelation occur because of misunderstandings about what kind of text it is. Our text firstly and foremostly obviously falls within the genre of literature known as Jewish apocalyptic. This includes from the Hebrew Bible Daniel and Ezekiel, and from para-biblical literature works such as the Enochian corpus, 2 Baruch and 4 Ezra. Literature which is gathered together under the apocalyptic umbrella usually purport to reveal secrets of the heavenly realms, whether that is about the present or future. The material disclosed need not be about eschatology, but can include calendaric information or details about say the beginnings of time or the origins of evil. 1 Enoch is a classic example of an apocalyptic text interested in astrological information, as well as the

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¹ W Carr, *Handbook of Pastoral Studies* (NPLC, London: SPCK, 1997) 118.

beginnings of evil, rooted it believes in relationships between angels (fallen and male) and humans (virtuous and female). Indeed one might be tempted to say that the majority of mysteries unveiled within apocalyptic literature are to do with understanding the historical present of the writer, rather than dealing with future events. By this, I mean, that the visions usually relate to the present earthly context; although described in heavenly language. Such a view does not negate the possibility that the text has meaning for the contemporary context (i.e., 21st Century context) or a potential future event. This would, I suggest be true of the Apocalypse of John. Thus, to understand Revelation we need some understanding of the rules that operate within the genre of Jewish apocalyptic.

The Revelation, in common with other apocalyptic dramas, needs to be read with all our faculties. To read it mentally and silently does little justice to a text that is filled with images, colour and noise.

Christopher Rowland notes that the Revelation

[m]ore than any other biblical book...asks us to suspend our judgement of normality and submit ourselves to be informed by the shock of what is unusual, for the sake of a better understanding of reality.²

That these particular writings of John ask us to set aside what we might deem to be normality with its kaleidoscope of images that assault us when we enters it world is, I think, taken as read. Lions that are mistaken for wrathful lambs, seven headed beasts are not the normal stock in trade for the 21st Century reader.

Wendell Berry called the Revelation 'the one great poem that the first Christian age produced'.³ Indeed Eugene Petersen makes the following claim, 'if the Revelation is not read a poem, it is simply incomprehensible'.

The inability (or refusal) to deal with St. John, the poet, is responsible for most of the misreading, misinterpretation, and misuse of the book'.⁴

That Revelation should be understood as poetry certainly has its merits; the genre of poetry does call for us to suspend reality. W H Auden argued that poetry must 'say something significant about a reality common to us all, but perceived from a unique perspective'. Again, the Revelation does this; and whilst we might begin from the common starting point that it offers a unique, if at times jarring, perspective, I would hope to persuade you that the reality it offers is not uncommon.

Seeing John as a poet-prophet might help us to engage with the text in a more rounded way; but I discern in John another type of artist that creates an

² *Revelation*, (London: Epworth, 1993), 1

³ *Standing by Words*, (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1983) 90

⁴ *Reversed Thunder*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1985), 5

alternative impression of the world. John is, for me, the political cartoonist par excellence. Political cartoons are those which describe an event in a particular way, using symbols/caricature which is readily accessible to those 'in the know'; although might be described as odd or without meaning to those outside of the group. This is picked up by G B Caird when he describes Johannine visions not 'as photographic art' but contain within them 'evocative and emotive power... that 'set the echoes of memory and association ringing'.⁵ The echoes of memory that resound within the text of the Revelation are from the Old Testament and wider Jewish apocalyptic traditions. For the initial hearers of the text, other echoes would have been called to mind, for example the real or perceived threat from the Imperial Cult.⁶ To develop this notion of John as cartoonist, we turn to the text of the Apocalypse itself. After doing so we want to look at how Revelation might be read as a political cartoon within a 21st Century parochial setting.

However, it is important to remind ourselves that pastoral theologians stress the importance of image, experience and feelings in making the connections between the text and context. Killen and De Beer write, 'Images symbolise our experience. They capture the totality of our felt response to reality in a given situation'.⁷

Passages from Revelation

I would like to turn to passages that feature the exalted Christ, and in particular the vision of the one like a son of man, the lamb-lion, as well as the warrior-king. In addition, we will also look at some of the passages that feature the trinity of dragon, beast and second beast.

The one like a son of man

Commentators, including Stephen Smalley, G K Beale and A Y Collins, are generally agreed that the striking thing about this passage is how closely related the exalted Christ is with God. I do not underestimate the importance of this, nor of the challenge this would have been to someone like John the seer, presumably schooled in the monotheistic sensibilities of Judaism. I have argued elsewhere that such monotheistic sensibilities were flexible allowing for exalted humans to have divine language claimed for them, and receive worship, without transgressing the boundaries of belief in one God.⁸

Craig Koester suggests that the purpose of the vision of the glorified Christ is to bring comfort to Christian communities on the verge of persecution.⁹ Koester

⁵ The Revelation of St John the Divine (London: A & C Black, 1965) 25

⁶ R J Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: University Press, 1993) 34-37; G K Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (Carlisle: the Paternoster Press, 1999) 850-851.

⁷ *The Art of Theological Reflection* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1994) 37

⁸ K S Ellis, *Degrees of Divinity*, Unpublished PhD (Brunel University/London School of Theology), 1995

⁹ C R Koester, *Revelation and the End of all Things*, (Cambridge: W B Eerdmans, 2001), 50-52

develops this point because the exalted figure stands amongst the seven lamp stands, which the seer tells us represent the seven churches. This is something that I do not doubt, but it is however the force of the image in its context that I wish to dwell upon. Notwithstanding the fusion of divine and angelic imagery around the figure, there is one particular item that stands out for me as resonating with the timbre of the cartoonist. It is the fact that a barbarian's sword protrudes from the figure's mouth. This is usually taken as a feature of the judgement that is to be executed by the 'one like a son of man'. Yet, this needs to be off-set against the words of the figure that he is one who lives – had died – but lives. As we shall see more pertinently when we move to a discussion of the Lamb in Revelation 5, the Christology of Revelation holds together the slain with the exalted Messiah.

The 'one like a son of man' who wields the sword of justice has been unjustly judged by the power of Rome. Given what we shall argue *pace* others below that the unholy trinity bears an uncanny resemblance with the Imperial Cult, there is certainly some humour in that the one who is unveiled as judge is a convicted felon. Martin Hengel rightly notes that this is 'the scandal par excellence' in earliest Christological development, rather than any progress towards divinity.¹⁰

The Lamb who was slain

No where does the paradox between weakness and strength combine so brilliantly in John's Revelation than in the portrayal of the Lamb.

In the very engine room of this apocalypse, the heavenly cult is assembled, with the seer told that none is worthy to open the scroll, which controls the world's destinies.¹¹ The seer's tears are broken by the announcement that the Lion of the tribe of Judah has conquered, has overcome. 'This martial description' writes Stephen Smalley 'is taken from Genesis 49:9-10 where it refers to the Messiah's sovereign power'.¹² Smalley could reasonably have pointed to other Jewish literature such as 4 Ezra (2 Esdras) 12: 31-32, 1 QSb 5: 21-29 and 1 Maccabees 3: 4-5 as pointing to lion imagery for the Messiah.¹³

Yet the announcement of the lion gives way to the vulnerable lamb with the appearance that it has been slain. Just as the vision at the beginning of the Revelation with the one like a son of man with the protruding sword evoked images of justice being wielded by one unjustly treated, Revelation 5 neuters normal perception of power with the image of the slain lamb.

¹⁰ M Hengel,

¹¹ Caird, *Revelation*, 72

¹² Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, (London: SPCK, 2005) 130

¹³ Beale, *Revelation*, 349 n 143

Hearers of the text would not have associated vulnerability alone with the image of the Lamb. A lamb with seven horns leading the people of God would have been familiar from Jewish tradition (1 Enoch 90:9 cf. T. Jos 19:8).¹⁴ The Lamb is the one who has conquered. In the midst of the heavenly court, the very nexus of holiness, it is a creature that was once dead, and therefore unclean, who has emerged victorious. Whilst, I do not wish to underestimate what the passage says about victory being achieved through the seeming defeat of the cross¹⁵, there is also more than a subtle irony in the fact that the Lamb's coming before God parodies the coming of the beasts in Daniel 7.¹⁶ (We will note later that the beasts of Revelation attempt to parody the Lamb). A fusion no doubt of Old Testament and para-biblical allusion, as well as of engagement with other Christological traditions, John the Seer has gifted us a distortion not only of Imperial conceptions of power, but of how Messiah had been, and continues at times, to be perceived.

This does not take away from the image of the Lamb notions of Passover and sacrifice. Indeed in the kaleidoscope of images that is the Revelation, such concepts have their allotted place; but in this context the purpose of the slain, yet vindicated, figure is not to point to the acceptability of sacrifice; but to its depiction of what might best be described as powerful powerlessness.

The warrior-king

If our first two images might be said to contain a critique of power, it does seem to stretch even caricature of the third that the rider on a white horse might in any sense be vulnerable. There are of course sufficient links between this warrior and the 'one like a son of man' for the hearer to realise that this too is the exalted Christ. The wearing of the diadem stresses the legitimate power of the figure, and as Koester writes, 'challenges the pretensions of the dragon and the beast, who display diadems on their heads and horns in a mockery of divine power'.¹⁷

The rider's clothing is dripped in blood. This is most likely the blood of the martyrs serving to identify the Messiah with his people¹⁸, although for Rowland it is the blood shed on the cross.¹⁹ The rider exercises judgement as the rightful king of kings and lord of lords, a title that stands out as a direct political challenge. It does so because politics and theology are inextricably intertwined within the Revelation. Within Judaism, it was Yahweh alone who had the right to such a divine title and despite the claims made by the enemies of God within the text in 17: 4 and 18: 7, the titles of God can only be shared with the Christ.²⁰

¹⁴ Smalley, *Revelation*, 133

¹⁵ Rowland, *Revelation*, 75

¹⁶ Beale, *Revelation*, 354.

¹⁷ Koester, *Revelation*, 175-176.

¹⁸ Beale, *Revelation*, 959

¹⁹ *Revelation*, 145

²⁰ Smalley, *Revelation*, 495-496

The other title ascribed to the figure is the Word of God. Any superficial link with the Logos of the Fourth Gospel needs to be dismissed. Our Warrior-King most easily sits with the personified Word of the Wisdom of Solomon, who leaps from the royal throne like a relentless warrior (28: 15-16). Smalley would seem to concur when he writes that this figure represents the 'full and final expression of God's will'.²¹

Whilst the 'one like a son of man' and the vengeful lamb might sit uncomfortably with 21st Century sensibilities, many I suspect find the warrior motif being applied to the Christ figure slightly beyond the pale. In some circles there is still some sympathy with the view of Martin Luther that the theology of the Apocalypse at best represents 'a weakly Christianised Judaism'. This finds echoes with D H Lawrence's statement that the Revelation is 'the Judas of the New Testament'.

Such views do not do justice to either the text or its apocalyptic genre. Nevertheless, they are views that are grappling with the image that the text sets before them. Corsini is not alone when he considers the image of the Rider a cruel vision that helped make the message of Revelation one of ferocious revenge.²² We are helped here by the work of Mark Bredin *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace*, when he argues that a better translation of Revelation 19:11 would be: in steadfast love, he judges and makes war.²³

Bredin here substitutes the word 'righteousness' for 'love'. This, he does, as he makes the point that righteousness is the opposite of violence, and associated with 'love, peace and faithfulness'. There are portions of both the Psalms and the Prophets that would confirm this.

In short, Bredin would argue that John of Revelation is using an image of the warrior, and actually subverting the war-like image, with one who acts out of love rather than vengeance. Whilst there is much in this approach that I like, it has to be said that it runs the risk of sanitising the uncomfortable parts of the text for modern sensibilities. It may be that the earliest Christians were desperate for those who oppressed them to be punished.

However, the idea of subverting traditional patterns of war lends itself to our overall thesis that the text should be read, seen and heard as a 'political' cartoon. One can well imagine a modern day Steve Bell or A N Other subverting a subject in this way. This idea of subversion also appears to fit neatly with our first two images, which do seem to undermine traditional understandings of power. Readers of the Apocalypse should, I think, beware of neat patterns and be a little more willing to live with the chaos that it causes.

²¹ *Ibid*, 492

²² E Corsini, *The Apocalypse*, (Dublin: Veritas, 1983)

²³ *Jesus: Revolutionary of Peace* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2003) 204-208

The Dragon and the Beast

We turn now to Revelation 13. In the dragon and the beasts, we have three figure of caricature. There does seem to be some scholarly consensus that what we have presented here are portraits of satan's minions 'incarnated in the political realm'.²⁴ I am less concerned with exact representation of each facet of the visionary description with a political equivalent; it is suffice to say that the might of Imperial Rome was part of the threat, real or perceived, that challenged the existence of John's community.²⁵

The first beast is introduced as rising out of the sea or abyss. Whilst Caird amongst others argues that Roman power annually came out of the sea 'with the arrival of the proconsul at Ephesus', the abyss was the mythological place from which some of the enemies of God had emerged.²⁶ In Jewish tradition, the leviathan was separated from the behemoth on the fifth day of creation, and consigned to the sea; a traditional place of chaos.

John draws on Danielic imagery to construct his parody of the powers of the beast. Like the Lamb is given authority from the one seated on the throne; the first beast receives authority from the dragon, which in the previous chapter had been roundly defeated by the archangel, Michael. The hearers of the Revelation already know the figures to be those of limited authority. One of the seven heads of the beast appears to have had a mortal wound, and whilst there have been attempts to associate that particular head with one of the Emperors, in particular Julius Caesar or Nero; one cannot help thinking that such specific identification is lost in the midst of time as perhaps was not what the Seer was intending. The beast is depicted as being sufficiently attractive to seduce a number of people. John's readers are left in no doubt though of what the appropriate response to such advances should be.

Indeed, in some ways, the Seer describes the beast in ways that are similar to earlier descriptions of the Lamb. Whatever theological qualms this may or may not cause, there seems little doubt for John the dragon and beast are parodying the relationship and powers of God and the Lamb.

The second beast is come out of the land, and has been associated with the imperial cult, as represented in the major cities of Asia Minor at the turn of the Eras, because as Caird writes, 'in all matters of local government it could be said to wield the authority of the first beast'.²⁷ With the second beast's influence extending over economics as well as religious praxis, there is something to be said of such identification. Although Beale draws back from association with imperial cult, and argues that the unholy trinity are all indicative of the Roman

²⁴ I Boxall, *Revelation: Vision and Insight*, (London: SPCK, 2002) 69

²⁵ Smalley, *Revelation*, 336-337 cf. Bauckham, *Theology*, 35-39

²⁶ Caird, *Revelation*, 162

²⁷ *Revelation*, 171

state, whether this was centred on the state apparatus in the Imperial city or through governance in the regions of the Empire.²⁸

For John though the significance of all three figures is that they are counterfeit, pale imitations of divinity. This is expressed in the description of the second beast, who has two horns like the lamb, but the voice of the dragon and in the first beast who has the appearance of being a martyr and who has authority over the earth. For the Seer though those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life are not deceived. John, in effect parodies those who dare to parody God and God's agents, who are the only ones worthy of receiving worship.

This is a significant point to make in our defining the Revelation as a political cartoon. For the Seer, Rome was pervasive. It is a 'system of tyranny and power' that 'was not resisted or opposed by most of its subjects'.²⁹ John may offer caricature, even humour, to sketch out in words the power that he was speaking out against, but his goal is always clear: to show the folly and impotence of any form of worship that is not offered to God. Rowland notes that part of 'the role of the book...is to point out what true worship is' and to whom it may legitimately be offered.³⁰

The imagery of Revelation is colourful and artistic. It does engage with the senses. It also shocks. The shock that causes is probably not just a modern phenomenon. The first hearers would probably have been jolted by the reminder of the wounded, yet victorious Messiah, even in the heavenly court or of the guilt by association incurred by economic association with guild smiths of Imperial Rome. In this sense, John might properly be described as the political cartoonist par excellence.

The Revelation though had, I believe, another overriding objective apart from reminding the believer, to whom worship should be offered; and that was to move those in fear of persecution from fear to hope. 'All is not lost' declares the Seer. It is to how this works out within local Christian communities in our era that we now turn.

Theological Revelations

In September 2002, when discussing with members of the congregation of St Katharine's Matson what we might do during Advent, the Apocalypse of John was mentioned (hereafter the Revelation) by two or three people, until the idea was adopted, albeit slightly reluctantly by myself. The 'course' was then repeated in Maryport in advent 2004

²⁸ *Revelation*, 707-708

²⁹ Bauckham, *Theology*, 36

³⁰ *Revelation*, 117

It was decided that the group would meet 4 times, and that the first meeting as well as offering a brief introduction to the biblical text would involve a discussion that might shape the rest of the course.

My own particular methodology within the group was to attempt to make relationships between the biblical text and local context. This is normative for all theology, and is what John does in the Revelation. Thus the opening statements made about the text were designed to ask a question about the experiences of the group. This pattern was repeated at each session, and in the last two sessions done so explicitly.

The opening statements about the text of Revelation were as follows. They were offered as themes that shaped John's world. At no time was there a discussion of authorship, nor was it raised in either context.

- John was in a minority group experiencing persecution. John himself was in exile and many of his friends had died.
- John's Church had to make a decision over whether to be part of the world or to be distinct and different.
- John longed for a world full of hope. It was a world shaped by justice and by what is right.

These were followed up with the question: what shapes our world? The dominant answers were as follows.

There were 14 people in both groups, and people were encouraged to offer more than one answer.

- Consumerism, money, greed (9 people)
- Love of Self (8)
- Politics (6)
- Hope (4)
- Corruption (3)
- Envy (3)
- Carnal pleasures (1)
- Intolerance (1)
- Love of the outward (1)

The group wanted to look at the meanings of some of the visionary material in the Revelation, and some of the images used for Christ. This was agreed upon and alongside them I chose to develop the themes of consumerism and love of self.

Cartoons of Beasts and Dragons, Consumerism and Christmas cake

The group were reminded that the visions would have been shaped by the entirety of the John's experiences of the world, both sacred and secular. In the course of this, the group was reminded that the Revelation is profoundly indebted to the Old Testament, and that it stands within a particular genre of literature.

Moreover that John's understanding of the Old Testament would have been shaped by particular experiences of God and of the world. With regard to the former, attention was drawn to the Jewish apocalyptic strains within John's understanding of Jesus, and to the fact that John was part of a small religious sect. As to the latter, the context of Imperial Rome and John's group perception that they were targeted for persecution was highlighted.

I took the issue of the Empire and the possibility of persecution as particular shaping that would have inevitably had a profound influence on John's world. I then reminded the group of the two major shapings they had said had an impact on their world (consumerism and love of self).

This led to a vibrant discussion where a number of suggestions were given for each theme. On consumerism, people moved from the general to the particular, beginning with large issues like Third World debt to the lack of affordable housing. When pressed as to how consumerism affected them: one mentioned a Christmas cake that they had bought. It had an expiry date of 14 December, which meant that another one had to be bought before Christmas Day itself.

On the love of self, people mentioned competitiveness and people's seeming need for special positions and badges of authority. The intriguing thing was that no one made an explicit connection between what they were saying and the Church, which of course is free of such things!

This discussion was taken a step further by my suggestion that John's use of images like the Dragon and the Beast should be seen as cartoon-like interpretations of the Empire and the Imperial Cult.³¹ In the process a number of political cartoons were shown.³²

The group were then asked what cartoons could be used to depict the shaping which they had chosen. For the concept of consumerism, two images were given. The first was of the hydra, which is a many-headed monster in the tale, *Jason and the Argonauts*.

A second image was used of an octopus with a disproportionately large centre depicting the West which has a disproportionate amount of wealth when compared with other nations and nation-groups.

³¹ Rowland, *Revelation* (London: Epworth, 1997)

³² www.politicalcartoon.co.uk

With regard to 'Love of Self', the group envisaged the two letters that make up the word 'me'. Each would be in capitals and a garish pink, twirling around drawing attention to itself.

Working with octopus and garish letters

The attention switched back to John's antidote to the first and second beast that of his image of Christ. Whilst neither the image of the warrior-king dripping with blood or the apocalyptic imagery of the one like a son of man were dismissed³³, particular emphasis was placed on the Lamb seated on the throne.

We suggested that the particular image of the Lamb seems at first to be puzzling when contrasted with the cartoon like figures of the beasts, which represent caricatures of the corrupting nature of power, whether secular or religious.

The group was led gently to the probability that John's Lamb was also cartoon-like, with the apparent gentleness of a Lamb standing as an antidote to the corrupting possibilities of power and control. As Koester writes, 'clearly the portrayal of the slaughtered lamb as a conqueror challenges ordinary modes of thinking'.³⁴ For John's community, this meant that how they were to be martyrs/witnesses must bear some resemblance to the way in which God had been mediated to them, through a Lamb.³⁵

With this in mind we explored how the group might respond to images of octopus and garish letters. Among the responses to the octopus were issues of Fair Trade and within that supporting local farm markets; practically this has meant the establishment of a Fair Trade Stall within the Church community in Gloucester (although not solely as a result of the group). Those who were members of the group are amongst the most committed purchasers.³⁶

Assessing the groups' response, individually and collectively to the garish letters is a little more problematic. As groups, they devised an act of worship offering reflections on what they had learnt. Not only was this a creative combination of readings, music, images, drama, song and the hallelujah chorus, seven people spoke in a church service for the very first time: one of whom is now part of the regular team of readers.

As individuals, whilst some of the group found the whole process of relating text to context an uncomfortable experience, the majority have taken part in further study groups.

³³ Indeed particular facets of both images were discussed, for example the fact that the one like a son of man and the warrior-king drew heavily from current messianic expectations, both relating to the dominant messiah images of king and priest.

³⁴ Koester, *Revelation*, 78.

³⁵ The group quickly dispelled notions of 'Larry the Lamb' or a sheep-like version of *Babe*.

³⁶ Another practical result was that a local farmer was invited to our Harvest Supper at the request of three members of the group.

A credible vision of Revelation

There is a danger when reviewing events in local context such as this one to be left with a warm and cosy experience that is somewhat unrelated to the biblical text, and in short there has been no real conversation between the text and local context. I am certain that in this case such a charge cannot be proven.

The Revelation is a text that has been misinterpreted. It has been used to justify violence and predict disasters of all kinds. Such do not do justice to the widely held thesis that the Revelation is unveiling secrets to do with *Sitz im Leben* of the time of writing, rather than a date that is to be revealed in the fullness of time. (Although, I do not totally rule out such a possibility). The text has also been championed by liberationists and others who claim to be working on the side of the marginalised. Rowland notes, 'it is not difficult to see the attraction of a book whose strengths lies in the promotion of a symbol of defeat and weakness and which recognises the importance of power but offers a very different perspective as to its exercise'.³⁷

My own approach is to take the Revelation as speaking profoundly to those who feared persecution (even if not actually undergoing it). This, the text does by interpreting how the world actually was, or seemed to be. The Revelation acknowledged the pervasiveness of the Roman state, through both its centralising and local incarnations. It turns normal conceptions of power on their heads – all seven of them – as it points to a God who is able to judge righteously; and perhaps mercifully. Such a story is seen clearly, I believe, through the medium of the political cartoon. A good political cartoon will always try to interpret events in the world. This is not to say that the text should solely be read as a cartoon of this genre, indeed to a full range of tools need to be utilised in order to read the text in a rounded way.

The Revelation is about giving new meaning to a particular situation. In its first context to churches in Asia Minor it offered a sacred canopy that allowed for the events that were seemingly conspiring against them to occur; but in the knowledge that the Christ, who had appeared defeated was Lord and King, perhaps even God, over all. In being a medium for the creation of new meaning, this Christian apocalypse is a good local theology. For contextual theology always creates new meanings.³⁸ Part of that new meaning was, I suggest, moving the believer from Fear to Hope. These revelations from St John the Divine of creating new meaning and moving people on are indeed treasures that can be legitimately mined from Patmos man, who was, like us, seeking to make sense of faith in a world that found it a little too peculiar to be comfortable.

³⁷ *Revelation*, 15

³⁸ Killen and De Beer, *Theological Reflection*, viii cf. Jarvis, *Adult and Continuing Education : Theory and Practice*, 42