

A critical analysis of the Millennial reign of Christ in
Revelation 20:1-10.

BY

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ABSTRACT

This thesis addresses the issue of the millennial reign of Christ in Revelation 20:1-10. It is an attempt to investigate whether the millennium is a future event or already inaugurated. The Apocalypse has been the focus of attention of many end time movements down through the ages. This thesis picks up one of the most popular issues out of such a focus. One of the issues in the Apocalypse of John is the expectation of a thousand year reign of Christ. During the period of early Christianity up to the middle ages the question of the nature of the millennium has been controversial. Recently the debate over the millennial reign of Christ in the Apocalypse has intensified more than ever before. Three major views have been advocated and such views have brought in a greater dilemma, since the reader of the Apocalypse has to choose one of the views.

Having grown up in an evangelical religious background, which places emphasis upon apocalyptic ideologies; I found myself becoming more and more attracted to this debate. At last I have entered the wagon with a view to demonstrate, in my own way, that the millennial reign is already actualised rather than expected. This sounds very controversial compared to what has always been thought by many Christians since their early days of Sunday School. This 'territory' has been trod by various scholars so much so that I am not in a position to claim to be a pioneer in this investigation. I endeavour to re-examine the issue of millennium in the light of a sociological analysis from my own perspective. I intend to perceive the other side of the mountain that has been hidden from me all along (as a hidden transcript of the Apocalypse).

After having established the task of rethinking millennium. I wish to go further and look at the East African concept of millennium, even though no comparative study is intended at this level of my research, apart from laying bare the framework, such is very important for the inculturation of theology today. This thesis will be tabulated into three main parts, the first deals with sociology of sects and the Apocalypse, in this part a model will be formulated, which will be applied in the delineation of the Apocalypse community in chapter three. The second part deals with the concept of millennium within the Bible and ends up with an exegesis of the passage that clearly mentions this term. The third part deals with the East African concept of millennium and the conclusion of the whole thesis. All Biblical quotations are from the Revised Standard Version Bible, while all the abbreviations follow Killian (1985).

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I sincerely wish to thank Prof Jonathan Draper for his constructive supervision, stimulating critique and dialogue that sharpened my focus and approach to this project. He always reminded me two things, not to be judgmental and not to be emotionally involved in my critical analysis, by so doing he inculcated in me a sense of academic discipline in biblical scholarship.

DEDICATION

To my wife Catherine Muthoni, daughters Wambui Mwangi, Wanjiru Mwangi, and Waithira Mwangi. They have shown patience and encouragement throughout the academic pursuits. Thanks for all the prayers and support.

DECLARATION

I, Rev Humphrey Mwangi Waweru, candidate for the Master of Theology Degree (Biblical studies) in the School of Theology, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg hereby declare that: Except for the quotations specifically indicated in this text, and such help as I have acknowledged, this thesis is wholly my own work and has been submitted for the degree purposes of the above mentioned degree.



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University of Natal

Pietermaritzburg, October 2000

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	i
Acknowledgments	ii
Dedication	iii
Declaration	iv
CHAPTER ONE : INTRODUCTION	
1.0 The major task of this chapter	1
CHAPTER TWO: SOCIOLOGY AND THE APOCALYPSE OF JOHN	
2.0 Introduction	8
2.1 The major task of this chapter	9
2..2 Sociology	9
2.2.1 Sociology of Sects	11
2.2.2 Models	14
2.2.3 A critique	15
2.3 Responses to the world	16
2.3.1 Charisma	17
2.3.2 Bryan Wilson's typology	21
2.3.3 Apocalypse community as a millennialist sect	26
2.4 A profile of a millennialist sect	29
2.5 A model for this thesis	32
2.6 Conclusion.	33

CHAPTER THREE : APOCALYPSE AND MILLENNIALISM

3.0 Introduction	35	
3.1 The major task of this chapter	35	
3.1.1 Defining Apocalyptic and Millennialism	36	
3.2 Apocalyptic literature	42	
3.2.1 Sources of apocalyptic thought	43	
3.2.2 Characteristics of apocalyptic literature	47	
3.3 Social background to the Apocalypse	49	
3.3.1 Social identity of the author	49	
3.3.2 When was the Apocalypse written?	53	
3.3.3 Social setting of Apocalypse	59	
3.4 The Johannine Apocalypse community	62	
3.5 Millennialism in the early church		65
3.6 Exegetical observations	68	
3.7 Conclusion	71	

CHAPTER FOUR: THE CONCEPT OF MILLENNIUM

4.0 Introduction	73	
4.1 The major task of this chapter	73	
4.2 Millennium	74	
4.2.1 Modern approaches to the millennium	75	
4.2.2 Various interpretations	78	
4.3 The concept of millennium in the Old Testament		82
4.4 Millennium in Jewish apocalyptic thought	89	
4.5 The concept of millennium in the New Testament	91	
4.5.1 The millennium already as a Christ event	93	
4.5.2 Millennium is now as a period for the Church	97	

4.5.3 Millennium inaugurates judgment	99
✦ 4.6 Apocalypse as a response to suffering and hope	101
4.7 Conclusion	105

CHAPTER FIVE: EXEGESIS (Rv 20:1-10)

5.0 Introduction	108
5.1 Translation	108
5.2 The major task of this chapter	109
5.3 Satan's imprisonment (Rv 20:1-3)	111
5.3.1 The reign of the saints (Rv 20:4-6)	116
5.3.2 Satan is set lose (Rv 20:7-10)	125
5.3.3 Revelation 20:1-10 and the millennialists	127
5.4 Summing up the exegesis	129
5.5 Conclusion	130

CHAPTER SIX: EAST AFRICAN CONCEPT OF MILLENNIUM

6.0 Introduction	132
6.1 The major task of this chapter	132
6.2 East African concept of time	134
6.2.1 East African concept of God as a future King	137
6.2.2 East African concept of history	138
6.2.3 East African concept of Judgment	139
6.2.4 East African concept of resurrection	140
6.3 The millennium discovered within East African	142
6.4 Why millennial groups may survive for a long time	147
6.5 The power of the Apocalypse	149
6.6 Conclusion	152

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

7.0 Conclusion 154

7.1 Resolution 157

CONSULTED WORKS 159

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The major task of this chapter

The major task of this chapter is to define what is expected from this study, beginning with the first chapter which will be the introduction and finishing with the last chapter which will be the conclusion of our study. The whole thesis will be comprised of seven chapters which will be detailed below. The chapter will also highlight what is expected in the whole thesis and the steps to be taken in achieving the best results.

The Apocalypse of John, which has been a favourite subject of millenarian movements and recently to a number of New Testament scholars, became a favourite of mine during the last five years (1995-2000). I was a priest in a Parish of the Diocese of Mt. Kenya South and, this affinity was as a result of views which were presented to me by various groups of people, who were moving from one place to another predicting the end of the world, as I will explain later. I then became more eager to learn more about the Apocalypse. The topic that struck me most in the Apocalypse was that of the millennial reign of Christ in Revelation 20:1-10. I therefore started looking for an opportune moment to probe into the nature of the millennium in the Apocalypse, an opportunity which was realised early this year (2000).

The issue of the Millennial reign of Christ in the Apocalypse of John has of late become so popularised that it has even induced suicides in order to actualize it. This has made the Revelation of John one of the most disturbing and puzzling books of the New Testament. The climax of the whole issue of the Apocalypse of John is the 'day of the Lord', when the messianic kingdom of a thousand years is established on earth, and the enemy is chained and locked in the bottomless pit.

To an oppressed society nothing else would have brought hope to them more than the realisation that soon they would be more than conquerors. The main reason why John repositioned the issue of millennium to the end of his Apocalypse is in itself not amazing, because in the Apocalyptic tradition which John must have inherited, the tribulations of the present world were often understood as climaxed by the beautiful description of the Lord's day, when the Messiah would start his reign on earth.

The message of the Apocalypse is simple and clear; the introduction and the conclusion of the book stresses that the reader must be watchful, for soon God will come and pass judgement on the world and the saints shall be rewarded while the wicked will be destroyed. So the millennium, which is to inaugurate a reward to the martyrs and a punishment to the wicked, is portrayed as imminent in the Johannine Apocalypse community. It will be a cataclysmic event which will see this evil world destroyed.

'Apocalypse', the first word in the book, means 'revelation'. The Greek term 'Apocalypse' has infiltrated the English language. The Apocalypse of John popularly known as the book of Revelation, is a very unique book in the New Testament. It presents a world that is new to us, for, even though it mentions things that we know, they are very different from the way we understand them to be; animals have more than one head, two eyes or horns, while cities are made of gold. The Apocalypse appears not only to be the last to have been penned but also the last to have been included in the New Testament canon, though not without antagonism. It contains the highest form of spiritual experience within the books of the New Testament. The author declares this, when he says Ἐν πνεύματι (means in spirit) in Revelation 1:10. According to Malina (1995:27), whether one translates this phrase by ecstasy or trance, the point is John was in an altered state of awareness. One of the primary reasons why the Apocalypse is so important to Christians is that it is in the Bible. This has made speculators have confidence in the analyses and predictions based on it.

The main theme of the Apocalypse is not what God has already done on earth in Christ, but the

still greater things he is expected to do at the end of all things. The sects which claim to be living at the end times, have found it easy to use the Apocalypse to claim that John predicted their own particular situations. It is a message of faith and hope to such groups and assures them anew of the expected millennial reign of Christ (Rv 20:4-6), when they will triumph over their enemies. The Apocalypse has a warning as well as an encouragement at the time of tribulations. It might be better understood as a wider religious phenomenon in antiquity and a source of knowledge of what is hidden to society.

Millions of Pentecostals, Evangelicals and Charismatics believed that Jesus would return before the end of the last century to establish his thousand-year reign on earth. A book that proclaimed such a message, Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth*, is said to have sold more copies in the 1970's than any other work of nonfiction. (He was probably the best selling author of his time). The worries caused by the number 666 (Rv 13:18) have continued to increase and have inspired ingenious solutions throughout the history of Christianity. More often than not, this mysterious number is interpreted as a reference to a personal antichrist or a false messiah. For example in the last century, Hitler, Kissinger, Anwar Sadat, Saddam, and even Idi Amin of Uganda in East Africa have been so identified, and the Pope has enjoyed this title more than any other person since the middle ages, at the hand especially of Protestants.

The number has also been assumed to be a common prefix in computer programs of large department stores and international institutions like International Monetary Fund or World bank. Millennial excitement and unwarranted fears have therefore been provoked by the computerisation of the world. The more recent introduction of pin numbers as identification numbers of all sorts, has aroused further expectation of the end of the world. In expectation of such a speedy end, it has been reported that some Christians have formed new communities and withdrawn from the host society to await the return of Christ. Others have suffered financial embarrassment because they gave all their money away or spent it carelessly, or even borrowed loans they never expected to pay back because the world was ending. This kind of approach has often characterised the interpretation of Revelation 20:1-10.

It is my hope that research into the book of Revelation, particularly the concept of the millennial reign of Christ, can help to address this problem, for it has often been interpreted to refer to a particular end time and this has sometimes resulted in destruction of life. In a country where there is freedom of worship like Kenya, there is a great need for a better understanding of Revelation so that it is not used as a manual to confuse and mislead people into accepting false doctrines, which may turn out to be fatal.

Theoretically the Apocalyptic has primarily been studied from critically, phenomenologically, generically, literary-theoretically, eschatologically and socio-historically. All these studies have examined apocalyptic literature in a comparative literature framework, despite their particular theoretical focuses and objects of research. This project will apply a research methodology based on insights gained from a contemporary study of sociological models.

The historical-critical approach came into being in the nineteenth century, focusing on the author of the text, the original readers and the historical setting of the text. In such a case Apocalypse came to be viewed not as a prophecy of our times, but as a response to the early Christian persecutions in Asia Minor towards the end of the first century. Nevertheless recent Biblical scholars have turned to the newer and less established use of the social sciences such as sociology, psychology, and anthropology for more promising approaches in the quest for the meaning of the texts. This newer method will be applied in our study.

Today there is a growing consensus that none of the many approaches to the book of Revelation are satisfactory on their own, so when I follow this method of interpretation it will not mean that other methods are right or wrong but it will be seen as one way of investigating the meaning of the text. To achieve the different goals of this study the biblical text will be part of my source material and my principle aim in this study will be to understand the nature of the concept of the millennium in apocalyptic thinking, and its relationship to sectarian community in the book of Revelation.

It is worth noting that most of the sociological discussions of the Apocalypse concentrate on the book as a whole and tend to assume that it is addressed to one community living in a particular social setting. It does no harm also to note that the letters were addressed to seven different communities living in seven different sets of circumstances. It is better, however, to assume that the book responds to the common general problems the Christians were faced with throughout Asia Minor. While the seven letters may be addressed to different Churches, the body of Apocalypse (Chs 4-22) was addressed to the whole Apocalypse community; which here refers to a millenarian movement. Reading Revelation more carefully can bring a new perspective to the Kenyan Church and contribute to controlling fanaticism. Christians need to address the issue of the millennial reign of Christ more critically than they have previously.

In the critical analysis of the millennial reign of Christ in the Revelation 20:1-10, the following steps will be taken:

Firstly, in chapter one we begin with a brief introduction to the Apocalypse. In this chapter the reason of study and the approach followed are equally spelt out.

Secondly, in chapter two, we shall embark on a sociological analysis of sects in an attempt to formulate a model which will be later applied in delineating the community of the Apocalypse. In this endeavour we shall try to establish a sociological model, similar to that of Bryan Wilson (1973), who has created a working typology of seven kinds of sects based on the group's relationship with its host society and its activities. In order to enhance our model, other scholars such as Worsley (1968), Gager (1975), and Collins (1984) will be consulted. A critique of this model will also be undertaken. Under this section we shall try to ascertain whether Apocalyptic fits a sectarian community as a response to social crisis or whether it is the expression of the views of the author as an individual. At the end of this chapter we will come to the conclusion of our model which will be applied in this thesis.

Thirdly, in chapter three, we shall try to explicate the possible problems that prompted the author

to write as the mouthpiece of a millenarian community. Following this we shall give brief definitions of the Apocalypse and its relation to millennialism, and what is understood by apocalyptic literature. Once that has been settled, we will also provide a brief definition of millenarianism, from which we shall derive a definition of the Apocalypse as a response to a millenarian movement. The Apocalypse was a response to the social situations which threatened the survival of this community. In clarifying this we shall look at the historical background of the Apocalypse in terms of the social identity of the author, date, and the social situations which might have prompted the author to write. In describing the community of the Apocalypse we shall make exegetical observations from the whole of the Apocalypse to portray the situations it might have been responding to.

Fourthly, in chapter four, we shall look at the concept of millennium. We will observe the modern concepts and the various interpretations, focusing on the three major views which have been advocated in order to choose the view which will be advocated in this study. After this is, we will look at the Old Testament concept, followed by the later Jewish concept in apocalyptic thought and end up in observing the concept in the New Testament. This chapter will provide background for the exegesis which will follow in the next chapter, since we believe that the idea was derived purely from Jewish thought on the Messianic kingdom, which the author of the Apocalypse understands.

Fifthly, in chapter five, we shall engage in an exegesis on the passage of Revelation 20:1-10; the only passage that specifically mentions the millennial reign of Christ as a period of a thousand years. In this chapter we will verify that the millennium should not be taken literally but symbolically, taking into account the apocalyptic use of symbolism and figurative language. Our conclusion will be that the millennial reign of Christ should not be interpreted as referring to a particular moment in the future when this world will experience a cataclysmic end of all things. It should rather be appropriately interpreted as referring to the symbolic period of millennial reign of Christ from the first coming to the second coming when evil will be totally eliminated. The thousand years should also be interpreted figuratively; signifying the completeness of time.

Sixthly, in the sixth chapter, we shall try to explicate the East African concept of millennium as the community where I belong. For greater clarity, we shall single out certain themes on which the Apocalypse millennium is constructed. Such themes are; the East African concept of time, God as a future king, life after death (resurrection) and the concept of judgment, the rediscovery of millennium within the Christian community, and the power of the apocalypse for the millenarian movements.

Seventhly, in chapter seven, we shall draw up our summary and the conclusion of the whole thesis and our resolution of this study. Our conclusion will be that the Apocalypse belongs to the literature of protest and revolt. It also belongs to those revolutionist and millennialist sects that await the destruction of the social order by divine forces- all apocalyptic groups fit this type of sect (Saldarini 1989:73).

We live in a received world and, we rarely question it and if we do, not very seriously. This is because we accept it to be real, but as time goes by our perception of the world that we have received changes. We sometimes influence it to change and on other occasions we are changed by it. It is for this reason that a detailed study into the sociology of the Apocalypse will help us to change the world which we have received as normal. It will help us to put forward new and empowering concepts of the work of God.

In our next chapter we shall look at the sociology of sects in an attempt to formulate our model, which will be applied in this study. We shall also define our terms in order to clarify what they mean in this study. The term Apocalypse will be used throughout to mean the book of Revelation.

CHAPTER TWO

SOCIOLOGY OF SECTS AND THE APOCALYPSE.

2.0 Introduction

2.1 The major task of this chapter

The major task of this chapter, which forms the point of departure for the present study, may be stated succinctly as a trial to formulate a model. This will be applied to the Apocalypse community as a sectarian movement in indirect agreement with the Jewish apocalyptic thinking which is largely future oriented.

The main task of this chapter is to spell out a sociological model that will be used to delineate the Apocalypse community. One of the most recent methods of delving into a biblical text is to use the tools and methods developed by sociology. It is an eye opening method of biblical scholarship, and it leads to new insights and understanding of what is contained in a particular text, whether from the whole Bible or from a particular book. The model will be applied in the study of the millennial reign of Christ (Rv 20:1-10) from the cultural perspective of the author of the Apocalypse of John- who was certainly not like a modern stereotyped preacher and very likely not a prophet in the order of the Old Testament either.

For a number of centuries historical investigations have occupied a dominant position in biblical criticism. A cursory examination of the range of commentaries shows that the most commonly answered questions are: the questions of date, authorship and historical setting. Nevertheless of late scholars have shifted to the questions of literary structure, ways of reading, and methods of interpretation.

They are hereby pushing the former into the background. Sociological methods have begun to be employed to interpret available data on the community that produced the Apocalypse of John (e.g. Malina 1995). The model frequently applied is that of sects.

Bryan Wilson (1973) has formulated a working typology of about seven kinds of sects based on the sect's relationship with its parent body as indicated above. His emphasis on the sect's relationship with society and its activities fits the approach this chapter wants to construct. I will also look at the Apocalypse community as a sectarian movement in terms of this typology, and conclude by formulating the model for my paper. More immediately I will define my terms. There are various uses of the terms sociology, sects and models and failure to define them would cause misunderstanding of what they mean in this research.

2.2 Sociology

Sociology is the study of human behavior. It is a science providing methods which we use alongside historical-critical methods to gain new insights about the biblical texts. It can be very disturbing to try to apply it to the study of the Bible, particularly the New Testament since it may not have been written for the purpose of the concept that sociology seeks to define. We cannot, nevertheless, ignore its importance since above every disturbing element it helps most in the understanding of human beings in community which it keeps at the forefront of the stage in all the complexity of their social relationships and turmoil of their social circumstances (Tidball 1983:12). According to Malina (1991:xiii) sociology looks to the broader, more encompassing social system and the coherence and interrelation of its component parts. Sociology makes it harder for us either to idealise what we read about the early followers of Christ or even to over theorise about them, hence we stand a better chance to gain new insights into the understanding of any text from the New Testament if we use a sociological model:

Sociology is certainly an attempt to understand society and social relations within society

in a disciplined way. To the layman the understanding of the society may seem straight forward, from experience however a sociologist has learned that the obvious is not always quite so obvious as it seems (Ibid:12).

The use of sociology will make it easier for us to make the biblical interpretation fit the reality rather than reality fit the interpretation, since its concern is to let the meaning of the text fit the situation or the context rather than our pre- conceived meaning fitting the text. It helps to create a space in biblical interpretation:

It can describe the social facts of early Christianity and place it in its social context...it can construct a social history of Christianity...it can examine the social forces which led to Christianity and the social institutions which resulted from its formation, it can investigate the creation of the Christian's world view, his social construction of reality and the structures which maintained that world view as plausible (Tidball 1983:14).

The Apocalypse has been variously interpreted by different kind of people according to their own prejudice in order to make public claims about the fulfilled prophecies concerning Christian growth and the second return of Christ. This sociology:

will help us to understand the growth and the development of Christianity as a social movement bearing in mind as we do so the types of authority it demonstrated; the social classes it attracted; the social structures which crystallised and the social effects it had (1983:14).

The use of sociology enables us to go deeper into the text, moving from known to unknown. It helps us to understand the experience of the first Christians and live their faith. The Apocalypse, which has puzzled scholars in so many ways, can be understood more fully if we are able to see it in a sociological perspective utilizing the sociology of sects.

2.2.1 Sect

Sect is an important term which is often loosely used to mean a religious group that has broken away from an older tradition. According to Wilson (1973), a sect is a self-distinguishing protest movement, and its protest may not necessarily be against the Church; it could be a withdrawal from a community, state, or probably in opposition to both. In simple terms it is a minority group that seeks separation from a traditional religious system and forms its own organisation. It therefore denotes a body with certain characteristics which may have a certain extreme emphasis on some aspects or doctrines of the Christian tradition at the expense of others. Emphasis could be placed on personal conversion as a condition of membership and condemnation of values and institutions of ordinary society.

Irving (1993:199) argues that the term has not always been properly understood, since confusion is created by the fact that it is sometimes used theologically to refer to groups of questionable orthodoxy or outright heresy. In sociological terms it has been contrasted with Church, denomination and cult. We need to seek a better way of understanding the term without comparing it with the above terms, abandoning the traditional way of identifying a sect. It is important to have a different approach so that we can develop a more sociological concern with the relation of doctrine, organisation, form of association, social orientation and action.

Wilson (1973:16) says that sects have always sought to 'destructure' the already prevalent religious practice, in order to replace formal ritual with spontaneous manifestation of devotion. This makes the sects claim fuller understanding of God than others and also claim to offer a better way of worship than the traditional overly dogmatic systems. Many of the sects claim not to have a particular pattern of procedure in their religious way and probably also in their social concerns, but they claim that the Holy Spirit is their guide. They settle down as groups, and however, end up forming particular procedures of worship. Therefore it is difficult at times to classify some sects purely in terms of doctrine and organisation. Wilson says, 'Perhaps the most

important defect of characterisation of sects by doctrinal divergence from orthodoxy is that, like characterisation in terms of organisation, it puts too much emphasis on specifically Christian preoccupations' (Ibid:16).

A better procedure for the characterisation of sects needs to be followed so that we can understand sects in a better way and at least avoid the danger of being too judgmental. We therefore have to change both our attitude and habit of classifying new religious movements in terms of doctrine, and also in terms of sociological attempts of how far a particular sect has gone in the process of institutionalisation and how it has separated itself.

To meet the wider aims of our sociological analysis we must then seek freedom from the presuppositions of one particular cultural tradition or of one historical period. Even the cross-cultural study that we may choose to adapt may nevertheless also have difficulties. According to Wilson (1973) sects need to be regarded in terms of their dominant social orientation and their response to the world. Such an approach would facilitate the analysis and the dynamic dimensions of the sectarian movements and our study would also not be too dogmatic.

A response to the world is not the way a sect understands itself but the way we see it. Sects may hold the same doctrines as the traditional movement from which they broke away and may also form their own institutions, but they have particular tensions with the world. How to contain and maintain the tension is the most important factor in classifying a particular sect. Response is always affected by the teachings of an older tradition; in other words a particular sect may have traits of the mother movement. People seek salvation in this world as part of their natural need for the supernatural help. According to Court (1994), people are encouraged in sects:

Sects make a strong reassertion of certain abiding human values, and all of them provide specific grounds for hope in on uncertain world, and offer the occasion for service and self- expression (Court 1994:13).

Sects do not use the normal traditional way of seeking salvation, such as the cultural or the institutional facilities which provide the means of attaining social and cultural goals, they will always reject the orthodox religious traditions. They separate themselves from these practices, particularly worship (Wilson 1973:17). They always try to challenge religious practices of institutionalised Churches and to replace their formal way of worship with informal practices.

A sectarian movement needs to be understood as a form of deviance. In a society which has many systems of belief where the movement develops an interpretation exceeding the traditional systems of belief, that society involves conflicting groups which often label one another deviant. Minority groups usually labeled deviant are out of power, dissatisfied with society and often interested in changing it. When such groups compete for power, like political groups, they try to label the dominant group as also deviant. At other times they accept their deviant status and form voluntary organisations to promote their way of life apart from the parent body (Saldarini 1989:70):

Therefore sects are movements of religious protest, whose members separate themselves from other men in respect of their religious beliefs, practices and institutions, and often in many other departments of their lives' (Wilson 1970:7).

It is obvious that the earliest sects had initially only limited prospects of creating a formal structure, because even the Church itself took a long time to do so. Sects will always have a model either adapted from the traditional organisation or from the local community. The Church unlike the sect, is ideologically committed to a traditional ecclesiology that it regarded as timelessly valid, viable and divinely warranted. It also has two dimensions: a theological and a sociological entity.

Since the time of the Reformation there has been considerable discussion among the protestant and the catholic apologists on how to identify the true Church. Two criteria have been suggested:

the proper preaching of the gospel and the proper administration of the sacraments. Avery (1974:117), quoting Luther in his treatise on the councils and the Churches (1539), gives the expanded notes by Luther which are seven in number: the preaching of the good news, the right administration of the sacrament of baptism, the right form of keys, the legal vocation and ordination of the Church ministers, the worship with psalms in vernacular, and the persecution. This kind of identification may also be noticed within various sects and it may not give a clear difference of the two.

The above would mean that the Church initially had also a big struggle in trying to identify itself and therefore the sects in their early stages undergo the same struggle. A sect will regard its acceptance of more rational forms of organisation as a continuing affirmation of its divergence from the Churchly forms. This means that in the long run sects get more rational traditions of organisation, even when they are still committed in theory to their extreme, emotional and expressive ways; which we refer to as their particular response to the world.

2.2.2 Models

The models are social science theories; modern constructions which can be applied to interpretations of older texts such as the Bible. The purpose of a model is to enable and facilitate understanding. Malina (1992:17) says that models are the result of the abstraction in terms of patterns which order, classify, and give shape to human experiences. He describes them as generalisations or abstract descriptions of real world experiences; as proximate, simple representations of more complex forms, processes, and functions of physical and non-physical phenomena. According to Rohrbaugh (1975):

Models are intrinsically generalizations and as such they tend to blur the contours of particular historical situations. Models are abstractions rather than analogies. They select rather than replicate, choosing to eliminate some characteristics of a situation with the

intent of isolating selected others in order to highlight them. Their tendency is thus to generalize in such away that the historical details of social situations fall out of focus (:8-9)

I do not use cross-cultural models for the purpose of studying social history, rather my concern is primarily to understand the Apocalypse placing it more nearly in the social world out of which it came. We cannot ignore such an important method of study since it would enable us to understand things cross-culturally. It helps us to keep our pre-conceived ideas and values at a distance from the biblical text, so that we interpret the biblical text in its own context. It can guide and illuminate our exploration of texts and in turn correct us. The use of models constructed from the sociology of sects is good but not without some dangers.

2.2.3 A Critique

It is important to recognise that models are notorious for misrepresenting the real world experiences, which they attempt to portray. Fear exists, therefore that sociological models will reduce religious experience to ordinary patterns of group behavior to be observed and categorised, instead of taking them as a bridge between everyday existence and transcendence.

Osiek (1992:5) argues that modern users of sociological models may forget about time difference between the first century Christians and ourselves and probably assume that our concepts and theirs are the same. The Apocalypse and the rest of the New Testament were not written to provide the kind of information which the sociologist primarily seeks. Therefore sociological models must be subjected to criticism in terms of antiquity before they can be used critically to evaluate society in antiquity.

The Apocalypse was written to meet pastoral needs rather than to provide historical information about its context. It was not written to describe the relationship between the apocalypse

community and that of the world, but as a pastoral message to make them strong and stand firm against any compromise. Equally the Gospel of St. John was not written to explain the life style of the Johannine community in comparison with the rest of the world, but to encourage them; it was to make strong and uncompromising statements about the identity of Jesus as believed by that community (Draper 1992,1997).

Anybody, therefore, trying to use models must note that they are not mere templates one can place over any or all data, but they must be constructed to fit the level of abstraction appropriate to the data and adapted to regional and historical variations (Rohrbaugh 1996:9). If they are far from perfect, there is an obvious danger on imposing our modern perceptions and categories on every biblical text we read. They do however remain essential.

2.3 Responses to the world

Responses to the world are beyond the self-conception of the sect, since they never accept the ordinary way to attain salvation through cultural means. This causes tension between the sect and the World. Responses are the means we shall use here, as Wilson (1973) has analysed them, in order to understand the religious movements of our modern times. Sects do not seek salvation through secular ways of life or the institutional facilities which may be provided for the society to attain social and cultural goals . The responses portray sects as groups of religious protest whose members separate themselves from the larger community in respect of their own religious practices, beliefs and institutions. They reject the authority of the orthodox religious leaders and even of the secular government.

Sect leaders are usually charismatic and they act as symbols of unity being believed sometimes without question by the members. They also function as a symbolic focus of identification rather than ideological in some groups. Such leaders are appointed as a result of their charismatic powers- the initiative of the appointments in such cases may originate with the members. In

notable instances the influence of a leader and his integrating power may enormously increase even when the leader is removed either by death or by imprisonment. In case of the Apocalypse of John, he is aware of his influence even though in prison, since he addresses himself just as John (Rev.1:9).

In this case, a sect is that which responds to situations that appear to threaten its survival in the world. Wilson (1973:21) has listed about seven responses as a way of identifying the sects. He argues that men always face the dilemma of seeking ways and means for salvation; even though the dominant position is usually to accept the world the way it is, the facilities it may offer, and the norms and values that a given culture provides for men. Such an orthodox response provides a baseline. The concern of the sect is with transcendence over evil and the search for salvation, *This* makes it reject the prevailing cultural values and norms. Here, indeed, is a tool for defining religious deviance.

Before we analyse the responses, one interesting aspect about sects is the charisma portrayed in their leadership. This is more charismatic than orthodox leadership. It can be agreed that in any critical analysis of religious movements, there appears a sectarian consciousness, a sense of exclusiveness, and in most cases a sharp delineation of the community from the world. In this sense the alienation or separation from the world may refer to the Christian sects generally. A sectarian consciousness would actually mean transfer to a community with exclusive claims, as a result of a charismatic leader in that community who may claim to have been in the Spirit, or to have received from the Divine the directions he now proclaims to be authentic. Many of the sects have charismatic origins with the charismatic leadership as their basis.

2.3.1 Charisma

Charisma refers to a special character of an individual personality, which makes the person have special place within the community. Such a person is regarded as having supernatural qualities

which may range from natural gifts to supernatural powers. Such are not for the ordinary people for they are thought to be of divine origin and, on that basis, an individual is made a leader. On this ground Worsely (1968 :xii) argues that charisma, sociologically viewed, is a social relationship, not an attribute of individual personality or a mystical quality.

The charisma theory was first formulated by Weber who:

developed the concept of charisma in order to explain a type of effect in behavior not rooted in traditional authority (for example, status) or legitimate authority (for example, office). If some persons have the socially recognized right to oblige others (this is authority), and this right cannot be explained by traditional warrants or national principles (law, custom), then what can explain it? The “black hole” was called charisma (Malina 1986:123).

With this concept in mind, we must ask how useful the term ‘charismatic’ is in the sociology of sects. Our particular interest is in what can be said about the social organisation of the sect and the dynamics of the social situation reflected in the apocalypse of John. The term ‘charismatic’, according to Woll (1981:115), draws attention to the aspect of authority together with related issues of power, legitimation, rank and prestige. When the community recognises such unusual qualities in an individual and then appreciates them positively, they adore the person both cognitively and emotionally and as a result a charismatic movement is formed. Sociologically such a leader would be given the right to formulate policies and then to command support for that policy.

According to Worsely (1968:xii), Weber argues that sociologically charisma is not to be viewed as a mystical thing which cannot be understood, but as an element of social interaction, since some people believe that charisma can be ‘given off’ or inherited by other individuals and they then act

differently to the giver and others. In the New Testament this can be done by the laying of hands (Acts 8). To the sociologist, however, charisma is no more than the recognition of authority by believers and the followers of a particular sect. Worsely (:xii) argues that a prophet without honour cannot be charismatic since he would not have the required relationship with his people. Such an honour is likely to be granted only by a small in-group.

The charismatic leadership, on which many sects rely, has authority which is irrational, value free, disruptive of rational and traditional authority in all forms making it a revolutionary movement of a kind (Malina 1986:124). It is unorthodox and it is always characterised by separation of the movement from the traditional system of authority.

Woll (1981:115) says that the charismatic leader will always claim to possess direct authority from the Divine as the source of power. Such authority needs no articulation except the passing on of it to the followers to be obeyed, since it bypasses the channels of authority articulated by systems of power agreed upon by everyone. In such a case the leader will depend only on being accepted by his followers. If by any means the followers disagree with this kind of leadership a split would occur and a new sect is formed.

The nature of values held by the followers of a particular movement, according to Worsely (1968:xiii), are of prime importance in understanding how the charismatic leader is able to mobilise support readily, or in some cases to have support thrust upon him. It is obvious that the charismatic leader enjoys this support even though some of the leaders may be obscure, often marginal and unbalanced. Such leaders may influence the sect's responses to the world and they may do extraordinary things; following what the leader may think is right for them since it is from a supernatural power and he/she is only transmitting it to the members. In such a case the leadership of the sect is not focused on the personality, but on the message 'borne' by the individual.

The charismatic leader must strike responsive chords within the movement; he is always required to do more than just evoke psychic responses and must at least create modes of action and interaction within the movement. If, however, his message is not realised to the community, as he had foreseen it, the members of the sect get disappointed and the leader must quickly find a way of 'escape' probably by giving another prophecy, saying that it happened spiritually, or telling them it will come at a later date. In such a case falsification would not be a serious problem. Worsely (1968:xxi) says that if the end of the world as prophesied cannot be relied upon, the leader has to find ways of changing the subjective state of the individual so that the world becomes a more tolerable place, or a new radical reinterpretation of the world events is formed and a new meaning is gained. A particular movement may withdraw from the world into a separate community, such as in ascetic mysticism, monasticism, or religious utopian communities if the environment permits. From such a point, whatever goes on in the world is no longer of much concern to the believer, or may be of subsidiary concern.

A new movement may also arise from an existing one if another person gains the charisma which may empower him differently from the existing leadership. Early Christianity developed as a movement of this kind after its charismatic leader, the Messiah, differed with all the existing Jewish structures which then arose against him. The movement which came to be called the Jesus Movement only got formed when the Messiah got killed. According to Draper (1997:18) the Jesus Movement was a movement of renewal or restoration aimed at all Israel, even though later the group adapted an introversionist response that no longer was directed to all Israel but to a small group of the elect.

The reason why such movements are formed easily, according to Woll (1981:115), is because the charismatic authority shows devotion to the specific leader who seeks to destroy existing traditions. According to Malina (1986:130), the charismatic leader achieves and maintains authority by putting extraordinary talents to use in the performance of miraculous feats or even formulates new ideology. In the traditional authority type obedience may be owed to the leader

of the movement who occupies the traditionally accepted position of authority and the obligation of obedience is a matter of personal loyalty within the area of accustomed obligations. According to Worsely (1968:xviii) charisma is not a description of a behavior but a datum; something that people believe. We can no longer depend on the personality traits of a leader, that is, a non sociological view of organised behaviour in analysing the sects, but we have to take a more sociological way of looking at how people seek salvation.

The analysis of the personality in the sect leadership may distract us from the real issue of sect analysis. I will therefore move from the social significance of the leader as a symbol, catalyst and message-bearer to a more analytical focus, where the charismatic leader is seen as a symboliser and where the movements are intrinsically projected upon and organised around symbols, even though there could be personalised symbols. The sectarian movements survive long after the death of their founding fathers. The Jesus movement mentioned earlier is a good example of how such groups increase in strength, split into opposing groups and even end up becoming institutionalised with all kinds of structures as the movement settles down. From this brief digression we return to our basic argument and we shall now look at Bryan Wilson's working typology.

2.3.2 Bryan Wilson's typology

As I said earlier, Bryan Wilson has created a working typology of seven kinds of sects, based on the groups relationship with its parent body even though later he has put them as eight his book (1973:20). People have always been faced with the imperative of how to enter the promised rest so that they may be free from the sufferings of this world. (I do not think there is anything else that worries people more than about their future security). They try to oppose cultural arrangements through various responses. These responses reject cultural goals and the soteriological theories and facilities that are present in a given society; such responses are classified in terms of behaviour. Wilson (1973 :21) says that the most common thing is to accept the world the way it is, the facilities it provides, and the goals and values that a particular culture

enjoins upon people. Such an orthodox response concerns us only as a foundation. It has been easy for people to reject the already existing way of attaining salvation and to seek a more complicated way of doing it. Such a search causes the behaviour of mankind to appear strange- as we shall see in the following responses.

To start with, we have the *conversionist* response, which argues that the world is evil and corrupt and only the transformation of people will give us hope of a change in our minds but not in the world. In such a situation salvation is personal, it is divinely initiated and objective preaching is not the emphasis since members only need to be subjective to what the spirit is saying. The world would not change. It is our attitude towards it that needs to be changed as a way of salvation. This subjective conversion is possible through the change in external reality at some future time or the individual is transferred to another sphere. This is the ideological principle of the matter, but the essential sociological fact is that people have to undergo an emotional transformation in order to be saved, known as a conversion experience. This appears as proof of having transcended the evil of the world (Ibid :22).

In a conversionist response a person does not need to withdraw from the world but he has to face the evil in the world, the Pauline community falls in this category. According to Paul people can still be with sinners and yet be righteous:

I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with immoral men; not at all meaning the immoral of this world, or the greedy and robbers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world (1Cor 5:9).

A person is assured of the unchanging condition of the world and it is up to her/him to take a step and change her/his belief in order to cope with the world. Such a group would not face much difficulty in adjusting to the world for they are usually encouraged to face the reality of the unchanging world, so, 'if you cannot change them, change your attitude towards them, and you

see a change'. The conversionist movement is not mainly concerned with recruitment in terms of numbers, but with familiarity of a change of heart. The early Christians fit this type of response.

Secondly, we have the *revolutionist* response which states that the only way to attain salvation is to demand a total transformation of the World, nature and even the social structures. This is perceived as the only possible solution. People however have no authority to do anything to effect such a destruction, for it has to be supernaturally caused even though they can participate in the process of overturning it. Salvation is only in the near future. In this case men cannot claim to be saved now, but they have to claim that they will be saved very soon and salvation for them is imminent. A revolutionist believes that 'no subjective reorientation will affect the present state of the world; its objective condition must be recognised'(Wilson 1973:23). Even though the revolutionists may claim to have no authority to overturn the world they are usually in full support of any kind of revolution that would ensure them of salvation, since this would be the intention of God or the gods. The apocalyptic groups, and specifically the Johannine apocalypse community which is more of a millennialist sect, fit this type of response. Millennialism is a social movement of people who believe that the present world is in crisis and will soon come to an end (Duling 1996:183). The difference between revolutionists and millennialists is that, while the former may demand a total transformation, the later only waits for God's intervention.

Thirdly, we have the *introversionist* response, which affirms that the world is so much tainted with evil that it cannot be redeemed by any means and men can attain salvation only by fullest withdrawal from the world. The individual can only be saved by renouncing the world and leaving it completely, withdrawing into a community of the elect. Salvation is highly individualistic but as a response of a social movement it is exercised within the community. Such a group claims to have the holiness that is required for men to gain salvation. They see themselves as the light of the world, so that salvation is ideologically for a future date. However in practice salvation is sociologically a present endeavour and there would be no salvation outside the community since it is the source and the seat of salvation. The introversionist community sees the devil as the cause

of their problems and they can do nothing about it but to wait for a divine intervention (Ibid:24) The community of St. John's Gospel, which is an introversionist sect, falls into this category (Draper 1992:16).

According to Draper (1992:17) the introversionist sect will always withdraw from the world into a separate community and cultivate inner resources and the possession of the Spirit. Such a group always claims inner illumination and ethical insight for the elect which is enlightened, preaching is not emphasised or eschatology, but it has a strong in- group morality, no ordained ministers and is completely different from other religious movements. The Essenes may fit this type of response.

Fourthly, we come to the *manipulationist* response which is in a sense narrower than the first three. While the revolutionist seeks a changed world, the introversionist a purified society, and the conversionist a transformed self, it seeks a new methodology of coping with the present untransformed world. It is our relationship with the world that requires a transformation but not the world, while the first three responses seek to reject the cultural goals and institutions of the world as a means and the facilities they provide for humankind's salvation.

The manipulationist response finds no fault with such, only rejecting the means and the facilities. What people need for salvation are just the correct means and improved techniques to deal with their problems. Providing people with the right means of salvation will just be a present, immediate and permanent experience. Such a conception of salvation is neither other-worldly nor transcendental. Salvation is attaining good health, wealth, longevity, happiness, success and the status quo. Hell is illness, incapacity, pain, poverty, sickness, death and man must be saved from such (Wilson 1973 :24).

According to Draper (1992:17) this type of sect claims esoteric knowledge which often revolves around the interpretation of the religious tradition with Christ is seen as the best example of truth

rather than as saviour. The manipulationists believe that the welfare of every person is paramount and if people could control the world they could explain evil away. The subjective orientation must be changed so as to bring the objective world into harmony with our new and skilled insights which should manipulate the world. What a person needs is to learn the universal principles so that she/he can understand evil and keep it away. The gnostics fit this type of response.

A fifth, *thaumaturgical* response is that which seeks salvation by providing relief to people from the present and specific ills by special dispensations which, in this case, are the supernatural means of the gods or divine. Such a response requires a magical practice for a person to be saved. Unlike the manipulationist response, here the problems are dealt with by means of miracles and magic. Such a means can be demanded locally and is personal. This response has no regard for doctrines as far as salvation is concerned. It seeks, rather, healing, avoidance of grief, restoration after loss, reassurance, the foreknowledge and avoidance of calamity. This particularistic understanding of salvation is known as the thaumaturgical response. The group sees sin as specific, from particular incidences and overcome through 'miracles and oracles' (Wilson 1973:25). Miracles and oracles as instruments of salvation looks primitive, for such a beliefs cannot be proved and there is always a strong tradition to oppose them. Placing evil as a case of particular incidence to me is just a matter of escaping responsibility. Magicians and healers with their followers fit this response.

The sixth response is that of the *reformist*. This is the assumption that we can amend the evil in the world through the supernatural insights. The correction of the world order is here the essential orientation. In this response one may not know when the correction is on religious grounds or on secular grounds for these are very similar:

It differs only in the belief that divine inspiration operates to indicate the focus of the reformist effort. This perspective has considerable convergence with some secular positions, but it is clearly maintained that although man will save himself, he will not do

so without the prompting of the supernatural agencies (Wilson 1973:25).

This is quite an interesting response, it would be prepared to encourage any reformation in the sense that a supernatural intervention is expected. Its style of accommodating the secular world makes salvation not one of its ideologies for membership. The Pharisees and Jesus would probably fit in this response.

The last, though not least, is the *utopian* response. The divinely given principles have to be applied to create another world order where evil is made past tense. Evil will not be eliminated by overturning the world but by remaking it. The world has gone wrong and we need to transform it. This response is quite radical in transforming the world, for it insists on a complete transformation of social organisation. It is more radical than the reformists and more constructive than the introversionists.

In conclusion these responses may be summarised as follows, the *conversionists* say that we need a change of our mind but not the world, the *revolutionists* say that the only way to salvation is to demand a total transformation of the world, God will come and overturn the world; *introversionists* say that God is calling us to be holy, let's withdraw from the world; *manipulationists* seek to cope with the world; *thaumaturgicalists* say that miracles can work; *reformists* need knowledge to change the world; and while the *utopians* expect divine principles which they can use, the *millennialists* wait for God's intervention. According to these responses a sect in a sociological category is a group referring to a religious movement protesting against its host society. Its characteristics are voluntary associations with exclusiveness toward outsiders and seeking equality of its members, with a low degree of internal organisation and differentiation and with total commitment. It has also appropriation of the parent body's ideology and status, yet rejecting it as evil. A group can have more than one response to the world at one time- though usually one is dominant.

Wilson's seven types of sect allow us to sort groups which have a religious base and which have strong positive or negative relations to society. The types have a focus on the goals of the groups, so they allow us to understand their choices and activities. Our question here is which of this typologies fits the Apocalypse community?

2.3.3 Apocalypse community as a millennialist sect

The letters to the seven Churches contain some statements which give insights into what type of community John was writing to. They first inform us that the community would survive until the second coming of Christ, who understands their sufferings. In the message to the Smyrna, the writer says 'I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan' (Rv 2:9). A similar comment is made about the Jews of Philadelphia (3:9). These comments imply a great hostility between at least some Christians and Jews of Asia Minor. If this is so the difference might have created a crisis of identity for the believers in Christ. Such a crisis may have made the status of Christian groups precarious. The Romans were naturally suspicious of new religions; only those firmly rooted in a stable tradition were acceptable. The Apocalypse community as a sect off course had no ancient tradition, no national identity and no religious centers besides the synagogues, according to Court (1994):

The Apocalypse gave an authentic picture of the primitive Christian community as more or less revolutionary group (part of the revolution of the masses). The evidence was that John showed clear signs of class hatred, a vengeful attitude against Rome and against the ideology of the oppressive class. Clearly such an interpretation is indebted to the model of socialist movements, as much as to the biblical evidence (:104).

John tells the Church in Smyrna not to fear what they are about to suffer, 'Behold the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested and for ten days you will have tribulations. 'Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life' (Rv 2:10). This gives

us the notion that the apocalypse community no longer enjoyed the social, economic and political security that was given to the Jewish religion, so they had to wait for God's intervention. The message to the Philadelphia promises them the bliss of the millennium, for in Revelation 3:9 we hear of the door and the key, which could be an allusion to Isaiah 22:22, where the possessor of the key of David is the king's steward, and he is the one who decides who will enter to the king and who will not. The key, now with Christ, suggests that he is the only one who gets access to God, and he will then make those who are the synagogue of Satan, those who claim to be Jews and are not, to come and bow down before the Apocalypse community, and they will know that Christ loved them. Such was the expectation of all Jews; but now the promise was to this community of Apocalypse.

The mention of the Nicolaitans, being active in Ephesus (Rv 2:6) and Pergamum (Rv 2:15), who were known as the adherents of Balaam and Jezebel in Churches of Pergamum and Thyatira, who were also said to be eating food offered to idols, implies relation between faith and culture. The issue here is to what extent should the Apocalypse community should be associated with pagan customs. Economic and commercial gain or sociability, everything in Asia Minor had a religious meaning (Collins 1984:88). To the millennialist community the millennium in Revelation 20 was a myth which, according to Cook (1995:32), is a story that provides a logical model capable of overcoming a contradiction; it mediates unwelcome contradiction. Hence in the Apocalypse it was a means to overcome the contradiction between rule of God who is almighty (παντοκράτωρ), allied with him is the lamb who was slain (Rv 5:6) who is also the son of man (Rev. 1:18) and the rule of the dragon, who has power, a throne, and a great authority (Rv 13:2), allied with him is the beast from the sea, who was wounded with a big wound and yet lived (13:3,14). There was an obvious tension between the Christians and the political systems of the time, that created cognitive dissonance; a state of mind that arises when there is a great disparity between expectations and reality. If we agree to such a tension behind the Apocalypse, then we can say Apocalypse was a reflection of that tension between what the Christian message (Good News) ought to be and the actual situation of the Apocalypse community.

According to Bauckham (1993:210-137), the Apocalypse is a Christian war scroll. He is postulating that militarism was an aspect within the Jewish eschatological expectations whereby the future would bring a bliss of peace and joy, since the final victory of the divine warrior over his people's and his own enemies was imminent. Even if the interest of this scholar is to show how John borrowed the idea from the Jewish apocalyptic literature, he still highlights that the Apocalypse community was a revolutionist sect. The Apocalypse itself carries the evidence of its revolutionism; in Revelation 5:5-6 the passage tells of the messiah as a military victor, in verse 6 we see him as the Jewish nationalistic military conqueror. In this passage John heard that the lion of Judah and the root of David had conquered. We also come across the Messianic army (Rv 7:2-14), the eschatological war is mentioned (Rv 12:17; 13:7); where the dragon who is conducting war against the people of God and the lamb and his army (Rv 14:1-5), stand to oppose them on mount Zion. The number of the army here is the 144,000. The mixing of the lamb and this figure in Revelation¹⁴ gives the sense that a holy war is to be fought even though it is by the sacrificial death of the lamb. I have mentioned these texts briefly to show that the Apocalypse community was by all means a revolutionist sect, but since John does not advocate violence or use of armed struggle against the oppressors, I will prefer the term millennialist for this community. The term millennialist will be used here to describe a movement which had a belief of and preparation for the coming of a period of supernatural peace and joy. The term will be narrowly confined to the classical belief that the millennial reign of Christ is of a thousand years on earth, which will be in line with the Apocalypse community belief (Rv 20: 4).

As I said earlier the recent methods of interpreting the Apocalypse and the New Testament in general have been to try to apply the model of sect. I contend here that the any apocalyptic writing is understood better in such a method of study. The Apocalypse corresponds closely to a particular pattern of a Jewish sectarianism, namely a millennialist sect, since it portrays a first century sectarian movement which was subjected to sufferings of all kinds by the mainline society of the day.

2.4 A profile of a millennialist sect

A millennialist group is one which holds an apocalyptic world views; not an individualistic phenomenon but one which always appears in the context of a cohesive and relatively well organised group. This group is a consequence of a stimulated awareness that the difficulties people experience are common difficulties, having their origin within the social systems, or in the imbalance between the community and its environment, or in the disordered relations of the community and those people from another society and another culture (Wilson 1973:348). Not all revolutionist religious movements are associated with warfare, rebellion, or guerilla terrorism; these movements are called the millennialists, for they are not renolutionary movements in terms of violence, since they do not necessarily expect themselves to implement God's will. The main outlines of the profile of the millennialist sect may be drawn as follows:

1. It is only at certain historical moments and in a particular combination of circumstances that millennialist movements emerge. They are always characterised firstly by the belief that elimination of all threats in life is the work of the Divine. Such movements mobilise men by creating a new and induced awareness of the commonality of their conditions, and the need for supernatural action at the community or the world level to produce effective change. This awareness is not a sophisticated consciousness of circumstances. It does not claim an understanding of the structure of the social order, nor a clear conception of its operation. It is rather, a widely diffused apprehension that things are wrong, and the wish that they should be better:

The evidence from recent work on millenarian movements shows that new converts come from those who feel disadvantaged in some significant way (Gager 1975:25).

2. It is an ideological movement, which welds so many people together and stimulates them to

action, has little or no analytical content, and produces little empirical evidence. It only represents a dream, a vision, a wish, and projects these as a prospect for the real world. It is a fantasy that fires the imagination and conforms to widely felt longings, which now acquire a focus and perhaps a stimulus for action, such as the formation of millenarian movement.

3. *It is always a transformative experience.* They believe in the restoration of the physical, social, and cultural conditions of the past, they postulate the creation of a new dispensation on earth, or in heaven, or both (1973:306). Some of the patterns of millennialism may survive, even if the specific content of the millennial hope wanes (Wilson 1973:349). The theory of cognitive dissonance is often applied to such groups, to explain why they survive long after their original prophecies of the end have failed- this will be elaborated later.

Such disappointment, which many would expect to lead to the group's disintegration, is apparently overcome by a revised message or by an increased missionary activity in compensation.

4. *It is recessive in both doctrine and practice to the dominant conversionist orientation* with its more conventional eschatology and its pastoral and counseling functions (:364). It is more active and constructive than the introversionist response of simply withdrawing from the world.

5. *It may also draw some strength from thaumaturgical pre-occupations,* particularly in the promise of a future time when all problems will not occur. One thing we must note here is the nature of the millennialists expectation. The prophet or the leader assures them that supernatural beings will care for the people who will join the newly formed society. Even though the care is not explained, some power will be involved. According to Gager (1975:32), the pursuit of the millennium is characteristically a communal venture. And within its most prominent feature, perhaps even its basic drive, is moral regeneration. If we look back to the first generations from the perspective of the third, fourth, and fifth centuries we cannot help but be struck by the relative absence of specifically theological reflection on the one hand and the tremendous emphasis on the

community and ethics on the other. One way to characterise, and also to explain this difference, is to state that in the first generations Christianity was a millenarian movement that always awaited for miracles to happen.

Doubtless the writer of the Apocalypse believed passionately that the last days would witness the holy war of God. Such a war was to appear in strange and terrible ways in which destruction was to fall upon the natural world. He was convinced that God's punishment for the world wickedness was imminent, then a new earth and a new heaven would appear (Rv 21:1). According to Gager (1975:21) there are five basic traits of millenarian movements: the promise of heaven on earth which would be soon, the overthrow of, or transformation of, the social order, a terrific release of emotional energy, a brief life span of the movement itself, and the central role of a messianic, prophetic or charismatic leader. The belief in a new heaven and a new earth in which all the elect have been morally regenerated and in which the hoped-for conditions will really exist, is a distinguishing feature of millenarianism. Without any doubt no other New Testament community fits this kind of movement better than the Apocalypse community.

The Apocalypse community is therefore seen in this light as a millennialist sect of first century Christianity. In the Apocalypse, several passages indicate that a small group of early Christians believed that they were being discriminated against(as passages will be shown in our next chapter as part of our exegetical observations). The community will be discussed later in the following chapter, since here I am just formulating a model.

2.5 A model for this thesis

The sociological model and methods developed here will be used in interpreting the available data on the community that produced the Apocalypse of St John. The model that has been reached is that of a sectarian group, marginalised by the larger community. The group is under severe stress, not necessarily due to persecution, but certainly faced with social contempt. It feels threatened and

insecure and must also contend with religious stress. Such religious stress is produced not only by the externally enforced worship of the Roman Emperor, and economic sanctions for those who refused to co-operate, but also by some internal conflicts such as the Nicolaitans (Rv 2:6,15) and the synagogue of the devil (Rv 2:9). It is good to note that the model is not used to mean that a sect has a negative connotation.

The model is developed from that of Bryan Wilson (1973), and Worsely (1968) and other sociological analyses of the religious movements; it has not previously been applied to the Apocalypse of John in the context of the millennial reign of Christ to the best of my knowledge. The failure of Christ to return within the first 40 years of his resurrection made Christianity form a separate group of its own kind, particularly after the destruction of the Temple in 70CE, and separate itself completely from other Jewish sects.

The historical and the sociological work on groups and social relations demonstrates the complexity of the society and only through such a model is it appropriate to imagine the apocalyptic community as an isolated religious group debating matters of belief, political and religious life. The model will help to investigate the circumstances that caused its development, the response to the world which will include the behaviour of the movement, the social setting of the group, and what happens when the expected never comes, and the final end of the movement and also suggest a solution.

2.6 Conclusion

Without further arguments at this point, we will take it as argued above that the Apocalypse Christianity meets these criteria and thus deserves to be designated a millenarian movement. In this chapter we have looked at the sociology of sects and a profile of a millennialist sect has also been drawn. We have formulated a model which will be used to delineate the community of the Johannine apocalypse through sociological terms. We are primarily interested in interpreting the

millennial reign of Christ in Revelation 20:1-10; we want to know what it means. In this chapter, therefore, we have not studied cultural anthropology for the sake of studying historical ethnography. The model will help us to understand the Apocalypse.

This chapter has shown the value of understanding sociological models which have been used by various scholars to get into the depths of the Bible and to give space to the reader for new meanings and understandings. Biblical scholarship has now valued sociological models as tools of biblical studies which help us understand the text with much depth. In this chapter we saw that there are various sects from the sociology of sects that resemble the communities which produced the Bible. We analysed seven types of sects. I contended that the apocalypse of John was produced by a millennialist sect and that the Jesus movement was also similar to some of the charismatic movements of our modern times, where there is always a close link between the leader and the movement.

In the next chapter we shall focus on the Apocalypse community and millennialism. We will also look at the social setting of the Apocalypse, since the historical data will qualify the sociological analysis done in this chapter. This will help us understand the circumstances which provoked the writing of this literature and the thought behind it.

CHAPTER THREE

THE APOCALYPSE AND MILLENNIALISM

3.0 Introduction

3.1 The major task of this chapter

The main task of this chapter is to try and understand some of the terms which could not be defined in the previous chapter and also to examine the historical data of the apocalypse. This part will help us understand the situation in which the apocalypse was written. I will to examine the terms that relate to the background of this Apocalypse in terms of our sociological analysis. I will start by defining the reference of apocalyptic and millennialism. I will then investigate the situation of the time of writing, and this is possible only by investigating the dating of the book. I will then look at millenarianism as a response and the historical phenomenon of it in the Christian Church and how it relates to the Apocalypse.

We will also look at the literature of the Apocalypse and the Apocalypse community as a millennialist community. The Apocalypse of John has not been given as much attention by scholars as it ought to have been given. This is the only text in the New Testament which has aroused controversy at every area of its making; whether in authorship, dating, purpose, or interpretation of particular parts of it. Right at the start of this chapter it should be noted that this is an area in which scholars disagree widely. The Apocalypse has also suffered literal interpretation by those who want to claim that its eschatology is nothing else but a literal prediction of the end of human history.

In the previous chapter I have provided an analysis of the sociology of sects in formulating a model that could be applied in delineating the community of the Apocalypse. This chapter will demonstrate some of the results of the use of sociology when applied to the Apocalypse of John.

The idea behind this chapter is to look at the historical phenomenon of millennialism as a community of Apocalypse, which strongly believes that God will intervene in creating a new world order since this world is irredeemably evil and only a supernatural power could be involved in changing it. By the end of this chapter we expect to come up with the clear conclusion that apocalypse belongs to a millennialist community.

3.1.1 Defining Apocalyptic and Millennialism

In order to have the concept of millennium made clear, we have to begin by defining ‘apocalyptic’ and ‘millennialism’. The proper understanding of the concept ‘apocalyptic’ illuminates the concept millennium in particular and ‘apocalypticism’ in general. The word ‘apocalyptic’ comes from a Greek verb Ἀποκαλύπτω which means to uncover, to reveal, or to bring to light. From this verb we have an abstract noun ‘apocalypsis’ from which we derive the English words apocalypse and apocalyptic which then gives the meaning of disclosure or revealing (Rowland 1982:450). According to Wainwright (1993:11), the name implies an unveiling of hidden truths, even though it seems to conceal them. Therefore the noun apocalypse means a revelatory writing. This is why the book of Revelation is regularly called Apocalypse and this is the term I utilise for this book in this study. Other examples of these kinds of writing in the Bible are Daniel, 2Thessalonians 2 and 1Corinthians 15. Those outside the Bible are the Apocalypse of 4 Ezra, 2 Esdra 3-14 and the Syriac Apocalypse of 2 Baruch (Collins 1984:84) in the Apocrypha.

Therefore apocalyptic writings are fundamentally a conventicle-literature designed to encourage a particular community. Apocalypses are revelations which describe the manner in which revelation is received by the particular author or prophet. Fiorenza (1989:298) says that Apocalypse is defined as a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative frame work in which a revelation is mediated by another worldly being to a human recipient disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, in so far as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spacial, in

so far as it involves another supernatural world. We should therefore, in this case, understand Apocalypse as a genre or type of writing. Therefore apocalypse is a concrete noun for a revelatory writing. There are many of these writings, as we have seen above, which may be called apocalypses, which flourished in great numbers during the Inter-Testamental period when prophecy had probably declined in Israel. From the word 'apocalypse' we then derive the word 'apocalyptic' which can be an adjective qualifying a noun or we can take it as a noun itself. As a noun the term 'apocalyptic' is used either to name all these kinds of literature, or to designate the idea in the world of these texts. As I have said earlier the world of these texts seems to be a period of uncertainty.

'Apocalyptic' as a term may also be used to qualify the term end or 'eschaton', which in this case is the expected millennium, so that we can have an apocalyptic millennialism. If then 'apocalyptic' is revelation of what must soon happen or take place either at present or at the end times, we can then designate it as the millennial end, which should represent the revelation of Christ's rule to be revealed soon.

Another scholar of 'apocalyptic' by the name of Schmithals (1975:14) argues that the major concern in 'apocalyptic' is to reveal a certain set of truths, which people cannot access by the general rational considerations of reality, but which must be disclosed to man by the supernatural. What the apocalypticist has to say is therefore always new to his hearers; it is the truth unknown being revealed. Apocalypse promises future events which will be realised soon, though they may not necessarily be achieved peacefully, since an imminent cataclysmic intervention of a divine power is expected in this world to destroy what is irredeemably evil and then create another realm of goodness and of peace to replace the sinful nature. This is usually seen as the millennium by the millennialist community, since the dominant feature of apocalyptic revelation was in essence a revelation of an event in the future (1975:17). By the means of the word 'apocalyptic' we can therefore designate the literary genres such as revelatory writings which disclose the secrets of the life beyond and especially of the end time. The term also designates the ideas from which this

literature was produced (Sanders 1989:447). We have however, to note that the exact meanings of the 'apocalypse' and 'apocalyptic' can never be precisely defined due to their complexity in meaning.

The 'apocalypticists' main emphases is that God must soon intervene as the only solution to the present circumstances to create a new order of events, since to the apocalyptic thinking the catastrophic future expected has no connection with the present world, which must be destroyed, and a new world created. According to Rowley (1950:36) such thinking gives the notion of a difference between the Old Testament prophets and the apocalypticists, for the prophets foretold the future that should arise from the present. For example, Isaiah says, 'they shall possess the land forever' (Is 60:21) since the promise is that God would restore the fortunes of the land as at the beginning (Jr 33:11). This will be elaborated upon more in chapter four as we look at the concept of millennium in the Old Testament, on the other hand the apocalypticists foretold the future that should break into the present. For John nothing less than a supernatural, divine intervention to destroy the old form and to create a new order of existence; a new heaven and a new earth (Rv 21:1) would have satisfied him, since they had little faith in the present begetting the future. A dichotomy between the present order and the apocalyptic future therefore exists.

The apocalyptic future is an intervention from the supernatural which comes in vengefully to alter the present situation that causes sufferings to the righteous. This kind of apocalyptic thinking tends to give hope to the minority who have no other means to change the present circumstances. This is the hope of millenarianism; that a more powerful agent needs to intervene on their behalf to bring the expected future where those who suffered will be compensated. At this juncture I will demonstrate the relationship between the apocalyptic thinking and the millennialist movements.

In the above definition of apocalyptic we have seen that the concept 'apocalypticism' seems to explain the apocalyptic phenomenon as a movement within the context of a certain trend. Hence we can describe apocalyptic as a movement in Christianity. Fiorenza (1989:296) says such a

movement is doubtless something new compared to the Jewish apocalypticism - and it is the new thing which needs to be determined. So here we can understand Christian apocalypticism as a movement within the general context of Jewish apocalypticism. According to Wainwright (1993:21), the earliest Christian movement which could be termed as Christian apocalypticism was the Chiliasm movement, which held the opinion that Christ would soon return to earth and inaugurate a millennium. Such were also generally known as millennialists due to their belief that the period would be of thousand years. The mention of the Millennium in Revelation 20 made them believe that the Apocalypse was written to a people faced with the same problems as themselves.

Cook (1995:30) argues that apocalyptic religion is never an individualistic phenomenon, hence millennialism is first of all a group phenomenon which always appears in the context of a cohesive and relatively well organised group. This would mean that millennialists think of themselves as a group and seek to maintain and preserve their structure. Such a group will have orders of leadership within it; headed by a millennial prophet as a catalyst figure, a clique of junior prophets as special disciples and an outer group of followers. It is such a group we designate as millennialist from the word millennium.

The term 'millennialism' is basically derived from the New Testament book commonly known as Revelation. As the Roman rule gradually replaced the Persian rule, the Latin language eventually became the language of the ordinary people, and so the Church and the Bible slowly adapted it too. The Latin word for the thousand-year reign of Christ and the martyrs in Revelation 20:4-6 was now millennium (Latin 'mille' meaning a thousand and 'annus,' year). There are other several equivalent terms used by social scientists such as 'millenarism', 'millenarianism' and 'chiliasm'. This word (Greek χιλιάς, chilas = Latin millennium) means a thousand. It is from these terms we get our term millennialism.

According to Duling (1996:187) the term millennialism describes a social group of people whose

central belief is that the present oppressive world is irredeemably evil and will soon be folded up by some cataclysmic event, and a new world which is perfect and blissful will be ushered in. The hope in such a movement is so great that those who are involved engage in preparing for this kind of future bliss and at times they may try to bring it about. According to Irving (1993:1999), millennialism is the Christian belief in a thousand- year period (millennium) in which the kingdom of God is to flourish and prosper.

The counterpart to millennialism and chiliasm in the language of biblical scholars is 'apocalypticism' as earlier defined. One notable thing is that these movements have a general thinking about the end times, which may be termed as 'eschatological' (Ἔσχατον meaning the End). In this case we can use the word 'apocalyptic' as an adjective, to refer to apocalyptic eschatology. In New Testament scholarship apocalyptic as a noun refers to the general thought of the 'end time,' therefore we have two terms in this study which will be treated as equivalent and from this point we shall now prefer the term millennialism which goes with our model of a millenarian sect.

The world views of many millennial groups include a vision of the coming new era including specific goals for the group. The group goals include revival or perpetuation of especially valued aspects of their own culture where the future vision often anticipates that the millennial group will inherit the secrets and the abundance of their enemies (Wainwright 1993:30). In the opinion of the earliest Millennialists in the Church as earlier mentioned, the Apocalypse predicted that Christ would return and set up a kingdom on earth for a thousand years (Rv 20:4-5) as the millennium (Irving1993 :199). With this concept we can now further our investigation into the term millennium.

According to Cook (1975:32) the millennial groups usually believe that their visions and aims will be achieved within a frame work provided by a supernaturally revealed timetable of past and future events, and they particularly prepare for it, to realise their goals and to find a way of living in the last days of history. The millennial groups develop a practical program for action. Such a

program may fall anywhere along a continuum from a passive to an active response. Cook also argues that the practical program of these groups may involve the partial or almost complete separation of the group from the host society. Other such movements may leave their communities to hold an extended vigil while awaiting the supernatural intervention or, alternately, the movement may desire separation in preparation for dooms day by refusing to work, destroying stockpiles of food, or spending all their savings. A recent example of such a movement is the Church for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of the Lord in Uganda. The Church expected God (through the virgin Mary) to come and take them to heaven. According to Draper (*The Natal Witness*, Saturday, April 29, 2000) they had cut all ties with their families, sold up their property and pooled their proceeds and followed their teachers with absolute trust and devotion. Unfortunately when the virgin Mary failed to come as was expected, a thousand people lost their lives in a mass murder. Not all millennial groups will advocate such an action, nevertheless many of them live in high expectation of a new future where they will be ruling with the King of Kings.

The millennial eschatology stresses the total sovereignty of God in the coming cataclysm. It is common thing that the millennial groups do not take arms. The practical programs of active millennial groups however sometimes stress preparation for military action, and other times the eschatological war is still understood as fought by God. The Group's military preparation is viewed as merely symbolic (Cook 1975:35). The movement looks forward to fulfilment in the future and is not concerned primarily with the salvation of the individual but with that of the community as a whole. In essence, it is not an expression of the concern of the individual for his own future well-being. It is rather an attempt to find an answer to the question as to what will happen to the many who are ungodly and sinful. There is common generalisation about millenarianism and apocalypticism as essentially the religious expressions of the deprived and oppressed minority groups, where millennium is seen as a reward for the less privileged in the society (Duling 1996:187).

Even though defining these terms is obviously difficult we found it necessary for the clarity of our critical analysis of a text that has been differently interpreted by many groups, but not from this perspective of a sociological model, which is a newer method. Having looked at these important terms, I will move to the next section of looking at the apocalyptic literature so that we can see how it fits these terms. We will also look at its sources and the characteristics of this literature of the Apocalypse.

3.2 Apocalyptic literature

Having defined the term apocalyptic at length in the previous section I only intend to talk about this type of literature briefly. It is commonly recognized that the Apocalypse falls in to the category of apocalyptic literature, as we have seen above. According to Käsemann (1969:40), apocalyptic is ‘the mother of all Christian theology’, for many passages may be quoted to illustrate millennialism. According to Beale (1998) and Bauckham (1993), one has, in interpreting the Apocalypse of John, to be aware not only of the many allusions to the Old Testament which it contains but also of the apocalyptic literature of the Inter-Testamental period which it so strongly resembles. One cannot rule out the relationship between the Qumran scrolls and the Apocalypse of John. Bauckham (1993:297) says, this resemblance is seen most clearly in its use of symbolism, its words of comfort to God’s people who are undergoing suffering and oppression and its confidence concerning God’s future intervention to raise the dead, judge the wicked, and inaugurate a new heaven and a new earth (Rv 21:1). At the same time, however, it should be noted that there are also differences between the Apocalypse of John and the Jewish apocalyptic works: it is not pseudonymous as I had mentioned earlier and does not claim to transmit secret information preserved from someone of the earlier age; there is therefore no recounting of past events in the guise of predictive prophecy as in Jewish apocalyptic literature. Although angels appear as revealers of heavenly truths, there are relatively few explanations given of the revelations they make; perhaps most importantly of all, for the writer of the Apocalypse, is the Messiah, so eagerly awaited by his Jewish counterparts, who has already come in the person of

Jesus and has already won significant victory over the forces of evil with the result that the final overthrow of Satan and his allies is seen as the logical outcome of a process under way.

According to Beale (1998:101), apocalyptic literature is not a particular collection of literature like the Apocrypha or the New Testament. Rather it is a particular type or genre of literature which appears in several different collections of literature in the Judeo-Christian tradition. In the Old Testament apocalyptic literature may be found especially in the book of Daniel and Zechariah 9-14, though there are also traces of it in the passages like Isaiah 24-27 and Ezekiel 38-39. In the Apocrypha, 2 Esdras is an apocalyptic work. Also much of the Pseudepigrapha and Qumran literature is apocalyptic. In the New Testament the Apocalypse of John is the clearest example, but we can also trace some passages of apocalyptic nature in the eschatological discourse of Jesus in Mark 13 and parallel and also in 2 Thessalonians 2 and 1 Corinthians 15. We will now look at the sources of apocalyptic and its development.

3.2.1 Sources of apocalyptic thought

According to Enslin (1971:1106), a number of different influences on the minds of the apocalyptic writers may be traced from the Persian influence. The apocalyptic literature writings came from a definite era in history of almost 350 years; 165 BCE- 135 CE. The years cover the period of Judas Maccabeus' opposition to the persecution of Antiochus IV (Epiphanes), to the final defeat of the Jews by Rome during the reign of Emperor Hadrian. Israel was subject to foreign oppressors for several centuries. However they had dreams of restoration after the Babylonian captivity which led to disillusionment. The Persians had allowed the Jews to go back and build the Temple but quickly stopped them from restoring the kingdom. This made the Jews change from a nation to a religious community with a priest as its head.

The Persian influence cannot be ignored; they allowed the Jews to continue with their Jewish religion. Since the Persian religion was congenial to Judaism in that they both had a worshiped

one supreme God, they equally shunned idolatry, and both focused on a golden age to come, so the Jews were not subjected to persecution even though they may have suffered other kinds of oppressions. During the two centuries of the Persian rule, Judaism experienced many changes through the unconscious stimulation of ideas that were in the air. Such ideas gradually entered her thinking and became part of her own heritage:

The Hellenistic features of the Apocalypse entered the conceptual world of the author through indirect and direct channels. Indirectly and unconsciously John emerged from a Judaism already 'orientalized' and Hellenized since the sixth century BCE (centering in Palestine and eastern diaspora). The orientalizing and Hellenization of Judaism are particularly evident (Aune 1987:481).

The above explains why the Persian belief in an age to come was similar to the Jewish expectations of a future Messiah who would come and inaugurate a new age. The difference might have been that the Jews were concerned with individual righteousness as part of community life, which would be rewarded in the age to come, as in Ezekiel, 'Behold, all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sins shall die' (Ez18:4).

The Persians, on the other hand never believed in future punishment. They influenced the Jews to change the whole idea of community punishment, where they came to believe that, 'for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in sheol, to which you are going' (Ec 9:10). They came to believe in the idea of the individual being rewarded or punished after death and they so emphasized this later idea that it came to occupy their whole belief. The Persian mind was completely dualistic, for they saw two forces in struggle; the powers of light and the powers of darkness. At the end of about 12000 years the Shaoshyant; the last expected saviour of the Persians would appear, and would prepare men for a new age free from evil and also preside over a final kingdom (Enslin1971:1107). By the time the Jewish apocalyptic literature began to appear the above ideas were already firmly within the Jewish thought line.

However the chief influence was that of the Old Testament itself. The writers show a thorough acquaintance with the Old Testament scriptures and a respect for all the institutions of Judaism even though not for those who ran them. According to Newsome (1992:66), the roots of apocalyptic are to be found in two of strands of Old Testament thought, perhaps the most important of which is the prophecy. The apocalyptic writers had a particular affinity with prophetic literature in the Old Testament canon, in their belief in the Lord as Lord of history and in their belief in a coming 'day of the Lord', when wickedness would be punished and a new redeemed order begin. Nevertheless they transformed these ideas so that they became new and distinctive. According to Morris, quoting Beardslee,

Apocalyptic was a Judaeo-Christian world view which located the believer in a minority community and gave his life meaning by relating it to the end, soon to come, which would reverse his present status. The key to the interpretation of apocalyptic has usually been rightly, in its restlessness with the imperfections of the present and its quest for a new and total solution to the human problem (1972:27).

The apocalyptic visions of the end are noticeably different from that of the prophets. Whereas the prophets tended to see the climax of history in these worldly terms; an earthly prosperity within history involving the living only, nevertheless the apocalyptic writers tended to see it in other worldly-terms. It would be a heavenly kingdom breaking in from outside of history and involving the dead (who would be raised) as well as the living. Another notable difference is that while the prophets were exhorting people to repent before it was too late, apocalyptic writers were comforting their people with assurances of their own salvation and imminent judgement of their enemies. Despite these differences of emphases, however, apocalyptic still has much in common with the Old Testament prophetic tradition out of which it grew.

One of the major influences we have to note and suggest is that historical circumstances also had a strong influence on the minds of the apocalyptic writers. This literature never flourished when

life was smooth and straightforward. The writings made life tolerable under intolerable conditions with their emphasis on God's final and perfect solution. Russel (1980:17) argues that apocalyptic is a literature of the oppressed who saw no hope for the nation simply in terms of politics or on the plane of human history. The book of Daniel for example was written probably at the time of Antiochus IV (Epiphanes) and Revelation, as suggested earlier, at the time of Domitian's persecutions. The writers were faced with the apparent triumph of the wicked, but their faith made them believe that triumph would be short lived. The imagery of the apocalypse made life bearable in harsh situations and intolerable conditions.

Personal experiences also have played a big part in apocalyptic writing. There are many references in apocalyptic literature to dreams, trances, visions, auditions and so on . Even though modern scholars usually attribute such experiences to sources other than the writers themselves (as with the authorship of the books themselves), according to Russel (1980:17) they are to be interpreted as descriptions of the true author's own experiences. They were sure that they were writing under divine inspiration.

Finally, foreign influences may also be seen at work in apocalyptic literature, as for example Zoroastrianism, the religion of ancient Persia. Newsome (1992) is of this idea that the:

Hellenistic world permitted the free flow of philosophical and religious teaching, a fact which bore profound consequences for both Judaism and Christianity, especially in the latter's early efforts at expansion (:23).

The influences of Persians on Jewish customs are obviously rampant, and are also reflected in the later writings, particularly apocalyptic. The Apocalypse of John portrays in a very distinctive way how the social and cultural were mixed to constitute late first century Christianity. Though a Christian document, it is heavily indebted to Jewish religious and apocalyptic traditions. It also exhibits both the influences of and reactions to Hellenism (Aune 1987:481). Such influences may

also be seen in the eschatological dualism found in apocalyptic literature, such as the contrast between the present evil age and the future glorious age, the interest in good and bad spirits (angels and demons), and the strong belief in the future resurrection of the dead for final judgement may all owe something to the Hellenistic influence which became strong following the conquest of Alexander the Great. This conquest also aided the spread of the Greek philosophy and brought the idea of the pre-existence and immortality of the soul, an idea to be found in a number of apocalyptic works particularly the latter half.

Many scholars, however, agree that even if John did use sources, he made them so thoroughly his own that there is no chance of our differentiating between the text and source.

3.2.2 Characteristics of apocalyptic literature.

One of the main characteristics of apocalyptic literature is that of pseudonymity. The books are ascribed to well known figures of the past such as Adam, Enoch, Moses, Baruch, Ezra etc. rather than to their real authors. We have to ask the question: why? It was probably to avoid persecution and in such a case anonymity would have served their purpose equally well. The Apocalypse of John does not fit well in with this idea since the writer calls himself John (Rv 1:9). This idea that the writers used other names in order to gain a hearing seems to charge them with deliberate deception.

The writers were using a literary device as Russel (1965:114-118) explains it, and they were understood by their readers, whereby they were expressing their belief that they were writing under the inspiration of the one to whom they ascribed their work and were saying the kind of things he would have said had he been alive at the writes time.

Another main characteristic is the use of symbolism. Extravagant imagery is used to convey the writer's message. Animals are used to represent men or nations, men often represent angels, and

stars represent demons, while numbers are usually to be interpreted symbolically, though the correct interpretation of all the symbols is no easy matter for us today. Morris (1972:52) says that the symbols may change in bewildering fashion, as read in 1 Enoch, about stars falling from heaven and changing into bulls which then live with cows and sire elephants and camels and asses (1En 8:1-4) and also of the white bull that changed into a man (1En 89:1), and of bulls that sired big creatures such as lions, tigers, wolves, and the rest (1En 89:10). Such wonders are common in the apocalyptic writings, nevertheless the use of conventional symbols does not mean that the apocalyptists were not expressing their personal experiences.

Apocalyptic literature may also be characterised by its nature of future promises which are usually full of rewards. In case of the Apocalypse the millennial reign of Christ was predicted as the reward for the martyrs who would experience first resurrection and also reign with Christ. The Apocalypse was addressed to the Christians who were faced with a particular crisis in Asia Minor. The author portrays himself as a spiritual hero who has received divine secrets, which are only to be shared by the members of his community. Such secrets include information about natural phenomena and the affairs of heaven, which were chiefly about the expected future. This 'future' promise is in fact partly an experienced one in the past, from the point of view of the true author. This makes the future an event of a restoration of past glory, enabling the recipients to guess how the future will be at the end. For the Old Testament prophets, Israel will be restored, for the Apocalypse, a new one will be created. Usually the end is perceived of as being imminent. This leads us, into the following section examine the social status of the Apocalypse.

3.3 Social background to the Apocalypse

I will now investigate and examine the various items that relate to the background of the Apocalypse. Even though this will not be fully detailed, its importance in this study cannot be ignored; it will give us more light about the Apocalypse and how it relates to millenarianism. In this section I will look at the social identity of the author and the social situation of the

Apocalypse, which will be looked at in terms of date. A short critique will be offered on this part rather than a mere presentation of facts. The greater part of this section of the chapter is taken up by an investigation into the situation that prompted the author to write and the categorization of this kind of literature as a millennialist response.

3.3.1. Social identity of the author

All the attempts to link apocalypse with a historical person or any figure in the early Church whom we can name as the author today may be very difficult, since this is one of the most disputed issues in the Apocalypse of John. The book itself says that the author was John, who presents himself as a servant and a prophet of God in several places (Rv 1:1-3; 10:11; 19:10; 22:6-10). It is unlikely that this is a pseudonym, or else the true author would surely have made clearer in whose name he was writing, for example by calling himself John the Apostle. But if the real author was called John the question remains, Was he John the apostle or another John? As Kiddle(1940) says,

No subject of Biblical studies has provoked such elaborate and prolonged discussion among scholars as that of the authorship of the five books of the New Testament which are traditionally ascribed to 'John' (the fourth Gospel, the three Epistles of John, and Revelation And no discussion has been so bewildering, disappointing, and unprofitable. The student who attempts to follow the innumerable lines of enquiry is soon caught in the a maze of conflicting arguments brought forward to support the rival theories, and invariably finds himself unable to reach any definite conclusion concerning the authorship of at least some if not all, of the books concerned. In fact, it is quite impossible to determine the authorship of any of these books from the available evidence (:33).

For this reason this section will deal with the issue of the social identity of the writer of the

Apocalypse rather than its authorship. According to Collins (1984:99), it was from the framework of a particular religious view of reality that John addresses the crisis he perceives in his social historical situation. John saw the elements of the crisis as the conflict between Christians and Jews, mutual antipathy towards neighboring Gentiles, and conflict over wealth as reflected in the Church of Laodicea. This was probably the cause of social unrest in the Churches of Asia Minor at the time growing out of the tension between rich and poor. Another issue could have been the public suspicion of the Christians which threatened the community's precarious relations with Rome, and several other traumatic events such as the destruction of the Temple, social- political pressure to engage in the polytheism of the imperial cult, the execution of Antipas (Rv 2:13) and the author's banishment into exile to the isle of Patmos (Rv 1:9).

According to Jeske (1985:457), it was the traumatic event of John's exile which leads most directly to his writing of the Apocalypse. The trauma rests in the interruption and prevention of his immediate physical access to the churches. As long as he was able to maintain direct contact with his congregations, John was able to deal personally with issues, as other prophets could. But his arrest and detention in the Island forcibly broke off the contact, and as a result, he was forced to write the Apocalypse. In such a case the Apocalypse should be seen as a representative of a particular group of people in Asia Minor whose community was constructed in opposition to the prevailing social structures. The Apocalypse community became a small millenarian community that maintained its own boundaries.

Another social role of the author was that of prophet, that is, he gave an intelligible prophecy to encourage his readers, which was a revelation from the Lord (Rv 1:1). Fiorenza, as cited in Collins (1984:40), suggested that John was a member of an early Christian prophetic-apocalyptic school. She attributed this to the fact that the writer has a high familiarity with the Jewish prophetic-apocalyptic traditions and forms. She concludes that John was the head or the leader of such a school, since she saw an analogy between John and the community of prophets who might have constituted the school. This argument seems to have been based on the mention of

prophets such as 'Jezebel' and 'Balaam' in the message to the Church of Thyatira (Rv 2:20). 'Jezebel' who calls herself a prophet with a number of followers might have been a prophet; a teacher of this school. Fiorenza's hypothetical school of 'Jezebel' functions as evidence for a prophetic school headed by John. While it is a fact that John was a prophet, as the Apocalypse presents him, the issue of him having been a head of a school or the existence of such a school remains a hypothesis.

According to Collins (1984:49), the writer was a Jew who was undoubtedly influenced by the written records and oral traditions concerning the classical prophets of Israel, hence the author needs to be seen as part of the phenomenon of early Christian prophecy. In early Christianity, prophecy was evidently very wide spread up to the time of Paul, and may have survived in Asia Minor, as we can see in the message to the Churches (Rv 2:20) the mention of the two prophets of that time and also the Apocalypse writer. We can say that the writer of the Apocalypse was evidently a prophet in the Churches of Asia Minor, who was in Patmos on the account of the Word of God and a servant of our Lord who was concerned with consoling his followers. While the author claims nowhere to be an apostle, he seems to assume a good command in the Churches he was writing to; he assumed that his one name was enough for his readers to identify him. Kümmel (1975:470) says that the simple use of the name John indicates a commonly known personality, as also does the self-evident manner in which he sets forth his claims to be heard.

The issue of whether or not the seven Churches of the Apocalypse were being subjected to an official and well organised persecution by Jews or Roman officials is still questionable as a social crisis to prompt the writing of the Apocalypse. Even without such reliable evidence for official persecution against Christians, as Christians, we have to note that several references in the Apocalypse still indicate at least sporadic and local hostilities directed to the various Christian communities existing in Asia Minor, which would still be a disturbing issue to the author of Apocalypse. He clearly knows them well and believes God wants to speak to them through him. The letters show a man of high authority who was concerned with the problems facing the

Apocalypse community.

The author was also probably a Jew who may have spent time in Palestine during his early days knowing one or two Semitic languages as well as a bit of Greek. This point has been extensively elaborated by modern scholars, particularly Charles (1920, 1: xliv), who says that the language of the Apocalypse is ‘unlike any Greek that was ever penned by mortal man’. This indicates that the author was probably a Jew. His major concern here was to strengthen a community that was faced with extinction due to persecution, and since the author may have never been in a Greek class, he could not have been accurate in his use of a foreign language. At the same time he was in a different emotional state. It was also written in excitement probably due to the trauma of being distanced, as the author says in Revelation 1:9. In verses such as Revelation 18:20, ‘Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you holy apostles and prophets for God has avenged you on her’ and also Revelation 21:14, ‘And the wall of the city had twelve foundations and on them the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the lamb’, this may show that the author was in a situation of a different emotional state, since he could now see through to heaven.

In conclusion, the author was writing to a minority and a deprived community that needed the assurance that a more powerful agent would intervene to bring a more peaceful era whereby those who suffered would be compensated. Apocalypse was a product of a certain social situation and a true religious view of what was happening to the Christians which the author tried to interpret. Now that we have an understanding of the author, even though not by his name but through his social identity, we can move ahead and investigate when the Apocalypse was written. Since Apocalypse is represented here as a response to particular situations in the life of the Churches in Asia Minor it is necessary to try and date this book as precisely as possible.

3.3.2 When was the Apocalypse written?

The conclusions in the previous section concerning the social identity of the author as a prophet

give us some light in seeking to place the Apocalypse in its historical context and even to understand it both as a product of its time *and* as a response to the circumstances of its environment. The arguments in this section try to determine a possible date when the Apocalypse was written. The establishment of a date would give us more light as to why the author of the Apocalypse composed his materials in the particular and distinctive manner that he did. What events was he responding to? These issues will help us to understand the social realities reflected in the Apocalypse.

The external evidence for the Apocalypse is the best starting point, such as the testimony of the early Christian writers. Collins (1984:55) says that the earliest witness is Irenaeus, who says that the Apocalypse surfaced towards the end of the reign of Domitian, who ruled from 81 to 96 CE. Irenaeus seems to suggest that the book may even have been written sometime later since he says that the prophet lived to the time of Emperor Trajan who ruled up to 117 CE. Whether John would have lived to such an age is a matter of debate and the probability is that John would have been very old by then (Sweet 1979:21). Irenaeus was probably confusing John with another John, since he believed that the Apocalypse was written by the same John who wrote the fourth Gospel. And this has led many scholars to dispute this evidence of a date from Irenaeus, since if he was wrong on authorship he may also be wrong on date.

Most scholars such as Collins (1984), Court (1994), Fiorenza (1973), Roloff (1993), Caird (1984) prefer a date towards the end of the reign of the emperor Domitian (81-96 AD) for the following reasons. There are a number of verses in Revelation which appear to refer to the Roman Imperial cult (13:4, 15; 14:9-11; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4). These references suit the time of Domitian better than any other, since Domitian's predecessors had either discouraged the worship of themselves or allowed it without enforcing it., (Caligula, 37-41 CE, being the short lived exception, even though the first after the death of Jesus). According to Kiddle (1940:xxxix), Domitian required that his officials should call him "Lord and God". It is true that there is no evidence that this was required of ordinary inhabitants of the empire, but it does seem that Domitian's reign marked a new step

in this direction, and perhaps some of John's readers had been faced with a demand to show where their ultimate loyalties lay. Sinclair (1992:57) says that from a pagan perspective Emperor worship was a mandatory gesture of patriotism; if one was loyal to the ruling government one was obviously expected to worship the emperor.

Victorinus, who lived in Pettau, was killed in 303 CE, during the persecution of Diocletian. In his commentary on the Apocalypse he argued that this book was written during the time of Domitian (Collins 1984:55). He also argued that John was exiled by Domitian and that he was set free after the death of this ruler. Such a suggestion may have been influenced by Revelation 1:9, where the author himself claims that he was in the Isle of Patmos 'on account of' the word of God. Such an argument may be rejected on linguistic grounds. In the Apocalypse the preposition $\delta\acute{\iota}\alpha$ which is usually translated 'on account of' does not carry the sense 'for the purpose of', but always suggests a past reason for something (Ibid 1984:55). If we may agree that John was exiled for the purpose of the Gospel, such a facet gives us more light on the attitude of the Roman authorities towards Christians. Eusebius is also known to have dated this book at such a time in the early Christian tradition, and he is said to have done it as a way of rejecting it as apostolic. Eusebius states that John was banished to Patmos by Domitian (Hist. Eccl 3.18.1). Such collective information has been responsible for the dominant theory that the Apocalypse was written towards the end of the first century C E, just before the death of Domitian (Knight 1999:18).

Other verses in the Apocalypse clearly refer to persecution, such as, 'I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience in Jesus Christ, was in the Island that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ' (Rv1:9). John himself seems to have been on the Island of Patmos as a result of his involvement with the word of God (Rv 2:13; 3:10; 16:6; 18:24; 20:4). This has been challenged by some scholars who argue that there is not enough evidence for John's banishment. Again, evidence for widespread persecution of the Christians in Domitian's reign is slight but it is sufficient to make this time more plausible than any other. Nero's persecution was confined to Rome, and was specifically

linked with the great fire of Rome in 64CE (Sweet 1979:22). The early Christian tradition however links the Apocalypse with the reign of Domitian. Collins (1984:56) says that the earliest evidence for Domitian as a persecutor was a passage in Melito's book which was written as an apology for Christianity. His arguments were not accurate since he wanted to conclude that it was the unpopular Emperors among Romans who persecuted Christians as scapegoats. However Irenaeus' argument on a date during Domitian time never mentioned persecution however. He had other sources for his argument. Caird (1984:6) lists those who affirm this tradition as Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Victorinus, and Jerome. There are a few who dissent from this view in the early church such as Eusebius and Dionysius (Charles 1920: xl).

The internal evidence for a date may strengthen the external evidence of the early writers. According to Kümmel (1975:469), the state of the Churches as described in chapters 2 and 3 seem to suggest a date late in the first century CE. Some have lost their early enthusiasm, because some time has elapsed since their foundation. There is evidence from Polycarp that the Church at Smyrna was not founded until after about 60-64CE. In Revelation 2:8-11 however it seems to be doing very well. Laodicea was destroyed in an earthquake in 60-61CE. In Revelation 3:7 however it seems to be quite prosperous. The Nicolaitans in Revelation 2:6,15 seem to be a well established sect (Morris 1969:37) and Paul is not mentioned. All these facts point to a date well beyond the 60's, in fact to the time of Domitian's reign:

Domitian seems really to have regarded himself as a god. On the score of emperor-worship Domitian's reign is the most probable by far. It was Domitian above all who demanded worship from his subjects. A difficulty is that we do not know what method he adopted to bring this about (Morris 1969:35).

Even though we may not know how he carried out his persecution, the probability is high that there was punishment to Christians due to their faith, since Antipas was already killed (Rv 2:6) and the author exiled as earlier said. Further evidence on the date may be drawn from the mention

of the name Babylon in the text of the Apocalypse. According to Collins (1984:57), the mention of a city by the name Babylon, which was to be destroyed (Rv 14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2,10,22), shows that this was not a physical city either in ancient Babylon or in a city in the recent world in the north of the River Nile in Egypt. Hence the name is not to be taken literally, since the name appears again in Revelation 17 in a vision of a woman who is the mother of all prostitutes (Rv 17:5). Such a city should be seen as Rome which was the biggest city of the Mediterranean world in John's time (Rv 17:18). Collins argues that Rome was called Babylon because her forces were like those of Babylon which at an earlier period had destroyed the Temple and the city of Jerusalem. According to Draper (1997:264) such a destruction of the Temple must rightly be seen as the major turning point in the development of the Jesus movement, from a movement for the physical restoration of the Jewish Kingdom into something else. Collins argues that many scholars have ignored the importance of the name Babylon for a date. He sees it as paramount, being internal evidence *for* a date, since it was unlikely that the name would have been used before the destruction of the Temple by Titus. Such a destruction would have ushered in a new era as Draper has suggested above. Such internal evidence thus points as precisely as possible to a date after 70 CE.

Other internal evidence is found in the motif of the seven Kings (Rv 17:9-12). This does not by any means point decisively to a date earlier than the reign of Domitian for the Apocalypse as a whole (Collins 1984:62-64). The motif is probably traditional, but the context shows it was meaningful for the author. Even though the motif does not establish a Domitian date, it is still compatible with such a date. Those scholars who, however, favour a Domitian date are not able to prove how persecution under this reign was conducted, while others like Beasley-Murray (1974:38) are associated with sweeping statements such as, 'Christian tradition unanimously represents Domitian to be the first persecutor of Christians after Nero'. How far some of these scholars did their investigations is still in question, but we can say that they had the pre-conceived idea of Domitian even before they wrote.

It has also been argued that there are references to the 'Nero redivivus' myth in Revelation. 11:7; 12:4; 13:3 and 17:8-11. This myth emerged in two forms: one that Nero did not actually die in 68 CE and would soon return to the public scene, two that Nero really did die but would soon return to life. The latter naturally developed later, when hope for Nero's survival of death faded, and was thought by some to be pre-supposed in the verses referred to above. It is disputed however whether this myth is actually referred to in these verses or had any influence on them (Morris, 1969: 37).

Some scholars have argued for a date in the reign of Nero, but quite apart from the contrary arguments above, the positive arguments used for this theory are not strong. One suggests that Revelation 11:1-3 presupposes that the temple is still standing in Jerusalem. According to Court (1994:102), the re- collection of the historical Nero is still vivid; the recent fact of Christian martyrdoms in the Nero's gardens may pre-suppose a date in his reign. Certainly this dating comes between the Jewish revolt in 66 CE and the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE, since the Temple is still standing and can be measured (Rv 11:1). This does not follow, however, since the passage may be interpreted symbolically. Secondly they argue that, the interpretation that the figure '666' in Rev. 13:18 is a cryptogram for Nero (being the sum of the letters used in Hebrew for 'Nero Caesar' when taken to stand for numbers). This is though only one of the many possible interpretations of this enigmatic number:

Highly polarised believers have again and again sought to prove that their hated opponents somehow fit the number "666" and so were in reality the nefarious monster described in Revelation 13 (the actual number occurs in verse 18). For example, in the middle ages, Franciscan opponents of pope Benedict XI pointed out that in Greek (where letters also stand for numbers) the sum of the letters of "Benedict" comes to 666 (Sinclair 1992:17).

Robinson (1972:222) is one well known scholar who has strongly argued for a date during Nero's reign. He has not however been able to account for why John could have gone to Ephesus at such

an early date, and write to Smyrna, a Church founded probably after the death of Nero as mentioned earlier (Kümmel 1975:469). Those who date this book here argue that John died early as a martyr, and therefore could not have written a work which is normally dated at the end of the first century CE.

Another argument is that the sixth king of Rev. 17:10 is Nero. But this assumes that the number seven in this verse should be taken literally and that the first king is Julius Caesar- neither of which suppositions is self-evident. The first king could equally be Augustus or Nero himself (as the first persecuting king) and, in any case, the numbers may be symbolic as are so many other numbers in Revelation (Farrar, 1964; Kummel, 1975).

Looking at the external evidence of the early Church writers who strongly argued for a date towards the end of the first century, particularly Irenaeus and Eusebius, we may have strong grounds for this date. The external evidence, particularly the mention of the name Babylon, as it was argued, and also the many references to events which were very traumatising to Churches founded in the late sixties suggests a date towards the end of the first century. In conclusion, taking all the above considerations into account, a date towards the end of the reign of Domitian perhaps c 95 CE is the most likely date for the composition of the book, though it is possible as Charles (1920) argued that some parts were written earlier. The date of this book remains a suggestion, since scholars have always differed as to the proper dating of it. Having tried to establish the date of the Apocalypse as precisely as are able we can now look at the type of this literature before we come to the social situation of the Apocalypse.

3.3. 3 Social setting of the Apocalypse

The Apocalypse contains evidence that controversies between believers in Christ and the local Jews had created a social crisis for at least some Christians in Asia Minor, if not all. The most popular cause for the rise of millennialism may be compounded with a number of factors as we

saw in our previous chapter, but generally, if the normal social order of a society is disturbed, a crisis comes up which may cause a cultural shock. This would then cause a frustration which cannot be coped with and as a result a general feeling of helplessness is aroused. Such may be caused by a natural calamity or a group within the society that dominates another which is common in tribalistic communities, or a superior group that dominates a simpler society as in the case of colonialism within Africa. These factors lead the group in crisis to perceive a discrepancy between what they deserve and what they actually receive, this makes them feel relatively deprived. To the Apocalypse community the evidence for such factors may be outlined as follows:

1. The message to Smyrna (Rv 2:9-10) is encouraging the Christians to overcome tribulations and sufferings; probably caused by those who were claiming to be Jews whom the writer calls 'the Synagogue of Satan'. The Christians should not fear sufferings, even being put into prison. The hostility and tension are high. The name Jew is now denied the Jewish Christian community in Smyrna. Those who claimed to be Jews were probably siding with the authority to suppress Christianity or else Christians were already excluded from the Synagogues of Smyrna in one way or another.

2. The message to Philadelphia places an open door before the Christians and Christ is the bearer of the key no one can close or open apart from him. They were encouraged because even though they had little power, they had remained faithful and Christ would make their enemies come and bow before them; this is the message from him who holds the key (Rv 3:7-9). (This was probably an allusion to Isaiah 22:22 where the bearer of the key is the king's steward as the one who decides who will have access to the king and who will not). When the imagery is applied to Christ it implies that Christ as the mediator is the only one who grants access to God. The open door would probably signify that Christ has given the Philadelphians access to God and no one can deprive them of it. It could also mean that they are still close to God even though they may have been closed out of the Synagogues; this is probably why the claim of being Jews is implicit.

3. A similar ambivalence is evident with regard to the name Jerusalem. The historical city is rejected and symbolically called 'Sodom' and 'Egypt' (Rv 11:8) and the destruction of the city is predicted, where a great earthquake is expected to strike and a tenth of it will be gone while seven thousand people will be killed and the rest will be frightened glorifying God. This response is in contrast with the reaction evoked by the plagues of the trumpets and of the bowls (Rv 9:20-21; 16:11,21). One positive thing we encounter here is the conversion of the Jews (Collins 1984:87). This also gives hope to Jerusalem even though its tenth is destroyed, since it appears as a major symbol of salvation in the Apocalypse (Rv 3:12; 21:2).

4. Rejection was another reason for response; Christians had started to be rejected by Jews and this made them feel threatened, since for a long time they had enjoyed a Jewish cover without their own identity and Jewish religion was respected by Romans due to its stable tradition. According to Collins (1984:87), Christians were hated and despised by the Gentiles due to their exclusiveness, lack of respect to other gods apart from their own, and their avoidance of Gentile political and social life. They were also seen as immoral and as cannibals; for they used to meet early in the morning claiming to eat the body. Another early tradition says that Nero chose Christians as his scapegoats to avoid public anger about a fire that burnt Rome. This shows that there was already a widespread animosity against Christians. The incitements in Acts 19 by the silversmiths who feared for their livelihood against some Christians may be a better example of animosity.

5. Divisions among the Christians were also looming. The Nicolaitans as we have seen earlier were active in Ephesus (Rv 2:6) and Pergamum (Rv 2:15). Such are the adherents of 'Balaam' and 'Jezebel' who are named to the messages to Pergamum and Thyatira. All these three groups are said to be following the same basic teachings and practice. John responds to such teachings by condemning their eating of food offered to idols and playing the harlot (πορνεία). The problem here was most likely not just food, but rather it was a matter of faith and culture. The issue was how far should the Christians be assimilated. The word πορνεία was used in Jewish

tradition to represent idolatry, and John metaphorically relates it to Babylon in Revelation 14:8. The issue was how far the Christians should adopt the pagan customs for the sake of survival. The teachings of the false prophets encouraged the Christians not to be exclusive but in his response the author advocated even more exclusiveness. The wealth in the Church of Laodicea had also caused some laxity among the Christians for they were trusting their wealth. The Apocalypse criticises them for this self-reliance and also it challenges Rome as the source of this wealth (Rv 18) since this caused tension between rich and poor.

According to Fiorenza (1991:124), there were several experiences of trauma which Apocalypse was responding to, such as the tension between the Christians' faith and their every day experience. She says that Christians believed in the ultimate power of God and Christ, but they were traumatised daily by vulnerability, alienation, harassments, marginalisation and sufferings. Such events were undermining their hope in God's kingdom of glory and life giving power. Such tensions required Apocalypse as a response. According to Collins (1984:99), the destruction of the Temple and the Jerusalem city must have been a very traumatic event particularly to John who was a Jew and Draper (1997:264) says that the destruction of the Temple was a turning point to both Jews and the followers of Jesus movement. So in Apocalypse the language of a heavenly Temple and a new Jerusalem seems to compensate the loss of an earthly Temple and the city as a major worship center. The message to the Philadelphians emphasises that the conquerors will be made pillars in the Temple of God (Rv 3:12). This implies that the negative language concerning Jerusalem was only an attempt to accept the loss other than distancing Christians from the city; even though it may also suggest a punishment, for Christ was crucified and killed in it.

3.4 The Johannine apocalypse community

Since we have looked at the social identity of the author and the social situation of the Apocalypse sociologically, we will now look at the community which received the Apocalypse. The

formulated model in chapter two concludes that a millennialist community was responsible for the Apocalypse. To an oppressed community nothing else would have brought hope to them like the realisation that soon they would be more than victors. The community was marginalised by the attitudes of the society, so they felt threatened. The apocalypse's message to this community is clear. According to Sinclair (1992:76), the introduction and the conclusion of the Apocalypse stresses that the reader must be watchful because God will come and pass judgement on the world and the righteous shall be rewarded, while the wicked will be destroyed. According to Gager (1975:25), the millennialists find in the separate society the soil in which virtues can flower better than in the relatively open society where vices proliferate like wild weeds. The community that received the Apocalypse had set itself aside for the coming of the Kingdom on earth where Christ was to be ruler.

It is worth noting that most of the sociological discussions on the Apocalypse concentrate on the book as a whole and tend to assume that it is addressed to one community living in a particular social setting. It is good to know that the letters were addressed to seven differing sets of circumstances although they follow a stereotyped pattern. It is noteworthy that the letters vary considerably in the message and in length. John's community is clearly having problems, although not necessarily caused by the Roman authorities. According to Court (1994:105), persecution in the first century may have been localised, but certainly the community faced ostracism and social contempt. The community felt threatened and insecure and had to contend with religious as well as social stress.

Unlike the Johannine community which is inward looking, having no interest in this world and its constraints (Jn17), the Apocalypse community is outward looking with a very positive mission to the world, this is seen in the key word 'witness' which has the same meaning as 'martyrdom':

'Witness' is therefore defined as communicating the gospel message in the context of a fundamentally prophetic community. Witness is an activity undertaken in the closest

relationship to Christ, on the path from suffering to glory (1.5;11.8). God's reign is seen as being universal in scope, but working towards its fullest realization through human agencies and representative individuals. The prevailing situation in the world is such that acts of witness often entail the completion of Christian testimony by martyrdom (Court1994:106).

This kind of witness implies that the Christians of the Apocalypse were expected to remain faithful here on earth as they waited for a new earth and a new heaven, where the martyrs would reign with Christ. Such hopes make the community completely agree with the hopes of millenarianism. The Apocalypse community was living at a time of the severe oppression of Christians (Kümmel1975:467). The officials were *expected* to persecute as we read in Revelation 2:10, that the blood of the witness has already flowed, and in Revelation 2:13 and 6:9 that a fearful danger threatened the whole Christian community. It was the new community that faced this kind of wrath since now it was known as a separate entity on its own. The millenarian community of Apocalypse was a minority group that was faced with oppression and deprivation as we saw in the social situation that produced it.

The Apocalypse community was a small, well self-enclosed community with relatively fixed belief systems. In our modern times such deviant groups may be termed as revolutionist, and if they are non violent we may term them millennialists; those expecting a new order of events with God's intervention as the only means of escape from suffering and then his rule for a period of a thousand years. Such groups constitute the sharpest of challenges to secularised society, at time even more than they do to the established religion, in case of Revelation established religion was Judaism from which they are a splinter-group. Gager (1975) says:

Thus far we may conclude that early converts did not represent the established sectors of Jewish society. We are supported in this not only by theoretical considerations and by the silence of Christian sources, but by positive evidence as well. The frequent and bitter

controversies between Jesus and the Pharisees as pictured in the Gospels leave no doubt that the latter numbered Jesus and his disciples among the impure outsiders (:26).

The apocalypse was then a product and a response of a revolutionist group which may be termed as a millennialist community was faced with persecution in the worst possible ways. The climax of the issue of the apocalypse is 'the day of the Lord' when a messianic kingdom of a thousand years is established.

The main theme of the book is not what God in Christ has already done in the world but the greatest he is expected to do at the end of all things as he inaugurates the millennial reign for the good of the Apocalypse community. It is a message of faith and hope and assures the sect of the expected victory of God over the evil in the world and also their enemies, as a revelation of what must happen soon. Although the book might appear to be difficult to today's readers the Apocalypse community, who were well versed with the apocalyptic, thought it was easier for them. According to Hengel (1974), the book might need to be seen as a wider religious phenomena of the late antiquity; it was to reveal to the community what was hidden with God and give meaning and purpose to human experience.

According to Lowland (1993:20), the Apocalypse became a source of hope to a deserted world and also a message of truth of what the past, the present, and all the more what the future was holding for the elect of God. The millennialist community focused on this idea because, to them, the future was more meaningful, since the world was intolerable and they could not leave the world but only wait for God to make it anew. So the millennial reign of Christ found a new place of expression in the new religious community of the Apocalypse.

3.5 Millenarianism in the early Church

According to Wainwright (1993:21) the history of the interpretation of the Apocalypse may be

dated as early as the second century. It was a period during which the Church enjoyed a spectacular growth throughout Roman empire regardless of the persecutions; which made Apocalypse very appealing to the Christians. The Apocalypse was faced by a sharp conflict of interpretations which were all caused by the teaching about a millennium. Millenarianism was evident within Christian circles for a long time and the earliest of such was known as Chiliasism which is derived from the Greek word χίλιαν meaning a thousand. Nevertheless this was not a historical movement but a general name designated to Christians who held this belief as earlier mentioned.

The Chiliasts lived in an age of persecution and they believed the Apocalypse was written for a corresponding age. The author, writing from exile received visions from God of his son Jesus Christ (Rv1:9). He exhorted the members to resist any attempt to make them give up their faith. His explanation of the compulsory worship of the beast (Rv13:1-18) seems to be an allusion to the Roman practice of enforcing emperor worship. At a time when Christians were attempting to compromise their faith in order to avoid suffering, the Apocalypse called for endurance and obedience, and offered the promise of future happiness; which is also the main aim of any millenarian community.

When people are oppressed they find consolation in dreams of a better life and focus their anger on the institutions and the leaders as a threat to them. Nevertheless they find the Apocalypse satisfying these needs. According to Wainwright (1993:22), it provides graphic pictures of the overthrow of evil powers and the establishment of a better world. Such pictures were highly attractive to the Chiliasts and continue to be so for the millennialist today. During the early times persecutions were sporadic and sometimes short lived, as we have seen earlier in the social situation of Apocalypse, but they occurred and they were ferocious. Christians lived in fear of imprisonment, torture and death. The Apocalypse brought them hope of salvation and of ultimate security.

The Apocalypse community believed that when Christ returned to earth Christians who died would arise from the graves and inherit an earthly paradise together with believers who were alive, as we read in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-20. They then expected Christ to reign on earth for a thousand years in an era of material prosperity in company with martyrs and other loyal believers 'but the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were over. This is the first resurrection (Rv20:5). In view of the uncertainty and injustice of the present they welcomed the prospect of life in the millennium. This kind of belief was very appealing to the Chiliast when persecution was increasing. Collins (1984:46) emphasises this by saying that Apocalypse evokes a sense of awe and instills conviction in its revelation of a transcendent world and the coming judgement. The writing creates the preconditions for the righteous action.

According to Wainwright (1993:23), Papias (60- C.150), the bishop of Hierapolis in Asia Minor is the first Christian writer whom we know to have held this idea of millennium. There is also Justin Martyr (100- C.165), who was a Chiliast and whose writings have survived with remarks about the Apocalypse. Other writers in the same tradition were Irenaeus (130- C.200), Tertulian (160-C.225), Hippolytus (170-C.230), Victorinus (d.304), Methodius (d.311). All these millennialists of the first and the second centuries experienced persecution. Justin, Victorinus and probably Methodius, were believed to have been put to death because of their faith in Christ. Hippolytus went into exile and Lactancius suffered the mild punishment of losing his teaching position as a great teacher of rhetoric. While Irenaeus did not suffer persecution, his mentor Polycarp was burnt to death and Pothinus his predecessor as bishop of Lyons died as a result of brutal treatment.

In all these tribulations and persecutions the Apocalypse community reinforced and strengthened their faith. It gave them hope for a better tomorrow where their sufferings would be reversed and they would be reigning instead of being the victims of their circumstances. They all expected a millennium of bliss in contrast with the agonies and pains of persecution (Wainwright1993:24). Justin predicted that the saints would live in the new Jerusalem for a thousand years, Irenaeus

predicted the joys of the millennium in terms of Isaiah 65: men and women, he predicted will build houses, plant vineyards and enjoy the fruits of their harvest.

However Chiliasts were divided on where the new Jerusalem would be revealed (Rv 21:1-22:5) as the events start to occur. Irenaeus predicted that Jerusalem would descend from heaven after the last judgement. Tertulian and Victorinus predicted that it would be the start of millennium. Commodianus saw the new Jerusalem in different terms; it would come in the start of the millennium, but then the new earth and the new heaven would come at the close of the millennium after the judgement. Even though these earlier millennialists differed, they all agreed that millennium would be a period of unparalleled bliss on earth.

Montanism, also a prophetic movement that arose in Phrygia in the latter part of the second century, predicted that Christ would return to earth to establish his kingdom. The new Jerusalem was expected to be in Pepuza, a small town in Asia Minor (Ibid 1993:25). It is not very clear how far these movements utilised the Apocalypse, even though they believed in a material kingdom here on earth.

Millennialists in the early Church also held different ideas on how the millennium would take place since they differed in the interpretations of some passages. Hippolytus and Tertulian saw the two witnesses of Revelation 11:3-12 as Elijah and Enoch, both of whom were believed to have entered heaven without tasting death. Victorinus saw them as Elijah and Jeremiah since he believed that Jeremiah also never died; for the Bible is silent about his death. These writers also differed on who the 144,000 virgins who never committed adultery with the beast were (Rv 14:4). Tertulian and Methodinus claimed that they were symbolical faithful Christians, while to Victorinus they represented the totality of Jewish Christians in the Church. Another interpretation was that of Origen, who was not a millennialist himself, to him they represented the saved, whether Jews or Gentiles (Ibid1993:28). One thing we *must* note is that until the reign of Constanine the Chiliastic interpretation was in fashion, even though not uniformly popular and,

as we said earlier, those who opposed millennialism like Eusebius were doing it because they wanted to classify the Apocalypse as non apostolic.

The idea of Millennialism in the early church tells us that the early suffering Christians found Apocalypse very appealing. It was really a book for people faced with persecutions. The Apocalypse has several passages that portray it as a millennialist response. These can be observed in our exegetical observations below.

3.6 Exegetical observations

A walk through the Apocalypse is now necessary here in order to understand it as a millennialist response. According to Gager (1975:25) we can link the first century Christianity with the millenarian movement, and according to our model no other book fits this movement better than the Apocalypse. The exegetical observations will portray Apocalypse as a millennialist response, which has three major themes, equivalent to the behaviour of millenarian communities. The first is that of persecution, which may be any sort of sufferings whether deprivation , oppression or mild sufferings. Who ever causes these problems will be faced with the wrath of God. The second is the kind of punishment the enemies of God will be subjected to and in this section we will spell out the punishment and give verses showing who they are. The third in these exegetical observations is the rewarding of the martyrs who, as a result of their sacrifice to God in faithfulness, will rule with Christ in the millennium. We will now look at various passages in order to bring these themes out and show how they are intertwined.

1. *The seven messages (Rv1:9-3:22)*. The seven letters to the Churches are introduced with a vision of two clear persecutions with more being implied. In Revelation 1:9 we find John saying that he is a partner in tribulations and endurance; these two words are used here in general terms, and their association with the kingdom of God gives us the notion that they may equally be referring to sufferings in the near future. John is already in the Isle of Patmos on account of the

word of God and of the testimony of Jesus. The second clear persecution in this introduction is that of Antipas in Revelation 2:3 whose death is mentioned in the letter to Pergamum; these two incidences are clear examples of persecution. The language in these letters to the Churches implies that more persecutions were expected to follow and endurance is a quality everyone needed to have. Christians have to take a strong stance against persecution. The Ephesians were exhorted for their endurance since they had borne up on the account of his name (Rv 2:3). This gives the idea that some kind of suppression was taking place but they had not fainted. The letter to Smyrna also highlights persecution (Rv 2:10). Those faced with these tribulations were all expected not to fear but to be faithful unto death. A message of encouragement that suggests persecution is also explicit in Revelation 2:13,19,25; 3:8,10-11.

1.1. The seven seals (Rv 4:1-8:5). The seven seals present persecution even more clearly, and it is very important in the events of the last days. When the fifth seal was opened John saw the souls of the saints under an altar in heaven (Rv 6:9), calling for a quick revenge upon those who persecuted them. The relationship of the souls and the altar here implies a sacrifice; which the martyrs gave on the account of the word of God. The combination is very important in this passage for faithfulness would be a sacrifice to God. The cry of the martyrs for revenge is also followed by a description of the final battle against the rulers of the earth and in the sixth seal John understands the battle as a revenge for the blood of the martyrs. This will be made clearer as we move to the next series of *trumpets*.

1.2. The seven trumpets (Rv 8:2-11:9). We are still in heaven and an angel stands at the altar offering incense and the prayers of the martyrs to God; the altar is the same one mentioned in the fifth seal. After the sacrifice the angel takes fire from the altar and throws it down upon the earth, and the destruction that follows the trumpets shows that the prayers of the martyrs were answered (Rv 6:10). We are not told to whom the destruction was directed, since it was to the whole earth. The message in the fifth trumpet shows that a particular group was targeted, a group without the seal of God on their foreheads. Other passages imply that such were the followers of the beast and

it may also mean the supporters of the Roman rulers (Rv 13:4-8,12-17; 17:8). The seven letters reveal the tribulations which these Christians must suffer and endure, and that they are important to the end events in the Apocalypse. The trumpets reveal to us who the persecutors of the Christians are; and the Roman empire is implied.

2.1. The seven visions (12:1-15:4). This brings us to the second part of this Apocalypse where, unlike other visions, these are not numbered. We have the two persecuting beasts with clear traits of Rome (Rv 13:1-18). The vision opens with the appearance of three angels with a message, and it is the second angel who makes the announcement ‘fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, who has made people to be drunk with her wine of prostitution’ (Rv14:8) (As we have discovered, this name refers to Rome). The third angel now warns those who worship the beast and his image, they shall equally be made drunk with the wrath of God, and their reward will be fire that burns with brimstone before the angels and the Lamb (14:9-11). This message was a warning that assimilation into pagan customs will lead to eternal damnation. It is followed with a remark, ‘Here is the endurance of the saints, who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus’ (Rv 14:12). We find here the mention of a special group of 144,000, who are not the faithful in general, but they were numbered and this distinguishes them from the general multitude described in Revelation 7:9-11. The number has a new song known to them alone; this probably signifies they died the same death as an exclusive group. Such are called the first fruits, which would also signify sacrifice, since all first fruits belong to God (Lv 2:12). These are then crowned with salvation in Revelation 15:2-4 which leads us to the next series. Like the seals and trumpets the bowls bring another message and their effects will be felt in the whole earth.

2.2. The seven bowls (Rv 15:1-16:20). The third bowl has a message which states that a plague will be poured out as punishment on those who have shed the blood of the saints (Rv 16:5-7). In this bowl the enemy is not clearly identified. The first and the fifth bowl are directed to the beast and those who worship him. The bowls carry God’s wrath (Rv 16:19), and the fall of Babylon becomes the climax of the seven bowls. The plagues are the judgment of God to the whole earth,

because it has tolerated the beast who is the persecutor of the saints. The relationship between the world and the human behaviour is expressed; the world will be destroyed due to the evil behavior of those who live in it. To the millennialist it is already irredeemably evil and awaits destruction.

3. The persecutors (Rv 17; 18). These two chapters bring us to the third part of the Apocalypse, where the enemy is now named. They explicitly explain the judgment of Babylon, which is announced in Revelation 16:19, and the following chapter, Revelation 19:1-10, presents the heavenly joy over this kind of judgment.

The epilogue of the Apocalypse is the millennium of Revelation 20:4 where martyrs are rewarded and a new earth and heaven comes (Rv21:1). So the Apocalypse provides an archetypal millenarian response to suffering and injustice; this may be the reason why it is so appealing to the people who found themselves in post-colonial situations in later times, the East African community is one example of such.

3.7 Conclusion

Looking at the data in this chapter we may suggest that the apocalypse of John reflects the time of its background and that it borrows heavily from the apocalyptic thought of its time. The social identity of the author, and the social situation of the Apocalypse help us to reconstruct John's understanding of what was going on when he wrote and what type of community he was writing to. John is giving his community something to hang onto in the unpredictable times of crisis in which they are living in. As we have observed, Apocalypse has played an important role in encouraging those faced with crisis in very depressing situations. It has turned out to be a strong shield to face trials without fear. The whole issue of the social situation, when it was written, and the type of this writing explains that Apocalypse was a response to the needs of a particular community.

The early Christian community serves better as an example of millenarianism in the early Church and the type of death faced by the first Christian writers explains better why Apocalypse was so powerful in encouraging Christians. It is my conclusion that the apocalypse of John was written to the community that eagerly awaited the second coming of Christ who was expected to rule for a thousand years here on earth. Such a community may be termed a millennialist sect. John here used a style which was common during his time even though he formed his own type of imaginations.

Apocalyptic literature was a fertile soil for the apocalypse as we saw that there were many influences on the Jewish apocalypticists who first formed the apocalyptic mind of how to face the issues which threatened their survival as a community.

I will now move to the next chapter which will focus on the millennium in the Old Testament. This part will be of paramount importance in understanding the millennium in present times. The work in this chapter will be of great help as the background to the millennial concept in the New Testament and also to the Apocalypse.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE CONCEPT OF MILLENNIUM

4.0 Introduction

4.1 The Major task of this chapter

The major task of this chapter is to spell out the concept of millennium as it has been interpreted by various groups, explain why it has been such a bone of contention in the last two centuries and then come up with one view which agrees with our sociological model. The view will be used in this study as a means of rethinking millennium in our modern times within the context of the East African peoples. The chapter, in conjunction with the previous chapters, will give more light on the community that received the Apocalypse.

In the previous chapter we looked at the Apocalypse and millenarianism, we also highlighted our exegetical observations arguing that Apocalypse was a response to the situations which were facing the millenarian community. The social setting of the Apocalypse has also been examined. We will now in this chapter look at the Old Testament concept and also the Jewish concept before we explore it in the New Testament. This will be an investigation into the background and also involve an attempt to create a proper understanding of the idea of millennium.

This chapter will also demonstrate that the millennialist communities held the opinion that a good future would be inaugurated and the millenarian views of inheriting the secrets of that future would be realised. Millennium as a term for these movements usually meant a good life in future. It is used in Revelation 20:1-10 to mean the period of the millennial reign of Christ here on earth but the writer does not tell whether Christ will rule literally or spiritually. This has left a loophole

for everybody to make his own interpretations. Millennialists tend to divide into three camps: those who believe that the millennium will follow the second coming of Christ, those who believe that the millennium will precede the second coming of Christ, and a third theological group that asserts that Christ will return with the millennium being seen in spiritual terms.

4.2 Millennium

This topic requires special attention because it has been a bone of contention in some Christian circles over the last two centuries. The debate has been centred on the proper interpretation of Revelation 20:1-10. According to Morris (1969:23), the whole idea of the millennial rule was congenial to Jewish thought. The Jews held the idea that there would be a messianic kingdom of a limited duration of time, and only after such a time would the believers get a chance to be in the final kingdom. Such an idea developed later during the post exilic period. Before then all Jews expected the kingdom to be an everlasting one.

The theological point of the millennium was solely to demonstrate the victory of the true witnesses of the word of God, and particularly those killed because of their faith. According to Kiddle (1940:393) the picture of the millennium is remarkable because of what it omits and what it includes. Its historical antecedents are to be found in the earlier prophetic and apocalyptic writings which looked beyond the day of the wrath to a true Holy Land, purged of all evil, rid of all oppressors and inhabited by the faithful people of God whose afflictions would be recompensed a hundred fold. This is one of the strains to be observed later in the Old Testament, while the other will be traced in apocalyptic thought. Just before we go into the Biblical concept of millennium we have to look at millennialism in historical perspective and at modern ways in which millennium has been interpreted.

Many scholars have sought the origins of millennialism in ancient Jewish and Christian apocalypticism. There are several suggestions which enables us to view millennialism with

historical perspective. According to Duling (1996:192), millennialism has been traced as early as the ninth to sixth century BCE, when the major prophets protested economic, political, and social oppression by their own kings and hoped for a coming 'Messiah' to bring in a new social order.

Another suggestion is that it originated from the late sixth to the late fourth century BCE, the period of the later Jewish prophetic writings, and the beginning of the exilic period. During this time the Jews were dominated by the Persians, whose religion, Zoroastrianism, contained characteristically apocalyptic themes.

A third suggestion about the origin of millennialism is that it originated from the late fourth century BCE to the fourth century CE when, as a result of the conquest by the Greeks and the Romans, Jews and other conquered peoples experienced a nostalgia for the past golden era of national independence, alienation about the present, and hope for future (Duling 1996:193). This was the period of the earliest written apocalypse, namely Daniel 7-12 (165 BCE). In this historical perspective we can say that Judaism spawned Christianity. Both religions produced documents riddled with apocalyptic thought, as well as some apocalypses. The millennium is therefore a historical phenomenon which has been subjected to various approaches (Ibid 1996:193).

4.2.1 Modern approaches to the millennium

During the past few months, our newspapers' headlines have been filled with the word millennium. It has caused many Christians to turn their attention to what has been said about the future more than at any other time before. As I have said earlier, in our own country people have been reported to have sold all their belongings and taken the proceeds to the Church when told to prepare for the end time. It is no longer a secret that a seclusive club of religious leaders has turned to this interpretation of the scriptures to justify their prophecies about the end time. The proliferation of self-styled preachers and the number of denominations that have come up of late is open proof of this fact.

It is therefore worth noting that their prediction about the end has had dangerously consequences and also has lead many astray. This is an issue we cannot ignore or just make assumptions about, particularly following the recent incident in Uganda, where the self-destruction and murder of over a thousand people of the Church for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of the Lord took place. The members of this sect, like any other millenarian movement, may have started with good spiritual intentions as a response to particular situations. An expectation that God would appear and take them to heaven was the central point of their teaching with the prediction that the world was coming to an end in the year 2000.

It is worth noting that the idea of God coming to inaugurate his rule on earth or us going to heaven is purely Christian and is not wrong in itself. The former is mostly for the millennialists while the latter is preferred by the introversionists. The problem comes when people overdo things; the community withdraws from the world into an exclusive community of its own and cultivates inner resources and the possession of the Holy Spirit. It then claims inner illumination and ethical insight for an enlightened elect. Activity in the world is allowed only for the sake of conscience (Draper 1992:17). The people in Uganda had cut all ties with their families and friends, sold all their property and pooled the proceeds and given them to their preachers. One wonders whether the preachers were not part of the heavenly trip since, unfortunately, when Mary did not turn up they all killed themselves to go and join her for the millennium (Daily Nation 20.03.2000 front page).

The above episode is a clear indication that the issue of the millennium has been taken too far by some members of our communities in Eastern Africa. According to Sinclair (1992:19), all earlier predictions have always failed. Whiston predicted that the millennium would begin in 1715. When this never materialised, he settled for 1734; after this prediction also failed, he wisely chose 1866 which was long after his death. Hal Lindsey predicted that the events of the end time would occur within a biblical generation of 1948, the year the present Jewish state was re-founded. He had argued that a generation was about 40-60years. When this prediction failed, he wisely argued that

a generation may also be of 60-80 years this too failed. Beyond the embarrassment, disillusionment and dishonesty that millennium predictions have inspired is the moral question, 'Are all these predictions true to the spirit of Biblical teachings?' Our concept of millennium needs reinterpretation.

In the apocalypse, the author promises a good future in the new world to come. The community which produced the Apocalypse seems to have been tempted by the idea of a new earth and a new heaven to come. Throughout the Apocalypse the 'world' is given a negative connotation: it is the place of evil and is under the control of the evil one, it rejects and crucifies Jesus and is now doing the same to his followers, but he tells them 'be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life' (Rv 2:10). Such a world only awaits a total destruction through a spiritual intervention. The expectations of this community and the reality of events created a contradiction.

All of us normally live with contradictions. As Christians, we assent to the importance of faith and commitment, and we believe that we should live out that faith. The Church calls on us to tithe, to attend services, to evangelise, to live out the precepts of the Bible. In other words our religious commitment calls us to live consistent lives. But, on the other hand, we need to provide for our personal needs, pay the school fees of our children, give time to our dear wives (Draper 2000:29). We also need to keep on talking to our brothers and sisters who still believe in traditional practices, and always laugh at our ideas about God. We live with a whole range of criss-crossing relationships and demands on us.

Sometimes millennialists just long to remove all these discordant noises and retreat into a world of complete harmony. To them only God can bring about such a world, where no-one contradicts their faith or challenges their behaviour. Jesus says no to this expectation as we can see in Revelation 2:10; in the midst of trying circumstances Christians are expected to hold fast to their faith and persevere to the end. Faithfulness and endurance are highly recommended in the whole of the Apocalypse. The reason I believe is that these contradictions are precisely what protect us

from exploitation and self-destructive religious tendencies. It is the tension between our faith (what ought to be) and our ordinary worldly relationships (the way things actually are) which gives us the space to make moral decisions (Ibid 2000:29). Moral decision is autonomous, self-initiated action; moral decision is not unthinking obedience to what others tells us to believe or do. The Apocalypse usually provides the means of acknowledging and dealing with the feelings of threat to the millenarian community.

When two equally strong force fields interact, they neutralise each other and set us free to decide for our selves what is right. According to Merton (1976:6), we need a 'sociological ambivalence' which creates dissonant norms and values that protect social order and provide a constraint against extreme behaviour in groups. The more we separate ourselves off from 'the world', by cutting ourselves off from family ties and reading the Apocalypse alone, the more our own autonomy diminishes and the more liable we are to extreme and anti-social behaviour. In such a situation following leaders who tell us what is right, with unquestioning obedience, since they tell us that 'the Bible says so' or 'the Holy Spirit says so', withdraws us from taking responsibility for what we do. We can do things we would ordinarily not do, because the possibility of moral choice has been taken away. Rethinking millennium therefore is very important to us, and to do so effectively we need to observe some of the well known interpretations that have been advocated.

4.2.2 Various interpretations

The millennium has a history of interpretations, since the literalism of early Christianity three positions have been taken in understanding the millennium. Firstly there are those who use the allegorical or spiritual interpretation of the thousand year period. This was the earliest method which was adapted by the earliest influential exegetes, probably from the fourth century to the eighteenth century. In the last century the majority view was to suggest that the author was not totally concerned with creating a fully consistent eschatological scheme, since there were apparent inconsistencies which were attributed to the disparate traditional eschatology materials gathered

by the author from the social setting of his book, so the author was not a timetable drawer about the end time events. Another recent move has been that of scholars who disregard chronological concerns in exchange for discerning the theological movement of the text. Such an approach emphasises that the author uses the Jewish thought of the future kingdom to make his readers understand that he was only delivering a theological message not about time. These views have of late been classified into three categories, as follows:

1. Pre-millennialist. This view asserts that Revelation 20:1-10 teaches that Christ's second coming will usher in a literal thousand year reign on earth whereby martyrs will be rewarded here where they suffered for their faith. These people are expected to be physically resurrected at that time. They believe that Christ will visibly inaugurate the period of a thousand years. It views millennium as beginning with the coming of Christ and ending before the last judgment of Revelation 20:11-15 (Wainwright 1993:81). It also takes the new creation of Revelation as coming after the last battle, so that the millennial reign of Christ is seen as taking place in the context of the present world, rather than in the context of the new creation described in Revelation 21:1-22:5. It gives the notion that those who rejected Christ during the period of the rule of the beast, will be spared at the parousia. Such a view sees these people as the subjects of the millennial reign who are sharing the earth with Christ and the saints. These people will continue with their normal lives probably marrying and giving in marriage to multiply during the millennial period. According to this view the attack of Gog and Magog, which Apocalypse says will happen at the end of the millennium (Rv 20:7-10), is the last rebellion of those who are subjects of the millennial reign (non-resurrected). According to their understanding the return of Christ takes place in relation to the millennial reign of Christ (1Th 4:17). They see the second coming as before the millennial Kingdom.

This view is not complicated, and it has of late become very popular among charismatic groups and pentecostals, who make a lot of prophecies concerning the millennial end. Many newly appearing sects prefer this view, for they anticipate that the millennium will take place literally,

that Christ will come with his armies (Rv 19:11-21) and destroy the beast. Satan will be bound and locked in the bottomless pit, so that he cannot deceive the nations any longer (Rv 20:1-3). Christ and the saints reign for a thousand years (Rv20:4-6). Satan will then be set loose and he will deceive the nations to rebel against the millennial rule and be destroyed with his followers (Rv 20:7-10). The dead will be raised and brought to the last judgment (Rv 20:11-15). The transformation of the whole creation will then take place, the new Jerusalem will be inaugurated on earth and a complete union of God and the saints will be pronounced (Rv 21:1-8). This view looks simple and clear, where the chain of events are chronologically arranged, but such a literal understanding of the text of Apocalypse fails to consider the wealth of symbolism of the book and also that the author was not actually concerned with a chronological order of events but with encouraging these people. Another group is that of the post millennial view. This was definitely the Apocalypse community's view.

2. Post millennialists. The post millennial view asserts that Revelation 19:11-20:3 should not be taken as signalling the parousia of Christ in the real sense of the word. According to Wainwright (1993:77), the word postmillennialist could strictly imply a millennial view but it has normally been used to describe theories of those who expect it in future. It asserts that Revelation 20:1-10 teaches that a literal thousand year period of unparalleled triumph for the Gospel and implementation of the kingdom principles will precede the second coming of Christ. There is a literal thousand year reign of Christ before he is fully come. The millennial reign of Christ takes place after the career of the beast. The new Jerusalem will come after the reign of Christ (Rv 21:2), Revelation 20:4-6 says nothing concerning the place of the saints' reign. According to this view, Christ and the saints rule from heaven for a thousand years. This seems to solve the problem of the resurrected and the non-resurrected people sharing the earth. It makes a bit of sense in the fact that the marriage pronouncement takes place in Revelation 19:7-9 and the new Jerusalem comes down after the millennium in Revelation 21:2.

This however, highlights another problem, since resurrection could suggest an earthly setting. The

Apocalypse has already shown such a meaning in the promise that those redeemed by the Lamb would reign on earth (Rv 5:10). This idea of earthly reign is not limited by the author's shift of perspective from earth (Rv 20:1-3) to heaven (Rv 20:4-6). If we adopt Daniel 7 as the immediate background of the passage, Daniel's perspective also encompasses both heaven and earth. To Daniel the son of man comes on the clouds to the ancient of days (Dn 7:13) and the beast is just destroyed while the saints inherit the kingdom of the earth (Dn 7:17-18). Even without comparison of these two passages, the reign of the saints in Revelation 20:4-6 still remains on earth and not in heaven (Mealy 1992:17). The Apocalypse says that all non Christians will be judged (Rv 19:11-21) and the inhabitants of the earth will be ousted completely (Rv 13:8; 14:9-11). If so then the martyrs will reign on the earth that was promised to them (Rv 5:10). There is of course no need to picture the new Jerusalem somewhere in the air for a thousand years, after the appearance of Christ with his armies in Revelation 19:15-21. We have to interpret the millennium within the context of Apocalypse, which through out promises resurrection to life and a reward of reigning with Christ to all those who persevere to the end. Others in this camp believe that we are living in that period and the Gospel must be quickly preached after which Christ returns (Wainwright 1993:13). However none of these two views can claim support from Revelation 20, since it does not mention Christ's return. When we take this context, the post millennial view loses its grounds.

3. *A- millennial*. This view seems to have more support among the New Testament scholars than the other views. It asserts that a thousand year period should be taken symbolically for the current era, which is seen to last from the first advent of Christ to the second advent. They do not believe that one thousand years refers to a literal time frame on earth. It is a symbol just like other symbols in the book of the Apocalypse for the total period of time between the first coming and the second coming of the Son of Man (Mealey1992:18). This view of interpretation was first known as the Augustinian view, since it was first championed by Augustine of Hippo.

Without going into all the details of the debate , a case for this last view may be briefly set out as

follows: It accords better with the rest of the New Testament, which nowhere mentions a literal thousand year reign of Christ either before or after his second coming. It also accords better with the rest of the Apocalypse, which uses figures as symbols and which repeatedly uses highly symbolic visions to convey certain truths about the whole Gospel era. (In view of the author's 'spiral' method, it makes no difference that Revelation 20:1-10 follows a description of the second coming of Christ in Revelation 19:11-16 and it may still precede it chronologically). The binding of Satan in Revelation 20:1-3 could refer to the gospel era in view of verses like Mark.3:27 and Luke10:18; and the coming to life of the believers in Revelation 20:4. The view will be taken here as the most preferred for interpreting the millennial reign of Christ in Revelation 20:1-10. The difficulty we expect with this view is that it must overlook the current evils in the world, which the author and his millennialist community wanted to deal with. It also takes the millennium to represent the periods of reprieve from persecution and not the entire Church age. After such an analysis of the various views we have to look at the background of the millennium to the New Testament.

The idea of millennium flourished in the Old Testament, particularly before the exile and afterwards as we saw in the historical perspective, when things were not as the Jews expected them as they returned to Jerusalem during the reign of king Cyrus. The literature seems to have surfaced in surplus during the Inter- Testamental period when prophecy had also declined, even though they only developed what was already known to them from the Old Testament perspective.

4.3 The concept of millennium in the Old Testament

The foremost observation that I can make about the millennium in Revelation 20 is that it alludes specifically to identical phrases in the Old Testament or at most echoes the general concept of 'latter days'. According to Beale (1998:60), the Apocalypse contains more Old Testament references than any other New Testament book. He argues that Old Testament plays such a major role that we cannot understand Apocalypse unless we start from this text. According to Draper

(1998:41), the method of Apocalypse is indeed ‘anthological’ rather than allegorical or literalistic, although it uses a definite method of Old Testament interpretation. However the Old Testament does not employ the more technical terminology of millennium when discussing the end time. For example Isaiah’s prophecy of the new creation is completely millennial, but he does not use the millennial formulae to introduce it (Is 65:17; 66:22). Joel’s prophecy of Holy Spirit in Joel 2:28 is also introduced with simple words ‘after this’. It is Paul who employs the formulae of latter days in Acts 2:7. It is important to look at the Old Testament understanding of any topic before we study it in the New Testament. The Old Testament understanding of millennium therefore needs to be understood before we investigate the concept in the New Testament where it may designate the ‘latter days’. The idea was prophetic and referred to future times which were always thought to be better than the present situations of oppression and deprivation as we saw in the previous chapter.

In the discussion that follows, the term millennium will be used in its loose, popularised meaning rather than as the technical eschatological one thousand-year phenomenon mentioned in Revelation 20:4. It nevertheless echoes the general Old Testament usage of the ‘last days’ or the ‘latter days’. The Old Testament expression ‘last days’ must therefore be understood before the New Testament use of millennium as a synonym can begin to be explained. In the Old Testament this wording is prophetic and refers to future time. Fiorenza (1985:6) argues that early Christian apocalyptic stands in continuity with Jewish apocalyptic, even though it represents a ‘new angle of refraction’, the redemption in the Apocalypse is therefore best understood in terms of Jewish theology such as the exodus and liberation from slavery rather than as the liberation of individual souls.

We will make no attempt here to tie these visions of future time in the Old Testament: of an ideal world to specific eschatological interpretation. The texts are taken in this study to be symbolic rather than literal and even the prophets may have never expected the ‘last days’ literally. It is note worthy however, that some of these prophecies of a future golden age focus on the restoration

of the Jews to Palestine after exile, others on the coming of the Messiah, and still others on the end times in a conclusive sense. Regardless of what the referent is, the image patterns and motifs are the same. The term millennium is therefore used in this context.

The millennial visions in the Old Testament are set in a time framework where the prophets portray a clear picture of the golden age in the near future. The Old Testament prophets use the future tense in their prophecies, 'it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord' ... are the opening words of prophet Isaiah, as he begins his prophetic ministry and describing his first vision of the golden age that was awaited by all Jews (Is 2:2). 'In that day' are also common prophetic words in millennial predictions and they are always in the future tense. Before such a wonderful time the Jews had to undergo some sufferings equivalent to what the millenarian community of the Apocalypse was facing. There would be much suffering for the people of God, consisting of their own Judgement leading to exile (Jr 23:20; cf.30:24). They would face severe persecution or oppression (Ezek.38:14-17; cf. Dan.10:14-16, 11:27-12:10), and such sufferings would be accompanied by false teachings, deception and apostasy.

In the latter days all these tribulations would come to an end, people would seek the Lord (Hos 3:4-5) and he would hear them. The millennial promises were characterised by the elimination of threats and tensions of everyday life. To the millenarian movement the millennium will always be a transformative experience, not only in its eradication of political and social oppression but also in the prospect of permanent relief from physical ailments, personal problems and fears in social relationships (Wilson 1973:350). God will hear them and bring his salvation to the house of David (Ezek 38:14-19; cf. Dn 12:1-13), and all those who oppress them will be put into judgement. Such a deliverance will take place because the millennial reign of the expected Messiah has come; where the Messiah will conquer all the Gentile enemies (Gn 49:1,8-12; Is 2:2-4; Mc 4:1-4). The resurrection of the saints will take place (Dn 12:12).(Revelation 20:4-6 may have borrowed the idea of resurrection from this text of Daniel).

The Israelites believed that the millennium would take place here on earth, hence the issue of the golden age was always associated with the promised land and the land itself was the motif (Fiorenza 1985:136). The Prophet Amos was well known for the propagation of this idea of land. The Jews would occupy the land in a permanent state, for God would restore all the fortunes of the earth as it was when He created it (Amos 9:15; cf. Is 60:21; Jr 33:11; Ezek.28:25).

The land will be characterised with pastoralism, and its natural landscape will be restored in the millennium. 'This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden (Ezek.36:35); the waste lands will be no more and they will blossom in abundance (Is 35:2). The millennium will take place in a new earth, so the plants will be green, while the trees will produce the fruits (Jl 2:22). During this time water will be a sign of joy, it will break forth and streams will flow in the desert, people will be active, they will farm their plots and enjoy their labour. Amos says that they will plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruits (Amos 9:14).

The community of the millennium will be radiant about the goodness of Lord, about the grain, the wine, the oil and their life shall be like the watered gardens (Jr 31:12). The millennial reign will be experienced even by the Gentile enemies (Jr 48:47; 49:39; cf. Is 19:19- 25). Amos gives us the most popular idea of how the millennium will be celebrated, 'Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when the Ploughman shall overtake the reaper and the threader of grapes him who sows the seeds; the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it'. During the millennium the prosperity of the land will be the order of the day. This will be a time of great spiritual blessing, and God's presence is going to touch people as never before (Amos 9:13). The Old Testament concept of millennium was that it would be full of peace.

Apart from the land being prosperous there will be a new city to complement the land. Ezekiel says that the city will be restored in the new order of civilisation, while for Isaiah the city will be fortified when the gardens shall be planted and the people shall inhabit the suburbs as they eat

their fruits (Ezek 36:35; Is 65:21). We learn from that the city of Jerusalem is also prominent in the millennium, even though it is not named here, as is the land in the countryside. The millennium city is nothing but peace on earth as Zechariah and Jeremiah proclaim. Old men and women shall be seen relaxing in the streets of the city and the boys and girls will play games on the streets, it will be a time of great harmony and peace (Jr 30:18-19; Zech.8:4-5). This will all be crowned by the beauty of a river flowing through the city. The river will be symbolic of blessings in the millennium vision, for it is more than the physical satisfaction of thirst. Water is life (Ezek.47; Is 33:21), and there will be no more thirst either in the city or in the countryside.

The people of the Lord will inhabit the land and the city. It will be a kingdom of joy and peace with street lights all over. The occupants will be the sons of God. It was the sore hope of the millenarian community to be the only beneficiaries of this kind of future life. A good example of the millennial promise is that pronounced by Ezekiel 28:25; when the Lord gathers the house of Israel from all the corners of the world where they are scattered to dwell in their own land which he gave to his servant Jacob. In the Old Testament picture it was for Jews while the Gentiles would serve them. Joshua gave them the work of collecting fire wood and water (Josh.9). In the New Testament millennium is for both Jews and Gentiles; those who would remain faithful unto death. To both groups God was expected to inaugurate the kingdom through a divine intervention at his own time. The millenarian community obviously thought of a state where they would just move to the new kingdom with Christ as the king and take their positions, and this made the apocalyptic thinking a source of hope to the suffering minority both in Judaism and Christianity.

One good observation in the Old Testament idea of millennium is that it will be a beehive of activities and it is difficult to imagine how lazy people who refuse to work will enjoy the new kingdom. The millennium is filled with visible industry in every direction. It will be a period of agrarian harmony where people will be planting and harvesting their crops and of course storing them. Food will be in abundance (Is 65:21-22). Everybody will be working hard and the weather will favour them. So millennium does not mean selling what one has and waiting for it, as some

millennialists have reported to have done. People are expected to work and receive the fruits of their labour (Is 65:8-9; Jr 31:5). This concept should be the best in any future expectation, since people will participate in making the future world a better dwelling place for mankind. It also means that the prophets probably never expected a literal future event; they may have only anticipated a restoration of the Jewish state after exile.

The Old Testament concept does not expect a new Jerusalem from heaven as the Apocalypse community does (Rv 21:1). Architects will be working around the clock, for people will be busy rebuilding the desolate houses and cities. In fact the millennium will experience a fast growth, for people will be acquiring new plots and they will be putting up new buildings. According to Isaiah, people will be putting up new houses and inhabiting them. The roads will be rebuilt, they will be good, and wide highways will come up like never before (Is 40:3; 51:14; 62:10). When these beautiful roads are complete, the millennium will be characterised by the influx of foreign traffic into the new city of God, the abundance of the sea will be turned to her, the wealth of the nations that once oppressed the people of God will be poured into the city and the creations of all kinds whether animals or human will come in (Is 60:1-14).

The joy of the millennium will be self explanatory. It will be a time of great spiritual blessing, universal knowledge, harmony, peace, holiness, healing, a time of great deliverance, great prosperity, and great love. The millenarian communities usually put all their expectations into one basket; this world just needs to be transformed and nothing else. According to Fiorenza (1985:135), the Apocalypse has the same vision, even though it does not even once quote the Old Testament, but the author uses it as he uses Jewish apocalyptic. He never interprets the Old Testament but uses its words and symbols as a language to express his own prophetic vision.

The millennium will be a visible event and people will work to make it realised and they will be rewarded, there will be satisfaction, 'my people shall be satisfied with my kindness and goodness' (Jr 31:14). They will eat and be content and all will burst into worship and praise the name of their

God. Wonderful voices of satisfaction will be heard all over saying, 'come to the living waters, get wine and milk without money and eat what is good' (Is 55:1-2). The most common word of the millennial predictions is *joy*. It runs through out the millennial promises of God: people will see and be radiant their hearts shall thrill and rejoice (Is 60:5). Shouts will be heard all over again, 'I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall exult in my God' (Is 61:10). All these people will be crowned with the prophetic voice of God, 'Be glad and rejoice for ever in that I create, for behold I create Jerusalem a rejoicing and her people a joy' (Is 65:18). During this time of satisfied reign of God not only people will rejoice but also the land will rejoice and blossom. Nobody else would rule in such a wonderful time except God. This will be an earthly kingdom with God, who will reign in righteousness as king (Is 32:1). The eschatological Messiah will be established on the throne of David to be king of the eternal kingdom. (Is 9:6-7; 11:1-5).

In conclusion: we can see that the Jews were also in the same state of affairs as the Apocalypse community. The order of events within the Jewish society were already disturbed; there is a crisis, the Jews may have experienced a cultural shock as a deeply felt frustration which made them a helplessness mass. This expected era will be dominated with worship, people shall be righteously praising God, and the millennium will be utopia. As millenarians the Jews expected imminent, total, ultimate, immediate, and collective salvation.

To Jews the millennium was chiefly a belief in the imminent advent of the Messianic reign. Unlike the East African concept of time where the world was divided into past and now, the world of the Jews was divided into the past and future, the future was referred to as the world to come. The Jews nevertheless did not expect or anticipate a swift and cataclysmic end of all things, as we have seen in this section. They believed that they would be involved in the reconstruction of the new earth and a new city. This gives us the idea that Old Testament prophecy was not merely literal but also spiritual. Millennial expectations may have occupied both ideas within the Jewish community.

For a long time some groups within Christianity have been convinced not only that Christ would soon return in power and majesty, but also that when he returned the millennium would be established as a Messianic kingdom on earth. The Apocalypse community which we have already delineated to be millenarian movement expected a cataclysmic end, since this world was irredeemably evil and nothing short of destroying it would have any meaning to this community. Later the Old Testament concept developed into an expected period within the Jewish society. Outside the Old Testament the idea of millennium therefore grew within the Jewish apocalyptic thought to mean a particular period of time. We will now look at this concept as it developed during the Inter-Testamental period.

4.4 Millennium in Jewish apocalyptic thought

The Apocalypse can also be called Jewish literature, but because it was written to Churches outside Palestine such a name may not be appropriate. According to Beale (1998:389), there were numerous traditions about the nature and the length of the Messianic reign in Judaism. Some Jews speculated that there would be no messianic reign at all, while others proposed that there would be periods of an intermediate reign ranging from 40 years to 365,000 years. It was only two rabbis who calculated the period to be 1000 years, Eliezer and Hyrcanus (c.90CE), who are seen to represent the earliest attested view of a thousand year reign-a conception which the author of Apocalypse may have gained from earlier rabbinic traditions. According to Barclay (1976:188), the Apocalypse draws a lot on traditional Jewish thought, particularly Revelation 20. The Jewish apocalypses of this period are diverse both in themes and in literary forms.

The Apocalypse of Baruch foresees the defeat of the forces of evil, and there after the rule of the messiah standing forever until the world of this corruption was at an end (2 Bar.40:3). 1 Enoch 93:3-10 sees history as a series of weeks; there are seven weeks of past history and the eighth is the week of the righteous, when a sword is given to the righteous and sinners are delivered into their hands and the house of God is built. On the ninth week the evil are written down for the

purpose of destruction and the righteous will flourish; in the tenth week judgement will come in and only then comes the eternal time of goodness and of God.

In the Apocryphal 2 Esdras we read ‘ the Messiah, who is the son of God will be revealed, together with those who are with him and shall rejoice with the survivors for four hundred years and then my son shall die and all that there is in human breath and the world will be turned into the primaeval silence and the world will be without for seven days as it was in the beginning and then the new age comes’ (2 Esd 7:28-29). According to Barclay (1976:188) this is a very special passage to us, for it not only mentions a period of Messianic rule but also of his death. Such may have been a good source for the idea of the millennial reign, although it is not certain if we are looking at a Christian editing of 2 Esdras. The millenarian movements differ in the sense that they do not expect their Messiah to die after the millennial reign, but to continue the rule after the final defeat of the enemy.

The Jewish idea of the four hundred years probably was arrived at by aligning two Old Testament passages: Genesis 15:13, where God tells Abraham that the period of affliction for Israel will last for four hundred years, and Psalm 90:15, where a prayer is made that God may make us glad for as many days as He has afflicted us and as many days as we have seen evil (Ibid1976:189). The Jews believed in compensation; eye for an eye, so the period of evil was thought equal to the period of affliction. It was also commonly thought that the age of the present world was equal to its creation period and Peter probably had this in mind when he said a day is equal to a thousand years and visa versa (2Pt 3:8). The six days of creation were seen to be a thousand years, so that the seventh day would be of a thousand years of bliss and the Messiah would reign. So out of Jewish literature we have a clear background of the idea of millennium.

Apocalypse nevertheless; has its own identity even after using the Old Testament and the Jewish apocalyptic theological ideas such as, images, symbols, and literary forms. According to Bauckham (1993:38) the relationship of the Apocalypse and other Jewish apocalyptic literature

is not one of literary dependence but rather a reliance on a tradition which also appears in other Jewish writings. This scholar argues that the Apocalypse stands distinct because of its particularity as a pastoral letter to the Churches in Asia Minor towards the end of the first century. As we have seen in chapter three, Apocalypse was written as a response to the contradictions of life in Asia Minor. The promise of the millennial reign was an offer of reprieve from persecution, oppression and other sorts of deprivation.

The Apocalypse cannot claim to be wholly independent since it repeatedly uses precisely the same notion of end time as we have seen in the Old Testament concept. Many of the predictions of the Old Testament are already seen as fulfilled by Christ's first coming. What the Old Testament, therefore saw as future, may be viewed mostly as present in the New Testament. The Apocalypse has nevertheless quite a teaching about future events, which not only encouraged the community that received it but also kept the Old Testament's vision of future growing.

The apocalyptic literature as we saw in chapter three is a literature for the deprived and the oppressed who are often attracted to millenarian communities seeing the future as their only solution to their present afflictions. We have to tread rather cautiously here, since our view of these matters depends to a large extent on our understanding of passages which are often highly symbolic in the New Testament, and whose meanings have often been disputed. With this caution, we now look at the concept of millennium in the New Testament.

4.5 Concept of millennium in the New Testament

When the sociological model outlined in chapter two is employed to interpret available data on the community that received Apocalypse, the following general pattern emerges which was very therapeutic to the millennial community of the Apocalypse. The time between the present and the second coming of Christ would be marked by tribulations which they were already facing as a community. This period is symbolically described in a series of visions stretching from chapter 6 to chapter 16, as we saw in the exegetical observations of chapter three. Such are mainly brought

out in the vision of the seals (Ch. 6-7) and the record of the activities of Satan and his allies in chapters 12-15 (Fiorenza 1991:80). The people of God will suffer at the hands of the beast, which uses political power, economic oppression and false religion. Such a ruler will show violence to oppose the people of God and even tempt them to renounce their faith, but the community must remain faithful unto death.

The time will be a recurrence of God's judgement on the unbelieving world. The community will not suffer eternally since soon the millennial reign will begin. This is mainly brought out in the visions of the trumpets and the bowls of wrath. The trumpets serve to warn unbelievers of worse to come if they refuse to repent, while the bowls describe a more final and complete judgement on those who harden their hearts against God (Bauckham 1993:18). The phenomena, it appears, will continue right up to the time of the climax of history, the return of Jesus Christ, though the activities of Satan will be particularly intense just before the end (Rv 11:1-17; 16:12-16; 20:7-10). During this whole period, God's people will be sealed (Rv 7:3-4), protected because they surely belong to him, not in the sense that they will be exempted from the sufferings of this time, but in the sense that the sufferings of this time will not be able to cause them ultimate harm. Hence they have to remain faithful unto death (Rv 3:10).

The second coming of Christ is referred to in Revelation 1:7; 3:11; 16:5; 22:7,12 and 20 and described further in 14:14-20 and 19:11-16 (Fiorenza 1991:90). While these latter passages are highly symbolic and the event itself unimaginable and indescribable in all its detail from our present perspective, at least we can say that, according to the author of Apocalypse, it will be a sudden, public and visible event, which will bring to a close the present and irredeemable world order; the contemporary order of the author, which he saw as his social situation, and reveal Christ for who he is even to those who rejected him during their lives on earth (Rv 1:7), ushering in the time of final judgement:

For Christian believers, to see Christ in this way generates a tremendous confidence and

trust in God's salvation, whatever the future may hold (Court 1994:33).

The writer is not so much concerned with the physical and geographical details of the event as he is with the conviction that at the end the truth about Christ *will* be vindicated, that the oppressed *will* triumph over the oppressor. Justice *will* be done to all who have lived, the righteous *will* inherit the kingdom and rule with God, while the sinners *will* be put into the fire burning with brimstone, and the entire universe *will* come under the direct rule of God. The millennial community expected nothing else apart from this millennial reign.

One particular problem is posed by the language used that states that Jesus is ἔρχομαι ταχύ (Rv 3:11;22:7). This needs to be understood in the light of the fact that for one, it is characteristic of biblical prophecy as a whole for the future to be seen as a unity with no exact chronological order of events leading up to the End. According to Malina (1995:28), an interpreter is required to delve into the stories in Israel's tradition concerning events occurring in an alternative dimension of reality. The Apocalypse characteristically tells of past history in the guise of prophecy. Because God is pictured in the New Testament as having already sent his son to set in motion the processes which would eventually lead to final salvation, it was naturally believed that the completion of that processes could not long be delayed since with the coming of Christ the final end had already begun; the end was therefore imminent. According to Bauckham (1993:107), the theological point of the millennium was solely to demonstrate the triumph of the martyrs, as a matter of comfort.

One thing we have to learn is that with God a long time from our perspective may in fact be short from his or vice versa (2Pt 3:8). The tribulations faced by Christians on earth at the moment are not enough to mean that God is totally absent. They rather mean that he is more present than ever before. If God had not been on our side the problems of this world would have finished us. The faithful are already in Christ Jesus who is the King of their lives. The presence of Christ signifies the presence of Millennium.

4.5.1 The millennium already as a Christ event

One of the most remarkable aspects of the Christology of the Apocalypse- as indeed of the Christology of the New Testament as a whole- is that terms customarily used for God are used also for Christ. Thus, for example, we find Christ being called Alpha and Omega (Rv 1:8; 21:6) and 'Lord of lords'(Wainwright 1993:154). According to Brunner (1954:68), Christ is the only agent of God who establishes God's rule on earth. He is the one who turns the kingdom of the world into the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ (Rv11:15). Christ is completely identified with God, so that the future expectation of salvation and judgement is none other than Christ's (Rv 22:12,20):

Because it is God who is working out his purpose in the events associated with calvary and because there is but one God, the salvation there wrought out is effective for all mankind. Thus Christ is spoken of not in terms of any restricted group but of all mankind (Morris 1967:159).

This Christ has already come, conquered the satanic forces and is now enthroned in heaven (3:21). We can say that the presence of Christ here on earth signifies that the millennium is presently occurring and what we are waiting for is the complete inauguration of the heavenly kingdom. Where Christ reigns in the heart, a change takes place, not only in the hidden depths but also in outward conduct, this is the millennial reign of Christ; which should be seen spiritually (Brunner 1954:68).

Christ is the anointed one of God and is so called seven times in the Apocalypse. The work of Christ during his earthly ministry was to be a 'faithful witness', Revelation 1:5. In his death he became the sacrificial lamb of God who paid for our sins on the cross. In a sense he 'bought' us (Rv 5:9; 14:3) for God by the shedding of his blood, and hence freed us from the kingdom of the

devil (Rv 1:5). The death of Christ is indeed an example, inspiring and enabling those who contemplate it correctly. Christ enabled us to overcome the devil; the accuser of the brethren (Rv 12:10). Jesus is referred to as the 'lamb' no less than twenty eight times in the Apocalypse. According to Wainwright (1993:154), the picture of Christ is also one of majesty. The word 'lamb' has sacrificial overtones throughout the Old Testament (Ex29:34-42; Isa53:7) and it refers especially to the passover lambs of the great exodus (Ex12:1-13), which helped the Jews to escape from the slavery of the Egyptians (cf. Rv 11:8) and became a kingdom of priests to God (Ex19:6:cf.Rv 1:6,5:10) in the wilderness (cf.Rv12:6,13-14). The understanding of the Jews seems to have shifted to that of the messiah as a militant and conquering 'lamb' probably due to his youthfulness. According to Bauckham (1994:179), this idea was already in the Jewish apocalyptic literature and this accounts for the way the lamb is pictured as strong leader, ruler, conqueror and judge. John wants to stress that the one who now rules on high is none other than the one who offered himself as a sacrifice for sin and he is ruling because of that sacrifice, as a faithful witness unto death. We have him reigning now.

In Revelation 5:5 it is declared that Jesus as the Davidic messiah has overcome the devil even though in the subsequent verses, the messiah appears as the lamb who was slaughtered. According to Caird (1984:73), the lamb who was slaughtered is the lion who has conquered and this means that by his exaltation he entered a new phase of his reign and his defeat of Satan (12:7-12). Since then he has a special role with regard to his church on earth as the Lord who cares, rebukes, warns, comforts and encourages according to his understanding of the community's needs (Rv1-3). In his reigning state he is the Son of Man of Daniel 7:13-14, the glorious figure to whom universal power is given. According to the prophet Isaiah, he will seize the power and reign since the kingdom is upon his shoulders, the wonderful counselor, the prince of peace (Is 9:6).

The presence of the kingdom now is an assurance to us that Christ is reigning and he will continue to do so. According to Brunner (1954:68), whenever the Gospel is preached it brings to birth new life by the service of human beings as co-workers with God; the kingdom of God is

set up. For whenever Christ is Lord over a person's heart, there the kingdom of God is. The millennium as we saw earlier requires a symbolic interpretation. We discover that Christ is already enthroned in heaven and the devil is driven out of heaven and thrown down to earth, hence Christ is now reigning on his throne.

The above understanding is completely in agreement with Jesus' teaching and preaching of the kingdom. Through his death on the cross he conquered the demonic forces of the world and through such victory he created a community of God made of priests (Rv 5:10). This community is the kingdom now and God reigns and will continue to rule. Without him it would be impossible to be faithful unto death. In this perception the millennium has already begun and the kingdom of God is already come into being, so the lamb who was slain has begun his reign; he is the host and we are his guests (Anglican Church of Kenya Prayer Book 1991:16).

For John's community, Jesus is the fulfilment of the Old Testament and the Jewish expectation of the Davidic messiah. This is clearly portrayed in the Apocalypse as we have seen above. What the author has done is to reinterpret the hope of the anointed to the millennial community as a response to their situation. According to Malina (1995:238), there is no teaching in the Apocalypse concerning a specific future for Jerusalem in Palestine. The author did not intend to place it in a physical place. The messiah's arrival was the victory over the powers of darkness (12:7-9), so it was not over Roman rule as many Jews anticipated. (No wonder the Roman rule survived for about three hundred years after the Apocalypse was written) According to Bauckham (1994:182), the author appropriated a messianic title: 'the Lamb of God' or 'Christ' as one and the same (Rv 3:21; 7:17), which was not very common in his time because it embodied the community's hope of a great conqueror of their enemies. The title reinforced the expectation of a destructive power. To John it may have had a different meaning than merely physical destruction of the enemies and the world in general.

The author was probably reinterpreting the messianic victory as a witness to the truth rather than

as a military conquest, but to the millennial community military intervention was preferable. The kingdom of the elect or the priests gathered by the messiah to share in God's reign was inclusive of all nations. Jesus is not just part of God's plan of salvation, he *is* God's plan of salvation in the flesh, he took upon himself the sin of mankind. This kind of understanding puts us into a better position to see the millennial reign of Christ already present in our time, but the apocalypse community would not have seen it that way; they had a strong expectation of a holy war which would result in the defeat of Satan and bring a new earth since the world was irredeemably evil. The millennium in terms of salvation and judgement needs to be seen as presently occurring.

4.5.2 Millennium is now as a period for the church

It is assumed throughout the Apocalypse that the Christians will belong to the church. The church is seen mostly as the new Israel (cf. Rv 1:6; 2:9; 5:10; 21:12-14), a 'kingdom' made up of 'priests' (subject to God's rule, yet also sharing in his rule, and enjoying access to his presence (cf. Rv 1:6; 22:5). The church is also seen as the 'bride' of Christ (Rv 19:9; 21:9; 22:17) indicating both intimacy and the commitment of a covenant relationship. At the beginning of the Apocalypse the author sees Christ as standing in the midst of the churches and holding their 'angels' (heavenly counterparts?) in his right hand (Rv 1:13,16,20). The welfare of his church is clearly on his heart. He is present with it in the midst of its trials and tribulations and controls its destiny until the church militant here on earth becomes the church triumphant in heaven.

Christ has already ransomed the church of God from the kingdom of the devil through his death and this church is the kingdom of God, now in the millennium, present on the earth (Rv1:6; 5:10). According to Bauckham (1993:73), the understanding of the way in which Christ establishes God's kingdom on earth is the conviction that in his death and resurrection he won victory over evil. The church makes Christ's triumph over the powers of darkness effective on earth. It is to be seen as the army of the messiah made up of 144,000 members drawn from the twelve tribes of Israel (Rv 7:4-8), but this is equally a symbolic number. The risen Lord, the

victorious lion, is present with the church (Rv 1:13; 2:1). According to Hunter,

He has destroyed the power of death to bring life to the people of God. He gives life to those who are in relationship with the heavenly Father. He provides ongoing life to the family of believers who share in the common Spirit. Jesus Christ gives life to the living organism called the Church (1973:49).

Jesus Christ reigns and leads the church as his army (Rv14:1,4; 17:14), so this period the church is existing in may be termed as the millennium time and Christ is ruling, empowering his church with the Holy Spirit, which is his breath of power operating in the world (Rv 3:1; 5:6). The church is an army, but of the slain lamb (Rv 14:1-5). So it participates in the lamb's victory, sharing with him to rule. The holy war may be an engagement in giving the testimony of Christ as a king even at the cost of death and resisting the idolatry of the false gods or the beast.

The persecution of the beast is fierce and the deception is seductive yet the church is to conquer, empowered by the spirit of prophecy (Rv 11:3-6; 19:10). All the nations will experience conversion through the faithful witness of the church during the millennial reign of God and the lamb(Rv 11:13):

The Church, as the people of God, is the living quarters for the holy Spirit. The Church is the on going presence of Christ in the world (Hunter 1973:53).

The reign is made possible over the nations through the church's witness. If millennium is a period of permanent peace or joy and blessings on the earth or elsewhere, I contend that the church internally experiences this kind of peace, for Christ is already reigning over it, and the millennium could signify this continuous event on earth.

In some other New Testament writings, millennium is also referred or alluded to Paul may have

referred to it when he talked about Adam comparing him with the risen Lord:

For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive, but each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet...that God may be everything to everyone (1Cor.15:23-26).

Paul in these verses may also be encouraging the Christians by promising them that Christ would take over the kingdom and then he hands it over to the father. This does not mean that Christ is not reigning at the moment, since the Holy Spirit has been with us all through. The author of 2Peter may also have referred to the millennium kingdom in an implicit manner, when he talked of God's concept of time in comparison to the mankind concept of time (2Pt 3:8). The author is here giving us a context that suggests eschatology similar to that of Revelation 20, since his readers are in doubt about the second return of Christ and they assume that life has remained the same in history (2Pt 3:4). As in the Apocalypse, what follows is a new heaven and a new earth where justice would reign (2Pt 3:13). Since this author was aware of the Old Testament, here he might be reflecting Psalm 90:4, rather than the millennium of the Apocalypse. The author's concern is not how long Christ would reign on earth as in Revelation 20, but about the perception of time difference between God and man, so he asserts that man's longest period is no doubt God's briefest time. 'For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night' (Ps 90:4). The presence of Christ on earth is not deniable by even those who expected him more in future, all agree that Christ is always with us through the Holy Spirit.

Time is taken as a matter of duration, and to the human mind time is a long period of waiting and enduring a lot of sufferings, but to God that time is just a short moment. The New Testament concept of millennium does not give a chronological time table for the end time events, but it may portray it as a means for Christians to survive the intolerable conditions they are facing.

Apocalypse has its own power of consoling the community, and it is only a response to the community's social situation, as we saw earlier, for it promises to bring judgment for those who oppose the millennial movement of the elect of God.

4.5.3 Millennium inaugurates Judgment

The fact of judgment dominates the whole of the Apocalypse. The writer depicts judgments as taking place within history following the second coming of Christ, as we have seen above, and the resurrection of the dead. Christ himself will be the agent of judgment (cf. Rv 19:15; 22:12). We are probably not to distinguish between this judgment by Christ and the great white throne judgment of Revelation 20:11-15. Those forces which have willfully opposed God's rule- the beast from the sea, the false prophets, and the devil, all will be thrown into the lake of fire (Rv 19:20; 20:10) and the dead will be judged by what they have done (Rv 20:12). The fact that those who are ultimately lost are also described as those whose names are not found in the book of life (Rv 20:15), suggests that the works of those who have not accepted the offer of salvation made available through Christ will not be sufficient to save them, whereas those whose names are found in the book of life will, through their faith, have done work acceptable to God. The principles of salvation by faith and judgment by works are thus upheld.

The fate of the unsaved will be the same as that of the devil and his allies (thrown into the lake of fire). Some scholars have argued that the fire will eventually consume those who are committed to it, so that in the end they will pass to oblivion. This is certainly an attractive theory, but it can hardly be supported from the Apocalypse itself (cf. especially Rv 14:11; 20:10). Whatever the precise state of the consciousness of the lost, their final fate in the view of the Apocalypse does seem to be an experienced eternal separation from all that is good.

The saved, by contrast, will know the presence of God in their midst, and will be set free from all

sin, sorrow and suffering in a new world which God will bring into being (Rv 21:1-4). The promises given to the 'Conquerors' in chapters 2-3 give a good, if symbolic, description of the experience which will be theirs: they will have eternal satisfaction and security, a perfected character, face to face fellowship with Christ and a share in his royal dignity and power. The description of heaven in Revelation 21 emphasises its communal nature, its beauty, perfection, and purity, and above all the presence of God and Christ- through whom the covenant promises of God will be perfectly fulfilled and in fellowship with whom the joys of the saints will be complete. This section shows that the author depicted the millennial reign as symbolic rather than being a real incidence to take place on earth.

All millennialism movements are responses to situations which are unbearable to the communities. The Apocalypse meant hope for the millenarian movement of the first century CE, they became a separate community from the Jewish religion. According to Draper (1992:21), the accession of non-Jewish converts into the new community would tend to exaggerate existing tensions with other Jewish communities. It was a threat to the status of the native collaborators and would not find favour with the ruling Romans, for whom it would represent a subversion of their accepted religious and cultural norms.

4.6 The Apocalypse as a response to suffering and hope

The millenarian community was subjected to deprivation, oppression, and suffering of all kinds of problems once a distinction was made between the Apocalypse community as a movement separate from the Jewish religion after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, as we saw in chapter three. According to Sweet (1979:23), the Roman persecution almost began by chance during the reign of emperor Nero (54-68CE), when he blamed Christians for a fire in Rome. The Christians were dragged to execution or torched alive in Nero's garden. Such persecution in which Christians had no legal ground might have continued on and off within the Roman empire until 250 CE. The community had now no choice but to seek ways and means of enduring the

sufferings that was now facing them , according to Kiddle (1940):

Those who are called upon to suffer for their faith will turn eagerly to this greatest of all textbooks for matters, and will not turn in vain; for through John's eyes they will see that unseen world where wilderness has been cast down, where the lamb is guiding his own to fountains of living water, and where God wipes every fear from their eyes(1940:xlix)

These words of Kiddle are probably the best to show how far the millennium was viewed as the only hope in suffering by the Johannine apocalypse community.

The millenarian community of the Apocalypse had not totally withdrawn from the world in the sense that with them they expected the world to be overthrown through God's intervention, hence they waited a new earth and a new heaven in order to obtain the utopian kind of life they anticipated. This community appealed to patient endurance amidst all kinds of sufferings (Rv 13:10; 14:12) (Sweet 1979:80). It appeals to the kingdom of God, to God's victory over evil and its attendant suffering (Rv 21:1-22:5). The Apocalypse does not deny the afflictions, as we shall see later, but deals with them, since the issue of suffering was given a wide scope. The Apocalypse was concerned, however, for those who already profess faith in Christ, and is especially concerned that, in the midst of trying circumstances, they may hold fast to their faith and persevere to the end as earlier said- such was the cognitive dissonance. As we have seen above, the suffering addressed by the Apocalypse of John is instigated socially, economically and politically. The Christians were being pressured to participate in Emperor worship. The hope for this community is only the imminent coming of the 'new heaven and the new earth' (Rv 21:1) which is given during the millennium of Revelation 20, after which the time of the last judgement comes, which will destroy the evil powers of this world and reward the oppressed (Rv14:4).

I find the above to be the key matters theologically, socially, and psychologically which affected this millenarian community and made them more eager to encounter the problems as they awaited

for the kingdom to come. Suffering becomes so severe, so empty of redemptive possibilities, that it becomes one of the things a faithful witness has to persevere through focusing on God to intervene for salvation. The community that had now been consciously separated from the wider Jewish community had only to focus on God to intervene and bring the millennium which the community saw as their only solution. According to Fiorenza (1991:108), John had employed the Jewish expectation of a messianic kingdom, which by then might have been traditional, in order to comfort the persecuted by stressing a reward, but seemingly intends to discourage a temporal understanding of the millennium. According to Mealey (1992:39), Fiorenza was affirming that millennium and the first resurrection was not to convey a chronologically-sequential information, but a theological promise. This implies that the millennial reign of Christ ought to be seen as a realised rule of God in an eschatological perspective, rather than a chronological event at the end of the world.

According to Becker (1987:52) the socioeconomic and political crisis of the churches in Asia Minor during emperor Domitian's reign of 81-96AD was so critical that Apocalypse offers Christians hope in a great number of images which represent the world of God's reality in a world of hostile experience. John stresses that even though the battle between good and evil is waged here on earth it is only a shadow of the heavenly battle between God and Satan. The conflicts and persecutions of this world are only temporary and cannot compare with our victory in heaven.

The Apocalypse says little about humankind as such, or the fall, or the way into the Christian life. The need for repentance in order to be saved is assumed in Revelation 9:20 and 16:9, but subjects such as saving faith, grace, forgiveness and regeneration scarcely enter the writer's thought. They are not central to his message. As a response, the writer is concerned for those who are already in the community as earlier said above. Faithfulness (Rv 2:10,13, 19; 13:10), and endurance (Rv 2:2 ;14:12), are commended, and the letters to the seven Churches in chs.2-3 are full of exhortations to Christians in the Churches to repent of their failings (Rv 2:5; 3:3), and full of promises of reward to those who 'conquer'(Rv 2:7,11,17,26-28; 3:5,12,21); to those who refuse

to give way to the enticements of sin and false teaching, renounce half-heartedness, and remain loyal to Christ to the end. In summary, the writer stresses the importance of 'works'(Rv 2:2,5,19,26;3.1,8,15; 9:20; 14:13; 16:11; 19:8), and the fact that God's judgment is according to works. Clearly for the writer, it is not enough to profess faith. One needs to demonstrate the reality of one's faith in what one does.

One particular question which has divided interpreters is the question concerning whether the writer conceived of the possibility that a Christian might lose his/her salvation through the various forms of unfaithfulness he mentions. What if some of his readers fail to 'conquer'? Does the promise not to blot out the names of conquerors from the book of life (Rv 3:5) imply that there will be those whose names will be blotted out? This is certainly one possible reading of the Apocalypse. However, it has also been argued that, though the book contains plenty of warnings, it does not make mention of any individual or group that will inevitably lose their salvation (the opportunity to repent always remains as long as life endures), and that God would hardly want to write names in the book of life before the foundation of the world (Rv 13:8; 17:8) if he knew perfectly well that he would have to erase them later. In short it cannot be said that the Apocalypse, any more than any other biblical book, resolves the mysterious antimony between divine sovereignty and human responsibility.

According to the Apocalypse of John, God was the victor of the heavenly battle and he will be the victor here on earth and Christians are assured of victory here on the earth because God's power has already won the conflict in heaven. Such hope was based on the millennial reign of Christ which must soon take place. The apocalypse community was encouraged by the knowledge that the scope of suffering in the world was extensive, but the reward was not comparable to these sufferings. The martyrs would reign with Christ and judgment would be given to them. John explains suffering and hope in a peculiar way; the suffering is absolute and it leads inevitably to death and martyrdom, while hope is comparatively more reassuring in a sense that it becomes a purely other- worldly hope. The hope offers a place for a possibility of a redemptive action in this

present world, since God will transform it:

But suffering is not the last word. Suffering is not the end, but the means to the end, and that end is victory (Morris 1967:130).

The community is encouraged to accept the oppressions and remain firmly rooted to the faith of the one who called them. It awaits the imminent and complete destruction of the present world, for a new heaven and a new earth is coming (Rv 20:1).

The above kind of sufferings and desperate need for hope has always resulted in the rise of millenarian communities, and many scholars are of the opinion that this might have been the major reason why the Apocalypse was written. The Apocalypse community became a radical sect which saw the world as so evil that only with God's intervention could it be replaced with a better one. Only those with a total perseverance of persecutions and afflictions would be assured of a better life in the new city of the new earth. In this case suffering is passively tolerated and hope is restricted to the millenarian community of God. This form of millenarian hope is completely determined to face the evil in the world. It does not see any hope for the world as God's creation and believes their new world will come as a result of bloody revenge against God's enemies. This is what they expected as the millennial reign of Christ.

4.7 Conclusion

In this chapter we have introduced a modern understanding of the millennium and also looked at the various modern approaches to the millennium in Revelation 20. We have seen that there are three predominant views of the millennium, each with a wide variety of interpretations. With pre-millennialism, the millennium will occur after the second coming of Christ. We have also seen that post-millennialists think that the millennium takes place towards the end of the Church age, and that Christ's climatic coming will occur at the close of the millennium. Thirdly we have

looked at the a- millennial view which states that the millennium started at Christ's resurrection and will be concluded at his final coming, and this last view is the one preferred in this thesis.

We have also keenly looked at the idea of the millennium in the Old Testament and demonstrated its impact on a community that was suffering as a means of hope. We saw that the idea of millennium grew to be seen as a period of a thousand years later in the Jewish apocalyptic thought, particularly during the Inter-Testamental period. It is my contention that the idea was not a new one by the time John was writing, even though it is he who categorically mentions a thousand year as a period for the Messianic rule here on earth. Thus the author has used these sources and he characteristically made something different, which could be symbolically interpreted. To the Jews the Millennium was the climax of all events on earth- and this is a tradition John was aware of since it occurs long before he wrote his book.

The millennium becomes incomprehensible once we take it literally, not only to us but also to the Apocalypse community; if we take the millennium literally as predicting an actual period in future history of the world we are left with a lot of questions. Where would Christ be seated, in Rome or in Nairobi? Whom do the saints rule? How will the eschatological life of resurrection be compatible with the untransformed world? Do they rule from heaven or on earth? The Apocalypse offers no answer to these questions. So there is no need to take the millennium literally. The millennium is an imaginative symbol of God's kingdom here on earth where Christ continues to be the King of kings.

It is clear that neither the Old Testament nor the New Testament have any notion of having a calendar of events pointing to the end of the world history. It comes out clearly that Apocalypse is also not interested in a particular number of years for Christ's rule on earth as a millennium but with a reward to the martyrs. It is a response to the situations in Asia Minor and today it gains more popularity among the oppressed even if not always the poor. I therefore contend that a -millennialism as our third theological option in this study is the right view to be taken by

Christians today. It asserts that Christ will return but that the millennium is to be understood in spiritual terms and that we cannot know the exact details surrounding the second advent.

In our East African context millennium has gained popularity since it has brought a new concept of future as we shall see later. The judgment in the Apocalypse was to perfect the reward of the saints and give them hope concerning a foreseen punishment for Rome. Hence I contend that any interpretation of millennium as a period of a thousand years rule of Christ before the end is misplaced. With this understanding, we will now move to our next chapter which will be the exegesis of Revelation 20:1-10 as the passage which mentions the millennial reign and which has been popularly used to predict the end.

CHAPTER FIVE

5. EXEGESIS (Rv 20:1-10)

5.0 Introduction

5.1 Translation

20:1 And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, holding the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. 2 And he got hold of the dragon, the ancient serpent who is the devil and Satan, and chained him for a thousand years, 3 and threw him into the bottomless pit, locked it and sealed it over him, so that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years were ended. After that he must be loosed for a little while. 4 And I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom judgment was committed and (I saw) the souls of those who had been beheaded on account of their witness to Jesus and on account of the word of God, and who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their right hands. And they came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. 5 The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. 6 Blessed and holy is he who takes part in the first resurrection. Over these the second death has no authority; instead, they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and they shall reign with him a thousand years. 7 And when the thousand years are finished, Satan will be loosed from his prison, 8 and he will come out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. 9 And they went up over the broad earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. Then fire fell from heaven and consumed them. 10 And the devil who had deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and sulphur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

The above translation is based on The Greek Testament and on Interlinear Greek-English New Testament. According to Metzger (1971:764) in verse 2 the reading ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος (A 1678

1778 2080) is usually preferred due to the linguistic usage of the Apocalypse which employs the nominative case for a title or a proper name that stands in apposition to a noun in an oblique case, instead of τὸν ὄφιν τὸν ἀρχαῖον (N 046 P) after τὸν δράκοντα.

In verse 6 the article τὸ before χίλια ἔτη (N 046) in square brackets has been added by translators.

In verse 9 the reading ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ is the most common from external evidence. I will now introduce the purpose of this chapter just before I embark on the exegesis.

5.2 The major task of this chapter

The major task of this chapter is to spell out the meaning of the only passage that specifically mentions the millennium in the whole Bible. An exegesis of this passage will be the center of this study, so that we can try and understand the term as the author may have used it. In the previous chapter we have already looked at various approaches in the modern times, the concept of millennium in the Old Testament in Inter-Testament literature and also in the New Testament. We have established that the idea existed in the Jewish apocalyptic thought long before the Apocalypse was written.

Having established that the Apocalypse was written to a sectarian community that closely relates to a millenarian movement, I now wish to investigate this idea as it appears in a passage within the Apocalypse in Revelation 20:1-10. This passage is one of the most difficult passages in the Revelation. Caird, (1984:249) agrees that it has been the paradise of cranks and fanatics on one hand and literalists on the other.

It looks forward to a period when the Messianic reign will take place on earth. It reflects Jesus' prayer 'thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven' (Mt 6:10), which forms

such a central part of our praise and worship in our services. Revelation 20:1-10 has become such a common passage to be interpreted as suggesting that the destiny of the blessed is heaven, to be with God. This passage reveals that for much of the first hundred or so years of the church's life, most Christians looked forward to the coming of the millennial reign. However this passage is only unusual in giving it a specific period of time (Rv 20:3). In all other respects it represents what most of our forefathers in faith looked forward to, and even today most Christians have such a belief. They only differ on how they interpret this passage, but they anticipate the full presence of Christ to be in future.

When the Apocalypse community perceived a discrepancy between what they wanted and what they actually received, the millennialist community felt 'relatively deprived'. They became frustrated about being unable to share in social and political power. This passage offers them a solution, the martyrs will reign with Christ for a thousand years. They had also experienced social isolation when the traditional ties between Christians and Jews were disrupted. The millennial community remained their source of hope.

Therefore this passage requires a thorough exegesis since it has been a bone of contention in some Christian circles over the last two thousand years. In fact Gaius of Rome (ca.210 C E), Dionysius of Alexandria (ca.250 CE) and Cyril of Jerusalem all are known to have forbade the public or private reading by Christians of the Apocalypse (Fiorenza 1991:6). In the foregoing chapter of Revelation 19, John starts by a thanksgiving for the punishment of Babylon (Rv 19:1-5) and moves to the victory of the saints of God, which he reveals with the imagery of a heavenly marriage, where the church is seen as the bride of the Messiah in Revelation 19:6-10. He then gives another vision of all his splendour, which leaves no doubt that the final dominion of the risen Christ is imminent (Rv 19:11-16). He then sums up this chapter with the overthrow of the beast and of the false prophet (Rv 19:17-21). He makes it clear that the beast is finally defeated including his various agents. They already had their share and now they are put in their rightful places.

Basically I will divide this passage into three portions in my exegesis for better clarity of the passage. Here we will follow Fiorenza's (1991:3) theoretical position, whereby rhetorical interpretation does not assume the Apocalypse as a means of historical reality. It is in no way taken as giving data and evidence of the end time, but it will be symbolically evaluated. A rhetorical interpretation is one whereby the authorial aims, author's point of view, his narrative strategies and persuasive means as well as audience perceptions are taken into account, as we did in chapters three and four. The first section will be Satan's imprisonment (Rv 20:1-3), followed by the reign of the saints (Rv 20:4-6) and lastly and not least the final deception (Rv 20:7-10).

5.3 Satan's imprisonment (Rv 20:1-3)

The obvious starting point for an examination of the sociological function of the millennium in the Apocalypse, is the fact that it concerns the second coming of Christ and the defeat of the enemy. According to Malina (1995:220), the one who descends from the sky is extremely powerful and extremely radiant. When one reflects upon the symbols of the Apocalypse in the light of its social setting and the social identity of the author, as we did in our chapter three, one sees that the task of this passage is to overcome the intolerable tension between reality and hopeful faith. According to Roloff (1993:223), the total freedom of the earth for God is possible only, when the inciter and the initiator of all human resistance against God is totally eliminated. The dragon's power is now stripped off in two phases. One, verses 2-3 reports his being shackled in the bottomless pit for the limited period of a thousand years; and he is finally destroyed in the third section of this passage. The hostile nations are destroyed and the two beasts thrown in the lake of fire (Rev. 19:17-21).

John now turns to the beast's master. In verse 1 (εἶδον ἄγγελον καταβαίνοντα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, he simply sees an angel come down from heaven. In this verse he does not describe the appearance of the angel, neither does he say anything to put this passage in a chronological

time. John only says that the angel came from heaven, and immediately the seer's interest is on what the angel does. Ford (1975:229) draws a contrast between the star fallen from heaven (Rv 9:1), who has the key of the pit of the abyss from which comes smoke, darkness, and locusts, and our present angel. The former fell; the latter descended. This vision is reminiscent of Revelation 12:7-9: where Michael and his angels had thrown the dragon out of heaven to earth, but now an angel descends from heaven to earth to curtail the dragon's power there (Roloff 1996:226).

The powerlessness of the dragon is indicated in the sense that it is only an unnamed angel who comes down to deal with him, probably this would also imply the insignificance of the dragon, compared to the angel. According to Fiorenza (1991:107), the mention of the key and the chain (Greek ἀλυσίς which means handcuffs, or leg irons) in this verse were only symbolical, because no way can the bottomless pit be keyed neither can it be possible to chain a spirit. They were used to show that the angel will definitely restrain the dragon, since the angel had the authority to do so. The language of the Apocalypse is normally very figurative and dramatic and this makes a big impact upon the listeners as we shall see later.

Verse 2. In this verse the dragon is given all the four titles by which the Apocalypse designates him, he is δράκοντα, ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος, διάβολος καὶ ὁ Σατανᾶς, it would probably be necessary to trace a bit of the background information concerning the work of the dragon as we encounter all his titles here. The names are mentioned here to portray the greatness of the power of the angel who laid hold on him, since these names would also mean that the dragon has some power. According to Mealey (1992:97), the angel's power was also to emphasise the victory of Christ who is now risen for the salvation of his people. The career of the dragon may be traced from Revelation 12, where John saw him and his agents being thrown out of heaven after he was defeated in a battle. While on earth Satan tried to persecute the woman but he failed, and in chapter 16:13-14 he tries to gather forces for another battle on earth, and in chapter 19 he was defeated and was cast into the lake of fire.

As the dragon he is the great enemy of heaven who has influenced the principalities of the universe in history, but he is now destined for total destruction. As the old serpent of Genesis 3:1, he is the greatest who deceived humankind from the beginning and chased them out of Eden. The serpent has since then been inflicting all kinds of sufferings on humankind.

Nevertheless his time has been cut short and he can no longer continue operating as per his names an angel has already bound him. Ford (1975:330) argues that Satan's destruction is so important that it has two themes to describe it instead of one, namely his chaining and his downfall. With the imprisonment of the dragon, the earth itself is free of his deceptive power, which incites rebellion against God.

The work of the dragon was destroyed by the death of Christ on the cross when he said all is finished and forgiveness was declared to all people. Paul says that our debts were paid, and the dragon cannot hold anything against us any more (cf. Rm 8:34). Satan was thrown out of heaven after the death and resurrection of the Lamb (Rv12:9). He cannot now create confusion in heaven, his work is on earth where he intensifies attacks, raging because his time is limited (Rv 12:12). At the Lord's power and authority he is now also removed from his usual place of operation and locked in the bottomless pit. According to Beasley -Murray (1976):

The subjugation of the Devil and his removal from the sphere of man's existence is characteristic of the biblical monotheistic religion of redemption, which cannot endure the notion that evil will be prevalent for ever. The removal of Satan, therefore, is integral to the good news of Jesus Christ. It is a complement of that teaching which lies at the heart of the Christian gospel, that the kingdom of God comes, through the Christ, and will triumph in history through him. The defeat of Satan and the triumph of the kingdom are essential elements in the acts of judgement and redemption which God accomplishes through the Christ (287).

The removal of the dragon from his position is now the beginning of the fulfilment of the hope of this community, because it is an affirmation that Christ is in control. We still here encounter the dramatic language of the Apocalypse which definitely carries a lot of impact on the millennial community. Through our sociological analysis we have made it clear that the millenarian community believes that it will be liberated from sin and pain and be happy. Christ plays a great role in the salvation of the millennialist sect, for he has now taken over since the accuser is locked in the bottomless pit. According to Rowland (1993:149), the binding of the dragon is equal to healing. This is comparable to the binding of legion in Mark. 5:3 (cf. Is 65:4), the defeat of the enemy results in salvation of the tormented and the inflicted. Earlier, in another parable in Mark. 3:27, Jesus talks of binding the strong man and then plundering his house. No one can dare to enter another man's kingdom without first of all tying him up. The binding of Satan takes place in Mark. 5:1-13. When legion is cast out and into the herd of pigs which rushes down into the sea, thus enabling the man who had spent his time in the mountains among the tombs, cutting himself, to sit clothed and in his right mind (1993:149).

This setting of the demoniac free contrasts with the idea of the binding of Satan, since, the angel tied him up for a thousand years. The healing allows for a symbolical interpretation of the tying of the dragon. It would mean completeness as it is in this book where Satan is bound for the perfect period. During this period the saints will reign undisturbed on earth with Christ before the general resurrection. The defeat of the dragon can only be symbolically interpreted. According to Charles (1920:140), before a 100 BC E, it was generally believed in Judaism that the Messianic kingdom would last forever on the present earth, and this concept was very common with the major prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah, but later the idea changed and the earth came to be regarded wholly unfit for the total manifestation of this kingdom except in a temporary character, which now brought the idea of the dragon being bound for a thousand years.

In verse 3 the angel now acts by casting Satan into the bottomless pit, and affirmed his authority by locking and sealing it. The word sealed may mean the sealing of a stone to prevent its being

moved (cf. Dn 6:17; Matt 27:66), it can also apply to the closing of a building so that one cannot open it (Ford 1975:229) or gain access. According to Sweet (1979:288) the sealing is an echo of Matthew 27:66, where the Jews sealed the tomb to prevent 'that deceiver' from escaping, to cause further mischief. Satan is now completely put under control (cf. Is 24:22), but it is good to note here that Satan is not in for punishment, but as a way of curtailing his activities, so that he will not deceive the nations any longer. Caird (1984:251) says that the locking up of Satan implies that, throughout the period, there will be a considerable growth of population which would otherwise be susceptible to the attacks of Satan. Such a population would be over and above the saints, who have proved themselves impervious to these attacks. This is confirmed by the repeating of a statement that conquerors are to rule with Christ. Satan will no longer have the power to destroy the church nor the saints. Knight (1999:131) makes a suggestion that, despite his seeming power, Satan is subjected to the authority of God.

The coming of God's kingdom on earth was through Christ and this means that there is no place for the kingdom of Satan. Just as in the parable of the strong person (Mt 12:29), which John may have known through oral tradition, it is clear that the arrival of a stronger person restrains the strengths of even the one who was strong before. The locking up of Satan is a provisional declaration that his rule is over (cf. Rv 12:7-9) and his tyranny will finally be eradicated, as we find in the middle of this chapter (Rv 20:11-15). So for a period of a thousand years Satan will not be active and the saints will be in the millennium. Then the period of restraint will end, since Satan must be loosed, even though only for a short while, hence this locking of Satan does not mean the end has come but it may mean a realised end. To the Christians resurrection of Christ is the greatest victory which signifies the defeat of Satan. Therefore the saints will also resurrect and reign with Christ.

5.3.1. The reign of the saints (Rv 20:4-6)

In this section all the attention now is concentrated on all those who suffered for the sake of the

Son of Man; they would reign with him for a thousand years. This section is one of the most commonly quoted and also one of the most controversial sections in the whole of the Apocalypse. The author now moves from the earth to heaven, and gets a vision of the resurrected Christ and the martyrs. Even though he makes them sit on the thrones, he never tells us who sat on them. According to Fiorenza (1991:108), this is the vision of the promises that those killed, because they refused to obey the imperial cult, will receive justice.

According to Collins (1987:205-6), there is only limited overlap between the Jewish apocalyptic literature and anthropological descriptions of millenarian movements, however the overlap helps us to understand how this passage was taken by the Apocalypse community. Millennium served as a bridge between Old Testament prophets' idea of renewal of this world, centred in Palestine, and the 'apocalyptists' idea of a new transcendent heaven and earth (Swete 1979:287). It was also to express the reward of the martyrs on earth rather than in immortality. Millennium as a reward was reserved for those who have been martyred for their faith (a stern warning to those who take the joys of the millennium for granted).

In verse 4. The author saw thrones. According to Roloff (1993:227), the scene changes and the seer sees 'thrones' with figures sitting on them. These have been considered to be thrones of judgment on which a heavenly tribunal- perhaps the twenty four elders or the apostles sits to pass judgment. According to Draper (1998:43), the apostles are mentioned because their witness and preaching are the foundation of the redeemed community. This takes us back to the book of Daniel 7:9, as if the author wants to make reference to it. But he never tells us where the thrones were. This makes it easy for those who advocate a literal millennium to place them on earth, so that they would be able to witness the rule of God. But it is good to note, as I have said above, that the author does not suggest where the thrones were. The word θρονός, is translated as throne for forty-seven times in all. And whenever thrones are mentioned in the Apocalypse they are always in heaven, and judgment always proceeds from the throne of God (Ford 1975:330).

Only two references to the throne of the devil (Rv 2:13) and that of the beast (Rv 13:2;16:10) are said to be on earth. All the other references are to be seen as in heaven, which would mean the reign John saw may also be in heaven where the resurrected Christ is, rather than on earth. Even though the author is very articulate, here he does not number the thrones nor does he tell us who sat on them.

He only says κρίμα ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς, which is translated as ‘Judgement was given unto them’. These words shows that justice was a matter of great concern, and they may also signify that part of the saints’ reward is to exercise authority over their enemies. Caird (1984:252) says that the author knew of the judgement in Daniel 7:9, 22, but he interpreted it according to his own understanding. In Daniel, it was the Ancient of Days who sat on the thrones, and the saints received judgement, which means that the verdict was in their favour. The words may equally mean that the imperial power was removed from the fourth kingdom and given to Israel. All this was happening in the heavenly sphere according to Daniel, although he saw it from the earth.

Even though it is not easy to make a conclusive idea of who sat on the thrones, it is notable that the author stood within a Christian tradition of interpretation (cf. Mt 19:28; Lk 22:29; 1 Cor 6:2), as we saw in our description of the social identity of the author. The tradition states that the saints shall judge the world. According to the passage in the book of Daniel thrones were in plural, hence they must be occupied by a plurality of assessors. So those who received the judgement were probably the ones who sat on the thrones rather than those in whose favour judgement was given. This was never the last judgment, but one among many to take place. In the earlier chapters of the book of Daniel, we learn that God was in control of the world and he chose rulers according to his own will (Dn 4:17, 25, 32), and that he gave judgement to any nation he wished to. Then the judgement given to the martyrs is not enough to determine the ultimate destinies of humankind. God still remains the final judge and the final destiny rests with him. According to Mealy (1992:107), this relating of verse 4 to Daniel 7:9-27 gives us the view that the enthroned ones are to be identified as the elders in their role as assessors in the judgment. To the Apocalypse

they could be the martyrs.

In verse 4b, John saw the souls of those that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus. This portrays a temporary state since he never saw people but souls. For a thousand years they would reign with Christ in a bliss, but the ultimate end awaits the general resurrection.

The word *πεπελεκισμένων*, is usually translated as beheaded, but the word literally means killed with an axe. It was the tradition of the Romans to execute with an axe, even though a sword would have served the same purpose at times. We can take this word to mean 'executed', no matter the means applied. The language here is similar to that of the martyrs who cried with loud voices under the altar for vindication (Rev. 6:9), who were then dressed with white robes and were told to be patient for a little while. Their prayer was answered and they were raised to reign with Christ in his kingdom. For a millenarian community such an assurance was paramount, since it does not deny persecution but affirms the reward. According to Beasley- Murray (1978:292), such an assurance held out the prospect that, even if they were called to yield up their lives for Christ in the last great conflict, they knew that their sacrifice would result in God's vindication of them in the kingdom of his Son.

Martyrs feature prominently as symbols for the righteous in the apocalypse, and they are not equally numbered nor is any distinction made between the martyrs and the larger community of the apocalypse, as Daniel 7:9 has done (Knight 1999:131). In John's symbolism, those beheaded may probably refer to all the Christian dead, who are distinguished from the rest of the non-Christian dead in Revelation 20:5. Nevertheless John makes it clear that only those who do what is required will share the first resurrection. People previously without status or value now claim the exclusive privilege of both.

These people would be those who had not worshiped the beast and had not received its mark (Rv 13:16-17). According to Roloff (1993:164), every participant in the Roman official cult is known

by a 'mark' on the right hand and on the forehead, and this mark allows participation in trade and commerce and therefore in public life. The martyrs are the Christians who remained faithful to Christ until their death. John defines the martyrs first as the faithful witnesses and also as the sincere, who never gave in or conformed to the teachings of the beast and all those who refused to receive his mark. The Apocalypse uses the term martyrdom five times. One use is in the introductory part (Rv 1:5), two uses are seen in the messages to the Churches (Rv 2:13; 3:14), and the remaining two are in the visions which form the body of the Apocalypse (Rv 11:13; 17:6). Jesus is referred to as a true witness twice in the Apocalypse (Rv 1:5; 3:14). In Revelation 13:8 all those who dwell on earth will be required to render obedience to the beast, except those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. The clear meaning which we can deduce here is that the church alone, but in its entirety, is distinguished by its rejection of allegiance to the beast, and this corresponds to the fact that the whole company of the church receives the seal of God, in contrast to all who dwell on the earth who receive the mark of the beast. It is for such to reign with Christ for a thousand years.

The millennium, or the reign of Christ and the martyrs on earth for a thousand years, is one of the strangest features of Apocalypse. It is full of symbolism and, obviously, its details cannot be pressed. According to Fiorenza (1991:107), the millennium is sandwiched between the capture and the final assault of the devil and his armies. The author characterises the millennial vision and the eschatological assault as one and the same visionary unit. If this is the case, only the devil's imprisonment, but not the reign of victorious Christians (Rv 22:5), is intended to be limited to a symbolic time span of a thousand years. There are two strains which had emerged within the Jewish thought of the future messianic kingdom. One going back to prophecy, which looked forward to a glorious kingdom on the earth, as we saw in chapter four. Such a strain is found for instance in Isaiah chapter eleven, which has been alluded to several times in the Apocalypse. This strain developed in apocalyptic writing as earlier mentioned. Isaiah 65 is an Old Testament apocalyptic specimen; other apocalyptic books like Baruch and some parts of Enoch developed later.

The second strain saw the present world as hopeless and irredeemable, and it looked forward for a temporary messianic kingdom on a restored earth as a prelude to a new earth altogether. We find a good example of this in the apocryphal 2 Esdras 7:27-30, which talks of a messianic reign of 400 years before the Messiah dies. According to Preston & Hanson (1949:123), the writer of the Apocalypse technically and impressively incorporates both types of thought and, as usual, adapts them freely. He takes the traditional details of the earthly kingdom articulately, and uses them to describe the new Jerusalem in the new heaven and the new earth of chapter 21, and he says very little about the millennium at all. Probably he only mention millennium here to provide an attractive reward for the martyrs.

Verse 5. In this verse the martyrs are differentiated from others. The rest must await the conclusion of the millennium. Such a unique state is termed as the first resurrection, and all who shared this unique state are termed as saints. According to Morris (1969:238), the phrase could refer to the resurrection of the dead at the end of millennium, even though the sense appears to require us to take it as the raising of the martyrs to reign in glory with Christ. However, for the pre-millennial view, it implies a second resurrection. Other views would see two resurrections of different types, so that John speaks not of two resurrections but of one.

Verse 6. This verse explains the state of those who took part in the first resurrection. They are μακάριος καὶ ἅγιος, which makes the impression that they are in a blessed and holy experience. They shall have the benefit of three blessings: for one they will not taste the second death; secondly they will be made priests of God and of Christ, and thirdly they are to reign with Christ for a thousand years. The joy is that they are associated with Christ in priestly duties and in royalty. According to Sweet (1979:289), the millennial priestly reign may signify not only a reward for the miseries of their earthly life, but also the hidden powers and functions of that life now openly expressed, because Christ is revealed. So verse 6 qualifies verse 4, but we must note that verse four does not specifically apply to the martyrs only, for this would exclude the non-martyred faithful believers from eschatological benefits. The hope of the millennium contrasts

with the rest of the New Testament in details, but not in the overall orientation of its eschatology.

Unique is the mention of the millennium and the two resurrections. Even though the idea of two resurrections may have been derived from the eschatology of Dan. 12:12, where we find a super resurrection of many who are dead to receive eternal life, while others receive punishment. The idea of the millennium as a period is eluded in 4 Ezra 7:28-29 and 2 Baruch 40:3 as mentioned earlier and, according to Knight (1999:132), the two books may have been written at the same time as Revelation. John appears to have been a very faithful Jew and we should not deny that he was influenced by the apocalyptic tradition of his time. While the first resurrection is a reward to the martyrs, the second would imply that the ungodly will be punished, when the rewarding of the martyrs has begun. Simply John portrays his belief in universal resurrection, but he differentiates the godly and the ungodly in order to make judgement a paramount feature. The second resurrection permits the judgement of the ungodly and their eternal punishment in the lake of fire (Rv 20:15).

The word ἀνάστασις (resurrection), is a terminology for the eschatological resurrection from the dead, which is first represented in later strata of the Old Testament. The verb ἀνίστημι denotes the resurrection of Jesus in the pre- Pauline article of faith in 1 Thessalonians 4:14, 'Jesus died and rose again'. Because of its relation to 'die', ἀνίστημι here clearly signifies the conquering of death (Balz & Horst 1990:90-91). The word here supports a literal interpretation of the first resurrection. The word ἀνάστασις, appears 41 times in the New Testament and it implies a physical resurrection with but two exceptions (Lk. 2:34; Jn 11:26). In this light, it would be probably right to translate the word in a literal meaning in Revelation 20:5-6 and in the same perspective the word ζάω (to live) which is found in both verses 4 and 5, needs also to be translated literally (Kittel 1964-76,2:382-387). The word ζωή denotes in Greek the physical vitality of organic beings. It is important to note that ἀνάστασις is found only in verses 5 and 6 in the whole of Revelation and that the word πρωτός with resurrection appears no where else

in both Testaments apart from this passage.

A word research study of the words ἀνάστασις (resurrection), ζάω (live) and ζωή (life) together with other common synonyms shows that they are interchangeably used to refer both to spiritual and physical resurrection within the same context (cf. Rm 6:4-13; 8:10-11; Jn 5:24-29). In the New Testament the word ζωή is first used of the natural life of man. The opposite then is conveyed by νεκρον, while the true and proper meaning of ζωή in this instance is the future life after death (Kittel 1964-1976. 2 :382-387).

Such striking observations do not demonstrate that the same words in the apocalypse 20:4-6 signify both spiritual and physical resurrection. Nevertheless it is a proof that they can have a dual meaning in other passages in the same context. A literal understanding of this text, may demand literal understanding of the millennial period also. The millennialist community expected a supernatural intervention, which would result in cataclysmic end of all things. But one must always bear in mind the word σημαίνω, which means ‘to signify’, in Revelation 1:1, encourages the interpreter to be predominantly symbolic rather than literal. The author wrote to respond to the situations facing the millenarian movement, but the community got his message differently. Symbolism is a narrative technique which we must take note of, particularly when dealing with numbers, hence the interpretation of millennium as figurative is the best interpretation of this period, because multiples of the figure a thousand have already been used (cf. Rv 5:11; 7:4-9; 9:16; 14:1; 14:20 ; 21:6), where ‘a thousand’ with other numbers are most likely figurative. Mealey (1992:27) argues that a thousand years is figurative and refers to saints physically reigning on the earth for a long time, and that it stands in contrast to the short time in Revelation 20:3.

If we agree with this scholar then a proper understanding of the millennium would have to view Revelation 20:3-6 as explaining a delayed or postponed coming of Christ, even though this would contradict the imminent expectation of parousia elsewhere in the book (cf. Rv 6:10-11).

Nevertheless it is best that we take a thousand years as figurative, meaning 'a long time'. In case of the contradiction, we also have other passages in the New Testament which show a delay before the second coming of Christ which also show contradiction with the imminence of parousia in their respective texts (cf. Mt 25:5, 24,36-44; Lk 12:41-48; 19:11-13). So the issue of contradiction in the case of figurative interpretation of millennium would not be fatal. The end is characteristically understood as both 'now and not yet' in the New Testament.

It is important for modern interpretation to note that the doctrine of millennium is found only in this passage in the New Testament and we cannot regard it as having great authority. The doctrine of the millennium developed later, when Christianity was faced with persecution, after its separation from the Jewish religion after 70CE.

It appears that millennium was probably of secondary importance in the author's mind, since his primary concern was looking for a way of rewarding the martyrs.

Millennium as a period of a thousand years occurs some twenty three times in the New Testament, 19 of which are from Revelation, and 13 of these are in Revelation 7:4-8 in reference to multiples of one thousand. Millennium expresses the comprehensive nature of eschatological events. It is striking that the word appears six times in Revelation 20:2-7. The primary point of the word is to connote figuratively a long time and also the thematic idea of the ultimate victory of Christians who have suffered death (Beale 1998:387). This is consistent with the use of other numbers in the Apocalypse where the largeness of the number implies a theme, for example, the length, width, and height of the walls of the new Jerusalem respectively is fifteen hundred miles. Basically the idea may not literally be of very long, very wide and very high walls, but the fullness of God's people who should be seen as the city (Rv 21:12-16,18-20). In the same spirit, the city's wall of 144 cubits does not mean a literary very high wall but the absolute security of God in the new creation (cf. Rv 20:17-20). On the other hand large numbers else where in the Apocalypse can have the figurative idea of a large crowd (Rv 5:11; 9:16), so the context will always decide in

each case.

The millenarian movements teaches that, for a period of a thousand years before the end, Christ will rule the earth in a kingdom of his saints and this will be followed by a final struggle then a general resurrection, the last judgement and the final inauguration of the kingdom. This was a very common belief in the early church and it still has its adherents in our churches today. One thing is very clear here, that the doctrine was prevalent throughout the early church, particularly among those who had received their faith from Jewish teachers. According to Barclay (1976:186), before the coming of Christ the general belief was that God would set up an everlasting kingdom, which would destroy other kingdoms (Dn 2:44; 7:14, 27). In the last century before Christ, many Jewish people felt that this world was irredeemably evil and the kingdom of God could never finally come, so a new idea emerged that the messiah could come for a limited reign and then afterwards the final inauguration of God's kingdom would come. According to Beale (1998:386), the old Testament use of a thousand is both temporal and non-temporal (1Ch 16:15-17), where God's covenant is forever and ever, and his everlasting covenant is equated with the word that he commanded to a thousand generations. It is out of this literature do we find the background of the millennium.

In the early church this idea was taken up and emphasised by the Apostolic Fathers, as we saw in our chapter three. According to Ford (1975:350), the resurrection of the righteous, the reign of the anointed one, and the frequent mention of a 'thousand years', indicate that Revelation 20:4-6 is a vision of the millennial kingdom. Millennialism describes a social movement of people whose central belief is that the present oppressive world is in crisis and will soon end, through some cataclysmic event, and a new heaven and a new earth will come, which will be perfect and blissful. In the early Church the concept of the millennium was generally accepted, but in later years it was the occasion for some controversy.

In summing up this section, I contend that the mention of millennium in Revelation 20:4-6 is as

a result of the author being influenced by the general Jewish attitude of an intermediate reign on earth and the social situation in Asia Minor at the time of his writing. Therefore we can conclude that the millennium is plausibly present which encompasses the time from the first appearance of Christ on earth until his second coming, that is, the time of the Church. We have also seen that the millennial reign portrays the victory of Christ as continuous while the thousand years signifies the complete defeat of the devil. According to Horsely (1987), the miracles and exorcisms of Jesus manifested an already present kingdom here on earth. The concept of the kingdom of God as already on earth signifies millennium. Such a concept is also highly debatable since, it depends on our interpretations of passages which are highly symbolic.

5.3.2 Satan is let lose (Rv 20:7-10)

In this section the author takes us back to a theme he has mentioned several times, namely the gathering together of all the powers of darkness at the end time, so that they can fight with the reigning Christ and the resurrected martyrs. Here the author tackles this issue very briefly. The victory of God is quick and sure. It is a section that explains what will happen after the millennium. Satan is expected to be set free from imprisonment and he will emerge to deceive the nations, at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog. According to Ford (1975:350), the immunity from satanic attacks is removed at the end of the thousand years and the enemy rallies his earthly allies to fight against the beloved city, presumably the millennial Jerusalem (vs 9).

Verse 7. The third section begins here, without the traditional way of introducing a vision. When the period of bliss comes to an end, Satan will be loosed, probably by the same angel who locked him in. The author does not explain who will loose him or how he will be set free. The word ὅταν signifies uncertainty of time. This strongly supports the figurative interpretation of the thousand years once again. The word should be literally translated as ‘whenever’ the period ends. According to Beckwith (1979:745), the victory that the author portrays in Revelation 19:19-21, over the dragon and his angels or his subjects, does not leave a room for satan to be set lose in

order to wage a battle. This verse also cannot be interpreted literally.

Verse 8. When let loose, Satan will resume his cunning tricks and activities, but now he will intensify his war, so like the unclean spirits, like the frogs, he will gather the nations for the final battle (Rv 16:13-16). The expression, Gog and Magog, seems to signify all people of all nations. We find the word Gog mentioned in a genealogy (1 Chr 5:9) and also in a prophecy (Ezk 38, 39) and now in this verse. Magog is also found in a genealogy in Genesis 10:2 and also in 1 Chronicles 1:5. When these verses are aligned, Magog seems to be the land from which Gog originated, although in the Septuagint Magog seems to be a prince (Morris 1969:239). In the later period, Jews thought of Gog and Magog as leaders symbolizing the powers of evil, particularly in the apocalyptic writings. This passage is probably best linked with the mention of Armageddon (Rv 16:16) and the unnamed battle of Revelation 19:19. We now find total conflict between the two forces, and the evil forces are absolutely destroyed (Malina 1995:232). So we can understand Gog and Magog as the world as it stands opposed to God (Ezk. 38:2, 9).

We realise that verses 7 and 8 are highly pictorial in their representation of the stance that Christians must take against the delights of the world in their own communities. The verses show a battle in which the forces of light or the sons of God must win victoriously. Probably the author combined them as a way of referring to the hosts of the wicked. The millenarian movement saw the victory as the key promise in the expected millennial reign.

Verse 9. After the battle, the downfall of the evil forces has come. This verse attempts to explain what will follow. John moves to past tense, ἀνέβησαν, meaning ‘they went up’, but he does not change the sequence, ‘the breath of the earth’ is a curious expression in this connection. This might signify the strength of their armies. According to Morris (1969:239) ‘the beloved city’ should surely be understood as opposed to ‘the great city’. This part of the verse denotes humanity in organised communities, or humanity opposed to God, so the beloved city portrays the spiritual person, who is now willingly placed under the rule of God. John once again sees evil as a

threatening force to the servants of God, and a battle seems imminent, but none takes place (Rv 19:10-20). The destruction of evil is now done through a fire from heaven that comes down (cf. Ezk. 38: 22). The author thinks of the power of God as so great that the battle is blown away without trace it, and the community now enters into the much awaited celebration.

Verse 10. The Devil is now portrayed as the deceiver of nations (cf. Rv 20:8). Nevertheless his cunning skills are now to be curtailed forever. His time is up more than ever before. He is thrown into the lake of fire and now he does not need to be bound. He will burn with brimstone, which signifies the fierceness of the punishment and continuity, so that it never stops. In the fire, the devil finds his agents the beast and the false prophets of Revelation 19:20. The picture is clear here. Their punishment is eternal. They will be tormented *ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτὸς* and it will also be for ever and ever without end. According to Sweet (1979:292), the abstractions like the dragon and beasts can hardly be tortured but only those who build their lives on them may (Rv 14:10). This phrasing shows the severity of the punishment such people will have to face. Both verses 9 and 10 describes the destruction of the enemy forces. The nations will march from the world and will surround the camp of the saints and the beloved city (cf. 4 Ezra 3:1-2: Hab. 1:6) (Knight 1999:132).

Such an image might have been derived from Psalm 34:7, where the angel of the Lord surrounds those who fear the Lord and he saves them.

5.3. 3 Revelation 20:1-10 and the millennialists

The importance of this passage to the millennialist sect has to be noted. The community's time is linear, moving towards a final, future consumation. The past is ambiguous. It is evil; so the Apocalypse community looks forward to the millennium. The dragon is now restrained and he cannot deceive the nations nor the Apocalypse community (Rv 20:1). The millennium is categorically mentioned in this passage as a blissful period. The Apocalypse community expects a new earth and a new heaven, whereby a new social order will appear (Rv 21:1).

The Apocalypse community orientation is that of establishing the new order for the repressed group. The community believes that it will be liberated from sin and pain and no evil activities will be present (Rv 20:4). They will always be happy and enjoying the millennium. The community believes in the 'messianic' figure who will reign, in this case the Christ and the martyrs are to reign (Rv20:6). For this reason the Apocalypse community was loosely organised, for Christ was the perfect leader awaited.

The millennialist community is usually characterised by strange emotional elements as we saw earlier (Duling 1996:191). This passage shows the emotional elements, the author was either in a trance or ecstatic when he received his visions from heaven (Rv 20:4). He may have been a paranoid or hysterical at the time of receiving his visions, since it is not easy to see such things as animals with more than one head or two horns in a normal state of mind. The divine intervention is the means to establish the millennial reign, the angel binds the dragon and casts him in the lake of fire (Rv 19:17-21).

Maintenance of the authority for the millennial movement may become a problem, for the martyrs and the Christ are going to rule. The expectation of the new social order reduced the stress of the millennial community. This was possible because it was spiritually perceived rather than practically experienced. The millennium can always be meaningful when taken to be a spiritual reign of Christ here on earth. It is impossible to imagine Christ sitting in an office in Jerusalem in Palestine or in Nairobi, Kenya, with all the armies and all the traffic in the cities. The passage requires a symbolic interpretation in order for it to have meaning throughout all generations. In this way it will not cause any disillusionment to any group.

5.4 Summing up the exegesis

There are several things that can be noted from this exegesis of Revelation 20:1-10. We note that the devil is bound by the angel and thrown into the bottomless pit. He is totally restrained from

deceiving the nations throughout the millennium (Rv 20:1-3). We also realise that Christ will reign throughout the millennium which will be characterised with peace and joy, since no evil activities will be present (Rv 20:4-6). Satan will be set loose for a while so that his total destruction will follow (Rv 20:7-10). A critical analysis of I Corinthians 15:23-28, would also portray that Paul might equally have believed in an intermediate period in which Christ would reign until his enemies are put under his feet (1Cor15:25). Millennium was a common idea within early Christianity.

Another notable thing in this exegesis is the notion that the martyrs, who died out of their witness and confession of Christ, will participate in the first resurrection and reign with Christ throughout this period. What comes out clearly here is that there is no mention of the relationship of this millennium to the time of the second advent of Christ. One wonders, whether Christ returns before or after the millennium. The text of Revelation 20:1-10, and also the whole of the Apocalypse, does not give an answer to this question.

Last and not the least, is that the millennium does not demonstrate a permanent establishment of Christ's kingdom here on earth. The New Testament in general does not portray Christ coming for a short time again on earth, unless the author was referring to the first coming. It shows a short lived reign of about a thousand years, 'But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day', (2Pt 3:8). So the millennial reign is portrayed as a temporary government, a period just before the end. It was a foretaste of the real kingdom. Then the Devil will be loose (Rv 20: 3, 7; cf 12:12). The second resurrection will take place and the dead will be put into judgement (Rv 20 : 14). After that comes the eternal kingdom of God. The primary point noted is that numbers are best interpreted figuratively in Apocalypse as also in the Old Testament. The millennial reign of Christ is therefore seen as a continuous victory for Christians other than a chronological event at the end time, since our first resurrection is our salvation in Christ (Rm 6).

5.5 Conclusion

The millenarian communities are naturally futuristic, but out of this exegesis we can say that the traditional emphasis on the millennium as a future event is a misplaced concept. We however cannot ignore the impact of this concept on these movements. The events of both verses 1-3 and 4-6 seem to occur at the same period of time, which is then referred to here as a thousand years.

We have seen that the millennium cannot be taken as a literal chronological number, simply because Revelation is full of figurative use of numbers. Out of this exegesis, we find nothing unique with the use of a thousand years, since many other words appear in this passage of Revelation 20:1-10, which cannot be literally interpreted. Such words are chain, bottomless pit, dragon, old serpent, locked or keyed, sealed and the beast, these words would have no meaning if literally understood, and their ambiguity is only removed by conceiving them as figuratively used. Apocalypse is predominantly fond of the figurative tone. We discovered in the foregoing chapters that the number one thousand is figuratively used in the Old Testament (Ps 90:4), and also in the New Testament, as well as in early Christianity, as a period of joy and peace for those who will remain faithful unto death.

Therefore a search for an African or Western calendar that plots out the future days and years as found in the Apocalypse is definitely a misguided concept. The apocalypse message is not in its details but in the impact on a millenarian community, that believed the world was irredeemably evil and only God's intervention could change the order of events. The adherent then only needed to hear what the Apocalypse had to offer. No wonder the phrase 'he who has an ear, let him hear what the spirit says unto the church' was a common statement with the writer.

From this exegesis the message is simple and clear. The suffering is just a temporary situation, but a necessary experience, for those who confess Christ in an evil world, not only in the first century, but also in our modern times. One major promise given in this passage is that Christ and the church will always prevail over these present afflictions and tribulations. Hence the

community of the apocalypse have to remain separated from the world, and hold on to their confession and faith until Christ returns, regardless of the sufferings. The community must cling to the belief that God's justice and peace will prevail, even if it is not completely evident to them.

This passage of the Apocalypse is one of the most difficult and controversial in the whole of the New Testament, but it has a clear message to the church which is militant in every age. The millennial reign is however not placed on earth by this passage, it is a heavenly activity. The believers, like Christ, require patience, endurance and faithfulness, since they will be triumphant. The millenarian communities see this passage and the Apocalypse as a whole as the best message which seems to fit their situations in life. The passage is regularly used for their own predictions concerning a good future. Embraced like a new bride or a new car, millennium is a new discovery to the East African community. In our next chapter we will spell out the East African concept of millennium and explain why this passage has been so appealing to them, along with the power it has. Millennium as a re-discovered concept may cause more harm to the new believers than to those who received the Apocalypse in the first instance.

CHAPTER SIX

EAST AFRICAN CONCEPT OF THE MILLENNIUM

6.0 Introduction

6.1 The major task of this chapter

The major task of this chapter is to spell out the East African concept of future time in terms of the millennium as an expected event in future. One important thing we wish to bring out in this chapter is that the Africans did not have the technical terms such as millennium and eschatology, such terms had no place in the traditional thinking. We also want to investigate the power of the Apocalypse which has given it such a great influence upon the East African communities, even though the millennium was a new idea to them. To clarify why the millennium might have been appealing, we shall look at some of the problems that have been faced by the East African communities. In the previous chapters we saw that the millennium was appealing to the Apocalypse community, because it addressed the contradictions experienced by the community. If the millennium is a period coming only at the final end, then East Africans would not have any place for it, as we shall see in this chapter, which may also explain why it is a disaster. To the East Africans what matters most is what happened in the past and what is taking place now.

We intend to establish that East African communities have, to a large extent, opted for a continuous reign of God (as millennium) from creation until the arrival of Europeans, where the world God created can only be improved rather than be destroyed by the same Creator. It was generally believed that God punishes evil, but he cannot destroy the whole world, such is incomprehensible to the Africans. This concept is in direct opposition to the Johannine Apocalypse community, which is largely future oriented. The main focus on this chapter is to spell

out the East African concept of millennium before the arrival of the missionaries and also the rediscovery of the millennium in a future perspective. The promise of good life was the order of the day during liberation days in East Africa and the word *uhuru* (independence) came to be the most commonly used slogan. This word is being translated as self reliance or independency (English-Swahili Dictionary 1996:398). It is important to note that translations do not convey the full meaning of the Kiswahili concept. Many East Africans thought that independence meant free things- just as many South Africans believe today: that just because they are blacks they should be given everything free. The East Africans never wanted *uhuru* before the coming of the colonialists. It was after deprivation of their own rights, that *uhuru* was required since the cultural and religious methods could no longer cope with colonialism.

Africans are known to have made no distinction between religion and their normal way of life. There was no time when African peoples were not religious, the whole life of an African involved religion. If somebody woke up in the morning having a headache in my custom, the first question would be, which side did you face as you slept? It was believed that a particular position of sleeping was godly. To Africans, God was one as supreme, but he manifested himself in various attributes (Mbiti 1970: 6). The Africans used simple language to describe God, such as his names. The daily events explained the time reckoning; without events there was no time.

The technical term 'millennium' found in the Apocalypse is unfortunately not found in either the Old Testament or in the rest of the New Testament, where other kinds of terminologies are used to suggest concepts of inaugurated or anticipated millennium, as we have already seen in the foregoing chapters. The millennium would make sense to Africans only if it could be taken to mean an actualised or experienced continuous rule of God as past and present, in terms of good harvests, health or as an anticipated good season ahead, which would not be more than two seasons. The millennium in East Africa would therefore be understood as *uhuru* (a continuous presence of blessings). In this thesis, this concept is of utmost significance. The East African traditional millennial concept from which the millennial concept of the Apocalypse has been

critically evaluated, is based on the general African concept of millennium. This idea is generalised here, although every people has their own specific beliefs.

The general African understanding of the millennium is the seed-bed on which the East African concept, including the Kenyan, is being constructed. The concept of the millennium as the reign of God does not have the potential to stand independently of the general African concept of the millennium. The traditional East African concept cannot be treated as if it were an independent entity, so that in spelling out the general concept, we have to follow particular routes in order to make sense of what we are to say about the millennium. We will then look at the African concept of time in terms of past, present and future to see whether a thousand year rule would have meaning to East Africans as a future event. We will also look at God as king, judgement as a sign of continuous millennial reign, and after life as the resurrection. Now we will focus on the East African concept of time as an attempt to establish whether millennial reign of God as a future event had any place in the African reckoning of time; and if it had, to what extent.

6.2 The East African concept of time

Time in African understanding has no value if no event is taking place at the particular moment. According to Mbiti (1969:16), the question of time is of little or no academic concern to African peoples in their traditional life. For them time is simply a composition of events which have occurred, those which are taking place now and those which are imminent. To Africans what has not taken place or what has no likelihood of an immediate occurrence falls in the category of no time. This gives us the notion that the pre-millennial view, which asserts that Revelation 20 teaches that Christ's second coming will usher in a literal thousand year reign on the earth, with those who have been martyred for their faith who will be physically resurrected at that time, would obviously not make sense to the Africans. This is because the occurrence of the millennium is not certain, but anticipated. It does not fall within the rhythm of natural phenomena, so it is not in the category of potential time. There is no way the East African communities would have a period

of a thousand years reign awaiting inauguration in the future since such falls outside potential time.

African time has really only two dimensions, with a long past and present and virtually no future. This rules out any concept of millennium as a numerical period of time in East African traditional thinking. Therefore the post millennial view, which asserts that Revelation 20 teaches that a literal 'thousand year' period of unparalleled triumph for the gospel and implementation of kingdom principles will precede the second advent of Christ, is equally not comprehensible to Africans. The Apocalypse's linear concept of time with an indefinite past, present and infinite future is practically uncomprehensible in East African thought and in African traditional thinking in general.

In the African understanding the future is basically absent, because events assumed for the future have not occurred, and that which has not been realised, cannot constitute time. If the millennium is an event that must occur because it falls within the inevitable rhythm of nature, it would, at best, constitute only potential time but not an actual time of a thousand years. African time is therefore what is past and what is present, since Africans are not used to setting their minds on future events but on the events which are past or which have just taken place.

The African understanding of time is basically governed by two dimensions of present and past, as said above, whether for an individual or community, so that time must be experienced in order to make sense, or to be seen as real time. To East Africans, unspent time is no time. Failure to do some expected activities like harvesting, planting, milking, or cooking would signify a waste of time because time is wasted if a particular event is not observed, where that which is required to be done is not done. In this kind of understanding the future is not an experienced event, and so it is not part of time. Millennium as a future event cannot therefore be time to the Africans and it is inconceivable.

These arguments leave us with the option of the a-millennial view, which asserts that the 'thousand year' (Rv 20:4) period should be taken symbolically for the current era, which lasts from the first advent of Christ as past to the second coming of Christ as potential time since it has already happened once. According to Mbiti(1969:18), in the East African languages, there are no concrete words or experiences to convey the idea of a distant future. In the languages, particularly Swahili, the largest single spoken language and a major uniting factor in East Africa, the furthest future is only a few seasons to come, and the future would only be an extension of the present. The East African communities have no active interest in events that lie in the future beyond, particularly beyond a few seasons or two, and our languages lack words by which such an event could be expressed . Mbiti (1969:12) says that we do not even have myths about the future. People's lives are anchored in the past, since God is only seen as being in and beyond the past.

When East Africans reckon time, it is for a concrete and specific purpose, in connection with events, but not just for the sake of mathematics. There is no time at all without a composition of events. People could not reckon the millennium in a vacuum(1969:21). People know future time in terms of the future death of the living to join the living dead in the spiritual world, but no time is anticipated for the dead to gain physical bodies; the living dead are always visiting in spiritual form. It is no surprise therefore that the pre-millennial and the post- millennial views which saw a thousand years of Revelation 20:4-6 as a literal time frame hold no place in the East African concept of time.

Therefore the millennium as a future event (Rv 20:4) consisting of a particular period of time is alien to the African way of thinking. Mbiti (1969:20) argues about the lack of future time in the African concept by using two Swahili words *Sasa* (present) and *zamani* (past) in order to move from the English thought line of present and past. Another factor is that even though counting of numbers is there, one can only count what is visible. Africans have no calendars in terms of days, months and years. Unless millennium is a re-occurring event it would not be visualised at all, hence not anticipated. One would however, know how many seasons a cow would take before

calving, since this was a rhythmical event. So a day is known according to its particular events, the year is likewise composed of events. It is made up of seasonal activities such as an agricultural event, a year depends on how long the season is and not on days; a year may have 400 days while another may have 370 days. This renders the numerical calendars meaningless (1969:21). The Apocalypse's concept of the millennial reign as a future event therefore becomes a misconception to East Africans and to Africans in general.

Concluding this section of time, we note that the a- millennial view would make more sense in the East African concept of time, whereby a thousand year reign is taken symbolically for the whole period of time between the first and the second coming of Christ. This interpretation fits our exegesis of the Apocalypse, since it does not anticipate a literal, specific period of time in future. This also fits East African experience and culture because beyond a few seasons from now, as we have seen, the East African concept of time is silent and indifferent.

6.2.1 East African concept of God as a future king

East African peoples cannot imagine a time when God was not reigning. God has always been there ruling all the time. Although the Kikuyu, to whom I belong, did not have traditional central rulers, such as chiefs, they still recognised God as 'the ruler and governor of the universe' (Mbiti 1970:71). The political authority was in the hands of elders, but universally the final authority was in the hands of God. None of them would be able to understand the millennial reign as a future event, perceiving the millenarian movements as a result of western invasion, which was brought in by the arrival of the missionaries.

The Chaggas of Tanganyika invoke God as chief and they have an attitude towards God as their king, which is a sign of complete loyalty (Mbiti 1970:72). The African concept of God as Lord and master is closely related to that of king and ruler. The title Lord or master is one of respect and honour; describing the status which people give to God and their attitude of humbleness and

submissiveness before him. In the East African concept, God is considered able to do all things now, as he has always done in the past. The Apocalypse community also had several names for God which signified his rule now both in heaven and on earth. He is the Lord (κύριος) of all things, the Almighty (παντοκράτωρ), and the king (βασιλεύς) (Rv 1:8, 6:10). The Apocalypse is rich in the terminology it uses to describe the character of God. In the East African community, God is also seen as judge. The Abuluyia of Kenya believe that God established the order of their society and believe that any breach would cause him to punish the offender. God is seen as a judge (1970:76). The spirits are the police and judges of tribal law and custom. In many East African societies it is believed that God punishes individuals through illness, misfortune, barrenness or death. So the concept of a future time, when God would rule better than now, does not exist. What exists was the continuous rule of God as king of the universe.

6.2.2 East African concept of History

The East African community sees history as what was time once and now has gone into the past. It is therefore important to look at the millennial reign of God in the perspective of African history. East Africans, like other people, have histories of their own. For us, history is progressively a backward movement in a straight line from now into the past, so history does not move from *zamani* (past) into *sasa* (present) and then into a future climax or a better future to a cosmic and cataclysmic end of the world (Mbiti 1969:162). As we have seen already the future is hazy. The actualised past as a whole is preceded by a pre-history dominated by myths. As earlier said, myths explained what people could not normally comprehend, such as the creation of the world, the first parents of every African tribe and the origin of death. The past is not a dead past but an active one which does not stretch much further back. One concrete thing here is that no myths existed concerning future events.

The East Africans looking at history see God as omnipresent. They are certain that nothing shall bring this physical world to a catastrophic conclusion. The idea of a new world to come as new

earth and new heaven (Rv 21:1) is foreign to Africans. In such respects there are no myths explaining any conclusion to history. This means that any idea of God destroying what he has created and creating it anew was not there. God in history acts in the past and the present, as we shall see, in terms of judgement. So God in history is the first in terms of existence, the cause of all things and he carries the final power and authority over all things (Mbiti 1970:21). In the East African understanding of history, people look back into pre-history, the actualised past, the actualised present and to a lesser extent to unactualised, unclear, immediate future. The East Africans have no hint of a continuation and conclusion of history, while the primeval age is characterised by such hints. In this way the East African concept of the millennial reign of Christ as part of history places an emphasis on the present which is more tied to the past than to the unclear future.

The millenarian community believed that God would judge the world by destroying it, since it was irredeemably evil, and reward the martyrs by giving them the judgement (Rv 20:5). This kept the Apocalypse community growing stronger in the midst of persecution and deprivation as we have already noted. However we need to observe the East African concept of judgment, in order to note that East African peoples did not expect a future judgment as a punishment for those dying without believing. All Africans are notoriously religious (Mbiti 1969:1).

6.2.3 East African concept of judgment

The concept of judgement after death is equally non existent to East African peoples and to Africans in general. So judgment after death is a new idea to these people, just like millennium. No rewards in the life beyond are expected by anybody, and no punishment is to be feared since punishment is a matter of the present. The next world has nothing to be longed for in the African way of life. People are more concerned with now and with the past, as we have seen, than with life in future. So punishment is seen in terms of an individual's death, or of pests to the individual's crops or a terrible sickness.

However, for some African peoples, the notion of punishment after death may also exist. The Yoruba of Nigeria is one example where judgement was imminent after death. They believed that a person appeared before God after death to render an account of his earthly life (1970:259). These people believed that all that they did on earth will be accounted for, kneeling in heaven to prove their case before God. In some other African communities, there is the belief that good people are aided on the journey to the next world, particularly in crossing the river of death and in facing the hardships which older spirits impose on new arrivals. In the next world the souls of good people are not expected to work. They just think what they want to eat, and they get it, and old spirits give them food and rest (1970:260). Such belief in the African setting does not however demand moral or ethical discipline on individuals in the present life. The stronger belief is that rewards or punishments are expected in this life from parents, teachers, the living dead and other spiritual beings.

In the Apocalypse, judgement and the future dominates the book, as we have already seen. The writer depicts judgment as taking place even within history, but the great judgement will take place beyond history, following the second coming of Christ and the resurrection of the dead. Christ himself will be the agent of judgement (cf. Rv 19:15). So to East Africans this kind of judgement still does not have a place. Our present situations are more valued than the life to come, why should I not enjoy the present life expecting to enjoy it in a future time. So the idea of judgment after death is also alien to the East Africans.

6.2.4 East African concept of resurrection

Human life was only conceived with the rhythmic order of nature which was eternal. Such a rhythm included birth, adolescence, marriage, procreation, old age and death. Several rituals were used to mark every stage of life and were used to usher in the next. The entry into the ancestral world of the living dead and spirits was one of the final stages of human beings. All these stages were the key moments of an individual. The belief that people would die and go into a period of

rest and then experience resurrection, where one would get a real physical body, was non-existent and is another new idea to the East Africans.

The term resurrection is also alien to Africans. Death is seen as a process which removed a person gradually from the present to the past. After physical death the individual continues to exist in the present period and will be remembered as long as those who knew him are alive. The dead are believed to be in communication with the old in dreams and not to the children. If all those who knew a particular person are dead, then the dead person moves to the world of unremembered, and will not be remembered nor resurrected. East Africans believe in the living dead and the ancestors who are classified as the dead-dead. Such a belief was mistaken by the missionaries as worship.

East African peoples believe in immortality, as a stage when a person is in the living dead. This kind of personal immortality may continue as far as the generations of these people will remember them. Therefore a living dead is not a resurrected person but a person who is physically dead but alive in the memory of those who knew him in his life time. The personal immortality concept should help us to understand the religious significance of marriage in African communities. Unless one has children to remember him or her after death, one will be forgotten. Such people are then lost and nobody remembers them. They vanish out of human existence like a flame when it is extinguished. It is good to note that the living dead later enter into a collective immortality, which is the world of spirits, where they occupy the ontological space between God and mankind. In the world of spirits humankind cannot grow or develop. This is then the destiny of all people as far as African ontology is concerned. In this state we say one has entered into eternal life (Mbiti 1970:26). Therefore we can say that the concept of resurrection is not African, just as the millennial reign of Christ is not.

This section contrasts with the Apocalypse's idea of life after death, where resurrection has two dimensions; reward for the martyrs, and punishment for the wicked. In the East African concept,

life beyond is of the living dead and the spirits, as we have seen above, who enjoy what we called collective immortality. According to Mbiti (1969:166), the dead do not occupy any kind of thrones as part of a modified or improved spiritual and ethnical status. We see that life lived in the next world is practically the same as life lived here on this earth. The next world is but a shadow of the present world.

The only differences of significance are that the living-dead can mediate between God and man. This is because the living-dead are in a spiritual world; a world of gods and therefore can mediate with God. This kind of belief may be the reason why Africans practiced libations and sacrifices to the living-dead. (They were mistakenly thought by the missionaries to be worshiping the ancestors). So once a person is dead always dead, no hope of any physical resurrection is possible in the East African traditional thinking. So, as I have said earlier, the technical terms of millennium, resurrection and others are all foreign to East Africans. East Africans however discovered a future dimension of time with the arrival of the missionaries, and this also led them to rediscover the idea of the millennium, which gained a new power within the African Christian churches, which has been interpreted in ways quite different to those that the author of Apocalypse would have anticipated.

6.3 The millennium discovered within East Africa

Millenarian movements have always attempted to respond to human pain brought about by social-political and economical crisis. In history such movements have tried to provide support to the communities striving to live out God's love by helping those who struggle with the uncertainties of the world. These movements have also been instrumental in preaching endurance to those faced with deprivation in all areas of life. In the Christian movements this commitment has been empowered by the comfort and hope provided by the Apocalypse, towards the alleviation of the depression and hopelessness arising from situations of oppression. The movement has historically arisen to give hope in a future justice, as we saw in chapter three. According to Fiorenza

(1985:185) the author of the Apocalypse seeks to motivate and encourage Christians in Asia Minor. The ideas of such a movement came as a result of the awakening created by the arrival of European settlers, who also brought in a new concept of time in East Africa.

The arrival of missionaries in East Africa in the middle of the 18th century was the beginning of a new chapter of life. The arrival did not only affect the traditional way of life, but also opened the East Africans eyes to a new dimension of time. Mbiti (1978:16) argues that, on the secular scale, the national planning for economic growth, political independence, and educational facilities made East Africans gain an overly enthusiastic focus on a future dimension.

Today many of us in East Africa believe that if the high lands in East Africa had not been quite so high, the modern history of the region would have been different. Most of the area is a plateau, surrounded by a beautiful coastal plain, but in large areas of Kenya and in parts of Tanzania it rises between 4,000 and 10,000 feet, providing the best temperate climate within the tropics. According to Hughes (1963:13), many of the first Europeans who visited East Africa considered that while the rest of tropical Africa was good enough for Africans and Indian immigrants, the beautiful East African highlands, which were also not highly populated, should be set aside for European settlement. East Africa, unlike some other large stretches of the continent, has been in almost continuous contact with the Mediterranean, Asian, and European civilisations over the last three thousand years.

Colonialism brought with it all sectors of production. The primary production sectors of the economy, agriculture, mining, livestock production industry etc, and indeed investment in all sectors of life were introduced. The East African community was established both by missionaries and imperialists. The community came to be known as Imperial British East Africa, while missionaries started communities, such as the Equatorial Diocese (Anglican), the Scottish mission established the Presbyterian Church of East Africa, which has remained until today. According to Mbiti (1970:27), this change from the African concept of life and time to that of the

western concept has not been a smooth one and may well be the cause of African political instability, while to the Christians it may be the cause of an upsurge in millenarian movements. Mbiti argues that, in church life this discovery seems to create a strong expectation of the millennium leading many Christians to escape from facing the challenges of this life by merely hoping and waiting for the life of paradise. This strong millennial expectation often leads to the creation of numerous small, independent churches, centered around individuals who symbolise, and more or less fulfil this messianic expectation. This happens as an attempt to preserve essential elements of indigenous culture by syncretism.

According to Hughes (1963:23), from their arrival most missionaries saw their task as involving more than saving people from slavery and converting them to Christianity; their main aim was the total eradication of social evils like poverty, ignorance, tribal war, disease and slavery. Such hopes definitely instilled the millennial hope, and movements must have started to form around this idea, particularly new converts who even moved to mission centers separating themselves from the host society. Millenarianism would also have helped them cope with the reality of the slave trade. The idea of millennial reign has flourished during the last two decades.

The East African community has of late faced a shake up that has contributed to the real growth of millennial feelings as a response to the situation that they find themselves in. According to Orwa (1989:239), the 1977-78 Ethiopia-Somali war and the 1978-79 Tanzania-Uganda war arose out of the collapse of the eastern African system that had existed since 1961. Economic self centered interest on the parts of Kenya and Tanzania, and a very uncompromising antagonistic personality clash between Amin and Nyerere, lead to the collapse of the East African community. Such problems must have distracted the Christian community and led frustration and a growing sense of hopelessness.

When a balance of power is disturbed, the tendency is to seek means for the situation to return to equilibrium. The above imbalance lead the group to perceive a discrepancy between what they

wanted and what they actually received. Social participation and aspiration to which they were traditionally accustomed was frustrated. According to Fiorenza (1985:187), the Apocalypse provides the vision of an 'alternative world'. The peace that had remained as a contributing factor to regional stability in the 1960s, was grossly disturbed in the 1970s, a decade that also saw the growth of religious movements of all kinds.

This brings us to a very important point in our discussion of the millennium in the East African thinking. We can now contend that although the future dimension of time is a new one in the African life, there has been steady growth of future dimension (millennium) in the East African understanding of time, until recently, when the rise in religious fanaticism and number of cults in the Eastern African region came to our notice.

It is no longer secret that a 'seclusive club' of religious leaders has turned the word of God into a money-spinning venture. The proliferation in the number of so-called prophets and the many sects and denominations that have come up in recent times within East Africa proves this fact. According to Mbiti (1970:27), the East African discovery and extension of the future dimension of time offers great potentialities and promises for the re-shaping of the entire life of East African people. If these are harnessed and channeled into creative and productive means, they will no doubt become beneficial, but they can obviously get out of control and precipitate both tragedy and disillusionment. Such disillusionment may be observed in a recent commentary from one of the Kenyan newspaper commentators, Wahome Mutahi, who was responding to the behaviour of these modern preachers, and I quote:

I have whispered before that the day I decide to cross the valley of poverty, I will buy myself one of those Bibles with thickness of a brick and covered with a goat skin and declare myself the prophet whispers or Bishop whispers. I will cross the valley of poverty and cease being the owner of a car that is permanently under intensive care called the whisper mobile because there are enough fools in this country to buy me a brand new car

for nothing (Sunday Nation March 26, 2000 :21).

This comment may not be linguistically sound, but it was a quick reaction to the ugly incident in the Church of the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of the Lord in Uganda. It also shows the situation created by the new dimensions of future events.

The sense of estrangement has been precipitated not only by modern changes, which have brought in new ideas, but also the erosion of traditional faith. Such changes, according to Mbiti (1969:229), have disturbed traditional solidarity, leaving an increasing number of African peoples with little or no foundation. Therefore rethinking the whole issue of the millennium at this time is not only of paramount importance but also has been the chief goal of this study. Although religion plays an important role for individuals and society, we must caution our people not to be emotionally carried away to join all sorts of movements. The question which remains is why these people have turned to religious fanaticism with such enthusiasm within the last two decades. The Republic of Tanzania has suffered economic problems for a long time, while Uganda has had political problems for a number of decades.

Kenya liberalised its economy between 1980 and 1994, primarily through the following measures: the removal of controls both on exchange rates and externalisation of foreign currency and importation of goods and services, the removal of price controls, and the removal of licensing for internal movement of agricultural produce. This resulted in a massive devaluation of the Kenya shilling and the displacement of internal industrial production by imports. As a direct result there was a dramatic rise in the inflation rate and a contraction of the productive sector - industry, manufacturing, trade and agriculture - followed by reduction in access to basic needs like health, education and basic amenities. The threat to employment and the actual collapse of whole sub-sectors of the economy were very real at the height of the liberalisation. The fear of economic collapse reached panic levels as major industries, multinational firms, local and public sector firms, either closed, laid off thousands of persons or tottered on the verge of collapse (Christians

for a Just Society Report unpublished, 1997: 3).

These East African problems had a direct impact on the Christian communities who felt threatened. So the *uhuru* (freedom) that everybody expected between the countries was now jeopardised, the community now turned to millennialism; an effort by members of a community to construct a more satisfying culture (Talmon 1962:125). As we have seen in the previous chapters, the Apocalypse was written as a response to such situations. It became turns out to be more appealing to the East African peoples who were under these threats. Many modern prophets in East Africa started to suggest that the year 2000 is about the right time for the millennium. So to the East Africans it is not a wonder that a cult in Uganda led over a thousand members to commit suicide at the beginning of the year 2000. We still have to ask ourselves: what makes the Apocalypse so powerful that it leads people to *kill* themselves in order to enter new bliss? The Apocalypse uses language, narrative techniques and drama to have impact upon its readers.

6.4 Why millennial groups may survive for a long time

One notable point in this thesis is that early Christianity's expectation of the millennium did not lead, as often happens today, with some sects taking an isolationist or quiet stance towards the outside world. They were to wait for a little while before the revenge of the martyrs was taken. This is because Christianity was basically a missionary faith and this element made it flourish in very hard situations. Early Christianity was both missionary and eschatological (Fiorenza 1985:104) in its focus. For this reason they were to wait for a little while for the number of saints to be complete (Rv 6:11).

The reason why the millennial movements survive the failure of a prophecy is because of *cognitive dissonance*. The theory of cognitive dissonance states that under certain conditions a religious community whose fundamental beliefs are disconfirmed by events in the world will not necessarily collapse and disband. As earlier said, the leaders usually make another prophecy or

spiritualise the event. In Christian circles, the Christians may undertake zealous missionary activity as a response to its sense of cognitive dissonance. For example, a condition of distress and doubt stemming from the failure of an important belief. The critical element of the theory is that the presence of dissonance gives rise to pressures to reduce or eliminate the dissonance. It is only in rare cases that such movements opt for killing themselves to make the prophecy realised and this may happen where there is no balancing of the contradictions in life.

According to Gager (1975:39) the strength of the pressures to reduce the dissonance is a function of the magnitude of the dissonance. The Christian community becomes more evangelistic than before in order to affirm their belief. This may explain why the Jesus movement spread more rapidly after the death of its leader. They said, 'but we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel' (Lk 24:21). The East African community also continued to struggle for freedom long after the colonialist had ceased ruling them. Many welcomed the idea of millennium for it emphasised that this world was not their home since it was irredeemably evil. This is basically the initial response to a failure of the expected *uhuru*, and this substantiates the basic theory of cognitive dissonance.

The community survives due to the continuation of their belief, and those who survive the failed prophecy have several commitments that result in the growth of the movement rather than its collapse. According to Gager (1975:40), the community has a strong belief with deep conviction, a strong commitment to the belief which is difficult to undo, and a belief that is specific and concerned with the real world, able to be refuted by events. Undeniable failure must occur to the individual holding the belief, and the believer must have social support. According to Brown (1965:705), we live in a world of contradictions and one must be able to choose between the commitments which are legitimate for all group members. A person must retain individual autonomy by honoring different loyalties depending on the circumstances. The Apocalypse offers such autonomy through its rhetorical narratives. According to Osiek (1992:45), when the expected fails to be realised or it is delayed, the apocalyptic message gets reinterpreted and accommodated

to a way of life intended to continue indefinitely in history. To the East Africans the imminent expectation of *uhuru* turned to a continual watchfulness, and the apocalyptic symbols have now become ways of predicting and interpreting history.

6.5 The power of the Apocalypse

The purpose of this section is to show what the Apocalypse does and how it does it. In other words I wish to focus in a few paragraphs on the effects that Apocalypse has on its readers and how it achieves these effects. As we have already seen, the Apocalypse was written to console a community that faced threats of all kinds to help them overcome the unbearable tension, foreseen by the author, between what was happening and what he thought ought to have been happening.

The Apocalypse uses language, narrative and rhetorical techniques to influence its hearers. The language is informative where words are used to describe people, things and ideas in a variety of ways. The leader tells people that supernatural beings will care for the people who will benefit from the newly formed society of millennialism (Christ will reign with those martyred for their faith as in Revelation 20:4-6). According to Collins (1984:154) the informative and cognitive language is also used which provokes people to think. Such a language may be called referential; it is a quality that allows us to relate the Apocalypse to its historical context and to discover social information in its pages.

The Apocalypse also employs a lot of expressive language, where words are used to display attitudes and feelings in such a way that it creates a virtual experience for the hearer or the reader (Rv3:16). According to Fiorenza (1985:6), the symbolic universe and the world of vision in the apocalypse is a 'fitting response', to its socio-political 'rhetorical situation'. It seeks to alienate the community from the symbolic persuasion of the Imperial cult. It is likely that the Apocalypse

was read aloud in public worship of a given locality, just as we read it today during funeral services in the Anglican Churches. The book opens with a beatitude 'blessed is he who reads aloud the words of the prophecy for the time is near'(Rv 1:3). The book encourages the millennialist community as the hearers of the word.

The Apocalypse is stimulatory; words are used which evoke attitudes and feelings. It handles the thoughts, attitudes and the feelings of the hearers carefully (Fiorenza 1985:183). Through this language the Apocalypse becomes a means to overcome the intolerable tension between a disastrous reality and the need for hope (Rv 3:20). This has a very therapeutic function for millenarian movements. The tension which is usually caused by unanticipated happenings in life like earthquakes, oppression, economic crisis, terrible accidents or loss of loved ones has far reaching effects. Sociologists term such tension 'cognitive dissonance'; a state of mind that arises when there is great disparity between expectations and reality (Collins 1984:141). The language used by Apocalypse is able to reflect these sharp contradictions in life, visions of what ought to have been are expressed in symbols related to God and Christ in the Apocalypse. To the East African community, who fought for their *uhuru* (independent) with a lot of hope which has not yet been realised, the Apocalypse remains very appealing as a way of rediscovering cognitive dissonance.

The titles of God in the Apocalypse (Rv 1:8; 4:8; 6:10) suggest that some Christians expected the rule of God announced by Christ to be a public affair. They expected the social, economic and political order to be changed speedily and thoroughly. Jesus and his followers must have public and communal vindication in the here and now, and soon (Fiorenza 1985:181). Such were the hopes and expectations of what ought to have been for the millennialist community, in striking contrast with reality, as we saw in our discussion of the social situation of the Apocalypse in chapter three.

The narrative and rhetorical technique of the Apocalypse mitigate the feelings of powerlessness

in such a way that they give assurance to people in that they have access to privileged information, to the revealed truth of heavenly origin. This narrative rhetorical technique does not deny the powerlessness and lack of control over events experienced within East African community, but affirms these feelings, saying that God is in control of them. The forces of evil are rampant now, but their defeat is certain (cf. Rv 12). The fear of the hearers is not denied or belittled, rather it is intensified. The enemies have power which cannot be overcome easily, but the symbolic language and rhetorical technique promise victory and new life. According to Fiorenza (1985:183), 'the Apocalyptic language is a secret code or sign-system depicting events that can be equated with historical persons or theological themes'. The hope of this victory is on the other side of suffering and death: 'be faithful unto death' (Rv 2:18) and I will give you a crown of life. Fearful feelings are purged by the very act of expressing them.

According to Collins (1984:154), the Apocalypse provides a healing process when it is applied to the millenarian community itself. It reduces the cognitive dissonance in two ways: firstly the disquieting, disruptive feelings are released in a literary, experiential process of healing. Secondly hearers are convinced of what ought to be. The Apocalypse carries a hidden heavenly reality that shows the visible world to be radically different from what it seems. Jesus, though crucified and slain, is already risen and exalted in heaven (ch.5). His followers are powerless, yet he is their true king and also the ruler of the earthly kings. Satan is the source of the power used by Rome (chs. 12 and 13). The reality of what ought to be is in the already determined future, which is in the hands of God and Christ.

The language made the feelings, which were probably latent, vague, complex and ambiguous explicit, conscious and simple because the millennial reign of Christ was coming soon, this made the difference. The narrative techniques made the complex relationships clear with the use of a dualistic frame work between good and evil. Those who rejected Christ were the followers of the beast, those without God's seal had the mark of the beast and were doomed to destruction. The sense of fear and helplessness and aggressive feelings were maximised, placed in a wide context

which helped the hearers to distance themselves from them. According to Becker (1987:52-57), the Apocalypse made it possible for the hearers to gain some distance from their experience. It provided a feeling of detachment and thus greater control. People were able to acknowledge the threats and were able to deal with them, probably by forming new religious movements, which catered for their spiritual crisis.

6.6 Conclusion

In this chapter we have evaluated the East African concept of the millennium, through its concept of time and its facets, and we have noted that there was no concept of future time as a long period; there were no calendars in numerical terms. East African time is made up of the events which are rhythmically ontological, transforming happenings into calendars in the African way of reckoning. In this chapter we have noted that millennium as a period of Millennial reign of Christ has no place in the African concept of time. It has to be taken only as the continuous rule of God from past to the present and to a very short future.

We have also noted that East African history moves backwards from now (*sasa*) into the long past (*zamani*). For the East Africans now is more important than the past and also than the short future. We have noted that death in itself is not the end of a person and that no future resurrection is possible in the East African concept of life after death. The living-dead continue to live without a reward or punishment but continue with the characteristics of the past. To the Africans no punishment is to be feared in the next world. So people never fear death nor do they anticipate it.

It came out clearly that the millennium was rediscovered with the arrival of the missionaries in East Africa in the middle of the 18th century, who opened the African eyes to a new concept of the future. Like a new dress or a new car East Africans have nurtured the idea of millennium in the last two decades. This nurturing was favoured by the social, political and economic problems, as

we have already analysed them, which have been the order of the day in East Africa.

We have also noted that Apocalypse's use of language, narrative rhetorical techniques helped to deal with the contradictions which threatened the communities. I therefore contend that the concept of the millennium is alien to the East African community. In such a case I advocate that the a millennial view, which allows continuity of creation without a total destruction, is more appropriate for this community. And this concept is also a re-discovered concept within the African setting of future time.

East Africa therefore has been invaded by revolution which brought in a new and rapid rhythm of modern science and technology, infrastructure, mass media, modern education and even modern spirituality from the new religions of the day. Nothing can stop this rhythm or slow down its rapid tempo. The East African must get up and dance, for better or for worse in the arena of these world dramas. We have to note that Christianity has been the major victim of all these elements of world revolution. Millenarian movements have flourished as a result of this revolution and Christians must be cautious how they interpret the symbolism of the Apocalypse. We can now move to the next chapter which is the conclusion of this thesis, summarise our findings and bring the whole work to a close.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

7.1 Conclusion

This research aimed at investigating the concept of the millennial reign of Christ in Revelation 20:1-10 in a critical analysis. This was done by rethinking the concept of the millennium, which of late has been popularised by various groups. This thesis started by formulating a sociological model. The model was used in delineating the Apocalypse community before evaluating into various interpretations. The sociological model was used as an attempt to unpack the hidden meaning of the Apocalypse, which has made many readers turn to literal interpretations of the text. Through the sociology of sects we were able to establish that the Apocalypse of John was produced by a millennialist sect.

The research provided a model for the interpretation of millennialism throughout Christian history. Our hypothesis was nevertheless that the community of Revelation is a millenarian sect and its concept of the millennial reign of Christ in the book of Revelation does not refer to a specific end time of the world, but to the continuous rule of God here on earth as part of a realised eschatology and a response to suffering and hope, this hypothesis was authenticated. The thrones were located in heaven, where Christ and his guests were now ruling from. The Apocalypse of John reflects the situation at the time of writing.

The millenarian community was subjected to deprivation, oppression, and suffered all kinds of problems. It is the conclusion of this thesis that the community had now no choice but to seek means and ways of enduring the sufferings that were now facing them. The Apocalypse helped to balance these contradictions. All millenarian movements are futuristic, and the traditional emphasis on the millennium as a future event is a misplaced concept, even though its impact on

these movements evoked this research.

This conclusion was reached with the help of our sociological model formulated by following a working typology of seven kind of sects by Brian Wilson (1973), and the following pattern emerged out of our research. In chapter one we began by introducing the Apocalypse, spelling out our aim, motivation, hypothesis, and our methodology.

Once that was settled we moved to chapter two, where we dealt with the sociology of sects in formulating our model similar to that mentioned above. The sociological theory in this thesis matches the data of the Apocalypse. The Apocalypse corresponds closely to the pattern of a Jewish and Christian literary genre and this is why it shows a sectarian group that is deprived by the attitudes of the host society. So our model delineates the Apocalypse community as a millennialist sect. For better clarity on our model, a profile of a millennialist sect was found necessary in this chapter. The main purpose of this chapter was to formulate the model of our thesis and also to show the value of the sociological reading of the Bible.

In chapter three we moved on to the discussion of the Apocalypse and millennialism, whereby we defined our terms 'apocalyptic' and 'millenarianism'. We then looked at the historical background of the Apocalypse in terms of the social identity of the author, date and the social setting. In this chapter we ended up by saying that the Apocalypse was a millennialist response to the Roman persecution, oppression and deprivation of the Christians in Asia Minor towards the end of the first century CE.

We then moved to chapter four, where we looked at the concept of the millennium in the Bible. In order to do this, we started by introducing the millennium and then went on to discuss the various views that have been advocated in interpreting Revelation 20:1-10. Here we advocated the a-millennial view. We proceeded to the discussion of the Old Testament concept of the millennium, followed by the Jewish apocalyptic concept of the millennium. The New Testament

concept of the millennium was observed and, for better clarity, we did this by looking at the Christ event in the Apocalypse as already in the New Testament. Millennium inaugurates judgment, the millennium constitutes the period of the Church, and we ended up by suggesting that what the author anticipated is far from what the readers understood. Having advocated our view strongly in this chapter, we then moved into the study of the passage that mentions millennium.

In chapter five we did a thorough exegesis of Revelation 20:1-10, as a way of investigating the basic meaning of this popular passage. It came out clearly that the search for an earthly calendar that plots out the future days and weeks, according to the Apocalypse, is misguided. The concept of millennium as a future historical event is a misplaced concept within the Christian teaching of the last days and of the second coming of Christ. The author of this passage does not seem to think of a death of the millennial community at the end of the interim kingdom but rather assumes that the first resurrection is the last one, so that the community enter immediately into the future new world of God. If that is so then the boundary between that world and the earthly reign of Christ is open and fluid. This means that millennium can then not be understood in the sense of a temporal period. It is therefore already here.

We then moved into chapter six, where we carried out an investigation on the East African concept of millennium. The writer of this thesis belongs to this community. In order to achieve good results, we did this by looking at the East African concept of time, history, judgment and after life. It was noted that the East African peoples had no concept of future time and therefore millennium would not have made sense to the Africans. To the East Africans and to all Africans in general God was always the king in the past and continues to be so now. However it was stated that millennium was a rediscovered event within the East African setting. In this chapter it came out clearly that past time was more important to the Africans, while to the Apocalypse millennial community past time is ambiguous and evil. In this section we also saw that cognitive dissonance has always helped the millennialist communities to survive a failed prophecy.

This thesis is by no means a way of doubting the second coming of Christ. The writer expects it, as most Christians do, but not within the millennial perspective of future. I contend that the millennium is already realised and God continues his rule from generation to generation. Christ is resurrected and he continues to rule from heaven. The author saw the thrones; nothing else suggests the rule of God as strongly as the presence of these thrones in the Apocalypse visions. Any group trying to interpret millennium as a future event will always be met with embarrassment or disillusionment. The millennium should be viewed as the present rule of God here on earth. The understanding of the millennium as a long period of time, where a thousand means completeness, helps us to see it as part of the now and not yet kingdom of God.

7.2 Resolution

The Church needs to be spared the mischief caused by the misguided interpretations of the Apocalypse by various sects, who have, in almost every age, endeavoured to prove that the Apocalypse prophecies were directed to their own times, as we have seen in this thesis. The author of the Apocalypse was mistaken about the future events in his prophecy about the shape of things to come.

The reason I contend this is that while the principles of the Apocalypse are eternal in their significance and are detectable in every age, it is wrong for any movement or group to claim that the author had prophesied about their own particular situations. This was possible only to the Apocalypse community of first century CE. Why do I think the author was mistaken? Because the world has not come to an end soon as he predicted. And every prophecy of this kind has always been faced with embarrassment and/or disillusionment. To start with the Roman empire lasted for more than three hundred years and the collapse was far from what the Apocalypse predicted. The supernatural terrors did not burst upon the earth as predicted, and where they have occurred they cannot be related to a beastly nation.

The other reason is that we have not experienced any ruler, not even the worst of persecutors like Hitler, who can be identified as the Antichrist. The author of the Apocalypse therefore wrote his book as a response to a millennialist community that was faced with rejection by the host society. For the author to encourage them, he used the term millennium to mean a blissful period already inaugurated by the resurrection of Christ. The term would have been easily understood by his readers as a central point to his prophecies. The author was not in any case in a drawing board to draw up a calendar of events showing a cataclysmic end of the world.

This resolution would not be very convincing to the groups who have always enjoyed making these prophecies, since they have always been eager to prove that they are the chosen people to witness the end of the world. And this is the reason why they have more often than not made innumerable and inaccurate predictions concerning the end. Our sociological model however, helps us to understand the motivation of these modern groups. The choice of interpretation remains however with a particular individual. This re-thinking of the millennium was done with respect for the communities that advocate the millennium as a future event and calls on them to participate in this re-thinking. The understanding of millennium as present does not make the world any the less full of evil. It only affirms 'the world' as the object of God's love and the sphere of our own loving as we fulfil the great commission; 'Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...' (Mt 28:19).

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