

# The Blasphemous Triad in the Book of Revelation

The crisis motif, prevalent in the apocalyptic literature, finds its central place in the book of Revelation which is the longest Christian apocalyptic in the NT. The Seer, himself being in an oppressed condition (1:9), and having seen the painful crisis of the faithful (2:13; 11:7), illustrates the conflicting fate of all the witnessing Christians (12:1-6, 13-17; chs 13-17). However, the heavenly conflict between Michael and the Dragon (12:7-12), the counterpart of the cosmic conflict of the Church, is the centre of Revelation's theme of trials and triumph. In particular, every crisis faced by the Church, of Asia Minor, be it religious (2:8-9, 13-16), social (11:7-10) or political (chs 13-17), is seen against the background of the religious conflict she experienced in the context of the totalitarian secular power which claimed itself to be God. We see the combat between Michael and the Dragon (12:7-12) as the reflection of as well as a solution to the overall conflict the Church of Asia Minor faced.

However when we move further towards the continuous fight of the Dragon from ch. 13-17 we come to know the intensity of the opposition put forth by the anti-God. The war of the Dragon continues through his two monstrous servants: the Beasts from the sea and the earth (ch 13). The Dragon having failed in his attempt to destroy the Woman and her offspring (ch 12), begins to make a fresh effort by calling to the two Beasts. By the last verse of ch 12 (v. 18) John connects, both structurally and thematically, ch 13 with the previous chapter.

The first is the Sea Beast, depicted as a brutal animal that functions as the proxy of the Dragon.<sup>1</sup> The Beast from the earth is seen next, speaking like the Dragon, and acting on behalf of the Sea Beast. Its main function is to deceive the inhabitants of earth through false signs and wonders (vv. 11-13). The nature of these three evil figures: the Dragon, the Sea Beast and the Beast from earth, as seen in Revelation, indicates that John pictures a *Blasphemous Triad* as the 'great' evil force against the Holy Trinity. The Christian concept of the triune God seems to be the source for John for his construction of the blasphemous triad.

### 1.1. The Holy Trinity and the Blasphemous Triad

In Revelation there is a concern to include Jesus, as well as the Spirit, in the Jewish monotheistic faith in God. Early Christian letter writing has its special form of greeting,<sup>2</sup> which indicates how the early Christians thought of one God in three persons (1 Pet 1:2). John writing his visions in a letter form, mentions the Holy Trinity in his opening vision itself (1:4a-5a). We shall present here how the author builds up the blasphemous triad as against the Holy Trinity and the severity of the antagonism of the Dragon against the Church.

1. "*Therion*" is the word used by John. Although literally it refers to the real animal, it also signifies the *animal-like beings*, of a supernatural kind (Dan 7) and figuratively the person with a bestial nature. The later sense is seen in Revelation. cf Bauer, 361. Out of the 46 occurrences in the NT, 39 are in Revelation. Revelation, (except in 6, 8) treats "*therion*" as the bestial embodiment of the evil antichrist figure, while the rest of the NT uses it to denote the wild, untamed and dangerous beast. cf. A. Strobel, "*therion*" *TWNT*, II, 369.
2. Cf. Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:3; Eph 1:2.

### 1.1.1. God the Almighty and the Dragon

Revelation presents God first and foremost as omnipotent. This is seen in the prologue itself (1:8), where the Almighty God is termed as '*alpha kai to omega*,' *who is and who was and who is to come.*' This is one of the two self-declarations of God, found in Revelation.<sup>3</sup> This form, along with the addition seen in 21:6, which is derived from Isaiah (44:4,6; 48:12), illustrates vividly the omnipotence of God. John establishes this fact by placing the designation: '*alpha kai to omega*' twice within his literary structure (1:8; 21:6). This designates that God is the sovereign Lord of all that takes place in the entire course of human history. As the Creator of the universe he precedes everything and he will bring everything to fulfilment. Thus he is the origin and goal of all history.

Similar to the presentation of God, Revelation characterizes the picture of the Dragon as the 'all-powerful' evil. We perceive this behind the language that is used by John<sup>4</sup> in order to picture the Dragon. The seven-headed red Dragon of ancient mythologies<sup>5</sup> depicts the greatness of the Dragon which continues to battle against God and His Church (12:15-18) till the end (Rev 20). Nevertheless, John seems to depend directly on Daniel for the description of this Beast rather than on the ancient mythologies. The title *mega*, attributed to the Dragon, his red colour, seven heads, ten horns, seven diadems and his powerful tail makes him "the mighty" one who tried to take the place of God in the Genesis story. When Michael (meaning "who is like God?") represents the Almighty God, the Beast from

3. The other is in 21, 6.

4. The ancient Serpent, the Devil or Satan.

5. Cf. H. Gunkel, *Schopfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit: Eine religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung über Gen 1 und Apo Joh 12* (Gottingen 1985) 171-398.

the sea (Rev 13:4: "who is like the Beast?") designates the all-powerful Dragon

The next important designation attributed to God is "ho pantocrator." This title, as seen in relation to the name Yahweh,<sup>6</sup> refers to God's supremacy over all things in order to encourage the faithful in a time of crisis. Besides, Revelation expresses God's supremacy by other forms such as: 'one who sits on the throne' (4:9;10:6) 'who lives for ever and ever' (15:7). That is to say that God is the eternal One who has power to judge all. Recognizing this great glory of God John repeats the song of Isaiah 6:3: 'Holy holy holy'...<sup>7</sup>

Pretending to be equal to God, the Dragon exercises his supremacy also. He builds up, first of all a conflict with the Woman. Exegetes are of diverse opinion regarding the identification of the Woman.<sup>8</sup> Many identify the Woman with Mary the mother of Jesus.<sup>9</sup> But application to Mary is difficult because of the reference to the "birth pangs" in 12:2 and at the same time, considering that the Woman gave birth to the male child, which certainly refers to Christ, the Messiah, the application of the woman to the Church, as the new people of God, seems also not possible, while the Church is born of the Messiah.<sup>10</sup> On the other

6. Cf. 2 Sam 5:10; Jer 5:14; Hos 12:5; Amos 3:13; 4:13.
7. Smoke (8:4; 15:8), thunder-storm (10, 4; 14, 2), and earthquake (6:12; 8, 5; 11:13, 19; 16:18) are symbols used by Revelation to depict God's glory.
8. Cf. Prigent, *Apocalypse 12* (1959) and Gollinger, *Das "Große Zeichen" von Apokalypse 12* (1971) for details of the different interpretations.
9. Le Frois, *The Woman Clothed with the Sun* (Rome 1954) has devoted his whole doctoral work defending the Marian interpretation.
10. Cf. Vanni, "Il 'grande segno': Ap 12, 1-6," *L'Apocalisse: Ermeneutica, esegesi, teologia* (EDB; Bologna 1988) 227-251.

hand the "offspring" in 12:17 indicates that the Woman in 12:13-17 is most likely the Church.

The proposal of Gunkel seems to fit well in the context of ch 12: the Woman in vv. 1-6 is the heavenly Zion, but in vv. 13-17 she is the Church.<sup>11</sup> However, we would like to maintain that the Woman spoken of in vv. 1-6 is not different from the Woman of vv. 13-17. The Woman in vv. 1-6 refers to that portion of Israel who awaited the Messiah. This Israel, in various struggles and conflict (birth pangs), for example, political, social and religious, brings forth the Messiah. Of course Mary is part of this Israel. With the coming of the Lord, the same Israel becomes the new Israel, the Church or the Christian community spoken of in vv. 13-17. This Church, in her turn brings forth the Messiah, in her missionary role; and this Church has the continuous protection of God (12:14). The Church as believing community is the continuation of Israel. Therefore the Woman of ch. 12 is the ecclesial community, both in vv. 1-6 and vv. 13-17.

After his conflict with the Woman, the Dragon leads his 'angels' in the cosmic war with Michael. Having his malicious agents both from the sea and the earth, he seems to bring both the sea and the earth under his control. The corruption of the "sea" and the "earth", as represented by the two beasts, is the work of Satan, the Dragon, who is thrown from heaven to earth. In his agents, the Dragon establishes his supremacy by assigning to them his whole authority (13:4, 12). Furthermore, the different names attributed to the Dragon would manifest his "supreme" power

11. GUNKEL, *Schopfung und Chaos*, 181; also R. E. BROWN, et al, (eds), *Mary in the New Testament* (Philadelphia 1978) 233-35.

over mankind. This seems to place the Dragon on a par with God.<sup>12</sup>

### 1.1.2 Christ and the Antichrist

Revelation depicts Jesus Christ as identical with God. The words of self-declaration ascribed to God are also attributed to Jesus.<sup>13</sup> Bauckham, in his elaborate study of these declarations, has conclusively proved that Jesus Christ belongs to the fullness of the eternal being of God.<sup>14</sup> The Seer, true to the Johannine tradition,<sup>15</sup> portrays Jesus as '*the first and the last*,' the term which stimulates confidence in the faithful. While mentioning that the angel refuses worship (19:10; 22:9), John portrays explicit divine worship paid to Christ; and Christ the Lamb standing on the divine throne (5:6; 7:17) receives the divine doxology (5:12//4:11).<sup>16</sup> While the Dragon is the antithesis of God, the Sea Beast is the antithesis of Christ the Lamb. As D. Guthrie observes the parallelism of the Sea Beast with the Lamb, once slain but now alive, is not far to seek. John vividly describes that the Beast from the sea, in form and function, is the replica or the duplicate of the Dragon.

12. But Revelation, in any case, does not equalize the Dragon with God. Even though Satan seems to be all pervading, the course of history (21,5), even the activity of Satan (13,5-7) is under God's absolute control. J. M. Court (*The Myth and History in the Book of Revelation* [London 1979] 123) who prefers to call the Dragon as the *Antichristian* power.

13. God: 1:8; 21:6; Christ: 1:17; 22:13.

14. Bauckham, *Theology of Revelation*, 54-57.

15. *ego eimi* is a favorite term in John's Gospel (24 times, while less than 12 times in the synoptics).

16. But nowhere John speaks of God and Christ as a plurality, which would lead to a polytheistic understanding.

In form: the first Beast, rising from the sea is the monster from the evil abyss<sup>17</sup> This apocalyptic figure, derived from the Dragon, has similarities with the Danielic Beast (7:1-9) and Paul's man of lawlessness (2 Thess 2:42). Having recourse to ancient mythologies, scholars try to explain this unnatural figure. In his study of the *Combat Myth* Bernard Batto has shown the sea as the archfoe of the divine sovereign<sup>18</sup> and Swete has pointed out that the sea is the symbol of unregenerate humanity, and especially of the seething cauldron of national and social life, out of which the great historical movements of the world arise.<sup>19</sup> This reservoir of evil is the antithesis of the heavenly sea of glass (4:6) and of the living creatures who are stationed near. The rhetorical phrase ascribed to the Beast (13:4b) puts the Sea Beast in the 'throne' of Satan (2:13).

As a genuine apocalypticist, John sees that the solution to the problem of evil is relegated completely to the future

17. The abyss comes from the Greek term *hay abussos*, which means literally the place of the dead or hell (H. K. Moulton, *The Greek Analytical Lexicon*). Out of 11 occurrences in the NT, 9 occurrences are found in Revelation. John uses this term mainly in the sense of 'bottemless pit' (9,1.2.11;11,7;17,8;20,1.3), which is the place of punishment of the fallen angels, of demons, of the Beast and the false prophet. The abyss, then, is the abode of God's enemy. Cf. Charles, *Revelation, I* (ICC; Edinburgh 1920) 240-43, for the same conception of abyss in the OT and in the book of Enoch. Also, see Gunkel, *Schopfung*, 91-98.
18. Cf. B. F. Batto, *Slaying the Dragon. Mythmaking in the Biblical Tradition* (Kentucky 1992) 41-153.
19. Cf. Swete, *Apocalypse of St. John* (New York 1907) 161.

coming of the Kingdom.<sup>20</sup> The frequent mention of *erkomai* in Revelation (2:5, 16; 3:11; 16:15; 22:6, 12, 20) divulges the hope of the imminent coming of Christ to establish God's kingdom on earth. This is the principal function of Jesus Christ, as conceived by John, which he conveys through the symbolic figure of a Lamb.<sup>21</sup> The lion of the tribe of Judah has conquered; but the lion is the slain Lamb, seen in the very middle of the throne, and it signifies the power of redemptive love (5:5ff). Christ is the only one who is worthy to open the scroll, the content (11:1-13) of which reveals to the faithful how they should follow him in witness, sacrifice and victory.

As against this primary function of Jesus, the Sea Beast is depicted as establishing the kingdom of the Dragon. As the second member of the *evil trio*, it represents an implicit contrast to Christ. It is the 'first born of Satan,' and a synonym for the Antichrist.<sup>22</sup> Beasley-Murray, observes that the Antichrist is presented as the "Christ" of Satan.<sup>23</sup> Almost all the commentators, both ancient and modern, recognize the Antichrist figure in this beast. The parallelism between Christ and the Beast is:

20. J. Fuellenbach (*The Kingdom of God* [Manila 1993] 45) says that this apocalyptic expectation of God's intervention reveals the pessimistic nature of apocalyptic writers (e.g. The book of Ezra). But this cannot be completely true in the case of John the Seer who promotes a positive prophetic eschatology, giving hope of the conquest.
21. The word 'Lamb,' referring to Christ, occurs 28 times. Bauckham (*Theology of Revelation*) 66-67, gives a detailed meaning of the symbolic number 28(7 x 4).
22. Cf. Polycarp, *Phil.* 7,1; W. Bousset, "Antichrist," In James Hastings (ed), *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics I* (New York 1908) 578-581.
23. Cf. Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 207f.

<b>Christ</b>	<b>The Beast</b>
Has many diadems (19:12), Has a worthy name (19:11,12,16),	Has ten diadems (13:10), Has the blasphemous name (13:1),
Brings men to worship God (1:6),	Causes men to worship Satan (13:4),
Shares the power, authority and throne of God (12:5, 10),	Shares the power, authority, and throne of the Devil (13:2),
Has the Holy Spirit.	Has the false prophet.
Is resurrected	Dead, but come to life (13:3, 4).

Christ, the Lamb, standing as slaughtered, is the symbol of all saving power, while the Beast, as Antichrist, slaughtered to death and healed, is the quintessence of demonic unreality. When Christ is to be the saviour of the faithful and secure them the kingdom of God, the Antichrist makes war with the saints to conquer them for Satan (13:7). He can appropriately be called the 'Antichrist,' which implies not just opposition to Christ but the claim to be Christ, as Satan claims to be God

Nevertheless, Revelation gives a hope that the Antichrist is not eternal, while Jesus Christ lives for ever (22:4).

### **1.1.3 The Holy Spirit and the False Prophet**

The prominent role of the Holy Spirit is an important characteristic of Revelation. The author uses the terms 'Spirit' and 'the Spirit of the Lord' in various combinations. These references to the Spirit can be divided into three categories: 'in the Spirit,'<sup>24</sup> 'to the Spirit,'<sup>25</sup> and 'seven

24. 1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10.

25. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 14:13; 19:10; 22:17.

Spirits<sup>26</sup> In every case, the Spirit of God is meant, although it is never called 'the Holy Spirit.'<sup>27</sup> After an elaborate discussion on different views of scholars, both ancient and modern, De Smidt comes to the conclusion that *eu pneumatikē*, which has more than one possible meaning in Revelation, refers basically to the Holy Spirit.<sup>28</sup> This is the Spirit which empowers the Church and strengthens her faith and protects her against Satan. The Spirit of vision (19:10) was the instrument in conveying to John the truth which Jesus had revealed and gives the vision of victory in Christ.

The seven Spirits are encountered in four places. The identity of these seven Spirits is debated.<sup>29</sup> Seeing the background of the throne around which the seven Spirits are standing some would identify seven angels who stand in the presence of God (cf. Tob 12:15; I Enoch 90:21). However, it is generally agreed that the expression, probably derived from Isa 42:1 and 61:1-6, is a reference to the fullness of the one Spirit of God.<sup>30</sup> As the Father sits upon the

26. 1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6. J. C. De Smidt, "The Holy Spirit in the Book of Revelation - Nomenclature," *NeoT* 28:1 (1994) 233, finds another three categories: The Spirit of visions, the Spirit of Prophecy and the Seven Spirits.
27. Morris, *The Book of Revelation* (Leicester 1989) 49; Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 150-173. Contra: J. J. Engelbrecht, "The Holy Spirit in Revelation 1-3," *Papers delivered at NTSSA Congress* (1987) 1-21. He holds that the terms do not refer to the 'Spirit' in every case.
28. Cf. De Smidt, "The Holy Spirit in the Book of Revelation - Nomenclature," 233-241; especially p. 241.
29. Cf. G. Dix, "The Seven Archangels and the Seven Spirits," *JTS* 28 (1926) 233-50; F. F. Bruce, "The Spirit in the Apocalypse," in B. Lindars and S. S. Smalley (eds), *Christ and the Spirit in the New Testament* (Cambridge 1973); R. Bauckham, "The Role of the Spirit in the Apocalypse," *EvQ* 522 (1980) 66-83.
30. The figure seven is a symbol of fullness, cf. U. Vanni, "L'Apocalisse" in *Il Messaggio della Salvezza* 8 (Torino 1990) 391.

throne in judgement (4:2), the Son appears in the imagery of the Lamb accompanied with the presence of the Spirit (4:5; 5:6). The seven Spirits in 5:6, identifying with the seven horns and the seven eyes of the Lamb, represent the presence and power of God on earth, bringing about God's kingdom by implementing the Lamb's victory throughout the world. Thus the Spirit is related both to God and to Christ. The Holy Spirit continues the earthly work of the glorified Christ (1:4; 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 4:6; 5:6). The Spirit is also seen as an active agent in divine revelation (1:10; 14:13; 19:10; 21:10) as well as the one who gives the final divine invitation to come and possess the eschatological kingdom (21:17).

Contrary to the nature of the Spirit, John presents the Beast from the Earth, the false prophet. This land-monster has two horns and a mouth of the Dragon (13:11). The description of the third member of this *evil trio* was fashioned partly from the elements in the preceding descriptions of the Dragon and the Beast, and partly from the other elements. Revelation explicitly identifies this Beast with the false prophet who serves the purpose of the Beast from the sea and through it, the Dragon (16:13; 19:20). As the Sea Beast is modelled on Leviathan which is the sea-monster, the Land Beast is patterned on the figure of Behemoth, the land-monster.<sup>31</sup>

John's mention of the Spirit of prophecy gives the functional dimension of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit in these references is the divine presence on earth, but unlike the seven Spirits "sent into all the earth" (5:6), the sphere of the Spirit is the Churches. It brings the words of Christ to His people on earth and directs the prayers of the Churches to their heavenly Lord. This view is clarified by

31. This view, proposed by H. Gunkel (*Schopfung und Chaos*, 51-61) is widely accepted today. *Contra* Bousset, *Die Offenbarung Johannis* (Gottingen 1906) 435f.

the phrase: 'the testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy' (19:10). This has been variously interpreted. It seems better to hold that when the Spirit inspires prophecy, its content is the witness borne by Jesus.

In contrast to the Spirit, the second Beast acts in a way traditionally associated with false prophets. The signs of the false prophets found in this section are: incorrect teaching, impressive signs done with satanic power, misleading the people, etc. This beast promulgates the evil designs of the Dragon (13:1; 16:14). Persuading the people to worship the first Beast, it encourages them to create an image of the Beast for a new cult, for which it uses economic and social pressures (13:16-17). This Beast is not "the recruiting officer and the enforcer of the new religion"<sup>32</sup> but he is the imperial cultic system itself. The above description can be tabulated antithetically as follows :

<b>The Spirit</b>	<b>The Earth Beast</b>
The 3rd person of the Trinity,	The 3rd character of the Evil Triad,
Indicates the presence of God,	Indicates the presence of the Dragon,
Related to both God and Christ,	Related to both Satan and Sea Beast,
Leads men to witness to God,	Leads men to worship the Dragon,
Brings to true worship,	Causes false cult.

As a conclusion to the above analysis of the Blasphemous Triad presented by John in antithesis to the Holy Trinity we can state that within these three figures there exists an evil "kinship" against God and his purpose. This leads us to the next consideration: the relevance of the "Blasphemous Triad" in Revelation.

32. G. C. Jenks, *The Origins and Early Development of the Anti-Christ Myth* (BZNW 59; Berlin 1991) 246.

## 1.2 The Relevance of the Blasphemous Triad

There is an unanimous consensus among scholars to interpret the Dragon and the Beasts within the historical situation of the author of Revelation. After giving the views of commentators (Bousset, Charles, Lohmeyer, Sickenberger, Wikenhauser, Kraft,) on *die teuflische trinität*, Bocher concludes that it is clear that the significance of the three demonic beasts is to be found in the historical interpretation. More specifically, they are interpreted within the political, social and religious policy of the Roman empire in the first century.<sup>33</sup> Apart from the ancient authors,<sup>34</sup> and the standard commentaries, there are also special studies on Rome as the historical basis for this 'Blasphemous Triad.'<sup>35</sup> No doubt, references to Rome and the emperor cult are plausible and pervasive in the descriptions of the Dragon and the beasts.<sup>36</sup> While E. Lohmeyer's

33. Bocher, *Kirche in Zeit und Endzeit* (Neukirchen - Vluyn 1983) 95-96; cf. *Rissi, Die Hure Babylon*, 68-71; Jenks, *The Origins and Early Development of the Antichrist Myth*, 228-285.

34. Suetonius, Tacitus, Dio Cassius.

35. E. Stauffer, *Christ and Caesars* (London 1955); R. Schutz, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes und Kaiser Domitian* (Gottingen 1985); Yarbrow Collins, *Crisis*. For the Nero legend cf. M. P. Charlesworth (ed), *Documents illustrating the Reigns of Claudius and Nero* (Cambridge 1939); E. M. Smallwood, *Documents illustrating the Principates of Gaius, Claudius and Nero* (Cambridge 1967); J. H. Bishop, *Nero: the Man and the Legend* (London 1964); G. Charles-Picard, *Augustus and Nero - the Secret of Empire* (London 1966); B. H. Warmington, *Nero: Reality and Legend* (London 1969); M. Graner, *Nero* (London 1970); J. M. Court, *Myth and History in the Book of Revelation*; recently, Bauckham, "Nero and the Beast," *The Climax of Prophecy*, 384-452.

36. E.g. the heads, horns, diadems of the Dragon and the blasphemous names, mortal wound of the first Beast, economic and social context of 13:16-17.

denial of the historical allegory is widely criticized,<sup>37</sup> many follow the historical interpretation of ch 13.<sup>38</sup> In particular, most exegetes think of the first Beast as Rome and of the second as pagan cult or the emperor cult.<sup>39</sup>

Apart from the curious identifications of the Antichrist throughout history,<sup>40</sup> Rome is associated, in general, with the Sea Beast as the Antichrist.<sup>41</sup> In the line of apocalyptic<sup>42</sup> and mythical tradition,<sup>43</sup> John characterizes the Dragon and the Beasts so as to indicate the conflict that the Church encountered in the Roman empire. Revelation sees Rome and her imperial cult as a threat to the Church, and as such the embodiment of evil. However, the sense of the symbolism of the "Blasphemous Triad" goes beyond Rome: John's visions are apocalyptic and prophetic and

37. Cf. Bultmann's review of Lohmeyer's commentary, *Offenbarung des Johannes*, in *TLZ* 52 (1927) 505-12.
38. Cf. Gunkel, *Schopfung*, 230-33; Allo, *L'Apocalypse*, 289; Johannes Behm, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (NTD 11, Gottingen 1953) 73-74, 91-93; also the commentaries by Kraft, Caird, Brutsch etc.
39. The obvious clue to this view is in the phrase: "let him who has understanding reckon the number of the beast, for it is a human number, its number is six hundred and sixty-six" (13:18). Most scholars see in the above phrase a reference to emperor Nero. Nevertheless, even though Gunkel, Bousset and Charles think of the beast as Rome, they do not ally any historical figure, such as Nero, to the number 666.
40. Cf. Charles, *Studies in the Apocalypse*, 20-40; More recently Arthur W. Wainwright, *Mysterious Apocalypse: Interpreting the Book of Revelation* (Nashville 1993) 21-89.
41. Starting from Irenaeus and Hippolytus, as cited by Swete, *Apocalypse*, 175.
42. Cf. Daniel 7 portrays the historical figures Nabuchadnezzar and Antiochus IV in its symbolic language.
43. Cf. Court, *Myth and History in the Book of Revelation*, 1.

can not be confined to a particular situation or period or person. As the word of God its symbolic meaning extends beyond the historical situation of the first century. The Beasts, the agents of the Dragon, represent the wicked actions of Satan in two different areas: political and religious, which are symbolically portrayed as "Sea" and "Earth." In this, Rome served only as the historical background for his message. The Dragon symbolizes not a particular person or power, but, a more general, constant evil power that assumes itself the place of God. Thus Rome represents every political authority that absolutizes its power, by which it enters into competition with God. Similarly, John used the "Nero Redivivus" superstition which was already prevalent in his time, in order to indicate the constant conflict the Word of God meets. Furthermore, as Lilje observes, the figure of the Beast is not simply a contemporary interpretation clothed in the garment of prophecy, but points to the events of the last days.<sup>44</sup> Although the vision employs references to contemporary history, its complete fulfillment is reserved for the final eschatological conflict, as indicated in ch 12:7 and elaborated in chs 19-20.

## 2. Conclusion

i) Rev 12 begins with the conflict between the Woman and the Dragon. This conflict is continued with the Dragon making war against Michael and his angels. Michael, according to the Jewish and the early Christian traditions, is one of the foremost of the archangels. He is the guardian and protector of Israel and sets himself in direct antagonism to Satan, the protagonist of evil. He, in his function represents God, who is the source of all good and the defender of Israel. While the Dragon rises against Michael, he, in fact, makes battles with God. The Dragon

44. Cf. H. Lilje, *The Last Book of the Bible* (Philadelphia 1957) 187.

intensifies his conflict by extending his sphere of action through his agents, the Sea Beast and the Land Beast.

ii) As Revelation presents a clear picture of the Holy Trinity, in contrast to that divine reality John seems to depict Satan, the evil force as the Blasphemous Triad. The description of this evil trio is seen both in form and function, as anti-trinity element. The purpose of this type of presentation goes beyond the historical understading. No doubt, in the description of the Dragon and the two Beasts, we can find a historical significance behind these figures, referring to Rome and her empires. Rome would have served as the basis for John's apocalyptic message. Yet the relevance of these figures goes beyond this restricted sense. It would refer to the perennial nature of conflict that we undergo in the world.

iii) The destructive evils of the Dragon, the Anti-God is very much alive also in the contemporary Indian society and politics. As the Church of Asia Minor in the first century found itself in conflict with the current society and politics, so too the Indian Church especially, in recent years, finds itself threatened by the forces of evil. Like the draconic allies the religious fundamentalism of Hindus and Muslims creates intolerance, militancy and communal violence in the country. Furthermore, fueled by the self-interested politicians to capture the majority Hindu vote bank, fundamentalists become a great threat to the minority religions like Christianity, Sikhism and Buddhism, and to the secular ideology envisioned by the Gandhian movement. As a result of this unsecular "secular" Indian society communalism shows its ugly head both in the minority as well as in the majority communities.

Indian Christianity which with its extraordinary network of educational, health and social service institutions<sup>45</sup> tries to show that it reaches well beyond the boundaries of Christian community and too often becomes a victim to the intolerant Hindu communal spirit.<sup>46</sup> Communal and religious violence have become, therefore, very frequent today-exposing India's communalized society, communalized politics, and communalized religions.

Unity in diversity is the basic principle that is taught by the Holy Trinity. As against this life of unity the *Blasphemous Triad* is active in the Indian soil through the "esteemed" caste system. Although 'untouchability' was abolished by the Indian Constitution it continues to be in practice throughout the country. The efforts of many humanistic movements both of religious and social groups have not been too successful in eradicating it.<sup>47</sup> The Dalit Christians, while sharing the same lot of untouchability and inequality of the Dalits of other religions, because of the ideological conviction of some important Christians at the

45. Cf. Yvon Ambroise, "Theology of Liberation: Its Emergence, Persistence and its Future in the Indian Context from a sociological perspective," *ITS* 24 (1987) 105-42, for a discussion on the value of the Christian social institutions in India.

46. It is also worth noting the paradox of Christian communalism, as observed by G. M. Soares-Prabhu ("Religion and Communalism: The Christian Dilemma," 145): "There seems to be a conflict between the 'head' of Christianity and its 'heart'; between the intolerant truth it professes and the unrestrained love it tries to live."

47. Cf. J. Kananaikil (ed), *Scheduled Castes and the Struggle against Inequality* (New Delhi 1983) 98-115.

formation of the Indian Constitution,<sup>43</sup> are deprived also of the economic and social rights that are available to the Dalit Hindus: If a Dalit Hindu converts to Christianity (or Islam), he forfeits all the facilities and benefits he gets. If he converts back, the benefits return!

All these above elements are to be seen as the plagues and pestiferous effects of the Evil in the society at large and Christianity in particular. It is the mission of every witnessing Christian who is the image of the invisible God (Gen 1:27) and "bride" of Christ to work for the total eradication of the Dragon in the society so that it becomes the "New Heaven and New Earth" (Rev 21:1-8) already now!

**Fr. Peter A. Abir**

43. Cf. S. Dasgupta, "In Quest of a Caste," in *India Today* (15/05 1995) 31: The problem should not have arisen at all. When Jawaharlal Nehru was compiling the Scheduled Caste list, he called three prominent Christians - Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Father Jerome D'Souza, S.J. and H. C. Mukherjee - to ask if any section of their communities should be included in the list. They however, said no such measure was needed. After all, Christianity was a classless religion. But they were wrong; and Christians in this country believe they are still bearing the cross.