

Crisis and Security Narratives in the Book of Revelation

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Abstract— This article examines crisis and security narratives in the Book of Revelation through an interdisciplinary framework combining exegetical analysis, historical context and contemporary security studies. The study identifies core symbolic structures such as the Beast, Babylon and New Jerusalem as mechanisms for constructing communal resilience and interpreting danger. The methods include textual analysis of selected passages, contextualisation with first-century Roman imperial dynamics and integration of theoretical perspectives from Polish literary studies and security studies. Findings indicate that Revelation offers a symbolic system of crisis communication that stabilises collective identity and functions as an early model of narrative security. The article concludes that apocalyptic texts remain relevant for understanding how communities interpret threats and maintain cohesion under pressure.

Keywords— crisis narratives, security, scriptural passages, ancient context, security and literature

I. INTRODUCTION

Traditional interpretations of the Apocalypse of St. John are dominated by eschatological, moral-parabolic or theological interpretations, focusing on the prediction of the end of time and the call to conversion. However, a broader humanistic and social perspective allows us to see this text as a response to the multidimensional crisis that affected the early Christian community a crisis encompassing the political, cultural, epistemic and existential spheres. When analysing the Apocalypse from a literary and securitisation perspective, it can be seen that in this sense, the Apocalypse acts as a ‘security manual’ which: The Apocalypse was written in an environment of persecution, destabilisation and imperial tensions; therefore,

its symbolic and narrative structure can be read as a literary strategy for managing fear, analysing threats and constructing a model of spiritual and communal security (Friesen 2014):

- 1) it identifies systems of oppression (e.g. the figure of the Beast as an allegory of empire), moral or political destabilisation, and the disintegration of world order - It diagnoses threats
- 2) transforms the unpredictability of reality into clear, narratively structured patterns (wars, plagues, judgements) that allow the crisis to be tamed - Organises chaos through symbolism.
- 3) directs attention to fidelity, perseverance and group identity, building a collective sense of meaning, mission and security - Establishes a framework for community resilience
- 4) the vision of New Jerusalem is not only an eschatological image, but also a project of a rebuilt world in which threats are symbolically neutralized - It proposes an alternative order of governance and sovereignty.

Two trends relevant to this analysis are clearly visible in contemporary literature. The first is historical and political interpretations that examine the relationship between Revelation and Roman politics and imperial propaganda practices; the second is research on the reception and instrumentalisation of apocalyptic motifs in later contexts, including psychological and military operations. These three areas: the symbolism of the text, the imperial context, and contemporary instrumentalisation, form the analytical framework of this work (Carter 2020). Bogusław Widła research on the existential anthropology of the Apocalypse of John points out that it is primarily a response to the experience



of fear, isolation, loss of stability and subjective disintegration. Apocalyptic language, thanks to its symbolic capacity, allows strong communal emotions to be processed, channelling anxiety into clear figures and narratives. (Widła 1996).

In this sense, the text can be interpreted as a therapeutic and existential space that enables the individual to find a foothold in a situation of radical crisis.

The emergence of the Apocalypse is linked to experiences of persecution, marginalisation and loss of control over the political and social environment. In light of contemporary studies on crisis, this text can be seen as an attempt to bring order to chaos through a system of signs that enables the community to survive.

Ulrich Beck pointed out that risk societies create a 'cosmology of risk' as a set of narratives that allow us to understand, control or tame the invisible and unpredictable (Ulrichs 2002). This is precisely how visions of the Apocalypse work: they transform the trauma of persecution into a clear, teleological scenario. Mary Douglas, in turn, analysing cultural constructions of purity and impurity, pointed out that every community organises chaos through symbolic boundaries. The Apocalypse works in exactly this way — it warns against spiritual 'contamination', identifies sources of danger (the Beast, Babylon, the False Prophet) and constructs a clear division between the "faithful" and the 'fallen world'. As a result, the crisis is not only described but also symbolically subdued. The community regains a narrative sense of control.

II. SYMBOLISM AS ELEMENTS OF SECURITY CONSTRUCTION IN THE NARRATIVE OF THE APOCALYPSE

The Book of Revelation is not only a record of revelation, but also a model of crisis narrative, in which successive visions function as stages of escalating and resolving tension. The structure of the text, comprising cycles of seven seals, seven trumpets and seven bowls of wrath, creates a ritual model of escalating threat, leading from chaos to renewal (Collins 2000; Koester 2014). From the perspective of security theory, it can be argued that the author constructs a matrix of 'crisis management' in which the sequence of disasters corresponds to the degrees of increasing uncertainty. Each stage of revelation is thus a symbol of the next phase of destabilisation of the security system — from the collapse of political structures to the spiritual trial of the individual (Buzan, Wæver & de Wilde 1998). The Apocalypse also implements a narrative mechanism that can be described as oscillating between fear and security. After each vision of destruction, an image of divine control appears — the throne, the Lamb, the new song, the New Jerusalem — which, in literary terms, constitutes a form of 'semantic de-escalation.' In this way, the text constructs a dialectic of threat and hope, in which security is not so much a state as a process of transformation of consciousness. The opening of the seven seals (Rev. 6–8) can be interpreted as a process of decomposition of the world order, in which successive levels of security — political, economic, ecological and spiritual — are destroyed. The first horse, white, symbolises

ideological victory, the second — the fire of war, the third — scarcity and economic crisis, and the fourth — death and pandemic. From the perspective of security studies, this is an early vision of a chain of systemic threats, in which the destabilisation of one sphere leads to cascading effects in others (Beck 1992; Kaldor 2018). In a literary analysis of symbols, the four horses represent the personification of global threats, and their successive appearance creates a structure of mounting tension. In this sense, the Apocalypse presents crisis not as a single event, but as an emergent process in which successive disasters reveal the fragility of the existing order. What contemporary security theory calls 'securitisation' (Buzan et al. 1998) takes the form of theological intervention in the Apocalypse — an act of divine judgement legitimises the transformation of the existing system. Narratively, this process resembles a modernist total drama — catastrophe does not lead to chaos, but to transcendence. Each seal is a stage of initiation in which a community learning to respond to crisis moves from panic to trust in divine authority. In hermeneutic terms, this can be called a rite of passage from fear to knowledge (Ricoeur 1981).

One of the central symbols of the Apocalypse is the opposition between the Beast and the Lamb. From a theological perspective, it signifies the struggle between repressive and salvific power. In terms of security studies, this can be interpreted as a conflict between security based on domination and security based on community (McDonald 2011). The Beast represents the authoritarian model of security that control through fear, enforced loyalty and symbolic violence. The Lamb, on the other hand, symbolises relational security based on sacrifice and trust. Literarily, both characters function as mirror characters: each act of the Beast is reflected in the actions of the Lamb. In the structure of the narrative, this dualism reflects the fundamental conflict between two paradigms of crisis management:

- 1) reactive, which responds to threats through repression (the Beast),
- 2) proactive, which transforms crisis into a space for spiritual development (the Lamb).

From the perspective of security studies, this opposition anticipates contemporary dilemmas between national security and human security (Buzan 1991). The Beast's power, based on fear and economic control ('mark on the hand and forehead'), resembles today's digital surveillance mechanisms, while the Lamb's sacrifice represents a model of 'empathic security' — relational and spiritual (Kaldor 2018). The conclusion of the Apocalypse — the description of New Jerusalem (Rev. 21–22) — is key to understanding the mechanism of security restitution. Cycles of disasters and judgements are followed by an image of a perfect city where there is no death or suffering. Symbolically, this means the transformation of crisis into an order based on justice and harmony. The New Jerusalem is not only an eschatological space, but also a political and cultural project — a vision of a world in which security is redefined as a community of common security. In this vision, the divine city is opposed to Babylon — a symbol of a system of power based on violence and domination (Yarbro Collins 1984). For

contemporary security studies, this represents an archetype of post-crisis reconstruction, in which a new ethical norm (salvation) replaces the old norm of force (hegemony). From a narrative perspective, New Jerusalem functions as a security metanarrative — it brings together all the earlier themes and gives them meaning by establishing an ultimate goal. It can be said that the Apocalypse does not end with the destruction of the world, but with the redefinition of security as a community of meaning (Ricoeur 1981; Gadamer 1975). Apocalyptic motifs are not limited to the religious context. Contemporary security culture often uses the language of the apocalypse to describe global crises — ecological, technological and geopolitical. Researchers note that narratives about the end of the world are mechanisms of social mobilisation: they enable communities to interpret threats and reconstruct their identity in the face of uncertainty (Bauman 2007; Beck 1992). Apocalyptic patterns appear in discourses on climate catastrophe, hybrid wars, and digital population control. Each of these contexts uses similar narrative structures: prophecy (scientific forecasts), punishment (consequences), purification (systemic change), and redemption (new order). In this sense, contemporary discourse on ecological and technological security can be read as a secularised continuation of the apocalyptic imaginary (Latour 2017). This approach emphasises that apocalyptic narratives have not disappeared but have been institutionalised in the form of security policies, strategic reports and global narratives about threats. It can therefore be said that the Apocalypse of St. John is a proto-discursive model of ‘total security’ in which knowledge, fear and hope create a system for managing the future (Debray 2019). Both theologically and culturally, the Apocalypse shows that crisis and security are narratively inseparable. Crisis is a prerequisite for revealing security — only through catastrophe can its value be understood. This model of thinking is reflected in contemporary security theories, which view crisis not as an anomaly but as a structural element of the system (Rasmussen 2001). In the Apocalypse, crisis becomes a medium of revelation — an experience that leads to a new epistemic order. As a result, the text is not a pessimistic vision of the end, but a positive theory of security transformation. Ultimately, it is only through confrontation with threat that a new dimension of stability can be built, based not on force, but on awareness and meaning. The Apocalypse of St. John is a text which, despite its religious and symbolic nature, can be considered an archetypal model for thinking about crisis and security. At the heart of the narrative is not destruction itself, but a process of revelation: the uncovering of structures of threat, their transformation, and the establishment of a new order. For this reason, the Apocalypse constitutes a theological and literary theory of crisis management — a system of signs in which divine intervention functions as a decision-making act, and the community of believers represents the entity responding to uncertainty. The category of revelation (Greek *apokalypsis*) does not therefore mean the end, but a transition between two states of reality: from chaos to order, from fear to hope, from death to renewal. In this logic, crisis is not a pathology of the system, but its mechanism of renewal. Contemporary risk theory (Beck 1992) confirms a similar

conclusion: social systems learn through crises, and each collapse becomes an impulse to redefine security.

From a literary perspective, the Apocalypse is an example of spiral narration, in which each successive revelation transforms and reinterprets the previous ones. This means that the text itself is a learning process — a gradual assimilation of knowledge about the threat. Gadamer's hermeneutics (1975) indicate that understanding a text takes place in dialogue with one's own experience. In this sense, every act of reading the Apocalypse is a reconstruction of symbolic security, in which the reader finds meaning in the chaos of the world.

The Apocalypse thus has a dual function:

- 1) aesthetic — as a work with a rhythmic and symbolic structure,
- 2) existential — as a guide to the experience of crisis.

Contemporary literary interpretations (Collins 2000; Yarbrow Collins 1984) emphasise that the author of the Apocalypse uses the technique of revelatory narration, in which vision serves as an epistemic tool. Vision here is not a dream, but a method of cognition — leading to the discovery of the truth about the world and about oneself. From the perspective of security studies, the Apocalypse is the prototype of systemic thinking about threats. Each of its motifs — wars, plagues, the fall of cities, the Last Judgement — can be interpreted as a metaphor for risk management and total security. Contemporary securitisation theory (Buzan, Wæver & de Wilde 1998) shows that security is an act of speech: naming something a threat becomes a political act. Similarly, in the Apocalypse, the very revelation of a catastrophe is already an act that transforms reality. In the modern world, which secularises religious content, apocalyptic language has been transferred to the secular sphere: it is used in climate reports, strategic analyses, the media and mass culture (Latour 2017; Debray 2019). This proves that apocalyptic narrative does not belong solely to theology — it is a universal code of security culture in which people describe their fears about the future. The concept of narrative security (McDonald 2011) assumes that communities create stories to give meaning to their experiences of threat. The Apocalypse of St. John is just such a story or a form of ‘resilience myth’ that helps the community survive chaos by giving it meaning.

III. CONCLUSION

Contemporary crisis narratives, such as climate change, hybrid wars, migration crises, pandemics and digital threats, largely reproduce an apocalyptic structure: a diagnosis of impending disaster, a moral call to action, an image of collapse and a vision of renewal.

UN and IPCC reports use almost theological language: they warn of ‘the end of the world as we know it’ and at the same time call for ‘conversion’ in the form of systemic changes (Latour 2017). In this sense, contemporary security discourse is eschatological and political in nature — it combines scientific knowledge with moral narrative.

The apocalypse can therefore be interpreted as an epistemological source for research on crisis communication.

Its symbolism shows that an effective response to a crisis requires not only data and analysis, but also a narrative that gives meaning. Without this, security becomes purely technical, and thus fragile and dehumanised (Bauman 2007).

At the intersection of security studies, theology and literary studies, a new field of reflection is emerging, which can be described as security theology – examining how religious and symbolic narratives shape the concept of security as a cultural value. The Apocalypse of St John is a point of reference here, as it reveals the process of spiritual risk management: from the disclosure of danger (revelation) to its overcoming (salvation). From the perspective of contemporary hermeneutics of crisis, the Apocalypse is a laboratory of meaning – it teaches that security does not exist without threat, and hope without confrontation with fear. In this sense, the text of John the Evangelist is not only a vision of the end, but a philosophy of survival in a world of uncertainty. For security studies, this means shifting the emphasis from controlling threats to understanding their meaning. Security that does not integrate the symbolic and ethical dimensions becomes incomplete. The Apocalypse thus reminds us that true security is holistic – spiritual, social and cognitive.

The Apocalypse of St. John, read from an interdisciplinary perspective, reveals itself as a text of enduring relevance. Its structure is not only about the prediction of the end of the world, but also about the constant question of the durability of human order in the face of the inevitable experience of crisis. Each era reads this book differently – the Middle Ages saw it as a moral warning, modernism as an allegory of revolution, and the present day sees it as a picture of the systemic collapse of global security. However, at the heart of all these interpretations lies the same core – the desire for meaning in the face of catastrophe. It is this desire that today becomes the most human dimension of security. In the context of contemporary theories of risk and global threats, the Apocalypse can be read as a proto-narrative about managing uncertainty, in which spiritual intuition replaces a lack of data and faith replaces a deficit of information. In a world saturated with messages about the climate, migration and technological crises, the symbol of the Lamb appears not as a religious figure, but as a metaphor for trust – the ability to maintain meaning when all structures of security fail. In this sense, the Apocalypse is not an end, but a cognitive process: an attempt to learn to endure in a state of constant instability.

The challenge for the contemporary researcher is therefore to read the Apocalypse not as a book of fear, but as a “laboratory of hope”. This text teaches us that security is never a given; rather, it is a movement, an act of interpretation, a space between catastrophe and redemption. In an age where threats are hybrid and global, a return to this apocalyptic sensibility is not a theological luxury but an epistemological necessity. In light of this reflection, the Book of Revelation appears as the world's first systemic narrative on security – written not by a strategist or philosopher, but by a witness who, in the midst of crisis, dared to speak the language of hope. In literary terms, the Apocalypse of St. John is not only a religious text, but also one of the earliest examples of narrative awareness in the face of

crisis. Its structure is based on a constant oscillation between horror and redemption, which in literary theory can be described as the dynamic between destruction and reconstruction of meaning. It is in this structure that a phenomenon appears which today we might call the ‘poetics of security’: the way in which the text builds a sense of stability in the reader through the very act of reading. When the world presented loses its coherence, language becomes the only space in which salvation is possible.

The Apocalypse thus acts as a mirror in which culture recognises its deepest fears and at the same time tests its ability to control them. In this sense, it is no longer merely a revelation of the future, but a process of literary simulation of a crisis in which the reader is included in the ritual of passing through danger. Understood in this way, reading the Apocalypse is initiatory in nature – it does not provide ready-made answers, but prepares us for life in a world of constant uncertainty. This is precisely why the Apocalypse remains relevant: not because it predicted the future, but because it is able to recreate the mechanism of experiencing uncertainty in every era. From the perspective of literary hermeneutics, the Apocalypse establishes a certain model of the relationship between text and world: external reality collapses, but the narrative creates a new order — not material, but meaning-making. It is in language, rhythm, image and metaphor that spiritual and cultural security is built. It can therefore be said that the Apocalypse anticipates the contemporary understanding of text as a tool for constructing reality and managing fear. It is no longer just a theological book, but a semantic architecture of security, in which every word serves as an existential safeguard.

It is worth noting that, in this sense, the Apocalypse is one of the first texts to cross the boundaries between literature and action. Its story does not end with the last verse — it continues in the consciousness of the community, transforming into various forms of cultural response to crisis: from iconographic art to contemporary catastrophic narratives. In each of them, the same pattern recurs: threat, revelation, transformation. This is proof that apocalyptic language has become a universal code for processing trauma — a mechanism through which humans give meaning to what transcends the boundaries of experience.

From this perspective, it can be said that the Apocalypse is not a conclusion, but an opening—not the end of the world, but the beginning of a new epistemology of hope. Its literary form becomes a model for thinking about security as a creative process, not just a systemic one. Security, like text, must be constantly written, negotiated and reinterpreted. That is why the Apocalypse, despite its ancient form, remains the most modern of texts: it speaks of a world in which language becomes a refuge and storytelling an act of salvation.

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