

**TANGAZA COLLEGE**  
**CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA**

**ENDTIME, TIME IN CHRIST**  
**Insight From The Seven Bowls in The Book of Revelation**

**Long essay submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirement for Bachelor of Arts, (Religious Studies).**

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## DEDICATION

To our Dear parents Modju and Modiri, thanks a lot for your gift of life to us, and for all that you have done for our growth.

To our Beloved niece and friend Mizou Mokango, we are grateful for her prayers and wishes for us to accomplish our studies.

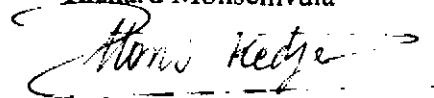
And finally, to our Beloved Friend Loreley Ifran Alvarez for her prayerful support, and for her sincere and patient love for us in spite of our human weaknesses.

Richard Monsemvula Keshundje

## STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the material used herein has not been submitted for Academic credit to any other institution. All sources have been cited in full.

Richard Monsemvula

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard Monsemvula", written over a horizontal line.

## PREFACE

If there is an absolute certainty in one's life, it is his/her disappearance from the face of the earth one day. The problem is so existential that it affects the actual living of people. Ancient people and us today, unbelievers and believers we all experience this same existential problem.

For unbelievers, their human disappearance from the earth whereby they have invested a great deal of infrastructure, and technology is fatal. This pessimistic thinking has been passed on by certain existential philosophies which sees human existence as accidental.

The believers, especially Christian believers, perceive the problem differently. In fact, the beliefs of Christians about this issue is collectively known as eschatology. It includes themes such as, the end of the world, death, Parousia, the resurrection of the dead, the last judgment, and heaven and hell. All these themes appear as mysteries which cannot be understood fully once and for all. However, Christians have the advantage of understanding these mysteries through another mystery, Paschal Mystery. Thus, through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the future humanity after this earthly life, the future of this world and its time become understandable. Therefore, the preoccupation of the Christian believers should be the life according to the demands of the Paschal Mystery.

Life modeled on Paschal Mystery is a commitment. The frailty of human life can force us to ask the kind of questions (about the end of human life, end of world and its time) whose answers might lead to despair if one does not get satisfactory answers. The present reflection does not provide the satisfactory answers for these people; but instead, it leads an understanding of the end of time in the perceptive of Paschal Mystery-Endtime. The focus of time in Endtime is no longer on the rhythms of the cosmic universe but on the Christ-event. This perception leads to a positive and optimistic approach to the future of human life and to the future of the world. This approach provides the readers with hopeful attitude towards life. This is important in today's world whereby many people have lost hope because of the hardships and the pressures of life. Only in the death and resurrection of Jesus do our hope make us alive.

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## INTRODUCTION

Human history has known prosperous civilizations which do no longer exist these days. We are living in modern civilization today; for sure, those who will live in the future will have an other kind of civilization. The changes in human history are signs reveal the end of this history one day. Thus, as the years two thousand is at our door, the question of the end of the world becomes present in people's mind. For the unbelievers, the preoccupation is purely the end of the cosmic universe which will cause the destruction of human kind. Whereas, some Christian believers associate this end with the second coming of Jesus Christ. Being part of human history, this question does not escape our mind. The present essay addresses this question. However, we do not address it as unbelievers but as Christians who, a part from scientific or philosophic knowledge, have God's revelation as an other source of knowledge. The present topic is a very existential one that science and philosophy cannot say the last word; therefore we will consider it in the perceptive of the divine revelation as manifested in the Bible.

Endtime, time in Christ; this tittle by itself establishes the distinction between a secular and Christian approach to the question. The end of time of the secular world is not what we mean by Endtime as Christian believers. In fact, according scientific research the world will come to an end one day, so will come the end of time. In Endtime the focus is not on the universe with its cosmic cycles which bring about time, but on Jesus Christ who through his Paschal Mystery has introduced a new order and a new era ( time) in the present world. The person of Christ is the central point in the Endtime. But we cannot hold that the time in Christ is separated from the cosmic time. Instead, in Jesus Christ, the cosmic time acquires a new significance. And this is not given to anyone to discover this new significance, but only to those who share in the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ. Christians who through baptism appropriate the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, live in the new ere (time ) inaugurated by Him. In order to reach this point, we divide the topic in three chapters.

In the first chapter: "Endtime According To Millennialism", we discuss millennialism theory on Endtime in its three main views; pre - millennialism, post - millennialism, amillennialism. We shall present these positions without any comment from our side. We

have retain the notion of “ Endtime” instead of end of time for the millennialism because this theory is based on divine revelation in Bible the Book of Revelation. For the millennial theory too, Christ is in the center of time. The second chapter “ Christ’s Event Introduces Endtime” is exegetical analysis of the seven bowls in the Book of Revelation. From the exegesis, we find that this passage is a suitable scriptural support for the topic, and also the Book of Revelation itself is seen as dealing with this issue of Endtime. The pouring of seven bowls has two major effects; first of all it destroys the great Babylon, the beast and its followers; and secondly, it brings about the new heaven and the new earth where the followers of the lamb are gathered with the Lamb itself. What appears is that through the act of pouring the bowls the old world has gone away, the “sea is no more”; it put an end to old creation - the old order of things. The new heaven and new earth which came up as result of the pouring of the bowl stand for new creation that this act of the pouring of the bowls has brought about. This act places us in the new “Genesis” in contrast to Gen. 1:1. This event is interpreted in the first point of the last chapter “ Theological Reflection” as Christ’s Event which judged the world. The Paschal Mystery is indeed the event in divine revelation which has put an end to the old creation, and brought forward an new one. Jesus Christ through paschal mystery has won new people for God. Then in the second point of the same chapter three, we make the connection between the Paschal Mystery and time. In fact, for us human beings, time is an element of creation. Now that Paschal Mystery has created a new creation, it has created also a new time; it is this time that we have called “ Endtime”. It has put an end the old creation - including old time -. However, this new time is not lived out of the cosmological time neither out of the historical time but it is embodied in them. The Christian believers who are living in this cosmic universe and participating in general history of human kind are at same time living in the Endtime through their incorporation in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ from their baptism. A non-Christian knows only about the end of time and lives according to it; in contrast, a Christian knows about the end of time but live according to the requirements of Endtime. Because his / her life does not cease with the end of this cosmic universe, it goes beyond. Thus, the Paschal Mystery has inaugurated here and now in this present age, the life of the age to come; the eternal life which belongs to the eternity of God is now present. However, this Endtime will reach its completion in the age to come; Paschal Mystery then raises the tension between “already and not yet”.

## CHAP. I : THE ENDTIME ACCORDING TO MILLENNIALISM

The main preoccupation of this theory is to put forwards a system of thought interpreting some passages in the Bible concerning the Endtime; the system itself speaks of the end of time. This system can be regrouped in three major trends of thoughts: premillennialism, post - millennialism and amillennialism. The common ground of these trends is that the Endtime is still an unfulfilled prophecy which has to be fulfilled one day. They view the Endtime as a static point in human history; the present world will come to an end, and this end is associated with the second coming of Jesus Christ. This Endtime is something knowable at its approach; its manifestations have been prescribed in the Scripture. Since the Endtime is manifested by the second coming of Jesus Christ, and he has not yet come, then the Endtime is not yet there present. Lightner says that, that time will determine the fate of all God's creatures: "The dead, small and great will be raised to spend eternity either with God in heaven or with the devil in the hell."<sup>1</sup> The main feature of this system is the belief in one thousand years which is linked to the return of Christ ( the second coming) to establish his kingdom on earth. There are three different system of thought in millennialism: Premillennialism, Amillennialism and Postmillennialism. Each one of these pictures differently the way it will happen. The differences are mainly the answers to the followed questions: Will Christ return when the kingdom has already established ? Will He establish an earthly kingdom and reign for one thousand years ? Or will the eternal state (hell or heaven) lead directly to the second coming? The three variations of millennialism theory need to be presented one after the other.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert P. Lightner; The Last Days, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publ., 1990), p. 42.

## 1. Premillennialism

It is a thought in millennialism which believes that Christ will first come to meet his church in the air - this is not second coming; but what is called rapture for the church and tribulation for the rest of the earth. And after this, He will come again on earth to establish his kingdom for one thousand years. Charles C. Ryrie characterizes premillennialism as follow: "At close of this age, premillennialist believe that Christ will return for His church meeting in the air ( this is not the second coming of Christ), the event called rapture or translation, will lead direction in a seven - year period of Tribulation on the earth. After this the Lord will return to the earth ( the second coming of Christ), to establish his kingdom on the earth for one thousand years..."<sup>2</sup> The second coming of Christ in power and great glory is not the church meeting in the air; instead the one thousand years of the earthly reign of Christ has to come first. It is during this time that the Old Testament promises to Abraham and David will be fulfilled. This trend of thought has also different views in regarding to the time of the rapture. The differences concern questions about the position of the church at the time of the rapture . There are at least four known different opinions among the premillennialist on this point.

In the first opinion, there will be rapture of the church before the tribulation begins on the earth. Those who hold this opinion are the pretribulationists. Their view is that the entire church will be caught up in order to be with the Lord. John Walvoord is the most outstanding defender of this position:

"The pretribulation interpretation regards the coming of the Lord and translation of the church as preceding immediately the fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy of the final seven - years period before the second advent. Based on the literal interpretation of Daniel's Prophecy is held that there has been no fulfillment of Daniel 9: 27 in the history and therefore it prophesies a future period, familiarly called tribulation. At the translation, before the seven years, Christ will return to meet the church in the air; at the

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<sup>2</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, The Basis of Premillennial faith, (New York: Chales Scribner Sons, 1961), p.50.

second advent after the seven years, it is held that Christ with His church from heaven to establish his kingdom on earth.”<sup>3</sup>

This view distinguish Christ’s coming “for His own” referring to the rapture, and Christ’s coming “with His own” as referring to the second coming. There is a short program about how the events will follow one another: increase in apostasy, resurrection, the seven - years of tribulation, the battle of Armageddon and tribulation, and at the end the millennial reign of Christ. During this time Satan will be bound in bottomless pit, then after Satan will be loosed for a little season, he will deceive the nations and lead a revolt against God, but he will be defeated by Christ and cast into the lake of fire. After this event comes the great judgment followed by the creation of the new heaven and the new earth, and lastly the eternal state starts; either hell for some people or heaven for others. We can find similarities of this thought in Revelation chapter 20. In short, this opinion can be summed up as followed: at the rapture when the church with Jesus Christ will be meeting in the air, the earth will undergo at that time the tribulation for seven years; then comes the second coming of Christ to establish his earthly kingdom with his church for one thousand years. Lastly, follows the eternity.

The second view premillennialism holds is that the church will go through the Tribulation. This view denies the catching up of the church to the meet the lord in the air before the tribulation on the earth. The thought insists that the church will pass through it, but God himself will protect it during that time. This opinion is known as Premillennial posttribulationism. There is no clear distinction here between Christ’s coming “for His own” and “with His own” these two coming will be at the same moment. There is no elaborate detailed program for the future with regard to the future reign of Christ. However, there will be the general resurrection and judgment of all human beings, followed by the eternal state. In short, the church will go through the seven years of tribulation on earth; the rapture and the second coming at the same time, then follows the establishment of the earthly kingdom and lastly comes the eternity.

The third view retains that the church will go through the first half of the tribulation. The view is known as midtribulationism. This opinion finds its basis on Dn 9:24 - 27. The last half of the seventieth week mentioned in the passage of Daniel is seen to be far more severe than the first half. In this view, the church’s Rapture is in the middle of the week

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<sup>3</sup> John F. Walvoord, The Rapture, mentioned by Lightner, op. cit., p.59.

according to Daniel passage. Gleason Archer described this position as follow: "Between competing views of the pretribulation and posttribulation rapture stands a mediating opinion, the theory of the mid - seventieth week rapture."<sup>4</sup> The order of event to take place is the same of the pretribulation position. The theory retains this; in the three and half years of tribulation comes the rapture, the church meets the Lord in the air; then follows the second coming of Jesus Christ to establish his earthly kingdom followed by eternity.

The fourth opinion is built on the assumption that the divine wrath begins with judgment resulting from the sounding of first trumpet in Revelation (chaps.8 and 9) causing cataclysmic disturbances. And at the same time the second coming of Jesus Christ. The rapture takes places in the eighteen months before the seven - year tribulation comes to an end. This view is called pre - wrath Rapture of the church.

Among the premillennial view, there are those who hold that, not the whole church will go through the rapture; only the spiritual believers will be caught up in order to escape the tribulation on the earth. These spiritual believers are the Christians who made themselves ready for the tribulation and the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. This trend of thought is known as " premillennial partial view".<sup>5</sup> In the premillennial view, apart from the premillennial posttribulation opinion which identifies the second coming with the rapture, all the rest separate them, and when the church meet the Lord in the air there is tribulation going on the earth.

## **2. Amillennialism**

This is millennial thought which does not believe in the future one thousand years of the reign of Jesus Christ on earth after his meeting with the church in the air. Amillennialism teaches that there will be a parallel in contemporaneous development of evil and good; it means that for this view, God's kingdom and Satan's kingdom coexist in this world up to the second coming of Jesus Christ. Only there at the second coming of Christ that comes the resurrection and the judgment followed by eternity.<sup>6</sup> Actually, the identification of this

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<sup>4</sup> Gleason, L. Archer, Jesus is coming again, (in Mid - tribulation Christian life, (May,1974), p.24.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Lightner, op. cit., p. 70.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p.72.

thought as part of millennialism is very inadequate. The holders of this position do believe in the one thousand years of the reign of Jesus, but not in the future. However, they do not agree with other millennial systems on the nature of the millennium (the thousand years), and on the chronological position of the one thousand in the divine plan of salvation. The amillennial thought teaches that the one thousand years is a present reality not project in the future. While amillennialism rejects the future millennium, it agrees with other millennial thoughts on the future golden age. The criticism of the amillennialism to other millennial systems is that other millennial thoughts maintain the one thousand years of Christ's reign on the earth in the future, because they cannot conceive of its nature as identical with the present age of the church. The holders of amillennialism prefer to call themselves "realized millennialists". There are also the division in the rank of the amillennialism; the division comes in the way the one thousand years are fulfilled. The first group sees this millennium as being fulfilled now on earth, and the second one holds that the millennium is being fulfilled now but in the heaven. Both groups agree that when Jesus will come for the second time, is not to inaugurate a kingdom on earth, but instead he will usher in the eternity ( the golden age). There are two possibilities with regard to the kingdom of Christ; either the church is that kingdom here on earth or that kingdom is now in heaven. The order of events embraced by the amillennialists is: worsening condition in the world before the second coming, then the second coming of Christ accompanied by the general resurrection and the general judgment then followed the eternity. The two variants of amillennialism do not teach the tribulation of seven years on the earth before the second coming of Jesus Christ. This second coming is identical with the rapture.

### **3. Postmillennialism.**

This view maintains that Christ will return after the entire world has been christianized by the Church. This is to say that the church will first establish the kingdom by her preaching and then Christ comes. The prefix " post" ( after) before millennial means that Christ will come after the kingdom has been established. The one thousand years in Revelation. 20 are not taken literally. Loraine Boettner defines the system as follow:

“Postmillennialism is that view of the last things which holds that the kingdom of God is now being extended in the world through the preaching of the gospel and the saving work of the Holy Spirit, that the world eventually will be christianized, and that the return of Christ will occur at the close of a long period of righteousness and peace commonly called millennium...It should be added that on the postmillennial principles the second coming of Christ will be followed immediately by the general resurrection, the general judgment, and the introduction of heaven and hell in their fullness”.<sup>7</sup>

According to this view, the second coming of Christ will close the present age, and will inaugurate the eternal state; either heaven for some people or hell for some others. Postmillennialism is more optimistic; their belief is that good will triumph over evil even before Jesus Christ returns. Some postmillennialists believe that the church is this millennium “inter- the second - advent” age. Others believe that the christianizing of the society will go gradually and be fully realized at the time in the remote future, but before the return of Jesus Christ. The new variant of the postmillennialism sees the Mosaic Law as constituting a continuing norm for the present age in order to make the kingdom easy to come about. In this way the civil magistrate is to enforce it ( the Mosaic Law), this means that the civil law in this present age has to be the Mosaic Law. This new approach of the postmillennial view is criticized even among the millennialists themselves.

For the postmillennialists, there is no such a thing as seven - years of tribulation on the earth when there comes rapture. Instead, rapture and the second coming of Jesus Christ is the same thing.

In the whole of this first chapter we have gone through a belief of certain Christians based on the holy Bible, specially in the Book of Daniel and Revelation. This belief has the central point, the establishment of the earthly kingdom of God by Jesus Christ in or after one thousand years. The picture has been confusing not only because of the three major division but also within each division there are the sub-divisions that are not easy to apprehend. However, the matters can be made simple in keeping the basics: first of all, with regard to the one thousand years; some in these this millennial systems believe that the kingdom has been fulfilled and when Jesus Christ comes, he will introduce the eternal state. Others maintain that

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<sup>7</sup> Loraine Boettner, The Millennium, quoted by Lightner, op. cit., p. 83.

Christ will return after the society (the world) has been christianized. Another trend holds that it has not yet been fulfilled but it will be when Christ will return and establishes it for one thousand years on the earth. Secondly, with regard to the seven - years of tribulation, some believe in a future seven-year tribulation some other do not believe at all. There is two different opinions among those who believe; there are those who believe that the church will not go through the tribulation, it (the church) will be raptured before any part of the tribulation starts, while others believe that only the spiritual believers will be caught up (rapture) and the rest will undergo the tribulation. A few retain that the church will partially go through the tribulation.

As the millennialism finds its foundation in a mixture of some biblical passage, we are also going to the Bible in the second chapter, not by mixing the passages but choosing one, which deal with issue, the pouring of the seven bowls in Revelation chaps.16 and its consequences (of the pouring of the seven bowls) in chap.17-22:1-5.

## CHAP. II: SEVEN BOWLS, CHRIST'S EVENT WHICH DESTROYS EVIL. AND INTRODUCES THE NEW ERA

The theory we have exposed in the previous chapter is founded in a certain reading of apocalyptic literature in the Bible, mostly the Book of Revelation. In the present chapter, we will go to the Book of Revelation also and let it speak itself ( exegesis) to us about the Endtime. When we read the pouring of the seven bowls in Revelation (chap. 16), two major effects emerge; destruction of evil and appearance of the new creation. We have found this passage useful for our reflection on the Endtime, therefore worthy of exegetic analysis.

### **1. The Seven Bowls, the Judgment of God**

The action of the pouring of the seven bowls itself is described in Rev. 16: 1-21, but it is predicted in chap. 14, and chap. 15 introduces the whole series of the vision. The two preceding chapters set the stage for the pouring of the seven bowls.

#### a. Chaps. 14 and 15; Announcement of the Judgment in 16:1-21 as liberating

Rev. 14:6-12. The three angels announce the judgment. Vv 6-7, the first angel proclaims precautions to take on earth, namely the fear of God and glorify him, because the hour of his judgment has come. V.8 is the announcement of what will happen in chaps. 17 and 18, namely the chastisement of the great city. In vv. 9-10, the third angel announces what will happen to the worshipers of the beast (cfr. 19:20). V.12 calls upon the endurance of those who fear God. From vv. 14-16, the theme of harvest comes up, specially in v.15; it points out that the hour of the judgment has come. The symbolism of harvesting expressed in vv. 17-20 brings up in strong way the apocalyptic symbol of judgment which will come in chapter 16. The vision of harvest may be based on Joel 3:12-13.

Chap 15 introduces the next series of the visions; v.1 expresses it more precisely, it presents the seven bowls as the last plagues which will end the wrath of God. Vv. 3- 4, identify the song of Moses to the song of the Lamb; the song of Moses was the one sang

after the liberation from Egypt, here this song becomes the one of the Lamb; that means the servant of God sing their song of liberation, delivrance acquired not by Moses but by the “New Moses”, the Lamb. The liberation is no more achieved by crossing the Red Sea, but through the action of seven bowls which the seven angels are getting ready to pour out v.7. In this point, chapter 15 presents the pouring of the seven bowls as the act of new Exodus. In v.8, the action of this bowls is what shows God’s glory and power. It is only after the end of their action that people are allowed to enter God’s temple (cfr. v. 8b). God’s temple is symbol of his present; therefore the action of the seven bowls puts people into touch with the very presence of God.

b. Chap. 16. Execution of the Bowls, the Judgment of God.

Text; the whole biblical translation of our reflection is taken from Revised Standard Version.

Chap. 16:

1. Then I heard a loud voice from the temple telling the seven angels, “go and pour on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God.” 2 So the first angel went and poured his bowl on earth. and foul and evil sores came upon the men who bore the mark of the beast and worshipped its image. 3 The second angel poured his bowl into the sea, and it became like the blood of a death man, every living thing died that was in the sea. 4 The third angel poured his bowl into the rivers and the fountains of water, and they became blood. 5 And I heard the angel of water say:” Just art thou in these thy judgments, thou who art and wast, O Holy One. 6 For men have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink. It is their due!” 7 And I heard the cry, “Yea, Lord God Almighty, true and just are thy judgments!” 8 The fourth angel poured his bowl on the sun, and it was allowed to scorch men with fire; 9 men were scorched by fierce heat, and they cursed the name of God who had power over these plagues, and they did not repent and give him glory. 10 The fifth angel poured his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was in darkness: men gnawed tongues in anguish 11 and cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores, and did not repent of their deeds. 12 The sixth angel poured his bowl on the great river Eu- phrates, and its water was dried up. to prepare the way for the kings from east. 13 And I saw, issuing from the mouth of the dragon and from the mouth of the beast and from the mouth of the false prophet, three foul spirits like frogs; 14 for they are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to

assemble them for the battle on the great day of God the almighty. 15 (‘ Lo. I am coming like a thief! Blessed is he who is awake, keeping his garments that he may not go naked and be seen exposed !’)

16 And they assemble them at the place which is called in Hebrew Armaged`don. 17 The seven angel poured his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying: ” it is done!” 18 And there were flashes of lightning, voices, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake such as had never been since men were on the on earth, so great was that earthquake. 19 The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered great Babylon, to make her drain the cup of fury of his wrath. 20 And every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found: 21 and great hailstones, heavy as a hundredweight. dropped on men from heaven, till men cursed God for the plague of hail, so fearful was that plague.

The plagues that happen in the pouring of the bowls as Rev.15:1 mentioned are the last ones. There is in the description of this event a reminiscence of the Egyptian plagues in which Pharaoh and his subjects were confronted to the wrath of Yahweh who liberated his people. Already in the announcement of the judgment in Rev. 14:3, a new song is mentioned; and in 15:3 the song of Moses that the Jews sang from their bondage becomes a new song sung by the servants of God. All these two passages see God’s judgment symbolized by the pouring of the bowls as divine liberating act, but no longer through Moses but through the Lamb. This is to say that the song of Moses and of the lamb set a parallelism between Israel deliverance and what happen in the event of the bowls. The pouring of the bowls in Revelation 16 is the reinterpretation of Exodus 7:20- 12:30. In fact, in the passage of Exodus, it is the plagues which liberated Israel, the account of Jewish Passover; then parallelism of the text in Exodus with the seven bowls means that the last plagues is the new divine act of liberation. The effects of the plagues of the seven bowls, compared with the other plagues in Revelation, however are more destructive. For example, in the seven trumpets, only a third is destroyed; in bowls is the complete destruction of God’s enemies.

In Rev.16:1, the order to release the plagues comes from the Temple. Since the temple suggests the very presence of God himself, we may see this order comes from God himself, or see it as resulting from the divine will; God himself allows what will happen from the pouring of the bowls. Comparing with the passage of Exodus that we have mentioned, the order to release the plagues to Egypt came from God himself: Ex. 9:2:“ Then the Lord said to Moses, “Go in to Pharaoh, and say to him, thus says the Lord, the God of the

Hebrews, let my people go...”; v. 13: “ Then The Lord said to Moses, “Rise up early in the morning and stand before Pharaoh, and say to him, thus says the Lord, the God of Hebrews, Let my people Go”; v.22 “And The Lord said to Moses, Stretch forth your hand towards heaven, that there may be hail in all the land of Egypt...”; Ex. 10: 12 “ Then Lord said to Moses, ‘Stretch out your hand over the land of Egypt for the locusts, that they may come upon the land of Egypt, and eat every plant in the land’ ...”.The same idea of the order coming from God to strike the plagues is also conveyed by the image of the Loud voice from the Temple ordering to pour the bowls out (v.1).

With regard to the action of the pouring the bowls itself, the first four bowls strike the different elements of the nature; earth, sea, rivers and fountains, and sun. The fifth one is upon the throne of the beast. The sixth one is on the river Euphrates, it does not cause the damage to the river. It is for an other purpose; preparation of the battle. The seventh one poured in the air, the effects are not against the air as such, but it is what is called in theological language theophany. The question why does God - even in Exodus - instead of destroying the evil forces which enslave people straight away, he starts the destruction by striking the nature? From this divine policy, the idea is that when man is corrupted, so is his environment; therefore first, is the need to liberate the corrupted environment so that when man is liberated, he may live in a new environment.

V.2 the first bowl upon the earth refers to the plague against the Land of Egypt- see Ex 9:9:“ And it shall become fine dust over the land of Egypt, and become boils breaking out in sores on man and beast throughout all the Land of Egypt.” The plague is directed towards the worshippers of the beast. When the bowl strikes the earth it not only destroys the physical world, but also most of the human world; the inhabitants of the earth. The second bowl in v.3 is upon the sea; see the first plague on Egypt Ex. 7: 20-21:“Moses and Aaron did as the Lord commanded; in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants, he lifted up the rod and struck the water that was in the Nile, and all the water that was in the Nile turned to blood...” Because of this bowl, every living thing in the sea died; there is contrast to Gen 1:21 whereby God created every living things in the sea. This bowl destroys totally - not a third as in Rev. 8:8-9 what has been created in Gen. 1:21(de-creation) . The third bowl in v.4 strikes rivers and fountains, as the second plague in the previous verse, this one too goes back Ex. 7:20-21. The angel of waters testifies in vv. 5-6 to the justice of God through the

pouring of the seven bowls. The angel's claim is the heavenly approval of what happens. The angel speaks of God as being just in the pouring of the bowls; so the bowls are not series of arbitrary actions of God, but the judgment of God; people deserve this judgment. In v.6 because men have shed blood of the prophets and the saints, now God's wrath comes upon them. The principle put forwards here is the one in Wis 11:16. The shedding of blood of the saints and of the prophets in v.6 points out the persecution that the Christians underwent. In v. 7, the voice from the altar too praises the Justice of God through this action of the bowls. The altar cry, can be either the voice of the angel of the altar - see Rev 14:18, or it is the answer to the prayer of martyrs under the altar waiting for God's justice in Rev 6:9-10: "When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the souls of those who had been slain for the Word of God and for the witness they had borne; they cried out a loud voice, 'O Sovereign Lord, Holy and true, how long before then wilt judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell upon the earth?'" Barclay interprets the cry of the altar in two ways: "This may be the voice of the angel of the altar; or the idea may be this; the Altar in heaven is the place where both the prayers of his people (God's People) and the lives of his martyrs are offered as a sacrifice to God; and the voice of the altar may be, so to speak the voice of Christ's praying and suffering Church praising the justice of God when his wrath falls upon their persecutors".<sup>8</sup> The effect of the fourth bowl against the sun attacks straight away men (v8). This bowl contrasts Rev 7: 16b: "The sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat". Wilfrid Harrington sees in this verse the principle of Wis.11: 16: "For through the very things by which their enemies are punished, they themselves receive benefit in their need."<sup>9</sup> For Joseph Rymer, "men" in v.9 against whom the plague is redirected represent those who cooperated with the beast.<sup>10</sup> But, God's judgment is not to destroy people, rather to lead them to repentance; this is what it expressed in v.9: "Men were scorched by the fierce heat, and they cursed the God who had power over these plagues, and they did not repent and give glory." In spite of divine judgment, people did not repent.

In the fifth bowl vv. 10-11, the plague attacks directly the citadel of the beast, as result, the beast's kingdom was darkened, a parallelism can be made with Ex.10:21-22 (ninth

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<sup>8</sup> William Barclay, The Revelation of John, Vol. 2, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), p. 127.

<sup>9</sup> Wilfrid J. Harrington, Revelation, (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1993), p. 164.

<sup>10</sup> Joseph Rhymer, The End of Time, (Middlegreen, Slough -U.K.-:St Paul Publ. 1992), p. 119.

Plague). There is no obvious explanation about darkness on the kingdom of the beast. However, it could mean that - since the beast is the light of his kingdom- now that it (beast) is attacked the whole of its kingdom becomes dark; its kingdom has gone astray. Taking into consideration the situation of the church during the period of Revelation was written, the scholars refer the throne of beast to Rome. It was Rome who instigated the persecution of Christians. "Men gnawed their tongues in anguish"; this pictures the pain that the cooperators of the beast undergo. Wisdom 17 paints a picture of the plague of darkness. Rev.16:11 indicates that in front of such a great pain, people did not repent, instead they cursed the God of Heaven. This shows that the judgment of God revealed in the bowls does not aim primarily to destroy but to lead people to repent as expressed above in v.9. But they are marked by the beast in such away that they cannot turn from it. They are the possessions of the beast.

The sixth bowl vv. 12-16 is poured on the river Euphrates in order to dry it up for warriors from east to pass. There is a remembrance of some Old Testament texts. In fact, in the Old Testament, the divine saving actions are frequently associated with the drying up of waters; the Red Sea in Ex. 14: 21: "Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the Lord drove the sea back by the strong east wind all night, and made the sea dry land"; Jos.3:16-17: "The waters coming down from above and stood and rose up in a head far off, at Adam, The city that is beside Zarethan, and those following down towards the sea of Arabah, the salt sea, were wholly cut off; and the people passed over opposite Jericho. And while all Isreal were passing over on dry ground, the priests bore the Ark of covenant of the Lord stood on dry ground in the midst on Jordan", in the prophecy of Is. 11:15b " And He will wave his hand over the river with his scorching wind, and smite it into seven channels that men may cross dryshod", Jer.51: 36, Zc.10:11. Here in the sixth bowl, the reference to the river Euphrates brings an historical and geographical element relating to the situation of Roman in the first century AD. According to geographical and historical details, the river Euphrates was the boundary of the Roman Empire in the east; and at the other side, the Parthians were living. During the first century there was a constant fear that they could invade the Empire.<sup>11</sup> The author is using an historical fact engraved in the minds of people in

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<sup>11</sup> a. William Barclay, op. cit., p.129.

b. Leon Morris ed., Revelation, (Revised. ed., Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eesdmans Publ. Company, 1978), p.191.

his time. Parthians were the greatest enemies of Rome. For the Parthians to come across the river Euphrates was a thought that struck terror in to the Empire. The frogs that come out from the mouth the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet in v.13 are the unclean spirits. The mouth is the organ of speech (words), and words is one of the most influential forces in human life. Now the dragon, the beast, and the false prophets being symbols of evil forces, what come from their speech are only evil. The connection can be made between the frogs here and in Exodus 8:5-11, the plague of the frogs. In Ps.78:45 they are attached with destructive effects: " He sent among the swarms of flies which devoured them, and the frogs which destroyed them" and in Psalm 105:30: "Their land swarmed with frogs, even in chambers of their kings." Frogs are the plagues which cause harm. Therefore, to say that the frogs came out of the mouth of the dragon, the beast and the false prophets is to say that the speech (words) from their mouths was the plague (destruction), was unclean. In v 14, this evil speech went abroad to make alliance among the kings of the whole world for the battle in Armageddon. This can mean in the first place, since dragon refers to Satan and the beast to Rome, that Rome seeks to make alliance with Parthians because of their threat to the Empire, and with other kings of the whole world. Or it may mean that is the battle between Rome and Parthia; and Rome made alliance with others powers to face them. But most commentators see this battle as coalition among all the evil forces, even the two enemies (Parthians and Romans), to face an other power. The battle is said to be held on the "Great day of God the Almighty" which may refer to some prophecies in Old Testament, specially Joel 2:30; the day that God reveals his might. In New Testament it takes a connotation of the second coming of Jesus Christ which will introduce to the New Heaven and New Earth. 2 Pet 3: 12-13:"... Waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be kindled and dissolved, and the element will melt with fire! But according to his promise we wait for a new heavens and a new earth in which righteous dwell". The battle is said to be held at the place called Armgeddon; the scholars identify it to the plain of Megiddo. It is one of the great battle - fields in the eastern ancient world. It was the place where Ahaziah died by the shooting of Jehu, 2 Kings 9:27: " When Ahaziah the king of Judah saw this, he fled in the direction of Beth-haggan. Jehu pursued him, and said, 'Shoot him also', and they shot him in the chariot at the ascent of Gur, which is by Ib'le-am. And he fled to Megiddo, and died there"; the plain where Josiah perish in the battle against Pharaoh

Neco, 2 Kings 23:29-30: “ In the days of Pharaoh Neco king of Egypt went up to the king of Assyria to the river of Eu -phrates. King Josi’ah went to meet him; and Pharaoh Neco slew him at Megid’do when he saw him. And his servants carried him dead in chariot from Megiddo...” We find an other detail in Zech. 12:11: “ On that day the mourning in Jerusalem will be as great as the mourning for Hadad-rim’mon in the plain of Megiddo.” The place is familiar to the Jews as the place of battle and tragedies. For sure the battle that John is building up in the story is not an historical one. Because we know according the text, on one side there is the dragon, the beast, the false prophets and their allies but their opponents are not given in the text. The idea beyond all this imagery is that, all these evil forces have formed a coalition in order to fight against God. This is to say that on one side, we have evil - Satan -, and on the other side, God. If it is accepted that the battle that John is putting forward is the combat between God and the evil, then the great day of the Lord Almighty on which the battle is held cannot be the second coming of Jesus Christ (Parousia). Because the Second Coming of Jesus Christ has not a warfare image, instead it is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Paschal Mystery) which have the image of war between God and evil. In this way the second coming of Jesus Christ will be the confirmation, and the manifestation in face to face between man and the glory of Lord acquired already in paschal mystery.

Now comes the pouring of the seventh bowl vv. 17-21. According to the symbolism of the text from the pouring of the sixth bowl where the dragon, the beast, the false prophets were getting ready for the battle, here in the pouring of the seventh bowl we suppose to have the battle itself. But we do not have the account of the combat as such, but its effects. In v.17, the bowl is poured in the “air” ; there are three trends of interpretation emerging in this point among the scholars; Barclay, mentioning H.B. Swete, sees this as the nature in the war against man. In fact, if the air was polluted, the very life of man was attacked at its source; Morris sees the pouring of the bowl in the air as the evil spirits being attacked in their own element; and the third interpretation is the one of Corsini, who sees in the action of pouring the bowl in the air as the lifting up Jesus Christ on the cross.<sup>12</sup> We could have problems in the

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<sup>12</sup> a . W. Barclay, op. cit., p. 133.

b. L. Morris, op. cit., p.194.

c. E. Corsini , The Apocalypse, The Perennial Revelation of Jesus Christ, (Wilmington, Delawere: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1983), p. 306.

second interpretation because air is the element of divine creation, then it is not element of evil spirit. The position of Corsini can be held in the application, but it might raise questions in the exegesis of the text as such. However from the three positions there is the idea of battle. At this pouring, the voice coming out of the temple and from the throne testifies that "it is done". The voice itself is unidentified, John tells us that it came out of the temple and from the throne. It can be the voice of the one seating on the throne in the temple; if so, it is divine testimony to what happens. "It is done", might mean the seventh pouring of the bowl is the last in the series the plague, it is the last in the sense that it is the climax, the final end, the fullness of all that happened before; in this sense it confirms what is announced in Rev. 15:1, or it can also mean that the battle for which the kings of the world were getting ready for in the sixth pouring of the bowl has happened. These two views do not exclude each other; this is to say that this last plague, the climax of what we have so far is the battle. V.18 enumerates some natural catastrophes that are known in theological language as theophany; the traditional divine manifestations, visitations or interventions; Ex 9:24: " There was hail, and fire flashing continually in the midst of the hail, very heavy hail, such as had never been in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation"; in Dan 12:1; Mark 13:19: " For in those days there will be such tribulation as has not been from the beginning of the creation which God Created until now, and never will be". As we can see from this divine visitation, the battle that John mentions here is not historical battle as such, but historical fact which involves God himself. He is the one engaged in the combat: a spiritual battle. Rev 16:18 looks as if the readers of John in Asia Minor were accustomed great earthquakes, but the one he pictured here surpasses whatever earthquake they have experienced. This image confirms the pouring of the seventh bowl as the climax of the divine plague and the accomplishment of Rev.10:7. As consequences of this divine manifestation the great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and through that event God remember great Babylon. W. Harrington and Barclay understand the great city in the perspective of the Rev. 14: 8 "Babylon the great city."<sup>13</sup> Actually there is difference in the text itself, there is the great city which was split, the cities of nations which fell, the remembrance of the great Babylon. If those three different cities refer to Babylon the great (Rome), there would not be these three

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<sup>13</sup> a. W. Harrington, *op.cit.*, p.168.

b. W. Barclay, *op.cit.*, p 134.

different detail on the cities. The great city appeared in Rev.11: 8: "And their dead bodies will lie on the streets on the great city which is the allegory called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified". Corsini finds this term symbolically wide open; it indicates the earthly cities dominated by Satan which engaged in the persecution of the Christians. Morris directs this view in the perspective of Corsini; he holds: " It (the city) stands for civilized man, man is organized in community but man ordering his affairs apart from God. It symbolizes the pride of human achievement, the godlessness of those who put their trust in man."<sup>14</sup> Since the great city and Babylon are enumerated at the same moment, but with different actions relating to them; this differences could mean that the great city symbolizes another city which dealt with the Christians in the same way of the great Babylon ( Rome). If we add the parallelism of the city in Rev.16:19 with the great city in Rev. 11:8, the great city could mean Jerusalem; it is in Jerusalem that the Lord was crucified, and so were his witnesses (Rev.11:8). From an historical point of view, the persecution of the christians started in Jerusalem by the Jews. This city was split into three; this means the total end the great city - Jerusalem. Other cities of the nations which deal with the Christian as Jerusalem did, fell also; and God remembers the great Babylon, its fate will be determined in chap. 17. This v.19 already introduces the theme of destruction.

V.20 mentions the disappearance of the mountains and the fleeing of every island; John refers to the concrete effects from the cataclysm of the seventh bowl. The disappearance of the mountains and every island is an apocalyptic image of the end of the old reality. This verse introduces already the theme of the new heaven and new earth which will come in detail in chap. 21; the remembrance of the great Babylon in v. 19 introduces the theme of destruction of Babylon in chaps. 17 and 18 (the fall of Babylon). In these two verses, 19 and 20, are to be found the first link between the pouring of the bowls and the destruction of the beast (dragon), and between the bowls and the coming down of the new reality. And the last verse of this plague ends with a sorrowful note; in spite of all the plagues, even this one which has been described as the greatest, men did not repent; instead they keeping cursing God as the previous plagues. John brings forward the idea, even though God enter in the battle against men - the followers of the beast- it is not to destroy them, but to win back them

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<sup>14</sup> a. E.. Corsini,op. cit., p. 308.  
b. L.. Morris, op. cit., p.195.

to Him (God). In paraphrasing Ellul we can say that man is so much the prey of the powers, so closely associated with their works, enjoys himself so thoroughly to their profit, desires so much all they offer, conceives his life to such a degree separated from God, that every approach of God, every positive work of God, appears to him as an unacceptable disturbance and finally an attack against him. He protestes against the breaking of the chains which are his destruction.<sup>15</sup>

Now that men - those who worshipped the best - refuse to repent in spite of the merciful judgment of God, their fate is determined by the destruction of the great Babylon in chaps. 17 - 20:15. And this destruction allows for the new heaven and new earth in chapters 21 - 22 :5.

## **2. The Destruction of Babylon and the Beast: Rev 17 - 20:5**

The theme of destruction is sub- divided into two sections: from chaps 17 - 19:10, the sub-theme of the destruction of Babylon, and from 19:11 - 20:15, the destruction of the beast and of the dragon. The main preoccupation is how this theme is related exegetically with the seven bowls. The event we identified as causing this destruction.

In the introduction of the theme (17:1), the link is made with the pouring of seven bowls. In fact, in v.1 it said that one of the angels who had poured the bowls showed John what happen from his/their action(s). This means that out the divine judgment there emerges the destruction of the evil forces symbolized here by Babylon, the beast and the dragon.<sup>16</sup> The meaning of the angel showing John what happened to Babylon can be that, after the great plague, pouring of the bowls, one of the angels who had poured it - the text does not mention which one- shows John the consequences of what they have done to Babylon. An other link is after the divine manifestation in the seventh bowl. It said: "God remembered great Babylon, to make her drink the cup of the fury of his wrath" (16:19b); this was already the introduction of what happen now to the great Babylon. Then we may say that the first act in the final tragedy of the divine merciful judgment is directly oriented against the great prostitution. Several times in the text, this prostitute woman is identified as the great

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<sup>15</sup> Jacques Ellul, Apocalypse The Book of Revelation, ( New York: The Seabury press, 1977),p.72.

<sup>16</sup> L. Morris, op. cit., p.197.

Babylon. The personification of Babylon as female, and its image as prostitute refer to idolatry. Babylon, Rome by worshipping several multitudes of gods are compared to a prostitute running after several men. Also to this image of prostitution is attached the idea of splendor (Rev.18:9-19); this is common to prostitutes. In order to attract her clients, the prostitute invests a lot to appear attractive in public; this idea goes back to Ezekiel 23.

The first section of destruction; namely the destruction of Babylon, has three divisions: first of all John sees the harlot (17:1-7), secondly he receives the explanation of significance of the woman (17: 8-18), and lastly he is informed of her punishment (18:1-24).

After this section comes the joyful hymn of God's servants in chap.19. The joy of God's servants is explicitly expressed in the expression "Hallelujah"- praise Yahweh !- This expression is found abundantly in psalms. The expression is from Jewish synagogue worship, and is taken up in the early church. In the Old Testament - specially in the psalms, God was praised for so many things: for creation, for his saving act, for Jerusalem... Here in Rev.19: 1-2 God is praised for exercising his Just and true judgments on the great harlot. It shows God's victory, glory and power.

This Judgment of God, the text does not refer it to the future, the tense used is the perfect tense "has judged"; this means that the act of judging has taken place in the past but the effects are still going on. In v.9, God's judgment upon the great Babylon, has made possible the gathering a people for a banquet; the text says: "Blessed are those who are invited to the supper of the Lamb." The Jews believed that, at the coming of Messiah God will offer to his people a great Messianic Banquet; Is.25:6 : " ...The Lord of hosts will make for all people a feast of fat thing, a feast of wine on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wine on the lees well refined". In Mat. 26: 29, Jesus was looking forward to the great Messianic Banquet. In v.9, this Messianic Banquet is offered by the Lamb. According to W. Harrington, "Lamb" is John's characterization of Jesus, the favorite title for Christ because of his shedding of blood for men's sins.<sup>17</sup> In agreement with Harrington, Paschal Mystery is seen as that judgment on the great Babylon which has gathered a people and inaugurated the Messianic Banquet.

From 19:11- 20:15 is the second sub-theme of the destructive theme; here is the destruction of the beast and the dragon. After the Messianic Banquet which ends the first

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<sup>17</sup> W. Harrington, op. cit., p.25.

section of the destruction; the second sub- theme starts with the section on a warfare image, Rev 19:11-21. In v 11, heaven is opened; we were told in 15:8 that no one could enter the temple (it may refer to the temple in heaven) until the seven plagues pass; that meant the temple was closed, but here in 19:11 it is opened for the plagues have passed. What is perceived at the opening of heaven; the white horse and the one sat on it in warfare image. According to Barclay, John sees Christ as the conqueror.<sup>18</sup> The white horse, and the description of his rider appeared in Rev 6:2. The horse symbolizes the war, and its color “white” has a meaning; in an apocalyptic perspective the color white is the symbol of victory: Rev. 2:17 : “ ... To him who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone”; 3:5: “ He who conquers shall be clad thus in white garments...” The description of the one seated on the horse 19:12-15a refers back to Rev.1:13 - 14:“...And in the midst of lampstands, one like son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden girdle round his breast; his head and his hair as snow; white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire”. V.15b of chap. 19 finds its parallelism in 14:15 “...Put in your sickle, and reap, for the hour to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is fully ripe”. The meaning could be that the one seated on the white horse is that one like the son of man coming from the cloud in order to reap the harvest of earth. Reaping is in term of war; his rod is dipped in blood. This blood could not be his own because he is riding a white horse - is the victorious -, the blood is of his enemies; the blood may well refer to Is. 63:1-3:

“Who is this that comes from Edom, in crimsoned garments from Bozrah, he that is glorious in his apparel, marching in the greatness of his strength? It is I, announcing vindication, mighty to save. Why is thy apparel red, and thy garments like his that treads in the wine press? ` I have trodden the wine press alone and from the people no one was with me; I trod them in my anger and tramped them in my wrath; their lifeblood is sprinkled upon my garments”.

V13 gives the name of the warrior, the Word of God. Jesus Christ is this word of God who made war from which he came out victorious. Barclay sees this war in dynamic way, Jesus in action embodies the whole of God’s power. Corsini refers that war to the Paschal Mystery. The war of Armageddon is seen as an allegory to battle on the cross

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<sup>18</sup> W.Barclay,op.cit., p.177.

between Christ and evil forces.<sup>19</sup> The two positions can be reconciled by the fact that the war had a starting point that would be on the Cross, and it goes on in the life of the Christian, but when one sides with Christ, he /she comes out victorious.

In chapter 20, is the description of the bounding of Satan (1-3), the reign with Christ (4-6), the end of dragon (7-10), the final judgment(11-15) .

a. The Bounding of Dragon (20:1-3)

The dragon is said to be kept in the abyss for a period of a thousand years. The number one thousand as used in Scripture is not to be taken literally, simply to described a very large number of years see Job 9:3; Ps. 50: 10. The dragon is identified to the ancient serpent the deceiver. At the end of the period of its bounding, it is to be let loose for a little time.

b. The Reign with Christ (20:4-6)

The attention of this section is on those who have shown their loyalty to Christ through their sufferings for him. Those who enjoy this privilege of reigning with Christ are divided into two categories: first are those who have been martyred for their loyalty to 20: 4b: “ ... Those who have been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and the word of God”, the word “behead” denotes a cruel death which refers to Christian martyrs during persecution; second are those who have not worshipped the beast and have not receive its mark on their forehead (v 4c). These two different categories can well refer to the two different ways of loyalty to Christ during the persecution in the church: martyrs those who actually died for their faith to Jesus Christ, and the confessors those who suffered everything short of death for the loyalty to Christ. Both he who dies for Christ and he who lives for Christ reign with him in his one thousand years reign. The insertion of this section in the

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<sup>19</sup> a. W. Barclay, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

b. E. Corsini, *op. cit.*, p. 351.

middle of the destruction theme can mean that; from the destruction of evil starts the reign of Christ.

c. The End of the Dragon (vv. 7-10)

John is mentioning an other gathering of the forces of evil for the battle against God. This section sheds light on the battle of Armageddon, it is not concrete historical combat, but a spiritual one. From vv. 9-10 is the description of the movement in the battle. "Satan and his allies marched up over the broad earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city (v9)". The camp of the saints and the beloved city refer to God's people. The camp brings the image of this people as soldiers of God. Maybe because they have undergone persecution without compromising their faith to Jesus Christ with the dragon. The beloved city should be understood over against the great city (16:19), this great city was the partisans of the beast, the beloved city is the new Jerusalem, people under the dominion of God.

The hostile armies of the Devil and its allies marched against God's people, but they are consumed with the fire of heaven, then the devil is cast into the lake of fire, that is, the complete destruction of the devil, and the complete triumph of God.

d. The Final Judgment (vv. 11- 15)

Finally, from the disappearance of the great city , the beast and the dragon now come the turn of the death and Hades. These two monsters who have devoured so many in persecution are now at the end they themselves. In this judgment those whom the names are not found in the book of life are condemned to disappear with the devil their master in the lake of fire, for those whose names are written in the book of life, death is defeated for ever.

### **3. The Emergence of The New Reality Rev. 21- 22:5, Result of the Pouring of the Bowls.**

#### a. New Heaven and New Earth mark the New Beginning.

From the fate of evil, John turns to that of good. He tells us in 21: 1 that he saw a new heaven and a new earth. This passage offers a close parallel to Is.65:17. The newness of this heaven and earth does not refer to creation in the sense of Genesis, but instead, the transformation of the old ones. In this new heaven and earth the sea is no more; the sea is the symbol of chaos, the original flood; the source of evil. Then its disappearance is an assurance of the total victory of new creation over the chaos. A. Yarbrow Collins sees in this passage the discontinuity of the chaotic flood of Old Testament as happening in the event of the pouring of the seventh bowls.<sup>20</sup> With the interpretation of Collins in mind, the discontinuity here is not of the Old Testament flood, but of the flood or the chaos caused by Babylon, the beast and the dragon. V.1 of chapter 21 is the echo of 16:20 "And every island fled away and no mountains were to be found..." What was announced there as the consequence of the pouring of bowls, is now described in length. Through a new heaven and earth, without a sea, John describes a complete transformation which occurs from the pouring of the bowls. What might be in the back of mind is Gen. 1:1: "In the beginning God created the heaven and earth". The event of pouring the bowls - specially 16: 17-21 - marks a new beginning. In connection of previous theme (destruction of evil), this new beginning does not come about by the explosion of the old heaven and earth, rather by stopping the evil power which has alienated the old heaven and earth (old creation). This difference can be expressed in this way; the first creation in Gen 1:1 from which started a first beginning ( first time) was "ex nihilo" from nothingness. The new creation here in Rev 21:1 which brings about a new beginning is not from nothingness but from the transformation of the alienated old creation. This point will be of great importance for the relationship between Endtime and Paschal Mystery in the next

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<sup>20</sup> Adela Yarbrow Collins, *op. cit.*, p. 1015.

chapter. V.1b points out that this process 'the coming of the new heaven and earth' is not in the future. The text says: "For the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more." Therefore, there is no way to see this new creation which marks the new beginning as a reality in the future; it has already occurred.

#### b. New Jerusalem, Reality from God and the Lamb

V.2 points to the new Jerusalem as part of God's reality; it is holy and from the heaven. Holiness is an attribute of God; the new Jerusalem being holy means that it is the reality fashioned by God himself, and finds its origin from him (from heaven), God himself is the builder of the heavenly Jerusalem. This verse is modeled on Is. 65:17-19: "For behold, I create new heavens and new earth; and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind ... For behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing..." The new Jerusalem contrasts the great city and Babylon with followers of the beast.

The voice in v.3 explains the significance of the vision. It testifies that the new Jerusalem is the people of God. This is the echo of God's promise to make Israel his people: Lev. 26:11,12; Jer. 31:33; Ezk.37:27. In vv. 4-5, this fellowship with God makes tears, grief, cries and pain to go away - see Is. 35:10. In vv. 3-4, there is verbal tenses that lead to the interpretation of this passage in different ways: first of all it is said in v.3a: "the dwelling of God is with men" in the present; secondly starting in v.3b-4 the tense is future: "He will dwell with them...they shall be his people,... he will wipe..." It looks as if God is at the same time present and not present; the new Jerusalem is his people and not yet his people. What is accomplished by in this tension is the objective presence of God among men, and the subjective appropriation of this divine presence from the side of men. This means that God has established friendship with men, but now they can choose to respond to this friendship, and God dwells in them. Lev. 26:3, 12 can help us to understand this appropriation of the divine offer: "If you walk in my commandments and do them, ... and I will walk among you, I will be your God..." God is always God in himself, but He will be someone's God through appropriation. It is in the same perspective in Rev 21:3-4, God has made his dwelling among men, but now it depends on men to appropriate his presence. However, the disappearance of death, mourn and cries known as the state of life in new Jerusalem, might be seen as

accomplishing in a future stage for those who abide with God. But they are already people of God - new Jerusalem - since the pouring of the bowls. We can say in short that, the present tense refers to this process which has already begun, and the future tense refers to its fulfillment whereby the consequences of evil (death, mourn, grief, pain, cries) will be no more. In vv.5-6, the one who sat on the throne (Rev.1:8), (God himself) is testifying this, is an act of renewing all things. Morris sees this renewing of all things as primarily occurring in future: " I am making everything new of course refers primarily to the final renewing at the end. But the present tense is used and it is worth reflecting that God continually makes things new and now."<sup>21</sup> There is no reason what so ever to say that the making of all things anew refers to the future; the text does not say it. The claim of Morris can be seen in different way ; the final renewing at the end as he puts it, is the fulfillment of a process which has already begun. Therefore, there is no final renewal as such but, the accomplishment of the process of renewing started already. The making of every thing new is a permanent process as Is. 43:19 mentioned: " Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it". In 2 Cor 5:17, the abiding with Jesus Christ gives way to new creation: " Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old one has passed away, behold, the new one has come". " It is done" in v6 - no more the war as in 16:17 - but the act of making everything new. In Greek the verb is in the perfect tense, which in no way interprets the action of renewal as in the future; the enterprise of recreation has begun; "It is done!"

V.9 shows another link between this theme of new creation and the pouring of the bowls as in 17:1, the link between the seven bowls and the theme of the destruction. One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls, after showing John what happened from his (their) action to the harlot (17:1), now in Rev 21:9, is showing him the Bride of the Lamb. This means as I mentioned above; the pouring of the bowls has put an end to evil and has gathered a people for God. The bride of the lamb is the redeemed people who form the new Jerusalem. These are the people who rejoiced at the destruction of Babylon in 19:7. In this theme, the Lamb is very prominent in the new Jerusalem. The term 'lamb' might bring different meanings; the one to come to vindicate the righteous and dismay the wicked - he is the ruler of people of God-, it can refer to Jewish paschal Lamb ( blood, Passover: liberation); the lamb of sin offering for the expiation of sin in the temple, and finally, the suffering servant in

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<sup>21</sup> Leon Morris, *op. cit.*, p.239.

Isaiah. The image of war given to the pouring of the bowls can identify Christ well as the one who made war (shedding of his blood) against evil on the cross in order to win a people for God over whom he rules. Christ is referred to as the Christian Paschal Lamb because of his act on the cross. Therefore, the cross becomes a Judgment of the wicked.

From v.12 to v. 14 is the description of the new Jerusalem. The new Jerusalem is described as having a great and high wall; this puts forth the idea that the new Jerusalem is secure and inviolable. This wall cannot mean a system of defense because the enemies, the beast and dragon have been destroyed. There are twelve gates in the new Jerusalem; three on each direction; north, south, east and west. The gates symbolize the entrance into the new Jerusalem; the entrances are on the four directions of world. That means all the nations from the all corners of the earth are now allowed to be citizen of the new Jerusalem. It is no longer as it was in old Jerusalem where only Jews were inhabitants of Jerusalem. Luke 13:29 expresses this idea more clear :“ And men will come from east and west, and from north and south, sit at the table in the kingdom of God”. The names of the twelve tribes of Israel inscribed on the gates, and the names of the twelve Apostles written on the twelve foundations of the wall of the new Jerusalem suggests that the Israel of old and Christians are united in God’s final scheme of things. Barclay expresses it in term of continuity; the God of the Old Testament is the God of the New Testament.<sup>22</sup>

From v15 to 17 is the measuring of the new Jerusalem; the image is taken from Ezk. 40:3,5. All this measuring shows how the city is strongly built and nothing can shake it; the city is secure and well protected since God himself dwells in the New Jerusalem. The idea of God dwelling in New Jerusalem is carried up in v.16. In fact, in the text (v16), the shape of the city is four squares; this is a perfect form of a cube. The cube is the symbol of perfection; the temple Salomon in 1 kings 6:20 was in the form of cubes. John intends us to see that the whole holy city is the Temple of God, his dwelling-place.

From v 18 to v.21, the description of the precious stones which decorate the city. In v. 18, the wall of the city is in jasper and the city itself was built in gold. Jasper is the jewel which symbolizes the radiance of the divine splendor, see Rev. 4:3: “ And he who sat there appeared like jasper and carnelian...”, and 21:11:“ having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper...” Jasper and gold refer to God’s presence in the city; the idea

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<sup>22</sup> William Barclay, *op. cit.*, p.210.

is taken from Is. 54:11-12 and Zech. 2:5. The city is shot throughout with the radiance of the divine splendor. The second jewel sapphire with what the wall of the new Jerusalem is adorned appears in Ex. 24:10: "And they saw the God of Israel; and there was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness." Most of jewels listed in vv.19 and 20 are what made the breast-piece of the high priest in Ex. 28:19. The same stones are mentioned in Ezk. 28:13. All these precious stones might suggest the unimaginable beauty and inaccessible riches of which the new Jerusalem is made.

In v.22, the new Jerusalem does not have the temple; it is full of the presence of God and the lamb, they are the ones to enlighten the city (v.23); this verse echoes Is. 60:20: "Your sun shall no more go down, nor your moon withdraw itself, for the Lord will be your everlasting light..." The whole city has replaced the temple seen as the only dwelling place of God. The holiness of God has extended to the entire city instead of only in the temple; this is why v.27 stresses on the absolute purity of the new Jerusalem.

### c. Life in New Jerusalem

In 22:1-2 John described the origin of life in the new Jerusalem. The water of life in v.1 has many sources in the Old Testament: the river which watered the Garden of Eden in Gen.2:10-14; the picture of the river flowing from the temple in Ezek. 47:1-7; Ps.46:4 sing the river whose streams make the city of God glad; in Zechariah 14:8, the living water shall flow out from Jerusalem on that day. Since the new Jerusalem has no temple, this living water flows from the throne of God and the Lamb. God's presence among his people in the new Jerusalem becomes the principle of Life. The throne of God is the one of the lamb, the same throne; what is implied here is that God, as well as the lamb, are the givers (the source) of life in the new Jerusalem. The living water flowing from the throne of the lamb finds its parallel in John 7:38: "He who believes in me, as the scripture said, 'out of his heart shall flow the living water'". V 2 pictures the tree of life on both sides of the river; this image can be the contrast of the tree of death in Gen 3:6-7: "So when woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate..." The tree that gave death in the old creation has been replaced by the tree of life in the new

creation. The tree of life gives many fruits; the symbolism of variety of fruit can be transferred to the variety of fruit of the Spirit in Gal.5:22-23. The tree is in the middle of the city for all to take, it is no more forbidden; nor are its fruits confined to Jews. Its leaves are for the healing of all the nations. This points out the universality of the new life brought by the action of the seven bowls.

From vv.3-5 the final culmination of the description of the city. There will be no more accursed thing there; this is to say no more harm to the life of the citizens of the New Jerusalem. Their foreheads will be marked with the name of God which is a sign of their belonging to him. The presence of God in their midst leads them to worship. From the description of the new Jerusalem, John moves from what happened to its final completion.

## CHAP. III: THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

The present chapter has two main points; the first is the interpretation of the exegetical analysis of the second chapter in the perspective of the Paschal Mystery, and the second point is the relationship between Paschal Mystery and Endtime.

Before we get into the interpretation itself, we can make a useful general remark in order to set the mind to understand the orientation we have taken in interpreting the seven bowls. The modern scholars agree that the Book of Revelation is Christian writing addressed to the Christian communities in Asia Minor who were undergoing persecutions. It was to give them hope and courage to persevere in their faith in Christ. The Book enters in the category of apocalyptic literature because of its genre. However, being the inspired Word of God, it is still relevant for us today. As it meant to strengthen faith of Christian in Asia, it straightens our faith here and now. For the Christian who underwent persecution at the time of the writing of Revelation, as well for us today, the basis of our hope in hardships of life is the Paschal Mystery. Christ has won the hardships, in him we find hope for the future.

The effects of Paschal Mystery - war between Satan and God, the destruction of Satan, and the creation of a people- are those ones mentioned in symbolic images by the pouring of the seven bowls.

### **1. Seven Bowls, Paschal Mystery**

#### **a . The Announcement and Preparation of the Pouring of Seven Bowls.**

Right from chapter 14, in the announcement of the seven bowls, the notions such as Mount Zion, the Lamb, and redeemed people through the lamb direct our minds to the saving event accomplished by Christ. Mount Zion is sometimes associated with deliverance as expressed in Joel 2:32: “ For Mount Zion and Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the Lord said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the Lord calls”. The lamb is the image of John which refers to Christ as the one “who loves us and has freed us from our sins

by his blood (Rev. 1.5b). When John paints in the Book the power and the triumph of the lamb, he is clear. He wants it understood that the decisive victory of the Lamb was won on the Cross. Jesus Christ acquired the title of "lamb" in his death and resurrection; through this event, he delivered this multitude of people who stood with him at Mount Zion. The title of lamb attributed to Christ refers to him as the one who comes to vindicate righteous and to dismay the wicked (the followers of the beast). Indeed through his death and resurrection, Jesus Christ became he who rules over the people of God, and has won them back to God. So what is more stressed in this title "slain lamb" is the act of death and resurrection of Christ. The lamb with forty-four thousand people standing on Mount Zion put forth the idea that Paschal Mystery is that event which has set the multitude of people free. It is the victory of Christ over death, which marks simultaneously the destruction of the evil forces and the foundation of new Jerusalem.<sup>23</sup>

The announcement of the judgment in chapter 14 is well expressed from verses 6 to 11. The judgment is experienced both as wrath of God for the beast and its followers, and as liberation for the followers of the lamb. The angels, the heavenly messengers announce the judgment; in the announcement of the first angel, the judgment of God is not a future reality. V7 says the judgment "has come"; this perfect tense means that the fact has already occurred, and it is still going on, or its effects are still going on. Therefore, the judgment which has been matter in the pouring of seven bowls is not to see, as some scholars suggest it, in the Parousia. It has happened as Rev. 14:7 and the actual pouring of the bowls in 16: 2, 3, 4, 8, 10, 12, 17 indicate. The announcement of the second angel, foresees the destruction of evil forces and those who worshipped these forces. The angel also invites the saints (Christians) for endurance. Here the situation is this of persecution, the Christians are called to endurance because the time of harvest is reached.

In short, the announcement of the judgment has two main points; the figure of the lamb and his followers on the Mount Zion, and the messages of the angels on the destruction of evil forces. The author first puts forth the liberation of God's people by the lamb, and second he shows what this liberation consists of. All this is the picture of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ - Paschal Mystery- which is the judgment announced in this chapter.

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<sup>23</sup> E. Corsini, op. cit., p.259.

Chapter 15 is the preparation of the judgment - the pouring out of the seven bowls-. These bowls convey the final plagues, they pour out the sanction of God. "No one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of seven angels ended" (v.8), this indication is of great importance; first its verbal tense is in the past - this means that this divine judgment described in the seven plagues is a past fact; second, only at the end of that event were people allowed to enter the Temple - to live with God-. This second point - entering the temple after the pouring of the seven plagues - refers to Paschal Mystery in symbolic way. In fact, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ has re-established the covenant between God and man. The Paschal Mystery is the only event through which man can get into touch with God; in the expression used by the Book of Revelation, we can say that the death and the resurrection of Christ is the event through which man enter the Temple. From this interpretation, we understand the seven bowls which is judgment of God, as Paschal Mystery.

The picture of the plagues reminds us of the action of God against Egyptians described in Exodus. In pouring of seven bowls in Revelation, the situation that the author is dealing with is the persecution of Christians. The message is that, though the Christians suffered persecution under evil forces (beast- Rome), they have been set free by the death and resurrection of Christ which the author of Revelation considers as plagues of God on these evil forces. Therefore, all those who abide with Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection are free people.

This judgment of God over evil forces is the source of joy for those who have conquered the beast. In v.3 of chapter 14, it is said that they sing a new song; in 15:3 that new song is identified to the song of Moses and of the lamb. This parallelism between the song of Moses, and of the lamb brings up the idea that the pouring of seven bowls is new a liberation because the song of Moses was sung in triumph to God after the safe crossing of the red Sea ( Ex. 15: 1-19). In the judgment of God - the pouring out of the bowls- this song becomes a new song, the song of the lamb; meaning that the liberation is no more under the leadership of Moses, but the liberation is acquired by the lamb. The song itself is the exaltation of the power and majesty of God shown through his judgment. The two elements of this chapter, namely the final plagues and the song of Moses, and of the lamb are indication that the judgment of God in the pouring of the bowls is the new exodus. Then we can say that this judgment of God in the seven bowl is not primarily - as some scholars see it

- to happen at the Parousia. Because we know that the second coming of Jesus is not primarily the act of salvation; but instead it is the meeting of Jesus Christ and those who have a share in his death and resurrection. What we try to say is that the second coming of Christ is not the event which saves or condemns people; salvation or condemnation is brought about through Paschal Mystery, then the second coming will be only the confirmation of saved people and the condemned ones. In this point then, the event which judges is Paschal Mystery not so much the second coming of Jesus. It is in this orientation of chapters 14 and 15 we are going to understand the pouring of the seven bowls out of the earth.

#### b. The Pouring of the Seven Bowls; God's judgment

The order to pour the bowls out comes from the temple Rev.16:1; that means the pouring out of the bowls is according to the divine will. The judgment that occurs here is a divine act. According the tenses used in the action of pouring, there is nothing which guarantees the projection of the judgment in the future. In fact, all angels "poured" (English translation from Greek) : 16: 2, 3, 4, 8, 10, 12, 17. No where in all these verses the future tense used for the pouring of the bowls. They are in the perfect tenses which do not expresses action in the future. Judgment has happened. The contrast between the beast and its followers, and the lamb and its followers is also the indication that the judgment has happened. How? If there were no judgment we could not have two opponents; the beast and the its followers on one side, and the lamb and its followers on the other. Without judgment either all are the on the side of the beast or on the side of the lamb, not two opposite sides. Because of this judgment, one is free to choose to belong to one side; then one judges him/herself by choosing one side or other. The contrast between the beast and lamb carries on the contrast of the Fourth Gospel between the light and the darkness which puts forth the idea of judgment; one judges oneself by choosing either light or darkness.

After this general indications, we come back to the pouring of the bowls itself. The first four bowls strike nature. The plagues are adaptations of the first six plagues of Egyptians. The plagues of Exodus were aimed to liberate Israelite people; and the plagues described in Revelation are aimed to liberate a multitude of people. What is common in these plagues both in Revelation and Exodus, is that instead of striking the oppressors at the first time, God

takes delight first to strike the nature. The observation of Ellul is: " Man is so much the prey of the power, so closely associated with their work, enjoys himself so thoroughly to their profit, desire so much all that they offer, conceives his life to such a degree separated from God ... When God comes to deliver him, he does not at all perceive his liberation; he protests against the breaking of his prison...And we must take account of fact that every work of liberation is in fact destruction of the evil environment."<sup>24</sup> To liberate man from an alienated situation, God creates first a new environment free from alienation in order to put in the liberated man. God creates first a new world before creating the new man/woman. God's judgment has only one purpose, re-creation. In Christian perspective in which John was writing, the judgment of God consists in redemption, in offering salvation to all men.<sup>25</sup> This task was done by Jesus Christ through the sacrifice of his own life. The notion of lamb which appeared in the announcement and at the preparation of the bowls has the connotation of the self sacrifice of Jesus Christ which reinforces the present idea of redemption. God's judgment are not arbitrary, because man became so alienated from evil that divine judgment was necessary. The situation in the text was the persecution " for men have shed the blood of saints (Christians) and the prophets. What leads to persecution of the Christians is the alienation of man by the evil forces.

The action of the bowls goes progressively, after striking nature, in the fifth pouring it goes against the throne of the beast- the very source of alienation. Rome has been suggested as the throne of the beast, because of its persecution against the Christians. However, the Book of Revelation, being inspired word of God, does not limited its significance to particular historical circumstances. It does say something for us today. The throne of the beast is no more Rome as in the time of persecution of the Christians; but every origin of evil power which enslaves humanity. The effect of this bowl is the darkening of the domain of the beast, from this divine intervention evil has become weak. Instead of repentance, Satan engages himself in war against God (16:11). From now, there is an open conflict between God and Satan which eventually leads to the battle on the Day of the Lord Almighty (16:14). In the sixth bowl is found the preparation of the battle. This bowl dries up the river Euphrates to give to the kings of east a route to travel for the battle. The Scholars

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<sup>24</sup> Jacques Ellul, Apocalypse, the Book of Revelation, (N.Y.: The Seabury Press, 1977), pp.71-72.

<sup>25</sup> E. Corsini, op.cit., p 291.

refer the “kings” of east to the great conquering empires from east, some more specifically the Parthians.<sup>26</sup> These kings moved westward, and the beast made an alliance with the kings of whole the world, and gathered them for battle. The battle is between who and who? It is not among these evil forces themselves. The fifth bowl solves the question. It was poured on the throne of beast (the bowls are divine judgments), that was the beginning of the conflict between God and the beast. Now the beast assembles its allies to fight God on the great Day of the Lord Almighty.

The great Day of the Lord Almighty describes the same partners of the Day of the Yahweh which was considered by the Jews as the day when Yahweh will fight against Israel’s enemies, and will show his power.<sup>27</sup> Due to the exile, and the destruction of the Israel, Jews thought that one day God would assemble again the whole Israel by destroying all the enemies of Israel. The question here is whether the day of Yahweh refers to the great day of the Lord Almighty. Rev.22:1 identifies the throne of God as the throne of the lamb: throne signifies authority, power, might. This means the lamb has the same authority, power, might as God. The seventh pouring of the bowl is actually the war itself; the author did not give the description how it happened, instead he gave its effects: flashes of lightning, voices, earthquake, the split of the great city, the remembrance of Babylon. These natural events from the pouring of the seventh bowl are the symbolical indication of the powerful presence of God in the midst of human beings. In the Christian perspective, God showed his power through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We may see that for us Christians the day of Yahweh when He manifested his power is Paschal Mystery. Therefore, we can admit that the day of Yahweh is the day of the Lord Almighty (Rev. 16: 14).

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<sup>26</sup> a. Ibid., p.303.

b. W. Harrington, *op. cit.*, 167.

<sup>27</sup> a. Is. 13:4-6: “Hark, a tumult on the mountains as of a great multitude! Hark an uproar of the kingdoms. of the nations gathering together! The Lord of hosts is mustering a host for battle. They come from distance land, from the end of heavens. the Lord and the weapons of his indignation, to destroy the whole earth. Wail, for the day of the Lord is near; as destruction from the Almighty it will come!”

b. Zp 1:18 “Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them on the day of the wrath of the Lord. In the fire of his jealous wrath, all the earth shall be consumed”.

c. Ezk 30:3 “For the day is near, the day of the Lord is near, it will be a day of the clouds, a time of doom for nations”.

The split of great city and the remembrance of great Babylon is a way of introducing the theme of destruction from 17- 20:15, especially mentioned it in exegesis part. 17:1 put a link between the bowl and the destruction of Babylon, the beast and the dragon. This is to say that the cause of the destruction of these evil power is found in the pouring of seventh bowl, 16:19 "The great city was split into three parts... And God remembered great Babylon, to make her drain the cup of fury of his wrath." This seventh bowl is also the cause of the end of the old creation and the coming up of the new one - the theme in Rev 21- 22:5. In the text, it is expressed in a symbolic way; Rev.16: 20 "and every island fled way; and no more mountains were to be found." The disappearance of the islands and mountains is an apocalyptic sign of the end.<sup>28</sup> There is the end of the world so far dominated by the power of the beast and the dragon - the forces of evil.-

The war whose effects are described in the pouring of the seventh bowl is the parallelism of the war on the Cross between God and the evil forces. The sixth bowl already mentioned the gathering of all evil power in Armageddon for the Battle. The author took from this historical famous warplan to refer to spiritual war between God and evil on the Cross. In fact, from the victory on the Cross Judaism came to an "end" (the great city-Jerusalem split); The Cross ends the evil power represented by great Babylon, the beast-Rome- (God remembered the great Babylon, to make her to drain the cup of his fury, 16:19). Through the Cross, God has passed his judgment on man.<sup>29</sup> In Christ's death the mercy and the justice of God is revealed. The text mentioned that even in the pouring of the bowls, men did not repent. The inner understanding of God's judgment is the repentance of men. The Paschal Mystery is the offering of God's mercy by judging evil.

Another parallel between Paschal Mystery and the seven bowls is their destructive and creative character. In the pouring of the fifth bowl on throne of beast hostility started which eventuality led to a battle in which God through the lamb destroyed the beast and its allies. In defeating these evil powers God gather around him a new people (new Jerusalem). This is what the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ did; it destroyed evil and won a people for God. In Christ the world become a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). The picture of the event itself in the seventh bowl is quite close to the description the death of Christ as presented in the

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<sup>28</sup> W. Harrington, op.cit., p.168.

<sup>29</sup> M. Schmaus, The Church as Sacrament, vol.5,(London: Sheed and Ward, 1975), p. 242.

Gospels, in regard to cosmic catastrophes. Corsini goes as far to see 'It is done' in Rev 16:17 parallel to John 19:30, "It is finished"; he finds other parallelism between the pouring of the seven bowl in the air with the lifting up of Jesus Christ on the Cross, "The bowl poured out 'into the air' by the angel could be an imaginative way of speaking of the realistic event of the lifting up of Jesus on the cross, but this is immediately transferred to a symbolic place."<sup>30</sup>

The text presents a contrast between the past event of casting out of Satan and the future of the redeemed people. Rev.22 :3-5 pictures this new creation as in progress, its final accomplishment will be in the future, "There shall no more be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the lamb shall be in it,... they shall see his face...and night shall be no more...for the Lord will be their light,... and they shall reign for ever and ever." Paschal Mystery has cast evil out and won a people for God. Therefore, people are in progress up to their final state in the face to face with God. This final state - some call eternity - is the aim for which the death and the resurrection Jesus Christ occurred.

## **2. Seven Bowls, Paschal Mystery, Introduces a New Era - Endtime-**

### **a. General Consideration from the Text**

The previous point on the interpretation of the pouring of the seven bowls led us to see this judgment of God as something already happened in the Paschal Mystery and the effects of which are still going on. That divine judgment is not what we commonly understood as taking place at the second coming of Jesus Christ; because the judgment presented in the seven bowls has a warfare image, and in the second coming of Jesus Christ there is no more war. It was over on the cross.

In this second point we make the connection between Paschal Mystery and the Endtime. We pointed it out that Rev 17:1 makes the link between the bowls and the theme of destruction, and Rev. 21:9 links the bowls and the theme of the new creation. This point needs to be stressed because it is here that resides the key point of the whole reflection. We said previously for Rev. 17:1 that one of the seven angels who poured the bowl on the throne

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<sup>30</sup> E. Corsini, op. cit., p. 306.

of the beast, now is showing to John what came out from his/their action - destruction of the beast's kingdom. In the same way for 21:9, one of the same angels shows to John a people who belong to a new creation that their/ his action of pouring the bowls have brought out. Morris expresses it in more clear way, " Out of God's final judgment there emerges a single purpose which means both the destruction of evil (17:1) and the appearance of the Jerusalem (21:9)."<sup>31</sup> Jerusalem - new people- belong to the new creation which is part of the new era bought about by the action of the angels; what we identified to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is to say that the Paschal Mystery creates a new era ( another point to see the judgment from the bowls not as at the second coming Jesus of Jesus; because the second coming of Christ does not have creative power but it confirms what has been created in the Paschal Mystery).

When the text speaks of the first heaven and the first earth having passing away, the allusion is made to the first creation in Gen.1:1 " In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth". The "beginning" marked the starting point of time in the creative action of God. Therefore, when the Paschal Mystery created a new creation it has marked a new "beginning", a starting point of a new time. Then time comes to be with creation. The Bible, the revelation of the Transcendent God, begins with reference to time (Gen.1:1). Thus, God is not understood in an abstract manner in the Bible, but in His intervention in history of the world.<sup>32</sup> As the first creation in the account in Genesis marked the beginning of our time, the creation from Paschal Mystery marks the beginning of a new time which ends the old creation with its time, so the title "Endtime" we have given to our reflection. The difference between the time and creation in the account in Genesis and in Paschal Mystery is that in the Genesis, the creation (time also is an element creation) was "ex nihilo" but in Paschal Mystery on contrary, the creation is not from nothingness but from the transformation of the old creation.

Up to this point the notion of "Endtime" may be confused with the end of time. We understand the two in a different away: by the end of time, we understand the common belief of Christian or common people that a day will come in the future when the present cosmic world will come to an end, and it will be the second coming of Jesus Christ. Endtime rather,

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<sup>31</sup> Leon. Morris, op. cit., p. 197.

<sup>32</sup> Xavier Leon-Dufour, ed., *Time in Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Second Ed. and Enlarg., New York: The Seabury Press, 1973), p. 600.

is this new era part of the new creation which has been introduced by the Paschal Mystery, and which has put an end to the old creation including its time.

b. Particular Understanding of Time

The Jews and Christians have a different perception of time from the most known Hellenistic thought. For the Hellenist, time is the eternal circular course in which everything recurs within the created space. In this conception, redemption does not happen in the course of time (history), but rather redemption is to free oneself from this eternal circle. For Judeo-Christian instead, human time is seen in a linear way having a beginning and an end. Time unfolds from creation, the coming into being of the matter marks the beginning of time.

Time can be viewed as pure profane cosmic time, by observing the regular rhythms with regular interval which the cosmic universe obeys: the movement of the stars, the recurrence of seasons, the alternation of day and night. This becomes the basis of understanding time. This regular rhythm can be measured; we have the calendar. The preoccupation here is nature. This notion of time can be made holy. In fact, many of the Judeo-Christian liturgical feasts follow the cosmic alternation of the seasons.<sup>33</sup> This cosmic time can become historic time with man living in the cosmic world as the point of reference. The measuring of this time refers to the important events which are related in his life. In historic time the focus turns from cosmic rhythms to man's events within the cosmic circle. It sounds a bit abstract. Let us illustrate it by an example: an illiterate person can measure time by saying that from the death of his father to the birth of his son it has passed one or two dry seasons; and from the birth of his daughter to the Gulf War, three rain seasons have passed. The reference of counting is based on human events: in our example, these human events are: the death of the father, the birth of the son and the Gulf War. This is also a way of measuring time. The historic time assumes cosmic time and transfigures it in man's image. Cullman speaks of "kairos" which mark the human time.<sup>34</sup> So, also is the history of redemption God marks human history with his decisive decisions on due moments - the

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<sup>33</sup> O Cullman, Christ and Time, (Revised ed., Transl. from Germ. by Floyd Filson, London: SCM Press Ltd. 1962), pp. 61-62.

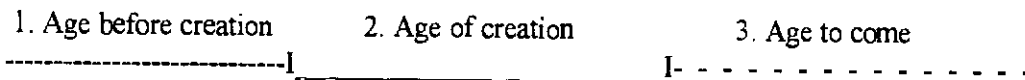
<sup>34</sup> "In secular usage, "kairos" (sing. of karoi) is a moment in time which is especially favorable for an undertaking; in modern jargon it is called D day". See Cullman, op.cit., p 39.

favorable moments- "kairoi"; by joining them the history of redemption arise. The focus here is no more on secular events of human history, but instead on saving events of God in history. In this point, we turn from the secular perception of the world and time to faith's perception. For the believer Judeo-Christian believers, the events which are recorded in human history have the sacred value, not by the fact they repeat primordial time when God created the world once for all; but and most of all, in the fact that they bring novelty to the extent that by following one after other, we discover steps of God bringing the human history to its culmination. Therefore, it is on this level of faith that Endtime can be understood. Otherwise there will be always confusion between end of time and Endtime.

The Endtime is not to be dissociated from cosmic time or historic time in their physical appearance. While in cosmic time the focus is on the rhythms of the cosmic universe which allow us to measure time, and in historic time the focus on the human events, in the Endtime the focus is on Paschal Mystery which has created a new creation including time which invites people to live according to its requirements. This clarification on the different understandings of the notion of time, leads us to elaborate the Christian perspective of Endtime.

Endtime sees time in the perspective of the history of salvation. In this view, the time line is divided into three sections: first the age before creation, in this age the Logos of God was already with God; the second, the present age, it starts with beginning of creation up to its end; and the age to come, the third, in which the eschatology falls. All these three ages: before creation, age of creation and the age to come constitute the eternity for God. Actually, eternity is an attribute of God.

What we have said may be illustrated by the drawing below:



### c. Relationship between Endtime, Cosmic and Historical Time.

The misunderstandings may come up in understanding the relationship between cosmic and historical, and Endtime. For remembrance, we have said that the cosmic time is the 'duration' constituted by measuring of the circle of cosmic rhythms of the universe; in the historical time the focus is turned from the circle of cosmic rhythms of the universe to the human events within these rhythms. In the Endtime the focus is neither on the circle of cosmic rhythms nor on the pure human event but on Christ-event with its climax the death and resurrection of Jesus. The question would be how to measure the Endtime. We only know that it started with the Paschal Mystery, but up to where it ends or it is eternal. In physical or material appearance, the Endtime is not to be dissociated with cosmic time nor with the historical time. For example there cannot have watches to tell time in the Endtime. The same watch we use for the cosmic time is valuable the Endtime. With this regard, even the Paschal Mystery itself which introduces the Endtime occurred within the cosmic time and historical time. Then in this way, we may say that the Endtime assumes the cosmic time.

What happened to Jesus, namely his resurrection anticipates the eschatological resurrection of human beings. In this way, his resurrection reveals and makes already present in the history the eschatological end of the whole humanity. The eschatological state of life is now through Paschal Mystery present in history.

The difference between cosmic time and Endtime is mainly in a way of living. The Endtime is more an existential time. It is not everyone who is living in the Endtime, only those who belong to the new creation. Endtime has been introduced for them to live in; up to each individual person to live in or not. This nature of the Endtime cannot be applied to the cosmic time; because since one is born (biological birth), whether he/she likes it or not, he/she lives in circle of cosmic rhythms of this universe. To live in Endtime is matter of participation in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the event which introduced this time. And this participation is through Baptism which gives access to life in Christ. At this point we can understand the point made by Cullman that the new creation, the replacement of the old one falls at the age to come. That age starts for every one from the Parousia. However, for those who live in Christ - through their Baptism- the coming age has been already inaugurated here and now. This is why the state of the age to come in the present age

cannot be perceived by non-Christians. They, of course, will see it at the due time; those in Christ perceive it in anticipate way.

The misunderstanding vision of the Christian eschatology as dealing with things to come without any reference to the past death and resurrection of Jesus Christ has been seen today as traditional eschatology, and an object of many criticism. Instead, Christian eschatology is perceived today as Christ-centric, there is tension between the already and the not-yet, fulfillment of the history of salvation; all this lead to the engagement in working for the kingdom.<sup>35</sup>

The relationship between Paschal Mystery which marks the starting of Endtime and the second coming is of great importance for the concrete life of the believers. When there is not a proper understanding, one may become an activist in the present time without any hope for the future; on opposite side, one may not take fully part in building the kingdom in the present world because of his/her expectation of the second coming. Acknowledging Parousia as the central point of the time line is emptying Paschal Mystery of its value; with the all consequences that it would bring in the concrete life of the believers; most of all "fuga mundi"( escaping from the present world). Rather, Parousia has its own place and value in the entire time line; its sense and value comes from Paschal Mystery. Jesus would not come for the second time if did not come for the first time. The first coming finds its climax in the Paschal Mystery; at his first coming battle was held on the Cross and the victory shown in the resurrection. The relationship between Paschal Mystery and the second coming can be imagined through the comparison between cultivating time and harvesting one. The first time plants what is going to be collected at the second time. Then the second time cannot exist without the first one. At the second coming, the new creation appears in its purity, but the second coming did not re-create the new creation. It only selects new creation from the old creation; because there has been the mixture of the two, and only at the second coming that the new creation appears in its purity. The big job of re-creating has been done by the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The question that Cullman asks with regard to the relationship between Paschal Mystery and the second coming is very pertinent: "In what way does our salvation depend upon that which is still to come"?<sup>36</sup> Strictly speaking, the second

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<sup>35</sup> Chalissery. Eschatology, (unpublished note Tangaza College: acad. Year 1996-1997), p.1.

<sup>36</sup> O. Cullman, op. cit., p.140.

coming does not save. Salvation comes only through the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ; but this salvation is in process. Parousia is the point in time line where it (salvation already acquired from Paschal Mystery) will reach its completion. Then, the relation between Paschal Mystery and Parousia is the relation of "happening - completion". This point is what we understand in the mixture of the past and the future tense in our interpretation of the pouring of the seven bowls. For example, the tense used in the action of pouring the bowls in the text is the past tense; Rev: 16;2, 3, 4, 8, 10, 12, 17. These past tenses express what has already occurred. However, when life in new Jerusalem is described, especially in Rev 22:3-5, the text uses the future tense. There is an event which has occurred and brought new life expressed in the use of past tense -that is Paschal Mystery-. But this new life which it has brought has not yet reached its completion. It will reach at Parousia. This is what is expressed in the use of the future tense. Parousia therefore, is what the believers are hoping for, but it is founded upon Paschal Mystery. The relation between Paschal Mystery and Parousia expresses the tension "already - not yet".

## CONCLUSION

Millennial theory in general speaks of the first coming of Jesus Christ by "His own" to meet his church in the air. The event is called the rapture of the church, and while the church and Christ are in the air, the rest of the earth is undergoing the tribulation. How long the rapture and the tribulation will take depends on interpretation of each variation of millennial theory. When this time is over, Christ comes with his church on earth to establish his kingdom and then followed by the eternal state of life. Without objecting to this perception, we find that this theory touches the very existential question of human beings. We find ourselves in this world but we do not know what the future will look like. The question remains a target as far as human beings live on earth.

We tried to understand the same question in our reflection in the term of relationship between the present time within human beings are living on earth, and its future. The topic being a theological reflection, we approach it in relation to Jesus Christ. Therefore, the inspired Word of God, was the basis upon which the reflection is built. Since the topic deals with time in Christ; past, present and future, the orientation taken is more eschatological; and we find the Book of Revelation the most adequate support our the reflection. The Book of Revelation, especially the pouring of the seven bowls was the text to support our approach.

In fact, the analysis of the text was the exegetical part of the reflection which led us to identify the pouring of the seven bowls as the Paschal Mystery. In reading Rev. 17-20:15, the theme of destruction appears, and it is from this destruction that the new heaven and new earth were able to appear ( Rev. 21- 22:1-5). From the exegetical analysis, the destruction which gave way to new creation were caused by the pouring of the seven bowls. By comparison between the effects of the seven bowls to the ones of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we came to identify the bowls as the symbolic representation of the Paschal Mystery. Then, attention was paid on the relationship between seven bowls and the new heaven and new earth as in Paschal Mystery and re-creation. This event, seven bowls (Paschal Mystery) re-creates the old creation which has been alienated by the evil powers (in Revelation; by the beast, dragon, the false prophets). By saying that this event re-creates, there has established a contrast between Gen.1 and this event. In Genesis' account of creation, the beginning which is the reference to time came about in the action of creation

from God. Therefore, time too is an element of creation; so no way to consider time outside of creation. The seven bowl seen as Paschal Mystery marked a new beginning which refers to the new time. The old time has come to an end with its creation.

The right perception of Endtime pastorally lead to mature Christian way of living. In fact, the tension between the “ already” and “not-yet” is what demands a balanced understanding of Endtime; otherwise there would be distortion if not well understood. There might be two extremist positions with regard to Endtime. An optimistic position would be the one which sees Endtime as something acquired once for all. One might say he/she is living in Endtime, therefore he/she has obtained salvation once for all. We know that salvation for us Christians is a process. Since one abides with Christ, he/she is growing daily in his/her christian life until he/she will meet Christ at the second coming. A pessimistic position would be the one which projects Endtime in the future, as do most of the Christian fundamentalist. This view separates Christian life from the realities of the societies where Christians are living. It does not give Christians motivation to take part in the transformation of the world to better place for human beings to live. Secular realities are still part of God’s overall plan of creation and therefore they have to develop in accordance with God’s laws and design. Herein the role of the Christian. God’s word has something to say in the regard to realms of Human activities: economic, politic, social life. Therefore, Christian cannot escape from this responsibility because of his/her expectation of the future Endtime. This is the reason why we choose of speaking of the Endtime rather than end of time. Endtime implies committed to a way of life from a Christian perspective.

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