THE LAMB OF REVELATION
In the Light of Peircean Semiotics

Markus E. Locker

The need for a systematic study of the symbols of the book of Revelation is apparent because for most readers Revelation remains a book with seven seals.¹ Martin Luther, for example, would have wanted to remove it completely from the New Testament.² What continues, however, to interest and intrigue readers is Revelation’s unique language full of fantastic imagery, mysterious numbers, and stunning symbols. At the same time, Revelation’s symbolic language opens the book to a multiplicity of readings.

The reason for the plurality in the interpretation of Revelation’s symbols seems to be twofold. Above all, exegetes do not agree about


²See Donald Guthrie, The Relevance of John’s Apocalypse (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 1.
the religious and historical origin of these symbols and, therefore, about the meaning they assume in the text. Whether the symbol of the Lamb derives its meaning from astrology (the ram), the book of Exodus (the Paschal Lamb), the prophet Isaiah (the Suffering Servant of God)—or from any other apocalyptic tradition—has become a never-ending debate without any resolution in sight.  

Yet another difficulty is rooted in the very nature of symbolic language. Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914), the founder of modern semiotics, has argued that language which is concerned with the relationship of signs with objects can fundamentally be understood as a complex sign-system that consists basically of three different types of signs, viz., icons, indices and symbols. In this classification of signs, each type of sign is characterized by a different relationship to the object that it describes. Consequently the interpretation of any sign is dependent on whether it is understood as *icon*, *index*, or *symbol*.

Brought to bear on Revelation, this means that first, the reader can assume that a sign is a *symbol*. For Peirce, a symbol is a sign that

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6 Nöth, 44.
does not have a physical relationship to the object it signifies,\(^7\) in the same way that a national flag symbolizes a country. Symbols, therefore, must be understood by the interpreter’s internal reflection on their meaning.\(^8\) If, for instance, the sign of the New Jerusalem in Rev 3:12; 21:3, 10 is interpreted as symbol, then it does not describe a physical city-like reality but the abstract eschatological actualization of the reign of God.\(^9\)

Second, the exegete can treat a sign as an index. An index is, to some extent, physically linked to the object it represents.\(^{10}\) This con-

\(^7\)A sign is a shared relation to the thing denoted and to the mind. If this threefold relation is not of a “degenerate species,” the sign is related to its object only as a result of an intellectual association, depending upon a habit assumed by the interpreter. Such signs are always abstract and general, because habits are general rules for the interpreter that are, for the most part, conventional or arbitrary. These signs are called symbols and include all general words, the main body of speech, and any kind of conveying a judgement (see 3.361).

\(^8\)This is the predominant interpretation of images in Beale’s 1999 commentary on Revelation. The author explains in the introduction to his work: “It is important to realize that in the Apocalypse some comparative figures of speech are intended as visual pictures needing interpretation, while others are meant only to be perceived on a more abstract level.” G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) 57. This assessment is a reinforcement of Eugene Boring’s postulate “that symbols are not to be decoded into propositional language that refers to objective realities, but are to be left as nonobjectifying pictorial language that only points to ultimate reality but cannot describe it, since it transcends our finite minds and cognitive categories of language.” Eugene Boring, *Revelation* (Louisville: John Knox, 1989) 51-59.


\(^{10}\)An index is a thing or fact that is a sign of its object by virtue of being factually connected with it. This factual connection forcibly imposes itself upon the mind of the interpreter (see 4.447).
nection calls attention to the existence of the object in the same way that smoke points to fire. An indexical interpretation of the New Jerusalem would see this sign referring to a Christian contrast-community to be established within this world.

Third, the interpreter can assume that a sign is the icon of the object it denotes. An icon almost fully represents the physical nature of the object it signifies. For example, most scholars understand the merchants in Rev 18:3, 11, 15, 23 to be icons of real tradesmen in the Roman Empire during the time of John.

The Lamb

The most notable symbol of the Book of Revelation is the Lamb, τὸ ἀρνίον. As a result of the above outlined premises for the interpretation of signs, the Lamb, though denoting Christ, most certainly obtains meaning as a symbol, thus seeking the reader’s genuine involvement in its interpretation beyond the historical-critical search for meaning.

For Peirce, the most significant effect of a sign on the interpreter is its dynamical interpretant (4.536), who can be emotional, energetic or logical (5.475). Whereas the emotional interpretant is mostly a feeling, the energetic interpretant involves concrete actions that are more than mere intellectual concepts. The logical interpretant, however, is not simply the effect found in the interpreter but also a universal sign, or habit. Peirce’s pragmatism of signs leads him to a

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11Fitzgerald, 61.


13"An icon is an appearance that, in the strictest sense, exists only in the awareness. However, in ordinary speech, the term might be extended to external objects which, to a certain degree, represent the object itself (see 4.447)."
more general reflection on the concept of meaning. "To develop its [thinking] meaning, we have, therefore, simply to determine what habits it produces, for what a thing means is simply what habits it involves" (5.400). Habits constitute a belief that determines when and how we shall act.

A study of the symbol of the Lamb has to demonstrate that το ἀρνίον conveys meaning not simply by alluding to biblical sources, but foremost by providing for a new answer to the question of how Christians should live in this world. The tool for this study will be the scientific inquiry of semiotic\textsuperscript{14} analysis investigating symbols from different perspectives and leading to the illustration of the significance of a symbol for its addressees. Seeking to prevent any arbitrary interpretation of symbols, semiotic analysis helps to work out actions or forms of life, which all hearers of the symbols of Revelation are supposed to adopt.

The Four Steps of Semiotic Analysis

Semiotics investigates signs by employing four major steps. The first step observes that signs are organized into codes that describe their position and selection in a given context.\textsuperscript{15} For Revelation, these codes are primarily the whole writing, i.e., the letters to the Seven

\textsuperscript{14}The 1969 International Association for Semiotic Studies adopted the term "semiotics" as combining "semiology" and "semiotics" into one concept. Umberto Eco, \textit{Einführung in die Semiotik}, trans. Jürgen Trabant (München: Wilhelm Fink, 1972) 17.

\textsuperscript{15}In a text, signs are organized into meaningful systems according to conventions called codes. Codes are procedural systems of related conventions, operating in certain areas and transcending single texts. Whereas every code is a system, not every system is a code. A code is characterized by its coherence, its homogeneity, and systematicity, despite the heterogeneity of a message that might continue throughout several codes. The meaning of a sign depends on the code within which it is situated. Codes provide a framework within which signs make sense. See Daniel Chandler, "Codes" in \textit{Semiotics for Beginners}, http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/S4B/semiotic.html
Churches in Rev 2-3, and the visionary chapters in Rev 4-22. Consequently, the first step of this analysis is to locate and to describe signs in their codes.

The second step, called syntagmatic analysis, describes the relationships of signs to other significant signs within the same code. Syntagmatic analysis describes the semantic field within which the sign is used and "reveals the rules or conventions underlying the production and interpretation of texts (such as the grammar of language)."\(^{16}\) Thus, syntagmatic analysis studies the narrative that is the surface structure of a text.

The third step, paradigmatic analysis, seeks to identify "the various paradigms (or preexisting set of signifiers) which underlie a text."\(^{17}\) Signs are studied according to their meaning and significance in literature earlier than or contemporary with Revelation. Paradigmatic analysis makes use of lexica, encyclopedias and commentaries. For the signs of Revelation, this means the study of their use in the Hebrew Scripture and in extra-biblical writings. Although this method is most frequently used in historical-critical commentaries, the diversity of possible conclusions will certainly question its up-to-now prevailing domination in biblical studies.\(^{18}\)

In view of the above-mentioned problematic inherent to a paradigmatic analysis, the fourth step, namely the study of the pragmatics of signs may well prove to be the most important step in semiotic analysis. Pragmatic analysis, which refers to the relationship between the sign and its interpreter,\(^{19}\) asks two questions. First, who is ad-

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\(^{16}\) "Syntagmatic Analysis" in Chandler.

\(^{17}\) "Paradigmatic Analysis" in Chandler.

\(^{18}\) J. Barr pointed out the concept of "root fallacy" in biblical semantics, i.e., the view that there is a "root meaning" which is identical in some sense for all derivations from a given stem. Arthur Gibson, *Biblical Semantic Logic: A Preliminary Analysis* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981) 167.

\(^{19}\) Peirce's assertion that a sign stands for something to the idea which it pro-
dressed by the symbol and how does the symbol affect its interpreter or interpreters, and second, what symbolically conditioned action is prescribed by the symbol for its interpreter(s)?

The Lamb: The Symbol in the Codes of its Occurrence

As stated, the most significant and most frequently occurring symbol of Revelation is the “Lamb,” τὸ ἀρνίου, occurring twenty-eight times in eleven of Revelation’s 22 chapters. It is not found in Rev 1-4, 8-10, 16, 18, 22, and does not appear in the literary framework (Rev 1:1-8; 22:6-21) of the book. The most significant code of the Lamb is the great throne-room vision-audition (Rev 5:6, 8, 12, 13), wherein Christ’s central role in John’s visions is confirmed. The vision of the opening of the six seals (Rev 6:1-18) and the vision of the saints in heaven (Rev 7:9, 10, 14, 17) present Christ as sole Lord over history and eternal life, thus confirming the eminent place of τὸ ἀρνίου in Revelation.

In John’s vision of Mount Zion (Rev 14:1-8), the Lamb assumes his authoritative role for all Christians. It summons and leads Christians to the vision of the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:9, 14, 22, 23, 27; 22:1, 3). Here the Lamb once more becomes the center of all Christian life. The Lamb likewise plays a significant role in Rev 13 and 19. Here it poses a contrast to Satan and his beasts. This contrast is intensified through the unique use of τὸ ἀρνίου in 13:11, where it surprisingly also characterizes the beast from the land, which looks like a lamb (若您κὲ ἀρνίῳ) that has two horns (κέρατα δύο), but speaks like a dragon.

Syntagmatic Analysis

In this step, τὸ ἀρνίου is sketched in its relationship to other significant signs and symbols in the semantic fields of its occurrence.

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duces or modifies (1.339) explains that every sign must also have an effect in an interpreter. Fitzgerald, 40.
The chart below shows the relationship of the Lamb to the key symbols of Rev 5. These symbols, therefore, co-define the meaning of Lamb in Revelation.

**Rev 5**

the Lion from the tribe of Judah;  
the root of David  

scroll —— ἀρχαίον —— the throne;  
One who is seated on the throne  
as though it had been slain;  
with seven horns and seven eyes

Most remarkable is the contrast between what John hears and sees. Hearing that the Lion of Judah, the root of David, is worthy to open the scroll, John looks and sees but a Lamb with the wounds of slaughter on it. At first sight, John seems to see something entirely foreign to his expectation. In terms of power, there can hardly be a greater difference than that between a lion and a lamb (see Is 11:6). The Lamb, however, is not an ordinary lamb, but has seven horns, symbolizing absolute power. In that way, the Lamb is depicted as all-powerful. In addition, the Lamb has seven eyes. Altogether, the Lamb is omniscient and has all the power normally associated with the word lion (see 1 Pet 5:8) However, unlike the lion’s power, the Lamb’s power is not native to it. The power is bestowed through the position given to it by God as the result of the sacrificial death of the Lamb through which it redeemed humanity (Rev 5:5f).

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20Beale, 351.
Another key symbol to which the Lamb is related is the “throne” and the One seated on it. The Lamb is closer to God than any other creature present in the throne room. Later on in Revelation, the Lamb takes its place together with God on the throne (Rev 7:14; 22:1-3).

The third symbol that co-defines the Lamb in Rev 5 is the scroll. In the following chapters of Revelation it becomes clear that the scroll contains universal salvation history, which only the Lamb is authorized and worthy to bring to its conclusion. The authority to break the seals of the scroll, similar to the position of the Lamb with respect to the throne, describes the power and supremacy of the Christ in heaven and on earth.

Rev 6 and 7 reveal more precisely the role of the Lamb in salvation history. In Rev 6, key symbols are the four riders unleashed by the breaking of seals, the martyrs under the altar and the terrified unjust who attempt to hide from the wrath of the Lamb. In Rev 7, the Lamb turns shepherd for its faithful followers, whom it leads to the waters of life (Rev 7:17).

Rev 6 and 7

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In these chapters, the interrelationship with the above-mentioned symbols presents the Lamb as judge and savior. The unjust must face not only the wrath of God, but that of the Lamb as well. In Rev 7, the Lamb’s sacrificial death justifies its followers who are symbolized by their white garments (Rev 7:14). Christ, the Lamb, shows himself as savior, because the Lamb now seated on the throne will lead its followers to life-giving waters similar to what God does in Ps 23:2.

Rev 19, 21 and 22 relate the Lamb to a wedding, a bride and a New Jerusalem.

*Rev 19, 21 and 22*

The Lamb leads Christians to its wedding. The righteous deeds of the saints are the brilliant white garment of the bride, the woman, who is also a city (Rev 19:8). Earlier on, John had depicted the city of Rome as a whore (Rev 17:1, 15, 16). For his bride, who is the New Jerusalem, God and the Lamb are temple, light and source of life (Rev 21:22, 23; 22:1). Thus, Christ can be seen as leading all Christians through their righteous deeds to salvation.

One final relationship must be brought out. The Lamb is related to the dragon, the beast from the sea and the beast from the land. The dragon and the beast from the sea sport royal diadems on their seven heads and are adorned with ten horns (Rev 13:1). By all appearances, they seem to be more powerful than the Lamb. The continuing story of Revelation will change this perception. What initially seems like insurmountable power is but a sham, already destined for destruction.
The syntagmatic analysis of τὸ ἀρνίου shows that, in Revelation, the symbol of the Lamb obtains its meaning in a threefold manner. First, by its paradoxical description as Lamb that had been slain but continues to live. Yet this Lamb is not weak but standing and appearing as powerful as a lion. It has seven horns and seven eyes as signs of power. Second, because of its role as the redeemer and the shepherd leading Christians to and into the New Jerusalem. And finally, through its contrast to the beasts.

In conclusion, the Lamb, though a symbol, must also be read as the index of the Risen Christ representing the essential qualities of a person. The heavenly connotation of the Lamb as Lion of Judah and Root of David, indicate that the Lamb is the true Messiah. His position of authority and power is manifested through the Lamb’s function as judge. Therefore, wherever the symbol of the Lamb appears in the text, it additionally functions as an index for a real person, Jesus Christ, the Risen Lord.

Paradigmatic Analysis

This step of semiotic analysis tries to arrive at the meaning of τὸ ἀρνίου by studying the use of the motif of the Lamb in biblical and apocalyptic literature. In the New Testament, apart from its plural form in Jn 21:15 (τὰ ἀρνία), τὸ ἀρνίου is mentioned in no other passage. Moreover, the particular diminutive -ίου in connection with ὁ ἀρνετός was not anymore in use at the end of the first century CE. That alone led to much speculation as to the religious and historical background of τὸ ἀρνίου.

Up to the present, those scholars who see Revelation as astral prophecy, identify τὸ ἀρνίου as Aries, the “first created celestial

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22 The diminutive ἀρνίου became a faded diminutive. Its meaning was lost during the late Hellenistic and early Roman periods. See David E. Aune, Revelation 1-5, WBC 52 (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1997) 368.

23 See Giesen, 164; Bruce Malina, “How a Cosmic Lamb Marries: The Im-
body, marking the inauguration of the cosmos.”24 While there are numerous traces of astrology in Revelation,25 this interpretation meets serious difficulties. If John had intended to refer to the sign of Aries, it is hard to explain why he used τὸ ἀρνίον, literally translated as the “little Lamb,” instead of the actual Greek word for the animal of the zodiac sign, i.e., the ram, which is ὁ κριός. Heinz Giesen precisely bases his evaluation of a celestial interpretation on the difference in meaning of the words κριός and ἀρνίον.

This interpretation overlooks that the Lamb achieved victory through its death. Thus, it does not possess power because of its natural strength (ram), but the bestowal of power is rather the consequence of its victory.... Therefore the Lamb carries the lasting wound of its slaughter.26

Revelation’s many allusions to Israel’s Exodus, and the description of the Lamb as being slain (σφακώ in Rev 5:6, 9, 12), led many scholars to conclude that τὸ ἀρνίον must be understood as a typology of the Paschal Lamb.

Introducing the title Lamb for Christ, the seer emphasizes the butcher’s incision (5,6.9.12) that on the basis of the Greek particle of “to butcher” marks the Lamb permanently. The butcher’s incision reminds of Jesus’ death on the cross.27


24Ibid., 77.


26Author’s translation from “Eine solche Deutung übersieht, daß das Lamm durch seinen Tod den Sieg errungen hat. Es hat also keine Macht aufgrund seiner naturgegebenen Stärke (Widder) die Macht-übertragung ist vielmehr die Folge seines Sieges.... Deshalb trägt das Lamm die bleibende Schächterwunde.” Giesen, 164f.

27Author’s translation from “Der Seher betont bei der Einführung des Titels
In fact, it seems that the theology of Christ as the Paschal Lamb is already well established in the New Testament (see 1 Cor 5:7; Jn 1:29.36; Acts 8:32; 1 Pet 1:19) by the time Revelation was written.28

These arguments, however, are challenged by Martin Hasitschka who points out “that the cultic slaughter of the Paschal Lamb is not associated with this verb [ὀφαλζω], but expressed through θυσώ.”29 Furthermore, the function of the blood of the Paschal lambs in Exodus is more apotropaic, i.e., designed to avert evil, than soteriological (Ex 12:7, 13, 22). Hasitschka concludes: “The image of the Lamb in Revelation is of such completeness and theological wealth, that the motif of the Paschal Lamb, if taken as interpretative key and background would be theologically overexerted.”30 The author goes on to claim that the description of the Lamb as the “Lion of the tribe of Judah” (Rev 5:5) indicates that the picture of the Lamb from the start is a metaphor for a specific person.31

Because of the above-mentioned reference to suffering and death, again, other scholars interpret the Lamb of Revelation as the symbol


28Ibid., 166.

29Author’s translation from “die kultische Schlachtung des Paschalammes im NT nicht mit diesem Verbum [ὀφαλζω], sondern mit θυσώ ausgedrückt [wird], (Mk 14:12 par.; 1 Cor 5:7).” Lecture notes of Martin Hasitschka, Die Offenbarung des Johannes (NT-Exegese WS 97/99, Innsbruck) 30.


31Hasitschka, 31.
of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53:7. The interpretation of τὸ ἀρνίον against the Isaian background is likewise not universally accepted among scholars. Although the nouns ἀρνίον and ἁμνὸς (Jn 1:29) are similar in meaning, nowhere does the seer in his writing use the Johannine expression “ὁ ἁμνὸς τοῦ θεοῦ.” Indeed, that the author of Revelation never uses the noun ἁμνὸς is still the main argument against an allusion to the Suffering Servant. In addition, the active role of the Lamb in Revelation, in contrast to the passive suffering of the Servant of God, as well as the fact that “servant” is never used for Christ in Revelation, further confirm these arguments.

Yet another interpretation sees in τὸ ἀρνίον not the Paschal Lamb, but the Lamb which is used in the sacrifice of atonement, i.e., the tamid-sacrifice (see Ex 29:38-42; Num 28:3-8). Giesen dismisses this solution by saying that “There is no visible interest of John in the temple cult.” It is, however, Jesus’ critique of the temple where Peter Stuhlmacher sees the precise origin of this interpretation.

Through the cleansing of the temple Jesus placed his own life as ransom and expiatory sacrifice for Israel which until then was represented by the daily tamid-sacrifice.... The confession of Christ as the ἀρνίον, i.e., the vicariously sacrificed sacrificial lamb, now reigning with God, is immediately linked to Jesus’ own understanding of his mission and sacrifice.

Advancing his hypothesis, Stuhlmacher explains, that in the Johannine tradition, the ὁ ἁμνὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ὁ ἀρνῶν τὴν ἁμαρτίαν τοῦ

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33 Hasitschka, 31.

34 Giesen, 165.

35 Author’s translation from “Johannes kein Interesse am Tempelkult erkennen läßt.” Ibid., 165.

36 Author’s translation from “Mit der Tempelreinigung hat Jesus sein eigenes
κόσμου (Jn 1:29) is the result of combining the motif τὸ ἀρνίου with Is 53:4, 8, 12.\(^{37}\)

The above-mentioned plausibility and, at the same time, improbability of these four different religio-historical backgrounds of τὸ ἀρνίου confirms what has been said earlier about the uncertainty of the results of a mere paradigmatic analysis. Notwithstanding that all four suggestions for interpreting τὸ ἀρνίου have their basis in the texts that could have been John's source, none can claim absolute validity when it comes to interpreting τὸ ἀρνίου within the text of Revelation as a whole. This observation points to the necessity of the fourth step of semiotic analysis, i.e., the study of the pragmatic meaning and significance of a symbol under the assumption that John creatively employed the symbol of the Lamb for a specific audience and its distinct reaction to it.

**Pragmatic Analysis:**
**How the Symbol Motivates Its Reader**

Although just a “little lamb” still carrying the wound of its slaughter, Christ the Lamb is the only one who can give life\(^{38}\) and who is worthy and able to open the seven seals, therefore, revealing all (Rev 5:2; see 1:1). Thus, the Lamb of Revelation is indeed the Lion of the tribe of Judah and the Root of David that Christians were expect-

\(^{37}\)Ibid., 540.

\(^{38}\)“Das Blut des Lammes steht in Verbindung mit dem gewaltsamen Tod Jesu... Nur dank des Todes Jesu erfahren die Christen die Erlösung.” Daria Leben als das wahre Lösegeld [the temple tax is according to Ex 30.12 seen as ransom for Israel] und Sühneopfer für Israel eingesetzt, das bis dahin durch die täglichen Tamidotopfer repräsentiert war... Die Bekenntnissrede von Christus als dem avrnivon d.h. dem stellvertretend aufgeopfernten, aber nun zusammen mit Gott thronendem (Tamid-) Opferwidder aus der Johannesoffenbarung schließt unmittelbar an Jesu ureigenes Sendungs und Opferverständnis an.” Stuhlmacher, 537.
ing. Christ is a leader who will rule with an iron rod and, ultimately, judge all evil, but is at the same time a tender shepherd, and a vulnerable lamb, like all he has redeemed (see Lk 15:4ff). While in his might and power, Christ must be feared by all who do evil, he can be trusted by all who worship only him.

The Lamb justifies those who have been martyred (Rev 7:13-17) and gathers around him all who are baptized in his name (Rev 14:1-5), not to receive worldly power and might, but to join the great wedding feast that has been prepared. The Bride of the Lamb is made ready because of the righteous deeds of the saints (Rev 19:9).

The Lamb leads all its followers—out of tribulation and death—to his bride, the New Jerusalem, where God and Christ will dwell in the world (Rev 21:3). In the New Jerusalem, God promises people security and life not because they join any system that guarantees wealth (see Rev 13:16f), but because God is present. There is no temple in the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:22), and its doors shall never be shut by day (Rev 21:25). God and the Lamb are its light and the water of life is free (Rev 21:6).

Christians who are able to enter the Holy City must heed the call of the Lamb for perseverance (see Rev 13:10; 14:12). This, however, is the demand to leave the reality of sin (Rev 18:4), which means not being able to participate in the excessive profit-making of the world (see Rev 2:9). All sinners and evildoers will forever be excluded from the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:8.27).


39The Lion of Judah is from Gen 49:9, while the Root of David is from Is 11:1, 10. These Old Testament texts mark central concepts of Messianic hopes in John’s time. See Richard Bauckham, The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993) 180f.

40Here the reader’s attention shall be called back to Peirce’s understanding of the dynamic interpretant. This effect of the sign on the reader is more than an intellectual conception. It is an action.
The Lamb finally calls Christians to remain with him and his bride. Leaving Babylon for Jerusalem must become a normative form of Christian life, a habit and inevitably, a matter of faith. Thus, worshipping God and the Lamb is not simply singing a song while waiting for the inevitable, but washing one’s robes white (Rev 22:14). These good deeds distinguish Christians from all evil outsiders (Rev 22:15) and ultimately will establish the new earth that John sees.

**Conclusion**

By way of associating and contrasting the Lamb in all its codes with Revelation’s other signs, the author of the book gives to Christ, the Lamb, a new meaning, far richer and compelling than anything the readers could bring to the book. In this way, the seer changes the connotations of Christ with which the readers were familiar and introduces them to a new one, filled with new meaning for the New World that Christians found themselves in.

It is for all these reasons that none of the prior existing meanings of “Lamb” can fully unlock the meaning of the Lam of Revelation, though they contribute to its richness. An exhaustive understanding of τὸ ἀρνίον can be arrived at only through a study of this symbol that recognizes all its conceptual richness in the context of the entire book.

Revelation’s symbol of the Lamb obtains meaning by being a powerful contrast to the index of Babylon and, at the same time, seeking a transformation of this unjust world. Christ, the Lamb, leads Christians to a New Creation in which authentic Christian living in a new but real world is possible.