# Fear Appeals, Crisis, and the Apocalypse of John: Analyzing an Apocalyptic Coping Strategy with the Extended Parallel Process Model

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**Abstract**: This paper will present and heuristically utilize the Extended Parallel Process Model to analyze fear appeals in the Apocalypse of John. John sought to increase the fear of God in his hearers as a means to cope with other pressing fears and motivate faithful obedience (in line with his vision of what that entails). John rhetorically utilized fear appeals to reshape his hearers' perceptions of danger and efficacy. He sought to increase fear of one object (God) and the inescapable crisis of divine judgment in order to decrease fear of other crises (death, disease, natural disasters, war, oppressive government, poverty, low social status).

**Key Words**: Apocalypse of John, EPPM, Fear Appeals, Rhetoric

The rapid spread of Covid-19 in 2020 has produced a significant, complicated, and deadly global crisis. This crisis has paralleled an equally powerful spread of fear throughout the world, fear which has motivated many personal and public policies and actions. Epidemics and various forms of fearful crises, of course, are not historically new phenomena, and many ancient authors reflect on the potential of fear to motivate or manipulate actions (Chantiotis, 2013; Glad, 1995; Henning, 2014; Patera, 2014; Stewart, 2019a). The Apocalypse of John does not contain any theoretical reflection on fear, but it does provide a vivid case study of the rhetorical use of fear appeals. Relevant to our current global pandemic, John even indicates that God would allow a pandemic or infectious disease of some sort (along with sword, famine, and wild beasts) to kill 1/4 of the people on the earth (Rev. 6:8; Aune, 1998: 402–403).

This paper will present and heuristically utilize the Extended Parallel Process Model to consider fear appeals in the Apocalypse of John and how John sought to increase the fear of God in his hearers as a means to cope with other pressing fears and motivate faithful obedience (in line with his vision of what that entails). John rhetorically utilized fear appeals to reshape his hearers' perceptions of danger and efficacy. He sought to increase fear of one object (God) and the inescapable crisis of divine judgment in order to decrease fear of other crises (death, disease, natural disasters, war, oppressive government, poverty, low social status).

## Fear Appeals

Social scientists, psychologists, and advertisers have been exploring fear appeal arguments quite extensively over the past sixty years. The primary application of this research has been to public health campaigns intended to promote preventive care behaviors such as flossing, condom usage, and breast self-exams and decrease behaviors such as smoking, binge drinking, drinking and driving, and drug use. Ruiter et al. (2004: 13; cf. Witte, 1992: 329) defines fear appeals as "persuasive communications attempting to arouse fear to promote precautionary motivation and self-protective action." Fear appeals are often characterized by gruesome content communicated

through vivid personalistic language and gory pictures and are focused on motivating behavior change (Witte 1992: 330–331; Witte, 1994: 132). Several meta-analyses of hundreds of empirical studies demonstrate the general conclusion that fear appeals are an effective and useful strategy to influence attitudes, intentions, and behaviors in target populations (Mongeau, 1998; Sutton, 1982; Witte and Allen, 2000).[1]

The most extensive meta-analysis of fear appeal research came to the following conclusions (Tannenbaum et al., 2015: 1198).

> Fear appeals are effective, and our synthesis organized and identified factors that make them even more effective. Specifically, fear appeals are particularly effective when the communication depicts relatively high amounts of fear, includes an efficacy message, stresses severity and susceptibility, recommends one-time only behaviors, and targets audiences that include a larger percentage of female message recipients.

Experimental studies regularly demonstrate that fear appeals work, i.e. they are an effective means to facilitate attitude, intention, and behavior changes (Tannenbaum et al., 2015: 1196). "Effectiveness" indicates "whether exposure to a fear appeal message resulted in more persuasion than a comparison condition. Thus, a fear appeal is considered effective if the effect size comparing treatment to control is significantly positive" (Tannenbaum et al., 2015: 1180).

Providing a minority report, Peters et al. (2013: 25) conduced a meta-analysis that concluded that only high threat and high efficacy fear appeals were effective and that "using threatening communication is at best ineffective, and at worst causes health-defeating behavior, unless the intervention contains an element that effectively enhances response efficacy and (especially) self-efficacy." They argue that significant outcome bias (only publishing studies which show significant effects) and the intention-behavior gap (the fact that only about a third of intentions lead to behavior change) has made past studies of fear appeals seem more effective than they actually are. Their meta-analysis uses stringent inclusion criteria to dismiss hundreds of peer-reviewed published studies from the past few decades and their final analysis depends upon the slim basis of only six studies (three of which are forty to fifty years old). Confidence in their conclusions is somewhat eroded when they claim that the six studies chosen for inclusion in their meta-analysis are tests of the EPPM model when three of the six studies were conducted decades before the EPPM was introduced (Peters et al., 2013: 26). They also seem to go beyond the evidence of their own meta-analysis when they elsewhere claim that the presentation of threatening information is one of the least effective methods for behavior change (Peters et al., 2014: 71). Their twin focus on the need for high efficacy and the danger of maladaptive responses are key components of the Extended Parallel Process Model (EPPM, see below).

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[1] Meta-analyses of protection motivation theory come to similar conclusions about the effectiveness of fear appeals (Floyd et al., 2000; Milne et al., 2000). De Hoog et al. (2007) conduct a meta-analysis of fear appeal literature from the perspective of stage theory and conclude that vulnerability (susceptibility) and severity have positive effects on persuasion, but they discount the role of fear. They claim, "the meta-analysis has shown that extremely 'fear-arousing' messages are no more effective than messages that simply state the negative consequences of a certain behavior" (280). The exclusive focus on cognitive processes in the stage model, however, is a step backwards since the emotion of fear cannot be so easily removed from the equation (Witte, 1992: 337).

Critics of fear appeals are correct that they are not automatically effective and can easily backfire or fail to achieve their intended goals. Kim Witte developed the EPPM in 1992 to explain how fear appeals work and why they sometimes fail. The EPPM "is a predominant message design theory in the social science fear appeal literature that provides a framework for effective communication of health-related information" (Maloney, et al., 2011: 206). Since its development, the EPPM has been widely utilized and tested and has established itself as indispensable theoretical framework within its field (Awagu and Basil, 2016: 362). The success of the EPPM is primarily due to the way that it builds upon and integrates prior theoretical models such as Leventhal's danger control/fear control framework (Leventhal, 1970) and Rogers' original Protection Motivation Theory (Rogers, 1975).

**The Extended Parallel Process Model (EPPM)**

The EPPM focuses on the relationship between two primary constructs: *threat* (defined as danger) and *efficacy*.[2] A threat is a real known or unknown danger but threat itself does not motivate action. Action is motivated by perceived threat which is further divided into two elements: *perceived severity* (how dangerous the threat is) and *perceived susceptibility* (how likely I am to experience the threat).[3] An individual must perceive that the threat is sufficiently real and dangerous *and* that he, she, or a loved one is in actual danger of experiencing harm for the threat to produce the emotion of fear and trigger a response. The level of fear produced by a message determines the level of response elicited.

Fear, by itself, is not enough to lead to acceptance of a message and positive attitude, intention, and behavior changes. Genuine fear is very effective at motivating a response of some kind, but that response could be negative or maladaptive; hearers could respond with coping mechanisms to manage their fear such as denial, reactance, or defensive avoidance. Such maladaptive responses are described as *fear control responses* and occur when *perceived efficacy* is not high enough to help hearers respond to fear with productive message-accepting *danger control responses*.

Just as perceived danger has two components (severity and susceptibility), perceived efficacy has two components: *perceived response efficacy* and *perceived self-efficacy*. Perceived response efficacy refers to whether the hearer thinks that the response would actually work to alleviate the threat while perceived self-efficacy refers to whether the hearer thinks he or she is actually capable of carrying out the recommended response. A fear appeal will lead to successful message acceptance through danger control processes if the hearer perceives that the proposed solution would actually work (response efficacy) and is doable (self-efficacy). In such a case the hearer is motivated to take action to control the actual danger instead of just trying to control the fear. "Efficacy messages must make target populations believe they are able to perform a recommended response . . . and that recommended responses work in averting or minimizing a threat" (Witte and Allen, 2000: 606). Witte and Allen continue: "To increase perceptions of self-efficacy, practitioners should identify barriers that inhibit one's perceived ability to perform a

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[2] The following description of the EPPM is drawn from Witte (1992: 337–45; 1994: 114–16) and Maloney et al. (2011: 207–208).

[3] Although not discussed by social scientists, alert readers will notice parallels between the EPPM and Aristotle's well-known discussion of fear (*Rhet*. 2.5.1–22).

recommended action and directly address these in a message (i.e., skills, costs, beliefs, emotions, etc.)" (2000: 606).

The relationship between perceived efficacy (self-efficacy, response efficacy) and perceived threat (susceptibility, severity) leads to one of three responses. *First*, if perceived threat is not high enough the individual will not do anything and will dismiss the message as irrelevant or insignificant. Perceived threat needs to be high enough to get the subject's attention and produce enough fear to motivate a response of some kind. *Second*, if the perceived level of efficacy is not higher than the perceived level of threat the individual will engage in fear control instead of danger control and will seek to manage the fear through denial, avoidance, or some other defensive activity. If the proposed response does not work or is too difficult to implement, there is no reason to try to avoid the danger. *Third*, if the perceived level of efficacy is higher than the perceived level of threat the individual will engage in danger control and will change intentions, attitudes, or behaviors in such a way as to control, prevent, fix, or avoid the threat. In a fear control response, the emotion of fear dominates while in a danger control response the fear motivates a cognitive process which assesses the level of threat and efficacy and leads to protection activities.

> In sum, fear appeals appear to be effective when they depict a significant and relevant threat (to increase perceptions of severity and susceptibility) and when they outline effective responses that appear easy to accomplish (to increase perceptions of response efficacy and self-efficacy). Low-threat fear appeals appear to produce little, if any, persuasive effects. Thus, regardless of which theoretical model is advocated, the advice to message designers is the same: A persuader should promote high levels of threat and high levels of efficacy to promote attitude, intention, and behavior changes" (Witte and Allen, 2000: 604).

Effective self-efficacy messages should include specific action instructions to guide a positive response (Ruiter, et al., 2014: 68; Ruiter et al., 2001: 625).

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| Low Perceived Threat | leads to | No Response |
| Higher Threat than Efficacy | leads to | Fear Control Coping Mechanisms |
| Higher Efficacy than Threat | leads to | Danger Control Protective Responses |

Tests of the EPPM consistently demonstrate that high threat and high efficacy messages are most effective but the exact interplay between the constructs cannot be perfectly predicted because of individual audience differences including an audience's prior emotions and thoughts about the issue (Popova, 2012: 468). Nabi et al. (2008: 192) suggest that "the fact that threat and efficacy may not be mutually contingent suggests that conditions may exist under which other message constructions may be more effective, depending on audience characteristics." For example, audiences with high prior knowledge (perceived or real) of the threat may not need a strong fear appeal to motivate a response and could be just as easily motivated by efficacy statements because they will fill in the details of the seriousness of the threat from their prior knowledge. "For those aware of the health threat, mere mention of it (e.g. mad cow disease, skin cancer) in the context of providing efficacy information may be sufficient to raise perception of threat" (Nabi, et al., 2008: 199).

This introduction to the EPPM provides a heuristic framework for analyzing fear appeals more generally; we turn now to the use of fear appeals in the Apocalypse of John.

## Fear Appeals in the Apocalypse of John

The Apocalypse of John includes fear appeals as part of John's rhetorical agenda. This is evident from the following considerations. *First*, there are explicit threats directed from Jesus through John to the Christians (Rev. 2:5, 16; 3:3; cf. 2:22; Stewart, 2017a).[4] Unless John's hearers repented, Jesus would move their lampstand from its place (Rev. 2:5), wage war against them with the sword of his mouth (Rev. 2:16), and come as a thief against them (Rev. 3:3). These fear appeals are directly addressed to some of John's hearers in the churches of Asia Minor. *Second*, fear appeals utilize gruesome content and vivid language and John's description of the impending danger throughout the Apocalypse are characterized by ekphrastic descriptions of judgment (Rev. 6:1–8, 12–17; 8:1–9:21; 11:15–19; 14:9–11, 17–20; 15:1, 5–16:21; 18:1–24; 19:11–21; 20:11–15; 21:8, 26; 22:15). Labahn (2017: 449; cf. Stewart 2017b; Whitaker, 2015: 97–100) rightly claims that "… können die Plagen- und Zornesschalen-Episoden nicht anders als eine Angst erzeugende Inszenierung verstanden warden." *Third*, descriptions of judgment explicitly highlight the emotion of fear (Rev. 11:11, 13; 18:10, 15) and fear of God is celebrated throughout as a positive and saving response (Rev. 11:18; 14:7; 15:4; 19:5). DeSilva (2009: 216) notes in regard to fear in Rev. 6:15–16 that, "Portraying these characters displaying such fear is the narrative equivalent of an orator feeling and making visible the very emotion the orator hopes to arouse at a certain point in the speech . . . . The cries of terror in the scene become the spark to kindle fear in the hearts of the audience." On the purposeful evocation of fear in Rev. 1:17, see Whitaker (2015: 99). John tried to produce fear by convincing his hearers they were susceptible to a severe and imminent threat which could only be averted by following his recommended response.

### Source Credibility

The effectiveness of a fear appeal depends heavily upon source credibility. Could John be trusted (Carey, 1999: 7)? Was he a legitimate prophet? Did his visions and warnings accurately reflect reality? It cannot be assumed that all of John's hearers would have viewed him as having the same level of authority and John does not assume automatic acceptance of his authority (DeSilva, 2012: 117–145). He makes a careful case for the authoritative nature of his visions by building rapport and comradery with his hearers through presenting himself as a prophet, witness, servant, and brother (Stewart, 2013: 556–561). He also utilizes the derived authority of the Hebrew prophets to legitimate his message (Naylor, 2018: 181).

[4] "Christian" is often used anachronistically when applied to first century realities and generally confuses more than clarifies (Barr, 2011: 7; Marshall, 2001: 25–87). It is used here and throughout by way of convenience to indicate Jewish and Gentile adherents to Jesus in the communities in Asia Minor with whom John shared fundamental convictions and over which he exerted some influence.

## Severity

John presents the threat as severe as humanly imaginable: torture and torment in the present and near future leading up to eternal exclusion from God's new creation and torture in a lake of fire.[5] John also presents the time as imminent and God's judgments were already being inflicted on humankind. The first four horsemen were unleashed and were causing warfare, civil unrest, and famine throughout the world (Rev. 6:1–8). The demonically instigated judgments of the four horsemen give way to more terrifying and supernatural displays of God's punishment: cosmic upheaval (Rev. 6:12–14) and demonic torture and slaughter (Rev. 9:1–21). As if these preparatory judgments were not terrible enough, the real danger lay in eternal exclusion from God's new creation and eternal judgment in the lake of fire with God's enemies (the dragon, beasts, and harlot): the second death (Rev. 20:14). Smith (2002: 112–114) helpfully describes how the visions of the Apocalypse help shape and train the imagination of readers to better appreciate the severity of God's future judgment.

Those allied with the beast through worship will drink God's undiluted wrath and be tortured with fire and brimstone before the holy angels and the lamb (Rev. 14:10). There is a clear parallel between the lack of rest of those experiencing God's punishment and the rest experienced by those who belong to the lord (Rev. 14:13). Even though God's preliminary and preparatory judgments lead to the slaughter of many, if not all, of the beast worshippers, there is no escape even in death. At the final judgment, the dead will be raised and those not having their names written in the Lamb's book of life would be thrown into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:15; 21:8). This punishment is later described as exclusion from God's future salvation in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:27; 22:15).

While normal fear appeals are limited to temporal consequences such as the danger of sexually transmitted diseases for unprotected sexual activity, cavities for lack of flossing, and possible death for drunk driving and smoking, John's prophetic insight into the future and the spiritual realm allows him to take fear appeals to a whole different level. Failure to comply with his recommendations would not only lead to God's spiritual and physical punishment in the present time but eternal punishment and consequences even after death.

It is hard to imagine how John could have made the stakes any higher or the danger any more severe. Audience perception of the severity of the danger would depend upon their prior understanding of the danger and their acceptance of John as a genuine and trustworthy prophet. Although John's descriptions of eternal judgment are much more vivid, they exist in substantial continuity with Jesus traditions (Mt. 5:22, 29–30; 18:9//Mk. 9:43–48; Lk. 16:23–24) and other diverse but early Jewish and Greco-Roman expectations (1QS 4:7–8; 1 En. 22:10–13; Apoc. Zeph. 1–3 (Sahidic fragment); 2:8; 4:1–7; 6:1-8; 10:3–14 (Akhmimic text); Polybius 6.56; Plato, *Resp.* 10.614b–621; Betz, 1983; Henning, 2014).

John's visions picture the world as entering the greatest crisis of human history. The crisis would increase in intensity until God's final judgment which would entail a process of decreation followed by recreation or renewal. John seeks to minimize the fear associated with common

[5] On the question of potential universalism in Revelation see Morales (2018: 5–25). Although not convincing on every point, his narrative and rhetorical approach cogently explains the tension in John's description of the nations and their fate.

experiences of crisis such as poverty, loss of status, exclusion and persecution, warfare, civil unrest, famine, and even death by focusing on the greater crisis confronting humanity: God's judgment which was already beginning, would soon culminate, and would have presumably irreversible consequences.

**Susceptibility**

Did John's hearers perceive themselves to be susceptible to the danger? It is evident from Revelation 2–3 that some of John's hearers did not view themselves as in danger from God's judgment; they thought everything was fine and John works hard to convince them otherwise. The Ephesian Christians evidently did not see themselves as in danger; they were doctrinally and morally pure (Rev. 2:2–3). Some in Pergamum were holding the teaching of "Balaam," evidently without any fear or concern (Rev. 2:14). A rival Christian prophetess in Thyatira actively sought to alleviate fear by advocating for a greater degree of assimilation with the surrounding culture and compromise with the emperor cult (Rev. 2:20; Fiorenza, 1986: 138). She was influential and had a following of Christians in the city (Rev. 2:22–23). Those in Sardis had a good reputation and evidently felt secure but did not realize they were dead (Rev. 3:1). The Laodicean Christians were quite content with the current situation: "For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing" (Rev. 3:17). These Christians likely thought of themselves as secure and with nothing to fear from God's punishment in the present or the future. They would not have viewed themselves as susceptible to John's message of impending judgment.

For John's fear appeals to be effective he would need to convince many of his Christian hearers that even though they thought they were secure and immune from future punishment they were actually just as susceptible to it as their pagan neighbors. Jesus was about to move their lampstand from its place, wage war against them with the sword of his mouth, throw Jezebel and her supporters into tribulation and strike her children dead, come like a thief against them, and spit them out of his mouth (Rev. 2:5, 16, 22–23; 3:3, 16). If John's hearers did not come out of Babylon they would participate in her sins and in her judgment (Rev. 18:4).

John seeks to convince many of those who think they are insiders that they are either outsiders or in imminent danger of becoming outsiders. He does this by 1) raising the standard of what it means to be an insider and by 2) connecting insiders who fall short of this higher standard with the outsiders who will experience God's judgment.[6] Those who think they are insiders but fail to overcome through behavioral changes consistent with John's exhortations will be judged with God's enemies.

John makes the case that intellectual assent to certain doctrines and having a reputation of vibrant devotion is not enough, those who will be saved from God's judgment and experience life in the new heavens and new earth must be overcomers. Only overcomers will experience and benefit from God's ultimate and eternal saving acts (Rev. 21:7; Tõniste, 2016: 154–157). Overcomers need to bear faithful witness to the point of death (Rev. 12:11). This involves a

[6] On the high standards see Cromhout (2014: 548). Duff (2001: 72–75) describes John's use of a rhetoric of innuendo or indirect accusation which is evident in the way that John connects Jezebel with Babylon and the second beast.

persevering commitment demonstrated by self-sacrificial actions, but it does not necessarily entail that martyrdom is necessary to overcome (Dixon, 2017: 157).

John's strict soteriological dualism thus appears, upon rhetorical inspection, to be quite porous. "Those who are 'in' must overcome or risk losing their lampstand (Rev. 2:5; cf. Rev. 3:5), while those who are 'out' are invited to repent and take part in God's eschatological salvation (Rev. 14:6–7; 22:17)" (Stewart, 2015: 110; cf. Decock, 2007: 47; Guttesen, 2009: 151; Morales, 2018: 161).

John thus attempts to convince his hearers that they were personally in a period of great crisis, they were not immune, and the outcome of the crisis would determine their inclusion or exclusion from God's new creation. Past discussions of how John sought to produce or increase a sense of crisis have tended to focus on historical reconstruction of the socio-economic situation of the churches and to what degree they were experiencing real persecution or suffering (Collins, 1984: 84–107; Duff, 2005: 164–168; Royalty, 1997: 599; Thompson, 1990: 175, 191). A consideration of John's use of fear appeals provides a different perspective; John does not seem to use fear appeals to exacerbate tensions with outsiders but to cause his hearers to see themselves as susceptible and in real danger of God's judgment.

**Response Efficacy**

Would John's recommended response work? Promises to the overcomers are given directly by Jesus and repeated at the end of each of the seven letters (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21). The final promise to those who overcome comes from the lips of God himself (Rev. 21:7). The blood of the Lamb is powerful to cleanse and empower God's people (Decock, 2004:160–165). John wants his hearers to have complete confidence in the efficacy of the response he seeks to elicit from them.

John also makes it clear that other potential responses would not be efficacious. Syncretistic compromise with the surrounding economic, cultural, and religious systems would lead to safety and security in the present but the cost would be high: all those who fail to overcome will be deceived by the beasts (Rev. 13:14, 16; 19:20) and will suffer the resulting judgment (Rev. 14:9–11; cf. Coutsoumpos, 1997: 26; Slater, 1998: 255).

John's claims in this regard would have likely been contested by Jezebel and other Christians with a less sectarian view of the soteriologically necessary response (Smith, 2002: 111–112). They would have likely argued that salvation did not require such a stringent rejection of assimilation into the cultural and religious life of the cities (DeSilva, 1992: 384).

**Self-Efficacy**

Could John's recommended response actually be done? John is not shy in noting the costs and potential side effects of his recommended course of action. Overcomers will be overcome by the beast and killed (Rev. 11:7; 13:7). They will be taken captive and slain with the sword (Rev. 13:10). They will be excluded from the economic life and prosperity of the world around them (Rev. 13:17). John's hearers may have wondered if the cure were worse than the disease. Even the Ephesian Christians with doctrinal vigilance and moral uprightness fell short in the area of love and were in danger.

John uses several means to convince his readers that although the costs were very high, his recommended response was possible and was worth the effort. *First*, he consistently assures his readers of divine assistance. Jesus intimately knows their situation and cares for them in the midst of the struggles (Rev. 2:9; 3:8, 19). Overcomers are assured of a divine seal of ownership (Rev. 7:3; 14:1) and divine protection: the inner court would not be trampled and the woman in the wilderness was immune to attack (Rev. 11:1–2; 12:3–16). *Second*, they were able to taste and experience future victory in the present: they had been loosed from their sins and made into a kingdom and priests (Rev. 1:5–6). Through worship they experienced and celebrated God's current rule and reign and anticipated the future kingdom in the present. They did not just have to take John's word that things would be worth it in the end; through corporate worship the community experienced a foretaste of that future day. John consistently seeks to draw his hearers into scenes of cosmic worship (Rev. 4:1–11; 5:6–14; 7:9–17; 8:1–5; 11:15–19; 12:10–12; 14:1–5; 15:1–4; 16:1–7, 19:1–8). Although he overstates his case, Gager is at least partially right when he argues that John sought "to make possible an experience of millennial bliss as living reality" or "to experience the future as present" (Gager, 1975: 55; see the critique of Gager in Fiorenza, 1985: 167–68). *Third*, John seems to support a form of predestination which could serve to encourage his hearers that overcoming was indeed possible. The names were written in the lamb's book before the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8; 17:8) and the seal is placed upon God's people prior to tribulation (Rev. 7:3). This attention to a form of predestination should not be understood as deterministic and does not undercut John's rhetorical agenda because the only way to know if one's name was written in the book was to persevere to the end and actually overcome and there is an indication that names could be blotted out of the book through failure to overcome (Rev. 3:5). The fact that the names were written in the book before the foundation of the world does give John's hearers confidence that his recommended response was possible.

## The Redirection of Fear in Times of Crisis

The foregoing discussion has sought to use inter-disciplinary insights into fear appeals to provide new perspectives and confirm some prior approaches to John's rhetorical efforts. Application of the EPPM to the evaluation of fear appeals in historical texts, in my knowledge, has not been done in prior research. Since it is not designed to be a historical methodology it does not provide new historical information, per se, nor does it solve the ethical questions raised by the rhetorical use of descriptions of future retributive divine violence (Barr, 2003; de Villiers 2015; Hylen, 2011; Middleton, 2018; Moyise, 2001; Street, 2016), but it does provide new lenses for looking at historical issues and raises fresh questions and perspectives. Three such contributions can be mentioned. *First*, John does not demonstrate particular interest in the other. Descriptions of the judgment of the other are conventional and are intended more to motivate insiders than to stereotype or confront outsiders. This insight falls in line with suggestions that Revelation be read from the perspective of the Laodiceans (Bauckham, 2015: 69–74; Maier, 2002). John builds upon common and widespread assumptions about God's judgment of the ungodly other, but, on this reading, he does not do so to engage in vengeance fantasies (Frankfurter, 2007) or facilitate catharsis (Collins, 1994) but to motivate insiders to pursue the moral formation necessary to keep them from becoming soteriological outsiders. The fact that John is more focused on motivating insiders than stereotyping outsiders is small comfort for modern readers who may identify as the other and encounter his text as an "experience of violence" (Van Henten, 2017: 77), but the historical reality should be kept in mind that John was not writing for such readers; they are not the target audience of his fear appeals.

*Second*, the EPPM also potentially sheds light on the effectiveness of fear appeals based on divine judgment. Non-religious audiences challenge the use of religious fear appeals at their most basic points: severity and susceptibility. Certain foundational worldview elements need to be in place before a religious fear appeal could be potentially effective: that there is something after death beyond the cessation of existence and that a God exists who will punish evil. DeSilva (2009: 234; cf. 254–255) describes the situation well:

> In regard to Revelation, the premises needing to be supplied and the knowledge that is presupposed often belong to the special knowledge transmitted within Jewish and Christian culture. These faith communities would accept many things as valid foundational premises for argumentation that would be hotly disputed (or even ridiculed) outside these groups. It remains 'insider' logic, not likely to persuade outsiders who would not, for example, share in the foundational conviction that Christ will return with authority to judge, punish, and reward.

The effectiveness of John's rhetorical strategy depends upon audience buy-in to his worldview and without such agreement the visions are incapable of producing meaningful fear.

*Third*, although John's fear-based rhetorical strategy partakes in all the potential dangers of the use of fear appeals noted by ethicists (Guttman and Salmon, 2004; Bayer and Fairchild, 2016; Hastings, Stead, and Webb, 2004; Brown and Whiting, 2014; for a recent summary see Stewart, 2019b), there are positive benefits for insiders who share John's worldview and seek to follow his recommended way of life. Critiques of the rhetorical use of divine threat in Christianity often do not identify why fear stubbornly remains important and valuable to Christian experience and piety (for a historical example see Fisher, 2000: 16). The EPPM draws attention to the significance of high response efficacy as a means to properly respond to danger. John promotes fear of God as the response that will effectively deal with any other fearful exigence. Recent cognitive approaches to emotions highlight the fact that emotions are oriented and directed towards objects (Hockey, 2019: 27). For example, fear can have God, death, disease, social or economic deprivation, or crime as objects. By seeking to increase his hearers' fear of God, John marginalizes or displaces every other possible object of fear (cf. DeSilva, 2009: 219). Fear focused on death is decreased because Jesus conquered death and has the keys of Death and Hades (Rev. 1:17–18). Fear of poverty is decreased because God declares the faithful poor to be rich (Rev. 2:9). Fear of spiritual or demonic oppression is decreased because insiders with God's seal will not be harmed by the locusts (Rev. 9:4). Fear of persecution, captivity, social marginalization, and potential death (Rev. 13:7, 9, 15) is decreased because of God's promise of future rest and a final reversal (Rev. 14:13; 21:1–22:5). In John's rhetorical strategy, an increase in the fear of God functioned to decrease fear of anything else and to help his hearers cope with the fear, vulnerability, and danger that accompanied every-day life in the provinces at the end of the first century. Similar to Revelation, Hockey (2019: 197–206) capably shows how 1 Peter crafts an emotional regime in which the fear of God relativizes and undermines other fearful objects. She argues that "those who fear God will have no fear of the other. . . . Thus, in 1 Peter, the audience is being asked no longer to see the abusive other as a powerful person with the capacity to harm" (Hockey, 2019: 204) and "[t]he believer–God relationship usurps the subordinate–master/husband or persecuted–abuser relationship with the consequence that the

master, husband, and defamer are sidelined" (Hockey, 2019: 200). In John's rhetorical strategy, the increased fear of God should bring some relief to other potentially debilitating fears.

## Conclusion

The EPPM demonstrates that fear appeals can be very effective means of motivation and argues that four main factors determine the effectiveness of a fear appeal: perceived severity, susceptibility, response efficacy, and self-efficacy. With this heuristic lens in place we can observe how and to what degree John addresses each of these factors in his Apocalypse. John makes the case that the severity is high, his hearers are susceptible to the danger, his proposed response would work, and his hearers were capable of doing what was necessary to avoid the danger.

John's Christian hearers would probably have had an easy time accepting his claims about the severity and the response efficacy. It was possibly harder to argue for susceptibility. Jezebel and her Christian followers could likely make a convincing argument against John's sectarian stance toward involvement with the broader economic, cultural, and religious landscape. They would not likely have viewed themselves as susceptible to God's judgment and perceptions of John's ethos would have been determinative at this point. It is unclear how John's first hearers would have thought of self-efficacy. John's standard for overcoming seems almost impossibly high. If the Ephesian Christians were not measuring up who had any hope? We could look for consolation in God's grace but, apart from the introductory and closing benedictions (Rev. 1:4; 22:21), χάρις is conspicuously absent from the book. Grace is implied, however, in the regular calls to repentance since it is clear that repentance would be effective. Hearers are assured that their victory is guaranteed because of the victory of the Lamb but that victory could only be won in the same way as the lamb—through faithful witness unto death (Rev. 12:11).

The EPPM provides a heuristic methodology for attempting to assess how and to what degree John's rhetorical use of divine threat would have been effective. In addition, it highlights how John sought to increase the fear of God in his hearers as a means to cope with other pressing fears. John rhetorically utilized fear appeals to reshape his hearers' perceptions of danger and efficacy in order to motivate them to faithful perseverance and moral formation. He sought to increase fear of one object (God) and the inescapable crisis of divine judgment in order to decrease fear of other crises (death, disease, natural disasters, war, oppressive government, poverty, low social status). John's presentation of God as the ultimate object of fear does not lead to debilitating terror because God is simultaneously presented as a powerful ally, provider, and protector (DeSilva, 2009: 220–222). High perception of danger mixed with high perception of efficacy does not lead to paralyzing or debilitating fear but something more akin to caution (Diogenes Laertius 7.116), courage (Aristotle, *Eth. nic*. 3.6–7 [1115a–b]), or fearful confidence (Philo, *Heir*, 28–29).

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