

**JUDAIC AND CHRISTIAN DIVERGENCE IN RENEWAL:  
APOCALYPTIC INDICATORS FROM THE REVELATION  
OF JOHN**

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## **STATEMENT OF CANDIDATE**

I certify that the work in this thesis entitled ‘Judaic and Christian Divergence in Renewal: Apocalyptic Indicators from the Revelation of John’, has not previously been submitted as part of requirements for a degree to any other university or institution other than Macquarie University. I also certify that the thesis is an original piece of research and it has been written by me. Any help and assistance that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself have been appropriately acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sourced and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

**Signature**

**Full name**

**Date**



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## ABSTRACT

Evident in the variety of Second Temple Judaisms are significant elements of renewal and diversification, emerging from the foundations of Judaic tradition and the Hebrew scriptures. Thus, continuity and renewal are features of the Judaic context from which Christianity emerged and to which it remained tethered through the first century. From such a context arise issues of Judaic-Christian divergence and modern metaphors deployed to suggest a definitive parting or partings. Such metaphors are argued to be modern theological constructs which do not portray the complexities involved in first-century issues of religious renewal and divergence.

To explore issues of Judaic-Christian divergence, the motifs of the temple and the new Jerusalem, the priesthood, and the temple, expressed in the *Apocalypse of John*, are analysed in the context of non-binary first-century, Jewish and Jewish-Christian, apocalyptic writings. This discussion, identifying less-discussed motifs in the *Apocalypse of John*, constitutes in Part 2 the main focus of the thesis.

The conclusion is drawn that, at the close of the first century of the Common Era, such motifs in John's *Apocalypse* serve as indicators of Judaic-Christian divergence in renewal, rather than bifurcation.

## ABBREVIATIONS

### Modern Texts

ASOR	American School of Oriental Research
<i>BRev.</i>	<i>Bible Review</i>
<i>BA</i>	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
<i>BASOR</i>	Bulletin of the American School of Oriental Research, Baltimore
BCE	Before the Common Era
CBC	The Cambridge Bible Commentary
CE	Common Era
cf.	Compare
<i>CRINT</i>	<i>Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum</i> , Assen and Philadelphia
ed	editor
eds.	editors
<i>EncJud</i>	C. Roth et al. (eds.). <i>Encyclopedia Judaica</i> , 16 Vols., New York, 1971-72
ET	English translation.
<i>HR</i>	<i>History of Religion</i>
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
<i>JAAR</i>	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JQR</i>	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>

<i>JR</i>	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
<i>JS</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>JSOT Suppl.</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement</i>
<i>JSP</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>MTSR</i>	<i>Method and Theory in the Study of Religion</i>
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue Biblique, Paris.</i>
<i>RBL</i>	<i>Review of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>RQ</i>	<i>Revue de Qumran</i>
<i>RSV</i>	Revised Standard Version of the Bible.
<i>WHJP</i>	<i>The World History of the Jewish People</i>
<i>ZTK</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>

### **Ancient Literature**

<i>Apoc. Abr.</i>	<i>Apocalypse of Abraham</i>
<i>2 Bar.</i>	<i>2 Baruch</i>
<i>b.</i>	Babylonian Talmud
<i>b. Ber.</i>	<i>Berakot</i>
<i>b. Hagig.</i>	<i>Hagigal</i>
<i>b. Yom</i>	<i>Yoma</i>

1 Chron.	1 Chronicles
2 Chron.	2 Chronicles
1 Cor.	1 Corinthians
Dan.	Daniel
Deut.	Deuteronomy
<i>Eccl.</i>	Ecclesiastes
<i>1-2-3 Enoch</i>	Ethiopic, Slavonic, Hebrew Enoch
Eph	Ephesians
Exod.	Exodus
Ezek.	Ezekiel
Gal.	Galatians
<i>Gen.</i>	<i>Genesis</i>
Heb.	Hebrews
<i>Hist.</i>	Tacitus, <i>Historiae</i>
<i>Hist. Rech.</i>	<i>History of the Rechabites</i>
Jer.	Jeremiah
Josephus	<i>Ant.</i> <i>Jewish Antiquities</i> <i>Ap</i> <i>Against Apion</i> <i>Life</i> <i>The Life</i> <i>War</i> <i>The Jewish war</i>
Josh.	Joshua
Lam.	Lamentations
<i>Let. Aris.</i>	Pseudo-Aristeas, <i>Letter of Aristeas</i>
Lev.	Leviticus
Macc.	Maccabees



Mal.	Malachi	
Matt.	Matthew	
Neh.	Nehemiah	
Num.	Numbers	
Philo of Alexandria		
	<i>Aet. Mund.</i>	<i>De Aeternitate Mundi</i>
	<i>Apologia</i>	<i>Apologia pro Iudaeis</i>
	<i>Op. Mund.</i>	<i>De Opificio Mundi</i>
	<i>Vit. Cont.</i>	<i>De Vita Contemplativa</i>
Prov.	Proverbs	
Ps.	Psalms	
Pss.	Psalms	
<i>Pss. Sol.</i>	<i>Psalms of Solomon</i>	
Qoh.	Qoheleth (Ecclesiastes)	
Qumran		
	1QH	<i>Hymn Scroll (Thanksgiving)</i>
	1QM	<i>War Scroll (War Rule)</i>
	1QS	<i>Rule of the Community</i>
	4QMMT	<i>Scroll of Some of the Precepts of the Torah</i>
	11 Qtemple	<i>The Temple Scroll</i>
Rev.	Revelation, book of ( <i>Apocalypse of John</i> )	
Rom.	Romans	
RSV	Revised Standard Version of the Bible	
<i>Sib. Or.</i>	<i>Sibylline Oracles</i>	
<i>Sir.</i>	<i>Sirach (Ecclesiasticus)</i>	

*T. Abr.            Testament of Abraham*

*Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*

*T. Ash.           Testament of Asher*

*T. Lev.            Testament of Levi*

*T. Naph.          Testament of Naphtali*

*T. Reub.          Testament of Reuben*

*Vit. Mos.        Philo, De Vita Mosis*





## INTRODUCTION

The initial focus of the thesis concerns the elusive boundaries between first-century Judaism and Christianities and the range of interpretations accorded them by modern scholars. The search in the modern era for indicators of divergence remains an ongoing endeavour with a lack of consensus on specific indicators relevant to the first century of the Common Era. Part 1 focusses on issues of interpretation in respect of religious history, explores the diversity and pluralism of first-century Judaism and the emergence of early Christianities, and concludes with a discussion of the continuity and renewal reflected in prophecy and apocalyptic.

In studies on early Judaism and early Christianities, references in modern scholarship to the ‘parting’ or ‘partings of the ways’ are not uncommon.<sup>1</sup> From the concept of a single ‘parting’, discussion moved to a range of ‘partings’ and, in recent years to a growing view that such a discussion has reached its conclusion. Such a view, however, may be challenged on the premise that an underlying question to a discussion of ‘parting’ is when early Christianities became self-evidently different from contemporary Judaism. There is the issue of determining the ‘when, why and how’ of the separation between Judaism and Christianity: what is the historical framework underlying the modern understanding of Judaism and Christianity as clearly separate religions?

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<sup>1</sup> For example, James D.G. Dunn, *The Parting of the Ways: Between Christianity and Judaism and their Significance for the Character of Christianity*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, SCM Press, London, 2006; idem (ed.), *Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways, AD 70 to 135*, Mohr-Siebeck, 1992; Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1999; Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed (eds.), *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 2007; and Judith Lieu, “The Parting of the Ways”: Theological Construct or Historical Reality’, *JSNT* 56 (1994), 101-119.

Such a complex issue requires a framework to narrow the focus on a very wide range of events and religious phenomena in the Second Temple Period, given that an historicist approach may not take into adequate account either the influences on historical interpretation presented by apologetics and confessionalism.<sup>2</sup> Further, there remains the issue of reaching a consensus as to when Jewish Christians became Christians and Jewish Christianity ceased being a Jewish sect.

Constructed metaphorical models as ‘parting’ and ‘partings’ constitute a legitimate attempt at categorisation and classification (or re-classification) of a range of micro-histories of religious phenomena and events over several centuries. Such constructions, however, do not adequately allow for the variety of religious events and historical complexities in the Second Temple Period and the early centuries of the Common Era.<sup>3</sup> Further, although extant historical data are limited, their interpretation within the context of the historical complexities of the period is likely to remain unresolved. During the modern period the interpretation of religious history has been an evolving process: traditional views have been widely challenged, Judaic-Christian boundaries re-assessed on ideological bases, and widely-employed metaphorical and figurative idioms increasingly debated. Therefore, rather than a concept of ‘parting’ in the first century, an appreciation of the extent to which continuity and renewal were features of contemporary Judaism and Christianities seems more appropriate.

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<sup>2</sup> Philip S. Alexander, “‘The Parting of the Ways’ from the Perspective of Rabbinic Judaism”, *Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways AD 70 to 135*, ed. James D.G. Dunn, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids/Cambridge, U.K., 1999, 1-2.

<sup>3</sup> See Robert A. Kraft, ‘The Weighing of the Parts: Pivots and Pitfalls in the Study of early Judaism and their Early Christian Offspring’, *The Ways That Never Parted*, eds. Becker and Reed, Mohr/Siebeck, Tübingen, 2003, 87-94.

Part 2, the main body of the thesis, develops the case that in lieu of a definitive ‘parting’, and beyond a concept of continuity and renewal, late first-century Jewish and Christian apocalyptic indicates a *prima facie* case can be made for the emergence of indicators of divergence *in renewal*. To this end the juxtaposition of continuity, renewal, and divergence is not explained by a framework of binary analysis in terms of Judaic-Christian divergence. The three categories of historical process, namely continuity, renewal, and divergence, are not separately demarcated but are regarded as inter-related, one flowing on from the other. Thus the term ‘divergence in renewal’ is used to indicate a shared momentum, in contrast with discrete categories of activity. The argument is presented initially through analysis of the apocalyptic narratives of the Temple and the new Jerusalem and their significance to redemption. Thence, ‘new’ dimensions to the traditional concept of the priesthood are elucidated, followed by the role of the Throne shared with the Lamb, and its range of interactive protagonists.

Primary focus has been accorded the *Apocalypse of John* because such indicators of divergence are argued to be part of his narrative, notwithstanding the more widespread view that greater significance attaches to images of monsters, dragons and angels, symbols of beasts and devils, and symbolic numbers, the meanings of which remain under debate. Amid such an apocalyptic array, it is posited that embedded in John’s narrative are innovative and theologically significant notions of redemption, priesthood and Throne, which constitute indicators of divergence in renewal. To this end, primary attention to the *Apocalypse of John* is contrasted with contemporary apocalyptic phenomena from 2 *Baruch* and 4 *Ezra*. Chapter 4 includes a discussion on the extensive use of cognitive metaphors in John’s *Apocalypse*, which serves to enhance the hermeneutical significance

of his narrative and highlight distinctions between the literal entities of Judaic tradition concerning the Temple, Jerusalem, the priesthood and the Throne.

Although there are only several references to the priesthood scattered through the twenty-two chapters of John's *Apocalypse*,<sup>4</sup> the case is argued in chapter 6 that if assessed as a totality, the brief passages portray a composite vision of the priesthood which clearly departs from that of Judaic tradition. Related to John's notions of priesthood are issues of redemption and authority and the integral relationship between them. In respect of the Throne, discussed in chapter 7, John depicts it as centrally significant in Rev. 4-5, elucidating its relevance through a range of throne-related heavenly protagonists and, in particular, the status accorded the Lamb/Messiah sharing the Throne with God. The conclusion is drawn that John's account of the new Jerusalem, the Lamb and redemption, the priesthood, and the Throne reveal indicators of divergence in renewal of religious thought and expression towards the close of the first century of the Common Era.

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<sup>4</sup> Rev. 1:5-6; 2:26; 5:9-10; 20:4-6; 22:3-5.



**PART ONE**

**ELUSIVE BOUNDARIES:**

**CONTINUITY AND RENEWAL**



## **Chapter One**

### **Interpreting Religious History: Traditions, Boundaries and Metaphors**

There is now a general acknowledgement that the inchoate character of Christianities in the first century is better understood in the context of contemporaneous Judaism. There is, however, less agreement on the relationships between the Judaism of the first century and the earliest Christianities. Such contextual relationships are often influenced by a scholar's conceptual approach and assumptions to understanding the first century; for example, sociological, political and theological inclinations will lead to different perceptions of first-century history, religious or otherwise.

#### **Interpreting early Judaic and Christian traditions**

Although often regarded in a pejorative sense, tradition has a very long history, providing intrinsic and extrinsic values to the study of religious history and challenging scholars to be selective in their interpretation and evaluation of historical data and situations. Tradition, in its complex plurality, is juxtapositioned with communities, small and large, fulfilling their roles in the diversity of everyday life. Although it preserves the memory of the past, tradition also evolves, as new generations confront new situations which influence their perceptions of their heritage. At the same time, the way in which new generations and communities respond to new circumstances is influenced by traditions.<sup>5</sup> Thus, Jewish communities faced contemporary phenomena through the prism of earlier communities' historical responses to historical events, a sense of *Vorverständnis*.

A linear view of the inauguration and development of early Christianities does not

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<sup>5</sup> Douglas A. Knight, 'Revelation through Tradition', *Tradition and Theology in the Old Testament*, ed. Knight. SPCK, London, 1977, 144.

take into account their diversity and pluriform beginnings. Until the twentieth century the Gospel accounts served largely as the basis for reconstruction of Christian origins, notwithstanding uncertainties concerning the historical accuracy of Gospel narratives and the considerable passage of time after the events described. Although the politics of identity formation were a feature of early Judaism and early Christianities, the politics of Jesus-identity became central to the interpretation of early Christianity, with Jesus serving as the central organising symbol for early Christian movements. In contrast, early Judaism, not being constructed on the politics of individual identity-formation, did not project a single emblematic figure perceived as central to its self-identity.<sup>6</sup> The four Gospels of the Christian Testament and others which were not included in the Christian canon suggest the inclusion of legend, myth and accounts which are self-serving rather than a single unified literary account of a linear history of momentous religious events.

### **Approaching religious history**

The age of the Enlightenment and rationalist thinking provided the context for the critical study of religious traditions of the history of the religion of Israel.<sup>7</sup> It is quite likely, however, that such study was not intrinsically due to interest in Israel's religious history as much as Christian scholars seeking confirmation of their view that 'Christianity was the ideal of a rational religion and high morality'.<sup>8</sup> Early twentieth-century scholarship witnessed a *Tendenz* to distinguish between early Christianity and early Judaism,

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<sup>6</sup> Admittedly, a contentious view if one accords comparable status and influence to Moses within Judaism as to Jesus within Christianity.

<sup>7</sup> Interest in the study of the history of religion arose later in the nineteenth century as a consequence of expanding knowledge of other religions.

<sup>8</sup> Georg Fohrer, *History of Israelite Religion*, trans. David E. Green, SPCK, London, 1972, 17-18; originally published as *Geschichte der israelitischen Religion*, Walter de Gruyter & Co., Berlin, 1968.

emphasising the distinctiveness of Christianity over Judaism and, by comparison, the ‘originality’ of early Christianity.<sup>9</sup> Until the mid-twentieth century, historical analyses of Judaism in antiquity generally proceeded from western theological and ideological assumptions which failed to take into account the range and diversity of Judaisms in the Second Temple Period.<sup>10</sup> An ideological approach to Christian origins is also evident on the part of some early church fathers and scholars who elected to overlook or deny the dynamism and variety of first-century Judaisms and whose polemical approach to Hebrew scripture led to a negative construction of Judaism as a stylised, tradition-bound religion.<sup>11</sup> In contrast, such scholars presented a positive construction of early Christianity focussing on the language of separation and unfavourable interpretations of Jewish ‘legalism’.<sup>12</sup>

Notwithstanding that early modern research into the history of religion was largely dominated by the prevailing eurocentric position of Christianity, some historians adopted the goal of recovering the rational history of religion by revisiting Hebrew and Christian scriptures, thus paving the way for an improved understanding of Judaism. Focus was on its diversity of belief and practice, its unique significance to Jewish communities before the Common Era, and the context it provided for the emergence of primitive Christianity. Not all revisiting of scriptures, however, resulted in improved understanding. There are numerous examples, particularly in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, of scholars seeking to superimpose their theological and doctrinal views on the history of

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<sup>9</sup> For example, M-J Lagrange, *Le Judaïsme avant Jésus-Christ*, Études Bibliques, Paris, 1931, 587-88.

<sup>10</sup> The same comment may be applied to the study of all other religions.

<sup>11</sup> Such an approach may follow a reading of Paul’s letters which does not take sufficient, if any, account of their polemical rhetoric.

<sup>12</sup> See discussion by Judith Lieu, *Neither Jew Nor Greek? Constructing Early Christianity*, T and T Clark, Edinburgh, 2002.

religion in antiquity. Frequently, Christian theological models led to an *aperçu*, one in which Christianity was perceived to have ‘triumphed’, and its Judaic heritage relegated to historical inconsequentiality in terms of a critical historical understanding of Christian origins.

### **Establishing boundaries and borderlines**

As discussion on the issue of the ‘parting(s) of the ways’ deploys a range of terms, including ‘borderlines, boundaries, frontiers, demarcation and bifurcation’, some brief discussion of their descriptive functions is necessary as well as their respective roles in the language of metaphor.<sup>13</sup> In general I have elected to use the term ‘boundaries’ in relation to the juxtaposition between early Judaism and early Christianities for two reasons.

First, the term ‘boundary’ is less connotative of fixed or immutable lines, not infrequently of a territorial nature, in contrast to ‘border’, which in modern usage is frequently taken to imply geographical, political or territorial divisions. Second, in respect of early Judaism and early Christianities, the term ‘boundaries’ leaves open the possibilities of plurality, fluidity, and continuity, factors which are inherent in early Judaic-Christian relations.

The term ‘frontier’ is generally employed in one of two contexts: a border between two countries or as an indicator between two states or conditions of being, for example, science and religion, or the known and the unknown. However, although the second usage would not be inappropriate in respect of first-century Judaic-Christian relations, the plural, ‘frontiers’, seems marginally less appropriate than ‘boundaries’ in the search for indicators

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<sup>13</sup> In her chapter on ‘Boundaries’, Judith Lieu emphasises that the ‘language of boundary is, of course, the language of metaphor’ (page 98); *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World*, Oxford University Press, 2004. I discuss the relevance of metaphor to issues of Judaic-Christian continuity, renewal and divergence later in this chapter and in chapter 4.

of renewal and divergence between early Judaism and early Christianities.

Given the pluralistic nature of early Judaism and Christianity, the alternative term ‘borderlines’, as distinct from rigid borders, is also relevant, as demonstrated by Daniel Boyarin in his analysis of Judaeo-Christian partitioning.<sup>14</sup> Used adjectivally, the term conveys a sense of marginality or indeterminacy in contrast to a clear-cut demarcation, thus being more appropriately descriptive of the uncertainties in the circumstances and events underlying the eventual separation between Judaism and Christianity. However, notwithstanding the relevance of both ‘frontiers’ and ‘borderlines’, I have elected to use the term ‘boundaries’ which I feel is more expressive of the pluralistic nature of first-century Judaism and Christianities and the aspects of continuity and renewal which exist between them. The elusive boundaries between first-century Judaism and Christianities may, of course, be viewed from historical or theological perspectives, if not from a combination of both. However, such perspectives are unlikely to be coterminous. Indeed, the differences between such approaches over the past century have led to divergent views on the nature of relations between first-century Judaism and early Christianity which are discussed in the following four schematic approaches.

### **‘The new replacing the old?’**

The first schema can be dated approximately from Adolf von Harnack<sup>15</sup> whose scholarly work on Christian origins early in the twentieth century set the stage for an interpretation

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<sup>14</sup> Daniel Boyarin, *Borderlines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2004.

<sup>15</sup> Adolf von Harnack, *Die Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten*, Leipzig, 1902; published in English as *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries*, 2 vols., Williams & Norgate, London, 1908.

which found widespread theological support. Von Harnack's historical view of primitive<sup>16</sup> Christianity was almost certainly influenced by his contemporary German Protestant theological context, evidenced by his tendency to overstate progress in the emergence of Christianity and understate, if not reject, the significance of the Judaic context from which it emerged. Denying the Judaic foundations to Christian origins led von Harnack to question the inclusion of Hebrew scriptures in the Christian canon. It is generally accepted by modern scholars that at the time of the emergence of Christianity, Judaism as a religious entity was characterised by diversity. Further, in the early centuries of the Common Era the level of anti-Semitism expressed by Christians indicates that Judaism was regarded as an 'active competitor'. Von Harnack acknowledges a level of Jewish 'vitality' which he associates with Jewish proselytism prior to the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, following which he views Jewish expansionism as in continuing decline.<sup>17</sup>

Four observations to von Harnack's view are appropriate. First, his assertion that Jewish interest in the Gentile world declined after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE is an indication of his opinion that Judaism was inherently inferior to Christianity. Such a view is largely predicated on von Harnack's distinction between Hebrew and Christian scriptures, resulting in a perceived qualitative tension between the 'old' Testament and the

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<sup>16</sup> The adjectival use of the term 'primitive' is not to suggest a degree of underdevelopment or naiveté in respect of early Christianity. The term is used to indicate a new religious movement which emerged in and developed through the first century but which was not fully independent of its religious antecedents; namely, the Judaic beliefs and practices which served as an influential backdrop to Jesus, his early followers, and the Jesus movements.

<sup>17</sup> von Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity*, vol. 1, Preface.



‘new’ Testament.<sup>18</sup> Second, even allowing for shifts in semantics over the past century, one can gain a sense of his views from his use of the term ‘missionary zeal’ in respect of Christians compared with the term ‘propaganda’ in relation to the Jews. Third, and more significant, is his questionable assertion that Jewish missionary activity declined after 70 CE; more recent scholars have argued that Judaism not only retained vitality in the second and third centuries of the Common Era but that the development of synagogues in Jewish communities contributed to a continuing if not enhanced level of proselytism.<sup>19</sup> Finally, von Harnack’s views do not take account of the identity issues and differences that existed within both early Christianities and Judaism as well as between the two emerging religions. In taking account of growing Christian influence, Judaism underwent change, a process of renewal, in order to reinforce its Jewish identity from within.<sup>20</sup>

Essentially, von Harnack viewed the first century from a theological perspective which saw the beginning of a process whereby Christians, as the ‘new people’ took the place of Jews, thus adopting a supersessionist position. Such a standpoint failed to recognise the diverse nature of religious belief and practice in early Judaism,<sup>21</sup> which has

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 125-30. It is to be noted, however, that renewal was a feature of first-century Judaism and that such renewal was not principally due to the emergence of Christianity.

<sup>19</sup> For example, Miriam S. Taylor, *Anti-Judaism and Early Christian Identity: A Critique of Scholarly Consensus*, Brill, Leiden, 1995, 9; cf. Martin Goodman, ‘Jewish Proselytizing in the First Century’, in J. Lieu, J. North and T. Rajak (eds.), *The Jews among Pagans and Christians: In the Roman Empire*, Routledge, London and New York, 1992, 53.

<sup>20</sup> See discussion, Maren R. Niehoff, ‘*Creatio ex Nihilo* Theology in *Genesis Rabbah* in Light of Christian Exegesis’, *HTR* 99:1 (2006) 37-40.

<sup>21</sup> The term ‘early Judaism’ is used in this thesis, unless otherwise qualified, to denote the phenomena in the Judaism of the period covering the third century BCE to the end of the second century CE, that is, up to the beginnings of synagogal Judaism. See J.H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha and the New Testament: Prolegomena for the Study of Christian Origins*, Cambridge University Press, 1985, 59.

subsequently become more widely acknowledged and from which new issues have emerged. Such issues include, for example, the extent to which the terms ‘Jews’, ‘Jewish’ and ‘Judaism’ denote clearly-defined entities in the first century.<sup>22</sup> The theological emphasis of the early twentieth century was based largely on a model of apostasy, one in which Judaism is perceived as having been superseded by Christianity, rather than on the social, religious and political characteristics which more aptly serve as a framework to consider first-century Jewish-Christian boundaries. The work of von Harnack *et al.* led to a widespread and negative view of Jewish-Christian relations, involving two distinctly separate religions, notwithstanding their common and linked origins.<sup>23</sup>

Another early modern scholar who ignored the variety and diversity of early Judaism and who had little regard for rabbinic literature and rabbinic Judaism, and who elected to disregard any significance attaching to the Apocrypha and the Pseudepigrapha is Wilhelm Bousset.<sup>24</sup> As well, Bousset was dismissive of the Apocrypha and the Pseudepigrapha, deeming them as reflecting only ‘popular piety’, in comparison with the more serious, rabbinic ‘learned’ literature. George Foot Moore, critical of Bousset’s views, notes that as Judaism had not sought to perpetuate the Apocrypha and

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<sup>22</sup> For example, see Robert Murray, ‘Jews, Hebrews and Christians: Some Needed Distinctions’, *NovT* 24 (1982) 194-201.

<sup>23</sup> An early exemplar of the ‘separate religions’ approach is M.J. Lagrange, *Le messianisme chez les Juifs*, Paris, 1909. Lagrange’s views follow those of Emil Schürer, an earlier but contemporary scholar, who described early Jewish prayer as ‘bound in the fetters of a rigid mechanism’, as a consequence of which, ‘vital piety could scarcely be any longer spoken of’; *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*, vol. 2, trans. S. Taylor and P. Christie, T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1898, 115.

<sup>24</sup> Wilhelm Bousset, revised by H. Gressmann, *Die religion des Judentums im späthellenistischen Veitalter*, J.C.B. Mohn (Paul Siebeck), Tübingen, 1926

Pseudepigrapha, Bousset had erred in not focussing on rabbinic literature which the Jews had preserved. Thus, according to Moore, Bousset's disparaging account of early Judaism is poorly grounded from the point of view of literary research and predisposes historical scholarship of Judaism into strands of normative and non-normative Judaism rather than Judaic continuity, renewal and transformation.<sup>25</sup> Such an approach invites the view that some revisiting of Jewish texts such as the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha may have been attempts to redefine Jewish identity. Moore's criticism of Bousset's work, however generally well-informed, overlooks the contribution of Bousset to an awareness of the relationship of Jewish soteriology to historical study of New Testament texts.<sup>26</sup>

### **'Parting of the roads?'**

The second schema is represented by the boundaries between Judaic literature and religion and early Christianity, described by Foakes Jackson as a 'parting of the roads';<sup>27</sup> a parting not in the sense of a divergence but as the beginning of a new religious hegemony. Using the 'road' metaphor, such a parting has been depicted as a T junction depicting rabbinic Judaism departing along one arm of the T junction and early Christianity heading along the other. Such a twentieth-century metaphor may be regarded as an extension of the view of Ignatius of Antioch who declared, 'it is monstrous to talk of Jesus Christ and to practise Judaism',<sup>28</sup> thus revealing an early, if not widespread, degree of discursive vehemence rather than objective historical interpretation. The use of 'road' as a metaphor to describe

<sup>25</sup> George Foot Moore, 'Christian Writers on Judaism', *HTR* 14:3 (1921) 197-254; cf. Samuel Sandmel, *Judaism and Christian Beginnings*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1978, 13.

<sup>26</sup> See critical discussion on Moore's work by M. Smith, 'The Work of George Foot Moore', *Harvard Library Bulletin* 15 (1967) 169-179.

<sup>27</sup> F.J. Foakes Jackson, *The Parting of the Roads: Studies in the Development of Judaism and Early Christianity*, Arnold, London, 1912.

<sup>28</sup> Ignatius of Antioch, *Magnesians* 10:3.

Judaic-Christian borderlines has its own long winding history, even into the twenty-first century. According to Daniel Boyarin, the origins of what became Christianity and Judaism involved ‘roads crissing and crossing through which identities [and] entities ... were forged in antiquity’.<sup>29</sup> Notwithstanding reservations about the limitations of such metaphors, Boyarin’s concept of a plurality of roads ‘crissing and crossing’, rather than a single road ‘parting’, is closer to the main arguments of this thesis.

Four related issues are raised by the views of von Harnack and scholars of similar views.<sup>30</sup> First, evidence from the first century is quite limited and thereby not conducive to drawing the conclusion of a definitive separation. Given that the study of the history of both Judaism and Christianity involves reconstructing the complex range of issues involved in the interactions between geographically and chronologically diverse entities, this study suggests that a definitive separation cannot be drawn until well after the first century of the Common Era.<sup>31</sup> As well, contemporary scholars have noted the ideological element underlying the question of when Christianity and Judaism did become separate religions, giving rise to basic proprietorial issues of ‘whose Judaism?’ and ‘whose Christianity’?<sup>32</sup>

Second, the starting point of von Harnack is a retrospective focus back through

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<sup>29</sup> Boyarin, *Borderlines*, xiv.

<sup>30</sup> See also Emil Schürer, W. Bousset, and Fr. Bonsirven; cf. George Foot Moore who in 1921 critiqued earlier writers for their neglect of Jewish literature, ‘Christian Writers on Judaism’, 197-254.

<sup>31</sup> Many contemporary scholars accept that it was not until the fourth century CE that Judaism and Christianity achieved status as separate religions. See for example Rosemary Radford Ruether, ‘Judaism and Christianity: Two Fourth-Century Religions’, *Science Religieuses/Studies in Religion* 2 (1972), 1-10.

<sup>32</sup> See, for example, Boyarin, *Borderlines*, 6; and Judith Lieu, ‘I am a Christian: Martyrdom and the beginning of “Christian” Identity’, in *Neither Jew nor Greek*, 211-31.

almost two thousand years of religious tradition and doctrine. Thus, there is the probability of perceptions and beliefs being projected onto a period in which the religious actors, far from being focussed on theological considerations, were rather dealing with their own contemporaneous issues of social, political and religious relevance.<sup>33</sup> Third, such views do not take account of the concept that rather than Christianity arising from or ‘succeeding’ Judaism, it may have served to stimulate the creation of the rabbinic Judaism that emerged as a normative religion in the third and fourth centuries. It may also be the case that neither emerged nor developed as a consequence of the other but that there was, in the context of the broader narrative of religion in antiquity, a mutually co-responsive emergence of two religions drawn from the religious context of the first century.<sup>34</sup> That early Christianity was to develop into a religion which did not simply emulate the diversity of Second Temple Judaisms and was able eventually to stand apart from the manifold contemporary and competing religious cults, does suggest that divergent trajectories began to take shape by the end of the first century.<sup>35</sup> The fourth issue raised by the views of early modern scholars relates to the concept of ‘identity’ in discussing early Judaism and primitive Christianity and their respective ‘identity-formations’. As the term ‘identity’ is one which has been used in English only since early modern times and the word has no equivalent in ancient Hebrew or New Testament Greek, the use of the term to describe

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<sup>33</sup> See Judith Lieu’s discussion in “‘The Parting of the Ways’: Theological Construct or Historical Reality?’, 101-119. Support for the distinction between the terms ‘theological construct’ and ‘historical reality’ is not to suggest a rigid separation between them to the extent that neither intrudes upon the other. Given that the discussion is focussed on two emerging religions in the first century, it would seem overly simplistic to assume theological considerations can be totally excluded from the discussion of historical (religious) reality.

<sup>34</sup> Boyarin, *Borderlines*, 71, 261 n.185.

<sup>35</sup> Four such ‘trajectories’, the Temple and the new Jerusalem, the Lamb and redemption, the priesthood, and the Throne, are discussed in Part 2.

religious groups in the first century has the inherent risk of imposing modern, determinative discourse on groups which did not possess ‘identities’.<sup>36</sup>

An example of such modern discourse is provided by the term ‘sectarian Judaism’, frequently applied to what is regarded as a feature of Second Temple Judaism. Within a first-century context, however, neither ‘Judaism’ nor ‘sectarian Judaism’ were terms of self-identity.<sup>37</sup> Given that Judaism in the Second Temple period was neither normative nor monolithic, Jewish sects may be regarded as constituting a variety of groups, parties and movements which, although standing in contrast with each other, were not in competition with or actively opposing any ‘mainstream’ Judaism. Although the term ‘Jewish sectarianism’ may generally infer prominent groups such as the Sadducees and the Pharisees, there was an extensive range of groups reflecting a variety of religious beliefs and practices.<sup>38</sup> If the word ‘sect’ is divorced from any sociological perspective and is regarded as implying ‘any group or movement involving a minority of the population’,<sup>39</sup> the number of groups which could be classified as sects increases to include the Jesus

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<sup>36</sup> See discussion by Judith Lieu, *Neither Jew Nor Greek?*, 191 and 208. For a discussion of group identity formation in first-century Christian communities see John K. Riches, *Conflicting Mythologies: Identity Formation in the Gospels of Mark and Matthew*, T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 2000.

<sup>37</sup> Although they may not have been terms of self-identity, ‘sectarianism’ was recognised contemporaneously, notably by Josephus, who refers to the Sadducees, Pharisees and Essenes as parties ‘at that time’, presumably during the reign of Jonathan the Hasmonean (164-143 BCE); *Ant.* 13.171.

<sup>38</sup> Notwithstanding the important roles played by Jewish sects in the Second Temple Period, that the majority of contemporary Jews were not members of a specific sect was acknowledged by Josephus (*Ant.* 18:12, 17), a view affirmed by modern historians who affirm that the major sects, the Sadducees, Pharisees and Essenes, represented only a small proportion of the Jewish Judean and Galilean populations; for example, Richard A. Horsley with John S. Hanson, *Bandits Prophets and Messiahs: Popular Movements in the Time of Jesus*, Trinity Press International, Harrisburg, 1999, xii.

<sup>39</sup> Jack T. Sanders, *Schismatics, Sectarians, Dissidents, Deviants*, SCM Press, London, 1993, 114-115.

movements which began as sects within a range of first-century Judaisms.<sup>40</sup> Thus, although the term ‘identity’ is frequently employed in respect of Judaism and Christianity in antiquity, it is a term which is in effect anachronistic to Judaic and Christian sects, groups and movements of the first century.<sup>41</sup>

### **‘From parting to partings?’**

The third schema, emerging in the last decades of the twentieth century through the work of scholars such as Walter Bauer,<sup>42</sup> Helmut Gese,<sup>43</sup> John Meier<sup>44</sup> and James Dunn,<sup>45</sup> purports to demonstrate that the first century did not witness a metaphorical ‘T junction’ separation between Judaism and early Christianity but rather a ‘Y junction’. Thus, the earlier model of separation becomes one of ‘parting’ which itself soon becomes pluralised to ‘partings’. Although less supersessionist than the earlier model, the pluralist ‘partings’ construct may be seen as an improvement in a theological, if not historical, understanding of the first century. It is, however, hardly a model which would have solicited acceptance by the Judaic or embryonic Christian parties of the time as, despite appearances, it serves not as an historical model but as one with theology as its central agenda. In any event, it

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<sup>40</sup> See Shaye J.D. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1987, 114-115.

<sup>41</sup> For discussion of the term ‘Jew’ see Shaye J.D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1999, 69 and Steve Mason, ‘Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism: Problems of Categorization in Ancient History’, *Currents in Biblical Research*, 9:1 (2010) 98-126.

<sup>42</sup> Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1971; first published as *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum*, Tübingen, 1934.

<sup>43</sup> H. Gese, *Essays on Biblical Theology*, Augsburg, Minneapolis, 1981.

<sup>44</sup> John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, 3 vols., Doubleday, New York and London, 1993.

<sup>45</sup> James D.G. Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways: Between Christianity and Judaism and their Significance for the Character of Christianity*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, SCM Press, London, 2006.

reflects a Christian (not Jewish) approach which may have some origins in biblical-theological scholarship from the late nineteenth century to the late twentieth century, as well as a modification to the earlier supersessionist approach of von Harnack and colleagues.<sup>46</sup>

Having expressed his basic approach in 1977 to the concept of a ‘parting of the ways’ between Christianity and Judaism,<sup>47</sup> James Dunn followed up in 1991 with his concept of ‘partings’, based on his perception of the challenges of the Jesus movements to what he describes as the ‘four pillars of Judaism’.<sup>48</sup> According to Dunn, monotheism, covenantal relationships of people and land, Torah and the Temple involved a variety of religious expressions at different times, equating to a range of ‘partings’ between two emerging religions, namely early Christianity and rabbinic (or formative) Judaism.<sup>49</sup> Such a ‘four-pillars’ model, however, may be regarded as a retrospective theological construct which is unnecessarily exclusive of other phenomena which can also be construed as belonging to the variety of contemporary religious expressions. For instance, it may also be argued that prophecy, apocalyptic, eschatology and Jewish sectarianism, while not necessarily ‘pillars’ of Judaism in terms of Dunn’s classifications, are nonetheless significant and underlying transformative vectors within Judaism as well as being relevant features of religious belief and expression in both Judaic and primitive

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<sup>46</sup> Notwithstanding its emphasis on biblical texts, potentially increasing the level of historical analysis, biblical theology was still largely pejorative in its views on first-century Judaism.

<sup>47</sup> J.D.G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Enquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity*, Trinity Press International, Philadelphia, 1977.

<sup>48</sup> Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways*, xiiiif., xxiv-xxviii, 126, 215, 301, 319.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.



Christian circles in the first century.<sup>50</sup> In both respects they occupy a legitimate place in the religious history of antiquity and should not be excluded from attempts to establish early Judaic-Christian boundaries.<sup>51</sup>

The contribution of James Dunn to the discussion of Judaic-Christian boundaries has added to an ongoing discussion into the twenty-first century with a comprehensive range of views widening the debate, challenging Dunn's concept of 'partings'. One such scholar, who reacted early (in 1994) to Dunn's thinking, is Judith Lieu who questioned if the term 'parting of the ways' was an historical construct rather than an historical reality.<sup>52</sup> Others have continued to contribute, seeking a more historiographical basis and a wider contextual approach to the search for Judaic-Christian boundaries. The range of contributions include assessments of the roles of apocalyptic and messianism, as well as the reinforcement of the significance of the Judaic context from which Christianity

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<sup>50</sup> In his text, *The Parting of the Ways*, Dunn excludes consideration of apocalyptic as a significant factor and makes only two brief references to eschatology, restricted to the 'eschatological consciousness of first Christians' (pages 108, 123).

<sup>51</sup> I am not suggesting Dunn's 'four pillars' are not fundamental aspects of the Judaic historical and theological context from which Christianity emerged. Nor am I suggesting that prophecy, apocalyptic, and Jewish sectarianism are more 'fundamental' than Dunn's 'pillars'. Indeed, there are yet other contributing factors to the context of Christianity's birth, not least including wisdom, colonial rule, and external political and cultural influences including Hellenism. Although such a list is not exhaustive, it indicates the vast field of scholarship required before hypothesising specific factors and time-lines in the elusive Judaic-Christian boundaries. Concerning the perceived significance of the 'pillars', Jonathan Z. Smith suggests the frequency of the 'pillars' provides a 'cognitive recognition' which tends to have overshadowed the congruence between other religious phenomena, such as the prophecy and apocalyptic and the continuum between them; Smith, 'A Twice-Told Tale', 144-146.

<sup>52</sup> Judith M. Lieu raises basic issues concerning a 'partings' model in her article, "'The Parting of the Ways': Theological Construct or Historical Reality?", 101-119. Her books which continue self-identity issues particularly in the context of Christian origins in a Judaic context include *Neither Jew Nor Greek?* and *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World*.

emerged.<sup>53</sup> Such approaches have also contributed to the ongoing discussion and the growing consensus of doubt concerning metaphorical models being significantly helpful to the determination of a ‘parting’ or ‘partings’ between Judaism and Christianity.

In support of the differentiation between a ‘departure’ and a ‘parting’, different metaphorical devices have been employed, including that of mother and child, mother and daughter, mother and two children, as well as that of ‘sibling rivalry’ between Judaism and Christianity. Boyarin suggests that far from Judaism being the ‘mother’ of Christianity, the two religions ‘are twins joined at the hip’,<sup>54</sup> a metaphor which also raises questions rather than answers, such as the implications of such twins being identical or non-identical, what vital organs are shared between them, and their prognosis of survival.<sup>55</sup> The metaphor of mother (Judaism) and daughter (Christianity), one which suggests the transfer of similar if not identical genes from one religious organism to another, was suggested by a Jewish scholar in the mid-twentieth century as a means of depicting Judaic-Christian divergence.<sup>56</sup> Apart from the difficulty of seeking to extract specific correspondences from a metaphor intended for general application, such matriarchially-oriented metaphorical approaches are not particularly helpful given that they are essentially a

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<sup>53</sup> Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed (eds.), *The Ways that Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 2007. Specifically relevant to this thesis are the editors’ ‘Introduction’ and chapters by Daniel Boyarin, Paula Fredrikson, Martin Goodman, Andrew S. Jacobs, and Robert A. Kraft.

<sup>54</sup> Boyarin, *Borderlines*, 5; idem., *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism*, Stanford University Press, 1999, 1-2.

<sup>55</sup> Otherwise expressed, Boyarin’s metaphor raises the issue of whether constituent elements are shared between the enjoined twins and, if so, what is the nature and extent of the sharing between the source and the target domains of the metaphor.

<sup>56</sup> See Jacob Z. Lauterbach, ‘Jesus in the Talmud’, *Rabbinic Essays*, Ktav, New York, 1951, 473-570.

refinement of the ‘departure’ model.<sup>57</sup> In noting that the approach of ‘the partings of the ways’ acknowledges the importance of the context of first-century Judaism, that it recognises the continuing significance of rabbinic Judaism and helps to deepen the debate on the complexity and variety of first-century Judaism, Judith Lieu asserts that the views of James Dunn<sup>58</sup> are not entirely free from theological apologetic and that the theological perspective overshadows his historical focus.<sup>59</sup> Thus, a basis is established for the development of a fourth schema, one which explores a more historical perspective on Judaic-Christian boundaries in the first century.

### **‘Partings to parallelism?’**

The fourth schema focusses more on distinct but less theological meanings attached to the local and specific institutions, sects and movements of the first century. Envisaging neither a T separation nor a Y junction in first-century Judaic-Christian relations, it is represented by diverging but parallel tracks, departing from a single line as deployed in railway systems, a metaphor which helps to remove the supersessionist tendencies embodied in the first two schemas.<sup>60</sup> As first-century Judaism and Christianities involved diverse and inchoate, but also creative phenomena, with an interaction of religious ideas, practices and innovations, the notion of parallelism rather than parting may be considered a more apt metaphor.

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<sup>57</sup> Lieu, ‘The Parting of the Ways’, page 108. For the views of a Jewish scholar on this point, see Alan Segal, *Rebecca’s Children: Judaism and Christianity in the Roman World*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1986.

<sup>58</sup> Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways*; *idem* (ed.), *Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways AD 70 to 135*.

<sup>59</sup> Lieu, ‘The Parting of the Ways’. In looking at the context of first-century Judaism, Lieu also cautions against historical or religious accounts being presented through theological assertions.

<sup>60</sup> I acknowledge that there is a spatial element to many, if not most, metaphors in that they seek to portray a spatial relationship between two subjects or phenomena.

However, for an increasing number of researchers, ‘parting(s)’ and ‘parallelism’, both heavily dependent upon metaphor, are not sufficiently comprehensive to capture the history of religious events and literature in antiquity.<sup>61</sup> In the place of a two-thousand year, theologically retrospective view of first-century Judaism and Christianity, involving an ‘abstract or universal conception of each religion’, the focus of a new schema shifts to an historico-religious and more eirenic account, based on the specific and contemporaneous characteristics of Judaism and Christianity.<sup>62</sup> To avoid the syncretising tendencies inherent in the first and second schemas, a specific focus is on the social and political phenomena of the period, viewed in terms of prophetic and apocalyptic discourse within the perspective of historical continuity and discontinuity.<sup>63</sup>

### **Message-driven metaphors**

The metaphorical use of language, which is intended to convey additional insight and meaning to a subject or concept through the use of an uncommon or unexpected word or phrase, requires a context: metaphors devoid of context are essentially meaningless.<sup>64</sup> For example, the metaphor ‘the parting of the ways’ requires a context if it is to be understood in terms of Judaic-Christian relations.<sup>65</sup> The term ‘parting’, which denotes an act of

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<sup>61</sup> One of the first late-modern scholars to challenge the terms ‘parting’ and ‘partings’ is G. Stanton, ‘Aspects of Early Christian-Jewish Polemic and Apologetic’, *NTS* 31 (1985) 377-92.

<sup>62</sup> Lieu, ‘The Parting of the Ways’, 108-9.

<sup>63</sup> The concept of a prophetic-apocalyptic continuum, reflecting Judaic-Christian continuity and renewal, is discussed in chapter 3.

<sup>64</sup> As will be noted in the discussion in chapter 3 concerning metaphor and the *Apocalypse of John*, metaphor involves more than words or phrases: it also has a conceptual structure, arising from ‘cross-domain correlations in our experience, which give rise to the perceived similarities between the two domains with the metaphor’; Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 245. Thus, metaphor has a *gestalterisch* quality, combining the juxtaposition of language, conceptual structures, and grounding in human experience.

<sup>65</sup> There is a further discussion of metaphor, in the context of the *Apocalypse of John*, in chapter 4.

separation, leaves no room in the metaphor for an appreciation of a sense of continuity and renewal: the term clearly implies a state of separation between Judaism and Christianity. Such a metaphor, setting aside issues of intentionality, is one which may be challenged as ‘message-driven’.<sup>66</sup>

In respect of modern analysis of the Judaic-Christian context in the first century, the language of metaphor is quite extensive, frequently engaging figures of speech such as the parting or partings of the ways, boundaries, borders and frontiers, as well as terms such as bifurcation, separation and divergence. Such metaphorical expressions are used to depict analogous phenomena early in the Common Era; namely, related issues of identity, ideology or authority between early Judaism and early Christianity. A significant difference exists, however, between the two examples of metaphor, ‘bread’ and ‘parting’. The former was used in contemporary contexts as a metaphor of immediate, everyday significance to the hearers (and readers); whereas, the latter is a modern figure of speech attempting to provide an analogy, perhaps more theologically than historically orientated, with religious events in antiquity.

Metaphors are not infrequently used in a descriptive sense as, for example, to depict a life journey.<sup>67</sup> In the case of a metaphor such as the ‘parting(s) of the ways’, an imaginative interpretation of meaning may well be too over-reaching in an understanding of a complex situation. The commonly-held metaphorical concept of a ‘parting of the

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<sup>66</sup> That metaphors involving the use term ‘parting’ may insufficiently describe the theological significance of the religious phenomena depicted in apocalyptic texts becomes apparent in the discussion in chapter 4, of the metaphors, the new Jerusalem, the priesthood, and the Throne as portrayed in the *Apocalypse of John*.

<sup>67</sup> The metaphor of life as a journey, depicted as a key conceptual metaphor, is discussed by Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 44-45, 89-101.

ways' may be challenged by the views of first-century Christians, Jews and pagans who did not identify contemporary Judaism and Christianities as either separate religions or as necessarily oppositional in their belief systems.<sup>68</sup> Thus, the terms 'parting' and 'partings' may be an inadequate or faulty description of what in fact is a complex variety of events and phenomena embodied in the development and emergence of the relationships between early Judaism and Christianities. Irrespective of the nature of the metaphor, a major difficulty in the use of a single metaphor to describe an historical situation is that of capturing the nuances of complex historical activities and their interrelations. Further, a single metaphor is unlikely to depict, to any adequate degree, the contemporary context of the metaphor. Nor does a single metaphor take account of the context, including the cultural and religious background, of the user of the metaphor, both of which may be considered relevant if not indispensable to its historical understanding. The risk of misunderstanding in the use of metaphors to depict, for instance, separation, distance, boundaries or frontiers in space or time is illustrated by temporal differences of understanding. A modern metaphorical understanding of 'boundary' is based on clearly demarcated lines of separation such as those of a football field or between political states. In contrast, first-century boundaries were more frequently thought of as cultural or religious influences as well as, if not more so than, territorial divisions.<sup>69</sup>

The central element of the metaphorical 'parting(s)' is that, notwithstanding the many common elements, traditions and movements between Judaism of the Second Temple Period and first-century Christianities, a clear barrier developed between what

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<sup>68</sup> For a wider discussion, see Lieu, *Neither Jew Nor Greek?* It might also be noted that the term 'religion' is itself problematic in that it carries a modern sense cast back on antiquity.

<sup>69</sup> Lieu, *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World*, 98-99.

became the distinctive religions of Judaism and Christianity. Paradigmatically, such a barrier resulted in an inflexible division which has survived two thousand years of unmetaphorically-entrenched religious ideology. The issue arises, therefore, as to the extent to which such metaphors as parting(s) and junction(s) are helpful, if at all, to an understanding of the history of first-century religion or if they have been developed to further theological constructs rather than deepen insight into the religious history of the period. A further issue concerning the use of metaphors to elucidate the emergence of Christianities from first-century Judaisms arises from the use of the metaphor ‘mother and child’ to depict divergence.<sup>70</sup> Even if the metaphor alludes to the ‘child growing up and leaving home’, it involves the assumption that each religious entity shares a cognate, if not self-identical, genetic structure. Although there are common features between early Christianity and early Judaism, it is not the case that the Judaisms of the first century can be reduced to a single organism. Rather, the emerging Christianities of the first century took on the characteristics of diverse Judaisms, some more than others, as for example the Qumran Community. Thus, the ‘mother and child’ category of metaphor may be challenged as oversimplifying a divergence arising from diversity rather than homogeneity.

Expressing a critical view of recent metaphorical approaches to describe Judaic-Christian boundaries is not to suggest that the use of metaphors is a modern methodology. In chapter 4, I discuss the extensive use of metaphors in the account of John’s visions in his *Apocalypse*. For some, a *Tendenz* to figurative depiction is evident on the part of prophets from the seventh century BCE. For example, Jeremiah’s vision of the earth ‘waste and ruins’ (4:8, 20, 23), the heavens without light, quaking mountains and

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<sup>70</sup> See use of the term ‘mother and child’ by Jacob Lauterbach, ‘Jesus in the Talmud’, 473.

all the hills moving to and fro, and the ‘fruitful land ... a desert and all its cities ... laid in ruins’ (4:23-24, 26) was not an observation of actual events but a metaphorical vision of the impending consequences of God’s judgement. Such a vision of cosmic upheaval is to warn of the day of Jerusalem’s destruction, deploying imagery which is addressed figuratively to an historic event.<sup>71</sup> The example from Jeremiah is far from isolated: prophetic and apocalyptic literature frequently employs metaphorical language, although figurative in character, to convey concepts. A metaphorical perspective is appropriate to explore the concept of apocalyptic as an intricate complex or blending of metaphors, not one created retrospectively by modern scholars, but one of contemporary meaning and significance in Second Temple Judaism. Blended metaphors, when not viewed through a literal lens, serve to reveal something of the hope and renewal embodied in the prophetic-apocalyptic movement.

An example of Jewish literature which employs an extensive rhetorical and metaphorical narrative is provided in Book Four of *1 Enoch* in which the author depicts Israel’s history from the creation to the arrival of the messianic kingdom through the interactions of a wide range of animals and birds. From cows of different colours and a snow-white bull, the cast of bovine characters extends to include elephants, camels and

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<sup>71</sup> See, for example, Paul S. Fiddes, *The Promised End: Eschatology in Theology and Literature*, Blackwell, Oxford, 2000, 23-24. Some caution is required, however, in seeking to establish a nexus between perceived metaphorical language of the prophets and the modern metaphor of the ‘parting of the way(s)’. A distinction may be argued in terms of their respective functions. For instance, the ‘parting(s)’ metaphor is deployed by modern scholars to give structure and therefore meaning towards understanding an historical sequence of phenomena; whereas, the perceived (by some) metaphorical language of the prophets may be more accurately described as *figurative* language due to its use of physical objects including, as will be noted, animals. It is argued in Part 2 that serving yet a different, and divergent, purpose is the metaphorical language of John in his *Apocalypse* in respect of the new Jerusalem, the Lamb, the priesthood, and the Throne.



donkeys as well as, emerging from the flood, ‘all classes of population: lions, leopards, wolves, snakes, hyenas, wild boars, foxes, squirrels, swine, hawks, eagles, kites, striped crow(s) and ravens’ (*I Enoch* 89:10). The extensive use of figurative animal-metaphors in the narrative would be largely meaningless and regarded as an empty metaphor by a modern reader without any knowledge of the meta-narratives such as the creation, the flood, the exodus, the building, destruction and rebuilding of the Temple, and the messianic expectations expressed in the account of Israel’s history.<sup>72</sup> In taking into account the view that readers and texts are contextualised and that as a consequence ‘the meaning of a text can never be natural or self-evident’,<sup>73</sup> it may equally be argued that the animal metaphors would have conveyed specific meanings to Enoch’s contemporaries who could have related the figurative-metaphorical accounts of the animals and birds and their interactions to contemporary religious traditions and prophecies.<sup>74</sup> Thus, although from a philosophical basis it may be argued that metaphors are explicitly meaningless,<sup>75</sup> in the case of the study of the history of religion they are not only impossible to avoid, they may

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<sup>72</sup> For example, Enoch’s ‘animal apocalypse’, *I Enoch* 89, having depicted the pollution and impurity of the Temple, does not return to the theme of a temple; nor is there any reference to ‘a temple in the eschatological kingdom’; Daniel C. Olsen, *A New Reading of the Animal Apocalypse of I Enoch*, Brill, Leiden, 2013, 96.

<sup>73</sup> William Scott Green, ‘Introduction’, *Approaches to Ancient Judaism*, Vol. III, ed. W.S. Green, Scholars Press, Chico CA, 1981, xix.

<sup>74</sup> For a discussion of metaphorical events and empty narrative, see Tom Thatcher, ‘Empty Metaphors and Apocalyptic Rhetoric’, *JAAR* 66:3 (1998) 549-570. Thatcher suggests the possibility that the ‘animal apocalypse’ of *I Enoch* associates the rise of the Maccabean Dynasty with the coming messianic age (page 556), thus reinforcing the view expressed above, drawn from Jeremiah 4, that metaphors may be used to depict historic events.

<sup>75</sup> See, for example, Donald Davidson, ‘What Metaphors Mean’, *Critical Enquiry* 5 (1978) 31-47. For contrasting views, see Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1987.

also serve a useful conceptual function.<sup>76</sup> For example, it may be assumed that in *I Enoch*, the account of the animals' and birds' behaviour and interaction, deploys them as relevant and meaningful instruments, of a metaphorical nature, to depict the historical events and messages. However, it may also be argued that, although metaphor is generally regarded as a sub-category of figure of speech, much apocalyptic language may be more accurately described as figurative rather than metaphorical. Further, in some cases, such as the interpretation of the 'animal metaphors' in *I Enoch* as forecasts of political events, the interpreter may be reading a code, rather than metaphor, into the text.<sup>77</sup>

It may be argued, of course, that metaphors by nature are essentially conceptual.<sup>78</sup> For instance, religion as an abstract concept requires metaphorical interpretation in respect of such constituent parts as belief, observance and ritual. The issue, therefore, is not the use of metaphors to increase our understanding of the history of religion in respect of the Judaic-Christian context and boundaries. For example, structural, blended and cognitive metaphors can provide a helpful conceptual framework within which one's understanding of complex experiences can be organised.<sup>79</sup> On the other hand, the modern use of metaphors to provide a structure for and give meaning to religious events of the first

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<sup>76</sup> In contrast to the view that metaphors may be explicitly meaningless is the view that metaphors serve to structure our conceptual systems; for example, cognitive metaphor theory holds that we actually think by metaphor, that metaphor is deeply embedded in language and grounded in our experience. See Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 39, 145, 235, 244.

<sup>77</sup> The complexity of metaphor and the meaning it conveys in contrast to literal language is discussed in more depth in the following chapter in respect of the metaphors deployed in the *Apocalypse of John*.

<sup>78</sup> See discussion by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2003, 'Afterword', 272-73. Lakoff and Johnson argue for the existence and significance of conceptual metaphors, thus raising issues for literalist and objectivist views of knowledge and meaning (page 273).

<sup>79</sup> This view is discussed in more detail, in relation to metaphors in the *Apocalypse of John*, in chapter 4.

century gives rise to the risk of imposing contemporary constructs on events in antiquity. Further, some modern scholarship tends to employ modern metaphors to interpret Judaic-Christian divergences while overlooking the complex metaphorical structures, both literary and phenomenological, in prophecy and apocalyptic.

## Chapter Two

### Plurality and Diversity: First-Century Judaisms and Christianities

The initial focus of this chapter is the identification of factors within Judaic tradition and Second Temple Judaism which are relevant to the issues of continuity and renewal, followed by the emergence of indicators of divergence in first-century Judaisms and Christianities and the relations between them. Second, towards establishing indicators of divergence in the first century, the extent to which early Christianity is tethered to Judaic tradition and the significance of Jesus and the Jesus movement are discussed. This analysis serves as a background to Part 2 concerning the significance within the *Apocalypse of John* of the Temple and the new Jerusalem, the Lamb and redemption, the priesthood, and the Throne as indicators of Judaic-Christian divergence.

For some modern scholars, by the second century BCE Judaism had begun to take on characteristics of prototypical Judaism, a recognisable shape distinct from the religion of Israel. Such a view, not uncommonly held in the early and middle decades of the twentieth century, was held by Joseph Bonsirven,<sup>80</sup> Joachim Jeremias,<sup>81</sup> and George Foot Moore.<sup>82</sup> That Judaism began to take on normative characteristics in the second century BCE is an understanding largely discarded more recently due to the increased recognition of the continuity and renewal of Jewish belief and practice well into the Common Era.

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<sup>80</sup> Joseph S. Bonsirven, *Palestinian Judaism in the Time of Jesus Christ*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1964.

<sup>81</sup> Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus: An Investigation into Economic and Social Conditions during the New Testament Period*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1969.

<sup>82</sup> George Foot Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era: The Age of Tannaim*, 3 vols., Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1927-1930.

Further, the concept of a single ‘normative’ Judaism in the Second Temple Period has been largely if not entirely replaced by a diverse range of Judaisms which congregate in varying structures and alignments. Although it is generally acknowledged that the destruction of the Temple was a watershed event in the transformation from the religion of Israel to prototypical Judaism, renewal and reform remained a continuing process. For example, the Jewish sages initiated reforms early in the Common Era, which contributed to what emerged as ‘normative’ Judaism.<sup>83</sup> The terms early and middle Judaism approximate the period 300 BCE to 200 CE, following which is a period of Judaism known as ‘Rabbinic’ or ‘Mishnaic’. Prior to 300 BCE are periods of post-exilic and exilic Judaism and, earlier, the history and religion of Israel.<sup>84</sup>

In considering first-century Judaism as a context in which Christianity germinated, the issue of ‘perspective’ warrants discussion from three viewpoints. At the outset, there is the range of meanings and their implications of the contemporaneous use of the term ‘Judaism’. Its first literary appearance is in 2 Maccabees in which ‘appearances came from heaven to those who fought bravely for Judaism (ὕπὲρ τοῦ Ἰουδαϊσμοῦ), so that though few in number they seized the whole land ... and regained possession of the temple famous throughout the world ...’ ( 2 Macc. 2:21-22a). Its initial Maccabean literary context is the religion of Judea and the Judeans who, for religious reasons, sought to preserve their Judaic beliefs from Hellenistic influences of the Syrians. The use of the

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<sup>83</sup> Gabriele Boccaccini, *Roots of Rabbinic Judaism: An Intellectual History, from Ezekiel to Daniel*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids and Cambridge, 2002, xiii.

<sup>84</sup> John Charlesworth, ‘Foreword’, *Middle Judaism: Jewish Thought 300 BCE to 200 CE*, Gabriele Boccaccini, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1991, xvii. Although Charlesworth describes the period 350 BCE to 200 CE as ‘early Judaism’, Boccaccini adopts the term ‘middle Judaism’ for the period 300 BCE to 200 CE. The term ‘middle Judaism’, however, does not appear to have met with widespread acceptance or use.

term ‘Judaism’ in the context of Judea and the religion of Judea in the second century BCE embodies it with an element of ethnic identity as well as a religious quality: the continuity of religious practices such as purity laws and circumcision (2 Macc. 6). Such a statement, however, is not to imply a normative quality: nor is it intended to disregard the range of Judaisms of the Second Temple Period.

The second viewpoint concerns the narrative of religion: its formation, consolidation and prescriptive quality. The term ‘normative Judaism’ has been described as the form of Judaism ‘which attained general acceptance and authority’ by the end of the second century of the Common Era.<sup>85</sup> It may be argued, however, that using the end of the second century CE as a determining date for ‘normative’ Judaism can be misleading because of Judaism’s long history of diversity and the range of sects, parties and movements which constitute a series of Judaisms. It should not be assumed, therefore, that rabbinic Judaism after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE is any more ‘normative’ than earlier Judaisms. Rather, rabbinism appears to have reinforced Pharisaism,<sup>86</sup> including the Pharisaism of Johanan ben Zakkai and, as Pharisaism constituted only one grouping within Judaic diversity, care is required in seeking to establish a specific date by which Judaism could be described as ‘normative’.<sup>87</sup> The use of the term ‘normative’ to describe Judaism is not helpful to historical understanding if it conveys an arbitrary categorisation rather than an approximate demarcation. Although there is a consensus that Christian origins are drawn from the Judaisms of the Second

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<sup>85</sup> Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era*, vol. 1, 125.

<sup>86</sup> That rabbinism may have reinforced Pharisaism, considered a majority view, remains nonetheless a hypothesis.

<sup>87</sup> See W.D. Davies, *Torah in the Messianic Age and/or Age to Come*, SBLMS, SBL, Philadelphia, 1952, 53.

Temple Period, the narrative that Christianity contributed to the creation of Judaism as a religion is quite conceivable, given that rabbinic Judaism took a normative shape after the emergence of Christianity. However, it is also possible that from the diverse, sectarian Judaisms of the first century BCE emerged two religions, not coterminous, but co-emerging religious formations drawn from the broader narrative of religion in antiquity.<sup>88</sup>

The third viewpoint concerns the use of the term ‘ancient Israel’. Although commonly used, the term may entail two errors of interpretation. One is the risk of engaging the literary text in a superficial manner, paraphrasing it with a ‘sprinkling of archaeological data’, stirring in some ‘mineral-rich inscriptions’, and then serving it up as history of Israel.<sup>89</sup> The other potential error is to assume without qualification that the Israel portrayed in biblical texts is historically grounded and that the historical Palestinian people correspond with the ‘people of Israel’ depicted in the Hebrew scriptures.<sup>90</sup> That there was a considerable diversity of Judaism within Palestine and other regions is now largely undisputed. Believers in the ‘God of Israel’ extended from Palestine to the province of Judah and the Jerusalem Temple, to Samaria in the North and Ammon in the East.

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<sup>88</sup> Daniel Boyarin, *Borderlines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2004, 71, 261 n.185.

<sup>89</sup> Lester L. Grabbe, *Priests, Prophets, Diviners, Sages: A Socio-Historical Study of Religious Specialists in Ancient Israel*, Trinity Press International, Valley Forge PA, 1995, 3.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. For a more comprehensive discussion see P.R. Davies, *In Search of ‘Ancient Israel’*, JSOT, Sheffield, 1992.

## The *esse* of early Judaism

The challenge to locate the ‘essential nature’ of early Judaism as a religious quantum, assuming its achievability, is far beyond the scope of this thesis.<sup>91</sup> To the extent that there may be an *esse*, or pronounced and sustained constituent quality of early Judaism, it could be expected to be revealed in the writings of early Judaism. Such does not appear to be the case.<sup>92</sup> James Charlesworth cautions: ‘We must not assume there is an essence to early Judaism, and then in a heavy-handed way construct models and techniques for helping us find what we think is there’.<sup>93</sup> Less daunting is the search for an understanding of the range of diverse *characteristics* of early Judaism, with a focus on the relevance of the prophetic-apocalyptic continuum and messianic eschatology as religious phenomena which serve to establish borderlines between early Judaism and primitive Christianity.

In terms of early modern scholarship, the issue of what constitutes Judaism was raised in 1915 by Benjamin Bacon<sup>94</sup> by citing Ignatius of Antioch who, 1800 years earlier, writing to the Philadelphian church expressed the view that ‘it is better to hear Christianity from a man who is circumcised, than Judaism from one uncircumcised’. Almost one hundred years ago, Bacon queried the perspectives of Christian scholars who were interpreting Jewish scriptures: ‘do his best, the outsider cannot enter into the spirit of

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<sup>91</sup> See Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 9; also, James Charlesworth takes issue with the concept of an ‘essence’ of early Judaism, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha and the New Testament*, 51-53.

<sup>92</sup> Otherwise expressed, it may be argued that religion is more than the texts it produces.

<sup>93</sup> J.H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha and the New Testament*, 56.

<sup>94</sup> Benjamin W. Bacon, “Jewish Interpretation of the New Testament”, *The American Journal of Theology*, vol. XIX, no. 2 (1915), 163.



Judaism and understand its ideas in their continuous unfolding throughout the ages ...'.<sup>95</sup> Clearly, such an observation is not without significance; however, it should serve to make more conscionable, rather than exclude, scholarship.

By encouraging scholars to search beyond their immediate theological and ideological<sup>96</sup> frameworks, they may be encouraged to move from a supersessionist stance, one which was not uncommon in nineteenth and twentieth century scholarship, to one of more objective historical enquiry,<sup>97</sup> aware of the danger of imposing theological assumptions on the social realities and faith issues of the Israelite peoples.<sup>98</sup> That such has been the case in more recent study of first-century Judaism is evident in the acknowledgement of two dimensions of Judaism before the Common Era: its continuity and its plurality. A starting point is to establish what is meant by the term 'Judaism'. According to Jacob Neusner, 'a Judaism is a system made up of a world-view, a way of life, and a social group that defines its life through that world-view and lives in accord with the descriptions of that way of life'.<sup>99</sup> Although helpful from a philosophical perspective,

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<sup>95</sup> Bacon, op. cit., 163.

<sup>96</sup> The word 'ideological', used concomitantly in this study with the word 'theological', is intended to convey the sense of a systematic body of ideas underlying theologically-orientated historical reconstruction. Given the politics and praxis of meaning-making associated with much historical research into Judaism by Christian scholars, particularly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the word 'ideological' is used to focus attention on the religiously-based politics of interpretation which have been a feature of early, and even late, modern scholarship into first-century Judaism.

<sup>97</sup> Supersessionist polemics are not, of course, restricted to the early modern period. The polemics deployed by Justin and Tertullian 'against the Jews' provide early and far from isolated instances.

<sup>98</sup> For a discussion of Judaizing and anti-Judaism in the Christian tradition, see John Gager, *The Origins of Anti-Semitism: Attitudes toward Judaism in Pagan and Christian Antiquity*, Oxford University Press, 1985, 117-133.

<sup>99</sup> Jacob Neusner, 'Exile and Return as the History of Judaism', *Exile: Old Testament, Jewish and Christian Conceptions*, ed. James M. Scott, Brill, Leiden, 1997, 221. Neusner's definition will be discussed in more detail; however, at this point it serves to undergird this discussion on continuity and plurality.

Neusner's definition is rather general and could be applied to other religions and ideologies. Further, it neither elucidates basic characteristics of Judaism nor captures the geographic and theological influences embedded in Judaic systems. Neusner's description is, however, in keeping with Josephus' views of Judaism which he expressed in philosophical terms, encapsulating Jewish culture: its origins, protagonists, sectarian constituents and ethical frameworks.<sup>100</sup> In its contemporary context, Judaism may have appeared as a philosophical movement, given that unlike contemporary cults it did not have images of its deity, in keeping with Greek and Roman views concerning invisible and indistinct gods as well as its lack of temples and sacrificial practices outside Judea, unlike other contemporary cults.<sup>101</sup>

Judaisms were not only diverse in terms of sectarianism but varied in characteristics according to their geographical locations. For example, there are still inadequately researched distinctions between the Judaisms of Egypt and Palestine, as well as those between the Judaism of Jerusalem and the diasporic Judaisms of Rome, Antioch, Damascus, Alexandria and Babylon. Likewise, Judaic theologies varied between the Temple cult practised in Jerusalem and the diasporic Judaisms of the Jewish communities in the synagogues or prayer houses outside Jerusalem. Of the latter, apocalyptic visionaries, the distinctive characteristics of the Qumran community, the legal issues debated by sages, divergent messianic views and different responses to observance of the Torah all contributed to the non-monolithic, non-Jerusalem Temple model of Judaism.

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<sup>100</sup> Alternatively, Josephus may have slanted his descriptions to be more comprehensible to a non-Jewish audience. Relevant writings by Josephus include the Jewish war, Antiquities, and Against Apion.

<sup>101</sup> See Steve Mason, *Josephus and the New Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edit., Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody MA, 2003, chapter three. It may be noted, however, there were other temples in Egypt.

Towards establishing a common Judaic thread to such a tapestry of Judaisms, this study concerns the extent to which the prophetic-apocalyptic movement, the Law, and the unique characteristics of Jewish communities were foundational elements of each Judaism's world-view. Caution is required, however, in adopting a methodological approach which risks extrapolating from specific differences to total difference. Although Neusner's definition helps to make the important distinction between the terms 'Judaism' and 'a Judaism', the differences between Judaisms existed within a framework of common belief and were differences of degree rather than of totality. For example, the Judaic arguments over the Jewish calendar concerned the establishment of specific dates for the observance of holy days, not the religious significance or propriety of such days.<sup>102</sup> Evolving from the religion of Israel, Judaism journeyed through adversity and defeat to a priestly theocracy centred on Jerusalem and the Temple, but able to fulfil its perceived social and religious roles under various hegemonic powers. Respecting and observing the common threads of prophecy and the Law, Judaism expressed itself in pluralistic communities from the destruction of the first Temple until after the Bar Kochba Revolt.<sup>103</sup> For example, the Judaism of the Second Temple Period reflects a significant degree of clearly differentiated sectarianism, which although not excluding a concept of inclusiveness embodied in a view of a 'pluralistic' Israel, does evidence internal

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<sup>102</sup> Sandmel, *Judaism and Christian Beginnings*, 15. See also Geza Vermes, 'Calendars of Priestly Courses 4Q320-30', in *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, Penguin Books, London, 1998, 335-362. A basic issue concerned the calendar of Judaic tradition having 354 days constituting one year and the Essene calendar comprising 364 days. Significant difference concerned the respective number and role of intercalated days.

<sup>103</sup> See Michael Stone, *Scriptures, Sects and Visions: A Profile of Judaism from Ezra to the Jewish Revolt*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1980. Stone supports his views based on the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Jewish literature of the Second Temple Period. He is not alone: other scholars share the view that the Dead Sea Scrolls elucidate substantially the nature of Judaism, its plurality, continuity and self-renewal, in the Second Temple Period.

differences, thereby supporting the argument for the existence of a range of ‘Judaisms’ in the Second Temple Period.<sup>104</sup>

The diverse Judaisms of the Second Temple Period become progressively overshadowed by a Judaism centred on the Talmud, influenced by a juxtaposition between Judaic continuity and renewal, built on the traditions of the prophetic movement and the law, and the consequences of the emergence of Christianity. As well, the influence of Hellenism cannot be overlooked. The Judaisms of the Second Temple Period could not escape engagement with the cultural mores and language inherent in the influence of Greek power, resulting to some degree in the inevitable inculcation of Greek culture into Jewish life.<sup>105</sup> Notwithstanding such influence, the Jerusalem Temple and the priesthood were *sui generis* to religious beliefs and practices in Jewish communities, not only in Jerusalem and other urban areas but also in rural communities.<sup>106</sup>

Common to an understanding of Second Temple Judaisms is the role of the Torah as foundational to Jewish faith and praxis. For Jewish communities, religion expressed as recapitulation of the Torah, equating to covenantal renewal, provided both a basis and continuing pattern for Jewish social life, individual faith observance, as well as Jewish polity. To the extent that there was not a single unitary and linear Judaism, neither was there a single ‘Jewish people’, nor a singular history of Jewish faith and praxis.

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<sup>104</sup> Boyarin, *Borderlines*, 45.

<sup>105</sup> Of the many texts on the influence of Hellenism on Second Temple Judaism, see for example, Victor Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews*, The Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, 1959 and Tessa Rajak, *The Jewish Dialogue with Greece and Rome: Studies in Cultural and Social Interaction*, Brill, Boston and Leiden, 2002.

<sup>106</sup> Rajak, *Jewish Dialogue with Greece and Rome*, 3-4.

Jewish history in the first two centuries of the Common Era is marked by two key events, the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 and the unsuccessful Bar Kokhba Revolt against Rome in 132-135.<sup>107</sup> The Roman conquests of 70 and 135 CE resulted in serious outcomes for Israel and its religion. Religious focus shifted from being Temple-centred to greater concentration on the Hebrew scriptures, the Law, and the prophets, at the same time as sectarian halakhic debates became more evident and textually-based.<sup>108</sup> In such a context the discovery and interpretation of the Dead Sea Scrolls has broadened modern understanding of sectarian Judaism, revealing its diversity and variety and its significance to the context of first-century Judaisms from which early Christianities emerged.<sup>109</sup>

### **Christian origins: Judaic traditions**

The focus of this section is on the links between early Christianities and their Jewish context, the extent to which primitive Christianity was Jewish in character, and the historical unreliability of attaching clear lines of demarcation between Judaisms and Christianities in the first century. It will be noted that in many respects primitive

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<sup>107</sup> Although both events of 70 and 135 CE may be described as catastrophic in Jewish history, the bar Kokhba Revolt has particular significance in that apart from special occasions, Jews lost access to Jerusalem and the central significance of its Temple, Jewish communities in the South were dispersed, and messianic hope was largely lost, all relevant factors to an analysis of Christian origins.

<sup>108</sup> See Eugene Ulrich, 'The Scrolls and the Study of the Hebrew Bible', *The Dead Sea Scrolls at Fifty: Proceedings of the 1997 Society of Biblical Literature Qumran Section Meetings*, eds. Robert A. Kugler and Eileen M. Schuller, Scholars Press. Atlanta, 1999, 34.

<sup>109</sup> There is also the possibility that further study of the Scrolls will elucidate the extent to which the Scrolls, particularly unpublished Greek texts from Khirbet Mird, contribute not only to the ongoing reconstruction of the context of early Christianities but also to the emergence of early Arab influence in the Byzantine Christian Negev region. See discussion by Lawrence H. Schiffman and Marlene Schiffman, 'Epilogue: And it Shall Come to Pass in the End of Days: An Agenda for the Future', *The Dead Sea Scrolls at Fifty*, eds. Kugler and Schuller, 209-211.

Christianity was neither antithetical to, nor distinctly different from, contemporary Judaism.

An emerging twenty-first century consensus is that Christianity not only had its origins in the context of first-century Judaism but also that early Christianity is part of an historical continuum of Palestinian Judaism. Such a view is supported by theological expressions and images in the New Testament which are pre-Christian in origin, having their antecedence in Judaic literature.<sup>110</sup> An example is provided in the New Testament accounts of Jesus' farewell discourse to his disciples (Luke 22:3-8; John 13-17), which draw upon testamentary literature, the genre of which deals with discourses and visions of patriarchal characters.<sup>111</sup> The notion that there is a level of continuity between Jesus and the Hebrew scriptures is generally accepted by modern scholars.<sup>112</sup> Thus, citations from the Hebrew scriptures in early Christian literature may be regarded as first-century expressions of the continuity between Judaic history and early Christianities rather than as Christian innovations or the consequence of Hellenistic or Roman influences.

Conventional interpretation of the Gospels has long focussed on the specific individuation

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<sup>110</sup> See, for example, Walter Brueggemann with Tod Linafelt, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon and Christian Imagination*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edit., Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, 2012; C.A. Evans, 'The Function of the Old Testament in the New', *Introducing the New Testament Interpretation*, ed. S. McKnight, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, 1990; Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and Christian Origins*, Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2000; Graeme Goldsworthy, 'Relationship of the Old Testament and New Testament', *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, eds. T Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, 2000.

<sup>111</sup> Such testamentary literature, included in the pseudepigrapha, includes the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Solomon and Moses (the latter otherwise known as the Assumption of Moses).

<sup>112</sup> For example, see R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, Vol. 1, Charles Scribner, New York, 1951, 15-16.

of Jesus and the range of christologies expressed in the Gospels, based on the received view that Jesus and the Gospels constituted the central elements of a new and universal religion which became known as Christianity. Such perceptions are seen to be in contrast with the religion it superseded, regarded by some early modern Christian scholars as the former, insular, intolerant and politically orientated religion invariably described as ‘Judaism’.<sup>113</sup>

### **Jewish and Christian identity formation**

The elusiveness of borderlines in the emergence of Jewish and Christian identities is reflected in the continuities and discontinuities of religious beliefs and practices in communities wherein religion was the dominant feature of individual and community ‘worldviews’.<sup>114</sup> Both Jewish and Christian continuities and discontinuities are complex and not easily understood by recourse to theological understandings without the underpinnings provided by historical and literary research. Different Christian doctrines relating to observance of the Law, the Sabbath, dietary and purity laws, the practice of circumcision, and the rites of passage signal transitional markers,<sup>115</sup> constituting some of the elusive indicators of divergence from which early Christian differences from contemporary Judaism were constructed. Some primitive Christians described themselves as strangers and aliens in response to their diminished social connection

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<sup>113</sup> See Richard A. Horsley, ‘Jesus Movements and the Renewal of Israel’, *Christian Origins*, Vol. 1, *A People’s History of Christianity*, ed. Richard A. Horsley, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 2005.

<sup>114</sup> The term ‘worldview’ may be regarded as too modern to depict first-century, community religious life given that the extant ‘religion’, for example, Jewish, Jewish-Christian, Christian-Jewish, and early Christian regulated much of the lives of people in communities.

<sup>115</sup> J.H. Charlesworth, ‘Foreword’, *Middle Judaism: Jewish Thought 300 BCE to 200 CE*, Gabriele Boccaccini, xvii.

following conversion and, from Hellenistic philosophy,<sup>116</sup> drew on metaphors of ‘sojourning in the world’ as a means of establishing a constructive existentiality.<sup>117</sup> Paul encouraged early Christians with issues of self-identity to accept the status of becoming ‘one new humanity in place of the two’ (Jews and Gentiles),<sup>118</sup> thereby becoming ‘no longer strangers and aliens, but ... citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone’ (Eph. 2:19-20).<sup>119</sup> Such discourse has been regarded by some as contributing to the emerging distinctiveness of early Christian identity and to the overcoming of issues of identity and difference.<sup>120</sup> For others, however, terms such as the ‘early church’ and ‘early Christianity’ have continued to present issues of historical understanding as such terms do not always take account of their contemporary context. As a result, the Jesus movement of the first century might be more aptly termed a ‘Jewish messianic sect’.

Although Judith Lieu’s view that Christianity emerged as ‘another Judaism’ appeals to this writer, some qualification is required in respect of terminological and theological considerations. First, the commonly used terms ‘Christianity’ and ‘Judaism’

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<sup>116</sup> The emphasis in this thesis on the Judaic context from which Christianity emerged is not to deny that the Judaic context involved a wider Judaic-Hellenist framework, or indeed a framework of Judaisms *and* Hellenisms. Second Temple Judaism was undoubtedly influenced by ‘Hellenic enlightenment, order and rationality’. See the discussion by Tessa Rajak, ‘The Hasmoneans and the Uses of Hellenism’, *A Tribute to Geza Vermes: Essays on Jewish and Christian Literature and History*, eds. Philip R. Davies and Richard T. White, JSOT, Sheffield, 1990.

<sup>117</sup> Benjamin H. Dunning, ‘Strangers and Aliens No Longer: Negotiating Identity and Difference in Ephesians 2’, *HTR* 99:1 (2006) 3.

<sup>118</sup> Eph. 2:15.

<sup>119</sup> It is noted, however, that the authenticity of Ephesians is widely, although not universally, disputed.

<sup>120</sup> See Margaret Y. MacDonald, ‘The Politics of Identity in Ephesians’, *JSNT* 26 (2004) 420.



are both *post factum*: Jewish and Christian writings were produced in the first and second centuries of the Common Era, a period of diverse religious systems, including diverse Judaisms.<sup>121</sup> Second, it may be argued that it is theologically questionable to perceive Christianity as either an extension of Judaism or as a reform of Judaism. Third, it is reasonable to question the meanings of the terms ‘Jewish’ and ‘Christian’ to the writers of texts described as ‘Jewish’ or ‘Christian’, given the variety of Judaisms until the second century CE and the lack of a stable ‘Christian’ identity until the emergence of Christian institutional authority in the fourth century.

It has been argued that, amid the complexity inherent in early Jewish-Christian relations, early Judaism had established a significant self-identity by 70 CE and that by the same time the earliest Jewish followers of Jesus had developed a significant degree of individual self-identity.<sup>122</sup> A concomitant view is that the formation of Christian identity, involving the development of distinctive ideas and concepts, was more rapid in the decades immediately following the death of Jesus than in subsequent decades or years.<sup>123</sup> According to Martin Hengel, a significant factor in such rapid identity formation may be attributed to Paul whose christological views were established by the time of the first

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<sup>121</sup> Jacob Neusner, ‘Judaism and Christianity in the First Century: How Shall We Perceive Their Relationship?’, *A Tribute to Geza Vermes: Essays on Jewish and Christian Literature and History*, eds. Davies and White, 256-57.

<sup>122</sup> See, for example, Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha and the New Testament*, 83, Joshua Schwartz, ‘How Jewish to be Jewish? Self-Identity and Jewish Christians in First Century CE Palestine’, *Judaea-Palaestine, Babylon and Rome: Jews in Antiquity*, eds. Benjamin Isaac and Yuvel Shahar, Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 147, Mohn Siebeck, Tübingen, 2012; Udoh, Fabian E. with Susannah Heschel, Mark Chancey and Gregory Tatum (eds.), *Redefining First-Century Jewish and Christian Identities: Essays in Honor of Ed Parish Sanders*, University of Notre Dame Press, 2008.

<sup>123</sup> See M. Hengel, *The Son of God: The Origins of Christology and the History of Jewish-Hellenistic Religion*, trans. J. Bowden, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1976, 2.

‘apostolic council’ in 48 CE.<sup>124</sup> In contrast to Hengel’s view, however, is the thesis that it is the second century which signals the most significant period in which Christians are faced with a range of sects and religious divisions contributing to the difficulty of establishing a unified self-definition.

The period between the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE and the redaction of the *Mishnah* towards the end of the second century was one in which Jewish focus shifted from Jerusalem, the Temple, the Land and the Covenant to study of the Torah and issues of ritual, festivals, the calendar, and ritual purity.<sup>125</sup> That such issues were faced concurrently by Jewish communities with the growth of Jesus movements professing belief in Jesus as *the* Messiah clearly suggests the likelihood of a process of adjustment and renewal within early Judaism. Although the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE did not occur without warnings,<sup>126</sup> given the significance of its history and tradition, its loss may be reasonably regarded as a watershed in the evolving identity formation of early Judaism. An indication of the changing nature of Judaism following the destruction of the Temple is the gradual decline in the range of Judaisms of the late Second Temple Period and the emergence, under new religious leadership,<sup>127</sup> of an embryonic and more homogenous,

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<sup>124</sup> M. Hengel, *Between Jesus and Paul: Studies in the Early History of Christianity*, trans. J. Bowden, SCM Press, London, 1984, chapter 2.

<sup>125</sup> Aharon Oppenheimer, ‘Leadership and Messianism in the Time of the Mishnah’, *Eschatology in the Bible and in Jewish and Christian Tradition*, ed. Henning Graf Reventlow, Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield, 1997, 152.

<sup>126</sup> For example, Josephus, *War* 6288-309, in which Josephus interprets the self-opening Sanctuary gates as a sign of the forthcoming destruction of the Temple. Some Jewish leaders also foreshadowed the Temple’s destruction; for example, the forewarning of Rabban Yohanan b. Zakkai: ‘O Sanctuary, Sanctuary, why do you panic? I know that you are doomed to be destroyed ...’. (*b. Yom.* 39b).

<sup>127</sup> Contributors to post-Temple Jewish leadership and the emergence of post-sectarian Judaism include Rabban Yohanan b. Zakkai and his successor Rabban Gamaliel of Yavneh.

‘normative’ Judaic community. As the post-Temple Jewish leadership discouraged Jewish-Christian groups from participating in synagogue worship and early Christians resented the inclusion of the *birkat ha-Minim* in Jewish prayers,<sup>128</sup> early signs of divergence may be drawn from such post-second Temple developments.<sup>129</sup>

Another early indicator of divergence in Judaic-Christian relations is suggested in Paul’s first Letter to the Corinthians in which he exhorts Christians in Corinth to enjoy freedom from the strictures of sacrificial rituals while at the same time respecting the practices of others by not offending Jews or Greeks (1 Cor. 10:18-32). Significantly, he adds that, equally, no offence should be given ‘to the church of God’ (1 Cor. 10:32). This phrase appears to be the only reference in Paul’s letters to a ‘universal’ Christian church in contrast to frequent references to geographically-designated churches, hence a phrase which suggests a distinction from the Jewish religion. It is possible, therefore, to suggest that the phrase ‘church of God’ denotes an early, if not the first, indicator of a Christian identity construct, one which neither draws on the terminology of Palestinian Judaism nor Hebrew scriptures.<sup>130</sup> To the extent that there are specific ‘milestones’ in Judaic-Christian relations, the situation following the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE marks one such historical period in which developments provide indicators for the eventual separation between early Judaism and early Christianity.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> That some early Christians appear to have resented the inclusion of the *birkat ha-Minim* in Jewish prayers is not to suggest that the *birkat ha-Minim* was specifically directed against Christians.

<sup>129</sup> Oppenheimer, ‘Leadership and Messianism in the Time of the Mishnah’, 153-4.

<sup>130</sup> I acknowledge, however, that such a reference may be interpreted as suggestive rather than definitive.

<sup>131</sup> See Steven T. Katz, ‘Issues in the Separation of Judaism and Christianity after 70 CE: A Reconsideration’, *JBL* 103:1 (1984) 43.

### **Jesus and the Jesus movements: new directions?**

Given the extent to which Jesus of Nazareth has been portrayed as the primary historical figure who is pre-eminently responsible for the emergence of primitive Christianity, it is logical to associate Christian origins with the emergence of the Jesus movement in the first century. Notwithstanding the Jewishness of Jesus and his early disciples, and the Judaic elements of primitive Christianity, the Gospels depict Jesus as representing new religious thinking and praxis.<sup>132</sup> It is difficult, however, to establish with certainty whether such a depiction was extant during Jesus' lifetime or, conceivably more likely, was ascribed subsequently by Christian writers. During the twentieth century it became generally accepted that because Jesus lived in Jewish communities in first-century Palestine, his life and teaching would be better understood if they were studied in the context of the history of first-century Judaism. An increased focus on the historical-critical study of Jesus as an individual elevated attention to his Jewishness and historical significance. Prototypical study in this area was signalled in the eighteenth century by Reimarus who explored the embryonic boundaries between Judaism and Christianity in the context of the discontinuity between Jesus and his disciples.<sup>133</sup> Two centuries later, the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls led to research on Jesus in the context of the religious and ideological sects and movements of Jesus' time, with a growing number of historians viewing Christianity as another, yet distinctive, Jewish movement with such distinctiveness deriving from the historical event of Jesus and his career.

The increased focus during the second half of the twentieth century on the 'historical Jesus' has served to provide greater emphasis on the Judaic origins of

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<sup>132</sup> A widely held view; see, for example, Samuel Sandmel, *Judaism and Christian Beginnings*, 393-94.

<sup>133</sup> H.S. Reimarus, *Reimarus: Fragments*, ed. C. Talbert, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1970, 71.

Christianity and the ‘Jewishness’ of Jesus. However, to argue that Jesus was a ‘Jew’ or a ‘Christian’ is to argue without an appreciation of the inappropriateness of the terms in the context of the first century in which Jesus was neither a ‘Jew’ nor a ‘Christian’.<sup>134</sup> The term ‘Jew’ as used in a modern context is a product of the fourth century in that it describes a person’s religious nomenclature in terms of not only the Torah but also the Mishnah, Midrashim and Talmudim.<sup>135</sup> That Jewish premises, based on the experiential wisdom of the Hebrew scriptures, were foundational to Jesus’ teachings do not suffice to describe him simply as ‘a Jew’. Equally, that he was born into the Jewish faith and died a Jewish pilgrim to Jerusalem does not serve to qualify him either in historical or modern terms as ‘a Jew’.<sup>136</sup> On the other hand, to describe Jesus as a ‘Christian’ is to ignore the social and religious realities of the first century. His life and teachings were an expression of Judaic religious diversity, drawing particularly on the wisdom experience of the Hebrew scriptures and remaining within ‘the hermeneutical horizon’ of the range and diversity of first-century, Judaic religious experiences.<sup>137</sup>

Not unlike some facets of renewal in the Qumran Community within the context of the Judaisms of the Second Temple Period, the Jesus movements also exhibited dimensions of renewal, including ‘the consciousness of being the eschatological

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<sup>134</sup> See John H. Elliott, ‘Jesus the Israelite Was Neither a “Jew” nor a “Christian”’: On Correcting Misleading Nomenclature”, *JSHJ* 5:2 (2007) 119-120.

<sup>135</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Judaism and Christianity in the Age of Constantine: History, Messiah, Israel, and the Initial Confrontation*, University of Chicago Press, 1987, ix.

<sup>136</sup> See Dieter Georgi, ‘The Early Church: Internal Jewish Migration or New Religion?’, *HTR* 88:1 (1995) 41-42; cf. Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew: A Historian’s Reading of the Gospels*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1981, 19-41.

<sup>137</sup> Georgi, ‘The Early Church’, 43.

community of Israel'.<sup>138</sup> Some manifestations of the 'newness' of renewal in the Jesus movements include baptism as an expression of the followers' sense of belonging to an eschatological community.<sup>139</sup> Also, the table-fellowship Jesus had with sinners and others reflected a natural expression of eschatological community (Luke 22:18), and his acts of healing outside recognised religious practice was also part of the newness.<sup>140</sup> As well, one may conclude that Jesus lessened the demands of the Law compared with its traditional centrality to a 'pure' Israel under Judaism.<sup>141</sup> Another example of Jesus indicating a new direction is his challenge to traditional purity laws. By drawing on the prophetic traditions, including Zechariah's prophecies, he established a vision for Israel that challenged the purity boundaries of Judaic Israel.<sup>142</sup> To such dimensions of the Jesus movement can be added worship and the Temple. In terms of early Christian practice there is an association between Jesus and the Temple. It is, however, not a relationship without discordant factors: there are examples of Jesus devoting less allegiance to the Temple than earlier Jewish worshippers.<sup>143</sup> Although the worship of the earliest Christian community centred on the Temple (Acts 2:46; 3:1; 5:12), the movement soon began to develop other forms of worship, held in private homes and non-Temple gatherings (Acts 2:46; 5:42).

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<sup>138</sup> Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit*, 183; cf. Bultmann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, 4.

<sup>139</sup> Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5; cf. 1 Cor. 1:13.

<sup>140</sup> See Schwartz, *Christology*, 69-70.

<sup>141</sup> For example, Mark 1:22; 2:6; 12:35-40; cf. Matt. 5:17ff.

<sup>142</sup> For example, Jesus' association with persons regarded as 'impure' who gain purity through such association, as well as his table-fellowship with sinners.

<sup>143</sup> For example, Jesus' dispute with Temple priests (Mark, chapter 12) and his demonstration in the Temple's precincts (Mark 11:15-18).

## Emerging borderlines

Although there were cultic and religio-legal differences between early Judaism and early Christianities, apart from issues related to circumcision and purity and food laws, they do not appear to constitute major borderlines. However, their respective attitudes to sacred writings indicate diverging views, with the Gospel accounts deemed by some to replace Hebrew scriptures and their divine promises bestowed on the ‘new people of God’.

Although both Jesus and the early Christian church drew extensively on Israel’s scriptures as foundational to their beliefs, as early as the second century, such scriptures became known as the ‘Old’ Testament while Christian writings were established as the ‘New’ Testament, and the emerging Christian church proclaimed itself as the ‘New’ Israel. A second dimension of early commonality relates to worship. In the first century churches and synagogues were frequently located in close proximity and well after 70 CE, Christians participated in services in Jewish synagogues.<sup>144</sup> Although such participation continued into the second century, patterns of ecclesiastical organisation began to emerge which, combined with the Christians’ diminishing expectation of Christ’s imminent return and the growth of the early church’s self-identity as an ‘earthly society’, marked the progressive decline of Christians’ association with the synagogue.<sup>145</sup>

The destruction of Jerusalem and the burning of the Temple in 70 CE constitutes a significant historical marker in first-century religious history in that Jerusalem was no

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<sup>144</sup> That (Jewish) Christians participated in Jewish liturgy in synagogues up to the fourth century is attested by John Chrysostom in one of his eight homilies, *Adversus Judaeos*, which discouraged such participation and which contributed to the ‘movement’ to encourage Jewish-Christians to choose between Judaism and Christianity. For a discussion of the patristic role in Jewish-Christian relations see Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries*, Princeton University Press, 1986, 66-67.

<sup>145</sup> Simon, *Verus Israel*, xvi.

longer the centre of Israel's cultic life. As well, the priesthood underwent transformation, if not dissolution, of its Judaic tradition.<sup>146</sup> Nonetheless, the events of 70 CE represented neither a decisive turning point in Judaic-Christian relations, nor a milestone in the early Christian church's response to changing circumstances within Judaism in terms of its own identity-formation. The emergence of two religions, clearly defined and separated, remained in an embryonic state throughout the first century. It was before the end of the first century, however, that the second generation of Jesus communities ceased being 'another Judaism' and became known as 'Christians', based on Jesus being regarded as the 'Christ' (cf. Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1Peter 4:16).<sup>147</sup> Belief in Jesus as the Messiah on the part of Jewish-Christians signalled a divergent belief from other Jewish groups which, although holding messianic expectations, did not identify Jesus as *the* Messiah.

Although Jesus appears to have explicitly avoided the title 'Messiah', he was very soon invested with it, the title becoming inseparable to the name Jesus.<sup>148</sup> On the other hand, notwithstanding Jesus appearing to have approved the designation 'prophet', the title was subsequently discarded by the church. Given the Davidic tradition, it would have been logical for a new 'messiah' to have a kingly connotation (Isa. 11:1-8). The term 'messiah' appears to have taken on greater significance than was the case in Jesus' time, when Jewish communities expected a 'messiah' would need to be a descendant of David, a messiah who would restore the destiny of Israel (*Pss. Sol.* 17). Thus, the later view of Jesus as *the* Messiah is unlikely to have prevailed in first-century Judaic and

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<sup>146</sup> The Temple, the new Jerusalem, and the 'new' priesthood are discussed in the context of John's *Apocalypse* as indicators of divergence in renewal in the following chapters.

<sup>147</sup> James H. Charlesworth (ed.), 'Preface', *Jews and Christians: Exploring the Past, Present, and Future*, 12.

<sup>148</sup> Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew: A Historian's Reading of the Gospels*, Collins, London, 1973, 224.



Jewish-Christian circles. Jesus' views on the messiahship and its superiority to the kingship of David are expressed in Mark 12:35-37.<sup>149</sup> The title 'messiah', as not uncommonly used within primitive Christian communities, had a contemporaneous meaning of a supra-human, not one of kingly or royal status as obtained with David. The notion of a 'supra-human' was not restricted to primitive Christians but was one within Jewish belief patterns as indicated in the fourth century BCE belief in the return of Elijah (Mal. 3:1-5; 4:5). However, although belief in 'supra-human' beings was not uncommon in Judaic history, the nature of their specific roles and significance is more related to apocalyptically-orientated groups.<sup>150</sup>

In respect of the word 'prophet', Jesus added a 'new' dimension with his proclamation of the concept of the kingdom of God. It is noted, however, that any discussion of Jesus as a prophet leads to the issue of what kind of prophet is being discussed. Jesus is presented by some as a wisdom prophet;<sup>151</sup> others portray him more as a social prophet in keeping with the prophetic tradition of Israel.<sup>152</sup> Yet another perception of Jesus is that of a Jewish Cynic peasant with a prophetic social vision which stood in contrast to the views of his day.<sup>153</sup> Such 'singular' views, however, require qualification. For instance, one of the issues related to seeking the historical Jesus is that

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<sup>149</sup> Mark 12:35-37, however, is admittedly an ambiguous text.

<sup>150</sup> Paolo Sacchi, 'Recovering Jesus' Formative Background', *Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, Doubleday, New York, 1992, 132.

<sup>151</sup> For example, Borg, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship*, 25-27 and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation*, Continuum, New York and London, 2000, 166-68.

<sup>152</sup> See, for example, Richard A. Horsley with John S. Hanson, *Bandits, Prophets, and Messiahs: Popular Movements in the Time of Jesus*, Trinity Press International, Harrisburg, 1999; cf. Borg, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship*, 28.

<sup>153</sup> John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Peasant*, 422.

the mystery surrounding Jesus as a person is compounded by the mysteries associated with his context and environment. To the complexity of Jesus as a historical figure may be added the significance of the portrayal of Jesus as the redemptive Lamb, sharing the Throne of God, in the *Apocalypse of John* as discussed in Part 2.

## Chapter Three

### Prophecy and Apocalyptic: A Renewing Continuum

Rather than engage with the synchronic approach to the phenomena of prophecy and apocalyptic, as generally practised in the nineteenth and much of the twentieth centuries, considered more appropriate to issues of continuity and renewal is a diachronic account. Such an approach challenges the concept of discrete prophetic and apocalyptic identities and argues for a degree of affiliation and an interdependent relationship between them. This chapter explores the extent to which continuity and renewal were features of both phenomena, not only within the diversity of Second Temple Judaism, but also in first-century Judaisms and Christianities. The underlying hypothesis to such an approach is that the elusive boundaries between early Judaism and primitive Christianity may be profitably studied within the spectrum of a continuing prophetic-apocalyptic movement which extended from the sixth century BCE to the second century CE.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> It is not suggested that prophecy and apocalyptic drew to a close in the second century; an apocalyptic revival is evident early in the fourth century following the emergence of more clearly-defined Christianity under Constantine. Concerning the use of the terms ‘prophetic movement’ and ‘prophetic-apocalyptic movement’, their use is intended in an inclusive sense, at the same time acknowledging that prophecy over centuries before and into the Common Era involved diverse prophetic and apocalyptic traditions, resulting in a series of prophetic and apocalyptic movements concerned with a variety of religious traditions including faith, the consolidation of monotheism, kingships, Temple, priestly and cultic influences, wisdom, religious universalism, and eschatology. It is acknowledged, however, that care is required in the use of the term ‘movement’ in respect of prophecy or apocalyptic because such a term could imply unified or cohesive groups. For example, such a view of prophecy, frequently drawn from theological rather than literary sources, is less likely to pursue a rational and methodical study of prophecy (or apocalyptic) and its role and influence in antiquity. Although there are differences between the prophets of history, they generally exhibit characteristics common to their religious and cultural milieux. Such degrees of commonality, however, cannot be presumed to constitute a normative model of prophecy. Based on such qualification, I have elected to use the term ‘prophetic movement’ to convey a sense of continuity, community, and a lack of

## Israel's prophetic tradition

The prophetic accounts contained in the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings constitute the earliest recorded prophecies. The role of early prophets, however, was not restricted to their views on earthly kingship. They were also engaged with contemporary issues, concerned to convey Y<sup>HWH</sup>'s cosmic rule in immediately relevant messages, thus exercising a state-political craft.<sup>155</sup> Issues concerned with the future are also identified in Isaiah in which the oracles of others who followed the Isaianic tradition through the use of ideas, aspirations and eschatology are preserved (Isaiah 24-27, 34-35, 40-46). In general, however, both the early and post-exilic prophets were concerned with their contemporary environments: prophecies were not intended to indicate events far into the future. Rather, they sought to deal with expected imminent events which would impact on the hearers' lives, calling on them to modify their behaviour to conform to Y<sup>HWH</sup>'s expectations of the people of Israel keeping his Law.

By the eighth century prophets such as Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, and the earlier prophets Zephaniah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, stood above population groups, temples and kings and prophesied as direct messengers of God.<sup>156</sup> The eighth-century individual

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imposed arbitrary boundaries between prophecy and apocalyptic.

<sup>155</sup> For example, they made their views known on treaty relationships (Amos 1-2; Isa 30-31; Jer. 27), threats of war (Isa. 7; Jer 22; Mic 1), and internal affairs (Hos. 3; Mic. 3; Jer. 29). See Paul D. Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic: The Historical and Sociological Roots of Jewish Apocalyptic Eschatology*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1979, 16.

<sup>156</sup> The commonly-applied association in the modern era between prophecy and prediction requires qualification concerning prophecy in antiquity in at least two respects. First, to the extent that the underlying purpose of early prophecies in the Hebrew scriptures is to confront people with their behaviour in contrast to the will of Y<sup>HWH</sup> and the concomitant influences on contemporary history, prediction *per se* is not central to prophetic accounts. Second, although such prophecy may be interpreted on occasions as 'predicting' impending events, such events rarely occurred. Rather than prediction being a central feature

prophets are in contrast to the cult-related professional prophets both in terms of their individual recognitions and historical record and the contrast between their prophecies and those of the professional, cult-prophets. Their impact is historically greater: although they represent only a relatively small numerical manifestation of prophecy, they carry more historical and theological weight than seers, cult-prophets or others engaged in the pre-exilic prophetic movement. Such influence results from their proclamation of divine revelations independently of institutional structures such as temple, royal court, or the framework of national Yahwism.

From the Hebrew scriptures, we know something of the prophets' selection, ministry, discourse and messages. For instance, in the case of Jeremiah, he was informed by the word of YHWH that he was known to YHWH before he was born, consecrated by YHWH before birth, and appointed a prophet to the nations (Jer. 1:4-5). Ezekiel's call to prophecy was rather more profound, with strong apocalyptic overtones, to the extent that Ezekiel sat 'stunned for seven days' (1;1-3:15). Following his receipt of the spirit of the Lord, he became speechless with his tongue clinging to the roof of his mouth (3:22-26), and a suggestion of ecstasy is expressed in the figurative accounts of Ezekiel lying three hundred and ninety days on his left side and forty days on his right side (4:4-8). The prophetic-apocalyptic character of Ezekiel's ministry is also expressed in the ecstatic element accompanying his visions, not infrequently conveying him to Jerusalem.<sup>157</sup> In contrast, for trito-Isaiah, prophecy is not suggestive of ecstasy and is without the

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of prophecy or function of the prophets, the major concern of the individual prophets was to convey a revelation from YHWH in terms of immediate behaviour and contemporary events and the desirability of early behavioural change rather than the formulation of responses to events 'predicted' in the future.

<sup>157</sup> For example, Ezekiel's Temple visions, 8:1-11.25.

underlying suggestions of apocalyptic, reflecting only part of a much wider ministry, having been sent by Y<sup>HWH</sup> to bring good news to the oppressed, to heal the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release the prisoners (Isa. 61:1-2).<sup>158</sup> The focus of the prophets, however, including the post-exilic prophets, was not far-distant: their prophecies concerned events which were expected to occur imminently. The prophets' discourses and messages arose from the 'spirit' or 'word' of Y<sup>HWH</sup>, sometimes expressed through dreams, even if suspect and practised by false prophets.<sup>159</sup> Other manifestations of prophetic messages include visions,<sup>160</sup> sudden inspiration arising from a sign from Y<sup>HWH</sup>,<sup>161</sup> and knowledge of a miraculous nature.

### Issues of Terminology

The nature of prophecy requires some clarification due to the modern vernacular usage of the word 'prophet' to indicate a person able to predict the future.<sup>162</sup> The English word 'prophet' derives from the Greek προφήτης, denoting one who announces or proclaims. Such an understanding has led to some ambiguity in interpreting the New Testament canon between the kerygmatic office of priest or preacher on the one hand and otherwise as a description of figures from the Hebrew scriptures whose prophecies included the coming of a Messiah, interpreted kerygmatically as being fulfilled in the advent of Jesus of

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<sup>158</sup> It may be noted that such a 'wider ministry' applies to trito-Isaiah, an independent writing within the book of Isaiah. The trito-Isaiah author, writing in Jerusalem, is less concerned with the theological context of prophecy than with his contemporary, existential elements of eschatological expectation.

<sup>159</sup> Jeremiah 23:25-28. Jeremiah deals with other areas of conflict concerning prophets including immorality, visions which raised false hopes, and unethical behaviour such as lying and deception (23:9-40).

<sup>160</sup> For example, see Isaiah 6.

<sup>161</sup> For example, Isaiah 7:10-17.

<sup>162</sup> See discussion by Lester L. Grabbe, *Priests, Prophets, Diviners, Sages: A Socio-Historical Study of Religious Specialists in Ancient Israel*, Trinity Press International, Valley Forge PA, 1995, 98ff.

Nazareth. Whether the Greek προφήτης reflects an accurate translation of the Hebrew נביא requires some qualification. For example, the use of προφήτης in the Greek version of the Hebrew scriptures as the translation of נביא may indicate the influence of the Greek understanding of the term ‘prophecy’ on Hellenistic Judaism.<sup>163</sup> Although προφήτης is widely used as the translation of נביא, in Greek, προφήτης generally has a more indefinite meaning than נביא has in Hebrew. It is used with more variety, describing different kinds of prophets as well as the terms ‘poet’ and ‘spokesman’.<sup>164</sup>

### **Prophecy: origins and characteristics**

A characteristic of the prophetic movement is the traditional use of the name ‘Y<sub>HWH</sub>’ by the prophets, who followed the practice of preceding generations: pre-exilic prophets announced their prophecies in the name of the Y<sub>HWH</sub> of tradition.<sup>165</sup> An early distinction is made between prophets who spoke the word of Y<sub>HWH</sub> and those who spoke on their own behalf or in the name of another god. The people are warned by Y<sub>HWH</sub> speaking to Moses that ‘any prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, or who presumes to speak in my name a word that I have not commanded the prophet to speak - that prophet shall die’ (Deut. 18:20). A further distinction is that the people may ignore prophets who claim to speak with the word of Y<sub>HWH</sub> but the prophecy does not come to fruition. In such an instance, Y<sub>HWH</sub> advises Moses, ‘the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; do not be frightened by it’ (Deut. 18:22). From such distinctions, the conclusion may be drawn that the people are not excluded from participation in the prophetic movement: religious

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<sup>163</sup> Terrance Callan, ‘Prophecy and Ecstasy in Greco-Roman Religion and in 1 Corinthians’, *NovT* 27 (1985) 132.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>165</sup> Walter Zimmerli, ‘Prophetic Proclamation and Reinterpretation’, *Tradition and Theology in the Old Testament*, ed. Douglas A. Knight, SPCK, London, 1977, 74.

communities are enabled to distinguish authentic prophets from those who do not speak the word of Y<sup>HWH</sup>. Although such a view, drawn from the text of Deuteronomy, is not unreasonable, qualification is appropriate in terms of both the complex nature of prophecy and the broad range of individual prophets.<sup>166</sup> For example, prophecy developed a complexity beyond that of the deuteronomistic, monarchical period. Further, some subsequent prophecies, including those of Jeremiah on covenantal relations contain predictions extending over decades.<sup>167</sup> According to the word of Y<sup>HWH</sup>, Ezekiel's vision 'is for many years ahead; he prophesies for distant times' (Ezek. 12:27). In moving to a discussion of apocalyptic as a constituent element of the prophetic-apocalyptic continuum, in Appendix A, consideration is given to the prophet Joel as an example of a prophetic window on apocalyptic.

### **Apocalyptic: meaning and context**

Following a review of the range of views concerning the terms 'apocalypse', 'apocalypticism' and 'apocalyptic', I have opted to use the term 'apocalyptic' in both its noun and adjectival senses.<sup>168</sup> Thus, in this discussion 'apocalyptic' covers the overall

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<sup>166</sup> See discussion by Robert P. Carroll, *When Prophecy Failed: Reactions and Responses to Failure in the Old Testament Prophetic Traditions*, SCM Press, London, 1979, chapter 6. Carroll is of the view that 'because prophecy was not simply about predicting events in the future but entailed a religious ideology about the nature of society ... Deuteronomy produced an inadequate criteriology for establishing prophetic authenticity' (page 188).

<sup>167</sup> In general, Jeremiah chapter 11; specifically, Jeremiah 29:10 expresses a predictive span of seventy years.

<sup>168</sup> For a diverse range of views see John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to the Jewish Matrix of Christianity*, Crossroad, New York, 1984, 10; idem, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, Eerdmans, 1998; Paul L. Fiddes, *The Promised End: Eschatology in Theology and Literature*, Blackwell, Oxford, 2000, 24; T.F. Glasson, 'What is Apocalyptic?', *NTS* 27 (1980) 105; Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic*, 29-31; 430-438; idem, *Old Testament Apocalyptic*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1987, 26-27; Christopher Rowland, 'The Parting of the Ways: the Evidence of



genus, or category, of apocalyptic literature, revelation, genre, and social and theological settings.<sup>169</sup>

The visionaries and seers of the first century of the Common Era who engaged in apocalyptic did so in terms of the religious context of their times, one in which existential spiritual issues and crises were a feature of daily Jewish life. Apocalyptic was a means of early Jewish and Christian communities seeking to comprehend the present and prophesy the future through messages of a religious nature, involving the encouragement of righteousness and the avoidance of the consequences of evil. Thus, the understanding of existence within the framework of the divine mystery was the religious context in which the apocalyptists sought to convey religious and philosophical meaning to people's lives. Such meaning was drawn from characteristic features of apocalyptic such as revealed knowledge, cosmological predictions, elements of historical determinism, dualism, and eschatological expectations.

Apocalyptic was not particularly characteristic of any specific sect within Judaism and nor was it restricted to 'fringe' communities.<sup>170</sup> Rather, it was central to Jewish life

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Jewish and Christian Apocalyptic and Mystical Material', *Jews and Christians: the Parting of the Ways A.D. 70 to 135*, ed. James D.G. Dunn, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1992, 213-218; Paulo Sacchi, *Jewish Apocalyptic and its History*, trans. W.J. Short, Sheffield Academic Press, 1996, 26; Robert L. Webb, '□□Apocalyptic': Observations on a Slippery Term', *JNES* 49:2 (1990) 115.

<sup>169</sup> See Lester L. Grabbe, 'Introduction and Overview', *Knowing the End from the Beginning: The Prophetic, the Apocalyptic and Their Relationship*, eds. Lester L. Grabbe and Robert D. Haak, T & T Clark, London and New York, 2003, 5.

<sup>170</sup> It is possible, however, that apocalyptic was a feature of some groups more than others. The dream-visions were revealed to religious communities rather than remaining only as oral and literary phenomenological accounts. Although it is unlikely that the specific communities to which the apocalypse was portrayed can be reconstructed from the limited historical resources available, it seems clear that

and faith, developing as a continuity of religious phenomena within Judaism, becoming a notable feature of Jewish tradition.<sup>171</sup> There were, however, some aspects of apocalyptic which related to specific Jewish groups more than others. For example, of the many apocalypses discovered near Qumran, most of which are written in Aramaic and therefore presumably not written by members of the Community, the focus on the final eschaton appealed to the religious thinking of the Community. Although such texts<sup>172</sup> were not sectarian-specific, it would appear that they held more meaning within the Community than in other contemporary Jewish groups. The extent to which such texts featured in the Dead Sea Scrolls, both numerically and configurationally, suggest they played a particularly significant role within the Community, notwithstanding their external authorship.<sup>173</sup>

There are scholars who, in view of the considerable diversity in apocalyptic writing, question apocalyptic being accorded the status of a movement.<sup>174</sup> For some, firm lines of demarcation exist between prophecy and apocalyptic and the concept of ‘movement’ is questioned. For example, as previously noted, to the extent that prophecy

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apocalyptic literature, or oral accounts, were contemporaneously significant, perhaps more with some groups than others within the overall Jewish community. For example, in the second half of the book of Daniel, the author has assembled stories of Daniel and some of his peers involving issues of faithfulness and persecution during the Maccabean wars, expressed as a series of visions aimed at supporting the faithful in difficult times rather than as a contribution to contemporary history.

<sup>171</sup> D.S. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic: 200 BC - 100 AD*, SCM Press, London, 1971, 23.

<sup>172</sup> For example, *1 Enoch* 1, the *Testament of Levi* 18, and *2 Baruch* 70-74.

<sup>173</sup> See discussion by Devorah Dimant, ‘The Scrolls and the Study of Early Judaism’, *The Dead Sea Scrolls at Fifty: Proceedings of the 1997 Society of Biblical Literature Qumran Section Meetings*, Scholars Press, Atlanta, 1999, 57-59.

<sup>174</sup> James Charlesworth, ‘Introduction’, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, *Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments*, ed. Charlesworth, Doubleday, New York, 1983, 3.

may be regarded as a movement, it is perceived as coming to an end. On the other hand, apocalyptic, although regarded by some as having been ‘produced’ by the prophetic movement, did not itself constitute a movement but existed as a literary genre. Although apocalypses, including those of Jewish and early Christian origin between 250 BCE and 100 CE, may be categorised as a literary type<sup>175</sup> and arguably as a distinct literary genre, apocalyptic as a movement transcends categorisation as only a literary genre. It will be argued that the term ‘apocalyptic movement’, conforming to the construct that prophecy and apocalyptic provide a religious continuum and that each has the essential qualities of a religious movement. Such a supposition is supported by the extent to which early and late Jewish apocalyptic writers, as well as first-century Jewish and Christian writers, share common apocalyptic traditions, symbols and images.

### **The modern study of apocalyptic: evolving views**

Debate on the nature of apocalyptic intensified in the last decades of the twentieth century. The dichotomy within apocalyptic, perceived by some, between myth and history has been challenged as being overly simplistic and unhelpful to an appreciation of the role of apocalyptic in both early Judaism and Christianities.<sup>176</sup> Although myth is a central component to the apocalyptic worldview, it need not be assumed that apocalyptic is myth and prophecy is history: the worldviews of both prophets and visionaries contain mythical elements.<sup>177</sup> Myth and history have long been intertwined across cultures and religions: ancient writings from the Indian sub-continent, predating those of Judaism and

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<sup>175</sup> See, for example, Paul S. Fiddes, *The Promised End: Eschatology in Theology and Literature*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford and Malden MA, 2000, 24.

<sup>176</sup> Grabbe, ‘Introduction and Overview’, *Knowing the End from the Beginning*, 5.

<sup>177</sup> For instance, the accounts of Elijah in 1 and 2 Kings reflect a mythical worldview.

Christianity, provide many examples.<sup>178</sup> Thus, the dichotomy between myth and history in respect of prophecy and apocalyptic is likely a construct of modern scholarship more than an accurate description of prophetic-apocalyptic writings.

Late modern scholarship of apocalyptic has been stimulated by the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the concomitant challenge to ‘the ossification in thinking that still owes a good deal to nineteenth-century stereotypes’.<sup>179</sup> Such stereotypes have tended to continue the obfuscation between prophecy and apocalyptic, not infrequently leading to arbitrarily-imposed distinctions between the two from both literary and phenomenological perspectives. Each perspective is significant to the study of both apocalyptic and prophecy and their relationship. The literary genres include prophetic writings and stories as well as apocalypses and stories of apocalypses and apocalyptic figures; social phenomena include prophets, visionaries, diviners and scribes and their activities and experiences.<sup>180</sup> A further definitional issue relates to the subjective nature of the terms ‘prophecy’ and ‘apocalyptic’: both are abstractions, useful terms for ‘understanding common features found in individual writings’ but otherwise without a physical presence in nature.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> One can also suggest that mythical worldviews are not outside the religious experience of many contemporary evangelical Christians and Islamicists.

<sup>179</sup> Lester L. Grabbe, ‘Prophetic and Apocalyptic: Time for New Definitions - and New Thinking’, *Knowing the End from the Beginning*, eds. Grabbe and Haak, 107.

<sup>180</sup> See Lester L. Grabbe, *Priests, Prophets, Diviners, Sages: A Socio-historical Study of Religious Specialists in Ancient Israel*, Trinity Press International, Valley Forge PA, 1995.

<sup>181</sup> Grabbe, ‘Prophetic and Apocalyptic: Time for New Definitions’, 110; see also John J. Collins, ‘Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre’, *Apocalypse: the Morphology of a Genre*, ed. John J. Collins, Scholars Press, Atlanta, 1979, 2-3.

### **Apocalyptic: literary scope**

The genre ‘apocalypse’ is depicted by revelatory literature ‘in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world’.<sup>182</sup> Such a definition helps to identify the basic characteristics which are intrinsic to the apocalyptic form.<sup>183</sup> It does, however, through the use of the term ‘eschatological salvation’ suggest an afterlife, a condition which is unlikely to have been in the thinking of many writers of the Hebrew scriptures. Although the concept of an afterlife became part of Jewish and Christian thinking by the first century, and although ‘end-of-the world eschatologies’ have featured in Judaic and Christian tradition to the present time, such a concept would not appear to be *ipso facto* a feature of the apocalyptic literary genre.<sup>184</sup>

Although apocalypses are less related to political events being a consequence of human behaviour, as obtains in prophecy, their origins are to be found primarily in prophetic literature.<sup>185</sup> Lester Grabbe suggests that a ‘solution’ to apocalyptic being regarded as a separate entity is to consider apocalyptic/apocalypses as a subdivision of prophecy<sup>186</sup> or as a ‘sub-genre of prophecy’.<sup>187</sup> Given Grabbe’s comment that ‘there is

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<sup>182</sup> A definition of ‘apocalypse’ produced by the Society of Biblical Literature working group; see John J. Collins, ‘Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre’, 9.

<sup>183</sup> The definition is not without qualification; see, for example, Lester L. Grabbe, ‘The Social Setting of Early Jewish Apocalypticism’, *JSP* 4 (1989), particularly 42 n.14.

<sup>184</sup> See Grabbe, ‘Prophetic and Apocalyptic: Time for New Definitions’, 114-116.

<sup>185</sup> Michael E. Stone, ‘Apocalyptic Literature’, *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period: Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Sectarian Writings*, ed. Michael E. Stone, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1984, 384.

<sup>186</sup> Grabbe, ‘The Social Setting of Early Jewish Apocalypticism’, 33-35; idem, *Priests, Prophets, Diviners, Sages*, 178; idem, ‘Introduction and Overview’, *Knowing the End from the Beginning*, 22 and 37.

no need to find a definition to show how apocalyptic/apocalypses differ from prophecy because one is a form of the other',<sup>188</sup> and his compilation of the common and important features shared by prophecy and apocalyptic,<sup>189</sup> his statement that apocalyptic is a subdivision (or sub-genre) of prophecy seems unnecessarily arbitrary. It may also be suggestive of modern classification rather than a depiction of the inter-related juxtaposition and shared mythical worldviews of the two phenomena. Further, although there may be differences of definition and genre, both prophecy and apocalyptic function within a similar, even if diverse, socio-religious context and culture. Thus, rather than apocalyptic being categorised as a subdivision of prophecy, and notwithstanding its relationship to prophecy and the extent of continuity and renewal between them, apocalyptic has claims to its own individuality both in terms of its genre as literature and as a religious phenomenon.

As well as the examples of vision-structures and symbols which have parallels between prophetic and apocalyptic literature,<sup>190</sup> there is a range of proto-apocalyptic literature expressed in Isaiah, Zechariah and Haggai. For example, Isa. 56-66 provides examples of proto-apocalyptic writings which can be claimed to indicate a transitional continuity between prophecy and apocalyptic.<sup>191</sup> As well, the oracles in Isa. 40-55

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Categorisation concerning apocalyptic is not unique to Grabbe: for David Aune, apocalyptic 'is a subset of eschatology'; 'Transformations of Apocalypticism in Early Christianity', *Knowing the End from the Beginning*, 55.

<sup>187</sup> Grabbe, 'Poets, Scribes, or Preachers? The Reality of Prophecy in the Second Temple Period', *Knowing the End from the Beginning*, 72.

<sup>188</sup> Grabbe, 'Introduction and Overview', *Knowing the End from the Beginning*, 22.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>190</sup> For example, the prophet Ezekiel's dream-vision of Jerusalem and his angel-guided tour of the new Jerusalem (Ezek. 40-48) may be compared with the dream-visions of Daniel and those in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*.

<sup>191</sup> Isa. 24-27 have also been identified as proto-apocalyptic if not early apocalyptic.

express a greater mythological content than is contained in earlier prophecy, thus serving prototypically as a history-centred to mythological-centred shift in the prophetic-apocalyptic continuum. The view that apocalypses may share characteristics of both prophecy and apocalyptic, thus indicating continuity and renewal, is discussed in relation to Ezekiel, the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, and Daniel in Appendix B.

According to Michael Stone, rather than only elucidating ‘certain streams of religiosity in Judaism’ as a stage of historical development, the apocalypses ‘show a bold attempt to reach a view encompassing the whole historical process, from creation to eschaton’.<sup>192</sup> Such a claim may be regarded as overly sweeping, particularly by those who identify prophecy and apocalyptic as finite, chronically-constrained phenomena. However, it does add philosophical support to the argument for a prophetic-apocalyptic continuum, one that has contemporary epistemological significance to religious knowledge and belief in antiquity and which contributed to both renewal within Judaism and the religious context from which Christianity emerged. Given the close juxtaposition between prophetic and apocalyptic literature, their frequent overlapping, and their not infrequent textual changeability, it may be argued that their respective traditions constitute, if not a movement, at least an historical and religious continuum in the history of early Judaisms and Christianities.

### **Apocalyptic eschatology**

There is a range of meanings associated with the word ‘eschatology’. For example, meanings may be associated with the end of the cosmos and human history, or decisive

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<sup>192</sup> Stone, ‘Apocalyptic Literature’, 437.

end-events *within* history such as those prophesied in the Hebrew scriptures,<sup>193</sup> thus substantiating the phenomenon of prophetic eschatology. A more modern meaning is often associated with a generalised concern for ‘end-events’ or ‘last-things’. In terms of apocalyptic, a more specific category of meaning is associated with apocalypses, extending the association of ‘apocalypse’ as a literary genre to the concept of apocalyptic eschatology, one which *may* be a feature of apocalypses but in any event indicates the end of history and the cosmos.<sup>194</sup> It may be noted, therefore, that not all apocalypses involve eschatology, a revelation of God’s will through an apocalyptic disclosure of previously undisclosed divine secrets.<sup>195</sup>

To the category of apocalyptic eschatology which focusses on the cessation of history and the end of the cosmos may be added the concept of apocalyptic as a movement which involves an element of renewal within the prophetic-apocalyptic continuum. For example, the concept of an apocalyptic eschatological movement shifts the focus of apocalyptic from a preordained and precise series of events, a schedule of divine determinism, to one in which the focus is on the sovereignty of God and its renewing influence through events in the world. Thus, events conform to divine principles rather than events which occur as part of a self-determined plan. Such a perspective of apocalyptic eschatology is in contrast with the visions of *4 Ezra* in which God planned for mighty kingdoms, each succeeding the other (*4 Ezra* 10-13). It engages an element of openness, such as that expressed in the *Apocalypse of John*, in contrast to the end of hope

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<sup>193</sup> For example Isa. 2:12-21; Jer. 4:23-26; Zeph. 2:2-4.

<sup>194</sup> Fiddes, *Promised End*, 24-25.

<sup>195</sup> Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 14.



and renewal in some earlier apocalypses.<sup>196</sup>

A discussion on apocalyptic eschatology raises the issue of the complementarity or discontinuity between prophetic eschatology and apocalyptic eschatology and whether the former may be viewed in terms of being of a universal and ethical character while the latter is more particularistic and essentially (Jewish) nationalistic. Such divisions, however, may be descriptive rather than definitive: it may be argued that prophetic and apocalyptic eschatologies are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they represent aspects of a continuum, a process of change and adaptation which constitute renewal within the prophetic-apocalyptic movement extending into the Common Era.

### **From prophecy to apocalyptic: indicators of renewal?**

Changes in the nature and function of the prophetic movement become apparent from the sixth century BCE. As the history of Israel changes, the country's status as a nation-state ceases, and the reign of kings draws to a close, so the role of the prophets in interpreting Y<sup>HWH</sup>'s 'cosmic will' comes to a stop. However, it is not the end of prophecy; the prophetic role changes rather than ceases, moving from an oral or recorded manifestation of prophecy to one of a visual dimension.<sup>197</sup> Prophecy in the context of contemporary events transforms itself into prophecy of visionary significance, involving visions which lead into apocalyptic eschatology.<sup>198</sup> Such a view, however, is not one of consensus.

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<sup>196</sup> Fiddes, *Promised End*, 25-26.

<sup>197</sup> Hanson, *Dawn of Apocalyptic*, 16.

<sup>198</sup> A factor in the differentiation between prophecy and apocalyptic in modern study is that of the issue of identity formation and determination. To some extent attention has tended to focus on the prophets as historical and religious figures rather than on prophecy as a genre and phenomenon. In contrast the study of apocalyptic literature tends not to focus on the writer of apocalyptic but rather on the 'surreal images'

Rather than a continuum in which prophecy transforms into apocalyptic, some scholars view prophecy drawing to a close, while others see it falling into decline, thus creating a vacuum into which apocalyptic emerges. Another view, one upheld in this thesis, is that notwithstanding factors such as conflicts between prophets, changes in the nature of prophecy, a decline in the influence exerted by prophets in religious communities, and the serious consequences of the exile, there was a process of transformation which carried prophetic visions and traditions into and through the Second Temple Period. Although an increasing community perception of the disreputability of prophets contributed to what some describe as ‘the decline’ of prophecy, such a decline is also referred to as ‘substantial changes in the movement that were to redirect its course in the direction of apocalyptic’.<sup>199</sup>

The continuum of prophetic tradition led to classical prophecy’s self-transformation into apocalypse by the second century BCE. The essential meaning of the word ‘apocalypse’ is not easy to demarcate between the range of meanings associated with terms such as genre, motif, metaphor, and mode of thought. However, Shaye Cohen suggests that, based on the Greek verb ἀποκαλύπτειν meaning to reveal or uncover, the terms ‘unveiling’ and ‘revelation’ are close to the underlying essence of ‘apocalypse’.<sup>200</sup> Although the advent of apocalypse has been interpreted by some as marking the end of the prophetic tradition, there are sufficient points of complementarity between the two phenomena to argue in favour of a self-renewing prophetic continuum. One common element is that of revelation from God. The emphases of such revelations may vary from

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contained in the text; Grabbe, ‘Prophetic and Apocalyptic: Time for New Definitions’, 116.

<sup>199</sup> For example, see Carroll, *When Prophecy Failed*, 198 and 204-205.

<sup>200</sup> Shaye J.D. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1987, 196. In support of his view, Cohen cites the book of Jubilees, written c.160 BCE, in which the content of some heavenly tablets is revealed to Moses by an angel.

those concerned with the Mosaic covenant to a more specific focus on finite human concerns. The classical prophets' concerns for the reawakening of the covenant shift with the advent of apocalypse to the visionaries' elucidations of the role of YHWH *vis-à-vis* human concerns related to life, death, fate and sin.<sup>201</sup> In each case, both the classical prophet and the visionary of the Second Temple Period deploy many common phrases, motifs and ideas.<sup>202</sup>

Prophetic and apocalyptic writings share a range of literary, social and religious characteristics, including a mythical worldview in which a transcendent, cosmic world determines earthly events, conveying divine messages to earthly recipients. Further, both sets of writings address contemporary religious communities in respect of their current situations and a transformative future in which the righteous will prevail and the evil will be punished.<sup>203</sup> To the view that such commonality may tend to 'morph' one genre into another is the response that clearly separated prophetic and apocalyptic identities are to some degree artificial and overlook the continuity that exists between them.<sup>204</sup> Not infrequently, such arbitrary distinctions are arrived at by using particular writings to fit one's preconceptions of what constitutes prophecy or apocalyptic.

One dimension of renewal between prophetic and apocalyptic literature is that a

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<sup>201</sup> The word 'prophet' is used in respect of the period of classical prophecy. In the case of apocalypse, I have used the word 'visionary', although the word 'seer' or the term 'visionary seer' carries comparable meanings.

<sup>202</sup> Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, 196.

<sup>203</sup> See the criteria outlined by Grabbe, 'Prophetic and Apocalyptic: Time for New Definitions', 117.

<sup>204</sup> An example of prophecies within the prophetic tradition introducing apocalyptic dimensions is discussed in Appendix A: The Prophet Joel: A Prophetic Window on Apocalyptic.

focus of the latter was initially on concerns related to cosmology.<sup>205</sup> The priest and prophet Ezekiel who, because of his exile to Babylon experienced the cosmological God as a God of transcendence and not only the God of Israel lays a foundation for apocalyptic literature, referring frequently to the ‘final day’: ‘Thus says the Lord God; Disaster after disaster! See, it comes. An end has come, the end has come. It has awakened against you; see, it comes!’.<sup>206</sup> From such concerns visionaries proceeded to focus on historical phenomena and eschatological issues as, for example, expressed in the book of Daniel. Although it can be claimed that by this point classical prophecy had reached its pinnacle, the views expressed by visionaries were nonetheless regarded by their listeners to be God-given, even if mediated, revelations. Another difference between prophetic and apocalyptic literature concerns the anonymity of the latter in contrast to ‘named’ authors of the former. However, the use of pseudonyms by apocalyptic writers did not preclude their messages being perceived by contemporary readers (and hearers) as other than messages from the God of Israel. As such views were not proceeded by, ‘Thus says the Lord’, and therefore not proceeding directly from God, they did not emanate directly from apocalyptic visionaries but rather through the medium of angels. Thus, prophecy becomes less clearly enunciated, perhaps less clearly recorded, and more manifestly visual, suggesting renewal within a prophetic-apocalyptic continuum.

### **Prophecy into the Common Era: continuity and renewal**

Assessments of prophetic continuity and renewal need to take into account transforming and transformative prophetic roles based on the social and institutional locations of the

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<sup>205</sup> For example, see Jubilees and the issue of legitimising the solar calendar.

<sup>206</sup> Ezekiel 7:5-6. The horrors of the ‘final day’ are cited, for example, Ezek. 5:15-17; 13:11; 21:3-5; 22:22; 30:12; 34:12.

prophets, editorial factors in the compilation of prophetic books, and the juxtaposition between prophetic experience and tradition. Although prophecy in Israel lived in tension with tradition, it was self-transformative and able to break beyond the strictures of tradition. For example, if the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs were written during 150-100 BCE,<sup>207</sup> that the text suggests a series of prophecies as much as accounts of apocalypses, a continuum between prophecy and apocalyptic is suggested. In terms of tradition, prophecy gestated within the framework of cultic institutions which exercised traditional authority in respect of the voice of YHWH speaking to the Jewish people. However, it came to assert a status independent of the Temple and the priestly cult, achieving recognition within Judaism as a distinctive movement, able to speak independently and afresh to Jewish communities unfettered by cultic tradition. As well, the Second Temple Period provides a window to explore the extent to which prophecy was self-transforming in an epoch that saw the shift from the religion of Israel to the rise and consolidation of Judaism.

Eschatology and universalism appear to suggest two indicators of prophetic-apocalyptic continuity into the Common Era. In the first instance, concerning the role of eschatology, the prophetic movements of the middle of the first century CE appeared to some scholars, based on their interpretation of 1 Kings 19:15-18, as preparing for an imminent 'eschatological event'.<sup>208</sup> According to Richard Horsley, such prophecy was based on a political tradition of popular struggle against the oppressive regime of

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<sup>207</sup> See H.C. Kee, 'Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: A New Translation and Introduction', *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Vol. 1, ed. Charlesworth, 777-78.

<sup>208</sup> Richard A. Horsley discusses scholars' frequent misreading of 1 Kings 19:15-18 in his *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence: Popular Jewish Resistance in Roman Palestine*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1993, 200-206.

Ahab and Jezebel, providing an historical prototype for the mission of the Jesus movement seeking to restore the people of Israel.<sup>209</sup> Given that the locus of the Jesus movement was at the level of village communities or in the newly established communities in larger towns, Horsley argues convincingly for the study of prophecy as a broader-based movement in the first century. His premise is based upon the initial prophetic movements initiated by Moses and Joshua and the tradition of prophecy extending to the Jesus movement of the first century CE, rather than focussing upon individual charismatic itinerants.<sup>210</sup>

A characteristic of prophecy in Israel was the extent to which it was predicated on the 'end event', which led to the unfolding of future events. The uncertainty of the timing of the 'end event' contributed to continuing prophetic concern with covenantal faithfulness. The situation was not dissimilar to that of Jesus' position; foreseeing the destruction of Jerusalem as the end of prophetic tradition, he believed the 'end event' was approaching in his generation.<sup>211</sup> Preoccupation with the 'end event', however, should not obscure the ongoing dialectic within the prophetic movement which related to time. The oracular nature of prophecy led to a structural tension based on time: immediate issues faced by Jewish communities in contrast to communities' hopes of the future.

In the overall context of Jewish religious history, and through the prophets of the Exile indicating that salvation could be achieved through belief in Y<sub>HWH</sub> and righteous behaviour, prophecy contributed to a perspective of universalism, a 'forerunner' to the

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<sup>209</sup> Richard A. Horsley, *Sociology and the Jesus Movement*, Crossroad, New York, 1989, 143.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 143. Horsley cites 1 Kings 11 and Elijah as sources of such tradition, 142.

<sup>211</sup> Luke 19:11; cf. Mark 13:33-37; Luke 12:35-39; Matt.24:42-44.

universalism of the *basileia* portrayed in the *Apocalypse of John* which, widely acknowledged as an apocalyptic narrative, is also significant to late first-century prophetic literature. An example of prophetic contribution to universalism is expressed in Zechariah 1-8 which, largely eschatological and messianic in content, concludes on a prophetic note of universalism: ‘Thus says the Lord of hosts: In those days ten men from nations of every language shall take hold of a Jew, grasping his garment and saying, “Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you”’ (Zech. 8:23). Such a notion of universalism was extended by early Christianity, based on both prophecy and Christian messianism, to a level of transcendent salvation. The significance of prophecy to both Judaism and Christianity is its long and unbroken continuity, expressed in universal prophets, not least Moses, Isaiah and Jesus.<sup>212</sup> Although Christianity did not produce the ‘major’ prophets of Judaic tradition, prophecy did not cease with the arrival of the Common Era. That prophets and prophecy were regarded positively in the early Christian movement is attested in first-century Christian writings<sup>213</sup> and persons claiming prophetic status continued into the Common Era in both Jewish and Christian traditions.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> The concept of ‘unbroken’ prophecy has been challenged by assertions that prophecy drew to a close in the fourth and fifth centuries and that ‘the whole prophetic movement died out’; a representative, although it will be noted, ambivalent, view expressed by Stewart W. McCulloch, *The History and Literature of the Palestinian Jews from Cyrus to Herod 550 BC to 4 BC*, University of Toronto Press, 1975, 60. McCulloch appears to qualify such assertions, however, by describing, somewhat paradoxically, apocalyptic as ‘a perpetuation into the post-apocalyptic period of ... Israel’s prophetic religion’; *ibid.*, 100. In contrast to his assertion that prophecy ended by the fourth century, McCulloch states that by 250 BCE. ‘the prophetic impulse was by no means squelched ... it was forced to take new forms, and in doing so produced ... a new genre of Jewish literature; *ibid.*, 101.

<sup>213</sup> For example, both prophetic and apocalyptic is evident in Rev. 1:3; 11:6; 22:6-7, 10, 18.

<sup>214</sup> Such claims are not made, however, without acknowledging the views of Josephus in *Ap.* 1.41 and *Ant.* 3.218 that prophecy had ceased before the Common Era. For an analysis of Josephus’ views on prophecy in the late Second Temple Period, and specifically on his views on the context of prophecy at approximately the time of the ministry of Jesus, see Rebecca Gray, *Prophetic Figures in Late Second Temple Jewish Palestine:*

To describe prophecy and apocalyptic as a continuum is not intended to imply that it is either chronologically or developmentally based. Considerable doubt exists concerning the cessation of prophecy and, if so, when as well as the arbitrary assumption that apocalyptic replaced prophecy. Countering the view that prophecy ended much earlier than the Common Era are the accounts reporting prophets and prophecy as not uncommon features of the early Christian church. Prophets travelled from Jerusalem to Antioch and prophesied global famine (Acts 11:27); they were active in the church at Antioch (Acts 13:1; 15:32); and conforming to Paul's account, they were accorded status in the early church next to that of the apostles (1 Cor. 12:28). The prophet Jesus, speaking to seventy disciples appointed to precede his visits to towns and villages (Luke 10:1), describe his prophetic-visionary experience of Satan falling from heaven 'like a flash of lightning' (Luke 10:18).

As noted earlier, in the book of Revelation John is commissioned as a prophet (10:8-11), a Jewish-Christian prophet engaged with the new Christian churches in the province of Asia. The overall context of John's *Apocalypse* concerns Christian prophecies in the early churches, not infrequently revealed by the prophets during worship services.<sup>215</sup> Although Judaic prophets are not cited directly by John, a degree of prophetic continuity is suggested by his treatment of Babylon: his oracle that with great violence, 'Babylon the great city will be thrown down and will be found no more' (18:21) continues the tradition of prophetic oracles on the destruction of Babylon.<sup>216</sup> The concluding chapter emphasises the significance of prophecy in an eschatological context with a

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*The Evidence from Josephus*, Oxford University Press, 1993, 7-34.

<sup>215</sup> For example, Paul encouraged prophets to share their prophecies with congregations (1 Cor. 14:29-31).

<sup>216</sup> For example, Isa. 21:9b; Jer. 25:12.



warning that ‘the words of the prophecy of this book’ are neither to be added to nor taken away (22:18-19). The *Apocalypse of John* provides considerable support for the view that a prophetic-apocalyptic continuum extended from the religion of Israel to at least the close of the first century. For example, John’s narrative concludes with the angel’s admonition: ‘Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near’ (22:10), which may be interpreted as indicating that the text is (also) prophetic and available for a universal readership. According to John’s account of his vision, the angel assured him that the prophets are his comrades (22:9). In the final verses, in anticipation of the return of Christ, are the injunctions to keep the words of the prophecy of the book (22:7) and to neither add to nor subtract from the prophecy of the book if wishing to share ‘in the tree of life’ and in the new *basileia* (22:18-19). Such expressions not only indicate the significance of prophecy in John’s apocalyptic narrative but also give support to the concept of a prophetic-apocalyptic continuum extending into the Common Era.

In summary, both prophecy and apocalyptic contributed to the ‘identity formation’ of early Christianity. The distinctive messianic element and eschatological conviction of apocalyptic insight, perceived through divinely-inspired visions, served to help establish an early Christian ethos.<sup>217</sup> Visions and revelations feature extensively in early Christian writings with prophecy and apocalyptic frequently juxtaposed, as in the *Apocalypse of John*, an *apocalyptic* narrative of John’s visions which concludes with a warning to safeguard the *prophecy* of the book (Rev. 22:18-19). Thus, support is accorded the hypothesis that their respective traditions and literary interrelationship constitute a case for religious continuity and renewal in first-century Judaic-Christian history.

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<sup>217</sup> See Christopher Rowland, ‘Apocalypse, Prophecy and the New Testament’, *Knowing the End from the Beginning*, eds. Grabbe and Haak, 163-164.



**PART TWO**

**DIVERGENCE IN RENEWAL:**

**INDICATORS FROM THE *APOCALYPSE OF JOHN***



## Chapter Four

### First-Century Apocalyptic: Indicators of Divergence

#### Introduction

In Part 1, chapter 3, the case is argued that the genres of prophecy and apocalyptic constitute a continuum which traverses Judaic tradition and early Jewish-Christian writings, and it is noted that prophecy and apocalyptic are features of both Second Temple Judaism and early Christianities. Part 2 extends the analysis from a prophetic-apocalyptic continuum involving continuity and renewal to one which explores the concept of ‘divergence in renewal’. Several phenomena have been selected, principally the Temple and the new Jerusalem, the priesthood, and the Throne, which reveal indicators of divergence in religious belief and praxis. There are, however, three underlying considerations to this approach. The first is to emphasise that the thesis does not associate the concept of divergence with that of bifurcation. Rather, the term ‘divergence’ is used to suggest a ‘drawing away from’ in contrast with the notion of a radical departure or final rupture. Second, such an understanding of ‘divergence’ remains linked to the concept of renewal, a continuing process of development. Thus, the term ‘divergence in renewal’ is used to reinforce the notion of connectivity and movement between the terms continuity, renewal and divergence. Third, the analysis in Part 2 of the Temple and the new Jerusalem, the priesthood, and the Throne does not claim to establish clearly demarcated components of divergence. Rather, as definitive Judaic-Christian divergence evolved after late first-century Jewish and Jewish-Christian writings, a main focus of the thesis is to explore *indicators* of divergence within the framework of ongoing Jewish and early Christian continuity and renewal towards the end of the first century. It is not claimed that such indicators are of themselves defining factors in the eventual

establishment of separate religions but that they serve as *indicators* of divergence within a continuing process of renewal, that is, a *Tendenz* towards divergence.<sup>218</sup>

### **From continuity to divergence in renewal**

Part 1 has argued the case for a prophetic-apocalyptic continuum from the Second Temple Period into the first century of the Common Era, one which transcends metaphorically-based assumptions of a ‘parting’ or ‘partings’ between early Judaism and early Christianities. However, in order to explore an alternative view that within first-century Christian apocalyptic there may be indicators of divergence between Judaic tradition and early Christian innovation, the main focus of Part Two is on the *Apocalypse of John*, chosen because of its authorship by a (Jewish) Christian late in the first century and the historical and theological weighting accorded the text by modern Christian scholars.

From the complexity of John’s narrative, the range of key images and motifs, and the broad theological significance of his visions, I have selected three facets: the Temple and Jerusalem, the priesthood, and the Throne. Such a selection is based on three significant constituent elements of Judaic tradition, and therefore relevant to issues of continuity, renewal and divergence. Their selection, however, is not to exclude the significance of Judaic-Christian issues embedded in the inclusive category of universalism or other topics of theological consequence. Such topics include the nature of God,

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<sup>218</sup> It may be noted that drawing conclusions of definitive divergence is a difficult task, given that both late first-century Jewish and Jewish-Christian apocalyptic texts contain different elements and stages of development in renewal. Thus, the boundaries between ‘divergence’ in the sense of bifurcation, on the one hand and, on the other hand, ‘divergence’ which is indicative rather than definitive, within a process of renewal, are difficult to establish authoritatively.

creation, the Spirit, the new covenant, messianism, angelology and prophecy, all of which contribute to the overall historical and theological impact of John's epistolary, prophetic and apocalyptic text. Of the wide range of theological issues which emerge in the complex narrative of the prophet-seer from Patmos, the three selected motifs appear to feature less prominently in the many and varied modern studies of the *Apocalypse of John*. Such would particularly appear to be the case concerning the priesthood and the Throne.

### **Jewish and Christian apocalyptic**

Compared with the nineteen apocalypses and closely related texts compiled in J.H. Charlesworth's *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*,<sup>219</sup> the Christian canon includes only two apocalypses: the book of Daniel and the *Apocalypse of John* both of which, drawing upon earlier Jewish apocalyptic writing, contribute to the continuum of Jewish apocalyptic thought.<sup>220</sup> Although apocalyptic is a central feature of the *Apocalypse of John*, the author clearly describes his text as 'prophecy' (1:3; 22:18) and includes several prophetic dimensions: his messianic prophecy (1:7), his warning that 'those who worship the beast and its image ... will be tormented with fire and sulphur ... in the presence of the Lamb' (14:9-10), and the prophetic messenger speech, although epistolary in form, in chapters two and three. The apocalyptic accounts contained in *4 Ezra*, *2 Baruch* and the *Apocalypse of John* serve to indicate affinities which exist between Jewish and Christian apocalyptic writings.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> J.H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*. vol. 1, *Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments*, Doubleday, New York, 1983.

<sup>220</sup> J.H. Charlesworth, 'The Jewish Roots of Christology: The Discovery of the Hypostatic Voice', *SJT* 39:1 (1986) 19.

<sup>221</sup> Although first-century Jewish and Christian borderlines are discussed in chapter two, in the context of late first-century Jewish and Christian texts it should be noted that the term 'Christian' does not necessarily imply 'non-Jewish'. Much of the New Testament, including the *Apocalypse of John*, may be described as

John's *Apocalypse* grew out of the Judaisms of the Second Temple Period and, drawing heavily on Jewish messianic literary and religious tradition, points to the messiahship of Jesus Christ. Although the references to Jesus in John's *Apocalypse* are frequent, they are not made in respect of the historical Jesus and his earthly teaching and ministry, nor to his role as a prophet. Jesus is a chief protagonist in John's text, referred to frequently as the Lamb and on one occasion as the Word of God (19:14). In acknowledgement of Judaic tradition, John refers to Jesus on three occasions in a Davidic context: 'the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David' (3:7); 'the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Root of David' (5:5), and at the close of John's *Apocalypse*, Jesus states: 'I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star' (22:16). However, his overall treatment of Jesus is as an exalted Messiah-figure sharing God's Throne in contrast to a kingly and earthly descendant of David or to the historical Jesus as an earthly Jewish rabbi. John draws on the Hebrew scriptures, weaving Judaic references into his Christian prophetic-apocalyptic narrative. Several instances may be cited. For example, in his first letter to the seven churches, John assures those who conquer evil that they will have 'permission to eat from the tree of life that is in the paradise of God' (2:7), and in his description of the new Jerusalem John depicts the tree of life on either side of the river which flows 'from the throne of God and of the Lamb' (22:2). Thus John's early and late references to the tree of life allude to the Yahwist account in Genesis. Further, the account of the new Jerusalem descending from heaven appears to have associations with the prophecies of Ezekiel (Ezek. 36:1 -39:29; 48:30-35) and the Psalmist's promise that the Lord 'will bless those who fear the Lord, both great and small' (Ps. 115:13) is echoed in John's reference to the voice from the throne saying, 'Praise our God all you his servants,



and all who fear him, small and great' (Rev. 19:15).

John's vision of the thrones upon which are seated those who have authority to judge (Rev. 20:4) appears to draw on the apocalyptic vision of Daniel in which he sees thrones set in place from which judgement was given 'for the holy ones of the Most High' (Dan. 7:9, 22). Trito-Isaiah's prophetic account of the Lord God's intention 'to create new heavens and a new earth' as well as 'create Jerusalem' in which he 'will rejoice ... and delight in his people' (Isa. 65:17-19; 66:22) is reflected in John's vision of 'a new heaven and a new earth' and the descent of the new Jerusalem where 'the home of God is among mortals' and 'he will dwell with them' (Rev. 21:1-3). From such examples, it appears that John accords respect to Judaic tradition and literature, in that his text may well take on a different character if his *Apocalypse* was divorced from Jewish tradition. As will be noted in the following chapters, John's narrative successfully reinterprets traditional symbols and images to the beliefs of new Christian communities, thereby reinforcing religious continuity and renewal. Such an approach may be regarded, therefore, as not atypical to a hybrid Judaic/early Christian legacy resembling, for example, the book of Daniel. However, it is argued in this and the following chapters that in deploying the new Jerusalem, the priesthood, and the Throne in its narrative and thematic approach and in drawing upon, *inter alia*, allegorical thrones, elders, beasts, and in particular the new Jerusalem, John's text presents a complex range of metaphorical meanings in his treatment of the phenomenology of apocalyptic from a Christian perspective. It is posited subsequently that such a combination suggests nuanced degrees of difference between Judaic-Christian continuity and renewal on the one hand and divergence in renewal on the other.

The *Apocalypse of John*, often regarded as a Christian rather than Jewish-Christian text, is approximately contemporaneous with the Jewish apocalypses in *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch*.<sup>222</sup> Other Christian apocalypses such as the *Apocalypse of Peter* and the *Apocalypse of Paul* appeared later. Establishing the date of the authorship of the *Apocalypse of John*, however, has involved considerable debate over a long period, principally between two schools of thought. The first argues that John's *Apocalypse* was written in the 60s of the first century CE; the second favours the 90s as the date of authorship. In support of the earlier dating, and drawing on descriptions of the beast in Rev. 13:1-18 and 17:7-14, Albert Bell associates the heads of the beast as indicating Roman emperors, with a specific allusion to the emperor Nero.<sup>223</sup> Another modern author who favours dating the authorship of John's *Apocalypse* to the 60s is John Robinson who suggests the lack of mention of the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE augurs for the earlier dating.<sup>224</sup> In general agreement with Bell and Robinson is Christopher Rowland who argues for dating the text to c. 68 CE, based on the unstable state of the empire following Nero's death as the setting in which John's *Apocalypse* was written.<sup>225</sup> Finally, in respect of support for a dating in the 60s are the views of Stephen Smalley whose conclusion is that the *Apocalypse of John* was written shortly before the destruction of

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<sup>222</sup> A similar situation obtains in respect of the *Apocalypse of John* and the Jewish apocalypses in *1 Enoch* 37-71.

<sup>223</sup> For a more comprehensive account of Bell's inclination to the earlier date of authorship, see A.A. Bell Jr., 'The Date of John's Apocalypse: The Evidence of Some Roman Historians Reconsidered', *NTS* 25 (1978) 93-102. Bell's association of the seven heads and the number 666 with the emperor Nero, however, may not be a definitive indicator of authorship in the 60s, if the extensive belief in later decades that Nero would return is taken into account.

<sup>224</sup> J.A.T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament*, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1976.

<sup>225</sup> Rowland, *The Open Heaven*, 403-406.

Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 CE, early in the reign of Vespasian (69-79 CE).<sup>226</sup>

Although there is a vast range of views in support of both datings, the complexity of the issue precludes further discussion, apart from an equally brief acknowledgement of the case for a later dating.<sup>227</sup>

Although from an historical perspective there is only a difference of some thirty years between the two datings, several phenomena between them are of historical consequence; namely, Roman persecution of the early Christian churches, the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, and the Roman civil war in 68-69 CE. Of such events, widely accepted support for an authorship date in the 90s is based on the persecution of the early churches in Asia Minor by Roman authorities. A related view is based on the identification of Rome with Babylon: Rome is depicted as Babylon following the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple.<sup>228</sup> An early modern-era scholar of the view that John's *Apocalypse* was written in the last years of Domitian's reign is Henry Swete.<sup>229</sup> Later scholars with the same opinion, even if decades apart, include R.H. Charles and

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<sup>226</sup> Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation of John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove IL, 2005, 2-3; idem., *Thunder and Love: John's Revelation and John's Commentary*, Wipf & Stock Publishers, Eugene OR, 2013, 40-50.

<sup>227</sup> For a selected lists of texts dealing with the dating issue, ranging from the eighteenth century to the present, see Kenneth Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation*, Institute for Christian Economics, Tyler, Texas, 1989, 30-38.

<sup>228</sup> L.L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire*, Oxford University Press, New York and Oxford, 1990, 14. Noting that Revelation, chapters 13, 17, and 18 refer to emperors and the city of Rome, Thompson concludes the *Apocalypse of John* was written 'in the time of the empire' but without a precise time being specified (page 13). For additional reasons for the later dating, including the *fiscus Judaicus*, and a coin issued by Vespasian, see Marius Heemstra, *The Fiscus Judaicus and the Parting of the Ways*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, 2010, 107-114.

<sup>229</sup> Henry B. Swete, *Commentary on Revelation*, Kregel, Grand Rapids, 1977 (first published 1906), xcixff.

Robert H. Mounce.<sup>230</sup> Leonard Thompson regards as ‘compelling evidence for dating the book [of Revelation] more precisely after 70 CE’ the reference by Irenaeus to the visions of Revelation being seen ‘not long ago’ but ‘close to our generation, towards the end of the reign of Domitian’.<sup>231</sup> Dating based on Domitian’s persecution may also be argued from John’s reference to ‘the souls of those who had been slaughtered for the word of God and the testimony they had given’ (Rev. 6:9) and ‘the image of the beast ... cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be killed’ (Rev.13:15).<sup>232</sup> Thompson’s conclusion is that the *Apocalypse of John* was written during the latter years of Domitian’s reign with likely dates being between 92 and 96 CE.<sup>233</sup>

Although such a brief review of the opposing views concerning the date of authorship, or final composition, of the *Apocalypse of John* does not permit a definitive conclusion between the 60s or the 90s CE, the prevailing view since early church tradition to the present appears to favour dating the book to the later years of the rule of Domitian, thus close to the year 95 CE. Assuming such to be the case, a contemporaneous setting can be claimed between John’s *Apocalypse* and the Jewish pseudepigraphical writings of *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch*, both of which are generally agreed to have been written late in the first

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<sup>230</sup> R.H. Charles, *The Revelation of St. John*, vol. 1, T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1920, xci; Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1977, 32.

<sup>231</sup> Thompson, op. cit., 15. Thompson cites Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.18.1 [Iren. Haer. 5.30.3]. It may be noted that Eusebius refers to persecution of Christians in *Eccles. Hist.* 3.17. Thompson’s reliance on the testimony of Irenaeus, however, requires a degree of caution in that it is external evidence. See Boxall, *Revelation: Vision and Insight*, SPCK, London, 2002, 89-91 and *idem*, *The Revelation of Saint John*, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody MA, 2009, 8.

<sup>232</sup> According to Heemstra, ‘the *fiscus Judaicus* may very have been the reason why Christian communities felt they were persecuted by Roman authorities’, *The Fiscus Judaicus and the Parting of the Ways*, 106.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

century CE.<sup>234</sup> The differences between the *Apocalypse of John* and *4 Ezra* relating to their notions of universalism and patterns of divine-human communication, as well as between John's *Apocalypse* and *2 Baruch* concerning the priesthood, take on added significance because of their respective contemporaneous (Jewish)-Christian and Jewish authorships. To the extent that such may be argued to be the case, the thesis that there are indicators of divergence in renewal in the first century CE is strengthened.

The *Apocalypse of John* is the only extant apocalyptic text, written by a 'Christian', which closely parallels Jewish apocalypses.<sup>235</sup> Although it is more closely allied to Jewish apocalypses than to other Christian apocalypses, one distinction is that the *Apocalypse of John* is generally believed to have been authored by an otherwise unknown prophet-seer and visionary named John (1:1, 4, 9; 22:8),<sup>236</sup> and thus is not pseudepigraphical as is the case with almost all other Jewish and Christian apocalypses.<sup>237</sup> Although there does not appear to be proof that the author was named 'John', the text is generally not considered pseudonymous as is the case with Jewish apocalypses and authorship of the book is not attributed to an earlier historical identity but is the work of a contemporaneous figure. Views on authorship, however, have not been consensual; for example, some scholars accept that John 'was the inspired prophet ... identical with John the apostle and Evangelist'.<sup>238</sup> There are also thematic and theological links between the

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<sup>234</sup> See discussions on *4 Ezra* in chapter 4, '*4 Ezra*: a contrast?' and on *2 Baruch* in chapter 6, 'First-century pseudepigraphical writings'.

<sup>235</sup> Such a statement is not to preclude the view that there are *parts* of other New Testament texts which, if not specifically apocalyptic, share an apocalyptic outlook.

<sup>236</sup> So described to avoid association with either John the Baptist or John the Evangelist.

<sup>237</sup> The *Shepherd of Hermes* is another exception.

<sup>238</sup> H.M. Féret, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, trans. Elizabeth Carathiel, Blackfriars Publications, London, 1958, 1; originally published as *L'Apocalypse de St. Jean*, by Editions Correa et Cie, Paris, 1942. Although

Gospel of John and John's *Apocalypse*. For instance, the Gospel of John uses the symbol of 'the Lamb' (1:29, 36)<sup>239</sup> and the concept of the '*Logos* of God' (1:1, 14) in respect of Jesus as Messiah. The two accounts make distinctions in presenting the figure of Jesus Christ. For example, in John's *Apocalypse* Christ, in heaven, is described as 'Faithful and True' who 'in righteousness judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems' (19:11-12a); he is riding on a white horse, clothed in a 'robe dipped in blood' (19:13), whose exalted status is 'King of kings and Lord of lords' (19:16), and a sharp sword which comes from his mouth enables him to 'strike down the nations' and 'rule them with a rod of iron' (19:15). Such a rhetorical account contrasts with the Gospel of John in which God the Father and Jesus the Son dwell together in peace and love with their believers (chapters 13-17). A comparison between the apocalyptically rhetorical text of the *Apocalypse of John*, for example 19:19-21, and the peaceful indwelling of God, the Son of Man and their believers in John's Gospel, for instance 13:31-35, would appear to indicate different authorship.<sup>240</sup> Notwithstanding the mix of genres in John's *Apocalypse* the major genre is Jewish apocalyptic, adapted to take account of early Christians' belief in Jesus Christ.<sup>241</sup> A further distinction between the two texts is that, unlike the Gospel of John, the *Apocalypse of John* is explicitly antagonistic to Rome's imperial role: references to the beast (13-17), the harlot and Babylon (14:8) depict Rome in a militantly unsympathetic manner. The imperial power of Roman rule is depicted by a beast from the sea (13:1-9) and the 'scarlet beast' and 'great whore' who 'will make war

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not regarded as an authoritative scholar on the *Apocalypse of John*, Féret reflects the view of a mid-twentieth century French theologian.

<sup>239</sup> It is, however, noted that John's Gospel and John's *Apocalypse* use different Greek words for 'Lamb'.

<sup>240</sup> A strong argument in support of different authorship may be drawn from the overall differences in literary styles.

<sup>241</sup> See Vermes, *The Changing Faces of Jesus*, 60.

on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful' (17:3,5,14). John develops a contrast between the evil of Roman oppressive rule and the freedom offered by God and the Lamb throughout his narrative, opening with a hymn to the Lamb and a new priesthood serving God and reigning on earth (5:9-10) and reinforcing the fulfilment of *basileiac* hope with the arrival of the new Jerusalem (20:6; 22:5).

As the concept of the *basileia* expressed in the *Apocalypse of John* is discussed later and as the term 'kingdom of God' evokes a wide range of theological interpretations, a brief explication of the meaning of *basileia* as deployed in this text is warranted. John's account of *basileia* is perceived as reflecting a radical Jewish democratic vision,<sup>242</sup> one which is shared by the Jesus movements, and is a vision which contrasts with the socio-political context of Roman imperial rule in the first century. Common translations of the term *basileia* used in first-century Christian writings include 'kingdom' or 'rule': both depict a royal-monarchical context of meaning which has the Roman Empire as its socio-political referent.<sup>243</sup> John's concept of *basileia* is also tethered to Second Temple Judaism in which the 'kingdom' reflects an ancestral symbol of the traditions of ancient Israel. Such a tradition is based, *inter alia*, on the children of Israel being saved from Egypt by YHWH (Josh. 24:7; cf. Exod. 3:9-13) and, subject to obeying the voice of God and keeping his covenant, becoming a priestly kingdom (*basileia*) and a holy nation (Exod.

<sup>242</sup> It is acknowledged the term 'democratic vision' may be seen by some as anachronistic, even if only *some* indicative steps *toward* a democratic vision were taken by early Christians. However, even if only tentative, John's 'divergently new' vision does stand in contrast with contemporary Roman imperial rule.

<sup>243</sup> See Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word: Feminist Biblical Interpretation in Context*, T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1998, 135. Such a view may be regarded as contentious: some theological interpretations of the term '*basileia*' are predicated more on the Kingdom of God as a referent rather than, or in addition to, the Roman Empire.

19:4-6). John's depiction of the new Jerusalem (Rev. 21) suggests a paradigm shift between the 'kingdom' of Judaic tradition and the emancipatory *basileia* of a temple-less Jerusalem in which the boundaries of basileaic understanding shift and the *basileia* becomes open to all who believe in the resurrected Lamb. The new *basileia*, which supersedes first-century issues of Judaic-Christian understanding, is one in which God dwells among mortals and makes all things new (21:3, 5). Such a *basileia* is of God but open to all, including Gentiles, offering a new world in which God 'will wipe every tear from [his peoples'] eyes, death will be no more, [and] the first things have passed away' (21:3-4). Hermeneutically, such an emancipatory concept of *basileia* suggests a strong redemptive component which results in an alternative world, one based on release from suffering and injustice and built on God's vision of justice and salvation.<sup>244</sup>

#### **4 *Ezra*: a contrast?**

A distinction between the apocalyptic accounts in *4 Ezra* and the *Apocalypse of John* can be discerned as the latter reflects a Christian transformation of Jewish apocalyptic, expressed in the author's treatment of universalism and messianism.<sup>245</sup> In the case of Jewish apocalypses there are examples of a dialectical relationship between the central figure, the Lord Most High, and those who take issue with the chief protagonist's views.<sup>246</sup> For example, in *4 Ezra*, Ezra's last vision is of the final judgement, the small number who will be saved, and the Lord's lack of grief 'over the multitude of those who perish' (4 Ezra

<sup>244</sup> Ibid., 114. The extent to which John's portrayal of *basileia* contains a significant element of redemption is discussed in the following chapter.

<sup>245</sup> I am using the term 'universalism' in the sense of inclusiveness, being open to persons of different ethnic, social and religious backgrounds, rather than the narrower doctrinal meaning of all people being 'saved' or 'redeemed'.

<sup>246</sup> The apocalypses in *4 Ezra* reflect cosmic upheavals which are also expressed in Christian writings, including the *Apocalypse of John*, Mark 13, Matt. 24 and Luke 21.



7:26-44, 60-61). Ezra renews his appeal to the Lord for the majority who will not be saved: 'There are more who perish than those who will be saved, as a wave is greater than a drop of water' (9:14-15). However, the Lord is unpersuaded: 'So let the multitude perish which has been born in vain' (9:22). In contrast to such a doctrinal view, one which emphasises the 'Jewishness' of those saved, the writers of Christian apocalyptic took account of the new non-Jewish adherents of the early Christian movement. In the case of the *Apocalypse of John*, those joining the Jesus movement are without restriction in relation to ethnicity, culture, or language.<sup>247</sup>

The author of the *Apocalypse of John* faced the issue of universalism because of the concept of, and responses to, the 'other' in early Jewish-Christian relations.<sup>248</sup> In general, apocalypses focus on the vindication of the righteous (the 'non-other') and divine judgement of the unrighteous (the 'other'), comprising those outside the apocalyptic author's milieu. Such a paradigm is not dissimilar to those in the Jesus movement ('non-other') and Jews outside the Jesus movement (the 'other'). The increasing attraction of the Jesus movement to Gentiles constitutes a paradigm shift in that the *Apocalypse of John* reveals that specific ethnicity is not a prerequisite to joining the Jesus movement (5:9; 7:9).<sup>249</sup> Rather, primitive Christianity draws adherents from diverse peoples, tribes and languages, leading to a wider pattern of intercultural worldviews which contributed to early Christian identity formation. As well as ethnic diversity, John was

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<sup>247</sup> In respect of 'culture', chapters 2 and 3 of John's *Apocalypse* appear to indicate a greater degree of conservatism on Torah-observance than is the case in Paul's writings.

<sup>248</sup> Although it is possible, if not likely, that the concept of the 'other' existed when John wrote his *Apocalypse*, his treatment of universalism does suggest that the contemporaneous view of the 'other' underwent change.

<sup>249</sup> Such a statement is not to suggest that proselytes were not accepted by some Judaisms.

writing in a religious context which included pantheons of divinities within national cults: a wide range of gods reflecting diverse national sentiments and causes within the extensive Roman Empire in Asia Minor. It was into a complex religious milieu of new temples, places of worship and a cross-fertilisation of Greek, Roman and oriental religious influences that John's *Apocalypse* appeared. It would have represented a clear contrast to, and competition with, the range of contemporary Judaic and pagan belief systems. In such a context John's narrative introduces new dimensions of divine-human communication concerning the priesthood and the Throne. For example, God communicates not only within his heavenly realm, depicted in the discussion on the Throne in chapter 5, but also from the Throne to his earthly realm.

### **Mapping first-century languages and communities**

As the Book of Revelation is generally acknowledged as a Greek text, in Part 2 the discussion of the three motifs, the Temple and the New Jerusalem, the priesthood, and the Throne draws primarily on their Greek translations to support their interpretation and conceptualization. Further, most citations are in Greek due to its prevalence in the Mediterranean east and west diaspora communities.<sup>250</sup> More focus on Hebrew and Aramaic would appear to be appropriate if the thesis was seeking a general comparison of Revelation to Judaism and Christianity. As such is not the case, citations of original languages favour Greek due not only to Revelation having been written in Greek for a Jewish-Christian audience but also to diaspora communities west of the Levant appearing to have lost facility in Hebrew and Aramaic. Such a view would appear to be supported

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<sup>250</sup> Concerning the two diasporas, the East/Aramaic-speaking and the West/Greek-speaking, see Michael E. Stone, *Ancient Judaism: New Visions and Views*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2011, p.8n.23, 137; Edrel Arie, 'The Diaspora in the Hellenistic Period', in M. Avrum Ehrlich (ed.), *Encyclopedia of the Jewish Diaspora: Origins, Experiences, and Culture*, ABC-CLIO, Santa Barbara, 2009, 8-17.

by three factors. First, the LXX appears likely to have been translated in the third century BCE for use by diaspora Jewish communities.<sup>251</sup> The second factor concerns literary evidence, including New Testament writings comprising the Acts of the Apostles, the Pauline epistles, the Letter to the Hebrews, and the Revelation of John which attest to Greek-speaking Jewish communities. Added to the New Testament writings are those of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha which, although composed in Hebrew or Aramaic, were translated into Greek for the diaspora communities.<sup>252</sup> Third, epigraphic and archaeological evidence may be taken into account. Such evidence includes extensive if not pervasive use of Greek and the influence of Hellenistic culture on the western/Mediterranean diaspora.<sup>253</sup>

### **Metaphor and the *Apocalypse of John***

An interpretation of the theological significance of John's account of the new Jerusalem, the Lamb, the priesthood and the Throne, discussed in the following three chapters,

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<sup>251</sup> For the prestige of this version in the diaspora communities of Egypt see *Letter of Aristeas* and Philo, *Life of Moses* 2.25-45. On the basis of evidence from the Judean desert Emmanuel Tov, 'The Text of the Hebrew/Aramaic and Greek Bible used in the Ancient Synagogue', in B. Olsson and M. Zetterholm (eds.), *The Ancient Synagogue from Its Origin until 200 C.E.*, Almqvist & Wiksell, Stockholm, 2003, 237-259, argues that it was only from c. 100CE that the Greek text underwent emendation conforming it to the emerging dominant Hebrew version and thus permitting its continued use in communities subject to rabbinic influence; the later translation by Aquila further attests the use of Greek among such communities.

<sup>252</sup> On the extent of diaspora Jewish literature composed in Greek for Jewish audiences see Martin Goodman, *Judaism in the Roman World: Collected Essays*, Brill, Leiden, 2007, 96, 105-106.

<sup>253</sup> See John J. Collins, *Jewish Cult and Hellenistic Culture: Essays on the Jewish Encounter with Hellenism and Roman Rule*, Brill, Leiden, 2005, 1-20. On Greek influence on the synagogues as attested in inscriptions and titles of officials see Lee I. Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2005, 625-626. Concerning the Hellenistic ethos of diaspora honorary inscriptions see Tessa Rajak, 'The Synagogue within the Greco-Roman City', in Steven Fine (ed.), *Jews, Christians and Polytheists in the Ancient Synagogue: Cultural Interaction in the Greco-Roman Period*, Routledge, London, 1999, 143-153; Edrel Arie, 'The Diaspora in the Hellenistic Period', 13-14.

requires an acknowledgement of the significance of his extensive use of metaphor. To elucidate his visions on these topics John depends heavily on metaphor, not in a textually manipulative sense but in specific applications, designed to strengthen the hermeneutical significance of his theological suppositions.<sup>254</sup> In relation to issues of Judaic-Christian renewal and divergence, John uses metaphors to depict religious apocalyptic phenomena in order to enhance theological understanding on the part of the first-century faithful beyond the notions embodied in Judaic theological traditions. This discussion, therefore, explores the extent to which John's use of metaphor serves to increase interpretative understanding of the theological significance of his portrayal of the new Jerusalem, the Lamb, the priesthood and the Throne, thus deepening the reader's appreciation of his notions of redemption and the new *basileia*.

The term metaphor, simply defined, is a word or phrase used in an uncommon context to convey a more insightful comprehension of a subject or concept. As noted in chapter 1, however, metaphor involves more than language: it serves to structure one's conceptual system, thus facilitating increased understanding.<sup>255</sup> That such is the case is explored in the following chapters in relation to John's use of metaphors in respect of the new Jerusalem, the Lamb, the priesthood and the Throne.<sup>256</sup> A framework for such an approach is provided by Johnson and Lakoff's view that 'from the experientialist

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<sup>254</sup> Examples are discussed in the following chapters in respect of the new Jerusalem, the Lamb, the priesthood and the Throne.

<sup>255</sup> According to Lakoff and Johnson, 'the locus of metaphors is in concepts not words', *Metaphors We Live By*, 244.

<sup>256</sup> Given that the term 'throne' may be described as a metonymy for power and authority, the accuracy and relevance of the terms 'metonymy' and 'metaphor' are discussed later in this chapter in the section 'Metaphor and the Throne'.

perspective, metaphor is a matter of *imaginative rationality*.<sup>257</sup> It permits an understanding of one kind of experience in terms of another, creating coherences by virtue of imposing gestalts that are structured by natural dimensions of experience. New metaphors are capable of creating new understandings and, therefore, new realities.<sup>258</sup> As well, metaphors vary quite considerably in complexity. For example, that God is described as a king does not have the metaphorical complexity of Jesus Christ as a slain Lamb; the first is a simple figure of speech, the word ‘king’ producing ready images of status and authority.<sup>259</sup> The second, however, is more complex: the term ‘slain Lamb’ is deployed by John to portray a deeper theological understanding of the religious significance of Jesus Christ to the faithful in the first century.<sup>260</sup> It possesses an allegorical component: the Lamb being the symbolic representation of Jesus Christ and the adjectival ‘slain’ symbolising the death of Jesus. Such theological notions are used extensively by John who, through his juxtaposition between allegory and metaphor, elucidates several of the divine symbols and images common to Hebrew literature.<sup>261</sup> Thus, rather than using traditional symbols and myths to depict his visions of the new Jerusalem, the priesthood, and the Throne, John deploys metaphor to deepen understanding

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<sup>257</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 244.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid.

<sup>259</sup> That John’s metaphor of the slain Lamb to represent Jesus Christ is more complex than, for example, the metaphor of God as a king may depend on the intellectual framework of the interpreter rather than any objective, qualitative understanding. It is expected, however, that the greater level of complexity of metaphor deployed by John will become more apparent in the following discussion in respect of the Lamb and redemption, the priesthood, and the Throne.

<sup>260</sup> In terms of their literary contexts, the word ‘king’ used as a metaphor, has a lexicalised context in contrast to ‘Lamb’ which involves a novel usage.

<sup>261</sup> The term ‘analogy’ may depict a figure of speech denoting a concept of correlation, equivalence, or comparative similarity in contrast to ‘metaphor’ which generally involves a more imaginative interpretation or understanding between two categories or phenomena.

of his theological notions beyond those of insights gained from Judaic traditions of, for example, Jerusalem, the Temple, and the priesthood. It is through metaphors which invite new understandings of religious phenomena that John moves beyond the archetypal narratives of the Hebrew scriptures, exploring deeper transcendental and divine realities.

### **John's *Apocalypse*: a metaphorical framework**

Although from an intellectual perspective exception may be taken to the lack of distinction between literal and metaphorical treatments of the new Jerusalem, the Lamb, the priesthood and the Throne, one may argue that the *Apocalypse of John* uses compelling cognitive metaphors to signal theological divergences through the conflation of literal entities from Judaic tradition with an apocalyptic genre. Thus, the four metaphorical entities are deployed to express, for example, innovative views of religious universalism, prophetic trinitarianism, and celestial interactive and liturgical joy in worship, as well as serving to elucidate John's concepts of a 'social' priesthood and a 'social' Throne.<sup>262</sup>

The use of metaphors by first-century Jewish-Christian writers was not uncommon. The apocalyptic genre of John's *Apocalypse* deploys both metaphors and similes which resemble those expressed in the eschatological views of Jesus in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. For example, John warns the church in Sardis that Jesus will come like a thief and the congregation will not know the hour of his coming (3:3; cf. 16:15), an account which is similar to that of Matthew 24:43 in which the thief will come at an unknown time.

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<sup>262</sup> Such suppositions are discussed in the following three chapters. For my metaphorical framework to John's *Apocalypse* I am indebted to the significance of metaphor expressed by Toby Tan in his B.Th. Honours Dissertation, *Living Metaphor: Birth from Above and the Birth of Meaning*, Charles Sturt University, 2010, 1-101.

Luke 12:39 provides a parallel account: ‘If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into’. The simile of the thief to convey the unknown time of Jesus’ return is consistent with its use in Luke 12:40; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10).<sup>263</sup> Notwithstanding the relatively common usage of similes in the first century, John’s *Apocalypse* features a use of metaphors which is more extensive and of more impact than other first-century Jewish-Christian literature. For example, the simile of ‘the thief’ is of a passing and illustrative nature, whereas the metaphors of the new Jerusalem and the Lamb are constitutive of John’s narrative.

Another example of John’s use of metaphor drawn from earlier Jewish and Christian writings is provided by his references to the ‘tree of life’. The symbolism of the ‘cosmic tree’, applied to both human and vegetative life and denoting renewal and fertility, is expressed by the metaphoric tree depicting not only the concept of the cosmos but also human life, immortality and wisdom. According to Mircea Eliade, ‘the tree came to express everything that religious man regards as *pre-eminently real and sacred*, everything that he knows the gods to possess of their own nature and that is only rarely accessible to privileged individuals, the heroes and demigods’.<sup>264</sup> More specific to John’s use of the metaphor of the ‘tree of life’ are the many accounts of trees, and trees of life, in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures. The creation account in Genesis states that ‘out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil’ (2:9). Such a biblical text combines the concept of trees which generate life and

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<sup>263</sup> See discussion by John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, Vol. 1, *The Roots of the Problem and the Person*, Doubleday, New York, 1991, 47.

<sup>264</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, 147-49.

convey a sense of renewal with the notion of the ‘tree of life’ denoting cosmological immortality (Gen. 3:24) and introducing, together with Gen. 2:17, the genre of ‘wisdom’ (cf. Gen. 3:22, 24).<sup>265</sup> Of the ten references to ‘tree’ or ‘trees’ in John’s *Apocalypse*, seven are relevant to John’s use of metaphor to convey his notions of the relationship between the divine entities and humankind.<sup>266</sup> For example, those who conquer evil will be permitted ‘to eat from the tree of life that is in the paradise of God’ (2:7), and trees are protected by four angels ‘standing at the four corners of the earth’ (7:1; cf. 7:3; 9:4), thus reinforcing the significance of trees to life and renewal. Of more significance, however, to John’s notions of redemption, liberation, and human relationships with God and Jesus Christ and more reflective of his use of metaphor, are his three references to the ‘tree of life’ in chapter 22.

In his final chapter, John engages with three dimensions of his ‘tree of life’ metaphor; respectively, renewal and universalism, redemption for the righteous and faithful, and disbarment from sharing in the benefits of the tree of life for those who detract from the prophetic accounts of his visions (22:2, 14, 19). In the first instance, on either side of the river in the new Jerusalem which flows ‘from the Throne of God and of the Lamb’ is the sustaining and renewing ‘tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month’ (22:2). As well, the leaves of the tree of life assure the ‘healing of the nations’, that is *all* peoples, indicating John’s notion of God’s concern for humankind irrespective of ethnicity, geography, or status.<sup>267</sup> Second, admission to the new *basileia* is

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<sup>265</sup> It is noted that not all references to trees in Jewish and Christian scriptures are, at least from a modern perspective, positive. For example, Deut. 21:22; Jos. 8:29; Matt. 3:10 (Luke 3:9); Matt. 7:19; Acts 5:30; 10:39b.

<sup>266</sup> Texts not relevant to this discussion comprise Rev. 6:13; 8:7; 11:4.

<sup>267</sup> It would seem very likely that John drew on the description of the tree of life in Ezekiel 47:12 in which



conditional: entry to the new holy city requires the ‘washing of robes’, symbolising a state of righteousness and faithfulness (22:14). Third, John’s final reference to the tree of life expresses the warning of Jesus concerning the prophecy expressed in John’s *Apocalypse* that ‘if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away that person’s share in the tree of life and in the holy city’ (22:18-19).<sup>268</sup> Finally, John’s references to the ‘tree of life’, combined with those of the ‘water of life’, constitute a metaphorical portrayal of his vision of the fullness and abundance of eschatological life, in contrast to the earthly experience of food and drink required to sustain earthly life, thus a specific gift from God. From the examples of the ‘thief’ and the ‘tree of life’, it may be claimed that as well as using such metaphors to achieve impact, John deploys them as a discursive approach, seeking to further elucidate the divine nature and deepen first-century understanding of a *new* pattern of divine-human relationships.<sup>269</sup>

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the trees bear fruit every month and the leaves are simply for healing. John extends the metaphor to indicate that the trees produce twelve different fruits and that the leaves are for the healing *of the nations*. See Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 138.

<sup>268</sup> Such a warning is a direct approach to the reader or hearer and follows the conclusion of John’s account of his visions, building on the equally direct statement of Rev. 1:3: ‘Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it; for the time is near’.

<sup>269</sup> This supposition is explored in the following discussion concerning John’s use of metaphor in respect of the new Jerusalem, the Lamb, the priesthood and the Throne. As a framework to this discussion I acknowledge that as metaphor is a basic constituent of figurative language, care is required lest it be interpreted in a dishonest or vague manner when seeking to depict the transcendent phenomena and dimensions of revelation expressed in John’s account. However, the lack of normative precision, that is, the wide scope for subjective interpretation by the reader or hearer, in John’s use of such metaphors justifies an imaginative interpretation of his theological notions. Thus, the following interpretations are not claimed as an inclusive, definitive study of John’s use of metaphor but as a framework in which to understand the theological significance of what John may have intended to convey to first-century hermeneuts.

### **John's metaphors: context and epistemology**

The expectation of the imminent arrival of a messianic kingdom late in the first century of the Common Era is significant to the extensive range of contemporary Jewish and Christian apocalyptic literature.<sup>270</sup> Such an eschatological expectation, however, should not overlook the diversity of suppositions as to the nature of the new divine kingdom. For example, the author of the *Assumption of Moses* foreshadows a kingdom more heavenly than earthly in nature (10:1-10). In contrast, the book of Daniel depicts an earthly, everlasting kingdom which shall be served and obeyed by all dominions (7:23-27).

Other contemporary writings which refer to the expectation of a new kingdom include *2 Baruch* and *4 Ezra*. Baruch describes his apocalyptic vision of a forest, including a vine, fountain and cedar which God interprets as the revelation of the dominion of his Anointed One (chapters 36-39). The anticipated kingdom is portrayed by Ezra in a variety of apocalyptic phenomena in twelve of the sixteen chapters (3 - 14), the aggregate effect of which tends towards divergence from Judaic tradition concerning eschatological expectations. Of relevance to the context in which John portrays the new Jerusalem is Ezra's description of freedom from Rome's imperial rule, symbolised by his vision of the 'eagle coming up from the sea' (12:11) and a kingdom on earth 'more terrifying' than all prior kingdoms (12:13). Ezra's vision of 'the lion' (of the tribe of Judah),<sup>271</sup> symbolising the Messiah 'from the posterity of David' (12:32), is also of the kingdom of God being established on earth (12:32-34). Ezra offers an alternative eschatological vision in the following chapter: the figure of a man, emerging from the sea, who flew up to a self-made mountain (13:3, 6). Speaking with a 'stream of fire', 'a flaming breath' and a 'storm of

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<sup>270</sup> For example, the book of Daniel, the *Assumption of Moses*, the books of Enoch.

<sup>271</sup> Cf. Rev. 5:5.

sparks', he destroys an evil multitude, descends from the mountain and assembles a multitude of the redeemed (13:10-13). Thus, the Messiah who will stand at the top of Mount Zion (13:35), as John's Lamb was standing on Mount Zion (Rev. 14:1), assembles a multitude of the faithful, depicted as the ten 'lost' tribes of Israel (13:39-40).

Although such visionary accounts in *4 Ezra* are similar to those in John's *Apocalypse* there appear to be fundamental differences between them. For instance, Ezra's visions of the Messiah (13:10-13), apocalyptic in genre and drawing on a range of other-worldly phenomena, contrasts with John's more succinct portrayal of the new Jerusalem (21:1-2) and his description of the nature and existential quality of the new *basileia* (21:3-8). Further, Ezra's Messiah arises from the sea, annihilates his enemies, and gathers a 'peaceful' multitude, symbolising 'the ten "lost" tribes of Israel to himself'.<sup>272</sup> John's alternative account is of a Messiah who shares the Throne of God, is portrayed as a slaughtered Lamb rather than one who rises from the sea, and who shares his authority with the redeemed (2:26) and 'ransomed for God', the faithful from *all* tribes, languages, peoples and nations who become priests serving God in a new earthly *basileia* (5:9-10). Notwithstanding apocalyptic links between the two texts, John's use of metaphor reflects a departure from the evocative nature of Ezra's apocalyptic descriptions in favour of introducing more peaceful and universalist dimensions of theological significance through his portrayal of the new Jerusalem, the Lamb and redemption, the 'new' priesthood, and the 'new' Throne.<sup>273</sup>

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<sup>272</sup> See B.M. Metzger, 'The Fourth Book of Ezra: A New Translation and Introduction', *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, ed. Charlesworth, 521.

<sup>273</sup> Support for this statement of dimensions of 'theological significance' is expressed in the three following chapters.

The significance of socio-political factors to the contextual derivation of John's metaphors cannot be overlooked as such factors serve to influence the identity-forming influence of his narrative. It may be assumed that late in the first century of the Common Era, John would have been influenced by at least three contextual factors. First, the lack of a clear-cut demarcation between the identities of Christian and Jewish beliefs resulted in overlapping identities such as Jewish-Christian and Christian-Jewish. As well, the influence of his own Jewish background on which his visions are superimposed would have combined to exert a strong contextual influence. Second, Jewish hostility to the dictates of Rome, the persecution of primitive Christian communities under the aegis of Nero, and Jewish-Christian aversion to the divine pretensions of earthly kings and emperors combined to provide a climate in which the account of John's visions would likely have been seen as a considerable contrast to Rome. Further, the religious cult associated with the temples and ceremonies of pagan Rome reflect considerable dissimilitude to the visions of a new Jerusalem and a new priesthood portrayed by John. The third factor of contextual significance to John's metaphors concerns the anthropological distinction between the essentially Jewish concepts embedded in early Christian writings and the interpretation of such concepts within the framework of contemporary Graeco-Roman culture. For instance, Jewish tradition distinguishes between the body and the נֶפֶשׁ<sup>274</sup> although both are derived from God and share an inter-relationship. In contrast, the soul in Graeco-Roman thinking enjoys a detachment from the body: the Greek soul finds its fulfilment *apart* from the body.<sup>275</sup> In summary: it

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<sup>274</sup> The term נֶפֶשׁ, literally 'life-breath' from Hebrew scripture, which became *anima* in the Latin Vulgate emerged as 'soul' in the King James Version.

<sup>275</sup> See Oscar Cullman, *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead? The Witness of the New Testament*, The Epworth Press, London, 1958, 30-34. Such a view conforms to the understanding of

is against the background of such contextual factors that John's metaphors are identity-forming in terms of new dimensions of religious experience. He deploys them to refashion the apocalyptic view of history beyond the strictures of his immediate socio-cultural and political context and the tradition of Judaic and Jewish apocalyptic. Such an approach results in a divergent understanding of religious experience and transcendental phenomena, emerging from the role of Jesus the Messiah.<sup>276</sup>

Concerning the concept of an 'epistemology of metaphor', the phrase is taken to mean the nature and role of deductive reason and inductive experience as applied to the major metaphors deployed by John in narrating his visions late in the first century. From a modern perspective, and in keeping with contemporary cognitive theory of development, the epistemology of religious metaphors would likely take into account a consideration of the cognitive resources perceived as available in religious faith and experience, scriptures, traditions and the revelation of transcendent phenomena. That John's metaphors of the new Jerusalem and the Lamb have a semantically cognitive element is argued shortly. At this point, however, it is worth noting the supposition that John's metaphors are not merely literary flourishes. They convey cognitive content, stimulate the reader's cognition, structure reactions, and deepen comprehension in terms of the reader's existential frame of life.<sup>277</sup> For example, it is possible that John's emphasis on the authority of Jesus Christ,

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first-century Hellenist thought involving a concept of dualism, one which distinguishes between the general and the particular, and the norm and phenomena.

<sup>276</sup> Support for this generalised supposition is expressed in the following chapters in which examples are discussed of John's notions of the new Jerusalem, the Lamb and redemption, the 'new' priesthood and the *basileia*, and the 'new' social and interactive Throne.

<sup>277</sup> See, for example, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, Chicago University Press, 1980, 4-6, 55. Such a supposition is in keeping with the views of Richard Swinburne: although the contexts of writing or utterance may be determining factors in the discrimination between ranges of meaning, an

paradoxically drawn from the metaphor of a slain Lamb, is an alternative to the authority of Roman rule. John's central portrayal of the Lamb, the new Jerusalem, the 'new' priesthood and the 'social' Throne of God also shared with the Lamb all provide contrasting alternatives to the contemporary authority of Rome.

That John's metaphors raise questions in respect of Judaic tradition and authority may be argued, for example, by his vision of the new Jerusalem in contrast to the earthly Jerusalem as well as his vision of the *new* basileiac priesthood compared with the priesthood of the first and second Temples.<sup>278</sup> John deploys the metaphor of the Lamb to help elucidate the revelation of Jesus Christ as the foundation to the notions of redemption, the *basileia*, and the priesthood expressed throughout the account of his visions. Although the word 'Lamb' is not entirely analogous to Jesus Christ because of the absence of exact synonyms or antonyms,<sup>279</sup> it is to some degree analogous in that the constituent elements of the Lamb are mapped to Jesus Christ, thus a sharing of attributes between 'Lamb' and 'Jesus Christ'. John's use of the metaphor 'Lamb', which serves to structure the reader's or hearer's understanding of a dimension of Jesus Christ, also conforms to the concept of a 'blended' metaphor in that the Lamb also shares the Throne of the kingdom, thus being conjoined with John's metaphor of the Throne.<sup>280</sup>

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analysis of such contexts is not a prerequisite to the generation of a cognitive generation of meaning; *Revelation: From Metaphor to Analogy*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1992, 43. Swinburne's approach to 'cognitive generation' will be seen as relevant in the following discussion of John's use of metaphor in respect of the Lamb.

<sup>278</sup> See discussion of the new Jerusalem in chapter 5 and the (new) priesthood in chapter 6.

<sup>279</sup> See discussion of analogy and meaning by Swinburne, *Revelation: From Metaphor to Analogy*, 41-42.

<sup>280</sup> John's metaphor of the Throne, discussed in chapter six, also involves 'blending', portraying the Throne in a basileiac sense involving a range of entities, which I describe as a 'social' or *gesellschaftlich* throne.

## Metaphor and the new Jerusalem

In deploying the apocalyptic metaphor of the new Jerusalem, John uses a range of images without apparent regard to their coherence. They are both allegorical and imaginative, comprising images of a temple, a city, a woman, a bride, trees and water. Such a range of images contributes to the audience's imagination and liberal interpretation, facilitating wider understanding of John's account of his visions of new religious phenomena. John's metaphorical portrayal of the new Jerusalem is phenomenal: it does not depict the new holy city in terms of intuitive understanding but rather as a phenomenon he has experienced visually, thus presenting a metaphorical realism, in contrast to a narrative account employing figurative language.<sup>281</sup> For John, his metaphorical presentation is essentially veridical: he is not only creating a narrative but is portraying, through metaphor, what he perceives as the truthful substance of his visions. Thus he is conveying new and diverging theological dimensions of the divine reality through a metaphorical account of his vision which dramatically broadens and enhances the traditional concept of Jerusalem and the first and second temples.<sup>282</sup>

John's metaphor of the *new* Jerusalem introduces an anthropological dimension to the kingdom of God, otherwise God's kingdom, a term which metaphorically depicts God as king (βασιλεύς), thus an allusion to God as the head of a royal family, even a vast

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<sup>281</sup> As John's vision of the new Jerusalem is narrated as described, the account suffers from the limits of language. Such a limitation, however, accentuates the imaginative and interpretative significance of the metaphor.

<sup>282</sup> See Jonathan Z. Smith, *Map Is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions*, University of Chicago Press, 1993. Smith suggests that 'if the temple had not been destroyed, it would have had to be neglected. For it represented a locative type of religious activity no longer perceived as effective in a new, utopian religious situation with a concomitant shift from a cosmological to an anthropological view-point'; page 128.

extended family.<sup>283</sup> The term ‘Father’ (πατήρ), applied to God also contributes to the anthropological aspect of John’s use of metaphor. For instance, those freed from sin by the blood of Jesus Christ will participate with him in a kingdom of priests serving the God and Father of Jesus (1:6) and also share in the authority of Christ as Jesus also received authority from his Father (2:26, 28). Further, Jesus will confess the names of the redeemed before his Father and his Father’s angels (3:5) and those who conquer evil will be accorded a place with Jesus on his Throne just as (he himself) sat down with (his) Father on his Throne (3:21). Such examples from John’s royal and family metaphors, depicting God as ‘King’ and as ‘Father’, contribute in an anthropological sense to the notion of the kingdom of God as a ‘social’ kingdom, one in which the level of participation and engagement of the redeemed with God and the heavenly court is enhanced.<sup>284</sup>

Further, John uses metaphor to introduce an extended dimension to the framework of divine-earthly interaction, one which establishes a new and divine pattern of socialisation within the *basileia* of the new Jerusalem.<sup>285</sup> That John’s new Jerusalem is earthly based is depicted in his vision of the descent of the new holy city to a new earth where the home of God is now among mortals (21:1-3), ending earlier uncertainty as to whether the prophesied new Jerusalem would be in heaven or on earth. For example, the account of the new Jerusalem in the *Testament of Dan* does not specify its location: ‘the righteous shall rejoice in the New Jerusalem, which shall be eternally for the glorification of God’ (*T. Dan* 5:12). That for some the new Jerusalem was associated with heaven may have been suggested by the *Testament of Levi* wherein the ‘new priest’, the Messiah, ‘shall open

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<sup>283</sup> Discussed in chapter 5.

<sup>284</sup> See the concept of the ‘social’ Throne in chapter 5.

<sup>285</sup> See Jan G. van der Watt, *Family of the King: Dynamics of Metaphor in the Gospel According to John*, eds. R. Alan Culpepper and Rolf Rendtorff, Brill, Leiden, 2000, 123-124.



the gates of paradise ... remove the sword that has threatened since Adam, and ... grant to the saints to eat of the tree of life' (*T. Levi* 18:10-11).<sup>286</sup> John's metaphor makes it clear that in the new earthly Jerusalem the redeemed will enjoy the 'river of the water of life' and the 'tree of life', the leaves of which will heal the nations (22:1-2). Further, God will not only dwell with mortals, he will end suffering and make all things new (21:4-5), thus emphasising the divine-role-in-human-life impact of his metaphor.

### **Metaphor and the Lamb**

That there is explicit identification between Jesus Christ and God in John's *Apocalypse* is expressed in both being depicted as the 'Alpha and the Omega' (1:8; 21:6; 22:13), 'the beginning and the end' (21:6; 22:13) and 'the first and the last' (1:17; 22:13).<sup>287</sup> It is the symbol of the Lamb, however, which John uses not only in support of such an identification as, for instance, the Lamb sharing the Throne of God (5:13) and being at the centre of the Throne (7:17), but as the *central* metaphorical figure in his depiction of the role of the Lamb in redemption.<sup>288</sup> Thus, beyond the Lamb being deployed as a divine symbol in order to establish the link between Jesus Christ and God, the Lamb also serves as an allegorical metaphor to elucidate John's accounts of redemption and its importance; namely, the transcendental dimension of redemption in which the interactive relationship between God, Jesus Christ and humankind is deepened through the new Jerusalem.<sup>289</sup>

Compared with John's use of metaphor to elucidate other theological notions, his

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<sup>286</sup> Such an association between 'paradise' and 'heaven', however, may be an overstatement in that the term 'paradise' may be construed as not more than an allusion to Eden.

<sup>287</sup> See Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 54-55.

<sup>288</sup> Discussed in the following chapter.

<sup>289</sup> This supposition is supported by more detailed discussion in the following three chapters.

use of the Lamb may appear to some modern and postmodern interpreters of his *Apocalypse* as an inappropriate or unconvincing metaphor for the purpose of establishing a ‘new’ relationship between God, Jesus Christ, and humankind. The juxtaposition of an apparently incongruous word (Lamb), in contrast for example to the word ‘shepherd’ to depict, respectively, Jesus and the death of Jesus is a semantically innovative metaphor which deepens the meaning beyond descriptive narrative.<sup>290</sup> The not uncommon substitution of animals, real and imaginary, in first-century metaphorical writings<sup>291</sup> is a *Tendenz* continued by John who uses the Lamb to signify Jesus, and the ‘great dragon’ and the ‘beast’ as substitutes (catachreses) for Satan.<sup>292</sup> In John’s substitution of ‘Lamb’ for Jesus, his intention is more than aiming for literary style: the substitution increases the reader’s level of interest and cognitive engagement. In Jonathan Smith’s view, ‘it is axiomatic that comparison is never a matter of identity. Comparison requires the acceptance of difference as the grounds of its being interesting, and a methodical manipulation of that difference to achieve some stated cognitive end’.<sup>293</sup> Such would appear to be the case in respect of John’s use of the Lamb as a metaphor to portray Jesus Christ and the power of redemption through the metaphors of the new Jerusalem and the

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<sup>290</sup> See Paul Ricoeur, ‘On Interpretation’, *Philosophy in France Today*, ed. Alan Montefiore, Cambridge University Press, 1983, 182-3.

<sup>291</sup> A practice which continues to the present time.

<sup>292</sup> Such ‘substitutions’ are discussed by Mark Johnson, ‘Introduction: Metaphor in the Philosophical Tradition’, *Philosophical Perspectives on Metaphor*, ed. Mark Johnson, 24; cf. Max Black, *Models and Metaphors: Studies in Language and Philosophy*, 33 and Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, 61-64. There are, however, categorisations beyond the concept of ‘substitution theory’; for example, Ricoeur adopted a synthesis approach involving the concept of ‘semantic innovation’, facilitating deeper meaning through the association between reality and meaning, a semantic content beyond the literal use of language; Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-Disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*, 98.

<sup>293</sup> Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity*, University of Chicago Press, 1994.

priesthood.

Portrayed as the central figure in John's visions, the Lamb first appears among the elders, between the Throne of God and the four living creatures, thus establishing an immediate association between the Lamb and the Throne (5:6). A second dimension to John's metaphor of the Lamb is the emphasis accorded by John to the appearance of the Lamb as having been slaughtered (5:6), the significance of which is the redemption of the faithful, with the blood of the Lamb serving as a ransom for God, enabling *all* those who believe in Jesus Christ to reign on earth as a kingdom (as well as) priests serving God (5:9-10).<sup>294</sup> The worthiness of the slain Lamb is emphasised, focussing on and limiting the range of elements to be mapped. For example, he is worthy to open the scroll and its seven seals (5:5b), thus revealing the secrets of heaven and worthy to 'receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing' (5:12). Further, the slain Lamb is worthy to receive the adulation and worship of the angels, the living creatures and elders, and all creatures in heaven, earth and the sea (5:11, 13), and the great multitude who acknowledge the Lamb's role in redemption (7:9-10).

John continues his metaphor of the Lamb by confirming that it is the blood of the Lamb that is responsible for conquering the 'great dragon', personifying Satan (12:11), and for the redemption of those recorded in 'the book of life of the Lamb that was slaughtered' (13:8). The metaphorical role of the Lamb in redemption is reinforced by John in his depiction of the redeemed with the Lamb who is standing on Mount Zion (14:1), the significance of which is discussed in the following chapter. The strength and impact of

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<sup>294</sup> Discussed in chapter 6.

the metaphor is even more apparent in John's final two chapters, reinforcing the view that the metaphor of the Lamb is fundamentally a soteriological metaphor. The climax of John's visions is the descent of the new holy city from heaven prepared 'as a bride' (21:2), a bride, however, who is 'the wife of the Lamb' (21:9). The Lamb is not only the 'bridegroom of Jerusalem' but also shares the Throne of God which will be in the new holy city (22:3). The Lamb as a metaphor for Jesus Christ is a key figure in John's visions. Slaughtered, and taken up to heaven, the Lamb is considered worthy to open the scrolls, to be the bridegroom of the new Jerusalem, and to share the Throne of God. The redeemed, made a kingdom of priests by the blood of the Lamb (1:6; 5:10), are depicted in the new holy city worshipping before the Throne of God and the Lamb. All such references are powerful images reinforcing the strength of John's metaphor.

### **Metaphor and the priesthood**

Although less cognitively powerful than John's metaphor of the Lamb, his notions of a 'new' priesthood combine to present a more nuanced priestly metaphor, one which portrays the priesthood in a different light from that of the temple-related Judaic tradition. In some respects, John's metaphor of the priesthood may be characterised as essentially an anthropological metaphor.<sup>295</sup> Not generally acknowledged as a significant text on the priesthood, John's *Apocalypse* does provide a range of priesthood-related notions which collectively serve as metaphorical allusions to the 'new' nature and role of a universal priesthood of the redeemed.<sup>296</sup> As such a supposition is discussed at length in chapter 6, the focus here is to review briefly such 'metaphorical allusions' and their contribution to an

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<sup>295</sup> John's concepts of the priesthood, and the extent to which they represent indicators of divergence from Judaic tradition, are discussed in chapter 6.

<sup>296</sup> Rev. 1:5-6; 2:26; 5:9-10; 20:4-6; 22:3-5.

understanding of John's concept of 'priesthood'.

Apocalyptic accounts concerning priestly relations between God and humans preceded those of John's *Apocalypse*, as did relevant references to the priesthood in the Hebrew scriptures of which two examples will suffice to serve as a background to John's 'metaphorical priesthood'. In Exodus 19:6 the covenantally faithful will constitute a 'priestly kingdom' and 'holy nation' and according to trito-Isaiah the faithful shall be 'priests of the Lord' and known as 'ministers of God' (Isa. 61:6). The later apocalyptic, pseudepigraphical account in the *Testament of Levi* <sup>297</sup> depicts the vision of the 'Holy Most High sitting on the Throne' informing Levi that he had been given by God 'the blessing of the priesthood until [he] shall come and dwell in the midst of Israel' (*T. Levi* 5:6a). Such a priesthood, however, is one in which Levi is to 'perform vengeance on Shechem' (5:6b), thus, a priesthood which is in stark contrast with the *basileiac* priesthood depicted by John (1:6; 5:9-10; 22:3-5). Levi's vision includes seven agents of God telling him 'to put on the vestments of the priesthood, the crown of righteousness, the oracle of understanding, the robe of truth, the breastplate of faith, the miter for the head, and the apron for prophetic power' (8:2). Having been anointed with holy oil, washed and dressed in priestly tradition, and accorded a 'priestly diadem', he was readied 'as a priest for the Lord God' (8:4-10; cf. Exod. 28:3-43). Such a depiction of priesthood is well removed from John's account, as is Levi's description of the priesthood in the 'seven jubilees', culminating in an association between priests and 'idolaters, adulterers, money

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<sup>297</sup> According to H.C. Kee, apart from Christian interpolations which probably date from the early second century CE, the *Testament of Levi* is likely to have been written in the Maccabean period, or from c.150 BCE and that the author is likely to have been a Hellenised Jew; 'Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs (Second Century B.C.): A New Translation and Introduction', *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Vol. 1, ed. Charlesworth, 777-778.

lovers, arrogant, lawless, voluptuaries, pederasts, [and] those who practice bestiality' (17:1-11). According to Levi, as a consequence of the Lord's vengeance the priesthood will lapse until the Lord raises up a new messianic priest 'whose star shall rise in heaven like a king', who 'will shine forth like a sun in the earth', and in whose messianic priesthood the gates of paradise will be opened and 'the nations shall be multiplied in knowledge on the earth' (18:1-9). In contrast, John's accounts of priesthood concern the redemption of *all* the faithful, sharing the authority of Christ as priests of God on earth, thereby establishing John's metaphor as inclusive, liberating, and graphic for those who conquer evil and recognise the metaphorical Lamb as Jesus Christ.

### **Metaphor and the Throne**

As the Throne and its centrality to the *Apocalypse of John* is discussed extensively in chapter 7, the assumption that the Throne may be viewed as a metaphor needs to be assessed in relation to its alternative depiction as a metonymy. As it would appear that of references in this chapter to the Throne in first-century Jewish writings many are metonyms, the distinction between the two terms warrants discussion. Lakoff and Johnson offer a basic distinction which involves a difference of domains: one domain in a metonymy which is the immediate subject matter and two domains in a metaphor. The latter comprises the target domain 'which is constituted by the immediate subject matter', as well as 'the source domain, in which important metaphorical reasoning takes place and that provides the source concepts used in that reasoning'.<sup>298</sup> Richard Swinburne suggests

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<sup>298</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 265. The authors also note that the distinction between metaphor and metonymy require that 'one must not look only at the meanings of a single linguistic expression and whether there are two domains involved. Instead, one must determine how the expression is used'; pages 266-267. Thus, if the two domains form a single complex subject matter in use with a single mapping, the expression is a metonymy. Alternatively, the expression is a metaphor if the two domains can

that a basic difference in the meaning of the two terms involves a difference or otherwise ‘between the speaker’s meaning and the sentence-meaning’.<sup>299</sup> For instance, according to Swinburne, metonymy involves referring to an object by using the name or description of some adjunct.<sup>300</sup> In contrast, Swinburne notes that ‘metaphor does not involve the speaker saying something other than he means to say; nor does it involve the speaker meaning what he says (in a normal sense) but hinting at something further on ...’.<sup>301</sup> Although there are common features between the two terms, Swinburne posits that the role of metaphor ‘is more to stimulate imagination than to convey truth’<sup>302</sup> and Lakoff and Johnson conclude that ‘the locus of metaphor is in concepts not words’.<sup>303</sup> Such contrasts with metonymy help to elucidate whether the term ‘throne’ is more aptly described as a metonymy or a metaphor. While technically the former in the sense that ‘throne’ may be regarded as a metonymy for authority and power, as portrayed in the Hebrew scriptures, one may argue that the Throne is depicted in the *Apocalypse of John* as a ‘social’ and interactive entity which invites imaginative and theological responses, not only because of the central role accorded to it, but also because of its complex and evolving nature.

The focus of this section is on the role and impact of metaphor in relation to the Throne, including the supposition that John’s metaphorical depiction of the Throne serves

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be separate in use, ‘with a number of mappings and with one of the domains forming the subject matter (the target domain), while the other domain (the source) is the basis of significant inference and a number of linguistic expressions’; (page 267).

<sup>299</sup> Richard Swinburne, *From Metaphor to Analogy*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1992, 17.

<sup>300</sup> Swinburne cites the example of the statement, ‘the White House said’, a statement from a presidential spokesperson rather than ‘a white house speaking’. Thus, meaning is determined by context.

<sup>301</sup> Swinburne, op. cit., 48.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>303</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 244.

a transcendental function, elucidating the interaction between the heavenly court and the Throne as well as between the Throne of God and redeemed humankind. That John's metaphorical throne serves a transcendental function, diminishing the distance between God, heavenly protagonists, and human beings will be posited as well as the function of the Throne in terms of linguistics, given that the Throne is a key element in the range of John's metaphorical discourse. For instance, 'the one who sits on the throne' is a descriptive designation of God used precisely, or with only minor variation, twelve times by John<sup>304</sup> who otherwise refers frequently to the Throne, establishing it as a central symbol of his narrative.<sup>305</sup> John's depiction of the Throne as a central element of his visions not only establishes it as a 'meta-metaphor' in its own right but also, because of the role it plays in the close juxtaposition between God and the Lamb, as a metaphor for Jesus Christ and, for the first time, the Lamb sharing the Throne of God.<sup>306</sup>

That there is a linguistic tradition to the role of the Throne in divine-earthly relations appears evident from earlier and contemporary pseudepigraphical and apocalyptic writings, often based on issues of mediation between God and humankind.<sup>307</sup> In the *Testament of Dan* the visionary tells his children 'to draw near to God and to the angel who interceded for [them], because he is the mediator between God and men for the peace of Israel' (6:2). In portraying the relationship between God, the Lamb and humankind, John does not accord such a role to an angel, nor does he discuss the role of divine-human mediation. The mediation depicted in the *Testament of Dan* stands in contrast with the

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<sup>304</sup> Rev. 4:2, 3, 9; 5:1, 7; 13; 6:16; 7:10, 15; 19:4; 20:11; 21:5.

<sup>305</sup> Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 31.

<sup>306</sup> Rev. 4-5.

<sup>307</sup> For example, *T. Levi* 5:6; *T. Dan* 6:2.



basileiac relationship of God and humans portrayed by John through the Lamb and the new Jerusalem. Likewise, from the *Testament of Levi*, an angel informs Levi that to him has been given ‘the blessing of the priesthood’ until God ‘shall come and dwell in the midst of Israel’ (5:2). Further, the same angel is the one ‘who makes intercession for the nation Israel’ (5:6), thus following Judaic tradition of priestly mediation between God and humankind and the divine relationship with the nation of Israel in contrast to a more universal transcendental relationship. Although from such examples it may appear John ‘borrowed’ from contemporary Judaic apocalyptic expression, his use of metaphor is more extensive, dramatic in effect, and theologically divergent than the metaphorical expressions in, for example, the *Testaments of Dan and Levi*. As well, his metaphors of the new Jerusalem, the Lamb, the priesthood and the Throne serve to structure the thematic nature of his narrative.

The transcendental element of the Throne-metaphor is enhanced as a key element of John’s metaphorical discourse because of the emphasis he gives to the association between the Throne and the Lamb, the elders, the living creatures, vast numbers of angels and multitudes, thus portraying not only the sovereignty of God on his Throne but also the interactive nature of the divine throne-room.<sup>308</sup> Richard Bauckham notes that John, having experienced a vision of God’s sovereignty in heaven, is able to appreciate ‘how it must come to be acknowledged on earth’,<sup>309</sup> thus reinforcing John’s transcendental concern to ‘narrow the gap’ between a sovereign God and human life on earth, which culminates with his vision of the metaphorically expressed new Jerusalem.

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<sup>308</sup> Chapter 7 contains a discussion of the Throne and all these protagonists, collectively described as the ‘social’ or *gesellschaftlich* Throne.

<sup>309</sup> Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 31.

### Summary: John's use of metaphor

From the preceding discussion of John's use of metaphor in respect of the new Jerusalem, the Lamb, the priesthood and the Throne, one may posit that such dimensions of late first-century, Jewish-Christian religion are not discrete phenomena but serve as an integrative and complex apocalyptic narrative which contributes to an understanding of divergence in renewal. Far from using a single cognitive metaphor, John deploys a network of metaphors, the aggregate effect of which deepens our interpretation of each metaphor, thus constituting a conceptual framework of hermeneutical integration and continuity.<sup>310</sup> The religious categories of the new Jerusalem, the priesthood, the Lamb and the Throne, as discussed in the following chapters, invest John's *Apocalypse* with integral metaphorical significance, with the metaphorical motifs remaining relevant to theological interpretation over two millennia. Continuing relevance, however, does not suggest any single definitive interpretation. The principal topics of Part 2 comprise a juxtaposition between overtly rhetorical but subtly nuanced texts, the meanings of which are influenced by the reader's response to their metaphorical impact and interpretation. The supposition that the texts indicate divergence in renewal is predicated on their coterminous nature: a complex metaphorical structure of transcendental revelation, the theological significance of which defies the application of dogmatic meaning. Thus, their coterminous theological impact is greater than the aggregation of several of John's visions. Rather than a set of disparate and unrelated heavenly visions, John presents a coordinated and systematically constructed revelation through integrated metaphors, the aggregate of which serves to elucidate a paradigm shift in late first-century understanding of the Jerusalem, the Temple, and the God of Israel on the one hand and the *new* Jerusalem, the

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<sup>310</sup> Van der Watt, *Family of the King*, 402.

*new* Lamb, the *new* priesthood, and the *new* Throne (shared with the Lamb) on the other. Such a supposition adds theological depth and enhanced revelatory impact to John's narrative. Without such metaphors John's account could be perceived in terms of notions based on traditional Judaic literary depictions of Jerusalem, the priesthood, and the Throne of Y<sub>HWH</sub>.<sup>311</sup>

Rather than a sense of apparent realism, John's *Apocalypse* depends on a series of complex rhetorical metaphors which serve as a structural base for his notions of redemption through the new Jerusalem, as priests for God and Christ, and for access to the 'social' Throne of God *and* the Lamb. Such extensive metaphors contain a degree of inscrutability which militates against definitive, discrete interpretations, suggesting that the new Jerusalem the 'new' priesthood, and the 'new' *gesellschaftlich* Throne reveal indications of Judaic-Christian divergence. It is to be noted, however, that although the metaphorical accounts of John's visions differ from traditional Judaic expression, his *Apocalypse* does not reject the heritage of Judaic scriptures. Rather, it cites and builds upon Judaic prophecy and apocalyptic, employing imaginative metaphors which may well have been regarded as innovative in his late first-century religious context.<sup>312</sup> His use of

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<sup>311</sup> See Sallie McFague, *Speaking in Parables: A Study in Metaphor and Theology*, SCM Press, London, 1975, 35, 45. It may be argued, however, that as the Hebrew and Christian scriptures are rich in metaphor, John's use of strong metaphors to portray his notions of the new Jerusalem, the priesthood and the Throne is within the framework of his experience of scriptural language even across different literary genres; see Wentzel van Huyssteen, *Theology and the Justification of Faith: Constructing Theories in Systematic Theology*, trans. H.F. Snijders, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1989, 134.

<sup>312</sup> Examples of John's references and allusions to Judaic prophecy and apocalyptic from the Hebrew scriptures are cited in the following chapter. Instances include Jeremiah 30:23; 31:1 and Rev. 21:3 concerning God's covenantal relationships; John's reference to the 'river of the water of life' (Rev. 21:1) *vis-à-vis* Ezek. 47:12; and, John's reference to the *materiality* of the new Jerusalem (21:11-21) in relation to descriptions in 1 Kings 6:2-22; 2 Chron. 3:2-9 and Ezek. 40:5-42:20. Other instances are cited in chapters

the metaphor of Jesus coming like ‘a thief in the night’ (3:3) presages his use of more expansive and rhetorical metaphors. It is as though he operates as a visionary ‘thief in the night’, ‘stealing’ the metaphor from the gospel tradition (Matt. 24:43; Luke 12:39) for his profound and extended metaphors of the new Jerusalem, the Lamb, the priesthood, and the Throne. Such a view, however, suggesting that John’s use of metaphor was intended as a ‘literary device’ does his range of metaphorical approaches a disservice.<sup>313</sup> Far from being literary devices, John’s metaphors exhibit a range of nuanced but powerful expressions of primary language, evoking ongoing interpretation in a variety of historical and socio-religious circumstances.<sup>314</sup>

The use of metaphor in John’s *Apocalypse*, which draws on different facets and boundaries of language, exhibits complexity and enrichment to the present time.<sup>315</sup> It seems reasonable to assume that his metaphorical approach to the new Jerusalem, the priesthood, and the Throne would have provided dramatically different and dynamic visions of the divine world to first-century exegetes. From a twenty-first century perspective, the range of metaphors used by John may be regarded as a ‘metaphorical process’, one involving varying depths of symbolic meaning as, for example, the different

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4-6.

<sup>313</sup> That descriptive language should not replace John’s primary metaphorical accounts of his visions is a view in keeping with Paul Ricoeur’s belief that reductionism should not be deployed in the analysis of metaphorical primary language. According to Ricoeur, he unequivocally associates himself ‘with those analytical philosophers who resist the sort of reductionism according to which “well-formed languages” are alone capable of evaluating the meaning-claims and truth-claims of all non-“logical” uses of language’; Ricoeur, ‘On Interpretation’, 191.

<sup>314</sup> The concept of ‘blending theory’, involving the conceptual and integrative nature of John’s metaphors, may be relevant to this supposition, given his metaphorical portrayal of the new Jerusalem, the priesthood, and the Throne discussed in the following three chapters.

<sup>315</sup> See McFague, *Speaking in Parables: A Study in Metaphor and Theology*, 43-56.

levels of metaphor between John's new Jerusalem, the Lamb, the priesthood, and the Throne. Further, one is able to explore the significance in the first century of John's allegorical and symbolic metaphors as well as the cognitive meanings attaching to the same metaphors at a distance of two thousand years, demonstrating that although metaphors are 'born' into language, they mature and maintain an ongoing life.<sup>316</sup>

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<sup>316</sup> Such a view is supported by Ricoeur, as expressed in the title of his text, *La Métaphore Vive*, Seuil, Paris, 1975.

## Chapter Five

### The Temple, Jerusalem, and the New Jerusalem

#### Tradition and divergence

Although the Temple is a major topic in this chapter, the city of Jerusalem cannot be divorced from the discussion, given the geographical and functional relationship between them in terms of religious belief and experience, as well as the significance of the new Jerusalem in Christian apocalyptic literature.<sup>317</sup> For example, Jerusalem served as the holy city for both early Judaism and early Christianity and as the location of the Temple of YHWH and God.<sup>318</sup> In terms of the juxtaposition between degrees of holiness and spatial construction, Jerusalem and the Temple may have occupied more significant roles in Jewish thought than in first-century Christian thinking. Within a Jewish worldview, Jerusalem and the Temple were central, with spatial dimensions including the Temple Mount, inner and outer courts, and the holy of holies in which the high priesthood officiated.<sup>319</sup> As discussed later in this chapter, such constructions of physical space stand in contrast to the non-material spatiality revealed in the new Jerusalem portrayed in John's *Apocalypse* (Rev. 21).

As noted in chapter one, although the destruction of Jerusalem and the first Temple in 587 BCE had a serious impact on Israel as a religious nation, belief in YHWH and observance of the Torah continued within Jewish communities. Notwithstanding the

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<sup>317</sup> Zones of sacredness extended from the Temple to temple courts and beyond to Jerusalem and to Israel.

<sup>318</sup> Cf. Acts 7:48. The phrase 'the Temple of YHWH and God', used in association with early Judaism and early Christianity, is not to suggest a differentiation between them as separate divine entities.

<sup>319</sup> The term *naos* is generally used to describe the actual temple building, including the sanctuary and the holy of holies; Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 605.

existence of religious pluralism even before 587 BCE, however, the diversity of Judaisms and sectarian beliefs were a significant feature of the Second Temple Period. Also of significance to this thesis, prophets and visionaries continued to express eschatological and messianic views in relation to the Temple and the new Jerusalem.<sup>320</sup> Thus, the focus of this discussion is the significance of the Temple to the emergence of early Christianity and, more specifically, the extent to which the Temple in the first century of the Common Era contributed to early indications of Judaic-Christian divergence.

### **The Temple: An Early Christian Perspective**

The Second Temple, operating during the initial forty years of the Jesus movements, not only contributed to the Judaic context from which Christianity emerged but also played a significant role in the evolving relationship between early Judaisms and Christianities. It served as a focal point for worship and religious teaching during the ministry of Jesus in which, after driving out ‘those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple’ (Mark 11:15a), he alludes to the account in Isaiah: ‘Is it not written, “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations”?’ (Mark 11:17a). That the Temple was regarded as a centre for worship and teaching by not only the Jewish community is reflected in Josephus’ account that, well recognised beyond Jerusalem, the Temple ‘is revered by the world and honoured by foreigners from the ends of the earth who have heard of its fame’ (*War* 4.262).<sup>321</sup> It is also possible that, based on Eusebius’ account that James, the brother of Jesus, served as the first elected bishop in Jerusalem, the Temple may have been thought to serve as the centre of his activities (*Eccl. Hist.* 2.1.1-6).

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<sup>320</sup> For example, Ezekiel 48; *SibOr* 5:414-15, 420-21; *Ps.Sol.* 17.

<sup>321</sup> Allowance should be made, however, for the general acknowledgement of bias in Josephus’ writings.

In a Matthean passage Jesus was taken by the devil to ‘the holy city’ and placed on the pinnacle of the Temple where he was challenged to prove himself the Son of God (Matt. 4:5-6a), thus identifying Jerusalem as *the holy city* (cf. Rev. 21:2). In Matt. 21:12 Jesus’ respect for the religious significance of the Temple is depicted after he enters Jerusalem: ‘Jesus entered the Temple and drove out all who were selling and buying in the Temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves’.<sup>322</sup> Further, he is cited as referring to the Temple as a house of prayer (Matt. 21:13) and as a location where he cured the blind and the lame (Matt. 21:13-14). As there are four Gospel accounts of Jesus teaching in the Temple and its precincts, the Temple is enhanced not only as a significant religious institution in Jewish community life but also as a locus for Jesus’ religious teaching.<sup>323</sup> Although Jesus’ healing and teaching activities would have taken place in the outer court of the Temple, accessible to Gentiles, it appears evident that Jesus regarded the Temple and its precincts as an important religious institution. His recognition of Jewish tradition is evident from his celebration of the Passover, an event which included a lamb sacrificed in the Temple (Mark 14:12; Luke 22:7-8). Luke portrays Jesus at twelve years of age staying in the Temple after Passover for three days, ‘sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions’, impressing those who heard him ‘at his understanding and his answers’ (Luke 2:41-52).<sup>324</sup>

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<sup>322</sup> Unsurprisingly, there are other interpretations of Jesus ‘overturning the tables’ in the Temple. For example, Richard Swinburne, in *Revelation: From Metaphor to Analogy*, suggests that rather than indicating Jesus’ respect for the Temple, his act of overturning the tables may be regarded as ‘a challenge deriving from the interpretation *which contemporaries would naturally put on these acts* [my italics] to a claim by Jesus of a very high God-granted status, one which would ‘constitute a challenge to the authorities’ (page 108). Further, Swinburne suggests that by riding into Jerusalem on the ‘first Palm Sunday’ and ‘overthrowing the tables of the money-changers’, Jesus may have been ‘declaring his Lordship over the Temple’ (page 114).

<sup>323</sup> Mark 12:35; cf. Matt. 26:55; Luke 20:1; John 7:28.

<sup>324</sup> Luke’s account of Jesus at the Temple (2:41-52) may also be regarded as pious legend rather than an



Although from such a few texts, and notwithstanding the likely embellishment in Luke's account, there does not appear to be a clear unitary message of the historical Jesus' attitude to the Temple. It would appear, however, that Jesus' relationship to the Temple mirrors, even if opaquely, the high regard in which the Temple was held within Palestinian Judaism,<sup>325</sup> thus suggesting a degree of continuity, one reinforced by the role played by the Temple and Jerusalem in the structure of Jesus' travels (Luke 9:51-53).<sup>326</sup> Beyond continuity, however, Temple tradition and the significance of Jerusalem are discussed shortly in terms of being indicators of divergence in renewal in the context of their portrayal in the *Apocalypse of John*.

That the Temple was a significant feature within the ministry of Jesus is not supported by all New Testament accounts. The Temple is treated neither extensively nor positively in the gospel narratives, generally being associated with the death of Jesus, arising from his critical perception of and responses to the Temple and priestly corruption. Although Jesus used the Temple for teaching, his eschatological prophecy was that God intended to destroy it. According to his accusers, Jesus was heard to state, 'I will destroy

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historical record.

<sup>325</sup> John P. Meier notes that although Jesus' attitude toward the Temple was complicated, he 'stood with "mainstream" Palestinian Jews who ... revered the temple as the one sacred place chosen by God for lawful sacrifice'. According to Meier, Jesus' attitude 'was basically accepting of the temple *in the present order of things*' [his italics]; *A Marginal Jew*, vol. III, 499. To Meier's statement, which seems reasonable and appropriate, might be added the notion that first-century attitudes to the Temple might be better viewed in terms, not of the historical Jesus' relationship to the Temple, but the attitudes of later first-century Jewish-Christians and Christians. Considered of significance, at least to this thesis, is the portrayal, or lack thereof, of the Temple in the *Apocalypse of John*.

<sup>326</sup> Luke's account of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem may be regarded as a literary, thematic feature. It may also be noted that although the Temple was held in high regard within Palestinian Judaism, a distinction may be drawn between regard for the institution of the Temple and criticism of its shortcomings arising from occasions of priestly misbehaviour.

this temple that is made with hands and in three days I will build another, not made with hands' (Mark 14:58). As Mark's account states such testimony was false (14:57); that 'on this point their testimony did not agree' (14:59); and that Jesus did not respond to the accusation (14:61), little if any weight can be attached to the reliability of the accusation that Jesus intended the destruction of the Temple.<sup>327</sup> Such textual uncertainty, however, does not necessarily mean that Jesus did not foresee a new, divinely cosmic Temple created by God, a view in conformity with contemporary eschatological thinking.<sup>328</sup> At the time of Jesus, however, the second Temple was extant: Jesus does appear to have accepted it notwithstanding instances of his critical regard for aspects of its cultic and non-cultic practices and, following his death, his followers continued use of the Temple as a centre of worship.<sup>329</sup>

That there was at least one significant instance of late first-century thinking on a new and future temple is expressed in John's *Apocalypse*: in the new Jerusalem there will not be a physical earthly temple, 'the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb' will constitute the Temple of the new Jerusalem (21:22). Thus, a clearly different, and christological, element is introduced which contrasts with traditional views of the Temple in Jerusalem.<sup>330</sup> Given contemporary eschatological views, such an expectation may not have been astonishing to late first-century Christians in view of literary evidence that contemporary Jewish thinking hoped for, if not anticipated, a new and illustrious temple. For example,

<sup>327</sup> The parallel account in the Gospel of Matthew is similar, although Jesus is not cited as referring to the use of hands in building the Temple (26:61).

<sup>328</sup> E.P. Sanders, *Historical Figure of Jesus*, 261.

<sup>329</sup> For example, Acts 2:46; 3:1, 8; 5:21, 42; 21:26; 22:17; 24:18.

<sup>330</sup> The word 'christological' is used to depict the examination and exaltation of Jesus, his being accorded the title 'Christ', and his significance to the development of the Christian faith and religion; qualities which may be differentiated from the redemptive and salvific characteristics of Jesus as the Messiah.

in *1 Enoch* the Jewish visionary saw ‘the Lord of the sheep [bring] about a new house, greater and loftier than the first one ... all its pillars were new , the columns new; and the ornaments new as well as greater than the first (house) which was gone’ (90:28-29). It would seem a reasonable supposition that in the context of late first-century Jewish and Jewish-Christian eschatological expectations of a new earthly temple, more magnificent than its predecessors, John’s vision of the new Jerusalem in which he did not see a temple, ‘for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb’, would have been regarded as a strikingly divergent Temple-concept.

There are other emphases concerning the Temple, however, in both the ‘letter’ to the Hebrews and the Acts of the Apostles. In the case of the ‘letter’ to the Hebrews, the author initially expresses ambivalence concerning the role of the high priest, who ‘must offer sacrifice for his own sins as well as for those of the people’ (Heb. 5:3). On the other hand, because the high priest ‘is subject to weakness’, he is ‘able to deal gently with the ignorant and wayward’ (Heb. 5:2). In Hebrews 9, the text continues to devalue the Temple: worship regulations and priestly duties are superseded by Christ who ‘entered once for all into the Holy Place, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption’ (Heb. 9:1-10, 12). Thus, presumably (but not conclusively) before the destruction of the Temple, but certainly before the end of the first century, the author of Hebrews juxtaposes the Temple and Christ. Christ is described ‘as a high priest of the good things that have come’ (Heb. 9:11a) to distinguish between the Temple as the central Jewish religious institution and Christ who ‘did not enter a sanctuary made by human hands, a mere copy of the true one, but he entered into heaven itself, now

to appear in the presence of God on our behalf” (Heb. 9:24).<sup>331</sup>

To the depiction of the Temple in the ‘letter’ to the Hebrews may be added those of the author of the Acts of the Apostles, who indicates that at least some early Christians not only respected but also worshipped in the Temple. New believers spent, ‘day by day, much time together in the Temple’ (Acts 2:46a). The disciples Peter and John are recorded as visiting the Temple ‘at the hour of prayer, at three in the afternoon’ (Acts 3:1); however, their action in healing a lame man at the gate of the Temple is credited to the healing power of Jesus (Acts 3:16; 4:10). Although the Temple is acknowledged as a religious centre by Jewish Christians and the author recognises Jesus as the servant of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Peter and John’s ancestors (Acts 3:13a), the focus of the healing narrative is on Jesus, ‘the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead’ (Acts 3:15; 4:10), thus indicating a degree of divergence from Jewish tradition and its view of the Temple’s significance. For example, in contrast to the importance of sacrifice in the Temple’s cultic practice is the focus on charismatic healing by Jesus in the precincts of the Temple.

A further suggestion of divergence from Jewish tradition is expressed by Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians. In a departure from the physical Temple in Judaic tradition, Paul cites the Temple as an image to symbolise the indwelling of God’s Spirit in the lives of Christians. For example, Paul tells those for whom Jesus Christ is the foundation of

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<sup>331</sup> Further to the significance of the Temple in the Letter to the Hebrews are the numerous references to the high priesthood in Hebrews, chapters 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, and 10. These are discussed in chapter 6 of the thesis in the context of their relevance to the high-priestly Christology expressed in Hebrews and its significance to issues of renewal and divergence between the priesthood of Judaic tradition and that depicted in the *Apocalypse of John*.

their faith that they ‘are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in [them]’ (1 Cor. 12:11b, 16). Although using the Temple as a metaphor for the body, Paul reinforces its significance in his second letter to the Corinthians in the context of idolatry: ‘what does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God: as God said, “I will live in them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people”’ (2 Cor. 6:15b-16). As well as appearing to draw on Jeremiah 30:22; 31:1, Paul’s metaphorical representation of the Temple as an indwelling manifestation of God’s spirit in human lives may be compared with the concept of the Temple in the new Jerusalem portrayed in John’s *Apocalypse* wherein John does not see a temple in the city, ‘for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb’ (21:22). Notwithstanding the discrepancy between the two notions of the Temple, both depart from the institutional character of the first and second Temples and their functional significance, thus suggesting divergence between first-century Jewish and Christian views.

### **The metamorphic and metaphoric Temple: The *Apocalypse of John***

In the *Apocalypse of John* the Temple and Jerusalem are referred to in seven of the twenty-two chapters.<sup>332</sup> The author first mentions the Temple in his sixth letter, to the church in Philadelphia, promising members that if they are able to conquer ‘the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world’, God will make them a pillar of the Temple, from

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<sup>332</sup> The term used for temple in Revelation is ναός. It occurs at Rev. 3:12; 7:15; 11:1, 2, 19; 14:15, 17; 15:5, 6, 8 (2x); 16:1, 17; and 21:22 (2x). Hatch and Redpath list it as translating four Hebrew terms, i.e. דביר, חֵיכַל, בית, or אולם, with חֵיכַל being the predominant term with the exception of Theodotion Daniel. Avoidance of οἶκος/בית is to be noted but easily explained in terms of its different semantic range in Greek, as indicated by the fuller description in the expression οἶκος τοῦ θεοῦ. Be that as it may, in Revelation the temple is the heavenly temple and there is no reference to the earthly temple. Indeed, when it comes to the establishment of the New Jerusalem from Heaven, it is specifically stated that there is no temple (21:22).

which they will never depart (3:10, 12a). With such an assurance, John is at the same time associating the Temple belonging to God and the word ‘pillar’ as an image of permanence and enduring support, thus suggesting a direct relationship between the faithful members of the Philadelphian church and God, without reference to any priestly mediation. John also refers to Jerusalem for the first time, describing the city of [his] God as ‘the new Jerusalem that comes down from [his] God out of heaven’ (3:12), presaging his vision of the descent of the new Jerusalem depicted in chapter 21.

In chapter eleven, John appears to build on the early suggestions of divergence embodied in a congregation being a ‘pillar’ of God’s own temple and a ‘new’ Jerusalem descending from heaven. Told by two angels that he ‘must prophesy again about many peoples and nations and languages and kings’ (10:11), John is instructed to ‘measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there’, in effect to make a judgement on the worshippers’ salvation. In contrast, he is told to ignore ‘the court outside the temple’, as such precincts are occupied by Gentiles (11:1-2). It is noteworthy that the Temple John is asked to measure is not the earthly Temple in Jerusalem: John does not allude to the earthly city of Jerusalem in his narrative. The significance of the Temple to the establishment of the ‘kingdom of the Lord and of his Messiah’ is addressed by John at the close of the chapter: the unrighteous are to be destroyed, and the faithful rewarded with the opening in heaven of God’s Temple wherein, amidst lightning, thunder, earthquake and hail, the faithful see the ark of God’s covenant (11:15b, 18-19). To the redeemed, the Lamb appears, standing on Mount Zion. For the unredeemed, ‘those who worship the beast and its image’ (14:9b), the earth is reaped by a sickle (14:17-19). Using the metaphor of a vineyard, John describes the high price of evil: the vintage of the earth is

thrown by an angel into ‘the great wine press of the wrath of God’ and ‘the wine press was trodden outside the city, and blood flowed from the wine press, as high as a horse’s bridle, for a distance of about two hundred miles’ (14:1, 19-20). That such a vivid account of God’s severe punishment emanates from the Temple (14:15-18) may suggest either that the Temple serves as a locus for the setting of John’s account or that ‘God’s temple in heaven’ is being contrasted with the earthly Temple in Jerusalem. A case for the latter view is more easily argued from John’s vision of the Temple and the new Jerusalem at the close of the *Apocalypse*.

John’s vision of heaven continues in chapter fifteen in which he describes the end of God’s wrath involving seven angels emerging from the Temple, each given by one of the four living creatures a bowl ‘full of the wrath of God’ (Rev. 15:7). John notes that the Temple ‘was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter it until the seven plagues of the seven angels were ended’ (15:8). Although the heavenly Temple does not play a central role in the chapter, the author does note that the seven angels emerge from the Temple and he reinforces the association between the Temple and the power and glory of God. John’s apocalyptic narrative continues in the following chapter with God, from the temple, telling the angels to ‘go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God’ (16:1). As the angel with the seventh bowl of God’s wrath empties it, God’s loud voice emanates from the temple, on this occasion directly from the Throne, saying, ‘It is done!’ (16:17). As is the case with the preceding chapter, the Temple is not central to the narrative; however, it is from the Temple in which God is located that the action commences with the emergence of the seven angels and concludes with God’s declaration of the conclusion of his wrath.

In contrast to the death, destined by God's loud voice from the throne (Rev. 21:3a), for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, the murderers, the fornicators, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all liars (21:8), the faithful and those who conquer evil will be rewarded by God who 'will dwell with them: they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them', thus establishing a new covenant (21:3b). Such features of John's apocalypse, although expressed more dramatically, do not appear to be significantly divergent from earlier prophetic views. An example is provided by Jeremiah's account of God's wrath, described as 'a whirling tempest' bursting 'upon the head of the wicked' while, for the faithful the Lord will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be [God's] people (Jer. 30:23; 31:1). Thus, although at first glance Jeremiah's and John's accounts of God's punishment of evil and God's new covenant with the faithful resemble each other, John's version may be seen to indicate divergence in two respects. First, God's promise cited in Jeremiah is to be the God of all the families of Israel and although the term, 'all the families of Israel' expresses inclusiveness, it is an inclusiveness specific to Israel. In John's account, he hears a loud voice from the throne saying 'the home of God is among mortals' and that 'he will dwell with them and they will be his peoples' (21:3). Further, John's text does not indicate God's new covenant is specific to Israel: it will be open to all creation, reinforced by God, again speaking from the Throne, saying: 'See, I am making all things new', adding that, 'to the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life' (Rev. 21:5, 6b). The second indication of divergence between the accounts of Jeremiah and John is that in John's apocalypse, the old creation has passed away, replaced by 'a new heaven and a new earth' and the 'holy city, the new Jerusalem [descends] out of heaven from God' (21:1-2a).



### **The new Jerusalem and divergence**

In the previous chapter, it was established that Jewish apocalyptic literature describes the eschatological world in post-historical terms as a new creation based on a day of judgement, following which a new Jerusalem will be established. The new and permanent Temple, to be established by God, will succeed the First and Second Temples. However, although it is clear from the Gospel accounts discussed earlier in this chapter that Jesus regarded the Temple as a significant location in his ministry and that early Jesus followers held the Temple in high regard, it would seem that a case for Judaic-Christian divergence can be developed, based on perceptions of the new Jerusalem and the different concept of an eschatological temple in the *Apocalypse of John*. That John saw no temple in the new Jerusalem is not to suggest that unimportance attaches to the institutional reality of the first and second Temples. Although John does not discuss the significance of the Temple in Judaic tradition, he would likely have been aware of Ezekiel's vision of the Temple and 'the glory of the God of Israel coming from the east' (43:2) given his portrayal of the city of the new Jerusalem showing 'the glory of God' (21:11). Other examples of the likelihood of John drawing from Ezekiel's visions include his references to the angel having 'a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls' (Rev.21:15), his account of the man 'whose appearance shone like bronze, with a linen cord and a measuring reed in his hand' (Ezek. 40:3, 5), and the parallel between Rev. 21:1 and Ezek. 47:12 in respect of the 'river of the water of life'. Similarly, in describing the new holy city as having 'a great high wall and twelve gates' on which 'are inscribed the names of the twelve tribes of the Israelites' (21:12), John appears to draw on the Judaic tradition concerning the restoration of Jerusalem at the end of time. Pseudepigraphical writings are also reflected in John's depiction of the holy city in the new Jerusalem. For instance, in

Ezra's third vision a city is built in which 'Paradise is opened' and 'the tree of life is planted' and 'goodness is established' (*4 Ezra* 8:52),<sup>333</sup> and Baruch is promised by the Lord a 'new Jerusalem' (*2 Bar.* 4:1-6). From such examples it is reasonable to assume that John was aware of Jewish expectations of the restoration of Jerusalem. However, as he does not refer to the earthly Jerusalem, the supposition arises that in portraying the descent of the holy city of the new Jerusalem (21:1) in which the 'home of God is among mortals' (21:3a) he wished to dissociate the temple-free new Jerusalem from the tradition of the Judaic Temple of Jerusalem: in lieu of a physical structure 'its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb' (21:22). A degree of divergence, if not a dramatic contrast, appears to be indicated between Judaic and Jewish-Christian perceptions of the nature of the Temple, its sacred space, and its role and function in late first-century religious life.<sup>334</sup>

As Jerusalem had occupied a significant place in the religious psyche of the people of Israel and as a central focus of Jewish hope, John's 'new Jerusalem' is an image with which his contemporaries are likely to have identified, one signalling the election of God's new people and God's new covenant. The covenantal promise of Jeremiah to the inhabitants of the earthly Jerusalem: 'So shall you be my people, and I will be your God', is extended by a 'loud voice from the throne' telling John that 'the home of God is among mortals', not in the earthly Jerusalem but in the new Jerusalem, the holy city, which came 'down out of heaven from God' (*Rev.* 21:2-3). The 'new Jerusalem' indicates that God should no longer be perceived only as the God of Israel but as the God of all his peoples

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<sup>333</sup> See also *4 Ezra* 10:27, 44, 55.

<sup>334</sup> Otherwise expressed, it might be said that the new Jerusalem is *new* and without its old *raison d'être*, the Temple, but it is still identified as the new *Jerusalem*.

and nations (21:24, 26). John has seen God's new heaven and earth through his vision of the new Jerusalem (21:1-4), a vision he elaborates in his closing chapters (21:9-22:5) and one which may be regarded as a fulfilment of the prophecies of trito-Isaiah that God is about to create new heavens and a new earth as well as 'Jerusalem as a joy' (Isa. 65:17-18), and new creations without finite limitations (Isa. 66:22).

A major significance of the new Jerusalem is that John 'saw no temple in the city', explaining that 'its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb' (21:22). Thus, for the first time in the Hebrew scriptures and the Christian Testament, the Temple is not a physical edifice in the city of Jerusalem but a spiritual state embodied in the Lord God and Jesus the Lamb in a construct named by John, 'the new Jerusalem'. As such, the account of John's vision appears to present a powerful indicator, late in the first century, of Judaic-Christian divergence. However, before such a conclusion may be drawn, a deeper analysis of the 'new' Jerusalem is warranted, given the extent to which the term is metaphorically grounded, and regarded traditionally by many Christians as their new *ekklesia*.<sup>335</sup> As well as the new Jerusalem symbolising the early Christian church for some, but not all, John's concept of the Temple has also been regarded by some twentieth-century scholars who, focussing a 'Christian view of history' on John's *Apocalypse*, interpret the apocalyptic image to symbolise the church.<sup>336</sup>

John describes the new Jerusalem as descending from heaven, 'prepared as a bride adorned for her husband' (21:2), a description confirmed by one of the seven angels who

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<sup>335</sup> Similar to the synagogue, the term ἐκκλησία is more associated with the concept of a 'people' rather than a physical edifice.

<sup>336</sup> For example, see H.M. Féret, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, chapter IV. Three reservations to the often polemically-based view that the new Jerusalem portrays the early church are discussed shortly.

said to John: ‘Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb’ (21:9). Whereupon he is transported to a ‘great, high mountain’ and shown ‘the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God’ (21:10). In contrast to the ‘new’ Jerusalem, the ‘holy city’ of Jerusalem has God and the Lamb serving in place of the temple (21:22); nor does the holy city need light from the sun or moon, ‘for the glory of God is its light and its lamp is the Lamb’ (21:23; cf. John 8:12). Although the holy city no longer has a physical temple, the Throne continues to occupy a place and fulfil a role. In the holy city, ‘flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb’ is the river of the water of life and although ‘nothing accursed will be found there ... the throne of God and the Lamb will be in it’ from which ‘they will reign forever and ever’ (22:1, 3, 5). As well as the river of the water of life, the holy city is a place in which people may share in the tree of life (22:19).

It is not without interest that John draws upon a range of symbols from the Hebrew scriptures which, rather than suggesting divergence, appear to support the case for continuity of religious expression.<sup>337</sup> For example, John is transported to a high mountain not unlike Moses (and elders of Israel) ascending Mount Sinai where Moses ‘saw the God of Israel’ under whom ‘was something like a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness’ (Exod. 24:9-10). As well as both Moses and John undergoing iconic and similar mountain-top experiences in direct encounters with God, mountains feature extensively in the early religious history of Israel across a wide range of narrative

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<sup>337</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza notes that John uses material from the Hebrew scriptures to which he alludes but which he never reproduces in quotations. He often fuses various OT texts to make his own statements or to create a new symbolic expression. On the other hand, she also notes that John deploys non-symbolic (*unbildlich*) images, for example, the slain Lamb depicted as the ‘lion of the tribe of Judah’ and ‘the root of David’ (Rev. 5:5); *Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment*, 73, 180n.47.

accounts in the Hebrew scriptures.<sup>338</sup> Ezekiel's vision of the restored temple was also from 'a very high mountain' and includes a detailed physical description of the temple, its wall and gates, and its outer and inner courts (Ezek. 40:2-42:20). Notwithstanding the indications of continuity suggested by the use of a mountain in the accounts of Moses, Ezekiel and John, the latter's experience from 'a great, high mountain', witnessing the descent of the new Jerusalem (Rev. 21:10), rather than physical depictions of the Temple, appears to express a notion of divergence.

Another image in John's *Apocalypse* which alludes to accounts in the Hebrew scriptures, thereby contributing to suggestions of continuity, is his depiction of the significant *materiality* of the new Jerusalem, including its wall, gates, construction, and physical measurements (21:11-21). John provides a comprehensive description of the city, using a wide range of precious stones to depict its physical features and emphasises its vast, cube-like dimensions with its equal 'length and width and height', each 'fifteen hundred miles' (21:16). There are similar accounts expressing *materiality* in the Hebrew scriptures, for instance, Ezekiel's vision of the new Temple which is extensive in its *Verkörperung* (Ezek. 40:5-42:20). Notwithstanding the vast differences in physical dimensions, the *materiality* of Jerusalem in the Hebrew scriptures continues in John's account, thus suggesting a degree of continuity between Judaic and early Christian understandings of the significance of the Temple and Jerusalem to first-century religious life. However, the case for divergence appears to be stronger, given the contrast between

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<sup>338</sup> Mountains mentioned in accounts of Israel's history include Baalah (Kiriath-jearim), Carmel, Ebal, Ephron, Gaash, Gerizim, Gilboa, Halak, Hermon, Hor, Jearim (Chesalon), Lebanon, Moriah (Jerusalem), Nebo, Paran (from which the Lord 'shone forth' (Deut. 33:2), Seir, Shepher, Sinai, Tabor, Zalmon and Zion. Hebrew scriptures which include mountains as significant elements in their narratives include Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, Isaiah, and Habakkuk.

the literal descriptions of the Temple in Judaic literature focussing on the physical construction of the Temple and its component parts and the metaphorical depiction in John's *Apocalypse*. The imaginative 'new' Jerusalem depicted by John is subjective, unable to be quantified as can the earthly city of Jerusalem, which can be assessed epistemically based on historical literary references. In such a context, the concept of the 'new' Jerusalem appears to represent divergence from its earthly antecedent.

Although Hebrew scripture contains descriptions of the Temple, there are few references to the physical characteristics of the city of Jerusalem.<sup>339</sup> Nor does the text of *4 Ezra* provide much data concerning the physical characteristics of the new Jerusalem. In Ezra's vision the heavenly Jerusalem, based on the trope of a mourning woman, becomes an established city, built on huge foundations (*4 Ezra* 10:19-20; 25-28). In contrast, John provides a detailed and graphic, but nonetheless metaphorical, account of 'the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God' (21:10-21). More significantly, John states explicitly: 'I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb' (21:22).<sup>340</sup> Thus, even allowing for allusions to *materiality* with temple descriptions in the Hebrew scriptures, the traditional Judaic regard for the Temple appears to be devalued in John's apocalyptic vision of the new Jerusalem (21:1-22:5), which involves 'a new heaven and a new earth' with the first heaven and the first earth having passed away (21:1). To such a view, however, must be added the caveat of drawing a comparison between the 'literal' Temple and the metaphorical 'new'

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<sup>339</sup> Such brief references include Nehemiah 2:13-15; 3:1-32; Isaiah 22:8-11. The Temple Scroll, however, offers more comprehensive descriptions (*11QT*: 2-7).

<sup>340</sup> I am interpreting John's statement as an explicit contrast between the new Jerusalem without a physical temple and the first and second Temples in the historical Jerusalem. An alternative interpretation is that John's statement reflects an accommodation of the post 70 CE absence of the Temple.

Jerusalem.

In contrast to the traditional glory of the Temple, John's description of the new Jerusalem and its lack of a physical temple does not dispense with the concept of holiness associated with the Judaic Temple. His vision of a giant cube, fifteen hundred miles in height, length and width, suggests a cosmic and holy dimension, one which is supported by the holiness of God and the Lamb representing the 'new' Temple. Verse 22 *may* be interpreted as the new Jerusalem and new 'temple' foreshadowing, if not portraying, the emerging church of early Christianity. Further, Jerusalem becomes in John's account, the *new* Jerusalem, a *holy* city in which the loud voice from the throne declares to John, 'the home of God is among mortals' (21:3a). To John's vision-narrative, God adds his own voice from the Throne, giving emphasis to the 'newness' of the new heaven and new earth, rather than a transformation of the existing cosmos: 'See, I am making all things new' (21:5a). A new dimension is suggested by the act of God speaking directly, thus the creative word of God, rather than through John, for only the second time in John's *Apocalypse*. On the first occasion of direct speech, God states he is the Alpha and the Omega, who is and who was and who is to come, thus indicating future eventuality.<sup>341</sup> John cites God proclaiming he is the Alpha and the Omega on two further occasions, including once from the Throne. On the second occasion of God's direct voice, God states, in the present tense, that he is making all things new.

Although the suggestion that the new Jerusalem foreshadows or portrays the emerging Christian church is one which has received widespread support, principally from

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<sup>341</sup> Rev. 1:8. John cites God proclaiming he is the Alpha and the Omega on two further occasions, Rev. 21:6 and 22:13, the former spoken by God from the Throne. In contrast, God does not appear to describe himself as the Alpha and the Omega in other biblical texts.

Christian scholars, it is a view which may be assessed on several grounds. For instance, the term ‘the beloved city’ (Rev. 20:9)<sup>342</sup> may be reasonably assumed to refer to Jerusalem. However, to assume from John’s text that Jerusalem symbolises ‘the (Christian) Church universal’ appears to impose a retroactive theological interpretation of the Jerusalem of Judaic tradition. Otherwise expressed, one may argue that recognition of the significance of the Temple in Judaic tradition, noting John’s narrative concerning the new Jerusalem not containing a physical Temple but one of God and the Lamb being depicted as a metaphorical Temple, does not appear to justify the latter as a symbol of what emerged, at a later date, as the ‘Christian Church’. God and the Lamb as a metaphorical temple does not constitute historical reality and would thus seem to be inappropriate as a foundational element of the Christian Church. Although it is a speculative exercise to understand the mindset of John in his use of the term ‘new Jerusalem’, the importance of seeking to do so is apparent if the distinction between literal and metaphorical interpretations is considered. John’s apocalyptic vision of a ‘new heaven and a new earth’ and the ‘holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God’, (21:1a, 2a) is likely to have been perceived by him as a reality.<sup>343</sup> Equally, the angel showing John ‘the bride, the wife of the Lamb’ (21:9) and transporting John to a high mountain from which John saw ‘the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God’ may be regarded as metaphors depicting Jesus enabling believers in him to overcome evil in God’s new order (21:9-10). From a modern perspective it is difficult to ascribe

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<sup>342</sup> The term ‘beloved city’ may well have been derived from the not infrequent use of the word ‘city’ to indicate a woman and ‘beloved’ indicating the relationship between God and the city as a woman.

<sup>343</sup> Such a likelihood is predicated on the supposition that John’s vision cannot be regarded as a metaphor: as a vision it would have been cognitively real to John. While John’s vision was ‘real’, however, portrayal of the ‘new Jerusalem’ is metaphorical.



other than a metaphorical interpretation.<sup>344</sup> Finally, that the ‘new Jerusalem’ may serve to indicate the ‘new’ Christian church, thus suggesting divergence rather than continuity or renewal, is an interpretation which warrants analysis concerning the use of the word ‘new’ to depict the Jerusalem of John’s *Apocalypse* in contrast to the Jerusalem of Judaic tradition. In Rev. 21:1-2, the Greek term *καινός* is used in relation to John’s ‘new’ Jerusalem, one associated with a new heaven and a new earth. The Greek term denotes a new, everlasting covenant, a new creation replacing the old, which contrasts with the materiality of the earthly Temple.<sup>345</sup> The *new* heaven and the *new* earth denote an extension of the divine to the human, of new life in the new Jerusalem, which surpass the ‘old’ life of the earthly Jerusalem (21:1-2).<sup>346</sup> Thus, *καινός* may be interpreted as a transition to a new state of being: a new divine-human order specifically related to a new heaven and earth (21:1a), in contrast with the first heaven and earth which have passed away (21:1b).<sup>347</sup>

In a modern context, the word ‘new’ may connote a sense of either renewal or divergence.<sup>348</sup> For example, the use of the word ‘new’ in the title ‘New Revised Standard Version’ indicates a modernised translation of an earlier version of the Bible, thus suggesting a sense of continuity and renewal with the existing Bible rather than divergence from the earlier text. On the other hand, the term ‘New Age’ implies a new, or divergent, historical demarcation. In the case of the new Jerusalem it would seem that both

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<sup>344</sup> It is possible, of course, for metaphor to exist without the reader (or hearer) being conscious of its use. See discussion on John’s use of metaphor in chapter 3, ‘Metaphor and the new Jerusalem’.

<sup>345</sup> Such a covenantal dimension appears to be a feature of Rev. 21-22. See Smalley, *Thunder and Love*, 106, 110.

<sup>346</sup> Ibid., 59-60.

<sup>347</sup> See Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1113-4.

<sup>348</sup> Based on the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, sixth edition, vol. 2, Oxford University Press, 2007, 1918.

interpretations, renewal and divergence, are possible.<sup>349</sup> One may argue, for example, that the apocalyptic concept of the ‘new’ Jerusalem stands in contrast with the idea of the ‘new’ Temple expressed in Jewish religious hopes in the Second Temple Period. It seems clear that an eschatological temple, one built by God, is in the minds of Jewish apocalyptic writers as well as in the Qumran Scrolls. Three citations may serve to support such a view. First, an eschatological temple is referred to in the Temple Scroll: God will create his temple, ‘establishing it for [him] self *for all days*, according to the covenant that [God] made with Jacob at Bethel’ (11 QT29:7-10).<sup>350</sup> Second, the eschatological temple is also depicted by the author of Jubilees: God instructs the ‘angel of the presence’ to ‘write for Moses from the first creation until my sanctuary is built in their midst *forever and ever*’.<sup>351</sup> Third, a later eschatological temple is cited in 2 *Baruch* which was written after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, and likely to have been composed within the first two decades of the second century CE.<sup>352</sup> Lifted up by ‘a strong spirit’ and ‘carried above the wall of Jerusalem’, Baruch has a vision of the ruined Temple’ (2 *Bar.* 6:3). However, his vision includes his witness of ‘four angels [standing] at the four corners of the city’ ... and ‘another angel came down from heaven ... and said to the earth with a loud voice ... “For the time has arrived when Jerusalem will also be delivered up for a time, until the moment

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<sup>349</sup> The word ‘new’ appears only nine times in the *Apocalypse of John*, five of which appear to depict the new Jerusalem (3:12; 21:1-2; 21:22) with the word denoting a divergent contrast with the earthly Jerusalem. Rev. 2:17 refers to a ‘new name’; however, the subject of the name is uncertain (Aune, *Revelation* 1-5, 190). Rev. 21:5a depicts the one seated on the Throne saying, ‘I am making all things new’, and Rev. 5:9a and 14:3 refer to ‘new songs’.

<sup>350</sup> I have used italics for the phrase ‘for all days’ to indicate the eschatological nature of the Temple. Likewise, in the following two citations, the terms ‘forever and ever’ and ‘forever’ are italicised.

<sup>351</sup> Jubilees 1:27; cited from Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, 154.

<sup>352</sup> A.F.J. Klijn, ‘2 (Syriac Apocalypse of) Baruch: A New Translation and Introduction’, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, ed. Charlesworth, 617.; also Flusser, *Judaism of the Second Temple Period*, vol. 1, *Qumran and Apocalypticism*, 211.

that it will be said that it will be restored *forever*” (2 Bar. 6:4-5, 8-9). Thus the voice of God, through the medium of an angel, heralds the new Jerusalem.

Another contemporaneous but more metaphorically-expressed account of the new Jerusalem is recorded in 4 Ezra in which Ezra has a vision of and conversation with a mourning woman. Following Ezra’s vision of the woman’s face shining ‘exceedingly’, her countenance flashing ‘like lightning’, and after hearing the woman emit a ‘loud and fearful cry’ which ‘shook the earth’, there appeared ‘an established city, and a place of huge foundations showed itself’ (9:38; 10:25-27). The symbolism of the woman is explained to Ezra by an angel: ‘This woman whom you saw, whom you now behold as an established city, is Zion’ (4 Ezra 10:45).

Common to the visions of the new Jerusalem in 2 Baruch and 4 Ezra is the voice of God, in each instance conveyed by an angel. In John’s *Apocalypse*, however, his vision is more complex: he sees ‘a new heaven and a new earth’ and ‘the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God’ (21:1-2). Although contemporaneous with 2 Baruch and 4 Ezra, the account of the new Jerusalem in the *Apocalypse of John* differs in at least three respects. First, Baruch and Ezra hear from God through the medium of an angel, whereas John heard ‘a loud voice’ from ‘the one who was seated on the throne’ speaking hypostatically (21:3-8). Second, John does not see a temple in the new Jerusalem, ‘for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty *and the Lamb*’ (21:22). Third, John’s vision of the new Jerusalem includes an interaction between God and his peoples: God will dwell among mortals and make all things new (21:3-5). Thus, as John’s text adds significant dimensions to those of 2 Baruch and 4 Ezra, the case for

divergence in Jewish and Christian accounts of the new Jerusalem is strengthened.

Although the new Jerusalem and the different concept of the Temple as God and the Lamb in John's narrative clearly reflect an apocalyptic account, earlier Jewish hopes for a new Temple, also expressed in an apocalyptic genre, anticipate a 'physical' Temple similar to the First and Second Temples.<sup>353</sup> For instance, Baruch addressed the elders: 'Do not forget Zion but remember the distress of Jerusalem. For, behold, the days are coming, that all that has been will be taken away to be destroyed, and it will become as though it had not been' (2 Bar. 31:4-5). Further, the eschatological temple 'will be renewed in glory and ... perfected into eternity ... when the Mighty One will renew his creation' (2 Bar. 32:4, 6). In contrast, John's apocalyptic vision of 'the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband' (21:2) has no parallel in earlier and concurrent Jewish literature. Nor does John's reference to the new Jerusalem, which does not include a temple such as the first and second Temples (21:22), suggest continuity and renewal in keeping with Jewish expectations. On the contrary, in that John's account of the new Jerusalem does not include a temple pertaining to the Judaic tradition, one may argue that his 'new Jerusalem' indicates divergence. Further, in considering John's apocalyptic account of the 'new' Jerusalem from the context of religious understanding in the first century, the term 'new Jerusalem' reflects a contrasting concept of significant renewal or, indeed, divergence in renewal.

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<sup>353</sup> See discussion by Sean Freyne, *Galilee*. Freyne distinguishes between loyalty to the Temple as such and loyalty to Jerusalem and notes that the 'idea of the new Jerusalem is not identical with that of the new temple in the Jewish religious hopes for the post-exilic period' (page 275).

From the preceding discussion, the conclusion may be drawn that, in contrast to the iconic religious dimensions of the Temple and Jerusalem portrayed in the Hebrew scriptures and the pseudepigrapha, John's *Apocalypse* suggests indicators of divergence more so than gradations of continuity and renewal. For instance, he describes a *new* Jerusalem, without a new (physical) Temple, a new holy city which is substantially different in historical and theological terms, as well as being supported by the hypostatic voice of God that 'all things are new' (21:5). The Temple and Jerusalem of the religion of Israel and the Judaisms of the Second Temple Period may be described as the Jerusalem temple-state, serving as the central focus of the Jewish cult and religious leadership. In significant contrast is 'God's own Temple' and the new Jerusalem descending from heaven in John's *Apocalypse*. As indicated earlier, from Jewish apocalyptic literature it seems clear that late first-century Jewish expectations anticipated an eschatological temple, a physical edifice conforming to the First and Second Temples. Such a view may have been within Jesus' own prophetic understanding that although God would destroy the Temple (Mark 13:2), in keeping with contemporary eschatological thinking, God would build a new Temple. A half-century later, when John's *Apocalypse* was recorded, early Christian thinking in respect of the Temple had shifted to a christological focus: the temple of the sacrificial cult based on animal sacrifice had been replaced by a temple in which nations will walk by the light of the [sacrificed] Lamb (Rev. 21:23b, 24a).

From the 'great white' throne-scene of judgement John creates, *ab initio*, a new cosmic construct, one in which 'the dead, great and small' are judged before the Throne (20:11-12). From this setting John's vision of the new Jerusalem emerges (21:1-2), a new holy city contrasting with the materiality and cultic traditions of Jerusalem and the first and

second Temples. Notwithstanding the prior foundation of pre-apocalyptic reality on the form and tradition of Jerusalem and the earlier Temples, the new Jerusalem brings a regenerated metaphysical and metaphorical dimension to the religious history of the first century. From such perspectives, rather than continuity and renewal, the new Temple and the new Jerusalem serve as indicators of Judaic-Christian divergence towards the end of the first century of the Common Era.

### **Excursus: Sacred space as an indicator of divergence**

John's portrayal of the new Jerusalem and his reference to the Temple becoming God and the Lamb, in contrast with the first and second Temples, suggests that the concept of sacred space is relevant to the discussion of first-century indicators of divergence. Thus, although our major focus concerns the Temple and the new Jerusalem, the priesthood, and the Throne, a brief excursus on the significance of sacred space is appropriate.

In the context of the term 'sacred space' the word 'space' is taken to mean area or dimensional extent rather than 'time', thus pertaining to size or expansiveness. As will be noted in relation to the *Apocalypse of John*, 'space' may denote a continuous, unlimited extension which is directionless and which is deemed to be void of, or without reference to, matter.<sup>354</sup> The word 'sacred', in association with 'space', pertains to a religious purpose deserving veneration based on its quality of holiness.<sup>355</sup> In brief, the term 'sacred space' in this discussion may be regarded as the respective areas of holy space associated

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<sup>354</sup> Shorter Oxford English Dictionary.

<sup>355</sup> Ibid. Although the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary refers to a broad range of items to which the word 'sacred' may be applied, for example, blood, book, concert, history, music, number, orders, poetry, was and writing, it does not include 'space'.

with the Temple of Judaic history and the new Jerusalem depicted in the *Apocalypse of John*. Such a brief statement of the term ‘sacred space’, however, is not intended to convey a simplicity of meaning. That modern studies of sacred space have revealed complexities of meaning, including religious, social and cultural dimensions, is demonstrated by Mircea Eliade, who depicts all sacred spaces implying ‘a hierophany’ or an ‘irruption of the sacred’,<sup>356</sup> thus implying a diversity and complexity of sacred and esoteric mysteries. That specific spaces are deemed sacred is based on the view that they are occupied by a divine power, even if such a space, as in the case of John’s new Jerusalem, is deemed a metaphorical holy city rather than a physical edifice.<sup>357</sup> Another perspective on the linkage of the presence of the divine and sacred space by Eliade is suggested by Jonathan Smith who refers to the variety of sacred spaces in that different kinds of sacred space entail different meanings. For instance, the notion of sacred space being occupied by the divine led to fourth-century Christians memorialising places of significance in Jesus’ ministry.<sup>358</sup> Smith points out that such ‘sacred spaces’ are often created by those wishing to ascribe a sacred significance to them, thus, the perceived sacredness of space may be derived from the distinctive ways in which religions ‘organise the participants’ of such sites.<sup>359</sup>

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<sup>356</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, 26.

<sup>357</sup> For example, the portrayal of the new Jerusalem (Rev. 21) is claimed to have been an inspiration for the building of Gothic churches in that the new Jerusalem and the celestial holy city was deemed by believers to reflect divine power, presence, and the holy life; Otto von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral: Origins of Gothic Architecture and Medieval Concept of Order*, Princeton University Press, 1988, 8.

<sup>358</sup> Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual*, University of Chicago Press, 1987, 76-116. Smith cites the tomb of Jesus venerated in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem due to the belief of early Christians that such a ‘space’ associated with Jesus was permeated with divine power.

<sup>359</sup> Smith uses Ezekiel’s account of the instructions for building a temple: spaces ‘were organised hierarchically along the longitudinal axis from the exterior of the building through the interior rooms to the *holy of holies*, the place where the godhead was believed may dwell’. Otherwise expressed: the Temple’s

In respect of issues of divergence and the notion of materiality applied to sacred space, there are two dimensions applicable to the Temple and the new Jerusalem. The first concerns the materiality of sacred space and relates to finite and measured sacred space in contrast with the notion of the sacred space portrayed by John in the new Jerusalem. Both Hebrew and Christian scriptures provide descriptions of sacred space which depict its materiality in some detail. For instance, Exodus 25:10-27:20 provides specific details of the measurements, construction and appearance of the Ark of the Covenant, the mercy seat, the table to accommodate religious accessories, including plates, dishes, flagons and bowls, a lampstand and seven lamps, the tabernacle with ten curtains, a tent over the tabernacle also with curtains, the altar, and the court with specific measurements of its length, width and height (cf. 2 Bar. 6:2-7). Thus, from the holiness of the Temple and its sacred objects, particularly the Ark of the Covenant, a strong sense of *Dinglichkeit* emerges.<sup>360</sup> Such detailed representation of materiality is partially reflected in Hebrews 9:1-5. However, unlike Exodus, Hebrews also depicts the functions of Temple priests and the high priest in order to provide a contrast with the different priestly function of Christ, who ‘entered once for all into the Holy Place, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption’ (9:12). The ‘letter’ to the Hebrews reinforces such a difference by noting that Christ did not enter a material sanctuary constructed by humans but into heavenly space ‘to appear in the presence of God on our behalf’ (9:24). That the Temple in Jerusalem had a significant level of materiality

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sacred space derived from the space of non-believers, to the space of lay believers, to different levels within the priesthood, to the Holy of Holies, the locus of God, accessible to the high priest; Smith, *To Take Place*, 56-60.

<sup>360</sup> See Skarsaune, *In the Shadow of the Temple*, 257. In terms of the materiality of the Temple and its objects, Skarsaune adds physical objects associated with the Temple cult, such as grain, wine, oil, cattle and notes that ‘much of the purpose of the temple cult is to bring concrete blessing on concrete physical life: fecundity on the fields, among cattle, among people’ (page 257).



appears to be the case, particularly from the description provided in Exodus 25:10-25:70. The materiality of sacred space as a factor in both Hebrew and Christian scriptures becomes clearer with John's depiction of the physical, if metaphorical, features of the new Jerusalem (Rev. 21:12-21). The angel who showed John the new Jerusalem had 'a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls' (21:15), which are unquestionably material, measuring respectively 'fifteen hundred miles' and 'one hundred forty-four cubits' (21:16-17). Although following the dimension of materiality attaching to the Temple in Exodus, John adds to the materiality of the new Jerusalem a transcendental dimension: God and the Lamb-Christ now dwell with the redeemed in the new *basileia* and there is no longer a physical, material Temple (Rev. 21:22). Such a difference would appear to justify a claim of divergence from Judaic Temple-tradition.

The second dimension relates to the perceived locus of God: on the one hand in the Holy of Holies of the Jerusalem Temple<sup>361</sup> and on the other, in the new *basileia* revealed by John in the new Jerusalem in which God's 'house' is among mortals (Rev. 21:2-3). Although at first glance, such a distinction concerning the locus of God seems reasonable, it may not take into sufficient account gradations of change and renewal in respect of Jewish views of sacred space in the first century CE. Although it was generally believed the locus of Y<sub>HWH</sub> was Temple-centred, in the first century CE it was not only primitive Christians who were 'redefining' notions of sacred space through identifying the divine within individual human religious existentiality rather than the historic Temples. In the first century CE there also appear to be changing notions within contemporary Judaism concerning the locus of God. Following the destruction of the Second Temple there was

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<sup>361</sup> That the Holy of Holies of the Temple was regarded as 'God's House' is expressed in Jewish prayer for the restoration of the Temple; cited in the *Amidah* prayer for Temple Service.

a shift in the Judaic tradition of temple-centred sacred space and the locus of God expressed through changing religious phenomena.<sup>362</sup> For instance, individual prayer to God became a feature of early Judaism in contrast with the cessation after 70 CE of the priesthood's practice of animal sacrifice. As well, traditional, sanctuary-related rituals such as pilgrim festivals and royal enthronements declined and Sabbath tables<sup>363</sup> became a feature of Jewish households in contrast with the centralised role of the Temple altar. Thus, Temple-related sacred space became diversely expressed, at individual and household levels, and the central role of Jerusalem in terms of sacred space was extended to include the Jewish diaspora. That such factors emerged in Jewish life late in the first century but not as a consequence of early Christian influence would appear to indicate a significant process of renewal in early Judaism that signalled different concepts of sacred space. Nonetheless, wider issues concerning sacred space and the locus of God, expressed in the *Apocalypse of John* and his vision of the new Jerusalem, the 'new' priesthood, and the role of the Lamb and the Throne and God's new home among mortals convey divergent aspects of the locus of God within the traditional framework of sacred space.

John introduces a different dimension of sacred space through his emphasis on the Throne and divine activity in heaven.<sup>364</sup> From the tradition of Y<sup>H</sup>W<sup>H</sup>'s role in Israel and the religious focus accorded Jerusalem and the Temple, both of which had material sacred space in earthly terms, John introduces God and the Lamb sharing the heavenly Throne (3:19-21). Such a spatial, heavenly element adds the dimension of divine transcendence

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<sup>362</sup> There were exceptions, notably in the Qumran Community, before the destruction of the Temple.

<sup>363</sup> Presumably based on Exod. 12:3-4; 20; 9-10.

<sup>364</sup> Discussed in chapter seven.

to first-century Jewish and Christian comprehension of earthly sacred space as well as contrasting with the limits to existential space and freedom imposed by Roman imperial rule.<sup>365</sup> Not only did the Lamb conquer and share God's Throne, he affirms that those who conquer evil will be accorded a place with the Lamb, as the exalted Christ, on his Throne (3:21). The 'enthronement' of the redeemed with Christ conforms to the kingship and enthronement imagery of the ancient Near East and Israel.<sup>366</sup> Thus, although from the perspective of 'enthronement' one may argue in support of religious continuity, there does appear to be a significant, divergent element in terms of the priority of and access to sacred space. Such a supposition may be argued from the perspective that *degrees* of priority and access appear to be centrally significant to sacred space. An example is provided by the notion of separation, both spatial and moral, embodied in the holiness of sacred space. That the Temple of Y<sup>H</sup>W<sup>H</sup> is sacred space is reinforced by the distinction between the sinful nature of humankind and the spatial separation from God: the former does not enjoy direct contact with Y<sup>H</sup>W<sup>H</sup> whose holiness is embedded in the Temple's holiest of holies, thus emphasising the spatial and moral separation between the divine and the human.<sup>367</sup> Such a notion of separation in the context of priority and access may be compared with the inclusive nature of sacred space in John's portrayal of the new Jerusalem.

John's narrative in chapter eleven emphasises the transcendent nature of heavenly

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<sup>365</sup> See Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 7.

<sup>366</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 261.

<sup>367</sup> See Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, vol. IV, *Law and Love*, 345. Meier notes that 'in Temple worship and in Israelite religion in general, "to make holy" meant separation from the ordinary world precisely in order to belong to God and his service'. Meier also suggests that the laws of ritual purity were created and maintained to protect the system of separate spaces between humankind and God's realm of sacred space (page 345).

space, in contrast with the depiction of space in the earthly Temple. He indicates the transcendence of the heavenly Temple by referring to the Ark of the Covenant being seen within and the presence of lightning, thunder, earthquake and hail (11:19). As well, 'loud voices' declare 'the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of [the] Lord and Messiah' (11:15b), a transcendence contrasting with the high priest officiating in the Holy of Holies in the earthly Temple. Such a view is not to suggest that the transcendence depicted in Revelation 11 constitutes a unified literary unit. Nor is it certain that chapter 11 constitutes a single vision, initially focussing on the earthly Temple (11:1-2) and concluding with an emphasis on the Temple in heaven (11:19).<sup>368</sup> It would appear, however, that Rev. 11:1-2 does refer to the earthly Temple<sup>369</sup> and Rev. 11:19 depicts God's heavenly Temple, the former finite and measurable and the latter infinite, of immeasurable space. The conclusion that John distinguishes between the two temples is supported by the Temple of God (11:19) being specified as in heaven (ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ) and the two being bridged by 'loud voices in heaven' depicting new dimensions of sacred space: 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and his Messiah' (11:15). John also expresses notions of sacred space in the account of his vision of the new Jerusalem in which he sees 'a new heaven and a new earth', the first having passed away (21:1) and God's home becomes a new *basileia* among mortals (21:3) without a physical, measurable Temple (21:22) with the Holy of Holies in which only the high priest officiated. Thus, in terms of the priority of and access to sacred space, it would appear that sacred space moved from being a central feature of the First and Second Temples to

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<sup>368</sup> See Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 585-586. Aune discusses modern interpretations of the symbolic significance of Rev. 11:1-2 on pages 597-598.

<sup>369</sup> John is given a measuring rod and told to 'measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there' but not to measure 'the court outside the temple' (11:1-2a).

one of a more universal character involving religious affinity with the divine through individual religious self-expression. It is also possible to make a case for a transformation in perceptions of sacred space in that compared with the Holy of Holies of the Temple, it takes on a dynamic quality in John's narrative. As portrayed by John, sacred space becomes more metaphysical and metaphorical, a dynamic state of being and interacting with the divine partnership of the God and the Lamb in the new *basileia*.<sup>370</sup> Combined with the change in the nature and function of the priesthood, as discussed in the following chapter, such changes suggest that sacred space may also be regarded as an indicator of late first-century divergence.

### **The new Jerusalem: John's hermeneutical framework of redemption**

Of relevance to issues of continuity, renewal and divergence is John's treatment of the concept of redemption in the context of his visions of Jesus as the Lamb, as the primary source of redemption, combined with the descent of the new Jerusalem.<sup>371</sup> Embedded in six chapters of John's narrative, including his opening and closing chapters, are his notions of redemption which, interpreted as a whole, appear to constitute a 'theological construct' of redemption.<sup>372</sup> In support of this supposition, it is argued that Rev. 1:5-6; 5:9-10;

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<sup>370</sup> See Jeanne Halgren Kilde, *Sacred Power, Sacred Space: An Introduction to Christian Architecture and Worship*, Oxford University Press, 2008, 3.

<sup>371</sup> I have elected to discuss the dimensions of redemption presented in John's *Apocalypse* because of the hermeneutical significance of redemption expressed in 1:5-6; 7:9-17; 14:1-4; 21:1-8; and 22:1-5. John's 'theology of redemption' is not a subject widely discussed in modern secondary sources. Such comment is not intended critically; clearly, the full scope and complexity of John's *Apocalypse* cannot be covered adequately in a single text. My point is, however, that interpretation of John's 'theology of redemption' is relevant to issues of renewal and divergence in the religious climate of the late first century of the Common Era.

<sup>372</sup> The phrase 'theological construct of redemption' is used in a modern context and is not intended to imply that John may have had such a term in mind. Although he expresses notions of redemption, which

7:9-17; 14:1-4; 21:1-8; and 22:1-5, interpreted collectively, portray a redemptive framework which includes dimensions of ‘newness’, liberation and universality, linkage to a ‘new’ concept of priesthood, and an underlying rationale to the redemptive and climactic focus depicted in the descent of the new Jerusalem. The conclusion is drawn that his accounts of redemption serve as indicators of divergence when considered against the background of the Judaic tradition of salvation.<sup>373</sup>

The quality of ‘newness’ opens with John’s reference to the blood of Jesus Christ freeing the faithful from sin and making them a *basileia* (1:5-6a) and continues with his three accounts of the ‘new’ song of redemption (5:9; 7:10; 14:3), without consideration of ethnicity or status, thus introducing a universal element to redemption in contrast to the salvation of the people of Israel (5:9; 7:9). That John regards redemption as universally available is underlined by his use of the four terms ‘tribe, language, people, nation’<sup>374</sup> on five occasions (5:9; 7:9; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6). His use of such inclusive terms contribute to rhetorical impact and reinforce the contrast with the Judaic tradition of ethnic exclusivism.<sup>375</sup> Such repeated references to pluriform demographics indicates John’s concern to embrace redemption in an inclusive sense: a *basileia* for God which is

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are specifically relevant to his vision of the new Jerusalem, he would not have categorised such notions as a ‘theology of redemption’. With modern interpretation, however, his references to redemption across a range of texts in six chapters of his *Apocalypse* would appear to justify the use of the term ‘theology of redemption’ to encapsulate his range of redemptive references.

<sup>373</sup> Such a statement is not to suggest that there was not an element of renewal in the concept of salvation in Judaic tradition.

<sup>374</sup> The four terms, tribe (φυλή), language (γλῶσσα), people (λαός) and nation (ἔθνος) are used in both singular and plural forms and the order varies in each passage, presumably without significance.

<sup>375</sup> Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1998, 136. This is not to suggest that *all* Judaic tradition involved ‘ethnic exclusivism’. John’s expressions of universalism, relating to his notion of a ‘new’ priesthood, are discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

universally inclusive of *all* peoples.<sup>376</sup> That he reinforces the universal quality of redemption is because of his concern that the Beast's domain is also universal. It was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation and 'all the inhabitants of the earth will worship it', that is, those whose names have not been recorded 'in the book of life of the Lamb that was slaughtered' (13:7-8).<sup>377</sup> John's linkage between redemption and priesthood is evident in 1:5-6; 5:9-10; and 22:1-3, passages which, as argued in the following chapter, indicate John's notions of a 'new' and divergent priesthood. In his depiction of the descent of the new Jerusalem and the religious life of the redeemed in the new holy city, John portrays the qualitative aspects of his understanding of 'new' redemption in terms of being the people of God among whom God makes his home (21:3). Such a concept is well removed from God dwelling in the 'holy of holies' of the first and second Temples. Further, the redeemed will enjoy the 'water of life' (21:7), the 'tree of life' (22:2) and the absence of night for they will be illuminated by the light of God (22:5).

### **Redemption and the hermeneutics of liberation**

The *Apocalypse of John*, in which Jesus is portrayed extensively as the slain Lamb symbolising the death of Jesus, denotes a concept of redemption in which religious liberation is open to all who believe in the redemptive quality of the Lamb's sacrifice.<sup>378</sup> John affirms that liberation arises from the act of one 'who loves us': those who believe in him are freed (liberated) from their sins by his blood (1:5b). John's reference to the blood

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<sup>376</sup> See David A. de Silva, *Seeing Things John's Way: The Rhetoric of the Book of Revelation*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, 2009, 3-4.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid., 3-4, 113.

<sup>378</sup> Although the term 'religious liberation' is not expressed in John's *Apocalypse*, its use seems justified from the viewpoint of a modern interpretation without being regarded as an unreasonable imposition on John's text.

of Christ (ἐν τῷ αἵματι αὐτοῦ) in association with freedom or liberation from sin had been expressed earlier in the century. For instance, Paul cited the ‘blood of Christ’ symbolising a sacrifice of atonement, for all who have sinned may gain ‘redemption that is in Christ Jesus’ (Rom. 3:23-25a), and Jesus spoke of his blood ‘which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins’ (Matt. 26:28).<sup>379</sup> Hebrews 9:12-13 distinguishes between the tradition of sacrifice using ‘the blood of goats and calves’ and ‘the blood of Christ’ from which eternal redemption is gained. In noting that the linkage between ‘blood’ and ‘redemption’ may have led John to an association with baptism, ‘through his blood Christ has set the baptised free from their own personal [*sic*] sins’, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza suggests that in an anthropological sense, Rev. 1:5b expresses redemption as the liberation of Christians from ‘the evil actions and deeds of their past’.<sup>380</sup> In any event, it seems reasonable to interpret 1:5 and 5:9 as an expression of the freedom and liberation available to the faithful as a consequence of the blood of Christ, which ransoms the faithful for God, irrespective of ethnicity, language or nation. Such an approach to ‘liberating values’ serves to elucidate a ‘new’ and ‘divergent’ theological construct, one which may be

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<sup>379</sup> See discussion by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1985, 71-72.

<sup>380</sup> Ibid. Schüssler Fiorenza again states that ‘in Rev. 1:5-6 John quotes a traditional baptismal formula which stresses that by his blood Christ has freed the baptised from their sins ...’ (page 76). She notes, however, that in Rev. 5:9-10 John introduces a further dimension, that of the ‘new’ song, thus modifying the ‘anthropological understanding of redemption and salvation by expressing it in theological, sociopolitical language’ (page 76). She makes clear, however, that John’s priority was not to depict redemption in terms of individuals and sin but rather he ‘asserts that redemption involves liberation from bondage and slavery and that salvation gives new dignity to those who have been redeemed through the death of Jesus Christ’ (page 68). In the light of what is known of the socio-political climate of the first century, such an opinion seems quite reasonable. Also of specific relevance to this thesis is that Schüssler Fiorenza interprets 1:5-6 and 5:9-10 as ‘redemption in liberation’ rather than new dimensions of priesthood (chapter 5). Although the two interpretations are not mutually exclusive, I have opted for the latter interpretation, as argued in the following chapter.



regarded as illustrative of a hermeneutics of redemption.<sup>381</sup>

Towards interpreting redemption from a first-century hermeneutical perspective, a distinction is appropriate between John's depiction of the significance of redemption involving the slain Lamb and the descent of the new Jerusalem *vis-à-vis* the Judaic tradition of salvation. As noted, expressions of the 'blood of Christ' had been recorded earlier in the first century. However, given the impact of the descent of the new Jerusalem, it is of interest that modern secondary sources pay little attention to John's theology of redemption, notwithstanding the integral relationship between the new Jerusalem and the dwelling with mortals of God and the Lamb. The supposition that, combined with the primary role of the Lamb, John's vision of the new Jerusalem is a hermeneutic key to his concept of universal and liberating redemption is discussed further when John's notions of redemption in 21:1-8 and 22:1-5 are considered.

The term 'redemption' is one with a wide range of interpretations, not infrequently deployed in particular constructs of religious faith and belief, and frequently associated with atonement as a related religious concept. In religious terms, 'redemption' is associated with the Latin *redimere*, denoting the paying of a ransom cost to achieve a slave's freedom.<sup>382</sup> The word 'ransom' (λύτρον) is used in the New Testament as a metaphor for the death of Jesus resulting in the liberation of the faithful from the bondage

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<sup>381</sup> The term 'hermeneutics of redemption' is used to denote the intended essential meaning to first-century hearers and readers of the notion of redemption contained in John's portrayal of the new Jerusalem; thus, the meaning of redemption in the context of the *new* Jerusalem as likely to be perceived by a hermeneut late in the first century CE.

<sup>382</sup> The payment of a ransom may also be associated with the release of a hostage or the reacquisition of forfeited property.

of sin<sup>383</sup> to a redemptive relationship with God (Mark 10:45b), establishing the case that Jesus paid the ‘ransom’ price for the redemption of believers (Mark 14:24; 1 Tim. 2:5-6).<sup>384</sup> Although John does not specifically use the word ‘redemption’ in his *Apocalypse*, he does portray notions of redemption which relate to the political and socio-cultural context of his first-century religious environment. For example, the act of redeeming a possession, or more significantly, one’s freedom from physical or cultural enslavement or, metaphorically, from the bondage of sin and evil, involves an intrinsic emotional element, of varying intensity, in the quality of redemption. Such notions of redemption are clearly more relevant to John’s religious and cultural environment than is likely to be the case in the post-modern and secular era.

That John would have been aware of the tradition of salvation in the Hebrew scriptures is a reasonable assumption, given the inextricable relationship between the religion of Israel and accounts of Y<sub>HWH</sub> saving *his* people (for example Exod. 6:2-3; 14:13, 30; 15:1-3). Such examples are situation-specific, denoting historical experiences of communities and the salvific actions of Y<sub>HWH</sub>. One may also assume John’s awareness of the covenantal dimension of salvation in the sense of the ‘deliverance’ expressed in Mic. 4:2 and more emphatically in Jer. 30:22; 31:1, 33-34. From the movement between salvation to covenantal ‘deliverance’ expressed in the few examples drawn from Exodus, Micah and Jeremiah, one may conclude that in Judaic tradition, salvation is of an inclusive, but not universal, nature based on Y<sub>HWH</sub>’s relationship with the nation of Israel or with specific covenantal communities, thus reflecting a pattern of continuity and renewal. In the case of John’s *Apocalypse*, however, there is an element of divergence in that

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<sup>383</sup> The terms ‘liberation’ and ‘bondage’ are also metaphors.

<sup>384</sup> This is not to assert that John was aware of such texts, given the uncertainty of dates of authorship.

redemption is expressed through the Lamb, the Lamb who was slaughtered and whose blood, symbolising the death of Jesus, serves as a ransom for the redemption of all the faithful, irrespective of ethnicity. In contrast to the Judaic notion of kinship benefiting from a covenantal relationship with YHWH, John posits a human relationship with God based on God's redemptive action through the ransom paid in the death of Jesus, the slaughter (sacrifice) of the Lamb.<sup>385</sup> In terms of the hermeneutics of redemption, as well as covenantal theology, it is significant that in John's portrayal of the descent of the new holy city of Jerusalem, he cites a loud voice from the Throne saying that 'the home of God (ἡ σκηνὴ τοῦ θεοῦ) is among mortals (μετὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων). He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples and God himself will be with them' (21:3). John's account extends the covenant between YHWH and the people of Israel: he will dwell with *all* the redeemed thus adding a universal dimension. He will wipe every tear from their eyes and death will be no more (21:4a), and the Lamb will not only share the Throne of God in the new holy city (22:1-3), his presence will be as a lamp illuminating the city, indistinguishable from the light of God's glory (21:23). Further, the redeemed will serve and worship God who 'will be their light' and with whom 'they will reign forever and ever' (22:3, 5). It seems evident that from John's depiction of redemption a case can be constructed in favour of religious continuity and renewal, drawing together Judaic and Jewish-Christian elements and expanding notions of covenantal theology. However, given John's account of the new Jerusalem in which God and the Lamb will abide with the redeemed, no longer only the nation of Israel, but a universally inclusive *basileia* of

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<sup>385</sup> It will be noted that I am using the term 'salvation' in respect of the actions of YHWH in saving Israel or specific covenantal communities and the term 'redemption' to depict John's more universal notion of redemption of all who follow the Lamb, without consideration of ethnicity, and are redeemed through the ransom paid by the death of Jesus.

believers in which there is interaction between the redeemed and God and the Lamb, a case can be argued for divergence in renewal.

### **John's christology and redemption (1:5-6)**

John introduces redemption in his opening salutation to the seven churches by asserting the status of Jesus as the Christ-Messiah, whose love freed the faithful from sin, establishing them as a *basileia*, one of priests serving God (1:5-6). Thus, at the beginning of his account John expresses the nature of the redemptive power of Jesus Christ, who as 'the firstborn of the dead and the ruler of the kings of the earth' loves the faithful and frees them from their sins by his blood.<sup>386</sup> Such a concept of freedom expresses a christological and divine act of redemption. For instance, although John states that grace and peace come from God who is eternal and from the seven spirits before the Throne (1:4), he declares that glory and eternal dominion are ascribed to Jesus Christ as Messiah. In contrast with the messianism depicted in the Hebrew scriptures, John depicts Jesus Christ as the Messiah, one who not only 'loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood' but also makes those so freed to be a kingdom of 'priests serving his God and Father'. Thus, John establishes Jesus as *the* Messiah, the sole agent of redemption in the world (1:5b-6a).<sup>387</sup>

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<sup>386</sup> For some scholars, the focus of Rev. 1:5-6 is on 'the redemptive work of Christ' (rather than the priesthood); for example, Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 50. Although redemption is clearly a dimension of 1:5-6, John's notions of a 'new' priesthood in 1:5-6 and other passages are also theologically significant, as argued in the following chapter.

<sup>387</sup> John's notion of 'priests serving God' in a new *basileia* is discussed in the following chapter. Further, that the scope of John's notion of redemption is extensive is also expressed in his description of the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders singing to the Lamb that by his blood (the death of Jesus), 'saints from every tribe and language and people and nation' are 'ransomed for God' (5:9). See the more detailed discussion in chapter 5 concerning the 'social' (*gesellschaftlich*) Throne.

John's initial description of Jesus is in keeping with apocalyptic as a genre involving symbolic imagery: in the 'midst of seven golden lampstands ... like the Son of Man' is one clothed 'with a long robe and with a golden sash across his chest' (1:12-13). The person has eyes 'like a flame of fire', feet like 'burnished bronze' and a voice 'like the sound of many waters'; in his right hand he holds 'seven stars' and from his mouth issues a 'sharp, two-edged sword': his face is 'like the sun shining with full force' (1:14-16). The 'one like the Son of Man' speaks directly to John 'in a loud voice like a trumpet' instructing him to write of his vision to the seven churches (1:10-11).<sup>388</sup> John's apocalyptic and explicit account portrays Jesus as an exalted divine identity, thus introducing a christological element in his opening chapter and subsequently reinforced in Rev. 5 as the sacrificial Lamb. Well in excess of an anthropomorphic description, John's account of the voice and physical appearance of the 'Son of Man' makes it clear that Jesus has risen from the dead, reinforced by the Christ-figure declaring: 'I am the first and the last, and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and of Hades' (1:17b-18), thereby establishing his authority in respect of the finality of death. In the Gospel of Matthew Jesus is cited as telling Peter that 'the gates of Hades (death) will not prevail against' Christ's church (Matt. 16:18b) and in the Johannine account Jesus states that whoever hears and believes his word will 'not come under judgement' but pass 'from death to life' (John 5:24). Whether or not John draws on such expressions of redemption beyond death, he stands in an earlier tradition of Jesus as the Christ-Messiah. He proceeds, however, to build an understanding of Jesus in such a way that the notion of redemption is broadened to include a universal level of redemption finally expressed in the manifestation of the new Jerusalem, a new *basileia* which no

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<sup>388</sup> The churches of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergumum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea (1:11).

longer has a physical temple as a symbol of exclusion.

The christological theme introduced by John in the opening chapter is reinforced throughout his visionary accounts. For example, not only does he describe Jesus as the ‘first and the last’ with the ‘keys’ to release believers from death (1:17b-18), Jesus is also depicted as having risen from the dead as Lord and from chapter 5 he is referred to frequently as the ‘Lamb’, representing the crucified (sacrificed) and raised Messiah.<sup>389</sup> In keeping with Jesus being portrayed in the fourth Gospel as the ‘Word of God’,<sup>390</sup> he is cited explicitly as ‘The Word of God’ in John’s *Apocalypse* (19:13). John also uses the image of kingship: Jesus Christ is ‘the ruler of the kings of the earth’ (1:5), ‘King of the nations’ (15:3) and ‘King of kings and Lord of lords’ (19:16b). Of particular relevance is John’s depiction of Jesus as the Lamb providing light for the new Jerusalem as ‘the lamp’ which will light the ‘way of the nations’ (21:23b-24; cf. Isa. 62:1). John’s portrayal of Jesus lighting ‘the way of the nations’ presents a christological and universal matrix: a hermeneutic of redemption which transcends the Judaic *heilsgeschichte* tradition of redemption in which God ‘saves Israel’.<sup>391</sup> From a hermeneutical perspective, John’s expression of his christological and universal concept of redemption is likely to have

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<sup>389</sup> For example, 5:6-8; 6:1; 7:9-10; 12:11; 13:8; 14:1 15:3; 17:4 19:7-9; 21:9; 22:1-3.

<sup>390</sup> For example, John 1:2, 9; 6:9.

<sup>391</sup> Although the words ‘salvation’ and ‘redemption’ are often used interchangeably, for the purposes of the discussion on John’s notions of redemption, the word ‘salvation’ is taken in its generally accepted context of ‘salvation history’, a saving action of God involving the deliverance of his people, the nation of Israel, from bondage and oppression. Such a view is in keeping with accounts in the Hebrew scriptures, for example Exod. 3:7f. and Psalm 106 which describes God’s saving role of his people and nation. In contrast, John’s notions of redemption portray the death of the Lamb as the ransom paid by Jesus Christ for the ‘purchase’ of the faithful, redeeming them for a priestly relationship with God and the Lamb in the ‘new’ *basileia* of the new Jerusalem. Such an account by John embodies the notion of atonement in which God is able to forgive sinners in contrast to the Judaic tradition of God’s saving acts in Israel’s history

involved political risk as well as theological challenge given that it represents a fundamental shift from traditional religious understandings of redemption within a non-accommodating political context.

### **The Lamb and redemption (5:9-10)**

In John's *Apocalypse*, his emphasis on the slain Lamb and its sacrificial significance to salvation/redemption has more dramatic impact than such a notion of redemption in other New Testament writings and appears to be in contrast with the Judaic tradition of salvation in which God's saving acts in history deliver 'his people' from bondage and oppression (for example, Exod. 3:7f.; Ps. 106). The death of Jesus plays a significant role in John's *Apocalypse*, portrayed by the slaughter of the Lamb (1:5; 5:9b; 12:11), the slaughtered Lamb's unique worthiness (5:6, 9), and the blood of the slaughtered Lamb ransoming the faithful to become a *basileia* of priests serving God (5:9-10).<sup>392</sup> John's christological account of Jesus as the Messiah and his redemptive role based on his death serving as a 'ransom' appears to be in the tradition of notions of atonement expressed in other New Testament writings, notably Mark 10:45; 1 Cor. 6:20; and the letter to the Hebrews.<sup>393</sup> The worthiness of the Lamb, depicted in Rev. 5:6-14, is not to be credited to his 'essential being' but stems from John's emphasis on the Lamb's 'great act of redemption'.<sup>394</sup> That the Lamb was slaughtered serves as a sacrificial death, one which enabled the Lamb to 'purchase' people for God with his blood.<sup>395</sup>

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<sup>392</sup> John's notions of 'priests serving God' is discussed in chapter 6.

<sup>393</sup> Cf. 1 Cor. 15:3; 1 Peter 1:18-19; 2:21, 24. It is not established that John was aware of such texts; moreover, it is not certain that his *Apocalypse* was recorded after all or most New Testament references to atonement.

<sup>394</sup> Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 135.

<sup>395</sup> In the Hebrew tradition the first-born was 'owed' to God as a sacrifice, human as well as animal.

### Redemption and universalism (7:9-17)

In Rev. 7:9-17 John again uses his rhetorical formula of all nations, tribes, peoples and languages to emphasise his notion of redemptive universalism: the redeemed are depicted as ‘a great multitude that no one could count’ (7:9). John appears to carry four redemptive messages in the passage. First, the multitude exclaims loudly that salvation (redemption) belongs to God, who is seated on the Throne, *and* to the Lamb (7:10). The notion of redemption is evident through his emphasis on its universal nature and his assertion that it belongs to *both* God and the Lamb, thus affirming Christ as a divine agent of redemption. In respect of the human community, John’s vision depicts a plurality of groupings. One community comprises the 144,000 people ‘sealed out of every tribe of the people of Israel’ (7:4-8); another, more universal community, is the countless multitude from *all* nations, tribes, peoples and languages (7:7-9) constituting the community of the sealed and redeemed (7:13-17).

Second, in John’s first vision in chapter 7, he hears the number of ‘those who were sealed’ as 144,000 (7:4), comprising 12,000 from each of the twelve tribes of Israel (7:5-8). That there is distinct contrast between the two groups seems to be a deliberate construct on John’s part. One group represents the tribes of Israel apparently designated for persecution and, in contrast, the other is a vast multitude, coming from the ‘great ordeal’ (θλίψις) who ‘have washed their robes’ and, paradoxically, whitened them in the blood of the Lamb (7:14).<sup>396</sup> By his juxtaposition of the two groups, John emphasises in the second group the specific role of the death and redemptive role of Jesus as the Lamb in

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However, the first-born child could be redeemed by the parent through animal sacrifice.

<sup>396</sup> John’s reference to garments being washed in the blood of the Lamb may well draw on Judaic and recent Jewish-Christian tradition; for example, Exod. 19:10, 14; Isa. 1:16, 18; Hebrews 9:13-14.



God's 'new' salvific plan for all the faithful without ethnic restriction. The second, much more numerous group, is also in contrast with the first by way of their loud and exclamatory acknowledgement of their redemption belonging to God *and* to the Lamb (7:10). A further distinction between the two groups is that the second, countless multitude is joined by all the angels, the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures around the Throne, thus constituting a 'social' setting to the redemptive adoration of God and the Lamb (7:11).<sup>397</sup> Such is not the case in respect of the 144,000 'sealed out of every tribe of Israel' (7:4).<sup>398</sup>

Third, John elucidates the religious and existential values of redemption in some detail, an explication which does not occur elsewhere other than chapters 21-22. In a response from one of the elders, John is informed that the redeemed, before the Throne worshipping God day and night, will be sheltered by God, they will not suffer from hunger, thirst, or scorching heat but will be shepherded by the Lamb who will guide them to springs of the water of life as God wipes away every tear from their eyes (7:15-17). Thus, the innumerable multitude is depicted as expressing their joy in redemption; further, their acknowledgement of the redemptive Lamb sharing God's Throne, their rescue and protection from tribulation and their liberation from human want and suffering combine to express the ultimate heavenly state of redemption narrated lyrically in 7:15-17.<sup>399</sup> The redemptive value of 7:17 is reinforced by comparison with John's account of the Lamb opening the seals in the preceding chapter in which even kings, magnates, generals, the

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<sup>397</sup> The concept of a 'social' (*gesellschaftlich*) Throne is discussed in chapter 7.

<sup>398</sup> It is noted shortly that the 144,000, 'sealed out of every tribe of Israel' (7:4) are also redeemed who acknowledge their victory of salvation, together with the 'great multitude' (7:4, 9-10).

<sup>399</sup> See Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 161-162.

rich and the powerful fear having to encounter ‘the face of the one seated on the Throne and the wrath of the Lamb’ (6:15-16). In contrast, John portrays the Lamb in a different light: far from being wrathful, the Lamb is at the centre of the Throne, from where he shepherds, and God comforts, the redeemed (7:17).<sup>400</sup>

The fourth element in John’s ‘theology’ of redemption concerns his notions of the nature and composition of the divine *and* human communities, serving to enhance our ontological understanding of each.<sup>401</sup> Concerning the divine community, John continues to emphasise that the Lamb has joined God, sharing the Throne (7:9), thus reinforcing the worthiness of the Lamb to be accorded a place with God and the Throne (Rev. 5). As well, the divine community again includes many angels, the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures (7:1), all before and around the Throne. As well as the worship component of the many angels, John opens the chapter with a vision of four angels ‘standing at the four corners of the earth holding back the four winds of the earth’ (7:11). They are addressed by another angel who instructs the four not to damage the earth, the sea, or the trees until they have marked the servants of God with a seal on their foreheads (7:2-3), signalling those who are to be saved. However, drawing on Jewish tradition that YHWH deploys natural elements to punish the sinful,<sup>402</sup> those who were not so marked with a seal on their foreheads are to suffer from the damage to be inflicted on the earth and

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<sup>400</sup> David de Silva describes 6:15-17 and 7:9-10 as a dyptych of rhetorical power *and* strategy which portrays ‘two starkly different encounters with God at the end of history’ which has hermeneutical significance for those currently engaged with apocalyptic cults; *Seeing Things John’s Way*, 216-18; cf. 98, 287 in which de Silva also refers to the contrast between the two passages.

<sup>401</sup> This discussion will be relatively brief as the following chapters cover the points in more depth.

<sup>402</sup> For example, the plagues in Exod. 7-12; the four winds from heaven scattering the evil (Jer. 49:36; cf. Dan. 7:2).

sea.<sup>403</sup> Because the four angels and their roles are not referred to elsewhere in John's *Apocalypse* it has been suggested that 7:1-3 (and perhaps 7:4-8) were reworked by John from earlier Jewish apocalyptic.<sup>404</sup> Such a supposition, however, does not detract from the view that John elects to portray an interactive divine community as well as a contrast between the human communities of the 144,000 'sealed' (7:4-8) and the great countless multitude of the redeemed (7:9). The collective worship of the divine community joins that of the 144,000 redeemed who acknowledge that their victory of salvation (σωτηρία) belongs to God *and* the Lamb (7:10).<sup>405</sup>

Another dimension of the vast multitude is provided by John's frequent references to the *basileia*, the new earthly kingdom depicted with the arrival of the new Jerusalem in 21:1-22:5. John is consistent in his depiction of interaction between the divine and human communities: every creature in heaven and earth worships God and the Lamb (1:4-6; 5:13; 7:11-13; 19:1-8). It may be posited, therefore, that John's understanding of redemption goes well beyond the concept of the redemptive role of God being restricted to individuals: it is also available universally and includes the agency of the Lamb and the protagonists of the divine community. From such dimensions of John's portrayal of his 'theology' of redemption, he proceeds to reinforce the role of the Lamb in redemption expressed in 5:9 by further stressing the Lamb's redemptive agency in contrast with the beast and its image in chapter 14. As well, he elucidates again the benefits and blessings

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<sup>403</sup> It seems likely that John's account draws on Ezekiel 9 wherein the Lord instructs 'the man clothed in linen' to go through Jerusalem 'and put a mark on the foreheads of those who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed' in the city. Those who do not have the mark were to be slain without pity (Ezek. 9:1-7).

<sup>404</sup> See Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon*, 215-220.

<sup>405</sup> The association of 'victory' with 'salvation' is not without debate. For a discussion of the pros and cons see Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon*, 225.

of redemption expressed in 7:15-17 in a quite similar manner in 21:3-4 in which physical well-being is one element but, more significantly, sharing life in the presence of God and the Lamb is emphasised.<sup>406</sup> Thus, an understanding of John's 'theology' of redemption requires a composite view of the interweaving of his redemptive notions across the entirety of his narrative.

### **Redemption, the Lamb and Mount Zion (14:1-4)**

In chapter 14, John's concept of redemption extends beyond freedom from sin, expressed more compositely in his description of the 'Lamb, standing on Mount Zion' and the 144,000 redeemed singing a new song before the Throne, the living creatures and the elders (14:1, 3).<sup>407</sup> The 'new song' is specific to the multitude 'who have been redeemed (οἱ ῥηγοράσμενοι) from the earth' (14:3b) and who 'have been redeemed from humankind as first fruits for God and the Lamb' (14:4b). In considering the significance of John's references to the 'redeemed', it is worth noting that the word 'salvation' (σωτηρία), used as a noun, appears three times in John's *Apocalypse* (7:10; 12:10; 19:1), the meaning of which, however, appears to be different from his notion of 'redemption' which is inextricably linked to the Lamb. In each instance, John's use of 'salvation' is to express his view that redemption belongs to and is an attribute of God: 'salvation belongs to our God' (7:10); 'the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God' (12:10); and, 'Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power to our God' (19:1).<sup>408</sup> Although such

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<sup>406</sup> See Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1991, 68; Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon*, 229.

<sup>407</sup> The issue as to whether the 144,000 redeemed portrayed by John in 14:1-5 are the same group as the martyrs (2:13; 6:9-11; 20:4-6) is discussed in chapter 7, 'The martyrs: included in the Throne'.

<sup>408</sup> John's view that redemption belongs to and is an attribute of God would have stood in contrast to the self-identification of Roman Emperors as the possessors of power, authority, and glory,

expressions conform to the Judaic tradition of God's liberation of 'his people' from Egyptian bondage, John adds new meaning to the traditional understanding of 'salvation'. He establishes and reinforces the view that salvation belongs to God *and* the Lamb (7:10); that with salvation comes God's *basileia* and the authority of the Messiah (12:10); and, that the great multitude in heaven acknowledges that salvation, glory and power belong to God (19:1). Thus John's depiction of 'salvation' serves to increase understanding of the nature of God and the Lamb rather than focus on redemptive *action* as expressed in his account of the redeemed multitude from the earth, the redeemed humankind 'as first fruits for God and the Lamb' (14:3-4).

The meaning in John's two references to the redeemed (14:3b, 4b) may be more comprehensively understood if interpreted within the general context in the preceding chapter of John's portrayal of the influence of Satan as the Beast (13:1-8) and the false prophet (13:11-18). John contrasts the imminent projection of suffering and death for those who would not worship the Beast (13: 15) and those 'who have been redeemed from the earth and who sing a new song before the Throne' (14:3, 4b), that is 'redeemed from humankind as first fruits for God and the Lamb' (14:4b). More specifically, John's two references to the redeemed (14:3b, 4b) gain enhanced meaning if interpreted within the passage (14:1-5). For instance, within the overall framework of the Roman imperial context John addresses issues such as justice, persecution and powerlessness by presenting the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, together with the great multitude of the redeemed singing a new song before the Throne, the four living creatures and the elders. The redeemed are 'blameless', having been 'redeemed from humankind as first fruits for God and the Lamb'. In John's vision Mount Zion is apparently the Heavenly Zion and his

reference to the 144,000 who have been redeemed (14:3a) indicates their redemption is the consequence of their righteousness and faithfulness (14:4-5). The righteousness of the redeemed is depicted by their not having ‘defiled themselves with women’, and because ‘in their mouth no lie was found’ (14:4a-5) they are described as blameless. Following ‘the Lamb wherever he goes’ is cited by John as an indication of their faithfulness (14:4). An indication of John’s hermeneutics of redemption is expressed in chapter 14 through the central role of the Lamb on Mount Zion, accompanied by the blameless and faithful redeemed singing a *new* song before the ‘social’ Throne.<sup>409</sup> Such an indication is articulated further by John as an act of fulfilment in his account of the *new* Jerusalem in 21:1-8 and 22:1-5 which texts complete an overall framework of John’s notions of redemption.

Another example of the contextual significance of Rev. 14:1-5 to John’s two references to redemption concerns his depiction of the Lamb and the significance of Zion. Portrayed as the only one ‘worthy to open the scroll and break its seals’ (5:2), and recognised as the Redeemer by the ‘great multitude’ (7:9-10), the Lamb is accorded a pre-eminent place, ‘standing on Mount Zion!’ (14:1). Long regarded as a holy place, Mount Zion was where the redeemed would be spared the vengeance of YHWH. Several centuries before the Common Era, the cultic prophet Joel foreshadowed that ‘before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes ... everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved’, noting that such salvation will apply to those in Mount Zion and Jerusalem (Joel 2:31b-32; cf. Micah 4:6-8; Isa.11:9-12). In John’s account of his vision, however, Mount Zion is in heaven rather than on earth, and is replete with a voice like many waters,

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<sup>409</sup> According to Mounce, for believers it will be ‘a time of joy and celebration as before the Throne of heaven they sing the new song of their redemption’; *Book of Revelation*, 264.

loud thunder and the sound of harpists, with the redeemed singing a new song before the Throne, the living creatures and the elders (14:2-3). In *4 Ezra* 2:42-47 the author's apocalyptic account of a 'great multitude' on Mount Zion, 'praising the Lord with songs' in the presence of the 'Son of God whom they confessed in the world' is often regarded as a contemporary Jewish parallel with John's vision of Mount Zion. Robert Mounce cites the text as a parallel to John's account and interprets *4 Ezra* 13:35, 39-40 as indicating the expectation of the Messiah appearing on Mount Zion with a great multitude.<sup>410</sup> Although it is relevant to note the significance of Mount Zion in Joel, Micah and Isaiah, drawing upon parallels in *4 Ezra* 2 is of questionable value given that the first two chapters of *4 Ezra* may have been Christian interpolations to the text. While chapters 3-14 are considered likely to have been written by a Palestinian Jew late in the first century of the Common Era, the first two chapters may have been added in the middle of the second century by an unknown Christian editor.<sup>411</sup> Notwithstanding such uncertainties, however, it would appear that over a period of some five centuries, both Jewish and Christian writers accorded Mount Zion a pre-eminent place in prophetic and apocalyptic messianic expression.

A third instance of the significance of John's contextual framework underpinning his portrayal of redemption in 14:3b, 4b concerns his notion of inclusiveness, one which suggests a 'social' or *gesellschaftlich* quality to redemption.<sup>412</sup> John does not depict

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<sup>410</sup> Ibid., 264 n. 4. Mounce links Mic. 4:6-8; Joel 2:32; and Isa. 11:9-12 with *4 Ezra* 13:35; *Book of Revelation*, 39-40.

<sup>411</sup> See B.M. Metzger, *The Fourth Book of Ezra: A New Translation and Introduction*, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Vol. 1, ed. Charlesworth, 517; and the Introduction to 2 Esdras, *New Oxford Annotated Bible*, NRSV, 300.

<sup>412</sup> The term *gesellschaftlich* is used to add meaning to John's depiction of a 'social' Throne as discussed in

redemption in individual terms. Rather, he cites ‘a great multitude that no one could count’ from all nations, tribes, peoples and languages who are redeemed, ‘standing before the Throne and the Lamb’, in the company of angels, the elders and the living creatures, all of whom join in acknowledging God to whom salvation belongs (7:9-12). Likewise, his portrayal of redemption in 14:1-5 is *inclusive*, comprising the Lamb, the 144,000 redeemed from the earth (symbolising the universally redeemed),<sup>413</sup> God (symbolised by the sound of harps), the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders. John appears to emphasise a bond between the Lamb and the redeemed. In portraying the Lamb and the 144,000 followers of Jesus redeemed from the earth, John’s vision is of the Lamb standing on Mount Zion with the 144,000 *with him* bearing the Lamb’s and his Father’s names on their foreheads; they *follow the Lamb* wherever he goes, redeemed from humankind as first fruits *for God and the Lamb* (14:1-4). Such a close relationship functions as an interactive, two-way process; for example, the Lamb ensures they will not suffer from hunger, thirst or scorching heat and he will guide them as their shepherd to the springs of the water of life (7:16-17). In turn, the redeemed express their adoration and worship to the Lamb (5:13; 14:3; 22:3).<sup>414</sup> That there is an inclusive group, singing a new song before the Throne, appears to echo 5:9 thereby suggesting a priestly status concerning the 144,000 redeemed.<sup>415</sup> That John has a notion of inclusiveness in respect of the redeemed

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chapter 7.

<sup>413</sup> John’s use of the number 144,000 in both 7:4 and 14:1, 3b may be regarded as portraying ‘the full complement of the redeemed throughout history’; Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 265. Thus, John’s concern with redemption is of a universal, specifically inclusive, nature.

<sup>414</sup> See Stephen Pattemore, *The People of God in the Apocalypse: Discourse, Structure and Exegesis*, Cambridge University Press, 2004, 117-118.

<sup>415</sup> Judith Kovacs and Christopher Rowland, *Revelation: The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ*, Blackwell Publishing, Malden MA, 2004, 160. Mounce describes the ‘new song’ in 14:3 as sung by those ‘who have been purchased by the blood of the lamb and made a kingdom of priests before the heavenly Throne’; *The*



is also evident in his portrayal of the priesthood and the Throne.<sup>416</sup>

### **Redemption and the new Jerusalem (21:1-8; 22:1-5)**

John turns again to his ‘theology’ of redemption in chapter 21 which opens with his vision of the ‘new creation’ (21:1-8), an account which is not out of character with the concept of replacing, or at least renovating, the old order, a not uncommon aspect of apocalyptic literature and tradition. John may have drawn on *I Enoch*, presumed to have been written in the century before the Common Era, given his echoes of Enoch’s reference to a new heaven and a new earth.<sup>417</sup> Enoch cites the ‘Lord of the Spirits’: ‘I shall cause my Elect One to dwell among them. I shall transform heaven and make it a blessing of light forever. I shall (also) transform the earth and make it a blessing, and cause my Elect One to dwell in her’ (45:4-5; cf. Rev. 21:1-3).<sup>418</sup>

The Jewish author of *4 Ezra*, writing about the same time as, or a little later than, John and his *Apocalypse* also depicts the ‘new creation’: the dead ‘shall be kept in rest until those times come’ when the Lord ‘will renew the creation’ (7:75; cf. 7:26-28). The ‘new creation’ in *4 Ezra*, however, is not a central theme of his visions. Nor is it in 2

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*Book of Revelation*, 266.

<sup>416</sup> Discussed respectively in chapters 6 and 7.

<sup>417</sup> Care is required in asserting John’s awareness of *I Enoch* which ‘is clearly composite, representing numerous periods and writers’; E. Isaac, ‘1 Enoch: A New Translation and Introduction’, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Vol. 1., *Apocalyptic and Testaments*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, Doubleday, New York, 1983, 6-7.

<sup>418</sup> Enoch’s eschatological depiction of the ‘new creation’ includes: ‘till the new creation which abides forever is created’ (*I Enoch* 72:1) and ‘the first heaven shall depart and pass away; a new heaven shall appear; and all the powers of heaven shall shine forever sevenfold’ (91:16). That such passages may have been written by different authors serves to reinforce the view that the replacement of the ‘old order’ by the ‘new creation’ is part of Jewish apocalyptic tradition.

*Baruch* in which the author assures the faithful they will be protected when ‘the Mighty One shall shake the entire creation’ (32:1) and ‘will renew his creation’ (32:6). Although such examples are not an extensive representation of the ‘new creation’, they serve to suggest that John is following Jewish apocalyptic tradition, thus supporting the notion of religious continuity. That John may have been influenced by *1 Enoch*, *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch*, and possibly Isa. 65:17-19, is not to detract from the supposition that his seventh vision of the new Jerusalem indicates divergence in renewal because unlike earlier references to renewal in creation, John goes beyond Judaic prophecy and later Jewish apocalypses in his association of redemption with the new Jerusalem in 21:1-8 and 22:3-5. The concept underlying John’s reference to ‘the river of the water of life’ (22:1; cf. 7:17; 21:6) may be derived from Ezekiel’s account of the life-giving river (Ezek. 47:19) and perhaps the river which flows from the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:10). If so, one may argue an element of religious continuity. However, it may also be posited that John’s depiction of the ‘river of the water of life’ in the context of the *new* Jerusalem and his ‘theology’ of redemption expresses divergence from the ‘rivers’ of Ezekiel and Genesis. A similar argument may be applied to John’s ‘tree of life’ (22:2) and Ezekiel’s reference to trees on both sides of the river (Ezek. 47:12), the leaves of which are ‘for healing’. John extends Ezekiel’s phrase: the leaves of John’s tree of life are for the healing ‘*of the nations*’, thus adding a universalist redemptive dimension.

The view that John’s depiction of the new heaven and new earth, and the new Jerusalem, is more an expression of religious discontinuity than of religious continuity and renewal and that it is unlike the ‘new creations’ of Jewish apocalyptic literature is supported by the extent to which redemption is a key dimension of John’s portrayal of the

new Jerusalem. Without his emphasis on redemption, his meta-metaphor of the new holy city would be far less theologically meaningful. For instance, John depicts the *new* Jerusalem as an alternative city to the earthly Jerusalem and accords it a hermeneutic element as God's *redemptive* city through his vision from the great, high mountain (21:10) of the new holy city's water and tree of life for the universal healing of the nations (21:6; 22:1-2) and the redeemed favoured with God's illumination, reigning forever (22:5).<sup>419</sup> John's notion of redemption, however, is not theologically discrete: it is inseparably associated with his portrayal of the new *basileia*, an earthly kingdom in the new creation in which God will dwell not judgementally but in a new and composite covenant, shared with Jesus Christ, guaranteeing life, joy and security.<sup>420</sup> John's depiction in 21:1 - 22:5 of redemption *and* the new *basileia* reinforces the argument in favour of John's theological divergence from Judaic tradition.

The first element of John's vision is of a new heaven and a new earth (21:1). The second is of the holy city, the new Jerusalem as it descends from heaven (21:2). His two sightings, however, are of the same metaphorical phenomenon. In support of the argument that there is a significant element of 'religious discontinuity' in John's notion of the *new* Jerusalem is his portrayal of the new holy city being far more than the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem, the physical Jerusalem from Judaic history. John's vision of the 'new' city is symbolic: for some it represents 'the church in its perfected and eternal state', a fellowship derived from God rather than an earthly institution formed by humans.<sup>421</sup> According to Paul, the people of God (the redeemed) constitute God's temple and God's

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<sup>419</sup> See Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 129-131.

<sup>420</sup> Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon*, 408.

<sup>421</sup> Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 382.

spirit dwells in them: God's temple is holy and the redeemed are the temple (1 Cor. 3:16-17). John's account appears to overlap with Paul's notion in that 'the home of God is among mortals' (21:3) and John 'saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God and the Lamb' (21:22). John's description of God's actions in dwelling among mortals (21:3-4) and God's voice from the Throne saying, 'See, I am making all things new' (21:5a) echoes Paul's depiction of the Messiah: 'If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!' (2 Cor. 5:17). John may well have been aware of Paul's belief in Jesus as the Redeemer of people from sin and death, obtaining 'the freedom of the glory of the children of God' (Rom. 8:21b; cf. Gal. 3:13; 1 Col. 13-14) as well as Jesus' reference to his life being 'a ransom for many' (Mark 10:45).<sup>422</sup> Both Paul and John appear to echo Isaiah's depiction of the transformation of heaven and earth. For instance, Y<sub>HWH</sub> is about to create new heavens and a new earth as well creating 'Jerusalem as a joy', and Y<sub>HWH</sub> 'will delight in the [new] Jerusalem and also delight in his people (Isa. 65:17-19a). That John is likely to have been aware of earlier Jewish and Jewish-Christian apocalyptic writing appears to be a reasonable assumption. Less evident, however, are his new theological notions. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza points out that it is the theological intentions of the author, in this case John, that are of significance and that they are to be derived from the total configuration (*Gestalt*) and composition of his *Apocalypse*, rather than drawing theological significance from earlier sources or traditions.<sup>423</sup>

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<sup>422</sup> John's awareness of such texts is suppositional. Furthermore, it cannot be assumed that all the Gospels and Paul's Letters were written before John's *Apocalypse*. However, the assumption that John would have been writing within a first-century tradition of 'redemption' seems reasonable.

<sup>423</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgement*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1985, 164. Her discussion, 'The composition and structure of Revelation' (chapter 6) is helpfully relevant as background to chapters 4-6 of this thesis.

In terms of configuration John appears not only to weave his notions of redemption throughout his *Apocalypse* but also to associate them with his concept of a ‘new’ priesthood. There are several significant examples where he depicts a ‘new’ priesthood, a key element of which also expresses his concept of redemption. John links the topics of redemption and priesthood, in his salutation to the seven churches in the opening chapter: from Jesus Christ ‘who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father’ (1:5-6). A similar juxtaposition between redemption and the priesthood is expressed by John in 5:9-10 and, less explicitly, in 2:26; 20:6 and 22:3-5.<sup>424</sup> Although such texts indicate continuity and renewal of religious expression, John’s *Apocalypse*, with the central role accorded to the Lamb, presents redemption and the new Jerusalem in such a fashion as to suggest discontinuity with earlier notions of the new creation. The case for divergence is strengthened by the view that John’s portrayal of redemption as part of his notion of a ‘new’ priesthood is largely centred on his central focus on the redeeming quality of the Lamb in chapters 4 and 5.<sup>425</sup>

John’s reference to the descent of the holy city, the new Jerusalem ‘prepared as a bride adorned for her husband’ (21:2b) solicits a variety of interpretations. If 21:9-10 is taken into account, the image of the ‘bride’ evokes the Lamb as the husband; from 19:7-8 the ‘bride’ *may* be regarded as the church. To such an identification of images, however, Frederick Murphy cautions that a more comprehensive interpretation leads to echoes of the combat myth in which the victory of the ‘good God’ gains kingship, marriage to a goddess,

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<sup>424</sup> The following chapter discusses at some length John’s theology of the ‘new’ and ‘divergent’ priesthood expressed in 1:5-6; 2:26; 5:9-10; 20:6; and 22:3-5.

<sup>425</sup> Although it seems evident (to this writer) that John associates redemption and priesthood together, an alternative interpretation is that John intends ‘redemption’ rather than ‘priesthood’ to be the central focus in texts such as 5:9-10. See Ian Boxall, *The Revelation of St. John*, Continuum, New York, 2006, 100-101.

and the building of a temple.<sup>426</sup> Most commonly, the image of the ‘bride’ is interpreted as the church, with the symbolic relationship of the ‘bride’ and the Lamb in marriage representing the redemptive relationship between Christ and his faithful followers.<sup>427</sup> That in 21:9-10 John equates the bride as the wife of the Lamb with the new Jerusalem descending from heaven does not negate John’s notions of redemption. The redemptive bond between Christ and his followers is reinforced by John’s portrayal of the new holy city prepared as a bride adorned for her husband (21:2); God establishing a new covenantal relationship with the faithful (21:3); the lamp of the new Jerusalem representing the Lamb (21:23); and the Throne of God and the Lamb being part of the new *basileia* (22:1,3).

In John’s text, such a redemptive bond appears to maintain a consistent element of victory over sin by those who conquer evil and who will be rewarded.<sup>428</sup> Such a pattern extends from his first to his last vision undergirding his hermeneutical framework of redemption and culminating in his final chapter with the eternal reign of the redeemed. Members of the church in Ephesus are informed that those who conquer will have permission to eat from the ‘tree of life’ (2:7b); those who conquer in the church of Smyrna ‘will not be harmed by the second death’ (2:11b); and in Pergamum, those who conquer will receive hidden manna and a ‘white stone’ on which ‘is written a new name that no one knows’ (2:17). To the church in Thyatira John cites the Son of God: those who conquer

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<sup>426</sup> Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon*, 382, 409. The complexity of meaning of the ‘bride’ symbol is enhanced if prophetic accounts such as Ezekiel’s lengthy narrative of the faithless wife of God (Ezek. 16) and Isaiah portraying Israel as YHWH’s wife (54:6; cf. Hos. 2:16) are taken into account. For discussion concerning the bride and the relevance of the ‘combat myth’ see Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Apocalypse*, 131. For a more comprehensive discussion, see Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation*, Scholars Press, Missoula, 1976.

<sup>427</sup> The association of the bride with the church may be drawn from 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:25, 32.

<sup>428</sup> See Pattemore, *The People of God in the Apocalypse*, 204-207.

and continue to do his works will be given ‘authority over the nations’ as well as ‘the morning star’ (2:26, 28).<sup>429</sup> In each of the seven letters, John refers to ‘those who conquer’ and depicts the rewards of those redeemed, thus emphasising the redemptive values of victory over evil. His redemptive theme continues in 7:9-14 in which he introduces the universalism of the redeemed and in 20:4-6 with the redeemed martyrs reigning with Christ one thousand years. Such examples serve to illustrate the redemptive foundation John establishes before his climactic vision of the new Jerusalem, the new holy city in which God will dwell with those who have conquered evil and the nature of the redeemed life with God is described (21:1-7). That only the redeemed, those ‘who are written in the Lamb’s book of life’ (21:27b), will enter the new holy city is not unlike the promise of the Gospels that only those redeemed by Jesus Christ will enter the kingdom of God.<sup>430</sup> John’s account of those entered in the book of life, who have conquered sin and avoided the idolatry of Roman imperial and religious life and now belong to the new Jerusalem, culminates the promise made to those who conquer in his letter to the church in Philadelphia in which the conquerors will have the names of God, the new Jerusalem, and Jesus Christ inscribed upon them (3:12).<sup>431</sup> Thus, John provides another example of weaving, throughout his *Apocalypse*, notions of redemption into a theological framework.

John hears a loud voice from heaven declaring that the ‘home of God is among mortals’ (21:3a) and that in the new creation God will wipe away tears and death will be no more; nor will mourning, crying or pain, ‘for the first things have passed away’ (21:4).

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<sup>429</sup> John continues with similar messages ‘to those who conquer’ in his letters to the churches in Sardis (3:5), Philadelphia (3:12; and Laodicea, where the ‘conquerors’ will share the Throne of the Lamb, who also ‘conquered’ and ‘sat down with [his] Father on [his] Throne’ (3:21).

<sup>430</sup> For example Matt. 5:20; 7:21; 18:3; Mark 9:47; John 3:5.

<sup>431</sup> Pattemore, *People of God in the Apocalypse*, 206-207.

His description of the redemptive life with God has parallels with the physical and religious qualities of life he portrays in 7:15-17 for those who have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. The qualities of redemption are available to the individually redeemed *and* to all who are God's people. Universalist expressions of redemption are emphasised in his final vision: the river of the water of life flows from the Throne of God and of the Lamb and the tree of life in the new Jerusalem has leaves for 'the healing of the nations' (22:1-3). The redeemed will see God whose name will be on their foreheads and whose light will illuminate their lives. Climactically, and with closing priestly connotations, John depicts them as reigning forever and ever (22:4-5).<sup>432</sup> Such a portrayal of the new Jerusalem, combined with his assertion that he did not see a temple in the new holy city for God and the Lamb constitute its temple, stands in contrast to the Judaic tradition of a restored Temple and reflects a new paradigm of the hermeneutics of redemption.<sup>433</sup> John's expressions of redemption present a divergent interpretation of the significance of the Temple and Jerusalem embedded in Judaic tradition, one which engages God and the Lamb with the redeemed in a new earthly cosmos.<sup>434</sup> Rather than the glory of the Lord filling the earthly Temple (1 Kings 8:11), God *and* the Lamb are themselves the Temple (Rev. 21:22). They dwell with the redeemed in the new holy city, one without an earthly temple, thus culminating John's divergent hermeneutical framework of redemption, one which also portrays new and divergent dimensions of priesthood.<sup>435</sup>

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<sup>432</sup> Aune points out that John's reference to 'his name', that is, the seal on the foreheads of the 144,000 (22:4), may be intended to apply to God, the Lamb, or both; *Revelation 17-22*, 1181.

<sup>433</sup> See Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon*, 418-425.

<sup>434</sup> The hermeneutical significance of John's divergent attitudes to the Temple and Jerusalem is accentuated if considered against the background of Ezekiel's stress on the Temple as the visible witness to YHWH's engagement with Israel.

<sup>435</sup> Discussed in chapter 6.



### **The new Jerusalem, the Lamb and redemption: a summary**

Although the Temple is significant to both the Judaisms and Christianities of the first century, John's portrayal of the new Jerusalem (3:12; 21:1-27; 22:1-5) adds a dimension of divergence from the Judaic tradition of the Temple and Jerusalem. The descent of the new holy city in which God will dwell with the faithful and those who conquer evil (21:3b, 24, 26), depicts a new covenant, one more extensive and inclusive than the covenantal descriptions depicted in the Hebrew scriptures.<sup>436</sup> God's new *basileia* does not have an earthly temple. Rather, the temple of the new Jerusalem is God and the Lamb (21:22), in lieu of the physicality and cultic traditions of the first and second Temples. In contrast with the cult of animal sacrifice is John's christological depiction of the sacrificed Lamb (21:23b) and, to the presence of God in the Holy of Holies, is added the presence of God and the Lamb in the new *basileia*.

John's vision of Jesus as the Lamb-Messiah opens up a new and primary source of redemption, a redemptive framework of consequence for new notions of the priesthood (5:9-10); the redeemed share in the Messiah's authority and redemption becomes universal without regard to geography or ethnicity. Jesus is portrayed by John as *the* Messiah, the sole agent of redemption in the world (1:5b-6a), predicated on the redeeming quality of the Lamb's sacrificial death. From such a perspective, John's portrayal of the Lamb-Messiah presents a significant divergence in the apocalyptic view of history in the first century. In contrast with the Judaic tradition of the salvation of Israel, the *Apocalypse of John* portrays redemption of a universal nature arising from the metaphor of the Lamb sharing the Throne with God and the descent of the holy city, the new Jerusalem, in which the home of God is

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<sup>436</sup> For example, Jer. 30:22; 31:1.

among mortals (21:3).

## Chapter Six

### A Changing Priesthood

The initial focus of the chapter is on the priesthood in the contexts of Judaic tradition, Jewish sectarianism of the Second Temple Period, Jesus and the New Testament, and several pseudepigraphical writings of the first century.<sup>437</sup> Following such an underlying framework an assessment is made of the extent to which traditional concepts of the priesthood contrast with the notions of a ‘new’ priesthood expressed in the *Apocalypse of John* and the extent to which they suggest elements of continuity and renewal, or of more significance to this thesis, divergence in renewal. Thus, the principal focus is not on an historical discussion of complex political dimensions within a long tradition of the priesthood. Rather, the primary cynosure is a received portrayal of the innovative and divergent, first-century priestly relations portrayed in John’s apocalyptic narrative.

#### Judaic Tradition and the Manifold Priesthood

The term ‘priesthood’ is frequently used to indicate a collective system of the office and

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<sup>437</sup> In the NT three terms are used to indicate the abstract notion of priesthood, ἱερατεία at Luke 1:9 and Heb. 7:5; ἱερωσύνη at Heb. 7:11, 12, 24; and ἱεράτευμα at 1 Pet. 2:5, 9. The terms are not found in Revelation. ἱερατεία appears in the LXX where in most instances it renders the Hebrew כהנה (cf. Exod. 35:19; 39:19; 40:15; Num. 3:10; 18:1, 7; 25:13; Josh. 18:7 etc.). ἱερωσύνη is found in the LXX translations of later texts of the Hebrew Bible or Apocrypha (e.g. 1 Chron. 29:22; 1 Es. 5:38, Sir. 45:24 etc.) and where a Hebrew *Vorlage* exists translates the nominal form (= qal participle) כהן (1 Chron. 29:22) or in the case of Sir. 45:24 כהנה. ἱεράτευμα is found in the LXX at Exod. 19:6; 23:22 (LXX diverges here from MT and repeats the promise of 19:6 in lieu of a promise that God would be the enemy of Israel’s enemy) and 2 Mac 2:17. Exod. 19:6 important not only for the citations in 1 Peter, but also for the occurrence of the concept of priesthood in the doxologies and blessing of Revelation. Exod. 19:6 is a message of YHWH delivered to Moses for the children of Israel. If they obey his voice and keep his covenant, the promise is that ‘you shall be for me a priestly kingdom (מלכתם כהנים) and a holy nation (גוי קדוש)’ - ὑμεῖς δὲ ἔσεσθέ μοι βασιλείον ἱεράτευμα καὶ ἔθνος ἅγιον. Cf. 1 Pet. 2:9 - Ὑμεῖς δὲ γένος ἐκλεκτόν, βασιλείον ἱεράτευμα, ἔθνος ἅγιον.

function of priests,<sup>438</sup> principally involving two key intermediary elements: first, the representation of others before God and, second, representing God to others. Examples of the first intermediary role include the exercise of cultic functions such as officiating at sacrifices and festivities, conducting worship, and leading prayers. According to the Chronicler, David ‘appointed certain of the Levites as ministers before the ark of the Lord, to invoke, to thank, and to praise the Lord, the God of Israel’, and ‘Asaph was to sound the cymbals, and the priests Benaiah and Jahaziel were to blow trumpets regularly, before the ark of the covenant of God’ (1 Chron. 16:4, 5b-6).

The second intermediary role includes the forgiveness of sins and the bestowing of blessings on worshippers, both functions performed on behalf of God through sacrificial rituals granting expiation or purgation of sins against purity laws. Such acts of atonement and blessings, however, were not bestowed lightly.<sup>439</sup> For example, priests exercised a verifying and determining role concerning the status of ritual purity of both households and individuals (Exod. 28:30; Num. 27:21). The purity status of households was assessed by priests at harvest times before members were allowed to enter the temple. Likewise, in maintaining the purity of the Temple, priests exercised authority in determining the status of lepers, eunuchs, women, and resident aliens.<sup>440</sup>

A function complementary to the two intermediary roles involves music and singing: for example, ‘David commanded the chiefs of the Levites to appoint their kindred

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<sup>438</sup> It is generally assumed that in early Israel the priesthood was restricted to men: it is not known that women became priests and is widely understood that women were precluded from becoming priests. See C.L. Meyers, ‘The Roots of Restriction: Women in Early Israel’, *BA* 41 (1978) 91-103.

<sup>439</sup> There is a distinction between acts of atonement and blessings. Blessing is a verbal act, one based on a long tradition.

<sup>440</sup> See discussion by Victor H. Matthews and Don C. Benjamin, *Social World of Ancient Israel 1250-587 BCE*, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, 1993, 188-190.

as the singers to play on musical instruments, on harps and lyres and cymbals, to raise loud shouts of joy' (1 Chron 15:16). Such a description of an ancillary role of the Levites within the Judaic priesthood contrasts with the wider and more varied functions of the priesthood in ancient Israel. For example, in the account in 1 Chronicles of the roles of priests in Israel, circa 200 BCE, it seems evident that priests engaged with farmers at harvest time with the status of state officials, assessing crop productivity, taxes, household quotas and sacrifices.<sup>441</sup>

To the manifold range of duties undertaken by priests must be added the various categories of priests which collectively constitute a wider meaning to the term 'priesthood'. For example, although in Palestinian Jewish society in the Second Temple Period the high priest fulfilled a central role, so too did the chief priests, supported by their associated Temple staff and Temple workers. Thus, the concept of the 'priesthood', although hierarchical in structure, embodies a broader range of religious leadership than an aggregation of priests serving under the direction of a high priest. Further, the role of the priesthood extended beyond the administration of the cult and the conduct of worship. To the considerable extent that religion played a major role in the socio-political life of communities, the priesthood exercised a multifaceted role.<sup>442</sup> For example, the book of Acts records priests, the captain of the Temple, and Sadducees reproaching Peter and John over their views on resurrection (Acts 4:1), and the temple captain together with temple police later re-arresting Peter and John and bringing them before the high priest (Acts 5:24, 26). In addition to the captain of the temple providing support to the high priest, others who constituted the group known as chief priests included directors of priests and temple

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<sup>441</sup> The chronicler describes the range of priestly roles in 1 Chron. 23:2-5; 23:27-29; 2 Chron. 24:5a; 34:11.

<sup>442</sup> See, for example, Saldarini, *Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees in Palestinian Society*, 12-75.

routines, overseers, and temple treasurers.<sup>443</sup> Thus, in addition to former high priests, the serving high priest was supported by a group which might be termed the ‘chief-priesthood’.

In addition to the high priesthood, and the much larger category of ‘ordinary’ priests, the priesthood extended to include Levites who provided services in support of the Temple. Examples include the maintenance of order and control of the Temple gates, undergirding the work of priests through, for example, provision of temple supplies, supporting priests in temple liturgy as musicians and singers, and accompanying priests in their duties outside Jerusalem.<sup>444</sup> The significance of the status of priests is expressed in a complete chapter of Exodus, describing in detail the vestments prescribed for the priestly Levites drawn from the tribe of Levi (Exod. 28). According to Acts, one Levite named Joseph, a native of Cyprus, who was renamed Barnabas by the apostles (4:36), accompanied Paul from Antioch to Seleucia and Cyprus, ‘proclaiming the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews’ (13:1-5). Such an account is of interest because it provides an example of a Levite-Christian actively associated with Paul, presumably a generation before the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE when the Levites ceased to exist as a religious entity. The account is also interesting because it describes the Levite Joseph exercising an active role in the proclamation of God’s word in contrast to the traditional role of Levites who have been regarded as ‘the assistants and servants of the priests’, assisting with temple maintenance and procedures.<sup>445</sup>

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<sup>443</sup> See Skarsaune, *In the Shadow of the Temple*, 98.

<sup>444</sup> For example, Num. 1:53; 1 Chron. 6:48; 9:26; 2 Chron. 8:14.

<sup>445</sup> For example 1 Chron. 23:28; 2 Chron. 7:6; Ezra 6:18.

From such a wide range of duties within the priesthood, two tentative conclusions may be posited. First, the scope of functions exceeds the intermediary roles of representing others before God and representing God to others. Second, the diverse nature of administrative and cultic functions stands in significant contrast to the metaphorical, rather than practical, priesthood associated with the new Jerusalem in the *Apocalypse of John*. Further, John's universal concept of priesthood, in which all the faithful followers of Christ share in his authority as a priesthood serving God, stands in contrast with the diversity of priestly groups during the Second Temple Period. For instance, conflicts arose between rural-based priests and those who achieved prominence under Persian rule; between priests, Levites and other Temple-based officials; and between different levels of priestly status and authority based on lineage.<sup>446</sup> Such conflicts within the priesthood are well removed from the universal, priestly *basileia* depicted by John in Rev. 1:6; 5:9-10.

A more generic concept of the priesthood, and one which is closer to the concept of the priesthood which emerges in the *Apocalypse of John*, appears early in Hebrew scriptures, when YHWH informs Moses that if his people keep the covenant, they 'shall be for [God] a priestly kingdom and a holy nation' (Exod. 19:5). It will be argued shortly, however, that the affirmations of priesthood for the followers of Jesus in John's *Apocalypse* indicate a divergent theological view from the concept of the 'priestly kingdom' expressed in Exodus and reflect an even greater contrast with the depiction of the diverse priestly functions in 1 and 2 Chronicles.

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<sup>446</sup> Richard A. Horsley, *Scribes, Visionaries and the Politics of Second Temple Judea*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville and London, 2007, 26-28.

## The High Priest

Of obvious significance to the priesthood, the Temple, and the role of the cult is the status and function of the high priest, who was regarded as anointed by God<sup>447</sup> and principal intercessor between Y<sup>HWH</sup> and Israel. As well, the high priest was seen as also fulfilling the pivotal role as the key political protagonist, after the Davidic monarchical dynasty, between secular rulers and Jewish communities. For example, during the Second Temple Period in which, notwithstanding a succession of empires involving appointed governors, Jerusalem continued to function as a temple-state within a theocratic but no longer monarchical state, the high priest served an executive function, effectively as head of the overall Jewish community.<sup>448</sup> Such a function, extending to both religious and political roles, was reciprocal in the sense that he was required to have an acceptable standing with the Persian and Hellenistic powers as well as, later, the Herodian monarchy, thus reflecting his political acceptance, as well as the capacity to represent and interpret his community's religious views to state rulers.<sup>449</sup>

The role of high priest also involved a strong cultic element as well as symbolic supra-human qualities, as described by Ben Sira of the high priest, Simon, son of Onias, around the end of the second century BCE (Sir. 50:5-15). That another high priest named Simon is also identified as Simon the Hasmonean (1 Macc. 14:41-49) indicates that he was not only high priest but also ruler: Simon 'agreed to be high priest, to be commander and

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<sup>447</sup> For example, Lev. 8:1-13.

<sup>448</sup> See Grabbe, *Priests, Prophets, Diviners, Sages*, 60.

<sup>449</sup> For all but a few years under the Emperor Claudius, the high priest came under the Roman governor in the first century CE. Notwithstanding such levels of accommodation to the rule of imperial powers, it is acknowledged that the role of the high priest under King Herod became diminished and thus of little political influence under Herodian rule.



ethnarch of the Jews and priests, and to be protector of [or to preside over] them all' (1 Macc. 14:47), which may explain Ben Sira's description of his power and exalted persona. Ben Sira's account of the high priest Simon II includes descriptions of his leadership qualities (50:1); his practical abilities in improving the Temple and establishing a water cistern which compared with a 'reservoir like the sea in circumference' (50:1b-3); and his guaranteeing the security of the people 'by fortifying the city against siege' (50:4). One may assume, however, that Ben Sira's references to Simon II undertaking such functions include the collective nature of the office of high priest comprising the group functioning as 'chief priests'. More symbolic language is used to describe the high priest's persona: 'How glorious he was', resembling the morning star, the full moon, the sun, a rainbow, fire and incense as well as 'an olive tree laden with fruit and a cypress towering in the clouds' (50:5-10). Ben Sira concludes his description with details of the high priest's 'glorious robe' and 'perfect splendour' and his significant cultic role officiating at the sacrifice 'at the hearth of the altar' (50:11-15). Such is one hyperbolic account of a high priest whose duties, however, were conflated with those of a ruler early in the Hasmonean dynasty two centuries before the Common Era,<sup>450</sup> a description which is not unlike a visionary's description of an apocalyptic heavenly visit. Although the images used are contemporaneously relevant, they strongly suggest the author's intention to present the high priest, although also ruler, in superlative terms. In contrast, notwithstanding apocalyptic similarities, stands the treatment of the priesthood in the *Apocalypse of John*, one at considerable variance with Ben Sira's depiction of Simon II.

Another high priest, of perhaps more historical significance in the context of the

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<sup>450</sup> Approximately 150 years in the case of the Hasmonean Simon.

Judaic priesthood, is Zadok, son of Ahitub (2 Sam. 8:17) who, less colourfully described, is nonetheless more archetypically significant because of his priestly status during David's reign and David's apparent injunction<sup>451</sup> to Zadok (and Nathan) to anoint Solomon as king, which Zadok duly did (1 Kings 1:34, 39). Zadok is also mentioned late in the sixth century by Ezekiel who, in his vision of the new Temple, is shown the chamber for the priests responsible for the altar, who 'are the descendents of Zadok, who alone among the descendents of Levi may come near to the Lord to minister to him' (Ezek. 40:46). Ezekiel appears to express his regard for the levitical priesthood and the priestly role of 'the sons of Zadok' by citing God's statement to him that 'the levitical priests, the descendents of Zadok, who kept the charge of my sanctuary when the people of Israel went astray from me, shall come near to me to minister to me; ... it is they who shall enter my sanctuary, it is they who shall approach my table, to minister to me, and they shall keep my charge (Ezek. 44:15-16).'<sup>452</sup> The significance of Zadok to Hebraic tradition is also illustrated by the naming of the fragment of a Dead Sea Scroll, commonly referred to as the *Damascus Document*, the 'Zadokite Fragment'. Thus, the High Priest Zadok is accorded historical significance based on the recognition of the priestly role within the Scrolls.<sup>453</sup> It may be noted, of course, that the Hasmoneans were not Zadokite priests.

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<sup>451</sup> The qualification 'apparent' seems appropriate given the historical uncertainty surrounding the events of Solomon's succession.

<sup>452</sup> That Ezekiel appears to express his regard for the levitical priesthood, the descendants of Zadok (Ezek. 44:15-31), is countered by his condemnation of the Levites who went 'astray' and because of their failure to be faithful are to be punished by menial service in the Temple, 'to do all its chores' (Ezek. 44:9-14). In more positive portrayals, YHWH spoke to Jeremiah of his 'covenant with his ministers the Levites' (Jer. 33:21) and according to David, only the Levites were chosen to carry the ark of God 'and to minister to him forever' (1 Chron. 15:2; cf. 15:15, 26-27). However, such a portrayal may be assessed in the context of Moses' description of the Levites (Deut. 31:24-29).

<sup>453</sup> See Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, Penguin Books, London, 1998, 11 n.29.

The beginning of the end of the period of hereditary high priests, which had commenced with David's high priest Zadok (1 Kings 1), was marked by the line of Zadok's descendants as high priests being broken by Hasmoneans who, in 152 BCE, installed Jonathan, the brother of Judah Maccabee, as high priest. Jonathan and his brother Simon and descendants continued to occupy the office for almost a century and, as noted earlier, served as both high priest and ruler. Another, but non-hereditary, high priest is Joseph Caiaphas, relevant to this thesis because he held office during the ministry of Jesus, including ten years concurrently with Pontius Pilate which suggests that the relationship was mutually satisfactory. Although his particular historical significance was his order to have Jesus arrested, the reasons underlying his decision may be viewed from several perspectives.

### **The priesthood and the Second Temple**

In contrast to the numerical selectivity of the high priest and his immediate circle, the large component of the priesthood which comprised 'ordinary' priests was extensive, not only in relation to the 'high priesthood' but also as a proportion of the population.<sup>454</sup> Based on daily temple duties and additional priests required on sabbath days, it is considered likely that there were more than seven thousand priests and a comparable number of Levites.<sup>455</sup> To such a figure of approximately fourteen thousand, however, there are reservations.<sup>456</sup>

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<sup>454</sup> For a comprehensive account of high priests in the second Temple Period, see James C. VanderKam, *From Joshua to Caiaphas: High Priests after the Exile*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis and Van Gorcum, Assen, 2004.

<sup>455</sup> See Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, 199-200, and Skarsaune, *In the Shadow of the Temple*, 100 n.14.

<sup>456</sup> See, for example, E.P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief 63 BCE - 66 CE*, Trinity Press International, Philadelphia, rev. ed., 1994, 78-79.

That scholars' views on the number of priests in the Second Temple period vary is not of major consequence to this study: suffice to state that the considerable number of priests and Levites in the first seventy years of the Common Era reflected the significance of both the Temple and the priesthood of the Judaism of the first century, given that their total exceeds the aggregation of Sadducees, Essenes and Pharisees.<sup>457</sup> Of more significance is their sociological significance as a hereditary class in contrast to the first-century followers of Jesus who may be described as a movement or, more accurately, a range of movements. For example, the first-century priesthood may be described as an extensive hereditary, religious cadre rather than a religious party, sect or movement. In contrast to the early Jesus movements which reflected 'campaign-style' religious ideals, the priesthood constituted an elitist class, including a priestly aristocracy dominated by the Sadducees, focussed on the preservation of the institution of the Temple, celebration of the cult, and adherence to Mosaic Law. That the priesthood occupied a significant position in religious life during the first decades of the Common Era provides a contrast with the non-hereditary, non-elitist religious activists of the Jesus movements, thus suggesting an early indication of Judaic-Christian divergence.<sup>458</sup>

The extent to which the priesthood came to be held in low regard in the second century BCE is expressed in the *Testament of Levi*,<sup>459</sup> which, in discussing the priesthood, indicates a link between prophecy and apocalyptic through messianic eschatology.

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<sup>457</sup> Josephus, *Ant.* 18:12, 17.

<sup>458</sup> It might be noted that the Pharisees could also be described as 'non-hereditary, non-elitist'. However, as will be discussed, it is the lack of an earthly Temple in the new Jerusalem of John's *Apocalypse* that provides the most significant contrast with the temple-centred focus in Judaic tradition.

<sup>459</sup> Written in the first or second century BCE. James Charlesworth notes the date of origin of the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* may have been in the Maccabean period; Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, 778.

According to the author, after mounting the second heaven and standing near the Lord, Levi is informed he ‘shall be [the Lord’s] priest and shall tell forth his mysteries to men’, announcing ‘the one who is about to redeem Israel’ (*T. Levi* 2:10-11). Further, Levi is informed that he ‘should become a son to [the Most High], as minister and priest in his presence’ (4:2). The gates of heaven open and Levi sees God ‘the Holy Most High sitting on the throne’ (5:1). The newly-commissioned priest and prophet Levi warns of the corruptness of the priesthood which ‘plunders the Lord’s offerings, stealing choice parts ...contemptuously eating them with whores’ (14:5). The holy places of corrupt priests ‘shall be razed to the ground’ and because ‘vengeance will have come upon them from the Lord, the priesthood will lapse’ and the Lord ‘will raise up a new priest to whom all the words of the Lord will be revealed’ (16:4; 18:1-2). Levi’s description of the ‘new priest’ suggests a broader mandate than that of the earlier priesthood, one including a combination of prophetic, priestly and kingly roles. For example, the new priest ‘shall effect the judgment of truth over the earth for many days’ (18:2b) and ‘in his priesthood the nations shall be multiplied in knowledge on the earth’ (18:9a), thus exercising a prophetic function. His priestly role is suggested by the revelation to him of ‘all the words of the Lord’ (18:2a), ‘in his priesthood the nations shall be multiplied in knowledge’ (18:9a), and ‘from the temple of glory sanctification will come upon him’ (18:6a). Finally, that ‘his star shall rise in heaven like a king’ is suggestive of a kingly, and not excluding political, role (18:3a). Such an exposition, expressed throughout chapter eighteen, indicates a significant degree of continuity and renewal concerning the nature and role of the priesthood. Although from a taxonomical viewpoint the text falls short of a statement of divergence between Judaic and Christian interpretations of the priesthood, it does suggest a shift from the traditional priesthood, one which augurs the kind of divergence argued in

this chapter.<sup>460</sup>

In *I Enoch*<sup>461</sup> there is expressed the woe of the righteous who, having ‘become the victuals of the sinners and the oppressors ... brought a charge against them before the authorities’. They found to their dismay that rather than paying attention to their cries or listening to their voice, the authorities ‘were assisting those who were robbing and devouring [them]’ (103:11, 14-15). Enoch continues his admonition to his children that the authorities ‘conceal the injustice’ of the oppressors ‘and do not remove the yokes of those who devour, scatter, and murder [them]’, thus colluding with the oppressors (103:15). Although the text does not specify the ‘authorities’ it may be assumed that it is refers to, or includes, religious authorities, thus expressing direct criticism of upper echelons of the priesthood around the end of the first century BCE. On the other hand, *I Enoch* contains no other reference to priests or the priesthood in an account which ranges widely over issues associated with the wicked and the righteous in a period leading up to the beginning of the Common Era.

More specific to the priesthood concerning issues of renewal and divergence is the expression of interest in the Temple and the priesthood in 2 Maccabees. Written late in the first century BCE during the period of Seleucid kingships,<sup>462</sup> Second Maccabees expresses criticism of the high priest Jason, the brother of Onias, who is charged with

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<sup>460</sup> Caution should be exercised, however, given that, according to James Davila, ‘the Christian writer/editor of the Greek *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* freely adapted this work in translation in the Greek *Testament of Levi* and even added explicitly Christian statements to it’, ‘The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha as Background to the New Testament’, *The Expository Times*, 117:2 (2008), 54.

<sup>461</sup> The date of the composite authorship of *I Enoch* is uncertain; however, most of the text would appear to have been written in the first two centuries BCE. See Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, 6-7.

<sup>462</sup> The date 63 BCE marks the date of the last Seleucid king, following Rome’s settlement in the East.

obtaining the high priesthood by corruption through an initial offering of four hundred and forty talents of silver (2 Macc. 4:7-8). Jason is also accused of the Hellenization of the people of Jerusalem through the promise to pay an additional one hundred and fifty talents of silver for approval to establish a Greek-style gymnasium which helped him to 'shift his compatriots over to the Greek way of life' (2 Macc. 4:9-10). The author describes such activities as 'an extreme of Hellenization' and an 'increase in the adoption of foreign ways', all due to Jason's 'surpassing wickedness' (4:13). As well as Jason being depicted as 'ungodly and no true high priest', priests are also criticised: portrayed as 'no longer intent upon their service at the altar', they despise the sanctuary, neglect the sacrifices, participate in unlawful proceedings in the wrestling arena and overvalue 'Greek forms of prestige' (4:13-15). Such portrayals of Jason and the contemporary priesthood not only present a critical account of religious leadership in the Seleucid period, they also serve as a backdrop to the contrasting priesthood exemplified in the *Apocalypse of John*, which will be noted shortly to diverge significantly from the account in 2 Maccabees.

### **The priesthood of Jesus: New Testament writings**

Although the writers of the Gospels did not specifically ascribe the term 'priest' to Jesus, he is depicted in other New Testament writings as exercising some of the traditional functions of the priesthood and the terms 'priest' and 'high priest' are deployed. For example, he is portrayed as interceding to God on behalf of humanity, not however as a 'priest' but rather in the role of a 'high priest', serving at God's right hand.<sup>463</sup> Further, although Jesus undertakes the priestly function of intercession on human behalf, his status

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<sup>463</sup> For example, Romans 8:34; 1 John 2:1; Hebrews 7:25. Although an exception may be read into Hebrews 5:6 where the term 'priest' is used, the author qualifies the priesthood of Jesus as being unlike the other high priests 'who are subject to weakness' (7:26-28).

is more than that of a high priest of Judaic tradition: because he shares the Throne of God, he exercises divine authority.<sup>464</sup> The depiction of Jesus as ‘priest’, and particularly as ‘high priest’, is more explicit in the Letter to the Hebrews,<sup>465</sup> wherein the author portrays Jesus in Christological and high-priestly terms. Such accounts of Jesus contrast with the high priests of the Hebrew scriptures and appear to open up new conceptual understandings of the priesthood and its role.<sup>466</sup> In this context, one might note the Jewish-Christian origins and character of the Letter to the Hebrews from two points of view. First, the Jewish-Christian character of the text as it relates to the high-priestly status of Jesus appears not dissimilar to the Jewish-Christian character of the *Apocalypse of John*, thus making more salient the respective treatments of the priesthood. The second aspect is in relation to the treatment of the priesthood in the two texts viewed from the perspective of the Jewish hermeneutical principle *a minore ad maius*: from the priesthood of the Second Temple, to the priesthood of Jesus, and to Jesus as the heavenly high priest.<sup>467</sup>

The Letter to the Hebrews provides several examples which may be interpreted as criticisms of the contemporary Jewish priesthood. For example, the author appears to express the view that because high priests are human and therefore subject to weakness,

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<sup>464</sup> For example, Mark 16:19; Matt. 28:18. Examples from the Book of Revelation are discussed later in the chapter.

<sup>465</sup> For example, Hebrews 2:17; 3:1; 4:14-15; 5:5, 6, 10; 7:11, 17, 20-21, 24, 26; 8:1-6; 9:11; 10:11-14, 21.

<sup>466</sup> This view is discussed further in the following analysis of the priesthood in the *Apocalypse of John*, wherein it is noted that John also refers to the high-priestly status of Christ, thus introducing a significant christological element.

<sup>467</sup> Drawn from Hillel’s interpretative method of *qal vahomer* (*a minore ad maius*), that is, ‘from less to more’. Thus, it is argued that the author of the Letter to the Hebrews is not critical of Jewish priesthood but points to the ‘greater value’ of Jesus as the heavenly high priest.



they must offer sacrifices for their own sins as well as for those of the people (5:1-3). In contrast to ‘every high priest chosen from among mortals’, Christ ‘did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest’ but was appointed by God ‘as a priest forever’ (5:1a, 5a, 6a). Further, the author of Hebrews extends the contrast between the priesthood of the Mosaic covenant and the new covenantal priesthood of Jesus Christ by comparing the priests who ‘go continually into the first tent to carry out their ritual duties’ and the high priest who alone is authorised to enter, once a year, the Holy of Holies with Christ who ‘came as a high priest of the good things that have come’ and is ‘the mediator of a new covenant’ (9:1-15). Such views, however, may be regarded as implicit. Rather than highlighting priestly corruption, it is quite possible that the author’s intention is to emphasise the redemptive significance of the death and resurrection of Jesus in contrast to the traditional cultic functions of priests. Specifically, one may interpret the text in chapter 5 as providing a contrast between the human-existential nature of the priesthood and the glorification of Christ, appointed by God as a ‘priest forever’ (Heb. 5:1, 5-6). For instance, ‘every high priest chosen from among mortals ... put in charge of things pertaining to God on their behalf’ (5:1) is not a criticism of the exercise of priestly functions. Although it stands in contrast with the author’s emphasis on Christ’s divinely-appointed and permanent priestly function (5:5-6), as discussed earlier in relation to the Temple and Jerusalem, drawing conclusions of divergence between a literal entity such as priests and a metaphorical ‘priest forever’ is not to be undertaken lightly.<sup>468</sup>

Returning to the Gospels and the New Testament more generally, apart from the issues associated with Jesus and his ‘priestly’ status, there are instances which may be

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<sup>468</sup> The case for divergence in renewal, including the notion of a ‘priesthood of all believers’, is discussed further in this chapter in the section ‘The priesthood and John’s *Apocalypse*’.

interpreted as Jesus' conceptual understanding of the future priesthood. For example, Jesus is portrayed as conferring on his apostles a kingdom, a *basileia*,<sup>469</sup> one which is associated with the authority of sitting on metaphorical thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Luke 22:13b). The Matthean account foreshadows Jesus as 'the Son of Man ... seated on the throne of his glory' with his loyal disciples sitting on 'twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel' (Matt. 19:28). Both accounts deploy the 'throne' as a metaphor for authority in the new Israel established by God. An allusion to a 'new' pattern of priesthood may be detected in the Letter to Titus in which, referring to Jesus Christ, the author states: 'It is he who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds' (2:14). Such a theological statement also finds expression in John's letter to the seven churches (Rev. 1:5-6); to the church in Thyatira (2:26); and in his account of his vision of the Lamb (5:9-10).

The First Letter of Peter, addressed to the elders of churches in Asia Minor, encourages those who, through redemption in Christ (1 Peter 1:19), let themselves 'be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ' (1 Peter 2:5). The letter continues, asserting that those who believe (in Jesus) 'are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people'. Significantly, the author adds that the function of such a 'royal priesthood' is to 'proclaim the mighty acts of him who called [them] out of darkness into his marvellous light' (1 Peter 2:9). Such a text appears to draw upon Moses' description of a 'priestly kingdom and a

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<sup>469</sup> Luke 22:29. Luke's concept of kingdom or *basileia* may have drawn upon Daniel 7:14 and 27; if so, providing an example of a Gospel writer being influenced by Jewish apocalyptic from the second century CE. The concept and significance of the *basileia* is discussed at the close of this chapter.

holy nation' (Exod. 19:9) in that both concepts of priesthood are linked to monarchical contexts. Thus, from one perspective the account in 1 Peter may be regarded as formulaically traditional and rhetorical rather than an indication of theological and historical significance in terms of Judaic-Christian divergence. An alternative approach is to regard the terms 'kingdom' and 'nation' as indicative of a people rather than a territory, in which case the notion of a 'priesthood of all believers', as discussed shortly as a feature of John's *Apocalypse*, would appear to be strengthened. As the notion of a 'priesthood of all believers' presupposes Christ's own priestly authority, John's portrayal of the Son of Man in high-priestly clothing (Rev. 1:13) warrants acknowledgement.

Notwithstanding the fact that in the *Apocalypse of John* Jesus is not referred to specifically as a priest or high priest, he is accorded high-priestly status through his portrayal in John's vision as 'one like the Son of Man clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash across his chest' (Rev. 1:13).<sup>470</sup> Although the description of the figure John sees continues from Rev. 1:13 to 1:16, it is not indicative of a human figure such as that of a high priest in Judaic tradition.<sup>471</sup> Rather, by using the term 'Son of Man', and specifying the high-priestly clothing, John is introducing a messianic, Christological

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<sup>470</sup> The long robe and golden sash, considered as possible allusions to Dan. 10:5 and Ezek. 9:2, are commonly regarded as indicative of high-priestly clothing. Concerning the tradition and significance of high priests' clothing see, for example, Margaret Barker, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, T & T Clark, London and New York, 2000, 39-41, 84-85. Of the clothing description in Rev. 1:13, Barker concludes 'the golden girdle shows he [one like the Son of Man] was the high priest (page 85). There are reservations to such a view, however, for example see Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 93-94. Aune concludes there is 'no clear intention on the part of the author to conceptualise the appearance of the exalted Christ in priestly terms' (page 94).

<sup>471</sup> John's description, however, does appear to have significance in terms of the semiotics of dress. For instance, the Son of Man's 'long robe' and the 'golden sash across his chest' may be presumed to have conveyed a highly elevated image of personage to John, or other witnesses of such clothing.

dimension to Jesus as a high priest. There are other passages in John's *Apocalypse* which may be interpreted as an indication of the high-priestly status of Jesus.<sup>472</sup> However, it is the wider description of Jesus as the Son of Man in Rev. 1:13-16 which provides a more comprehensive portrayal of Jesus in Christological, high-priestly images. For example, in Rev. 2:18 Jesus is described as the Son of God, with eyes like a flame of fire and feet like burnished bronze, thus providing two parallel images with Rev. 1:14b, 15a. He is not, however, depicted with high-priestly clothing. In Rev. 14:14 John sees a white cloud upon which is seated one like the Son of Man, wearing a golden crown and holding a sharp sickle. As with Rev. 2:18, he is not in high-priestly clothing. Both Rev. 2:18 and 14:14 are in keeping with the notion of the Son of Man in Rev. 1:13-16, assuming that John is using the terms 'Son of Man' and 'Son of God' coterminously. Although a less explicit depiction of Jesus as a high priest is conveyed in Rev. 12:5 and 21:7, both passages conform implicitly to the portrayal of Jesus in high-priestly terms, again assuming John's use of the terms 'Son of Man' and 'Son of God' as coextensive in meaning.<sup>473</sup>

The term 'the Son of Man' (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου) is likely to have been known to the author of the *Apocalypse of John*, given the frequency with which the term is used in the four Gospels<sup>474</sup> and that the notion of the Son of Man is, as discussed in the following chapter, a feature of the Similitudes of *I Enoch*.<sup>475</sup> In Mark 13:26 and 14:62 Jesus is

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<sup>472</sup> For instance, Rev. 2:18; 12:5; 14:14; 21:7. Margaret Barker also includes Rev. 3:7, identifying 'the holy one, the true one' as a claim that Jesus is the new high priest; *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 66.

<sup>473</sup> Given that the high-priestly role of the Son of Man is implicit rather than explicit, it may be argued that, essentially, the Son of Man is the principal image, overshadowing other images drawn from Judaic tradition.

<sup>474</sup> In the Koine Greek version of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, the term 'the Son of Man' appears, respectively, no fewer than 30, 14, 25 and 12 times.

<sup>475</sup> The Son of man appears in *I Enoch*, chapters 46, 48, 62, 69, 71. See discussion on *I Enoch* in chapter 7, 'First-century Jewish writings'.

cited as referring to the coming of the Son of Man in/with clouds, references which are generally regarded as being drawn from Daniel 7:13 where Daniel saw ‘one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven’.<sup>476</sup> In contrast to the Gospels wherein the Son of Man comes from heaven to earth, the account in Daniel 7:13 is of the Son of Man coming to the Ancient One, from earth to heaven.<sup>477</sup> The portrayal of the ‘Son of Man’ in Daniel 7:13 is relevant to the following discussion on John’s notions of the priesthood in that Daniel’s vision may be argued to have been of a divine priest-angel, possibly conforming to Israel’s eschatological expectation of a messianic high priest, one who supersedes the traditional status of the Judaic king.<sup>478</sup> An alternative view is that the Son of Man in Daniel 7:13 is not an individual angel, or heavenly being, but is ‘simply a symbol of the people of God’: just as the beasts from the sea symbolize kings (Dan. 7:17) or kingdoms (7:23), the man figure symbolizes the saints of the most High (Dan. 7:18, 25, 27).<sup>479</sup> John J. Collins supports the view that the Son of Man is an individual figure and the expression ‘(one) like a son of man’ is more properly translated as ‘one like a human being’.<sup>480</sup> Further, he suggests that ‘(one) like a son of man’ - כְּבֶר אִנֹּשׁ in Dan. 7:13 may be ‘most plausibly’ interpreted as Michael who appears as the ‘prince’ of Israel in Dan.

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<sup>476</sup> For a discussion of the imagery of coming on ‘clouds of heaven’, see Steve Moyise, ‘Jesus and the Scriptures of Israel’, *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus*, vol. 2, eds. Tom Holmén and Stanley E. Porter, Brill Leiden, 2011, 1162-1163.

<sup>477</sup> Crispin Fletcher-Jones, ‘Jesus and Apocalypticism’, *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus*, vol. 3, 2906.

<sup>478</sup> The view that the ‘Son of Man’ in Daniel 7:13 may be interpreted as a composite figure representing Israel and its restoration cannot be ignored. However, there appears to be greater weight attaching to the figure being perceived in high-priestly terms.

<sup>479</sup> Crispin Fletcher-Jones, ‘Jewish Apocalyptic and Apocalypticism’, *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus*, vol. 2, 1575.

<sup>480</sup> John J. Collins, ‘The Son of Man in Ancient Judaism’, *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus*, vol. 2, 1548.

10-12.<sup>481</sup> In any event, it may be assumed that the ‘(one) like a human being’ in Dan. 7:13 has divine status in that he was given dominion, glory, and kingship, served by all peoples, nations and languages, in an everlasting dominion (Dan. 7:14). An interpretation of such a level of divine, high-priestly status, in the context of Jewish mysticism, serves to undergird the high-priestly status of the Son of Man in Rev. 1:12-16.<sup>482</sup> Thus, Dan. 7:13 may be read as providing foundational support to Christ’s own high-priestly authority in the *Apocalypse of John*, one which provides the context for John’s notions of a ‘priesthood of all believers’.

That John may have been aware of the expression from the Hebrew scriptures due to its frequent mention may not be as relevant as the Gospels and *I Enoch* due to the use of ‘Son of Man’ as a descriptive phrase for ‘humanity’ rather than as a messianic title. Further, in contrast to the use of the definite article in the term ‘Son of Man’ in the Greek New Testament, the absence of the definite article in the Hebrew versions of ‘Son of Man’ (בן-אדם) and in the Aramaic version of Dan. 7:13 (בר אנש) does not suggest a singular, messianic dimension to the term.<sup>483</sup> In terms of first-century Jewish and early Christian notions of the Son of Man, John may have drawn on both the Similitudes of *I Enoch* and the Gospels in which the image of the Son of Man is a heavenly or divine being, extending

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<sup>481</sup> Ibid., 1551. Collins notes that the possibility of the Son of Man in Dan. 7:13 being Michael parallels the account in the *War Scroll* (1QM XVII, 7-8) wherein Michael will be exalted by God with authority ‘above all the gods and the dominion of Israel over all flesh’ (page 1551).

<sup>482</sup> It may be noted that John’s depiction of the Son of Man in Rev. 1:12-16 and Rev. 14:14 does not include the definitive article.

<sup>483</sup> See Geza Vermes, *Jesus in His Jewish Context*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 2003, 82. From Vermes’ view that the use of the term ‘the Son of Man’ does not derive from the Hebrew scriptures, one might draw the same conclusion in respect of the term in the *Apocalypse of John*.

the concept to one who shares the Throne of God<sup>484</sup> and who will exercise authority over the unrighteous and reward believers with a shared priesthood, a *basileia* shared by believers and the Lamb in the new Jerusalem.<sup>485</sup> It is difficult, however, to be definitive about perceptions of the term ‘Son of Man’, particularly if one speculates on likely first-century understandings of the term. For example, according to an account in the Gospel of John, ‘a crowd’ with Jesus is perplexed by Jesus described as using ‘the Son of Man’ self-descriptively (John 12:34).<sup>486</sup> A positive view of the divine nature of the Son of Man may be drawn from *I Enoch* 48:2-3: ‘even before the sun and the constellations were created, before the stars of heaven were made, his name was named before the Lord of spirits’. In expressing the view that first-century Jews understood the notion of a divine Messiah, Boyarin suggests that both theophany and apotheosis exist in the Enochic versions of the Jewish Son of Man tradition.<sup>487</sup> The brief portrayal of Jesus in high-priestly terms in the *Apocalypse of John* continues the role of the high priesthood in first-century Jewish apocalyptic and early Christian writings.<sup>488</sup> As well, his use of the image of the Son of Man serves as a foundation to his more extended notion of the priesthood of all believers, one which is predicated on the high-priestly status and authority

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<sup>484</sup> The Son of Man shares the Throne of God in *I Enoch* 62:2, 5; 69:27, 29; 61:8, thus indicating a divine status.

<sup>485</sup> This view is discussed in more detail in the following section, ‘The Priesthood and John’s *Apocalypse*’.

<sup>486</sup> For an account of what first-century Jews may have understood by the term ‘Son of Man’, see Crispin Fletcher-Louis, ‘The Revelation of the Sacral Son of Man’, *Auferstehung*, the Fourth Durham-Tübingen Research Symposium: Resurrection, Transfiguration, and Exaltation in Old Testament, Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity, Tübingen, September, 1999, eds. Friedrich Avemarie and Hermann Lichtenberger, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, 2001.

<sup>487</sup> Daniel Boyarin, *The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ*, New Press, New York, 2012, 91.

<sup>488</sup> For such a view see Margaret Barker, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, who states Jesus ‘was initiated into the tradition of the high priesthood’ and ‘the picture of Jesus as the great high priest in all his roles and aspects appears throughout the New Testament and is the key to understanding all early Christian teaching about him’ (page 4).

of Jesus.

Although a more detailed discussion of the complex and contentious term ‘the Son of Man’ is beyond the purview of this study, a general conclusion may be posited. The portrayal of Jesus in the *Apocalypse of John* in high-priestly terms conforms, albeit not as extensively, to the more comprehensive christological imagery of the Son of Man in the Gospels. It is also in keeping with the Jewish apocalyptic images of the Son of Man in the Similitudes of *1 Enoch*. John’s depiction of Jesus as a high priest, based on his high-priestly clothing as the Son of Man (Rev. 1:13), appears to parallel the status of Jesus as a high priest in *1 Enoch*.<sup>489</sup> From the Similitudes of *1 Enoch* and the Gospels, the Son of Man may have been perceived in first-century apocalyptic as a divine figure, one who shares the Throne of God, and who has priestly authority to judge the unrighteous and reward the believers. John’s imagery of the Son of Man, which is in keeping with first-century Jewish apocalyptic and early Christian writings, as reflected in the Similitudes of *1 Enoch* and the Gospels, suggests a high-priestly Christology. Such a portrayal by John of the high-priestly authority of Jesus undergirds the case argued in this chapter that John’s notions of priesthood involve a basileiac ‘priesthood of all believers’.

### **First-century pseudepigraphical writings**

Written during the period of early Judaism after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, the Jewish author of *2 Baruch* expresses criticism of the priesthood in a poetic lamentation over Zion, in which Baruch issues the command:

‘You, priests, take the keys of the sanctuary,

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<sup>489</sup> Discussed in the opening section of chapter 7, ‘First-century Jewish Writings’.



and cast them to the highest heaven,  
and give them to the Lord and say,  
“Guard your house yourself,  
because, behold, we have been found to be false  
stewards” (2 Bar. 10:18).

There are only two other references to the priesthood in 2 Baruch, both of which may be interpreted in a positive light. First, during the evil days of Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah, priests were driven away ‘lest they minister in the sanctuary’. Second, in a reference to the priesthood of the seventh century BCE during the days of Josiah, the king of Judah, the country was ‘purified from the idols’, the priests were brought back to their ministry, and the ‘magicians, enchanter, and diviners [were] destroyed and removed’.<sup>490</sup> In the contemporaneous text of 4 Ezra there are no references to the priesthood, thus suggesting the possibility that to the author, the priesthood did not constitute an issue of religious significance.<sup>491</sup> It will be noted shortly that, against the background of two such contemporary texts, neither of which expresses indications of divergence in respect of the priesthood, the *Apocalypse of John* highlights some new and metaphorical dimensions which may be interpreted as suggesting divergence in renewal.

Another example of critical views on the priesthood is contained in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* in which criticism of the folly and futility of idolatry and its underlying cause of the Temple’s destruction may be interpreted as an implicit criticism of failure on the

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<sup>490</sup> Respectively, 2 Bar. 64:2; 66:2.

<sup>491</sup> Admittedly, a supposition based on silence. An alternative possibility is that the author of 4 Ezra may have regarded the destruction of the Temple as the cause of the priesthood, if only temporarily, becoming redundant.

part of the priesthood (*Apoc. Abr.* 25-27). Abraham's vision of an altar on which boys are being slaughtered (25:2) indicates the absence of a responsible and dutiful priesthood. The author portrays God permitting the destruction of Jerusalem and the burning of the Temple due to cultic atrocities such as the sacrifice of children (*Apoc. Abr.* 27), which suggests either the absence of a priestly function or the abdication of all priestly responsibility. Such cultic transgressions stand in contrast to Hosea's prophetic injunction that the altar be respected otherwise the Lord does not accept sacrifices (8:11-13a) and Amos' criticism of sacrificial transgressions (4:4-5) and the express disregard of YHWH for inappropriate cultic and sacrificial practices (5:21-23).<sup>492</sup> Written after 70 CE, the text of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* emphasises idolatry as a significant corruption of the Temple cult, and although the author does not refer to observance of the Torah or the role and function of the priesthood, the absence of the latter cannot be disassociated from his emphasis on idolatry, the cultic worship of idols, as the cause of the destruction of the Temple.<sup>493</sup>

In contrast to the critical views of the priesthood which may be drawn from 2 *Baruch* and the *Apocalypse of Abraham* is the concept of an angelic priesthood described in the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, the first five songs of which depict a priesthood of angels offering praise to God.<sup>494</sup> The locus of the priests is not an earthly Temple but a sanctuary of angelic priests within heaven, in effect a metaphorical 'celestial Temple', thus

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<sup>492</sup> Such examples are not cited to negate the prophets' stress on the need for obedience (*hesed*) to be an integral part of the cult.

<sup>493</sup> Although written after 70 CE, it is possible that the author of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* may be deploying a rhetorical formula, or *topos*, of relevance to earlier prophetic and Deuteronomic criticism of the pre 586 BCE monarchy.

<sup>494</sup> *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, songs 1-5.

suggesting distinctions between earthly and heavenly temples and their respective priesthoods. Rather than ‘angelic priests’, a more accurately descriptive term could be ‘priest-like angels’, given that essentially they are angels, in heaven, described as priests. George Nickelsburg notes that the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* were well received within the Qumran Community, perhaps because the Community’s rejection of the priesthood of the Jerusalem Temple led to a positive identification with heavenly priests serving God’s heavenly kingship.<sup>495</sup>

Another late pre-Christian, pseudepigraphic writing which refers to priests in the heavenly sanctuary is *I Enoch*, in which the author identifies Michael as an angel-priest. God commissions Michael to ‘cleanse the earth from all injustice, and from all defilement, and from all oppression, and from all sin, and from all iniquity’, following which God expects that ‘all the children of the people will become righteous, and all nations shall worship and bless [God]’ (*I En.* 10:20-21). Thus, Michael is commissioned to undertake an earthly assignment as well as serving as an angel-priest in the heavenly court. Additionally, he serves an intermediary function, noting that the cry of the voice of the oppressed on earth reaches the gates of heaven pleading to the Most High (*I En.* 9:2-3). Michael is one of four to whom *I Enoch* assigns specific names.<sup>496</sup> Although *I Enoch* does not provide physical descriptions of the four, it is possible, although admittedly hypothetical, that the four angel-priests in Enoch’s vision better reflect a shared tradition as

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<sup>495</sup> G.W.E. Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature between the Bible and the Mishnah: A Historical and Literary Introduction*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 2005, 152-53. It may also be argued that sectarians such as the Qumran Community believed their own liturgy formed part of the heavenly liturgy, given the role accorded to angels; see discussion on the *Songs of Sabbath Sacrifice* in the section ‘Angels and the “social” Throne’ in chapter 6.

<sup>496</sup> *I Enoch*, Asuryal (10:1); Rafael (10:4); Gabriel (10:9); Michael (10:11).

found in Ezekiel 1 and Revelation.<sup>497</sup> Whether or not such is the case, Michael and his three Enochian colleagues also appear in the Dead Sea Scrolls,<sup>498</sup> thus establishing him as a significant heavenly, angel-priest figure.

### **The priesthood and John's *Apocalypse***

Having discussed the portrayals of the priesthood and the high priesthood contained in the Gospels, the Letter to the Hebrews, and *I Enoch*, it is argued in this section that a different perspective on the priesthood in New Testament writings is evident in the *Apocalypse of John*.<sup>499</sup> Although the priesthood *per se* is not explicitly treated in a single passage, there are five texts (1:5-6; 2:26; 5:9-10; 20:4-6; 22:3-5) which, considered in their totality and inter-relatedness, combine to build the notion of a reconfigured priesthood, thus reflecting divergence from earlier traditions of the priesthood. The following discussion on John's notions of priesthood concerns the extent to which John's five references depict a 'new'

<sup>497</sup> For example, Rev. 4:6b-8.

<sup>498</sup> For example, The War Scroll, 1QM 9:15.

<sup>499</sup> In Revelation the term ἱερεύς is met three times, each in the plural and in a liturgical genre. In the doxologies at 1:5-6 – 'To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father (καὶ ἐποίησεν ἡμᾶς βασιλείαν, ἱερεῖς τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ αὐτοῦ), to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen' – and 5:9-10 – 'You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God [saints] from every tribe and language and people and nation; you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God (ἐποίησας αὐτοὺς τῷ θεῷ ἡμῶν βασιλείαν καὶ ἱερεῖς), and they will reign on earth.' Revelation alludes to Exod. 19:6 but does not cite the concept in the form of the LXX as 1 Peter does. Instead, it appears that John has coordinated the two nouns that were in Hebrew in a construct relationship, i.e. 'a kingdom of priests' becomes 'a kingdom (and) priests'. To a degree he agrees with the translations found in the targumim. Cf. Onqelos מלכין כהנין (kings, priests), Jonathan וכהנין מלכין ... (wreathed kings and ministering priests), Neofiti מלכין וכהנין (kings and priest). The third occurrence of the term is in the blessing at Rev 20:6 – 'Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. Over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ (ἔσονται ἱερεῖς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοῦ χριστοῦ), and they will reign (βασιλεύσουσιν) with him a thousand years.' Again we find here an allusion to Exod. 19:6 but in a more attenuated format, i.e. not a 'kingdom/ממלכת/βασιλεία (and) priest' but 'you will be priest and will reign βασιλεύσουσιν'.

concept of priesthood involving a change in the nature of religious authority, as well as John's portrayal of the 'priestly' Lamb and Messiah presenting a dimension of 'priestly' redemption which diverges from other New Testament writings.

In contrast with the portrayal in the synoptic Gospels of Jesus during his earthly ministry, the *Apocalypse of John* contains only several passages which refer to the earthly life of Jesus, of which two appear relevant to his role *vis-à-vis* the priesthood.<sup>500</sup> In comparison with John's *Apocalypse*, *1 Enoch* 46-48 appears to be more descriptive of the 'prototype of the Before-Time', the Son of Man (46:2) as an historical and messianic figure.<sup>501</sup> For example, the 'One who was born of human beings' had a countenance 'full of grace like that of one among the holy angels' (*1 En.* 46:1); even before the creation of the sun, moon and stars, the Son of Man was named in the presence of the Lord of the Spirits (48:2-3) and, as the 'light of the gentiles', 'all those who dwell upon the earth' shall worship him (48:2-5). Thus, the Messiah depicted in *1 Enoch* is a pre-existent heavenly being but was born of human beings: he sits on his 'throne of glory' but is also 'the light of the gentiles'.<sup>502</sup> Although there are similarities between the Messiah portrayed in *1 Enoch* and the *Apocalypse of John*, John's emphasis on the Lamb, the Lamb's sharing the Throne with God, and the role of Jesus Christ in the new Jerusalem, contrast with very

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<sup>500</sup> Rev. 1:5, 7; 5:9; 12:11. Rev. 1:5 and 5:9 depict Jesus in relation to the priesthood. It might be noted, however, that although the three passages are indicative of the earthly life of Jesus and his ministry, they also express a Christological dimension.

<sup>501</sup> Although from *1 Enoch* 46 and 48 it may be argued that historical and messianic figures are portrayed, given that the text is of a composite nature and there is a possibility of Christian interpolations, the comparison with the *Apocalypse of John* must be tentative. However, the christological impact of the Lamb in John's narrative and the emphasis on redemption indicates a greater degree of divergence in John's *Apocalypse* from the first-century apocalyptic account in *1 Enoch*.

<sup>502</sup> See E. Isaac, '1 Enoch: A New Translation and Introduction', in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, ed. Charlesworth, 9.

little reference to the earthly life of Jesus. John's portrayal of the Lamb is strongly christological and is highly symbolic of John's depiction of Jesus as the Messiah.<sup>503</sup>

### **Rev. 1:5-6**

In his first reference to the priesthood (Rev. 1:5-6),<sup>504</sup> John is extending his salutation to the seven churches in the Roman province of Asia,<sup>505</sup> to which he writes individually in subsequent chapters. In Rev. 1:5, Jesus is specifically described as Jesus Christ (thus the Messiah) who is 'the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead (thus resurrected) and the ruler of the kings of the earth (cf. Ps. 89:27): the Davidic Messiah will be 'the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth', that is, to reign over the human cosmos.<sup>506</sup> From his early depiction of Jesus as 'Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth' (1:5a), John establishes a christological framework which he develops further through the portrayal of Jesus as the Lamb in chapter five.<sup>507</sup> John's doxology in (1:5-6) is specifically addressed to the Lamb, in contrast to almost all Christian doxologies being addressed to God.<sup>508</sup> That Jesus will be a physical presence

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<sup>503</sup> Although the term 'Messiah' is not referred to in John's *Apocalypse*, in his introductory greeting to the seven churches John refers specifically to 'Jesus Christ' (1:5a). As well, the elevated status of the Lamb, sharing the Throne with God, equates with messiah-status.

<sup>504</sup> The text Rev. 1:5-6 is not commonly taken as a unit. For example, David Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, exegetes Rev. 1:4-5c as an epistolary prescript and 1:5d-6 as a doxology. While such a delineation is appropriate from an exegetical point of view, I have selected Rev. 1:5-6 as a unit because I believe the passage, together with 2:26, 5:9-10, and 20:6, taken collectively, portray a concept of priesthood by John which would be less evident if the texts were otherwise delineated.

<sup>505</sup> In the western area of what is now generally known as Asia Minor.

<sup>506</sup> See Bruce J. Malina, *On the Genre and Message of Revelation: Star Visions and Sky Journeys*, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody MA, 1995, 71. The three images applied to Jesus in Rev. 1-5 and their relationship to Ps. 89:24-30 are discussed by Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 37-38.

<sup>507</sup> See Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 38-41.

<sup>508</sup> *Ibid.*, 45-46.

on earth may be drawn from 1:7 which portrays Jesus ‘coming with the clouds’, to be seen by everyone and on whose account ‘all the tribes of the earth will wail’. John first introduces the role of Jesus in his concept of a ‘new’ priesthood by referring ‘to him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be the glory and dominion forever and ever’ (1:5b-6).<sup>509</sup> John’s use of the redemption-metaphor, the blood of the Lamb freeing people from their sins (1:5b), is the immediate prelude to those so freed becoming priests serving God (1:6a). The redemption-metaphor is repeated by John in 5:9a with the Lamb’s blood, as a symbol of the death of Jesus, ransoming people for God, again a prelude to them being made a kingdom of priests serving God (5:10; cf. 14:4).<sup>510</sup> The concept of ‘priests serving God’ is introduced by John, not as a *fait accompli* but as an indication of what will eventuate with the new earth and new heaven embodied in the eschatologically-orientated priesthood to which he refers in 20:6 and the metaphorical ‘new Jerusalem’ introduced in chapter 21. The three characteristics of Jesus as a faithful witness, resurrected, and reigning on earth, serve as normative models to John’s hearers and readers, an encouragement to the followers of Jesus to witness faithfully, earn resurrection, and share his reign on earth, thus linking 1:5 with 20:6.<sup>511</sup> Given that John’s message to the seven

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<sup>509</sup> John’s use of the term ‘kingdom’ (1:5-6; 5:9-10) implies priests to God although he also uses the terms ‘saints’ and ‘servants of God’ with the same meaning as ‘priests’; for example, 5:8; 8:3-4; 11:18 (saints); 1:1; 2:20; 7:3; 22:3 (servants of God).

<sup>510</sup> David Aune notes that the redemption-metaphor may have originated with Paul, based on Gal. 3:13; 4:5; 1Cor. 6:20; 7:23; *Revelation 1-5*, 47.

<sup>511</sup> See Ben Witherington III, *Revelation*, 76. Of interest is that in his discussion of Rev. 1:5-6; 5:9-10; and 20:6 Witherington does not refer to the priesthood or to the significance of John’s use of the word ‘priests’, other than to associate all believers as kings and priests predicated on 1 Peter 2:5 and suggesting that John’s reference to priests in 1:5 alludes to ‘going from the status of a slave to the upper echelon of society, a message of hope for Christians being oppressed in their social situation’. According to Witherington, ‘John’s theology is that Jesus alone is King of Kings, and his followers are not slaves but

churches opens with the suggestion of a ‘new’ kingdom and a ‘new’ priesthood, the concept of a more generic and inclusive kingdom of priests serving God, in contrast to the Temple-centred priesthood of Judaic tradition, may be construed as not without significance. Such a view is supported by reading the text in conjunction with John’s vision of the ‘new song’ in chapter five in which those believers who are to be victorious through the blood of the slaughtered Lamb, will constitute a kingdom of priests serving God who ‘*will* reign on earth’ (5:9-10).<sup>512</sup> That the redeemed become a *basileia* of priests serving God is in the same song which also records the death of the Lamb ransoming people for God, warrants the song’s description as a ‘new’ song. Although the term ‘new song’ appears in the Hebrew scriptures, almost exclusively in the Psalms,<sup>513</sup> Aune notes that the word ‘new’ is used simply to indicate ‘the introduction of a new composition for the purpose of celebrating a very special occasion, or the introduction of a new composition into a setting in which many songs have been used traditionally for a very long time’ and is generally used in ‘formulaic clauses’.<sup>514</sup> Given John’s ‘theology’ of redemption<sup>515</sup> and his concept of a ‘new’ kingdom of priests serving God, his use of the term ‘new song’ departs from the traditional and formulaic use of the term in earlier Jewish literature and serves to reinforce the *newness* of his vision of the priesthood reigning with Christ, and sharing his authority, on earth.

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rather kings and priests’ (pp. 76-77).

<sup>512</sup> The view that the priesthood depicted by John in Rev. 5:10 has an eschatological element is not without variance. For example, Caird points out that some texts use the present tense in reference to the redeemed reigning on earth and notes that John depicts the redeemed as kings and priests already in Rev. 5:9 and 10; Caird, *Commentary*, 77.

<sup>513</sup> Pss. 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9 149:1 and Isa. 42:10.

<sup>514</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 359.

<sup>515</sup> Discussed in chapter 5.



As it is considered likely that John was aware of the Exodus tradition he may well have been conscious of the much earlier promise of Y<sub>HWH</sub> to the people of Israel who keep his covenant: ‘Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation’ (Exod. 19:6). From the images of Exodus 19:6, John portrays a reign of priests serving God: the promise to Moses is in keeping with the promises recorded by John (1:6; 5:10); the redeemed will serve God rather than imperial Rome or specific Greco-Roman deities. The prophet trito-Isaiah records that Y<sub>HWH</sub> anointed him to bring the good news that the faithful ‘shall be called priests of the Lord, [and] shall be named ministers of God’, enjoying the wealth of the nations in whose riches they shall glory (Isa. 61:6). However, notwithstanding the idea of a ‘priestly kingdom’ expressed in Exodus 19:6 and Isaiah 61:6, it may be argued that John’s notions of priesthood provide a late first-century indication of Judaic-Christian divergence in that not only some are ordained to serve as intermediaries for God but that all followers of Jesus can join the priesthood of God and share in the authority exercised by Jesus the Messiah.<sup>516</sup>

John’s depiction of the authority exercised by Jesus the Messiah is in contrast with the tradition of Judaic temple-authority vested in the high priest, the authority of kings, and the authority of Y<sub>HWH</sub>, all of which display an association between authority and power, in the sense of the capacity to enforce obedience and to exercise finality in decision-making. The notion of authority in John’s *Apocalypse* arises from the kind of *basileiac* authority in which there is a sharing of influence towards a common ideal. John depicts ‘authority’ in

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<sup>516</sup> Jürgen Roloff, one of the few modern writers who links the priesthood-related texts under discussion here and associates Rev. 1:5-6 with 20:6 and 22:3-5, interprets 1:6 as the redeemed who remain faithful to God no longer needing the mediation of priests ‘who establish the bond between the world of the profane and the distant realm of God. Instead, they, like the priests in the Old Testament, have immediate access to God’s realm; indeed, they belong to this realm’; Roloff, *Revelation*, 26.

a non-authoritarian manner of priests serving rather than controlling, that is, priests serving the God and Father of Jesus Christ (1:6; 5:10; 20:6) and reigning with Jesus Christ, sharing the ‘authority’ to be priests of God and of Christ (20:6). Rather than the exercise of power, John’s notion of authority is expressed in 7:17 in which the redeemed will be led by the Lamb as their shepherd, enjoying the ‘springs of the water of life’ as they are guided by, and share priestly authority with, the Lamb while they serve God. Such a notion of ‘authority’ not only contrasts with Judaic tradition: early Christian writing associates the authority of Jesus Christ with power, as expressed by Peter in Acts 3:19-21 in which the Messiah Jesus will return for the ‘universal restoration that God announced long ago through his holy prophets’. John’s alternative notion presents a ‘new’ dimension of authority, one which portrays Jesus Christ as God’s priestly Lamb whose role is that of a priestly shepherd, guiding the redeemed who share his authority as priests serving God.

At first glance, Rev. 1:6 may be regarded as part of John’s formal and opening salutation before proceeding to the substantive part of his letters. There would appear to be a contextual significance, however, in John’s early reference to priests.<sup>517</sup> Certainly, the context is the ‘new’ kingdom established by Jesus, a kingdom in which all Christians become priests of God, serving the God and Father of Jesus. Such a context is in contrast with the traditional Judaic role of priests serving in the Temple (rather than the new kingdom), giving expression to the cult, Temple worship and sacrificial practice (rather than serving the God and Father of Jesus). John’s notion of believers constituting a kingdom of priests serving the God and Father of Jesus Christ (1:6) retains the elevated status of priests but depicts a substantial elevation in role and function. For example,

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<sup>517</sup> John uses the term ἱερεύς or priest three times in his *Apocalypse* (1:6; 5:10; 20:6). The Greek for priesthood, ἱεράτευμα, does not appear.

priests are no longer engaged in the sacrificial cult but constitute a *basileia*; nor do they officiate in the Temple serving as intermediaries between the faithful and God. In contrast, they directly serve God, idiomatically as a royal priesthood (βασιλείον ἱεράτευμα), with Christ as the agency.<sup>518</sup> Thus, early in John's account of his revelation, he introduces the issue of priestly authority based on the changing roles and functions of the priesthood, derived from the worthiness of Jesus both as the slain Lamb and the Messiah through whom redemption is achieved. As a consequence, the notion of a once-for-all sacrifice removes the role of the priest as an intermediary between God and humankind.

John's notion of the authority vested in Jesus is expressed early in his text when he gives greetings to the seven churches from Jesus as the Christ, 'the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth' (1:5). That Jesus' status includes being portrayed as the 'ruler of the kings of the earth' is in keeping with the tradition of associating religious titles with earthly political titles, a pattern which conforms to descriptive perceptions of religion in the ancient Mediterranean.<sup>519</sup> By employing the term 'ruler of the kings of the earth', in the context of the authority and power associated with earthly kingships, John establishes early in his *Apocalypse* the concept of messianic authority which he reinforces in 5:9-10, 2:26 and 20:6. The four passages underpin a 'new' concept of priestly authority, one which moves from the worthiness of the slain Lamb to Jesus as the Messiah and to a priestly *basileia* in which the redeemed are priests

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<sup>518</sup> Expressed otherwise, John's portrayal of the priesthood is one in which the redeemed are now priests and the traditional intermediary role of priests no longer exists. Such a transformed priesthood constitutes a *basileia*, one comprising the *priestly* people of God. The 'basileic priesthood' is discussed in more detail at the close of this chapter.

<sup>519</sup> Malina, *Genre and Message of Revelation*, 262-3

serving God through the sharing of the authority vested in Jesus Christ. The Lamb symbolises the love of Christ for humanity whom he frees from sin by his blood (1:5). In addition to such redemption, however, the same verse depicts the faithful as not only redeemed but also as priests serving God.

That John portrays the redeemed to be a *basileia* of priests serving God (1:5b-6) does not appear to be of theological significance to all scholars. For example, James Resseguie interprets Rev. 1:5b-6 as praise to Jesus for his redeeming work and that the result of liberation from sin ‘is that Christ has established a counter kingdom - a kingdom opposed to the influence of the dragon and the beast, the Pharaohs of this narrative’.<sup>520</sup> Resseguie identifies Rev. 1:6 as echoing Exodus 19:6, ‘a priestly kingdom and a holy nation’, which although a widely held view, is one which does not distinguish between ‘a priestly kingdom’ and ‘a kingdom, priests serving God’ (βασιλείαν, ἱερεῖς τῷ θεῷ).<sup>521</sup> Resseguie continues: ‘The plot of Revelation is the story of how the Lamb leads his people out of slavery and exile into the new promised land, the new Jerusalem’.<sup>522</sup> It is, however, an interpretation which does not appear to do justice to John’s specific reference to the redeemed becoming priests serving God who, as will be noted in the discussion of

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<sup>520</sup> Resseguie, *Revelation of John*, 67. Resseguie repeats his view that the kingdom of God ‘is the counter kingdom to the empire of the beast and Babylon in this story’ on page 73 but again makes no reference to the significance of John’s reference to the kingdom as priests serving God.

<sup>521</sup> Although the Hebrew construct may be translated as a ‘kingdom of priests’, in an unpointed text it could be read as ‘kingdom, priests’. Although the LXX may be translated as ‘royal priesthood’, as indicated previously, to the extent that ‘royal’ is associated with the term ‘reign’, John’s focus is on the priestly rather than royal sense of *basileuein*.

<sup>522</sup> Ibid., 68. That Resseguie does not discuss John’s depiction of the priesthood is not intended as a disparaging comment but rather as an example of the lack of priority scholars have generally applied to John’s references to priests and the priesthood. It is recognised that the complexity of John’s *Apocalypse* precludes an author from interpreting every nuance of John’s narrative.

5:9-10; 2:26 and 20:6 share in the authority of Christ's earthly and priestly reign.

Resseguie's use of the term 'counter kingdom' brings to mind the context in which John's *Apocalypse* is set, one of Roman imperial rule in which John would have been conscious of another, non-Judaic, priesthood. Religious ceremonies held in major cities or provincial assemblies in honour of the emperor included the services of an officiating priest. Festivals held to celebrate milestones in the lives of emperors as well as several annual 'imperial days' involving processions and animal sacrifices also involved priests, including provincial high priests.<sup>523</sup> In writing to the seven churches John would have been aware of the followers of Jesus aware of, if not participating in, such events and witnessing the role of priests serving the emperor. His term 'priests serving God' in the context of a 'new' kingdom in which Christ reigns on earth with priestly authority, in contrast to the emperor ruling in his Roman 'kingdom', may have been predicated on his immediate concerns with Roman priestly influence as much, if not more, than the priestly role in Judaic tradition. Traditionally a priest would have been recognised as a religious specialist with an elevated level of religious authority, authorised to officiate at religious ceremonies, including the sacrifice of animals, and serving as an intermediary between a community and YHWH. However, such qualifications and characteristics are not reflected in John's use of the word 'priests' in 1:6; nor in the two other instances he uses the term (5:10; 20:6). Far from being acknowledged as religious specialists, the priests in 1:6 and 5:10 are portrayed by John as all those believers in Jesus who have been 'ransomed' by his death and in the case of 20:6, who have participated in the first resurrection. They have all been redeemed and serve as priests on earth, thus constituting a 'universal' priesthood

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<sup>523</sup> Thompson, *Revelation*, 26-27.

and, with the inclusion of 2:26, sharing authority, with Christ, over the nations.<sup>524</sup>

### **Rev. 2:26-28**

The second text in John's *Apocalypse* suggestive of divergence in priestly function is when John, writing to the church in Thyatira, states that those who overcome Satan's evil and continue to do the works of Jesus 'to the end' will be given 'authority over the nations; to rule them with an iron rod, as when the clay pots are shattered - even as I also received authority from my Father' (2:26 - 28a).<sup>525</sup> Of the secondary sources consulted in reviewing John's notions of the priesthood, although the majority of which contain a subject index, very few list 'priests' or 'priesthood'. Of those which include either term, an even smaller proportion includes discussion of 2:26 or 2:26-29. Possible explanations are that the passages do not specifically refer to priests or the priesthood, or that scholars do not regard the priesthood in John's *Apocalypse*, least of all 2:26, as pertinent to his major theological foci. This discussion, however, seeks to reinforce the supposition that John's *Apocalypse* does address new notions of the priesthood and that 2:26-27 is relevant to the views he expresses in 1:5-6; 5:9-10; 20:6; and 22:3-5.

Although the text does not refer explicitly to the priesthood, one may conclude that as the faithful will also receive authority from God to exercise religious jurisdiction 'over the nations' (2:26b), the concept of a priesthood of all faithful believers is introduced. Such a priesthood, which shares the authority of Christ, is a concept appears to be well

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<sup>524</sup> See Aune, *Revelation I-5*, 48-49.

<sup>525</sup> Although Rev. 2:26-28 does not specifically use the term 'priesthood', the expression 'those who do the work of Jesus' will share authority as Jesus has authority from his Father, implies a priestly role. This notion is discussed in more detail shortly.

removed from the traditional Temple-centred, intermediary and cultic, priestly function.<sup>526</sup> To the church in Thyatira, John writes that to those who conquer (evil), Christ will give ‘the morning star’ (2:28). The term ‘morning star’ has been variously interpreted. For example, from 22:16 it may be concluded that the morning star is Christ himself. From other sources the terms ‘star’ and ‘morning star’ connote an association with priestly and messianic factors.<sup>527</sup> John’s use of the term ‘authority over the nations’ is in keeping with earlier mid-first-century Jewish writing, for example, the *Psalms of Solomon* in which the royal messiah, the ‘son of David’ will rule (exercise authority) over Israel, smash the arrogance of sinners, and destroy unlawful nations with the word of his mouth (*Pss. Sol.* 17:21-24). Although authoritarian images of sinners being smashed like the potter’s jar and shattered with an iron rod suggest a determined, ruthless expression of authority, the author proceeds to qualify messianic authority: the Messiah ‘will *gather* a holy people whom he will *lead* in righteousness ...’. He shall know the holy ‘are all children of God and will distribute land to them’ (*Pss. Sol.* 17:23-24, 27-28). In contrasting images of both stern and compassionate authority, the author includes priestly references to the royal messiah as ‘*compassionate* to all the nations who are reverent before him ... *wise* in the counsel of *understanding* with strength and righteousness’ (17:34b, 37b), *shepherding* the Lord’s flock’ not letting ‘any of them stumble in their pasture’, and *leading* them all in holiness (17:40b-41).<sup>528</sup> From *Pss. Sol.* 17:21-43 authority is depicted as both stern and

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<sup>526</sup> John’s notion of a priesthood of all believers, introduced in Rev.2:26b, suggests authority manifested in priestly rather than royal or judicial terms, thus indicating a shift from the traditional authority vested in royal or judicial contexts.

<sup>527</sup> Examples include the *Testament of Judah* 24 in which a ‘Star from Jacob’ shall arise (cf. Num. 24:17) and the *Testament of Levi* 18:2-3, 9 which depicts the Lord raising up a new priest whose ‘star shall rise in heaven like a king’ and in whose ‘priesthood sin shall cease’; cf. 4 Macc. 17:5.

<sup>528</sup> The use of italics is to support the contention that the *Psalms of Solomon* also express *priestly* qualities and functions. As the notion of ‘shepherd’ seems to be the guiding metaphor of the *Psalms of Solomon*, a distinction needs to be made between positive and negative connotations. For instance, the term ‘shepherd’

forceful as well as priestly and compassionate, an interpretation which is not dissimilar to the portrayal of authority in John's *Apocalypse* (2:26-28). In his description of messianic and priestly authority, particularly in respect of 'authority over the nations' and images of 'a rod of iron' and the destruction of 'the potter's vessel', it is considered possible that given the use of the same images (iron rod, potter's vessel), John may have been influenced by Psalm 2:7-9.<sup>529</sup> The symbolism of an iron rod and the smashing of clay pots raises the political context in which John is writing, one which presents a contrast between the reality of Roman rule and the promise of God involving the sharing of Christ's priestly authority. Other questions arise from John's symbolism; for example, did John replicate a literary formula of the psalmist to undergird his portrayal of messianism and its implications for the followers of Jesus, or, are there linguistic configurations at play, a reinterpretation of which may contribute to the view that John is seeking to depict a 'new' priesthood?

The author of the *Sibylline Oracles*, Book 8, although writing after the *Apocalypse of John*, may help to elucidate the term 'rod of iron' which appears to be out of keeping with the notion of a priestly reign, by the use of the term 'an iron shepherd's rod', the use of which will ensure that the will of the royal Messiah will prevail on earth. Although the author's phrase in English, 'iron shepherd's rod' is clearly clumsy in that 'iron' could be taken to refer to either 'shepherd' or 'rod', the intended meaning is clear: it is an iron rod

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was traditionally used of the leaders of Israel, frequently in a negative sense of bad or immoral 'shepherding'. In contrast, as indicated in the above discussion, the author of the *Psalms of Solomon* also uses the term in a priestly connotation, not dissimilar to that of John's *Apocalypse*.

<sup>529</sup> Although Psalm 2 is generally considered to be a royal rather than priestly psalm, the use of the same images by John as well as both the psalmist and John referring messianically to 'Zion, [the Lord's] holy hill' (Ps. 2:6; Rev. 14:1) and the contrasting concepts of 'kingdom' and 'priestly authority' justify a comparative assessment.



belonging to a shepherd. The inclusion of the word ‘shepherd’ qualifies the object ‘iron rod’ in that a shepherd does not use a rod for destructive purposes; rather, the shepherd uses a rod to guide his flock that it remains safe and secure within the shepherd’s care. Although it is possible that, as Book Eight of the *Sibylline Oracles* was written after the *Apocalypse of John*, the author may have interpolated a Christian sense of ‘iron rod’ by inserting the word ‘shepherd’, it is also possible that the term ‘iron rod’ may be equated with a shepherd’s staff, thus softening its image’s impact. Further, the translation of the terms ‘iron rod’ and ‘rod of iron’ does not meet with universal agreement: for some the word ‘rod’ is translated as ‘sceptre’ to which is attached notions of respect, office, and authority. David Aune notes that the terms ‘sceptre, shepherd’s crook’ and ‘staff of a shepherd’ are closely related, that for some the crook was regarded as a symbol of royalty, and that the metaphor of shepherd as applied to God (Ps. 23:1; 80:1) has positive meaning, as does God’s possession of a shepherd’s rod (Ps.23: 4b) and shepherd’s staff (Micah.7:14).<sup>530</sup> In any event, it may be argued that the nature of authority expressed as ‘authority over the nations’ (2:26) is to be interpreted in the context of shared priestly authority based on the inter-related duality of two promises. First, those who conquer and do the works of Christ will share in the authority of Christ, as Christ received authority from the Father. Second, as well as being granted the morning star, those who conquer will share in the reign of Christ.<sup>531</sup> From such a perspective, the religious authority

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<sup>530</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 196, 210

<sup>531</sup> As the term ‘reign’ appears seven times in the *Apocalypse of John* (5:10; 11:15, 17; 19:6; 20:4, 6; 22:5) and as four of the references are discussed in this chapter as having a ‘priestly’ connotation, some clarification is warranted concerning the interpretation of ‘reign’ in a priestly rather than royal context. It would appear that in John’s first reference to reign (5:10) he draws on the Judaic tradition of the reign/rule of kings in Israel and Judah as well as the lesser tradition associated with the term, that of the ‘reign’ of God (for example, Exod.15:18). He may also allude to the kingdom, kingship, dominion and glory expressed in Dan.7:14, 18 and the notion of ‘reign’ used in the sense of participation of the redeemed in the reign of God.

granted by God no longer rests with temple-centred priests, but with all who conquer evil, follow Jesus, and continue to do God's work 'to the end'. Such a supposition, however, requires further analysis in terms of the distinction between prophetic and priestly traditions within Judaism, as well as the differentiation between Judaic and Christian views of priests and the priesthood, particularly in view of the significance of metaphorical rather than literal readings of texts concerning the priesthood.

Concerned with the status of and challenges to the church in Thyatira, John seeks to counter the influence of 'that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet' and who is perceived as 'teaching and beguiling' the followers of Jesus 'to practise fornication and to eat food sacrificed to idols' (2:20).<sup>532</sup> The influence of Jezebel and her followers prompts John to assure the followers of Jesus that if they resist the 'deep things of Satan' (2:24), that is, if they conquer such evil and continue to do the works of Jesus to the end (2:26a),

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According to Aune, such an apocalyptic theme emphasises the acquisition of power by the powerless expressed in Dan 7:18, 27 (cf. 1QM 12:15; Matt. 19:28); *Rev. 1-5*, 362. *Rev. 22:3-5* provides an example: the servants of the Lamb will reign forever and ever in the new Jerusalem. Although John may well have drawn on Judaic tradition in respect of the term 'reign', his use is more innovative than the traditional association of the term with earthly kings which connotes a sense of 'royal' rather than 'priestly'. For instance, John associates the term 'reign' to a priestly rather than royal function on four occasions: 'priests' serving God and reigning on earth (5:10), the resurrection of the martyrs who 'reigned with Christ a thousand years' (20:4), 'who will be priests of God and of Christ and [who] will reign with him a thousand years' (20:6), and as servants of the Lamb reigning forever (with Christ) in the new Jerusalem (22:5). In the other three texts, John deploys the term 'reign' in the context of 'divine' rather than 'kingly' reign (11:15, 17; 19:6). The impact of the seven passages, alluding to priestly and divine rather than royal functions, if viewed retrospectively over two thousand years may not appear to have immediate significance to the priesthood of Judaic tradition. However, in the context of the first century they may also be regarded as innovative and, as argued in this chapter, of significant consequence to John's notions of a 'new' priesthood.

<sup>532</sup> John's concern with the duel between religious and prophetic authority is also expressed in *Rev. 2:14*: John feels his authority is challenged by some in the church at Pergamum 'who hold to the teaching of Balaam' and in 2:15 some 'hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans'.

holding fast until Jesus returns, they will share in the expected rule of Christ. Thus John presents a priestly alternative to those who resist being beguiled by Jezebel and her teachings, who conquer temptation and remain faithful to Jesus, sharing with his authority as Jesus himself received authority from the Father (2:28).<sup>533</sup> As well as identifying the threat of Jezebel and her teaching to the followers of Jesus, depicting it as being ‘of Satan’, Brian Blount adds a second dimension to John’s use of the phrase ‘authority over the nations’, suggesting it may relate to John’s intention to distinguish between the authority vested in Roman imperial rule and the authority of those who conquer sin to reign as priests with Christ, sharing in the Christ’s priestly authority.<sup>534</sup> Such a view is in keeping with a dual perception of John’s use of the word ‘authority’ in that it may be interpreted in both human and divine dimensions. For example, it is possible that John’s use of the word is intended to contrast with Judaic tradition in his contemporary context of Roman imperial rule as well as, *for the first time*, denoting a concept of *shared* authority, thus combining human and divine authority through the medium of the Lamb as a priestly Messiah.<sup>535</sup>

The notion of followers of Jesus conquering evil and overcoming the wiles of Satan is not unique to John’s *Apocalypse*. In the Fourth Gospel Jesus appears to encourage his

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<sup>533</sup> See Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment*, 107. Although Schüssler Fiorenza does not refer to the priesthood in her brief reference to 2:26, she does depict the significance of the threat of Jezebel and her influence on the members of the church in Thyatira. She repeats her opinion on page 145.

<sup>534</sup> See Brian K. Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, 2009, 64-65.

<sup>535</sup> For a brief discussion on ‘contests of authority’ in John’s *Apocalypse*, see Jean-Pierre Ruiz, ‘Hearing and Seeing But Not Saying’, *The Reality of Apocalypse: Rhetoric and Politics in the Book of Revelation*, ed. David L. Barr, SBL, Atlanta, 2006, 107-109.

disciples by telling them he has conquered the world (John 16:33), and in the First Letter of John the author also states that believers in Jesus as the Son of God and those born of God conquer the world (1 John 5:45). In addition to John's reference to those who conquer in 2:26, he includes a range of allusions to those who conquer and overcome evil.<sup>536</sup> However, Rev. 2:26 specifically accords 'authority over the nations' to those who conquer.<sup>537</sup> By introducing the notion of the faithful followers of Jesus having 'authority over the nations', John portrays authority in a functional sense: 'to rule them with an iron rod, as when clay pots are shattered' (2:27), as well as in a comparative context: 'even as I also received authority from my Father' (2:28a). Another dimension of 'authority', benevolent rather than wrathful, is conveyed by John in 7:17 (cf. 6:16): authority is expressed as the Lamb, shepherd of the multitudes, 'guiding them to the springs of the water of life'. Both the functional and the comparative senses of 'authority' deserve examination if the passage 2:26-28a is to be considered significant in relation to John's notions of priesthood in 1:5-6; 5:9-10; and 20:6. As well, his reference to the followers of Jesus ruling the nations 'with an iron rod, as when clay pots are shattered' (2:27), requires interpretation if the text is to be seen as relevant to John's portrayal of a 'new' priesthood. John's use of the word 'authority' in the phrase 'authority over the nations' applies to those who conquer evil and seek to fulfil the will of Christ. However, such authority is qualified: it is in keeping with the authority Jesus Christ received from the Father (2:28a; cf. 1:5). Nonetheless, it may well have been surprising to late first-century followers of Jesus to learn from John that those who conquer evil and continue to do the works of Jesus 'to the end' are promised a share in the Messiah's own mandate and authority, not a

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<sup>536</sup> For example, Rev. 2:7, 11, 17; 3:5, 12, 21.

<sup>537</sup> The reference to 'authority over the nations' may be regarded as an echo of Rev. 1:5, 'ruler of the kings of the earth', thus reinforcing John's concept of priestly 'authority'.

worldly authority but one based on that of the Lamb, a sacrificial authority.<sup>538</sup>

### **Rev. 5:9-10**

The third text dealing with John's concept of the priesthood (5:9-10) is liturgical in character, expressed as a 'new song', a hymn of praise by the living creatures and the elders to the worthiness of the Lamb who is revealed as the Messiah. John's account of this vision is framed by his vision-narrative phrase 'then I saw' (καὶ εἶδον) (5:1; 6:1).<sup>539</sup> Revelation 5:9-10 follows John's introduction of the Lamb, the central figure of the chapter, who symbolises the conquering Christ, the Lion of the tribe of Judah and the root of David (5:5). Those portrayed by John as constituting a *basileia* and becoming priests serving God (5:10) are specifically linked to the Lamb through whose death they were ransomed for God (5:9). John's notion of the redeemed constituting a 'new' priesthood is inextricably linked to his introduction of the Lamb in 5:5-6 and to the redemption offered by the Lamb's slaughter ransoming all people for God (5:9). Some scholars depict 'redemption' as the key theological element in Rev. 5:9-10 to the exclusion of a new *basileia* and the redeemed as 'new' priests serving God, thus focussing more attention on 5:9 than 5:10.<sup>540</sup> However, interpreted as a unit, 5:9-10 reveals that John portrays redemption as a part of priesthood through the central role he accords the Lamb.<sup>541</sup> The 'new song' announced by John at the beginning of 5:9-10 is *one* song which embraces and links as a unit his related concept of redemption *and* basileiac priesthood. The metaphorical Lamb is depicted with dual functions, each component related to his vision of

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<sup>538</sup> Boxall, *Revelation of St. John*, 66.

<sup>539</sup> See Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 329.

<sup>540</sup> For example, Boxall, *Revelation of St. John*, 100-101.

<sup>541</sup> It may also be argued that John (also) portrays the priesthood as an aspect of redemption.

a *basileia* of priests serving God. First, the Lamb is initially introduced as the ‘Lion of the tribe of Judah’ and ‘the root of David’ (5:5), thus establishing his status as a messianic conqueror. Second, the Lamb as a symbol for Jesus is presented as if it had been slaughtered, portraying a redemptive image of a crucified Messiah (5:6). Thus the conquest of the Lamb, indicating his worthiness through having been slain, results in the means of redemption for all people on earth (5:9).<sup>542</sup> Such a duality of function in 5:5-6 presages John’s ‘new song’ of the living creatures and elders in which the death of Jesus ransomed (ἀγοράζειν, literally, to purchase)<sup>543</sup> all his faithful followers to be priests (with Christ) in serving God in an earthly kingdom (5:9-10).

In contrast with the ‘literal priests’ of Judaic tradition, John introduces a universal concept of priesthood involving ‘saints from every tribe and language and people and nation’ (5:9b) as a kingdom of priests serving God.<sup>544</sup> Such a depiction of priesthood may be regarded as a metaphorical treatment of the priesthood, one which introduces images far removed from Judaic priestly culture but which nonetheless involves some

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<sup>542</sup> See Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 352, 360. Given the Judaic tradition of the priesthood comprising a privileged male elite, it is likely John’s ‘universal’ notion of priesthood would have been regarded as an implicit challenge to the political authority of Roman rule; Boxall, *Revelation of St. John*, 34.

<sup>543</sup> Based on the terminology of the slave-market, the figurative meaning is to have someone freed by paying a price. John’s terms ‘slaughtered’, ‘blood’, and ‘ransomed’ also appear in 1 Peter 1:18-19 in which the metaphor of ‘Lamb’ is also used for Christ; see Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 361.

<sup>544</sup> John’s division of humanity into four categories (tribes, languages, peoples and nations) is intended to depict all the earth’s peoples and conforms to John’s use of the number ‘four’ to portray all elements of creation; for example, the earth’s four corners and four winds (7:10), the four time-periods of hour, day, month, year (9:15), and the earthly phenomena of thunder, rumblings, lightning and earthquake (8:5). See Resseguie, *Revelation of John*, 29, 121, 198. It is also possible John alludes to Dan. 7:14b which refers to ‘all peoples, nations, languages’.

aspects of the priestly Temple cult.<sup>545</sup> A specific contrast relating to sacrifice is introduced by John: the priestly role in the cultic sacrifice of animals is replaced by the sacrifice of Jesus. John depicts Jesus as the Lamb, deemed worthy to open the seals of the scroll (5:6-10) through having been slaughtered (5:9c), the consequence of which is that people are ransomed for God (5:9c-10). Through the death of Jesus, reflected in the symbolic slain Lamb of God, through whose blood<sup>546</sup> the faithful are redeemed, a metaphorical kingdom of priests serving God is constituted (5:9-10). In terms of John's notion of priesthood, it is significant that his portrayal of redemption through the blood of the slaughtered Lamb in 5:9 is specifically linked, in 5:10 to the redeemed, constituting a kingdom of priests serving God. That John's depiction of 'priesthood' may be regarded as metaphorical, in contrast to the literalness of the Judaic priesthood, does not detract from the claim that his treatment of the priesthood indicates divergence in both literary and theological terms.

The concept, 'the priesthood of all believers', is reinforced by John in chapter five when he describes the opening of the scroll, held 'in the right hand of the one seated on the throne' (5:1), by the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, signified by the sacrificial Lamb, who was declared by the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders to be 'worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals' (5:5). Because he was 'slaughtered and by [his] blood [he] ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation', they became a kingdom of priests serving God and reigning on earth (5:9-10). John's depiction of the Lion and the Lamb reflects a symbolic contrast between power and

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<sup>545</sup> For example, Rev. 1:13 may be interpreted as Christ dressed as a high priest.

<sup>546</sup> The word αἷμα, translated as 'blood', may be taken by figurative extension to mean 'death'; Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 325.

worthiness portrayed on the one hand by the powerful ‘Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David’ who can open the scroll and its seven seals because he has *conquered* (5:5) and, on the other hand, the worthiness of a slain Lamb whose blood is deemed to ransom people of all ethnicities and nations, and who can take the scroll and open its seals because of his *worthiness*. Notwithstanding such a contrast, however, the Lion and the Lamb appear to be the same entity, deployed by John to bring together the exodus tradition of the freedom of Israel from Egyptian bondage and the redemption from sin and evil made possible through the blood of the slain Lamb.<sup>547</sup> John portrays the Lion of Judah as also the triumphant Messiah and as the Lamb he is both slain and victorious, sharing God’s Throne.<sup>548</sup>

Through Jesus’ death, ‘the slaughter of the Lamb ransomed for God’, the priesthood is extended to ‘every tribe and language and people and nation’, constituting a kingdom (rather than Temple) and a priesthood of a universal character serving God (5:9-10).<sup>549</sup> The notion of a ‘universal character’ is predicated on John’s use of the polysyndetic formula, ‘tribe, language, people and nation’ which John uses elsewhere (7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15), albeit with a variety in the sequence of the groups.<sup>550</sup> In a sense, such a concept of priesthood serves as a reversal of the cult: in lieu of a priesthood, a

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<sup>547</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, 21. Schüssler Fiorenza links the election of Israel arising from the Exodus as the nation of YHWH with the redemption of the Lamb’s followers who constitute a ‘new’ priestly *basileia* (page 61).

<sup>548</sup> For a discussion on the juxtaposition between the Lion and the Lamb in Rev. 5 see Rebecca Skaggs and Thomas Doyle, ‘Lion/Lamb in Revelation’, *Currents in Biblical Research* 7 (2009), 362-375.

<sup>549</sup> John’s reference to the messiahship of the Lamb and the kingdom of priests serving God and reigning on earth (5:9-10) may be an allusion to Dan. 7:14, 18, 27; cf. 4 *Ezra* 3:7 in which the descendants of Adam are described as ‘nations, tribes, peoples and clans’.

<sup>550</sup> See Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 362 who also views such lists as indicative of universality.



function of which is to conduct sacrifice, John's 'universal' notion is one of a priesthood of voluntary sacrifice and service. For some, however, Rev. 5:9-10 is essentially an echo of Exodus 19:6, a 'new exodus' from the bondage of sin and liberation 'from the oppression of the new Pharaoh', depicted as Satan and 'the beasts from the sea and land (Rev. 12-13)'.<sup>551</sup> Such an interpretation, which does not acknowledge John's 'theological' perception of a 'new' priesthood conveyed in 1:5-6, 2:26; 5:9-10 and 20:4-6, appears to constitute a general pattern in modern scholarship, an opinion arrived at after reviewing a broad range of secondary sources. There are, however, exceptions.<sup>552</sup>

Although in his *Commentary* G.B. Caird takes Rev. 5:7-9 rather than 5:9-10 as a unit, he does note the significance of 5:10 to John's depiction of a 'new' priesthood.<sup>553</sup> His grouping of 5:7-9 is based on his perceived association between the Lamb receiving the scroll, the heavenly choir singing the 'new song' (cf. Ps. 98:1), and the 'determinative symbolism' of the new 'covenant' (cf. Ps. 98), based on the worthiness of the 'slain' Lamb to open the scroll's seals due to the Lamb's blood ransoming for God all redeemed peoples.<sup>554</sup> As Caird notes on 5:10, by ransoming people for God Christ makes them 'a royal house of priests in God's service', thereby reinforcing John's notion in Rev. 1:5-6 of a priestly *basileia* of the redeemed serving God. Thus, a different grouping of verses does not detract from the significance of Rev. 5:9-10, building on 1:5-6, to strengthen John's

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<sup>551</sup> Resseguie, *Revelation of John*, 121

<sup>552</sup> Scholars who acknowledge John's portrayal of a 'new' priesthood include Brian K. Blount, G.B. Caird, and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza.

<sup>553</sup> Caird, *Commentary*, 76-77. Caird's grouping of Rev. 5:7-9 is based on his association between the Lamb receiving the scroll, the heavenly choir singing the 'new song' and the 'determinative symbolism' of the 'new covenant' based on the worthiness of the slain Lamb to open the scroll's seals due to the Lamb's blood ransoming for God all redeemed peoples (page 76).

<sup>554</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

vision of a ‘new’ priesthood, one which from the phrase βασιλείαν, ἱερεῖς τῷ θεῷ may be construed as two states of being, a kingdom *and* a priesthood. Caird’s phrase, ‘determinative symbolism’, is helpful in emphasising that those ransomed for God are made to be a kingdom who will reign *on earth* (rather than in heaven), serving God ‘with a sovereignty and priesthood derived from Christ as his was derived from God’.<sup>555</sup>

Of significance to this thesis is Caird’s elucidation of two relevant aspects of the text which support the suppositions of the authority of the ‘new’ priesthood and John’s linking of the priestly Lamb and Messiah to the concept of a redeemed, universal and *earthly* priesthood. The first is his depiction of the kingly and priestly qualities of the redeemed being inextricably associated with the Lamb, expressing qualities which are of privileged, priestly functions which only exist in relation to their derivative nature from the priesthood of Christ. Second, Caird notes that the Messiah exercises his priestly messianism and his priesthood, not in heaven, but on earth with saints (priests) from all tribes, languages, peoples and nations, thus depicting the concept of a continuing redemptive process involving a *basileaic* human priesthood serving God’s purposes.<sup>556</sup> The concept of a *continuing* priesthood reigning on earth expressed in Rev. 5:10 is reinforced by John in 22:5 when he depicts the martyrs reigning a thousand years on earth with Christ as well as in the new Jerusalem when the redeemed will reign, with God as their light, forever.

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<sup>555</sup> Ibid., 77. The notion that the priests ‘will reign on earth’ with the Christ who shares the Throne with God may be drawn from Dan. 7:18, 27 in which God’s people will receive (reign in) the kingdom forever, and will exercise authority in their service of the Most High; see Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 362.

<sup>556</sup> Ibid., 77.

One of the characteristics of the kingdom of priests serving God (5:10) is that it is a kingdom under the authority of the Lamb who is found worthy to open the seals of the scroll (5:9a). The particular ‘worthiness’ of the Lamb depicted by John in 5:9 is foreshadowed by John in 1:5 wherein Jesus is referred to specifically as Jesus Christ (thus the Messiah) who is the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead (thus resurrected) and ‘the ruler of the kings of the earth’. That Jesus is intended to reign physically on earth is reinforced by John in 1:7 which describes Jesus ‘coming with the clouds’ and seen by ‘every eye’. Having been slaughtered and by his blood ransoming the saints from all peoples for God, the Lamb is depicted as pre-eminent and most-worthy, qualities which are recognised by the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders acknowledging such religious authority by singing the third song in John’s *Apocalypse*. John’s emphasis on the *worthiness* of the Lamb has some significance in that hitherto the quality of divine worthiness has been the property of God. In John’s first vision of heaven and the Throne the living creatures and the elders sing of the *worthiness* of God to receive ‘glory and honour and power’ (4:11). John concludes chapter four with such a sentiment, declaring in the following chapter that the Lamb shares such worthiness (5:9), thus elevating the Lamb to share the status of divine worthiness with God.

The saints (priests) ransomed for God from all ethnicities and corners of the earth are constituted as a *basileia* not in their own right or on their own status, but as a kingdom in which their reign is shared with the authority of the most worthy and pre-eminent Lamb, the Christ as Messiah. Such a priestly *basileia* contrasts with Judaic priestly tradition in which priests are appointed ‘to voice the people’s prayer, offer temple sacrifices, and [who] are accorded a rank of second place to kings’, whose primary earthly status ‘reached

out to the heights bordering on heaven'.<sup>557</sup>

### **Rev. 20:4-6**

The fourth reference to priests in John's *Apocalypse* appears in chapter twenty, indicating that those who had been martyred for their 'testimony to Jesus and for the word of God' (20:4) will be 'blessed and holy' and 'will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign (βασιλεύσουσιν) with him a thousand years' in God's new *basileia* (20:6).<sup>558</sup> Many modern scholars have opted to discuss 20:4-6 as a unit rather than the single verse 20:6, focussing on the significance of the 'Millenium' and issues related to the 'first resurrection' and the 'second death'.<sup>559</sup> The priority attaching to the following discussion, however, is to explore John's reference to 'priests' in 20:6 in respect to his notions of the priesthood and the changing nature of religious authority involving the empowerment of the redeemed to serve God as priests as well as his concept of the 'priestly' Messiah and issues of redemption. Notwithstanding such a focus, one cannot overlook issues associated with interpretations of John's reference to the 'Millennium'. That the passage 20:4-6 is controversial is borne out by the variety of interpretations which have been applied to it.<sup>560</sup> For example, the term 'a thousand years' may be taken literally as a period of reign lasting one thousand years; as an indeterminate but lengthy period of time in which the martyrs would come to life and reign terrestrially with Christ;

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<sup>557</sup> See Malina's discussion on priestly status, drawn from Manilius, *Astronomica*, in *Genre and Message of Revelation*, 40.

<sup>558</sup> The concept of *basileia* is discussed at the close of this chapter.

<sup>559</sup> For example, Boxall, *The Revelation of St. John*, 281-85. It would appear that there has been a greater focus on the perceived significance of the 'Millenium' of Rev. 20:4-6 than on John's innovative and theological notions of priesthood which he also constructs in chapters 1, 2, 5 and 22.

<sup>560</sup> For a discussion of issues associated with the thousand-year kingdom and the range of views extending over centuries see Roloff, *Revelation*, 223-226.

or, as an allegorical description of the period between martyrdom and resurrection or death in general and resurrection.<sup>561</sup>

Although there is debate as to whether John's reference to the 'priests of God and of Christ' who 'will reign with him a thousand years' (20:6) constitutes a heavenly priesthood, their reign through successive generations may not be unlike the priests serving in the *basileia* (1:6) and those, also a *basileia*, serving God and reigning on earth (5:10). John's use of the future tense in 20:6 concerning the priests and their reign is future-oriented and, unlike 1:5-6 and 5:9-10, expresses an eschatological dimension. His vision in 20:6, is of the 'second' death. The first resurrection is of the martyrs who, blessed and holy, are before the Throne dressed in white, serving God (cf. 3:5; 6:9) and worshipping him day and night (7:15) and for whom the Lamb will be their shepherd, guiding them 'to the springs of the water of life' (7:17). John emphasises that for the martyrs, the second death holds no power: they will be 'priests of God and of Christ' and will reign with Christ 'a thousand years' (20:6). In his letter to the church in Ephesus, John has already indicated that 'whoever conquers will not be harmed by the second death' (2:11).

John again refers to the redeemed martyrs becoming priests of God and of Christ who are to reign with Christ one thousand years, thus reinforcing his earlier promise that the multitudes of the redeemed will be priests serving God and Christ (1:6; 5:10). That 20:6 refers specifically to the martyrs does not detract from John's view that *all* the

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<sup>561</sup> For various interpretations of the term 'a thousand years' see, for example, Boxall, *Revelation of St. John*, 281; Kovacs and Rowland, *Revelation*, 201-14; Arthur William Wainwright, *Mysterious Apocalypse: Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1993, 21-103.

redeemed will enjoy a priesthood with Christ, ensuring that his redemptive and regal activities are ‘mediated and diffused throughout the world’ bringing all the peoples of all nations to God.<sup>562</sup> Such an interpretation, however, is not held by all with some scholars deciding that the blessed and holy who will be priests of God and of Christ (20:6) are the resurrected martyrs, those ‘who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus’. James Resseguie is of such an opinion, stating that John’s literary style provides for only the resurrected martyrs.<sup>563</sup> It may be argued, however, that although 20:6 refers to the martyrs in a literal sense, John intends that the resurrected martyrs be regarded as representative of all faithful followers of Christ, a view which, given his other texts concerning the priesthood (1:5-6; 5:9-10), seems reasonable.<sup>564</sup>

As John’s reference to ‘a thousand years’ in 20:6 does not appear in the other priesthood-related texts, a brief discussion is warranted concerning his intended meaning. Several interpretations of ‘a thousand years’ may be posited. For example, the term may be interpreted simply as a symbolic period of time, representing a total and complete period based on the cube of ten (10 x 10 x 10).<sup>565</sup> More likely, however, in the context of the priesthood, is that John may have intended to emphasise that the role of the ‘new’ priesthood serving God, on earth, under the aegis of Christ is intended to continue for successive generations. Further, although a millenium will contain many generational deaths, Christ’s redemptive work will continue to be supported by new generations of

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<sup>562</sup> See Caird, *Commentary*, 255.

<sup>563</sup> Resseguie, *Revelation of John*, 246-47. Others who hold that John is referring only to the martyrs in 20:6 include Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1088; Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 106-8; Mitchell G. Reddish, *Revelation*, Smith & Helwys Publishing, Macon, Georgia, 2001, 383.

<sup>564</sup> See, for example, Osborne, *Revelation*, 705.

<sup>565</sup> Resseguie, *Revelation of John*, 244

priests serving God.<sup>566</sup> Within the passage 20:1-10, which depicts John's view of the Millennium, 20:6 is the only verse which specifically refers to the priesthood. In general, chapter 20 establishes a range of expectations about the millennial kingdom in which the redeemed will reign with Christ for a thousand years. Revelation 20:6 depicts, after the imprisonment of Satan (20:2-3), the undertaking of a priestly ministry with Christ by the redeemed. From a first-century perspective, one thousand years is likely to have been regarded as a very long period of time. John did not, however, intend the phrase to imply 'forever'.<sup>567</sup> More likely, John's focus on the Millennium is the period of Satan's imprisonment when the deaths of Christ and the martyrs are vindicated and earth is the setting for a 'new' priesthood, serving God, with Christ.<sup>568</sup> Such a perspective supports the notion of a new paradigm of priestly authority which, even if metaphorical, is nonetheless not Temple-related. Rather, it is directly associated with the authority of the resurrected Christ: one in which the second death is no longer a threat as the redeemed will enjoy priestly privileges in the saving realm of God and Christ the Lamb.<sup>569</sup>

For some, however, a thousand years does not necessarily indicate a long period of time. For example, Bruce Malina suggests that, based on 2 Peter 3:8, one thousand years is but a 'day' in the sight of the Lord.<sup>570</sup> Such an observation, however, does not appear to take account of two relevant factors. First, if John had not intended to imply a long period of time he is likely to have used a term such as 'a day' or 'days'. Second, in the

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<sup>566</sup> Caird, *Commentary*, 256.

<sup>567</sup> For other examples of interpretations of the term 'a thousand years' see Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 108; Stanley J. Grenz, *The Millennial Maze: Sorting Out Evangelical Opinions*, InterVarsity, Downers Grove. 1992; Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 363-71; Roloff, *Revelation*, 223-26.

<sup>568</sup> See John M. Court, *Revelation*, JSOT Press, Sheffield, 1994, 65-66.

<sup>569</sup> See Roloff, *Revelation*, 228.

<sup>570</sup> Bruce J. Malina, *On the Genre and Message of Revelation: Star Visions and Sky Journeys*, 57.

unit 20:4-6 the expression ‘a thousand years’ is used three times: the martyrs ‘reigned with Christ a thousand years’ (20:4); the rest of the dead only came to life after one thousand years (20:5); and, ‘those who share in the first resurrection ... will be priests of God and of Christ’ whose reign will extend over one thousand years (20:6). In his brief discussion of 20:4-6, Malina’s citation of 2 Peter 3:8 to indicate a thousand years is but a day in the sight of the Lord, does not conform with John’s threefold reference to ‘a thousand years’.

Further, specifically concerning 20:6, Malina uses the term ‘during this period’ to depict ‘a thousand years’ and states ‘those who witness to Jesus live and reign with him’ without reference to John’s specific statement that the resurrected will be ‘priests of God and of Christ’ who will ‘reign with him a thousand years’.<sup>571</sup>

The three-fold reference to ‘a thousand years’ in Rev. 20:1-10 does not occur elsewhere in John’s Apocalypse; nor are there other references to the ‘Millennium’ elsewhere in the New Testament. As John’s three references to the ‘Millennium’ occur in a text of over 400 verses and only within one passage, they do not appear to weigh heavily in relation to his overall narrative.<sup>572</sup> Such a view, however, is not universally shared and the range of interpretations given to John’s notion of ‘a thousand years’ suggests the controversial nature of the millennial concept remains unresolved in terms of issues of time and space.

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<sup>571</sup> Ibid. Malina’s interpretation of ‘a thousand years’ as a ‘day’ in the sight of the Lord, his citation of 2 Peter 3:8, and his statement: ‘During this period, those who witness to Jesus live and reign with him (20:4-6)’ without any reference to John’s description of the redeemed as ‘priests of God and of Christ’ are repeated *verbatim* on page 205. The exclusion of John’s specific reference to priests in Malina’s brief discussion of Rev. 20:4-6 provides an example of the view that John’s portrayal of a ‘new’ priesthood is not a subject of widespread interest by modern scholars. However, given that the sub-title of Malina’s book is *Star Visions and Sky Journeys*, a discussion of John’s concepts of priesthood may be an unreasonable expectation.

<sup>572</sup> See Boxall, *Revelation of St. John*, 281.



John may have been aware of much earlier Jewish depictions of a messianic kingdom on earth, one unconstrained by historical time. Such a kingdom could be expected to continue on earth indefinitely in keeping with the views of Isaiah, when the Lord ‘will assemble the outcasts of Israel and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth’ (Isa. 11:12). A messianic age is also depicted in the third vision of Ezra (*4 Ezra* 7:26-44), a text which may, however, have been written shortly after John’s *Apocalypse*. Unlike John’s references to ‘a thousand years’, Ezra portrays a key role of the Messiah over a period of four hundred years (7:28) which is presumably intended to convey a lengthy period of time. More specifically longer-term is Daniel’s vision of ‘one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven’, who was given ‘dominion, glory and kingship’, served by ‘all peoples, nations and languages’, and whose dominion is everlasting and whose kingship ‘shall never be destroyed’ (Dan. 7:13-14). That John may have been aware of earlier Jewish eschatological thinking concerning a ‘permanent’ messianic kingdom on earth, however, does not imply that John’s depiction of such a kingdom was based on a concept such as that of Daniel. John’s references to the reign of Christ include the redeemed martyrs (if not all the redeemed followers of Jesus) whom he designates *priests* of God and of Christ who will reign *with* Christ a thousand years (20:6). Reigning *with* Christ, as priests, is a significant extension of Daniel’s account in which all peoples will *serve* the ‘one like a human being whose dominion is everlasting’. In 1:6 John tells the seven churches that those ransomed from sin by the blood of Jesus Christ will also be a kingdom of priests serving God, sharing the authority of the priestly Messiah, thus adding a further redemptive dimension to Daniel’s notion of an earthly messianic kingdom.<sup>573</sup>

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<sup>573</sup> Some interpretations of Rev. 1:5-6; 5:9-10; 20:6 add 1 Peter 2:5. In the latter text the author exhorts

Those who are redeemed by the resurrected Christ (20:6) constitute a central element of John's depiction of the consummation of the divine plan for history expressed in 20:1-10, the central element of which is the establishment of the messianic kingdom, the *basileia*, in which the redeemed will be priests of God and of Christ. The blessedness and holiness of those who share in the first resurrection (20:6) contrast with John's portrayal of the 'second death' in 20:14 in which the unredeemed will be thrown into 'the lake of fire'. Those who are part of Christ's priestly reign will have no fear of their second death: they will be priests serving God (1:5), reigning with Christ on earth (5:10), for a thousand years (20:6). The dominion of Christ on a renewed earth, the new Jerusalem, is shared with the redeemed 'new' priests who participate in the religious authority of Christ in a *gesellschaftlich* manner.<sup>574</sup> For John, the manifestation of the reign of Christ over the whole cosmos is a primary theme in his theology: the manifestation of God's *basileia* on earth is to be regarded as an eschatological reality.<sup>575</sup> Revelation 20:4-6 conveys the

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the followers of Jesus to be 'built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ'; see Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 371. Notwithstanding the similarities between the texts, the contexts are different: 1 Peter 2:5 uses the symbolism of 'living stones' being used to build a spiritual house and a holy priesthood. The author of 1 Peter reinforces the 'holiness' of those who are 'born anew' as a 'chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people' (2:9). The emphasis of the author is on the need for the 'born anew' to behave in a fitting manner, for example, to 'abstain from the desires of the flesh', among the Gentiles (2:11-12); thus, to observe a code of conduct in keeping with a 'holy priesthood'. In contrast, John's notion of the priesthood is to share in the reign and religious authority of Christ, the universality of the priestly Messiah, and redemption based on a priestly kingdom serving God. Robert Mounce's discussion on Rev. 20:4-6 devotes over four pages to issues of the 'Millennium' and only one brief paragraph on 20:6 and John's reference to the priests of God who will reign with Christ a thousand years, thus following a pattern of interpretation and commentary in keeping with the approach of most modern scholars (363-71).

<sup>574</sup> The use of the term *gesellschaftlich* is explained in the following chapter in the discussion on the 'social' Throne.

<sup>575</sup> That the phrase 'they will reign' (βασιλεύσουσιν), used in most modern translations, is clearly future tense does not detract from John's conviction of the eschatological reality that the resurrected 'will be priests

meaning that it is only when the reign of Christ on earth has been established that those who had not worshipped Satan and his image were resurrected and shared Christ's priestly reign on earth. Such is not the view, however, of all scholars. Some regard John's depiction of those who conquer the evil intentions of Satan to exercise a priestly reign with Christ on earth as a misinterpretation of 20:4-6 in that such a messianic reign is taken to be one of a celestial nature, perhaps attributable to John's portrayal in chapter five of Christ's assumption of power in heaven through the sharing of God's Throne.<sup>576</sup> The eschatological notion of an interim reign preceding the judgement and the concept of a new heaven and a new earth is one John may have been aware of from *1 Enoch* and *2 Baruch*, which texts may be interpreted as suggesting an earthly messianic kingdom. For example, in the description of the *Apocalypse of Weeks*, *1 Enoch* depicts an impermanent reign prior to a great and eternal judgement revealed to the whole world (91:14-15) when a 'new heaven' (91:16) and a new earth (91:14, 17) will come about.<sup>577</sup> In similar style, Baruch states that the Anointed One will be revealed (2 Bar. 29:3) to the faithful for whom 'the treasury of manna will come down again from on high' for those 'who will have arrived at the consummation of time' (29:8; cf. 40:1-3; 72:2; 74:2-4).

The notions of priesthood in John's *Apocalypse* are not expressed as a dramatic trajectory in the sense that they are not depicted as resolute or highly directional. They are, however, specifically contextual within the overall framework of his apocalyptic

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of God and of Christ and will reign with him a thousand years' (20:6).

<sup>576</sup> For example, J.H. Elliott is of the opinion that the priesthood referred to in Rev. 1:5-6 and 5:9-10 is located on earth but that Rev. 20:6 refers to a celestial priesthood; *The Elect and the Holy*, Brill, Leiden, 1966, 117.

<sup>577</sup> For a discussion of the significance of Enoch's *Apocalypse of Weeks* in Jewish apocalyptic writing see Schüssler Fiorenza, *Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgement*, 39-41.

narrative. For example, John weaves and consolidates his notions of a ‘new’ priesthood in five determining sections of his *Apocalypse*; namely, his epistolary opening (1-3, specifically 1:5-6); his seven letters (2:1 - 3:22, specifically 2:26); the worthiness of the Lamb and the opening of the scroll (5:1-14, specifically 5:9-10); and his concluding vision of the consummation of God’s plan of the new Jerusalem in earthly history (19:11 - 22:5, specifically 20:4-6).<sup>578</sup> That the ‘blessed and holy’ are to be priests of God and of Christ conveys a notion of a new people, a normative and prophetic praxis of hermeneutical significance, not only for John’s hearers and readers, but also of meaning to liberation theology in the post-modern world in which communities grapple with situations of poverty, injustice and oppression.<sup>579</sup> In 20:4-6 John affirms that the resurrected will reign with Christ a thousand years, the period of Satan’s imprisonment, and builds on Exod. 19:6, reaffirming his earlier promises of a *basileia* of priests serving God (1:6; 5:10). In his final reference to a ‘new’ priesthood, John adds to the priestly relationship of the redeemed to God that of their shared reign with Christ, thus reinforcing the God-Christ relationship established in John’s depiction of the Lamb sharing the Throne with God (cf.

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<sup>578</sup> See Roloff, *Revelation*, and his construct of John’s *Apocalypse*. In addition to the five determining sections of John’s narrative, I consider chapters 4 and 5, with their focus on the Throne and its protagonists, and recognition of the crucial significance of the Lamb, to be central features of his narrative and foundational to this thesis.

<sup>579</sup> For examples of such views see Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, 11; Gilberto da Silva Gorgulho, ‘Biblical Hermeneutics’, *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, eds. Ignacio Ellacuría and Jon Sobrino, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 1993, 146. Da Silva Gorgulho also cites Rev. 1:5-6 as a text which ‘base’ communities in Latin American countries plumb in their struggle to be prophetic and witnessing within a ‘new’ priesthood. (page 146). For a summary of liberationist readings of John’s *Apocalypse* which includes the significance of a ‘new’ priesthood to Latin American Christian communities see Jean-Pierre Ruiz, ‘Taking a Stand on the Sand of the Seashore: A Postcolonial Exploration of Revelation 13’, in *Reading the Book of Revelation*, ed. David L. Barr, SBL, Atlanta, 2003, 121-122.

22:3-5).<sup>580</sup>

### **Rev. 22:3-5**

Although Rev. 22:3-5, as the fifth priesthood-related text, does not specifically refer to priests *per se*, on three counts related to John's portrayal of the priesthood of the new Jerusalem, the passage is considered relevant to the priesthood based on a collocation of related concepts. The context is set in Rev. 22:1-2 which depicts the existentially perfect new Jerusalem with the Throne of God and the Lamb as the source of the river of life, thus reinforcing John's earlier emphasis that the Throne of God and the Lamb is shared between them.<sup>581</sup> The holy city of the new Jerusalem is depicted in idyllic terms, with the river of the water of life flowing from the Throne of God and the Lamb and the tree of life either side of the river producing twelve kinds of fruit, thus ensuring the faithful in the new Jerusalem a paradisaic but earthly existence.<sup>582</sup> Such was not the case, however, in John's earlier vision of the scene of judgement which graphically depicts blood flowing from the wine press of the wrath of God 'as high as a horse's bridle for a distance of about two hundred miles' (14:19-20). The leaves of the tree of life are 'for the healing of the nations' (22:2), also suggesting a secure and peaceful life for God's people and likely an

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<sup>580</sup> John's portrayal of the 'new' priesthood, one which is shared with the God-Christ relationship, suggests a priesthood of a 'social' nature, one which is in parallel with the 'social' Throne, as discussed in the following chapter.

<sup>581</sup> Aune suggests the phrase 'and of the Lamb' may be 'a later gloss'; *Revelation 17-22*, 1179.

<sup>582</sup> Although much briefer, John's portrayal of the river has parallels with Ezekiel's account, chapter 47, of the 'sacred river'. One distinction, however, is that Ezekiel is referring to land of the tribes of Israel in contrast to John's more universally inclusive account of the river and tree of life being for 'the healing of the nations'. A second distinction is that Ezekiel credits the Temple as a source of fertility; whereas, John's holy city has no temple, the river flows directly from the Throne of God and the Lamb. For an account of the distinctions between Ezekiel 47 and Rev. 22:3-5 see Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon*, 428-29.

allusion to Ezek. 47:12; cf. Gen. 2:15-17.<sup>583</sup> A distinction, however, is that John refers to the plurality of nations in contrast with Ezekiel's focus, which is on the nation of Israel, thus reinforcing his earlier references to all the tribes, languages, peoples and nations.<sup>584</sup>

The first indication that John is referring to the priesthood in the new Jerusalem is expressed in 22:3b: the *servants* of God will worship him. The term 'worship' in 22:3b (λατρεύειν) may also be translated to the more literal meaning 'serve' or 'service', also a function related to priestly roles. Underlining 22:3 (cf. 7:15) is John's concept of priestly service which now, however, is within the holy city of the new Jerusalem where God and the Lamb are dwelling rather the earthly, Judaic Temple of Jerusalem in which Y<sup>HWH</sup> was to be sought in the Holy of Holies (21:9-27). John's reference to the servants of God is followed by the conclusion of his vision: his description of them being illuminated by God, no longer requiring the light of a lamp or the sun (22:5), reinforcing 21:23 and echoing Isaiah's depiction of the restored Zion where the Lord will be his people's everlasting light (Isa. 60:19). The Psalms also provide examples of John's statement that 'the Lord God will be their light' in keeping with Judaic *priestly* tradition: for instance, the priestly blessings expressed in Ps. 18:27 and the light of God's face shining on God's people (Ps. 4:6b),<sup>585</sup> symbolising the dispensation of God's favour on the faithful.<sup>586</sup>

The conclusion to John's vision leads to the second dimension in the passage 22:3-5 which may be taken to allude to the 'new' priesthood, that of John's reference to the

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<sup>583</sup> See discussion by Osborne, *Revelation*, 772-773.

<sup>584</sup> For example, Rev. 1:7; 2:26; 5:9-10.

<sup>585</sup> Likewise, Ps. 31:16a; 67:1b; 80:3; 89:15b.

<sup>586</sup> See Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1181.

servants of God reigning forever (22:5b). Such a reference reinforces the notions of priesthood expressed earlier: the redeemed serving God forever and ever as a kingdom of priests (1:6); the people of God as a kingdom of priests reigning on earth (5:10); and, the martyrs who will be ‘priests of God and of Christ, reigning with Christ on earth for a thousand years’ (20:6). However, unlike John’s earlier references to the reign of ‘a thousand years’ (20:4, 6), he concludes his vision by stating explicitly that God’s ‘priestly servants’ will reign forever and ever (22:5b), thus transforming a millennial reign to one which is eternal, conforming to Daniel’s prophecy that ‘the holy ones’, God’s priestly saints, shall receive the kingdom and possess it forever and ever (Dan. 7:18).<sup>587</sup> Added to the linkage between the five priesthood-related texts and the supposition that John seeks to convey an underlying sense of ‘new’ priesthood is his concluding promise that those who are redeemed and remain faithful will reign *forever* (22:5b), thus consolidating his opening proclamation to the seven churches that those freed from sin by the death of Jesus will constitute a *basileia*, serving the God and father of Jesus Christ *forever*. As the priests of God, the ‘saints’ shall serve God with the authority of the Lamb, enjoying the privilege of a priestly reign in the new eternal *basileia* (22:3-5; cf. 7:15). Additionally, the promise of Jesus Christ that those who conquer will be given a place on his Throne (3:21), thus alluding to sharing Christ’s priestly authority, is fulfilled in the holy city of the new Jerusalem where they will reign on earth, forever, sharing Christ’s priestly authority and worshipping God (22:3-5).<sup>588</sup> Thus, although not central to John’s portrayal of the priesthood of the new Jerusalem, Rev. 22:3-5 is worthy of association with his earlier priesthood references, serving to reinforce his earlier notions of a ‘new’ priesthood.<sup>589</sup>

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<sup>587</sup> See Osborne, *Revelation*, 775.

<sup>588</sup> Frederick J. Murphy expresses a similar view; *Fallen is Babylon*, 430-31.

<sup>589</sup> Of the modern authors reviewed in relation to Rev. 22:3-5 only one, Jürgen Roloff, associates John’s

Further, in arguing the case that John's *Apocalypse* expresses his concept of a 'new' priesthood, it is of interest that the account of his visions ends with 22:5, the redeemed serving and worshipping God and the Lamb forever in the new Jerusalem.<sup>590</sup> The account of John's visions *concluding* with an allusion to priestly functions and *opening* with the promise that the redeemed will constitute a kingdom of priests serving God and Christ forever (1:6), combined with 2:26; 5:9-10 and 20:4-6, serves to support the view that John's notions of priesthood constitute an aggregated pattern of divergence in renewal from the priesthood of Judaic tradition.

### **The *basileia* and the priesthood**

Because the concept of *basileia* has a range of meanings, given its use in this discussion of the priesthood an explication as to its application is appropriate. Although the meaning of the term βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ does not have a consensus, most scholars understand *basileia* to mean 'kingly rule and reign', thus implying divine rule under God's kingship and sovereignty.<sup>591</sup> There is, however, a corporate dimension to the term, one which focusses on a sense of 'kingdom' as a *basileia*, entry to which is open to people of common religious purpose and devotion, serving as 'priests for God' as depicted in John's *Apocalypse* (Rev. 1:5; 5:10; 20:6). Such a concept contrasts with the eschatological, millennial understanding of *basileia* as may be construed from 'the one thousand years' in Rev. 20:1-5 which, however, has failed to materialise in subsequent history.<sup>592</sup> As well,

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passage with *priests* serving God (through Christ); Roloff, *Revelation*, 246-47.

<sup>590</sup> John's visions are framed initially by Rev. 1:1-3 and conclude with 22:3-5 the function of which may be regarded as an epilogue.

<sup>591</sup> For example, see Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comparative Guide*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1998, 275.

<sup>592</sup> See discussion by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Priester für Gott: Zum Herrschafts- und Priestermotiv*



the term *basileia* may be interpreted contextually, emphasising its political significance. Given that although the Roman imperial system was also termed *basileia*, in the context of Jesus' ministry and the Jesus movements, the term becomes inclusive of the poor, the dehumanised, the powerless and the outsiders.<sup>593</sup> Accordingly, *basileia* takes on a new dimension of meaning, one which empowers the oppressed who belong to God and Christ to become their priests in a non-eschatological religious kingdom, as expressed by John in his *Apocalypse*. Such an interpretation of *basileia* may be construed as following in the tradition of Israel's 'priestly kingdom' and 'holy nation' (Exod. 19:6) and also in the prophetic tradition expressed by Isaiah in which the oppressed, the broken-hearted, the captives and the prisoners shall be 'called priests of the Lord' and 'ministers of God' (Isa. 61:6).

Another dimension to the relevance of the term *basileia* in first-century religious history is presented by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza who, while noting the significance of the context of Roman rule and the oppressed, asserts that 'the *basileia* movement is ... best understood as a Wisdom/Sophia movement in which Jesus is *primus inter pares* ...', thus arriving at 'a broader universalizing historical frame of reference'.<sup>594</sup> According to Schüssler Fiorenza, there is agreement among exegetes that 'the Roman form of imperial domination signified by the term *basileia* has determined the world and experience of all Jewish movements in the first century, including that which named itself after Jesus'.<sup>595</sup> Further, according to Schüssler Fiorenza, Jesus and his first followers, seeking 'the

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in der *Apokalypse*, Aschendorff Verlag, Münster, 1972.

<sup>593</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation*, 113.

<sup>594</sup> Ibid., 166-167.

<sup>595</sup> Ibid., 169-170.

emancipation and well-being of Israel as the people of God', a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, 'announced the *basileia* of God as an alternative to that of Rome'.<sup>596</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza's arguments, developed in the context of feminist and political theology, are (to this reader) convincing because she notes the interaction between elements of a wider concept of *basileia*, thus avoiding the risk of a retrospective analysis which results in several discrete theological dimensions to the term. It is the concept of *basileia* as a concerted and inclusive movement, one that incorporates a range of interacting dimensions that are not mutually exclusive and which includes the concept of redemption embodied in the 'new' Jerusalem and the 'new' priesthood with God and Christ that are of particular relevance to this thesis.

To the description of *basileia* as a 'religious symbol' which proclaims God's power of salvation as well as a 'political symbol' which appealed to those oppressed by Roman imperial rule,<sup>597</sup> two points are noteworthy. First, although the term 'symbol' conveys several meanings of a religious character, it also serves dual functions, rhetorical and prophetic, which derive from behavioural examples reflecting attitudinal change drawn from Jesus' ministry. That Jesus presented alternative religious options to both Jewish practices and the oppression of Roman rule is evident from Gospel accounts of his attitudes to purity laws, inclusive table-fellowship and overt and positive relations with sinners, tax-collectors and prostitutes.<sup>598</sup> As a consequence, there is an element of emancipation in the concept of *basileia* based on examples from Jesus' ministry. The concept βασιλεία

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<sup>596</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>597</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>598</sup> For a discussion of Jesus' inclusiveness in contrast to the oppression of Roman rule see Alan F. Segal, 'Jesus, the Jewish Revolutionary', in *Jesus' Jewishness: Exploring the Place of Jesus Within Early Judaism*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, Crossroad, New York, 1991, 212-14.

τοῦ θεοῦ integral to the teaching of Jesus through his relations with outcasts, is reflected in the notion of a priestly emancipatory movement in John's *Apocalypse*, a 'kingdom of priests' serving God, who will reign on earth (5:10). From such a perspective the concept of *basileia* as a symbol moves to a metaphor, one which not only had relevance to first-century believers but which, according to John, underlies a priestly *basileia* in which those who are redeemed will constitute a kingdom serving God (1:5) and reigning with Christ 'a thousand years' (20:6). Such an interpretation would convey to first-century believers an imaginative and spatial challenge, one adding an eschatologically-imaginative dimension, a vision of divine transcendence to which the redeemed can aspire, to the reality of their contemporary existence.

The second point to note in respect of such a concept of *basileia* concerns its normative nature. As understood by the Jesus movement, the concept of *basileia* is unlikely to have been normative in the sense of a concerted, unified and peaceful religious coexistence with God and Christ. The *pericope* in Mark 7:24-30 provides an example in which Jesus enters into a dialectical discourse with a woman whose plea for her daughter he initially rejects. In the Markan text she is introduced culturally as Greek and ethnically as Syrophoenician;<sup>599</sup> in Matthew's account she is 'a Canaanite woman' from the region of Tyre and Sidon (15:22a). Thus, it is a reasonable supposition that she was not a Jew

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<sup>599</sup> The woman, generally referred to as the 'Syrophoenician woman' is introduced as 'a Gentile, of Syrophoenician origin' (Mark 7:26a). Some scholars suggest that by using 'Greek', the author of Mark is suggesting she would have been at least to some extent Hellenised, likely to have been fluent in Greek, and perhaps integrated in Hellenist culture; for example, see Hisako Kinukawa, 'The Story of the Syro-Phoenician Woman (Mark 7:24-30)', *In God's Image* 23:4 (2004), 50; cf. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word: Feminist Biblical Interpretation in Context*, T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1998, 122. Based on the Greek word *Hellenis*, the translation 'Greek', rather than 'Gentile' is, at least literally closer. However translated, it is clear that the woman stands in contrast to Jesus as the 'other'.

and that, culturally and ethnically, she was a ‘foreigner’ to Jesus. The initial response of Jesus to the woman’s plea for her daughter, ‘it is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs’ (Mark 7:27b) is, although figurative, nonetheless a cruel apophthegm and stands in contrast to the priestly behaviour of the *basileia* depicted in John’s *Apocalypse*.

The significance of the issues underlying a normative understanding of the first-century *basileia* is that by appreciating the Jesus movement as an emancipatory first-century basileaic movement within which there were instances, even on the part of Jesus, of non-normative attitudes and behaviour, one avoids the normative-Christian Jesus movement set against negative perceptions of first-century Judaism. That there were issues of self-understanding, for example, issues of identity-terms such as Jewish, Jewish-Christian, Christian-Jewish, and Christian in the first century militates against the use of simplistic and pejorative phrases like ‘Christians against Jews’. Finally, taking into account the range of meanings which attach to the term *basileia*, the use of the concept by Christians and the *basileia* of John’s ‘priestly kingdom serving God and Christ’ stand in significant contrast to the *basileia* of David’s kingship or the *basileia* of Roman imperial rule, thus reinforcing the case for divergence in first-century religious renewal.

### **The Priesthood in John’s *Apocalypse*: A Summary**

Although the preceding discussion of new dimensions to the traditional Judaic priesthood, even if metaphorical, suggests a significant level of divergence, such a new priestly status and vocation may not have been an entirely original apocalyptic insight to the ‘Jewish-Christian’ author of the *Apocalypse of John* late in the first century. The genesis

of the ‘priesthood of all believers’ may have existed in Isaiah’s proclamation that the exiled and oppressed who conquer evil and remain faithful to God ‘shall be called priests of the Lord [and] shall be named ministers of our God’ enjoying ‘the wealth of the nations’ in whose riches they shall glory (Isa. 61:6). It is also possible that the account in trito-Isaiah may have been predicated on the narrative in Exodus in which Moses hears the Lord calling to him from the mountain that if Israel obeys the Lord and keeps the Lord’s covenant, the people of Israel will be regarded by God as ‘a priestly kingdom and a holy nation’ (Exod. 19:3, 5-6). There may be more than a nuanced difference, however, between priests of the Judaic tradition who mediated between humankind and God and who also enjoyed access to the realm of God and John’s depiction of priests who not only had access to God’s realm but who served God, with Christ’s authority, as priests who *belonged* to, and were integrally part of, God’s realm and Christ’s messianic reign.<sup>600</sup>

Although it is possible to suggest that in his *Apocalypse*, John is drawing on a theological construct traditional to the Hebrew scriptures, his references have the distinction of being apocalyptically and theologically relevant to his post-Jesus and post-Temple context, one in which Jesus is increasingly recognised as the Son of God, depicted metaphorically as the Lamb, sharing the Throne with God, indeed, ‘at the centre of the throne’ (Rev. 7:17). As well, in Rev. 1:6 and 5:10 John emphasises the newness of the priesthood: the redeemed human community, a priesthood serving God, constitutes a new *basileia* for God on earth. Further, the image of the priesthood referred to in Exodus and Isaiah is extended geographically, ethnically and linguistically by John to constitute a kingdom in which those ransomed by Christ will be priests reigning on earth (Rev. 5:9-10).

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<sup>600</sup> See Roloff, *Revelation*, 26, 81.

Thus, from the contrasting differences between John's five references to the priesthood and the limited accounts in Exodus and Isaiah, a case for divergence appears reasonable.

To the extent that 1 Peter 2:9 and Exod. 19:6 express a traditional, view of a royal priesthood, John's treatment of the priesthood in Revelation 1:5-6 is also formulaic, but one based on baptism from sin through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. One may argue that there is a distinction between the priesthood formula predicated on the kingship of a Davidic model and one based on a liberating, priestly way of life, one dependent upon the holiness of redemption associated by John with the sacrificial blood, as a symbol of the death, of Jesus Christ (Rev. 1:5-6). Support for such a view is suggested by John's vision of 'one like the Son of Man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash across his chest', a description of clothing which indicates a sacerdotal, priestly presentation of the Son of Man (Rev. 1:13). John's priestly association with Jesus is reinforced with his description towards the end of his account of the rider on the white horse who 'is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is called the Word of God' (19:13). In associating the priestly robe of the Son of Man and the Word of God with the sacrificial blood of the Lamb, John's view of the quality of priesthood moves beyond the reciprocal and intermediary function of a covenantal relationship to one constructed on redemption, the liberation from sin. Such liberation is offered by Jesus Christ, 'the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth' who liberated the faithful from their sins by his blood, establishing a kingdom in which the redeemed serve as priests glorifying the God and Father of Jesus Christ forever (Rev.1:5-6).

It has been argued that the *Apocalypse of John* introduces a new concept of priesthood: a communitarian priestly state comprising a new kingdom of those redeemed by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Such a concept stands in contrast with an aggregate of priests individually appointed or anointed who collectively constitute a priesthood distinguished by selectivity rather than universality. Although John's universal priesthood of redeemed Christians may be interpreted as a priesthood of more metaphorical than doctrinal significance, it does represent a theological and historical shift from the priesthood of the Hebrew scriptures and the pseudepigraphical accounts. It generally embraces the view that through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and his redemption, all Christians have access to God and, like priests, can intercede for others. Further, John adds to his concept of the priesthood in chapter five by describing the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders singing to the Lamb that by his blood, he 'ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation', making them 'to be a kingdom' - a *basileia* rather than a monarchical kingdom - as well as 'priests serving God', thus emphasising the universal nature of his vision of the priesthood (5:8-10). Such a *basileic* concept is not to suggest that John denies the kingship of God and Jesus Christ; rather, it is to emphasise John's assertion that the kingdom is constituted by the redeemed, on earth, who all have priestly status.

Finally, according to John, 'those who share in the first resurrection' will be 'blessed and holy', over whom 'the second death has no power [because] they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him a thousand years' (20:6). Thus, John's treatment of the priesthood is not coincidental to his overall text: he presents his vision of the priesthood in three strategic sections of his *Apocalypse*, comprising his

opening salutation, his vision of God and the Lamb, and his vision of the final victory and last judgement. Such a supposition is predicated on the view that any one of John's five references to his notions of a 'new' priesthood is, of itself, inadequate in terms of assuming a 'theology' of the priesthood in John's *Apocalypse*. However, by identifying the five passages as an inter-related, inclusive and concerted exposition of John's notions of a 'new' priesthood, a composite picture of theological significance emerges.<sup>601</sup> Therefore, although it seems probable that at the time John's *Apocalypse* was written many early followers of Jesus could still be described as 'Jewish-Christians', one may claim that John's concept of a universal priesthood of the redeemed followers of Jesus Christ signals an indication of divergence between late first-century Jewish-Christian beliefs and the Temple-related priesthood of Judaic tradition

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<sup>601</sup> Concerning the view that the *basileiac* priesthood of all believers portrayed in the *Apocalypse of John* overshadows the cultic, legalistic theology of the Jerusalem priesthood, see Crispin Fletcher-Louis, 'Jewish Apocalyptic and Apocalypticism', in *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus*, vol. 2, *The Study of Jesus*, Brill, Leiden, 2011, 1573.



## Chapter Seven

### The Throne: Interacting and Outreaching

An early sixth-century BCE, priestly-prophetic description of ‘something like a throne, in appearance like sapphire’ on which ‘something that seemed like a human form’ which looked like fire ‘with splendour all around’ is provided by Ezekiel (1:26, 27b). The throne was set on four wheels, gleaming of beryl, with ‘tall and awesome’ rims which ‘were full of eyes all around’ (Ezek. 1:15-16, 18).<sup>602</sup> Seven hundred years later,<sup>603</sup> after the destruction of the Second Temple, the Throne is described in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* with similar images of fire and eyes: Abraham saw ‘a throne of fire and the many-eyed ones round about’ (*Apoc. Abr.* 18:3). In the Merkabah tradition, each account contains similar parallels in respect of four fiery creatures and the four wheels of the throne. Analogous descriptions of the four creatures include human forms with faces, in each instance with the characteristics of a lion, man, ox and eagle.<sup>604</sup> As well, each

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<sup>602</sup> In Hebrew the term used for ‘throne’ or a seat of honour is כִּסֵּא. See for example, 2 Sam. 7:13 (‘He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne/כִּסֵּא of his kingdom forever.’) spoken of the establishment of the royal house/throne of David. Targ. Jon. translates the term with the cognate plural כִּוְרִסְיָא. Of the heavenly throne see Ezek. 1:26 (‘And above the dome over their heads there was something like a throne/כִּסֵּא, in appearance like sapphire; and seated above the likeness of a throne/כִּסֵּא was something that seemed like a human form.’). Cf. also Ezek. 10:1 and 43:7. Similarly rendered in Aramaic (Targ. Jon.) with כִּוְרִסְיָא. And Dan. 7:9: ‘As I watched, thrones were set in place, and an Ancient One took his throne (lit. seated himself), his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne/כִּרְסִיָּה was fiery flames, and its wheels were burning fire.’ In each of these instances the LXX renders the term by θρόνος.

<sup>603</sup> The date of authorship of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* is unknown but is generally assumed to have been composed at the end of the first century CE. See R. Rubinkiewicz, ‘Apocalypse of Abraham: A New Translation and Introduction’, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, ed. Charlesworth, 683.

<sup>604</sup> Respectively, Ezek. 1:10 and *Apoc. Abr.* 18:5.

account of the chariot involves four fiery wheels, each wheel full of eyes.<sup>605</sup> In Abraham's vision, above the wheels he saw the throne 'covered with fire' and 'an indescribable light', from which he heard God's voice saying, 'Abraham, Abraham' (*Apoc. Abr.* 18:13; 19:1). According to Ezekiel's account, the throne is above a dome which is over the heads of the living creatures: its appearance is like sapphire and 'seated above the likeness of a throne was something that seemed like a human form'.<sup>606</sup> Although from the parallel accounts of the four creatures and the chariot wheels it appears that the author of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* has drawn on Ezekiel's text, there are slight differences in the respective descriptions of the Throne. In any event, as will be argued, the two accounts appear to be more indicative of continuity than divergence, if viewed within a framework of a prophetic-apocalyptic tradition. The search for indications of divergence between Judaism and Christianity in the first century warrants a review of the treatment of the Throne in the Pseudepigrapha and apocalyptic writing of that period before a discussion of the presentation of the Throne by early Christian writers.

### **First-century Jewish writings**

The Throne, as the Throne of God, sometimes depicted as the throne-chariot, does not appear to be a topic of central concern in the narratives of the first-century writers of the Pseudepigrapha. Nonetheless, it is not ignored, even if referred to sparingly: *2 Baruch* cites the Throne on five occasions while *4 Ezra* refers to the Throne only once.<sup>607</sup> The reference by Ezra, as part of an invocatory paean in his prayer to the Most High imploring God to be merciful to his creation, includes the phrase: 'whose throne is beyond measure'

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<sup>605</sup> Respectively, Ezek. 1:18 and *Apoc. Abr.* 18:12

<sup>606</sup> Ezek. 1:22, 26. The description of the throne in Ezek. 10:1 is almost identical.

<sup>607</sup> Respectively, *2 Bar.* 46:4; 51:11; 54:13; 59:3; 73:1 and *4 Ezra* 8:21.

(4 *Ezra* 8:21).<sup>608</sup> Such a single formulaic reference by the author of 4 *Ezra* does not contribute to an increased understanding of God or the Messiah; nor to the role of the Throne in first-century Judaic-Christian relations. As will be noted shortly, however, it stands in contrast to the frequent and significant references to the Throne in the *Apocalypse of John*, a contemporary Jewish-Christian apocalyptic writing.

The five references to the Throne in the contemporary Jewish apocalyptic text 2 *Baruch* appear to have more, but not overly significant, relevance to issues of continuity and renewal but do not *a priori* indicate divergence.<sup>609</sup> Although, as is the case in 4 *Ezra*, God does not speak from the Throne and nor is the Throne central to the author's visions, Baruch's depiction of the Throne does contribute to the argument for continuity and renewal in Jewish literature. Such continuity is reflected in Baruch's recognition of the Mosaic tradition: in the interpretation of Baruch's apocalypse by the angel Ramael, Baruch is informed that at the time of reward or punishment, 'the heaven will be shaken from its place ...; that is, the heavens which are under the throne of the Mighty One were severely shaken when he took Moses with him' (2 *Bar.* 59:3; 73:1). Baruch does not, however, provide any traditional description of the Throne: it is not a throne of fire, there are no fiery wheels, nor any depiction of forms on the throne. Thus, although Baruch expresses some degree of continuity concerning the Throne, it would appear that suggestions of renewal appear on three occasions. First, he advises the 'elders of the people' that he 'cannot resist the throne of the Mighty One' and that 'Israel will not be in want of a wise man, nor

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<sup>608</sup> The term 'throne' used in first-century Jewish writings is generally regarded as metonymy rather than metaphor. The difference between the two terms is discussed in chapter 3. In the case of the Throne and its central role in the *Apocalypse of John* I argue that, given its 'social' and 'interactive' qualities discussed later in this chapter, it may be regarded as more metaphorical than metonymical.

<sup>609</sup> In support of the claim that 2 *Baruch* is a Jewish text see Davila, 'Old Testament Pseudepigrapha as Background to the New Testament', 56.

the tribe of Jacob, a son of the Law' (2 Bar. 46:1, 4). Rather, in his commitment to the 'throne of the Mighty One', he cautions the elders to prepare their hearts so that they obey the Law and subject themselves 'to those who are wise and understanding with fear' (2 Bar. 46:5), thus indicating a degree of renewal in response to tradition and the Law.

Second, the author associates Wisdom with the Throne: 'to those who are saved ... the extents of paradise will be spread out ... and to them will be shown the beauty of the majesty of the living beings *under the throne* [my italics]' (2 Bar. 51:11). In a prayer to the Mighty One, Baruch reinforces the throne-Wisdom association: 'you reign over all creation which your right hand has created, and you have established the whole fountain of light with yourself, and you have prepared under your throne the treasures of wisdom' (2 Bar. 54:13). Third, rather than physical depictions of the Throne, Baruch introduces the concept of a 'social throne', one which it will be noted later is developed in the *Apocalypse of John*.<sup>610</sup> Speaking in 'the presence of the Mighty One', Baruch addresses God: 'you who reign with great thoughts over the powers which stand before you, and who rules with indignation the countless holy beings, who are flame and fire, whom you created from the beginning, those who stand around your throne' (2 Bar. 21:3, 6). In a further reference to the Throne as a social entity, the author indicates that, for the saved, the 'extents of Paradise' will be theirs and they 'will be shown the beauty of the majesty of the living beings under the throne, as well as all the hosts of the angels ...' (2 Bar. 51:11).

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<sup>610</sup> Although, in symbolic terms, all thrones are in some sense 'social', John's text in chapters 4 and 5 reveals a 'socially interactive' heavenly Throne, one which includes the participation of twenty-four elders, four living creatures, the seven spirits of God, myriads of angels, martyrs, multitudes and, for the first time, God's Throne is shared with the Lamb. John's 'social Throne' stands in contrast to the thrones depicted in Judaic tradition and those in other first-century Jewish and Christian apocalyptic writings. An explication of the concept of the 'social' Throne is contained in the following section titled, 'The "social" Throne: *gesellschaftlich* and ontological'.

Although *2 Baruch* and *4 Ezra* have been discussed because they are two Jewish first-century texts contemporaneous with the *Apocalypse of John*,<sup>611</sup> another relevant text, if not as contemporaneous, is *1 Enoch*. *1 Enoch* is an apocryphal text which appears to have been drawn upon by the authors of *2 Baruch* and *4 Ezra*, as well as by the *Apocalypse of John*, and is therefore likely to have influenced religious thought in first-century Jewish-Christian history. Thus, its relevance to this discussion on the Throne in Jewish and Christian first-century communities appears justified. In turning to *1 Enoch* and its pertinence to the *Apocalypse of John* in terms of issues of renewal and divergence, a word of qualification on the text and date(s) of authorship is appropriate.<sup>612</sup> *1 Enoch* is a composite collection aggregated from different sources, generally regarded as comprising five sections or sub-chapters, the ‘authors’ of which are unknown.<sup>613</sup> Although the name ‘Enoch’ is applied to the entire book, the five sections were written at different times, ranging from the second century BCE to the first century CE.<sup>614</sup> Of the five sections, the

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<sup>611</sup> The statement that *2 Baruch* and *4 Ezra* are Jewish, first-century texts is based on, respectively, A.F.J. Klijn ‘2 (Syriac Apocalypse of) Baruch: A New Translation and Introduction’, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Vol. 1, ed. James H. Charlesworth, 615-618; and B.M. Metzger, ‘The Fourth Book of Ezra (Late First Century A.D.: A New Translation and Introduction’, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Vol. 1, ed. Charlesworth, 517-520.

<sup>612</sup> Given the uncertainty attaching to the nature of the authorship of the five books constituting *1 Enoch*, the term ‘author’ is not considered appropriate in terms of accurately depicting the auctorial entities or entities responsible for the composite text. Terms such as ‘tradent’ and ‘redactor’ might be considered more appropriate. I am following Daniel Boyarin, who uses the term ‘author’, even if the Similitudes were ‘arrived at by someone who put together’ the text; Boyarin, ‘Enoch, Ezra, and the Jewishness of “High Christology”’, in *Fourth Ezra and Second Baruch: Reconstruction after the Fall*, Brill, Leiden 2013, 347 and 347 n. 25.

<sup>613</sup> The five ‘books’ comprise the Book of the Watchers, the Similitudes of Enoch, the Astronomical Book, the Animal Apocalypse, and the Epistle of Enoch. In acknowledging the plurality of authors and dates of authorship in *1 Enoch*, and given the inappropriateness of using the name ‘Enoch’ to indicate authorship of the five ‘books’, the term *1 Enoch* is used in this section in the sense of a final redaction.

<sup>614</sup> The anonymous authors, designated as ‘Enoch’, may derive from Genesis 5:19, 21-24, thus establishing

*Similitudes* of Enoch, chapters 37-71, appear to be relevant to this study in that they contain references to the Throne, had Jewish authorship, and appear to have been written in the mid or late first century of the Common Era.<sup>615</sup> John Collins is of the view that the *Similitudes* were written prior to the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE and suggests ‘the early or middle first century CE’.<sup>616</sup> Thus, the *Similitudes* may have been within a generation or two of either the Gospels or the *Apocalypse of John* and available as a source. There are three accounts, or Parables, concerning visions of the heavenly Throne in the *Similitudes* which are not dissimilar to John’s visions of the Throne in Rev. 4-5. In *1 Enoch* 38-44, Enoch is portrayed as seeing the ‘Elect One of righteousness and of faith’ and ‘a dwelling place underneath the wings of the Lord of the Spirits’ (39:6-7). In the second Parable, chapters 45-57, Enoch sees the Son of Man, chosen by the ‘Lord of the Spirits’ (46:3) at the Throne.<sup>617</sup> The third Parable, chapters 58-71, relating to the righteous and the elect, depicts the ‘Son of Man sitting on the throne of his glory’ (62:5). The concluding chapter of the *Similitudes* describes Enoch’s vision of the ‘heaven of heavens’ and ‘rivers full of living fire’ encircling the throne which was guarded by

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an ancient and traditional association. Concerning estimated dates of authorship see, for example, Daniel Boyarin, *The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ*, The New Press, New York, 2012, 73-74; E. Isaac, ‘1 (Ethiopic Apocalypse of) Enoch: A New translation and Introduction’, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, ed. Charlesworth, 6-7.

<sup>615</sup> Ibid., 7. Isaac describes the *Similitudes* as Jewish and that they date from the first century CE; cf. Ben Witherington, *The Christology of Jesus*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1990, 234. An earlier view was that the text had been written in the first century BCE; see, for example, C.L. Mearns, ‘Dating the *Similitudes* of Enoch’, *NTS* 25 (1979) 360-369. Since the discovery at Qumran in the mid-twentieth century of fragments of *1 Enoch*, most scholars have come to regard the dating of the *Similitudes* as the first century CE. That the *Similitudes* may be regarded as a text that is Jewish beyond reasonable doubt is a view supported by James Davila, ‘The Old testament Pseudepigrapha as Background to the New Testament’, 56.

<sup>616</sup> Collins, ‘The Son of Man in Ancient Judaism’, 1552-1553.

<sup>617</sup> Margaret Barker interprets this scene as the heavenly counterpart of the Day of Atonement ritual in the (earthly) Temple; *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 57. For further discussion of the *Similitudes* by Barker, see *The Lost Prophet: The Book of Enoch and its Influence on Christianity*, SPCK, London, 1988, 65-68.

‘seraphim, cherubim, and ophanim’, and surrounded by many millions of angels (71:1, 6-8). Such necessarily brief accounts of the Son of Man as a heavenly, not human, figure at the throne, the great judgement and the transformation of heaven and earth, may be regarded as prescient to John’s narrative concerning the Throne of God and the Lamb (Rev. 4-5) and the new Jerusalem (Rev. 21).

Apart from references to the Throne in the Similitudes, in the full Enochic accounts, the throne is cited on fourteen occasions in twelve verses of four of the five ‘books’, with half the references depicting the throne as ‘the throne of [God’s] glory’. The throne is ‘lofty’: ‘its appearance like crystal and its wheels like the shining sun’, thus ‘difficult to look at it’ (14:18-19). The treatment of the ‘fiery’ throne in Enoch 14 establishes the parameters within which notions of the throne and the heavenly court are further developed. The description of the Throne is similar to Ezekiel’s as well as Daniel’s, whose depiction of its fiery character is closer to the time the Similitudes were written.<sup>618</sup> Enoch is not the first to see God seated on his Throne: the author of 1 Kings describes Micaiah seeing ‘the Lord sitting on his throne’ (1 Kings 22:19) and, likewise, the prophet Isaiah saw the Lord on the throne which he also described as ‘high and lofty’ (Isa. 6:1). Closer to the Common Era, after an angel opens the gates of heaven, Levi sees ‘the Holy Most High sitting on the throne’ (*T. Levi* 5:1). A further example of a Jewish vision of the Throne at approximately the same date as John’s *Apocalypse* is contained in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* 18. The throne is depicted as a chariot-throne with vivid images and the passage includes the ‘four fiery living creatures’ who are singing under the throne, a portrayal not unlike that of the four living creatures in Rev. 4. From 2 *Baruch* and 4

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<sup>618</sup> Respectively, Ezek. 1; Daniel 7:9-10.

*Ezra* one may conclude that by drawing on earlier textual accounts, Enoch is continuing Judaic tradition: a lofty, fiery throne on which God is seen and from which his voice issues. As well, the text suggests additional dimensions which reflect more than the semblance of renewal: the concepts of a ‘social’ throne and a messianic throne.<sup>619</sup> In the concluding chapter of *I Enoch*, which appears to be a later addition to the text,<sup>620</sup> reference is made to plural ‘thrones’: the faithful will become heaven-dwellers (*celicole*), each seated ‘one by one upon the throne of his honor’ (*I En.* 108:12). Notwithstanding the likelihood of this text being a later addition, it adds to rather than detracts from the throne-views of *I Enoch* which appear to suggest notions of a ‘social’ throne.

Inchoate notions of a ‘social’ throne arise from the depictions that although the Glorious One ‘needed no council, ... the most holy ones who are near to him neither go far away at night nor move away from him’ (*I En.* 14:23). Further, all the escorts of the ‘Antecedent of Time’, who was ‘sitting upon the throne of his glory’, stood before him, including ‘the angels and the righteous ones’ who surrounded him (*I En.* 47:3; 60:2).<sup>621</sup> In a later vision, Enoch’s spirit saw seraphim, cherubim and ophanim, ‘the sleepless ones who guard the Throne of [God’s] glory’ encircling the Throne, together with ‘countless

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<sup>619</sup> The term ‘messianic’ Throne is used to acknowledge the sharing of God’s Throne with the Lamb, portrayed with divine status, and for the first time worshipped universally at the Throne, jointly with God (Rev. 5). John depicts the Lamb as Jesus Christ who as the Messiah will reign forever (Rev. 11:15). The concept and significance of the ‘social’ and ‘messianic’ Throne in John’s *Apocalypse* is discussed later in the chapter.

<sup>620</sup> See, for example, J.T. Milik, ‘*Problemes de la Litterature Henochique à la Lumieres des Fragments Arameens de Qumran*’, *HTR* 64:2 (1971) 333-378.

<sup>621</sup> It may be noted that the term ‘Antecedent of Time’ in *I En.* 47:3 and 60:2 does not refer to God but is used in a messianic sense, in conjunction with the term ‘Son of Man’, *vide I En.* 48:2-3. Terms such as ‘Ancient of Days’ and ‘Antecedent of Time’, perhaps drawing on Dan. 7:13-14, may refer to God but may also be identified with Jesus Christ in texts such as *4 Ezra* 13 and the *Similitudes of Enoch*.



(ten million times ten million) angels’, including Michael, Raphael, Gabriel and Phanuel, as well as the ‘Antecedent of Time’, thus introducing an angelic relationship to the throne and extending the concept of a ‘social’ throne (71:7-10).

More specifically relevant to the case for divergence in renewal are the references to the Throne in the context of messianism in *I Enoch*. Although *I Enoch* 14:15-25 depicts the splendour of the Throne, the first messianic suggestion, which presages the descent of the new Jerusalem in the *Apocalypse of John*, appears when Michael, the ‘chief of the angels’, informs Enoch that the summit of the tall mountain he saw is indeed the Throne of God ‘on which the Holy and Great Lord of Glory, the Eternal King, will sit when he descends to visit the earth with goodness’ (*I En.* 24:6; 25:3). In a later vision, Enoch is told that those who deny the name of the Lord will face the ‘day of burden and tribulation’, when God’s ‘Elect One shall sit on the seat of glory and make a selection of their deeds’ (*I En.* 45:1-3a; cf. 61:8). Enoch’s visions include seeing the ‘Antecedent of Time ... sitting upon the Throne of his glory and all his power in heaven above and his escorts stood before him’ (47:3).

The descriptive messianic terms in *I Enoch*, comprising the Son of Man, the Righteous One, the Chosen One and the light of the Gentiles, combine to constitute a pre-existent divine entity who is accorded a place on ‘his Throne of glory’ and who, with ‘the books of the living ones open before him’, exercises eschatological judgement on the unrighteous (*I En.* 47:3 - 48:7). Although in *I Enoch* various depictions of the Messiah move beyond the concept of a Davidic ‘royal messiah’, they do not arrive at images associated with the portrayal of the resurrected slain Lamb deployed in John’s text.

Significantly, the Enochic Messiah does occupy a Throne. However, unlike the accounts in the *Apocalypse of John*, the Messiah is not described as *sharing* the Throne with God.<sup>622</sup> In *1 Enoch*, God's Throne is constituted by 'all the heavens forever' and 'has not retreated from her station' (84:2-3), taking on the characteristics of a permanent kingdom rather than a specific locus on which God sits and from which he speaks, not unlike the thrones depicted in *2 Baruch* and *4 Ezra* (*1 En.* 84:2-3). In depicting God's Throne as 'all the heavens', the account in *1 Enoch* appears to be following the view expressed in trito-Isaiah that God's locale is not the Temple; rather, the Lord says: 'Heaven is my Throne and the earth is my footstool' (Isa. 66:1).

To the extent that the representation of the Throne in *1 Enoch* reflects a degree of divergence in renewal, divergence is further accentuated in John's *Apocalypse* through the depiction of the Messiah sharing the Throne with God. The sharing of the divine Throne by the Lamb is a significant development in late first-century apocalyptic literature and appears to represent a distinction between levels of divergence between the Enochic portrayal of the Throne and that depicted in John's *Apocalypse*. It may be argued that the throne described by John remains divinely distinctive: it is enhanced rather than diminished by the Lamb as Messiah sharing occupancy with God. It is John's portrayal of the Lamb as the resurrected Messiah, and his sustained Christological treatment of Christ, that maintains the distinctively divine character of the Throne, one of Christological dimensions that does not appear in the Enochic account. Such a view may be challenged, however, by the one occasion when Jesus may be interpreted as having a throne separate

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<sup>622</sup> It may be noted, however, that in *1 En.* 48 the Son of Man is depicted as sitting on the throne of glory (v. 27) in contrast to earlier portrayals of only God upon the throne while other heavenly beings stand. From *1 En.* 48:27, 29 it may be presumed that the Son of Man is sitting on the same throne as God.

from the Throne of his Father.

In Rev. 3:21a, Christ is cited as declaring to the Laodiceans: ‘To the one who conquers I will give a place with me on my throne; whereas, in Rev. 3:21b Christ, having conquered evil, is described as having sat down with his Father on his [Father’s] Throne - ὥς καὶ γὼ ἐνίκησα καὶ ἐκάθισα μετὰ τοῦ πατρός μου ἐν τῷ θρόνῳ αὐτοῦ.<sup>623</sup> To the extent that Rev. 3:21 suggests two thrones, the argument in favour of greater divergence between the portrayal of the Throne in *1 Enoch* and John’s *Apocalypse* may need qualification. There are, however, several other factors which appear to suggest a greater degree of divergence in John’s *Apocalypse* than in *1 Enoch*. First, Rev. 3:21a portrays Christ promising ‘to the one who conquers’, a place with him on his throne, that is, a place in heaven equal to his own.<sup>624</sup> Although John’s notion of ‘conquering’ or ‘overcoming’ is applicable to the Christians of the seven churches in Asia Minor (Rev, 1:11), it is in Christ’s last message to the Laodiceans that John points to Christ sitting down with his Father on the Throne after his own experience of ‘conquering’ (3:21).<sup>625</sup> Thus, it may be construed that the reference to Christ’s throne is to reinforce John’s notion of believers in Christ sharing a place in heaven with him, rather than a focus on the Throne (or two thrones) *per se*. Second, John’s narrative involving the throne(s) in Rev. 3:21 conforms

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<sup>623</sup> According to Stephen Smalley, ‘Christ’s “conquest” was accomplished by the resurrection, while his heavenly session (he “sat down beside [his] Father on his throne” followed at the moment of the ascension (cf. Eph. 1:20; Heb. 1:3; 12:2)’; *The Revelation to John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove IL, 2005, 103.

<sup>624</sup> Stephen Smalley, *Thunder and Love: John’s Revelation and John’s Community*, Wipf and Stock, Eugene OR, 2012, 130.

<sup>625</sup> See Laszlo Gallusz, *The Throne Motif in the Book of Revelation: Profiles from the History of Interpretation*, Bloomsbury T & T Clark, London and New York, 2014, 180-181.

to Jewish apocalyptic tradition,<sup>626</sup> involving the visit to God's throne-room in heaven by a prophet, to whom God's divine purposes are revealed.<sup>627</sup> In chapter 4 John is transported to heaven where he sees a range of heavenly beings around the Throne, declaring God's sovereignty in heaven and revealing to him the sovereignty of God being extended to earth in what John comes to describe in his vision of the new Jerusalem.<sup>628</sup> With regard to the single description of Christ having a separate throne on which those who have 'conquered' may sit with Christ (3:21a), John's description may be viewed within a context of 'enthronement imagery' for 'reigning with Christ', a literary construct which appears to have parallels in Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:4, 6 and 22:5 and one which may have been drawn from Daniel 7:18, 27.<sup>629</sup> Earlier references to sharing the throne of Israel, which may be construed as the Throne of God, also provide precedents of enthronement imagery which may have foundational significance for Rev. 3:21.<sup>630</sup> Examples of Jewish enthronement imagery closer to the *Apocalypse of John* include *1 Enoch* 51:3; 55:4, both texts referring to the elect and the chosen being invited to sit on the divine throne.

Finally, the perception of an intentional distinction between Christ's Throne and the Throne of the Father (Rev. 3:21) appears to be countered by the notion of those who conquer becoming *σύνθρονοι* with the Father in like manner to Christ's sharing the Throne with his Father as well as those who conquer. Further, the distinction of thrones between Christ and the Father pales in significance if viewed in juxtaposition with John's climactic

<sup>626</sup> For example, *1 Enoch* 14-16; 60:1-6; *Apoc. Abr.* 9-18; cf. 1 Kings 22:19-23; Isa. 6; Ezek. 1.

<sup>627</sup> See Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 7.

<sup>628</sup> *Ibid.*, 31-34; 41-42. The significance of the 'heavenly beings' around the Throne is discussed in the ensuing section on the 'social' Throne.

<sup>629</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 261. Aune is of the view that 'the victorious Christian who will sit with Christ on his throne is based on ancient Near Eastern and Israelite kingship and enthronement imagery' (page 261).

<sup>630</sup> *Ibid.*, 262. See, for example, Job 36:7; 1 Chron. 28:5; 29:23; 2 Chron. 9:8.

vision of the new Jerusalem in which a river of living water flows from the Throne of God *and* of the Lamb through the city - ποταμὸν ὕδατος ζωῆς ... ἐκπορευόμενον ἐκ τοῦ θρόνου τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἀρνίου ἐν μέσῳ τῆς πλατείας αὐτῆς (22:1-2). With additional emphasis, the redeemed will see the face of Christ and worship him at the Throne of God *and* of the Lamb - καὶ ὁ θρόνος τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἀρνίου ἐν αὐτῇ ἔσται, καὶ οἱ δοῦλοι αὐτοῦ λατρεύσουσιν αὐτῷ, καὶ ὄψονται τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ (22:3-4).<sup>631</sup> The portrayal of the Throne in the concluding chapter of John's *Apocalypse* reinforces with rhetorical emphasis the oneness of God and the Lamb and their sharing of the Throne overshadowing what, in comparison, may be regarded as a formulaic reference to the separate Throne of Christ depicted in Rev.3:21.<sup>632</sup> Thus, the claim that the portrayal of the shared Throne in John's *Apocalypse* represents a greater degree of divergence than that expressed in *I Enoch* would appear to be not without merit and one which is not prejudiced by the reference to two thrones.

In terms of Judaic renewal, rather than divergence, a second significant point is that Enoch's dream visions not only describe the arrival and appearance of the Messiah but also depict the establishment of a messianic kingdom and the arrival of the new Jerusalem.<sup>633</sup> Although not contemporaneous with the *Apocalypse of John*, as is *2 Baruch* and *4 Ezra*, there is a prescient quality to the accounts of Enoch's visions foreshadowing developments

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<sup>631</sup> Smalley notes that in Rev. 22:3-4, the reference to the Throne of God and of the Lamb uses a singular pronoun for both the Father and the Son; viz. *his* servants, worship *him*, *his* face, *his* name; *Thunder and Love*, 164.

<sup>632</sup> Gallusz, *The Throne Motif in the Book of Revelation*, 180 n.18. Gallusz notes that of forty-seven references to the Throne in the Book of Revelation, only one verse (3:21a) is ascribed to a separate Throne of Christ (page 2).

<sup>633</sup> *I Enoch*, in general, chapters 83-90; specific verses 84:2-3; 90:20.

of the first century which are developed in a more ‘theological’ sense in the *Apocalypse of John*. In these respects, *1 Enoch* and the *Apocalypse of John*, both thematically eschatological texts, share elements of continuity and renewal such as the enthronement of the Messiah and the expectation of the new Jerusalem more than the texts of *2 Baruch* and *4 Ezra*. For example, as noted earlier, in the final chapter of *1 Enoch* plural ‘thrones’ are depicted which shall be used by God to reward the faithful: God will bring the faithful ‘out into the bright light ... and seat them each one by one upon the throne of his honour’ (108:12). That such a reference is suggestive of the new Jerusalem, however, is countered by the likelihood that chapter 108, ‘another Book of Enoch’, may be a later construct. In any event, it will be argued that in John’s treatment of the Lamb and the Throne and the descent of the new Jerusalem, the *Apocalypse of John* goes beyond the messianic and throne-related notions expressed in *1 Enoch*, and appears to establish indicators of divergence within the context of first-century religious renewal.

### **First-century Christian perspective**

There are relatively few references to the Throne (θρόνος) in the Christian scriptures compared to the Hebrew scriptures. Although in the New Testament the Throne is referred to extensively in the *Apocalypse of John* it is cited only four times in the Gospel of Matthew, once in the Gospel of Luke,<sup>634</sup> and once in Acts in which the Lord states that heaven is his throne and the earth is his footstool (7:49). Thus, the question arises if the Throne is of more significance to Judaic rather than Christian contexts and therefore an indicator of Judaic-Christian divergence. Embedded in the answer is the significance of

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<sup>634</sup> Matt. 5:34; 19:28; 23:22; 25:31 and Luke 1:32. In Luke 22:28-30 Jesus tells his loyal apostles that ‘they will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel’. As the word ‘thrones’ is not specific to the Throne of God, I am not including the reference in this discussion.

genre, given that apocalyptic is a literary genre and John's *Apocalypse* belongs self-evidently to an apocalyptic genre, notwithstanding the strong warning at the close of John's narrative that there are not to be additional or fewer words of prophecy in his *Apocalypse* (22:18-19).<sup>635</sup> Thus, the significance of the Throne in John's apocalyptic account in terms of Judaic-Christian divergence may be facilitated by an analysis of first-century Jewish and Christian apocalyptic writings.

In the Matthean text the author refers to heaven as the Throne of God (Matt. 5:34), and Jesus tells his disciples that when he, the Son of Man, is seated on the throne of his glory, the twelve disciples will sit on twelve thrones (Matt. 19:28; cf. 25:31). In criticising hypocritical behaviour by scribes and Pharisees, Jesus affirms that 'whoever swears by heaven, swears by the Throne of God and by the one who is seated upon it' (Matt. 23:22). From this brief review, it may appear that the author of the Gospel of Matthew is deploying the image of the Throne, drawing upon Judaic tradition, to reinforce his text rather than any suggestion of the Throne being an indicator of divergence. However, the Matthean text makes it clear that the apostles being accorded twelve thrones is not simply honorific: they will 'sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel', thus indicating continuity with Judaic tradition. It is significant, however, that their enthronement will be conditional upon the Son of Man being 'seated on the throne of his glory' (Matt. 19:28; cf. Luke 22:30). Thus, the Gospels' use of the image of thrones may be regarded as deliberate, indicating an association between the image of 'throne' and the

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<sup>635</sup> As will be noted later, as well as apocalyptic, the *Apocalypse of John* also contains significant references to prophecy, the juxtaposition of the two supporting the concept of a prophetic-apocalyptic continuum. Although literary genre is a modern construct and John's *Apocalypse* is depicted as foundational to his narrative, the account of John's visions is also clearly apocalyptic.

authority and power of God.<sup>636</sup>

The Gospel of Mark reinforces such a view. Acknowledging himself as the Messiah, Jesus tells the high priest: ‘you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power’ and ‘coming with the clouds of heaven’ (Mark 14:62).<sup>637</sup> From such references, and those discussed shortly in the *Apocalypse of John*, it seems evident that early Christian writers identified the Throne as more than a convenient site for commissioning religious leaders or the dispensation of justice; rather, the image of ‘throne’ signifies eternal and divine exaltation.<sup>638</sup> In the case of the Lukan reference, the angel Gabriel informs Mary that her son, who will be named Jesus, ‘will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David’ (Luke 1:31). Although the title, the ‘Son of the Most High’, suggests a new element to the concept of Jewish messianism, Luke’s single reference to the Throne is to the throne of David, thus suggesting a reinforcement of Judaic continuity.<sup>639</sup> The author of the Letter to the Hebrews cites Jesus as a ‘permanent’ high priest, ‘seated at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens’ from where ‘he is the mediator of a better covenant’ (Heb. 8:1, 6). Notably, there is no reference in Hebrews to the Throne *per se* although Jesus is accorded the status of a ‘permanent’ high priest seated at the right hand

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<sup>636</sup> The Gospel references to ‘throne’ are metonymical rather than metaphorical in that, similar to the word ‘crown’, the term ‘throne’ alludes to authority and power. As will be noted later in the chapter, the portrayal of the Throne and the centrality of its role in the *Apocalypse of John* suggests it is used as a blended metaphor rather than metonym.

<sup>637</sup> It is acknowledged, however, that Mark 14:62 infers, rather than cites, the Throne.

<sup>638</sup> See John J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: Messianism in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, second edition, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids and Cambridge UK, 2010, 163.

<sup>639</sup> This view does not diminish the critical nature of the messiahship of Jesus to divergence, an aspect discussed in the analysis of John’s treatment of the Lamb sharing the Throne with God in the following section.



of God. Notwithstanding the relatively few references to the Throne in early Christian writings and their apparent support for the concept of Judaic-Christian continuity, they combine to give an exalted status to the Throne, the significance of which is, however, far more centrally emphasised and reinforced in the *Apocalypse of John* in which Jesus as the Lamb shares the Throne with God and the Throne is surrounded by other heavenly and interacting protagonists.

### **A Metamorphic Throne: The *Apocalypse of John***

As well as Ezekiel's depiction of God's throne-chariot, John's vision of God occupying and speaking from a throne follows both the apocalyptic tradition and that of the *merkabah* tradition in which God is regarded as the sovereign of heaven, an image drawn from the Hebrew scriptures. In John's vision, a door stood open in heaven: 'at once [John] was in the spirit, and there in heaven stood a throne, with one seated on the throne!' (Rev. 4:1a-2). A significant difference in John's vision, however, is that although Jesus has elsewhere been identified as 'seated at the right hand of the Power' (Mark 14:62), John's account has the deified Messiah depicted as the Lamb sharing the Throne with God, thus identifying him with the same authority accorded to God in the Hebrew scriptures.

In the *Apocalypse of John*, the Throne of God (and of the Lamb) occupies a central place in John's vision: it is referred to no fewer than forty times in all but five of the twenty-two chapters, thus serving as a significant motif in his apocalyptic narrative.<sup>640</sup> In

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<sup>640</sup> Reference is not made to the Throne of God in chapters 9, 10, 11, 15, 17 and 18. The words 'throne' and 'thrones' appear forty-eight times in the book of Revelation; however, three references are to the throne of Satan (2:13; 13:2; 16:10) and five references are to multiple thrones (4:4; 11:16; 20:4). Thus, the Throne of God is referred to specifically on forty occasions.

contrast, in the other books of the New Testament there are fifteen references to the ‘throne’ and ‘thrones’ of which eleven are specific to the Throne of God.<sup>641</sup> Apart from the significance of such a quantitative use of the Throne in John’s narrative, however, most of John’s references to the Throne are contextual in that the Throne is not only the location from which God speaks and acts but also the locus around which the seven spirits, the four living creatures, the twenty-four elders and the angels function and interact.

That the Throne is a central feature in John’s *Apocalypse* appears to be a general consensus between most scholars; however, some suggest that the Throne is also significant in terms of John’s ‘theological’ concerns.<sup>642</sup> Although it may be argued that as the Throne does not appear to serve a protagonistic function in the narrative and is therefore not theologically significant to the overall text, central to this thesis is the argument that the author uses the Throne as a vehicle to address four dimensions which may be claimed as indicators of divergence between the role of the Throne in Judaic tradition and its role in John’s *Apocalypse*. The four dimensions comprise the introduction of the Lamb who shares the Throne with God, the participatory and interactive nature of the Throne, the manifestation and role of evil and its ‘enthroned’ status described by John as the throne of Satan, and the Throne as the source of the new Jerusalem.

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<sup>641</sup> The word ‘thrones’ appears in Mt. 19:28; Luke 1:52; 22:30; Col. 1:16. Thus, in the book of Revelation there are approximately four times more specific references to the Throne of God than in the rest of the New Testament. References to ‘throne’ and ‘thrones’ have been sourced from *A Concordance to the Greek Testament: According to the Texts of Westcott and Hunt, Tischendorf and the English Revisers*, eds. W.F. Moulton and A.S. Geden, fifth edition, T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1978.

<sup>642</sup> For example, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1991, 120; Ben Witherington III, *Revelation*, Cambridge University Press, 2003, 113.

## **The Throne and the Lamb**

The first, and arguably the most important, such indicator of divergence is that for the first time the Throne is not only the platform on which, in Judaic apocalyptic tradition, God is seated and from which he speaks and acts, but it is also the locus for the Lamb. To set the scene, the significance of the Throne is introduced in John's seventh letter to the church in Laodicea, pointing out that the 'lukewarm' nature of the church, resulting in 'wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked qualities', is in sharp contrast to the benefits of repentance (Rev. 3:16a, 17). Those who repent and conquer evil are assured of a place on the Throne: 'To the one who conquers I will give a place with me on my throne, just as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne'.<sup>643</sup> Thus, in the age to come, the faithful and the righteous will share in the new Jerusalem on the throne of God and of the Lamb. For the first time, the throne of God is no longer the throne of Y<sub>HWH</sub> but a throne shared with the Lamb, as well as a throne in the new 'holy city' to which a place will be accorded to those who repent and conquer evil, as well as hear the voice of the Lamb and open the door (Rev. 3:19b-21). The sharing of the throne of God with the Lamb and the promise of access for the faithful and the righteous to a place with the Lamb on the throne reflect a new religious construct which is divergent from the traditional Judaic concept of the throne of Y<sub>HWH</sub> such as, for example, the account of the throne in Ezekiel 1.

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<sup>643</sup> Rev. 3:21. That two thrones are cited, one each for the Lamb and the Father, is not regarded as significant. Although the text generally uses the definite article, signifying one throne, the author uses the word as a conceptual construct which does not preclude a pluralistic element to the term 'the throne'. In other instances in which the plural 'thrones' is used, the author intends a plurality of thrones. For example, Rev. 4:4 refers to twenty-four thrones, on which are seated twenty-four elders, surrounding the throne of God; and thrones of judgement are cited (Rev. 20:4).

The whole of Revelation 4 is devoted to a vision of God and a detailed description of the Throne, which draws partly upon descriptions from the Hebrew scriptures. For example, both John and Ezekiel refer to flashes of lightning, thunder and crystal and, in more detail, the four living creatures each with wings and, in the case of Ezekiel, each with the characteristics of a lion, a human, an eagle, and an ox. However, in John's account the living creatures were 'full of eyes in front and behind' and in lieu of sharing the same characteristics, each creature resembled either a lion, an ox, a human face, or a flying eagle.<sup>644</sup> That there are minor differences in such descriptions after some seven hundred years have elapsed is hardly surprising.<sup>645</sup> Nor is it surprising that, given the significance of the prophetic-apocalyptic tradition, there are descriptive passages employing such similar images. Of particular significance to the search for indications of divergence is that in contrast to descriptions of the throne of Y<sup>HWH</sup> in the Hebrew scriptures and the apocrypha, John's account not only provides an introduction to the Lamb but also emphasises the relationship between the Lamb and the Throne (Rev. 3:21). Before portraying the divine status of the Lamb in chapter five, in which the Lamb is clearly associated with the Throne and God, John reinforces the status of the Throne as the locus of the divine presence in chapter four.<sup>646</sup> His depiction of the Throne is through a hermeneutic filter which views it as an inclusive, collectively-concerted entity, one which serves an ontological function: the portrayal of an innovative God and the Lamb, sharing the Throne while interacting with elders, living creatures and angels in the divine

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<sup>644</sup> Ezekiel 1 and Rev. 4.

<sup>645</sup> In discussing such literary allusions, it is acknowledged that differences may arise due to faults in transmission or translation over an extended period of time.

<sup>646</sup> John's heavenly tour of the temple and the Throne in chapter four follows a literary pattern and the use of images also discernible in *1 Enoch*, chapters 1-36.

throne-court from which the new Jerusalem descends.<sup>647</sup>

For the first time, in chapter five, the Lamb is worshipped universally at the Throne, jointly with God. The nexus between God and the Lamb is emphasised by both sharing the Throne: at the centre of the Throne is the shepherd of the multitude who will ‘guide them to springs of the water of life’ (Rev. 7:9, 17). Further, the heavenly voices exclaim: ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign forever and ever’ (Rev. 11:15). Thus, the realisation of the kingship or sovereignty of God, jointly associating God and the Messiah, emanates from the precincts of the Throne in heaven. Building upon prophecies in Israel’s history, those of Moses, Isaiah, and Ezekiel,<sup>648</sup> the *Apocalypse of John* uses apocalyptic images to reveal that the Lamb that was slaughtered is Jesus, enthroned with God (Rev. 5:6, 12; 13:8; cf. 7:14) and, for his followers, Lord of history.

A new dimension of John’s apocalypse is introduced in chapter five, that of an unopened scroll with seven unbroken seals; the scroll is held in the right hand of the one seated on the Throne (5:1). Between the Throne and the four living creatures, John sees the Lamb which approaches the Throne and takes the scroll, following which the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders sing their adoration to the risen Christ who redeemed ‘saints from every tribe and language and people and nation’. Thus, a note of universalism is introduced, arising from the sacrificial death of the Lamb and the redemption open to all in a new era established by the risen Christ (5:6a, 7, 9). John is

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<sup>647</sup> The sharing of the Throne and the interaction between the figures surrounding the Throne is discussed shortly in ‘The Throne: *gesellschaftlich* and ontological’.

<sup>648</sup> Respectively, Exodus 24:9-11; Isa. 6:1-4; Ezek. 1:22-28.

informed by one of the elders that the one who is ‘worthy to take the scroll and open its seals’ (5:9a) is ‘the lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David’, thus reinforcing the Judaic antecedents of the newly-worshipped Lamb (5:5). The chapter concludes with the Throne as the central locus for ‘myriads and myriads and thousands and thousands’ of angels, together with the living creatures and elders all surrounding the throne acknowledging the new status of the Lamb and ‘every creature in heaven and on earth singing praise not only to God on the Throne but also to the Lamb’ (5:11-12). As with the preceding chapter, although the Throne is not the subject of John’s vision, it does serve a central function, reinforcing the locus of God’s authority as well as the setting for the newly established status of the Lamb: ‘to the one seated on the Throne and to the Lamb’ are accorded ‘blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!’ (5:13).

John returns to the theme of salvation and the adoration of the multitudes in chapter seven, citing all twelve tribes of Israel (Rev. 7:5-8), and a vast multitude from every nation and all tribes, peoples and languages, exclaiming, ‘salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!’ (7:9-10). To the qualities of God’s ‘power and might’ a pastoral and compassionate dimension is introduced. An elder informs John that God, ‘the one seated on the throne will shelter’ the redeemed and the righteous who will no longer hunger or thirst or be overcome by the sun, but *as well* the Lamb ‘at the centre of the Throne will be their shepherd’, guiding them to the ‘springs of the water of life’ (7:15b-17). Thus John emphasises two dimensions: first, the complementary nature of God and the Lamb both in delivering salvation as well as protecting and guiding the redeemed; and second, reinforcing the status of the Lamb who, ‘at the *centre* of the throne’, will be their shepherd, thus acknowledging a priestly-pastoral role (7:17a). Such

a portrayal suggests a degree of divergence from the depiction of Y<sup>HWH</sup> in Judaic tradition and the respective use of metaphors.<sup>649</sup>

In contrast to the Throne as the locus of God, and frequently the voice of God, as well as the context in which the Lamb is introduced, toward the end of John's *Apocalypse* he introduces an unspecified number of 'thrones' on which those who are seated have been given authority to judge (20:4). The use of the plural 'thrones' as thrones of judgement may reflect both John and Matthew drawing upon a common Jewish-Christian tradition or John building upon the Matthean account of Jesus telling his disciples: 'At the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man is seated on the throne of his glory, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel' (Matt.19:28; cf. Luke 22:30). However, although the image of Jesus' disciples sitting on twelve thrones as the Son of Man will be seated on the throne of his glory (Matt.19:28) *may* have been noted by John,<sup>650</sup> his portrayal of the 'social' Throne of God and of the Lamb depicts a throne which is conceptually and metaphorically more complex than the throne, and thrones, referred to in Matthew 19:28. Notwithstanding the parallel between Jesus' twelve disciples sitting on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28) and, in John's vision, an unknown number of thrones on which those seated 'were given authority to judge' (Rev. 20:4), it is not considered that such parallel references are of particular consequence to the central significance of the Throne in John's narrative. It might also be noted that the structure of Rev. 20 is not dissimilar from the structure of

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<sup>649</sup> As per the discussion in chapter 2 of John's use of metaphors. The suggestion of divergence drawn from Rev. 7:9-12 and 7:15-17 is drawn from interpreting the passages holistically rather than atomistically.

<sup>650</sup> Whether John *may* have been aware of Matt. 19:28 would depend on its date of authorship. In any event, it is considered likely that John would have been familiar with the tradition underlying the Matthean account.

Daniel's vision, in which he saw judgement thrones set in place, an Ancient One taking his place upon his throne, and the divine court sitting in judgement (Dan. 7:9-27).

Although the similarity of the two texts may support the concept of a prophetic-apocalyptic continuum, the introduction of the 'thrones of judgement' in John's text does not appear to contribute to the debate between continuity and divergence. It is possible that John may have drawn on the account of Daniel's vision to prepare the setting for his closing two chapters which open with John seeing 'a new heaven and a new earth [and] the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God' (21:1-2a). Revelation 21 opens with John hearing 'a loud voice from the throne' declaring that 'the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them' (21:3). As well as the theological significance of God declaring a new covenant as a feature of the new Jerusalem, it is the first indication in John's revelation that the locus of God, and the voice of God, will no longer be the throne in heaven but that God will dwell among mortals. Further, that the one who was seated on the throne is making all things new (21:5a) is reflected in the final two references to the Throne in the *Apocalypse of John* (22:1, 3). Both references indicate that although the Throne has not disappeared, it has taken on a metaphorical role<sup>651</sup> in the new Jerusalem and is shared by God and the Lamb. John is shown, by an angel, the river of the water of life 'flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street' of the new holy city (22:1) in which nothing accursed will be found any more, 'but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it' (22:3). One may conclude that although the role

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<sup>651</sup> The Throne has previously had a figurative role as a metonym; however, as noted earlier and discussed in the following section, it takes on the character of a blended metaphor due to its portrayal by John as a 'social' and interactive entity.



and function of the Throne change with the arrival of the new Jerusalem, the Throne remains a significant feature of the text and, in the final reference to the Throne, that it becomes the Throne of God *and of the Lamb*.

### **The ‘social’ Throne: *gesellschaftlich* and ontological**

The terms ‘social’, ‘*gesellschaftlich*’ and ‘ontological’ are used in this discussion with the following respective meanings. In the case of ‘social’, the word is used adjectivally to depict John’s revelation of the Throne in chapters 4 and 5 as one which includes the participation of a range of interactive protagonists. For example, in contrast with the Throne of Judaic tradition, one which is the locus of Y<sub>HWH</sub>, John’s portrayal of the Throne includes not only God but also the Lamb who shares the Throne with God, as well as the Throne-related participation of twenty-four elders, four living creatures, seven spirits of God, many angels, martyrs, and all tribes, languages, peoples and nations. Such entities participate in and around the Throne and their participation is of an interactive nature.<sup>652</sup> As the word ‘social’ may not be generally construed as capturing the concepts of active participation and interaction, the term ‘*gesellschaftlich*’ is considered to embrace a wider and more inclusive sense which, given the centrality of the Throne in John’s *Apocalypse*, is regarded as appropriate to the broader meaning John intends to convey.<sup>653</sup>

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<sup>652</sup> As for example in their liturgical expressions (Rev. 4:9-11; 5:8-9, 11-14).

<sup>653</sup> Although the term *Throngesellschaftlich* may have a more comprehensive meaning than ‘social’ in the sense of a ‘societal Throne’, other terms also have relevance to the kind of Throne John seeks to portray. For example, *Throngemeinschaft* captures the concept of a community-Throne, *Throngesellschaftformlich* suggests a ‘social-system Throne’, *Thronsaalgemeinschaftssinn* suggests a ‘community-spirited Throne-room’, and *Throngesellschaftlichzusammengesetz* conveys the sense of a ‘societal throne’ which is socially-composite. Given the range of nuanced meanings which may be applied to terms applicable to the Throne portrayed by John, the term ‘social’ Throne is adopted in the following discussion, noting that the concept of collective participation of an interactive nature is intended to be embedded therein.

The term ‘ontological’ is used in the sense of an understanding of the existence, nature of, and essential qualities underlying a term or concept. It is argued in this section that the ‘social’ Throne portrayed by John in Revelation 4 and 5 serves to elucidate new dimensions of human understanding of God and Jesus Christ. John’s vision appears to have ontological implications in that he is transported to God’s Throne to witness directly ‘the one seated on the Throne’ surrounded by those who constitute the Throne’s immediate society. Such protagonists include elders, living creatures, spirits of God, angels, martyrs, multitudes and for the first time in extant first-century religious literature, the Lamb, who shares the Throne with God (Rev. 5). Transported into the presence of God and his immediate entourage, John conveys a new and comprehensive account of the nature and function of God: in effect, a divine transcendence which adds an increased ontological understanding of God and his ‘social’ Throne for late first-century Christians.<sup>654</sup>

As the use of the word ‘social’ to describe the Throne in John’s *Apocalypse* does not adequately convey its nature and significance to his overall narrative, four points will serve to further elucidate the concept. First, the Throne in John’s vision is ‘social’ in the sense that it includes a wide range of Throne-related participants, all serving the structure and narrative of John’s text. John introduces the chief protagonists associated with the Throne in chapter four: in addition to God and the Lamb<sup>655</sup> are twenty-four elders (εἴκοσι τέσσαρες πρεσβύτεροι) ‘dressed in white robes, with golden crowns on their heads’, who are seated on twenty-four thrones surrounding the Throne of God (4:4). In front of the

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<sup>654</sup> See Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 6-8.

<sup>655</sup> The Lamb is depicted ‘between the four living creatures and among the elders ... standing as if it had been slaughtered’ but with ‘seven horns and seven eyes’, thus symbolising the ‘seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth’ (Rev. 5:6).

Throne are seven spirits of God (ἐπτὰ πνεύματα τοῦ θεοῦ) symbolised by seven flaming torches (4:5b). ‘Around the Throne, and on each side of the Throne, are four living creatures’ (τέσσαρα ζῶα) (4:6b), ‘each of them with six wings [and] full of eyes all around and inside’ (4:8a) who are symbolised by a lion, an ox, one ‘with a face like a human face, and the fourth living creature like a flying eagle’ (4:7). John concludes chapter four with the chief protagonists to God’s Throne singing to God’s holiness and glory (4:8-11), thus indicating their status as more than ‘extras’ attending the heavenly Throne: they are significant to the composite nature and function of the Throne depicted by John. The wider composition includes many angels numbering, with the elders and the living creatures, ‘myriads of myriads and thousands and thousands’ (5:11). In addition to the many angels, John’s vision includes ‘a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the Throne and the Lamb’ (7:9). Nor were the redeemed multitudes serving as ‘stage-property’; they exclaimed, ‘salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the Throne, and to the Lamb’ (7:10) and ‘before the Throne of God ... [they] worship him day and night’ (7:15a), actively reinforcing the liturgical unity associated with the Throne.<sup>656</sup>

The second aspect relating to the ‘social Throne’ concerns its interactive and functional nature. That there was interaction between the chief Throne-related protagonists, including ‘all the angels ... the elders and the four living creatures’ is expressed by John in his references to their coordinated singing, around the Throne, of thanksgiving and praise to God (7:11). Their singing is followed by ‘the great multitude

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<sup>656</sup> 2 *Enoch* 22:2 does refer to ‘the supremely great throne of the Lord’ and the ‘cherubim and the seraphim armies’ who are ‘in attendance all around’ the Lord without reference to other protagonists; nor is there any suggestion of the significance of the Throne being central to the text or of an interactive nature.

that no one could count' exclaiming loudly 'before the Throne and before the Lamb': 'Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the Throne, and to the Lamb' (7:9-10). Thus, John depicts socially interactive and collaborative activity which takes place before and around the Throne and which includes God and the Lamb. That there is interaction between several categories of participants as well as interaction with great multitudes and all tribes and their combined interaction with God and the Lamb, portrays a dynamic and collegial Throne. In support of the concept of 'social' Throne is John's sense of inclusiveness: he heard 'every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, singing "to the one seated on the Throne and to the Lamb ..."' (5:13).

In terms of the function of the Throne, John's *Apocalypse* depicts a duality of communication channels. In addition to the association of the Lamb with the Throne and the collaboration of diverse protagonists interacting with God and the Lamb on the Throne, John portrays the Throne as the locus from which God communicates to his heavenly and earthly realms.<sup>657</sup> For instance, there is communication between the twenty-four elders and God: the elders 'sit on their thrones before God' (11:16a). The Throne also serves as the site of God's wrath; 'from the face of the one seated on the Throne and from the wrath of the Lamb' emerges their wrath upon 'the kings of the earth and the magnates and the

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<sup>657</sup> The Voice of God may be interpreted as a rhetorical means of emphasising the transcendence of God through an increased level of rhetorical persuasion. As well as heightened rhetorical persuasion in John's *Apocalypse* there is wider audience reception to the Voice of God. God is speaking hypostatically to *all* people, in contrast with his utterances to single prophets and seers, or to the people of Israel. God's Voice from the Throne represents a paradigm shift from the barriers between God in heaven and earthly-bound humankind to one where both exist in communion and where the home of God is among mortals (Rev. 21:3-4). Thus the Voice of God addresses the dichotomy 'between the kingdom of God in heaven and its absence on earth' on earth; Rowland, *Christian Origins*, 294.

generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free' (6:16-17).

Judgement from the Throne is not the sole prerogative of God: John's vision includes thrones upon which those seated 'were given authority to judge' (20:4a). The 'thrones of judgement' in John's *Apocalypse* are similar to those in Daniel's vision which include other heavenly thrones with a judgemental function (Dan. 7:9). Likewise, in a Matthean account Jesus tells his disciples: 'When the Son of man is seated on the throne of his glory, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28; cf. Luke 22:30). Notwithstanding such similarities, the emphasis in John's text falls on 'the great white Throne', a throne of judgement, before which 'the dead, great and small' were standing and 'judged according to their works' (20:11-12; cf. 2 Cor. 5:10). In considerable contrast, however, to a great white Throne of judgement is the Throne from whence the new Jerusalem is announced. God's voice, from the Throne, declares that 'the home of God is among mortals' and, in lieu of his wrath, he will wipe every tear from the eyes of his peoples (21:3-4). Thus, from only several examples, one may appreciate the multifaceted roles of the Throne and its divine constituents.

The third dimension of the social Throne concerns the *Sitz im Leben* of its spatial dimension.<sup>658</sup> The inference that the Throne is the centre of a considerable heavenly space may be drawn from John's accounts of the multitudes of angels and the one hundred and forty-four thousand redeemed, drawn 'from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the Throne and the Lamb' (7:4, 9). The nature of the space in which the Throne is located, apart from its self-evident heavenly setting, is enhanced by the privileged and holy space it occupies. John specifies that the redeemed

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<sup>658</sup> Perhaps not unlike a 'physical geography' of the Throne.

‘are before the Throne of God, [worshipping] him day and night *within his temple*’ (7:15), thus associating the Throne of God with the Temple of God, a signification of holy and sacred space. The significance of the spatial holiness associated with the Throne is also indicated by John’s references to the Lamb who, from ‘the *centre* of the Throne’ will be the shepherd of the redeemed, guiding them ‘to springs of the water of life’ (7:17) and to the angel ‘with a golden censer’ who stood before ‘the golden altar that is before the Throne’ (8:3).

John’s descriptions of Throne-related liturgical activities, which depict a ‘heavenly cultic’ expression contrasting with the cult associated with the Judaic Temple, constitute a fourth dimension of the ‘social’ Throne. Far from the Throne being depicted as a static object, it serves as the centre of liturgical expression in the heavenly cultic activity. ‘Around the Throne and on each side of the Throne’, the four living creatures *sing unceasingly*: ‘Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God the Almighty’ giving ‘glory and honor and thanks to the one who is seated on the Throne’ (4:8). They are joined by the twenty-four elders who ‘fall before the one who is seated on the Throne’ in *worship*, casting their crowns before the Throne, *singing*: ‘You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power’ (4:10-11a). Chapter five concludes in similar vein: myriads and thousands of angels with the living creatures and the elders sing with full voice to the honour, glory and blessing of the Lamb. John hears ‘every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea’ singing to God and the Lamb who occupy the Throne, following which the four living creatures say ‘Amen!’ and the elders fall down and worship (5:11-14). Likewise, John concludes chapter seven with the many angels, the elders and the living creatures, falling on their faces around the Throne and

worshipping God by singing to God's wisdom, honour, power and might forever and ever (7:11-12). As well, the 'great multitude' of the redeemed worship God and the Lamb day and night before the Throne, in their washed robes made white in the blood of the Lamb (7:14-15). In the following chapter John depicts an angel at the altar of the Throne with a golden censer and 'a great quantity of incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar that is before the Throne' (8:3), thus reinforcing the image of cultic tradition. It may be noted, however, that beyond the extension of cultic tradition, John's depiction of the liturgical fervour, the unceasing singing and worship by the Throne's social constituency of God and the Lamb sharing the Throne is indicative of divergence in renewal because of the extent to which it contrasts with Judaic liturgical tradition involving the Temple, high priests and Temple-priests.

### **The twenty-four elders**

The preceding discussion of the four dimensions of the 'social' Throne are drawn from chapters 4-7 of John's text which constitute a contained sequence in his narrative, one in which John's visions of the Throne commence and conclude with the Throne-related participants worshipping God and the Lamb in and around the heavenly Throne. Thus, the four chapters which chiefly involve the elders, the living creatures, the spirits of God, the angels and the redeemed open and close with John's account of his vision of the heavenly Throne. His first sighting of Throne-related participants is the twenty-four elders dressed in 'white robes, with golden crowns on their heads', each seated on a throne surrounding the Throne of God (4:4). At first glance John's use of the colour white for the robes of the elders does not appear to follow the tradition of early Judaic literature, which describes robes as richly ornamented (Gen. 37:3; 2 Sam. 13:18), hemmed with linen

(Exod. 39:24), made of fine linen (Gen. 41:42; 1 Chron. 15:27), or blue and white with a purple mantle (Esther 8:15). However, Hebrew scriptures also refer specifically to white raiments, associating the colour white with purity. For example, Qoheleth advises the righteous and the wise, ‘let your garments always be white’ (Eccl. 9:8) and in Isaiah’s oracle, YHWH declares that in ceasing to do evil and learning to do good, ‘sins like scarlet’ shall be ‘like snow’ (Isa. 1:16-18; cf. Ps. 51:7). Daniel’s dream-vision includes seeing YHWH as ‘the Ancient One’ on his Throne with his clothing as ‘white as snow’ (Dan. 7:9).<sup>659</sup> Although brief, such examples suggest that in describing the twenty-four elders dressed in white robes, John was influenced by colour associations with the depiction of the colour white in the Hebrew scriptures and Jewish apocalyptic literature. It is also possible that New Testament writings may have exerted an influence. The Gospel of Mark cites Jesus taking Peter, James and John up a high mountain: ‘he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them’ (9:3).<sup>660</sup> Mark’s account of the heavenly messenger, described as a ‘young man’, at the tomb of Jesus, depicts him ‘dressed in a white robe’ (16:5). The parallel Matthean depiction is of an ‘angel of the Lord’ dressed ‘in clothing white as snow’ (28:3). The Gospel of John depicts ‘two angels in white’ (20:12) and at the ascension of Jesus in Acts 1:12, ‘two men in white robes’ tell the apostles that Jesus would ‘come in the same way as [they] saw him go into heaven’. As Jesus’ clothes became ‘dazzling white’ and the heavenly messenger and the two angels were attired in white, it would seem reasonable to

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<sup>659</sup> White raiments are also depicted in 2 Macc. 11:8 and 2 Esdras 2:40. Pre-Christian Jewish apocalyptic writings also make reference to the significance of the colour ‘white’: Enoch’s vision includes the ‘white gown of the ‘Great Glory’ sitting on the Throne, ‘shining more brightly than the sun ... whiter than any snow’ (1 Enoch 14:20; cf. 71:1 and 90:31). Thus, the range of depictions of white raiments suggests a literary motif.

<sup>660</sup> The same phrase, ‘and his clothes became dazzling white’ is used in Matt. 17:2.



assume that John's depiction of the twenty-four elders 'dressed in white robes' may have been sourced from Jewish apocalyptic imagery, as well as partly attributable to earlier Christian writings.<sup>661</sup> A commonly held view is expressed by David Aune: 'White robes, the characteristic garb of heavenly beings ... are also used as a polyvalent symbol for salvation, immortality, victory and purity'.<sup>662</sup> The colour white, however, apart from generally indicating purity, does not of itself serve to provide further identity-specific elucidation. Although the elders have individual thrones and wear crowns, suggesting an elevated regal status, their specific identity remains a matter of conjecture: a range of theories includes angels, gloried human beings, advisers to God, religious community leaders and symbolic figures devoid of specific identity-status.<sup>663</sup>

Speculation concerning the number 'twenty-four' ranges from a combination of the twelve sons of Jacob, the twelve apostles<sup>664</sup> and the twelve patriarchs, as well as the twenty-four orders of priests heading the ancestral houses of priests and Levites attributed to the time of David (1 Chron. 24:7-18, 31). Considered even less likely are the twenty-four divisions of musicians, set apart by 'David and the officers of the army', who

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<sup>661</sup> However, G.K. Beale notes that first-century writing almost contemporaneous with John's *Apocalypse* depicts robes as symbols of bodies but are not described as white; *The Book of Revelation*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1999, 394.

<sup>662</sup> Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 410.

<sup>663</sup> Adela Yarbro Collins, *Apocalypse*, 35. Witherington suggests that their role in the heavenly court I as representatives of human beings either as 'saints in heaven or simply as representative symbols of the elect or people of God'; *Revelation*, 117. David Aune's view is that the quest for the identity of the twenty-four elders 'has been the cause for much fruitless speculation'; 'Apocalypse Renewed' in *The Reality of Apocalypse: Rhetoric and Politics in the Book of Revelation*, ed. David L. Barr, SBL, Atlanta, 2006, 52.

<sup>664</sup> A view perhaps construed from Matt. 19:28 in which Jesus informs his disciples: 'Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man is seated on the throne of his glory, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel'; cf. Luke 22:30.

‘should prophesy with lyres, harps, and cymbals’ (1 Chron. 25:1).<sup>665</sup> Another unlikely explanation is the view that the elders are twenty-four in number because the day contains twenty-four hours and God is offered praise through a full daily cycle.<sup>666</sup> Given the lack of certainty concerning the identity of the elders and the reason they number twenty-four, it seems logical to focus on the *Sitz im Leben* of the term ‘elders’ in a search for identity-meaning. The term ‘elder’, generally accepted as the translation of the Greek πρεσβύτερος was used by first-century Jewish and Christian writers. Concerning the Hebrew scriptures, the term ‘elders’ is used frequently, commonly associated with the nation of Israel (for example, Exod. 3:16, 18 Deut. 31:28) and Judah (Ezek. 8:1), cities, towns, communities and gates (respectively, Josh. 20:4; Deut. 19:12, 21:6; Lev. 4:15; Deut. 21:19) and individuals (Lev. 9:1; Num. 22:7). On other occasions, the term ‘elders’ is deployed in association with other groups of people, including tribes (Deut. 5:23), judges (Deut. 21:2), officials (Deut. 29:10), judges *and* officials (Josh. 8:33), leaders (Josh. 24:1; Isa. 3:14), nobles (1 Kings 21:11), prominent people (Isa. 9:15), exiles (Jer. 29:1), and priests (Lam. 1:19).<sup>667</sup>

Two additional dimensions of the depiction of elders in Hebraic tradition relate to their numbers and to their status and function. The term ‘elders’ ranges across the

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<sup>665</sup> For discussion of the uncertainty concerning John’s use of the number twenty-four, see in particular, David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 288-89. Other relevant discussions include those by Craig R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, 74-75; Edmondo F. Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, trans. Maria Poggi Johnson and Adam Kamesar, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2006, 134-35; James L. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John: A Narrative Commentary*, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, 2009, 108-110; and M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation*, John Knox Press, Louisville, 1989, 106-107.

<sup>666</sup> Jürgen Roloff, *Revelation: A Continental Commentary*, trans. John E. Alsup and James S. Currie, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1993, 69.

<sup>667</sup> Such examples tend to indicate segmented societies reflecting tribal and/or clan-based systems.

Pentateuch, the Prophets and Wisdom literature and with few exceptions elders are referred to in terms which indicate extensive but unspecified numbers. For instance, according to Exodus Y<sub>HWH</sub> instructs Moses to ‘assemble the elders of Israel’ (3:16): the use of the verb ‘assemble’ suggests plurality of numbers. The phrase, ‘all the elders of Israel’ which is frequently cited (for example Deut. 31:9; 1 Kings 8:3) also suggests significant numbers. Likewise, the expression ‘elders of Judah’ (Ezek. 8:1) and the phrase, ‘bring together the elders’ (Joel 2:16), suggests greater rather than smaller numbers. An exception to the generally unspecified number of elders is noted: on several occasions Y<sub>HWH</sub> instructs Moses to ‘gather seventy of the elders of Israel’ (Exod. 24:1; Num. 11:16; cf. Ezek. 8:11). There does not appear to be, however, a rationale underlying the use of the number ‘seventy’. In respect of their status and function, it seems evident that elders were accorded an elevated socio-religious status, being summoned by the kings of Israel. They convened with David (2 Sam. 5:3); King Ahab of Israel summoned them to help deal with threats from King Ben-hadad of Aram (1 Kings 20:1-7); and King Josiah ‘gathered together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem’ (2 Chron. 34:29), resulting in a covenant with Y<sub>HWH</sub> (2 Chron. 34:31-33). Such few examples point to the elevated status accorded the elders, whose function is often described as providing counsel, self-evidently of a high level to those in absolute authority.<sup>668</sup> Although the elders’ elevated status is also reflected in the *Apocalypse of John*, their numbers are reduced to twenty-four. In summary: there does not appear to be a consensus on the rationale for John’s selection of ‘twenty-four’ to quantify the number of elders. Nor does his depiction of them in white robes, which are a characteristic of apocalyptic language, appear to clarify their identity other than to suggest the quality of purity and, perhaps, an association with the ‘dazzling

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<sup>668</sup> For example, 2 Chron. 34:29; 2 Kings 23:1; Ezek. 7:26; Ps. 119:100.

white' of Jesus' 'resurrection' garment.

Notwithstanding uncertainty concerning the identity, status and number of the elders, John does accord them a significant role: they are seated on twenty-four thrones around the Throne (4:4). They are also active in worshipping the 'one seated on the Throne' (4:10; 11:16; 19:4) and in the liturgical expression shared by other protagonists surrounding the Throne (4:10-11). Concerning the twenty-four elders' status, it is significant that John specifies that each is *seated* on a throne surrounding the Throne of God (4:4); whereas in the following chapter John introduces the Lamb in a *standing* position (5:6).<sup>669</sup> That the elders are *seated* in the presence of God serves to indicate an elevated status in relation to others in the throne-court, given the Judaic tradition that those who entered the throne-court were obliged to stand in the presence of God on the Throne.<sup>670</sup> Together with the four living creatures, the elders render homage to the Lamb (5:8) and combine with myriads of angels and the living creatures to sing of the worthiness of the Lamb (5:8, 11). Although the elders share worship roles with the living creatures and the angels, John accords them specific functions which include an elder announcing to him the appearance of the Lamb as the Lion of the tribe of Judah (5:5). The same or another elder announces the elect 'who have come out of the great ordeal' and whose robes have been washed in the blood of the Lamb (7:13-14), and collectively they lead the worship of God for saving the faithful (11:16-18).<sup>671</sup>

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<sup>669</sup> John also sees the Lamb *standing* on Mount Zion (14:1).

<sup>670</sup> For example, 1 Kings 22:19; Jer. 23:18; Dan. 7:10; *T. Abr.* 4:5; 8:1; *T. Levi* 2:10. David Aune notes that the tradition of standing before the Throne continues in rabbinic literature, *Revelation 1-5*, 352-53.

<sup>671</sup> See L. Hurtado, 'Revelation 4-5 in the Light of Jewish Apocalyptic Analogies', *JNST* 25 (1985), 105-24. Another author who depicts the functions of the elders is Leonard L. Thompson, *Revelation*, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1998, 91. Neither author, however,

## The four living creatures

John's second citing of participants at the 'social' Throne is of the four living creatures, or cherubim, who 'share' chapter four with the twenty-four elders. Unlike the twenty-four elders, the four living creatures are more familiar due to references to them in the Hebrew scriptures.<sup>672</sup> They are represented symbolically by a lion, an ox, a creature 'with a face like a human face', and a flying eagle (4:7).<sup>673</sup> To such differences in species, however, are added the shared attributes of each having 'six wings' and being 'full of eyes all around and inside' (4:8). The living creatures are, 'day and night without ceasing', singing 'Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come' (4:8). As they 'give glory and honor and thanks to the one who is seated on the Throne' they are joined by the twenty-four elders who fall before the Throne singing God's praises (4:9-10), thus reinforcing the interacting, social nature of the Throne.<sup>674</sup> In addition to drawing on aspects of Ezekiel's depiction of the Throne, John portrays the four living creatures in terms which are remarkably similar to Ezekiel's vision of 'something like four living

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discusses the interaction of the elders with other Throne-related protagonists or the Throne as a 'social' entity. Yet another view is that the elders symbolise the twelve Hebrew patriarchs and the twelve apostles of Jesus and as such serve as representatives of the church in heaven; see John R. Yeatts, *Revelation*, Believers Church Bible Commentary, Herald Press, Scottsdale PA, 2003, 470.

<sup>672</sup> For example, Ezek. 1:4-28; 4:7.

<sup>673</sup> Such a depiction is construed by some as a symbolic representation of the animate creation: the lion and the ox as symbols of wild and domesticated animals; the man as humankind, and the eagle as all bird-life, thus portraying the whole of the animate creation worshipping and praising God and the Lamb; see Yeatts, *Revelation*, 468.

<sup>674</sup> Russell S. Morton, referring to the living creatures (Rev. 4:6b; 5:6), notes that they are depicted by John as not bearing the throne-chariot of God but are "constituent elements of an animate throne", that is they are part of the Throne of God. Thus, they reflect a new image by John, not of an unapproachable Throne but one that is inclusive and interactive, a view that is close to the concept of a 'social Throne' argued in this chapter. See Morton, *Once upon the Throne and the Lamb: A Traditional Historical/Theological Analysis of Revelation 4-5*, Peter Lang, New York, 2007, 103.

creatures' (1:5).<sup>675</sup> Parallel characteristics of the living creatures, in addition to their identical number of four, include their possession of wings, although Ezekiel states each creature has four wings (1:6) and John's account is 'each with six wings' (4:8a). Ezekiel accords each of the creatures the characteristics of a human being, a lion, an ox and an eagle (1:10). John's description is of a lion, an ox, one with 'a face like a human face', and one 'like a flying eagle' (4:7), thus indicating minor differences but otherwise deploying similarities too parallel to ignore. As well as similarities, however, there are differences: Ezekiel refers to human hands under the creatures' wings and comments on their legs and feet (1:7-8), whereas John makes no reference to such attributes. Although Ezekiel's vision does not include any reference to the creatures' eyes, John refers to the creatures being 'full of eyes in front and behind' (4:6b) and 'full of eyes all around and inside' (4:8a), thus reinforcing their 'all-seeing' qualities. In terms of the creatures' behaviour, Ezekiel depicts the creatures moving 'straight ahead, without turning as they moved' (1:9) and repeats such movements in 1:12. In contrast, John does not describe their movements. He does, however, portray them as singing 'day and night without ceasing' to God's holiness and everlasting nature (4:8), a throne-related, participatory and liturgical dimension not contained in Ezekiel's account. Notwithstanding such examples of descriptive differentiation, the several parallel similarities support the case of John drawing upon Ezekiel's vision-narrative, indicating a significant level of apocalyptic continuity over some five hundred years.<sup>676</sup>

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<sup>675</sup> Ibid., 100-104. Morton concludes that although the four living creatures in John's *Apocalypse* may be drawn from the *Apocalypse of Abraham* chapter 18, their identity represents a new image of the Throne, one beyond that contained in Ezek. 1 and Isa. 6.

<sup>676</sup> The argument in support of prophetic-apocalyptic continuity remains valid even if one denies that the text of Ezekiel does not conform to apocalyptic genre. In such case, it may be argued that John is reinterpreting the prophet Ezekiel's vision, thus also reflecting continuity.

Both Ezekiel and John specify the number of living creatures as four. However, notwithstanding the elaborate symbolism in each account, neither author offers a rationale for that number having been chosen. As with the twenty-four elders, there does not appear to be a consensus concerning the selection of the number four. Although Ezekiel does not appear to have a predilection for the number, John deploys the same number in describing the four different coloured horses and their four riders emerging from the first four of the seven seals opened by the Lamb (6:1-8). In the following chapter John's vision includes 'four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth', 'four angels who had been given power to damage the earth and sea' (7:1-2), and in four chapters John makes four references to the seven spirits of God (1:4; 3:3; 4:5; 5:6). That John refers to the Lamb on twenty-eight occasions may be linked to his propensity to use the numbers seven and four, the multiplication of which is twenty-eight. As such a view is speculative, more significance may attach to the view that John appears to have used the number four with deliberate, symbolic intention.<sup>677</sup> Perhaps drawing on Ezekiel's reference to 'a wheel on the earth beside the living creatures, one for each of the four of them' (1:15), he describes the earth with either four corners (7:1; 20:8) or four divisions (5:13; 14:7). As well, on seven occasions he designates, in various orders, 'peoples, tribes, languages and nations', namely, a fourfold reference to the constituent populations of his known world.<sup>678</sup> Although certainty concerning John's use of 'four' to quantify the living creatures is beyond the scope of this discussion, the significance he accords the number in other respects appears to elevate the importance of

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<sup>677</sup> According to Richard Bauckham, however, the seven-times-four references to the Lamb 'indicate the worldwide scope of [the Lamb's] complete victory' based on the view that 'as seven is the number of completeness, four is the number of the world', *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 66-67.

<sup>678</sup> Rev. 5:9; 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15. See Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 67 and 109.

the living creatures in his portrayal of the ‘social’ Throne of God and the Lamb.

The four living creatures are consistently described by John as ‘creatures’. They are not endowed with either traditional angelic or human characteristics, with the exception of the third creature which has ‘a face like a human face’ (4:7). They do have eyes; indeed, they are ‘full of eyes in front and behind’ as well as ‘all around and inside’ (4:6, 8), a characteristic which does not suggest an anthropomorphic quality. Rather, the emphasis accorded to their being all-seeing, and perhaps all-knowing, suggests heavenly rather than earthly status. The Hebrew scriptures, particularly the Pentateuch and the Prophets, include frequent references to ‘living creatures’ (נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה in Hebrew and ψυχὴ ζῶσα in Greek; cf. Revelation’s expression τὸ ζῶον) commencing with the story of creation in Genesis in which God calls for ‘the waters [to] bring forth swarms of living creatures’ (1:20) and ‘the earth [to] bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind’ (1:24).<sup>679</sup> In the conversation between God and Noah and his sons concerning God’s covenant with them and their descendants, God distinguishes between Noah and his descendants and living creatures including birds, domestic animals, and ‘every animal of the earth’ (Gen. 9:8-10, 15-16). Such accounts restrict the term ‘living creatures’ to the non-human species of animal life and are devoid of any inference of heavenly status. Moses distinguishes between clean and unclean animals and winged creatures (Deut. 14:3-20), thus raising purity issues with respect to living creatures. Likewise, YHWH instructs Moses concerning clean and unclean animals and marine ‘living creatures’. Everything in the waters that does not have fins and scales

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<sup>679</sup> As well as the term ‘living creatures’ associated with the creation account in Genesis, the text also uses synonymously the term ‘living things’; for example, 1:28; 6:19; 7:4. Neither term, however, is used to denote human (or heavenly) life.



is ‘detestable’ to the people of Israel (Lev. 11:1-12; Deut. 14:9). Similarly, birds and winged insects are specified clean or unclean for human consumption (Lev. 11:13-23). As all such species are ‘living creatures’ according to the account of creation in Genesis, it seems that unlike the heavily-symbolic use of the term by John in his *Apocalypse*, the Pentateuch deploys the term rather widely. The term encompasses all non-human creatures in positive and negative contexts of purity, which are well removed from the heavenly court and Throne depicted by John.

The prophet Ezekiel’s accounts of living creatures represent a paradigm shift from those in the Pentateuch. Rather than living creatures which constitute part of the creation and which are specified clean or unclean, Ezekiel’s vision portrays the specific number of four living creatures in very imaginative and symbolic terms. His vision of the four living creatures is in the immediate context of his vision of God and ‘when the living creatures moved, the wheels [of the throne-chariot] moved beside them’ (1:19). Over the heads of the living creatures was a dome, above which ‘there was something like a throne’ seated above which ‘was something that seemed like a human form’ (1:22, 26). Ezekiel heard a voice from the Throne (1:25) and witnessed ‘a splendor all around’ (1:27-28). For Ezekiel, ‘this was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord’ (1:28b). Such a brief extract from Ezekiel serves to highlight the prophet’s perception of four living creatures accorded a heavenly status, physically related to the throne-chariot of Y<sup>HWH</sup>, and a central part of the splendour which surrounded ‘the likeness of the glory of the Lord’. Such a portrayal of living creatures which contrasts strongly with their depiction in the Pentateuch and closer to John’s account in several key respects. In chapter ten, Ezekiel reinforces the difference between his portrayal of the living creatures and those in the

Pentateuch: in lieu of species of animals, birds and marine life Ezekiel refers to the living creatures as ‘cherubim’ (10:1-5). They are, however, the same creatures he depicts in chapter one, the living creatures he saw by the river Chebar (10:15), and their function remains the same: heavenly attendants and guardians of the Throne, whose spirits are in the wheels of the throne-chariot (1:20; 10:17). Ezekiel uses the terms ‘living creatures’ and ‘cherubim’ synonymously: ‘these were the living creatures that I saw underneath the God of Israel ... and I knew that they were cherubim’ (10:20). Ezekiel is the only biblical prophet to portray living creatures in positive, celestial terms. Other references in Jeremiah and Isaiah, few in number, are to creatures rather than *living* creatures and are of a negative character such as, for example, Jeremiah’s reference to a deserted, uninhabited Babylon occupied by wild animals, including hyenas and ostriches (Jer. 50:39), and Isaiah’s account of Babylon with wild animals and ‘its houses full of howling creatures ... hyenas in its towers and jackals in the pleasant places’ (Isa. 13:21-22). Both depictions stand in vivid contrast to those of the living creatures described by Ezekiel and John. John’s use of the term ‘living creatures’ to portray heavenly and Throne-related entities in contrast to Judaic tradition, other than that expressed in Ezekiel, suggests that John elected to transform a common expression in the Pentateuch to one of new and different meaning, adding a theological and divergent dimension to the term.

John’s depiction of the four living creatures also stands in contrast with other New Testament writings which, apart from four brief texts, do not include references to living creatures. None of the four, however, uses the Greek ψυχὴ ζῶσα, the expression used consistently by John to refer to the living creatures. In Hebrews 9:5 the reference is to ‘the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat’; Paul’s letter to the Colossians

refers to the Gospel having been proclaimed to ‘every creature under heaven’ (1:23); the Letter of James depicts the taming of ‘every species of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature’ - *πᾶσα γὰρ φύσις θηρίων τε καὶ πετεινῶν ἑρπετῶν τε καὶ ἐναλίων δαμάζεται* (3:7); and Simeon Peter’s reference to creatures is to unrighteous people being ‘like irrational animals, mere creature of instinct, born to be caught and killed’ - *ὡς ἄλογα ζῶα γεγεννημένα φυσικὰ εἰς ἄλωσιν καὶ φθοράν* (2 Peter 2:12). Thus, John’s portrayal of four living creatures is unrelated to any other New Testament reference to ‘living creatures’, a factor which suggests divergence from other first-century Christian texts.<sup>680</sup> Although John does not explain why the living creatures are at the centre of Throne-activities, they are presented as integral elements of the Throne, components which contribute to the inclusive and interactive nature of the Throne.<sup>681</sup>

The principal if not sole function of the living creatures, who do not appear in John’s vision other than in their relationship to the Throne, is liturgical: ‘day and night without ceasing they sing’ giving ‘glory and honor and thanks’ to the one seated on the Throne (4:8-9). John’s vision includes a Lamb, between the Throne and the four living creatures, ‘standing as if it had been slaughtered’ (5:6). Together with the twenty-four elders, the living creatures fall before the Lamb, ‘each holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints’ and sing a new song, on this occasion to the Lamb, by whose blood ‘saints from every tribe and language and people and nation’ were ransomed for God and made to be a basileia, priestly kingdom (5:8-10). John’s

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<sup>680</sup> Although John’s depiction of the ‘living creatures’ does not have parallels in New Testament writings, he does employ the term within the location of the term within the genre of apocalyptic and its antecedents.

<sup>681</sup> See R.G. Hall, ‘Living Creatures in the Midst of the Throne: Another Look at Rev. 4:6’, *NTS* 36 (1990), 609-13.

vision includes the voice of many thousands of angels ‘surrounding the Throne and the living creatures and elders’ all singing to the ‘honor and glory and blessing’ of the Lamb (5:11-12). To the significant liturgical dimension of the living creatures’ role may be added their central and representative, Throne-related, worship-role on behalf of not only the ‘saints from every tribe and language and people and nation’ (5:9) but indeed the whole of creation: ‘every creature in heaven and on earth and under the sea and in the sea, and all that is in them’ (5:13). All are united in singing ‘blessing and honor and glory and might’ to the One on the Throne and to the Lamb, to which the four living creatures announce, ‘Amen!’ (5:13-14). Thus, John’s account of the dynamic worship and liturgical functions of the living creatures comes to a close: a hymnic, cosmically inclusive chorale, one which they initiate and conclude.<sup>682</sup>

### **The seven spirits of God**

Although the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures appear to be the chief protagonists in the central role John accords to the Throne, its *gesellschaftlich* nature includes other related entities, namely, the seven spirits of God, the myriads of angels, the martyrs, and the great multitude of tribes, peoples, languages and nations. The seven spirits of God (τὰ ἑπτὰ πνεύματα τοῦ θεοῦ) are referred to in four chapters of John’s *Apocalypse*: 1:4; 3:1; 4:5b; and 5:6.<sup>683</sup> In the context of the complexity and symbolism of John’s narrative, the seven spirits of God do not appear to have been as widely recognised as other protagonists in the central role of the Throne or the overall account of John’s

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<sup>682</sup> See Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 33-34.

<sup>683</sup> The pneumatological element of the seven spirits perceived in Rev. 1:4; 3:1; 4:5b; and 5:6 may be equated with the ‘seven-fold demonic power’ expressed in Rev. 12:3 and 13:1; see Edmondo F. Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, 35.

visions. However, it will be argued that that they contribute to proto-trinitarian notions of consequence to John's narrative in three respects; first, as prototypes of the divine (Holy) Spirit; second, their juxtaposition with John's other references to the Spirit; and third, their role in elucidating the interactive nature of the Throne and its outreach, beyond the heavenly court, to humankind.

John's testimony to the seven churches opens with the inclusion of 'grace and peace' from 'the seven spirits who are before [the] Throne' (1:4). The 'grace and peace' extended in John's epistolary prescript, however, are not extended only by the seven spirits of God, but are also conveyed from God, who is, was, and is to come, as well as from Jesus Christ, the 'firstborn of the dead', and the ruler of the kings of the earth' (1:4-5). In such manner, John conveys 'grace and peace' from three entities which, although linked together by three noun clauses, are portrayed as a composite group, with the seven spirits before the Throne, suggestive of a proto-trinitarian construct on John's part.<sup>684</sup> In any event, it appears noteworthy that John includes the seven spirits as directly associated with God and Jesus Christ, and identifies them as being before the Throne which we come to know is also shared by the Lamb. Further, the seven spirits are also depicted as a source of grace and peace, thus indicating at the outset they are not 'ornamental adjuncts' to the Throne but divine protagonists interacting with humankind.<sup>685</sup>

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<sup>684</sup> See Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 24; cf. Lupieri, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, 103.

<sup>685</sup> By introducing the seven spirits in his prescript extending 'grace and peace', John provides a contrast with similar New Testament salutations including the phrase 'grace and peace' but which refer only to God as Father and Jesus Christ as Lord; for example, Rom. 1:7b; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:3; Eph. 1:2; Phil. 1:2; 2 Thess. 1:2; 1 Tim. 1:2b; Titus 1:46; 2 Peter 1:2. Further, the phrase 'spirits of God' does not appear in Hebrew scriptures.

As noted earlier, the number ‘seven’ is generally accepted as signifying the concept of completeness: the quality of perfection and totally Spirit-filled.<sup>686</sup> In the letter to the church in Sardis, the presence of Jesus includes ‘the seven spirits of God and the seven stars’ (3:1); John’s first vision of the Throne, the ‘one seated on it’, the elders and the living creatures, includes the seven spirits of God represented symbolically by seven flaming torches in front of the Throne (4:5b). The notion of completeness implicit in John’s use of the number seven is applied to his description of the death of Jesus symbolised by a Lamb ‘between the Throne and the four living creatures and among the elders’ ... ‘standing as if it had been slaughtered, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth’ (5:6). Adela Yarbro Collins also associates the number ‘seven’ with the concept of completeness and state of perfection in that the symbol of the slain Lamb with seven horns may be interpreted as the Lamb having ‘great might’ and the Lamb’s ‘seven eyes’ to symbolise the seven ‘eyes of the Lord, which range through the whole earth’ depicted in Zech. 4:10.<sup>687</sup> Various views attach to the significance of the Lamb having seven horns. For instance, Steven Friesen suggests that the horns (and eyes) are deployed by John to distinguish the slaughtered Lamb from ‘other known proto-Christian texts’ and that the seven horns denote power but ‘without a

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<sup>686</sup> For example, see Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, in which he notes that although it is ‘typically maintained’ that John’s quantification of the ‘spirits of God’ with the number ‘seven’ is ‘indicative of the totality, perfection, and fullness of the Spirit’, the number ‘seven’ is not the only numeral used to ‘indicate the totality of something’ as the case, for example, with the quantification of angels (pp. 102-3). As will be noted, however, there are varying views on the semantic significance of John’s use of the number ‘seven’.

<sup>687</sup> Yarbro Collins, *Apocalypse*, 41. In noting that the number ‘seven’ appears fifty-four times in the *Apocalypse of John*, Aune is not of the view it symbolises ‘completeness’; rather he is of the view it ‘emphasises the divine origin and authority of the message of John, since seven is primarily a number with cosmic significance and is therefore associated with heavenly realities’; *Revelation 1-5*, 29.

clear literary precedent' for the number seven.<sup>688</sup> Richard Bauckham is of the view that the Lamb's seven horns 'are the divine power set against the horns of the dragon and the beasts' in John's narrative (12:3; 13:1, 11; 17:12-13), a contrast which seems relevant and reasonable.<sup>689</sup>

Although John's reference to the seven spirits is often interpreted as a representation of the Holy Spirit,<sup>690</sup> such a description based on the sevenfold manifestation of the Holy Spirit in Isa.11:1-3 should not be accepted too readily as such an association may be a consequence of modern understandings of trinitarianism.<sup>691</sup> David Aune suggests that the seven spirits before the Throne refer to the seven archangels who are continually in God's presence (4:5; 5:6; 8:2; cf. Tob.12:15; *I En.* 20), and are an emphasis by John on the heavenly origins of his revelatory visions.<sup>692</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza is also of the view that the notion of the 'seven spirits' is probably derived from the concept of the seven archangels and that, 'in Revelation they represent

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<sup>688</sup> Steven J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins*, Oxford University Press, 2001, 200 and 256 n.29.

<sup>689</sup> Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 112.

<sup>690</sup> For example, Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 25, 66, 110-115; G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John*, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody MA, 1996, 15. Bogdan G. Bucur deems it 'most likely that the mention of the "seven spirits" corresponds to the expected reference to the Holy Spirit' and that John's expression 'seven spirits' designates what the early church more often referred to as 'Holy Spirit'; 'Hierarchy, Prophecy, and the Angelomorphic Spirit: A Contribution to the Study of the Book of Revelation's *Wirkungsgeschichte*', *JBL* 127:1 (2008) 176. See also Bruce M. Metzger, *Breaking the Code: Understanding the Book of Revelation*, Abingdon Press, 2006, 23-24.

<sup>691</sup> See Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 33

<sup>692</sup> *Ibid.*, 40-41. Aune suggests the seven spirits may be understood as the 'seven principal angels of God', noting that in Qumran literature angels are designated 'spirits' (for example, 1QM 12:8-9; 4Q 404 5:5; 4Q 405 23 I 9-10); *ibid.*, 34-35. Further, he associates the seven spirits of 1:4, 3:3; 4:5b and 5:6 with the seven angels standing before God (8:2) to support his sustained view that 'the seven spirits are the seven archangels'; *ibid.*, 35, 227, 353.

the spirit of God in its fullness and completeness of God's own action',<sup>693</sup> presumably a description predicated on John's reference to 'the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth' (5:6). However, the semantic significance of John's use of 'seven' to depict the spirits of God would not appear to be easily categorised. As the same number is also used extensively by John to quantify, and presumably qualify, lampstands (1:12), stars (1:16), heads (5:6; 12:3; 17:3), angels (8:2), and trumpets, bowls and seals (chapters 12-14), John gives a narrative weighting to the number which greatly outweighs such references in the Hebrew scriptures and the New Testament.

The second dimension of the contribution of the seven spirits concerns their juxtaposition with the divine (Holy) Spirit. In comparison with references to God and the Lamb and Christ in John's narrative, his mention of the Spirit, although relatively infrequent, is not without consequence to his overall narrative.<sup>694</sup> Richard Bauckham holds such a view: 'the Spirit plays an essential role in the divine activity of establishing God's kingdom in the world'.<sup>695</sup> Another dimension to the Spirit's role is offered by David Aune who suggests the role and function of the Spirit in Revelation is associated with an apocalyptic understanding of inspiration and that the Spirit is the divine agent who mediates apocalyptic visions.<sup>696</sup> The two perspectives are not necessarily contradictory. John's narrative is apocalyptic and it does culminate with the *basileia* of the new Jerusalem. Thus, the engagement of the Spirit in both dimensions adds to its overall significance to the account of John's visions.

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<sup>693</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Justice and Judgment*, 77 n. 8.

<sup>694</sup> Of interest is that the phrases 'spirit of God' and 'Holy Spirit' do not appear in the *Apocalypse of John*.

<sup>695</sup> Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 109.

<sup>696</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 36. Aune distinguishes Rev. 19:10 and 22:17 from other references to the Spirit in that they are more associated with John's emphasis on prophecy.



John appears to give emphasis to the Spirit in several respects. First, he declares his own state of being ‘in the Spirit’ at significant moments in his narrative. Such instances include hearing the hypostatic voice of God and seeing one like the Son of Man (1:10, 13), seeing the heavenly Throne with one seated on the Throne surrounded by the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders (4:2ff.), seeing the woman on the scarlet beast, both heavily symbolic (17:3), and witnessing the holy city, the new Jerusalem, ‘coming down out of heaven from God (21:10). Second, John gives emphasis to the role of the Spirit addressing the churches, concluding each message with the significance of what ‘the Spirit is saying to the churches’ (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). Third, the Spirit acts in its own divine right and status, confirming that those who ‘die in the Lord ... will rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them’ (14:13) and, together with the bride, says ‘Come ... and ‘take the water of life as a gift’ (22:17). Thus, John refers to the Spirit in relation to key elements and at particular points of his narrative, described by Richard Bauckham as ‘strategically placed’, the effect of which is not merely to associate the Spirit with parts of John’s visionary experience, but to ‘attribute the whole of it to the agency of the divine Spirit’.<sup>697</sup> In similar vein David Aune, who having described the role and function of the Spirit in Revelation as the divine agent who mediates apocalyptic visions, now depicts it as ‘primarily prophetic, representing the divine agent through which divine revelation is mediated to human beings’.<sup>698</sup>

The seven spirits of God are not portrayed by John as depicting a doctrine of the Holy Spirit, that is, God as three persons in one substance. Nor is John’s portrayal of the Spirit characteristic of the Holy Spirit viewed from a modern perspective. However,

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<sup>697</sup> Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 116.

<sup>698</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 36.

neither can John's four references to the seven spirits nor his fourteen references to 'the Spirit' be categorised as irrelevant to trinitarianism, if regarded in their first-century prototypal form rather than what emerged in the Christian church as the Holy Spirit.

Richard Bauckham's statement that the seven spirits represent 'the fullness of the divine Spirit in relation to God, to Christ, and to the churches mission to the whole world' may be regarded as an overstatement if viewed from a first-century apocalyptic perspective.<sup>699</sup>

Such a perspective may have drawn on Zechariah 4:6: the angel of the Lord indicates that God's earthly kingdom will not be achieved by worldly power such as that of the beasts, but by divine spirit, expressed by John as the seven spirits of God.<sup>700</sup> In any event, it does seem reasonable to assume that John did not disavow a complementarity between the 'seven spirits' and 'the spirit'. Further, John's understanding of the divine Spirit is actively represented by the seven spirits which serve to communicate, from the locus of the Throne, the will of God and Christ in the new earthly *basileia*, thus demonstrating an active outreach from the Throne.<sup>701</sup>

The third aspect of the seven spirits and their outreach beyond the heavenly Throne is associated with John's first vision of the Lamb (5:6). It is when John sees the Lamb, standing as though slaughtered, 'having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God' that we learn the seven spirits 'are sent out into all the earth' (5:6). Thus,

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<sup>699</sup> Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 115. Less of an overstatement is his view that while God and the Lamb share the Throne, 'the seven spirits are the presence and power of God on earth, bringing about God's kingdom by implementing the Lamb's victory throughout the world'; *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 113.

<sup>700</sup> Ibid., 110-111.

<sup>701</sup> Such suppositions may also be challenged as overstatement, noting that the reference to the seven spirits in Rev. 4:5 is stated by David Aune as 'probably an explanatory gloss'; *Rev. 1-5*, 33. It may be argued, however, that Rev. 5:6 provides support for the active, outgoing role of the seven spirits.

the seven spirits are identified not only with the Throne of God, but also the Lamb-Messiah and that they are far from static protagonists at the Throne but divine agents at work in the world.

Notwithstanding various interpretations of the symbolic significance of the number ‘seven’ and its application to, and the identity-meaning of, John’s use of the expression *ἑπτὰ πνεύματα*, the seven living spirits are associated with his other references to the Spirit, as well as to the centrally-depicted Throne, the Lamb, and the twenty-four elders and four living creatures. John reveals that beyond the interaction around the Throne, through the agency of the seven spirits of God, there is a reciprocal divine action extending outwards from the Throne. Thus, the seven spirits may be deemed to represent the presence of God in the world, at work in all the earth (5:6), as active agents in the establishment of God’s *basileia*.

### **Angels and the ‘social’ Throne**

Angels also feature as participants at the Throne of God and the Lamb, for example, in respect of the seven seals and the seven trumpets (6-11). An initial impression is that John portrays angels as priests of the heavenly Temple performing cultic duties.<sup>702</sup> Such a brief description, however, does not adequately portray their throne-related liturgical functions, nor their status as an ‘angelic priesthood’.<sup>703</sup> As well, angels undertake a range

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<sup>702</sup> See Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, 2002, 259.

<sup>703</sup> John’s treatment of angels in the context of the Throne has a resemblance to the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, thirteen liturgical songs from the Second Temple Period which portray priestly angels serving and worshipping God. It would appear reasonable to assume that John’s portrayal of throne-related angels alludes to second Temple priestly tradition and angelic liturgy of the Qumran Community (4Q400-407 and 11Q17).

of diverse roles, if not directly centred at the Throne, acting in the world from the Throne as the locus of God and the Lamb. Examples of angels acting as divine agents between heaven and earth include their proclaiming the ‘eternal gospel’ on earth ‘to every nation and tribe and language and people’ (14:6) and announcing God’s impending judgement (14:7-13). They also disperse on earth the ‘seven bowls of the wrath of God’ (15-16), call on God’s people to leave the doomed city of Babylon (17-18), and participate in the victory of Christ, the overcoming of Satan, and the final judgement (19-20). Finally, they show John ‘the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God’ (21) and ‘the river of the water of life’ flowing ‘from the Throne of God and the Lamb’ through the middle of the new Jerusalem (22). That John accords angels significant roles in all but three of his twenty-two chapters (4, 6, 13) indicates their relevance to his *Apocalypse* and their dynamic functions as more than mere attendants to God, the Lamb and the Throne. It is their Throne-related identity, function and interaction, as well as their divine agency on earth that are contextually relevant to the concept of a *gesellschaftlich* Throne.

Of the many verses in John’s *Apocalypse* which portray angels, there are three of specific significance to the concept of a ‘social’ Throne. Honouring the sacrificial Lamb and ‘surrounding the Throne’ with the elders and the living creatures, are ‘myriads and myriads and thousands and thousands’ of angels (ἄγγελοι) ‘singing with full voice’ (5:11). Far from being passive heavenly court attendants, the angels are singing with ‘full voice’ in concert with the elders and living creatures, concluding with a hymn to the honour of ‘the one seated on the Throne and to the Lamb’ forever and ever (5:11-13). John’s final vision in chapter five of the myriads of angels is essentially auditory in nature. He hears first the ‘voice of many angels’ singing to the glory of the Lamb (5:11) and, second, he

hears ‘every creature in heaven and on earth’ singing to ‘the one on the Throne and to the Lamb’ (5:13), thus associating the angels with all the beings of heaven and earth, a cosmos including the millennial perspective of ‘the honor and glory and might’ of God and the Lamb ‘forever and ever’ (5:13). Although John’s vision is of the whole cosmos, the many angels are separately seen and heard by John, who emphasises their numerical strength and associates them with ‘every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea’ (5:11, 13). A similar situation obtains in chapter 7 in which John associates ‘all the angels’ with the elders and living creatures around and before the Throne. His vision is of ‘a great multitude’ from all nations, tribes, peoples and languages exclaiming that salvation belongs to ‘God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb’ while ‘all the angels stood around the Throne and around the elders and the four living creatures’ worshipping God (7:9-11). The second portrayal of such a scene involving the Throne and the active collaboration of angels, elders, living creatures and the ‘great multitude’ reinforces John’s portrayal of the centrality of the Throne and its ‘social’ nature.

As well as such large-scale images of ‘myriads of angels’ and their participation with others in cultic celebration, John’s vision includes images of seven angels who stood before God, to whom ‘seven trumpets were given’ (8:1) and six of whom successively blew their trumpets (8:6 - 9:13). Following an interlude, the seventh angel ‘blew his trumpet’ whereupon ‘loud voices in heaven’ declared: ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah’ (11:15), thus announcing the consummation of God’s kingdom. Although the Greek and the Hebrew words for ‘anointed’ share the same meaning, the translation of the word *Christos* in the NRSV as

‘Messiah’ shifts the earlier focus on the slain Lamb to the concept of the Lamb being anointed as *the Messiah*, one who will share the *basileia* of God forever (11:15b). At the least, John accords an angel the honour of signalling the arrival of God’s kingdom and that of his Messiah.

John depicts the angel who descends from heaven with the scroll as ‘another mighty angel’ (10:1) in apocalyptic terms: ‘a rainbow over his head, his face like the sun, and his legs like pillars of fire’ (10:1b), descriptive terms which are divine rather than anthropomorphic in character. John’s reference to ‘another mighty angel’ echoes his first reference to the ‘mighty angel’ asking in a loud voice, ‘who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?’ (5:2). The first ‘mighty angel’ (5:2) leads to the introduction of the Lamb and the second is central to the chain of revelation that commences with chapter 10.<sup>704</sup> Thus both ‘mighty angels’ figure at key points in John’s narrative.

In Rev. 14:6-11 each of three angels delivers a proclamation addressed to the world: the proclamation of the eternal gospel to all people and every ethnicity on earth (14:6), the sin of Babylon (14:8), and the wrath of God for those who worship the beast (14:9-10), thus providing further expression to the active agency of angels in communicating divine messages to all peoples in the world. The seven angels who are to pour out the bowls of God’s wrath on the earth emerge from the heavenly temple (15:5-6) and reappear in chapter 16. As the seventh angel ‘poured his bowl into the air’ ... ‘a loud voice came out of the temple,’<sup>705</sup> from the Throne, saying: “It is done!” (16:17), indicating

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<sup>704</sup> See Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 81-82.

<sup>705</sup> That there is a ‘temple in heaven’ is explicitly referred to by John on three occasions (11:19; 14:17; 15:5). As well, there are ten other references to ‘the temple’ which implicitly place it in heaven and

that with the seventh plague God's retributive intervention in the world is concluded.<sup>706</sup>

Thus, John demonstrates that God's earthly interventions are carried out through his angelic intermediaries, until he dwells with his people on earth in the new holy city.<sup>707</sup>

John's vision continues with one of the seven angels identifying Babylon and its fall through the symbolism of the 'woman sitting on a scarlet beast' (17:3), 'drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the witnesses to Jesus' (17:6). By concluding chapter 17 with the angel's statement to John that 'the woman [he] saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth' (17:18), one may conclude that John's depiction of the 'harlot' city is intended to evoke images of imperial Rome and the threat of pagan cults.<sup>708</sup>

'Another angel coming down from heaven', one with 'great authority' (18:1), introduces John to six scenes of mourning which portray responses from kings, merchants, and seafarers (18:9, 11, 17) to the fall of Rome (depicted as Babylon), thus reflecting Wisdom literature in that the text deals with issues such as the ephemeral nature of earthly life, the transient value of wealth and influence, and the inconsequentiality of much of

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associate it with God (3:12; 7:15; 11:1; 16:1). The ark of God's covenant was seen 'within his temple' (11:19); John associates angels with the Temple on five occasions (14:15; 14:17; 15:6; 16:1; 16:17); and the Temple is identified twice as the location of God's Throne (7:15; 16:17). It would appear, therefore, that John acknowledges a heavenly temple and that God's Throne is located therein. In contrast, John's vision of the new Jerusalem does not include a temple, 'for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb' (21:22), thus highlighting a shift from John's portrayal of God's Temple which draws on Judaic tradition to a divergent vision of 'temple' which is of God and the Lamb.

<sup>706</sup> There are various interpretations of the roles of the seven angels in chapter 16 and the voice from the Throne, coming out of the Temple, declaring: 'It is done!'. I have elected to adopt an historical, non-prophetic interpretation, one which associates, implicitly, the fall of Babylon with Satan (the beast) and his followers (16:2, 6), thus linking God's judgement of the nations with the fall of Rome and its imperialism (chs. 17-18). See Yarbrow Collins, *The Apocalypse*, 115-16.

<sup>707</sup> Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 46.

<sup>708</sup> See Boring, *Revelation*, 179-81.

human achievement and pleasure. Such a view of human existentiality contrasts with John's vision of the *basileia* of the new heaven and new earth of the new Jerusalem (21:1-2). John's vision is also guided by an angel in the following chapter in which the judgements of God are celebrated (19:1-2) and the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures reappear, falling down and worshipping God 'who is seated on the Throne' (19:4) and joining 'what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven' (19:1). By such textual reinforcement, John sustains the concept of a 'social' Throne, one which continues to remain a central focus of his visionary narrative and one from which angels undertake proactive roles.

In John's concluding chapter it is an angel who shows him the crystal-bright 'river of the water of life ... flowing from the Throne of God and of the Lamb' through the middle of the new Jerusalem (22:1), thus concluding John's consistent association of angels with the Throne and their agency role in divine-earthly relations. Following John's depiction of the descent of the new Jerusalem, the 'making of all things new' (21:5), his vision of the tree of life (22:2) and his realisation that the new Jerusalem will contain 'the Throne of God and of the Lamb' (22:3) he falls down 'to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to [him]' (22:8). The angel responds to John that such obeisance is unnecessary as the angel is 'a fellow servant with John and his comrades the prophets, and with those who keep the words' of divine enlightenment in John's *Apocalypse* (22:9).

The angel, 'as a fellow servant', alludes to the angelic priestly role, and the reference to the prophets and those who keep the words of divine enlightenment echoes the



depiction of the ‘angelic priesthood’ in the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*.<sup>709</sup> Another ‘echo’ in John’s narrative of the ‘social’ Throne may be surmised from the portrayal of a wide range of heavenly Temple-related protagonists in the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*. There appears to be a liturgical parallel in that in the *Songs of Sabbath Sacrifice* ‘all sing to the Go[d who is a]wesome in strength ... to extol together the splendid firmament, the supreme purity of [His] holy sanctuary’ (4Q403). That the heavenly Temple in the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* has a ‘social’ character is supported by the extensive range of participants depicted in 4Q400-407: God (אלהים), priests, ministers, sovereign princes, the seven priesthods of the inner Temple, the seven councils of holiness, holy ones, divine spirits, angels (of holiness) and (of the King), *cherubim*, holy spirits, spirits of the living ‘gods’, many-coloured spirits and ‘all ... fi[gures of the innermost] chamber of the King’. Notwithstanding such parallels between the two texts there are, however, two distinctions. First, the protagonists in the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* respond liturgically with songs of praise directed to the heavenly Temple. In the *Apocalypse of John*, there is interaction *between* the protagonists as well as *with* the Throne. Second, although depictions of the heavenly Temple and the Throne both draw on Ezekiel’s throne-chariot, the Throne in John’s *Apocalypse* is more socially interactive and evidences divergence from Hebraic tradition in that it is portrayed as the Throne of God *and* of the Lamb.

There are several additional points of significance in terms of issues of renewal and divergence, between the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* and the *Apocalypse of John*. Although the two texts are not contemporaneous, with approximately two centuries separating them, the lack of certainty with regard to dates of authorship does not preclude

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<sup>709</sup> See Geza Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, 321 and Noam Mizrati, ‘The Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice and Biblical Priestly Literature’, *HTR* 104:1 (2011) 33-41.

drawing some conclusions, even if tentative, about similarities and differences.<sup>710</sup> Such appears to be the case concerning their respective portrayals of the Throne and Temple, the characteristics and roles of angels, and the juxtaposition between different concepts of earthly and heavenly kingships. Although the Throne is central to both texts, there is a distinction between the two portrayals. For instance, in the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, the heavenly Temple is disassociated from the Jerusalem Temple. According to Doran Mendels, the Temple in the *Songs* is portrayed as a ‘heavenly apolitical *duplicate* (not an alternative!) of the present real Temple, which is so politically oriented’.<sup>711</sup> Although it is described in vague terms, there appear to be parallels between earthly and heavenly temples in terms of structures, physical characteristics and concerns with purity.<sup>712</sup> However, although the description of the Throne in the *Songs of Sabbath Sacrifice* also draws on Ezekiel’s visions of the heavenly chariot-throne, in the *Songs of the*

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<sup>710</sup> The date of authorship of the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* seems less certain than that of the *Apocalypse of John*. Although there is general agreement that the latter was written in the late first century CE, the former may have been written in the first century BCE, or even earlier. See, for example, Doran Mendels, *The Rise and Fall of Jewish Nationalism*, 72, 148, 307; R.M.M. Tuschling, *Angels and Orthodoxy: A Study in their Development in Syria and Palestine from the Qumran Texts to Ephraim the Syrian*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, 2007. 124; and George W.E. Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature between the Bible and the Mishnah*, 153. Nickelsburg notes that all the Songs date from the time of the Qumran Community (75 BCE – 50 CE), however, they may have originated earlier in ‘circles’ disaffected with the Jerusalem Temple and priesthood (page 153).

<sup>711</sup> Mendels, *The Rise and Fall of Jewish Nationalism*, 148. Mendel notes that unlike the Temple Scroll, the Temple in the *Songs* is described less precisely; it is where the heavenly King (God) resides, thus retaining earthly political imagery surrounding the Temple; and the significance of cultic and religious functions portray the priests as God’s servants (pages 148-149). Mendels notes further that although the Temple in the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* may be heavenly, it ‘is considered to be a duplicate, rather than an alternative, to the earthly Temple’ (page 307).

<sup>712</sup> For example, descriptions of gates, curtains, inner room and priestly vestments, and concern with sacrificial practices and that there be no defilement; Jonathan Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2006, 135.

*Sabbath Sacrifice* the Throne is portrayed in an animated manner, with protagonists engaging in celestial worship (Songs 9-13), thus distinguishing it from the Jerusalem Temple.<sup>713</sup> Specifically, Song 7 describes the Throne of God in the Holy of holies in the context of a praise liturgy which includes a ‘plurality of animate thrones praising God’ (4Q403).<sup>714</sup> Song 11 portrays the Holy of Holies and the surrounds of the Throne but the actual description of the throne-chariot, which draws on Ezekiel and the *merkabah* tradition, is expressed in Song 12 (4Q405). As well, Song 12 portrays a range of creatures associated with the heavenly Throne offering praise to God, a feature of the *Songs of Sacrifice* which appears to be prescient to John’s notions of a ‘social’ Throne (Rev. 4-5). Song 13, which concludes the text, depicts the angelic high priests who conduct the Sabbath sacrifices. However, as noted by Carol Newsom, the heavenly sacrificial cult portrayed in the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* is probably not indicative of the sacrificial cult of the Jerusalem Temple.<sup>715</sup> Although there are correspondences concerning the Throne between the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* and the *Apocalypse of John*, thus suggesting continuity and renewal, John’s treatment of the Throne in Rev. 21-22 and his portrayal of the new Jerusalem (22:1-2a) appear to constitute indicators of divergence.<sup>716</sup>

Both the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, also known as the Angelic Liturgy, and the *Apocalypse of John* portray angels and worship around the heavenly Throne, each

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<sup>713</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>714</sup> Laszlo Gallusz, *The Throne Motif in the Book of Revelation*, 71.

<sup>715</sup> Carol A. Newsom, *Songs of Sabbath Sacrifice: A Critical Edition*, Scholars Press, 1985, 39-59

<sup>716</sup> Not all scholars of the Throne in the *Apocalypse of John* attach a relevance to the heavenly Throne in the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*. For example, except for a passing reference to the throne room in 4Q405 (page 93) it is not included in Russell Morton’s analysis of Rev. 4-5; *One upon the Throne and the Lamb*.

appearing to draw on imagery from Ezekiel, Isaiah, Exodus, *I Enoch* and the *Testament of Levi*. In the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* most of the angel-related text (Songs 1-5) expresses the author's notions of priesthood and ordination: although the Songs constitute praise of God, their greater focus is on the angelic priesthood itself.<sup>717</sup> As servants of God, the cultic and religious functions of the priests are emphasized and the angels are 'sometimes viewed in terms of the advisers of earthly kings'.<sup>718</sup> The notion of 'priestly angels' is supported by Songs 6, 7 and 8 referring to seven 'chief princes' and seven 'deputy princes', which presumably relate to the seven divisions of priestly angels and to the seven holy areas of the heavenly Temple.<sup>719</sup> Although the *Songs of Sabbath Sacrifice* do not specifically depict a human visionary ascending to heaven, as is the case in *I Enoch* and the *Testament of Levi*, the focus is on angels and the praise of angelic choirs as they worship God in the heavenly Temple. Their priestly characteristics are analogous to earthly priests in that the angels offer their sacrifices to God, in priestly vestments, in a state of purity in the (heavenly) Temple.<sup>720</sup> In Songs 1-5 the angels are frequently depicted as priests as the worship of God is taking place at the heavenly Throne. George Nickelsburg notes that 'through the medium of these songs, priests in the community at Qumran could attune themselves with their counterparts, the heavenly priests'.<sup>721</sup> Thus issues concerning the likely juxtaposition between the Jerusalem cult and the 'angelic liturgy' are raised: the Qumran Community's critical view of the Jerusalem cult is set

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<sup>717</sup> Tuschling, *Angels and Orthodoxy*, 124.

<sup>718</sup> Mendels, *The Rise and Fall of Jewish Nationalism*, 149, 72.

<sup>719</sup> Tuschling, *Angels and Orthodoxy*, 125.

<sup>720</sup> See Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple*, 135-137. Klawans associates the angelic liturgy with the traditional Jewish prayer known as *qedushah*, drawing on biblical doxologies employing presumed angelic expressions such as 'Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God of Hosts (Isa. 6:3).

<sup>721</sup> Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature between the Bible and the Mishnah*, 153.

against the priestly-angelic praise of God at the heavenly Throne.<sup>722</sup> An understanding of the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, as suggested by Carol Newsom, is that they represent a form of ‘communal mysticism’, practised by those priests who thought they constituted the ‘authentic’ priesthood even though they were no longer serving in an earthly temple.<sup>723</sup> Such a view suggests that the priestly-angelic community is a step removed from the Judaic priesthood tradition. The veneration and the dynamic liturgical roles of the priestly-angels in the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, which constitute a communal mystical experience drawn from Jewish tradition, appear to reflect an expansion of angelic veneration of God at the heavenly Throne.<sup>724</sup> Should such be the case, however, it would represent religious continuity and renewal rather than the divergence argued in this chapter as depicted in the *Apocalypse of John*.

The third point of significance concerning issues of renewal and divergence in the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* relates to the binary element of the text and the author’s notions of earthly and heavenly priesthoods and kingships. In general, Judaic tradition attributed human, rather than divine, attributes to earthly kings.<sup>725</sup> In the second Song, God is depicted several times as ‘king’ and the terms ‘majesty’ and ‘glory’ are used (4Q403). A focus of the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* is the portrayal of veneration and

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<sup>722</sup> Ibid.

<sup>723</sup> Carol Newsom, ‘Introduction’, James H. Charlesworth and Carol A. Newsom (eds.), *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek Texts with English Translations*, vol. 4B, *Angelic Liturgy: Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, Westminster John Knox, Louisville, 1999, 4.

<sup>724</sup> See Tuschling, *Angels and Orthodoxy*, 126 Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple*, 128.

<sup>725</sup> Mendels, *The Rise and Fall of Jewish Nationalism*, 72. Mendels notes exception to such a generalisation including, for example, Moses’ dream in Ezekiel’s *Exagoge*, circa third century BCE, in which Moses receives his kingship from God, becoming ‘a universal kind of king’ (page 71). As well, Ptolemaic kingship in ancient Egypt applied the status of ‘universal king-gods’ to Dionysus and Osiris (pages 71-72).

worship of God around the heavenly Throne, built upon an ancient Temple ‘theology’ of God’s kingship.<sup>726</sup> The text indicates the notion of the heavenly Temple corresponding to the earthly Temple in the sense of being the dwelling-place of God but with the modification of the priestly-angelic liturgy in praise of God in the heavenly Temple replacing the priestly, sacrificial worship practised in the earthly Temple.<sup>727</sup> For instance, there does not appear to be any evidence that the depiction in the final Song 13 of the high priests performing the Sabbath sacrifices corresponds with an actual earthly sacrifice. It might be argued, however, that the description of the sacrifices and the vestments of the priests in Song 13 is more earthly-grounded than what could have been an ending to the Song emphasizing God’s kingship and his heavenly Throne.<sup>728</sup> Alternatively, one might argue that the conclusion to the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* relates to a new priestly role in worship and a new priestly authority, noting the elevation of the true High Priest to divine status.<sup>729</sup> Such a view is in keeping with James Davila’s suggestion that the liturgical role of the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* may have been to validate their self-identification as a spiritual rather than earthly Temple, in the sense of the cult in the heavenly Temple being more exalted than the (traditional) priesthood of the earthly Temple.<sup>730</sup>

In Judaic tradition there appears to have been a juxtaposition between kingship as

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<sup>726</sup> Tuschling, *Angels and Orthodoxy*, 124.

<sup>727</sup> See Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple*, 128.

<sup>728</sup> See Gallusz, *The Throne Motif in the Book of Revelation*, 72.

<sup>729</sup> See Crispin Fletcher-Louis, ‘Heavenly Ascent or Incarnational Presence? A Revisionist Reading of the *Songs of Sabbath Sacrifice*’, *SBL Seminar Papers, 1998*, SBLSP, 37, vol. 1, Scholars Press, Atlanta, 1998, 367-399.

<sup>730</sup> James R. Davila, *Liturgical Works*, Eerdmans Commentaries on the Dead Sea Scrolls, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2000, 89-90.

an earthly institution and God, frequently depicted as the ‘king of kings’. As noted by Doron Mendels, however, the ‘king of kings’ was sometimes described with terminology used to depict earthly kings.<sup>731</sup> In the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* God is portrayed as a king (מלך) in his heavenly Temple who rules (משל) from his heavenly Throne (כסא) and whose priests and angels may be interpreted on the model of advisors of earthly kings.<sup>732</sup> Thus, God is portrayed more as a heavenly, universal figure, an image more reflective of the Qumran Community’s Temple-related eschatological expectations, than the God of Israel and the Jerusalem Temple.

There are common elements between the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* and the *Apocalypse of John* which draw on Judaic tradition. Such elements include the significance of the number ‘seven’, the exalted status of angels, the seven spirits/archangels, the throne-chariot, the Throne and interaction around it by heavenly participants, and the range of songs and extent of praise to God. There are, however, also significant contrasts. In John’s *Apocalypse*, the Throne is more central to the text, there are more participants and interaction between them with the Throne, the Throne is shared by God and the Lamb, and there is no Temple in the new Jerusalem. In two respects such contrasts need not be seen to diminish the significance of the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* to the focus of this thesis on the *Apocalypse of John*. First, there is a significant degree of correspondence between the heavenly angelic liturgy in both texts which draws on a tradition of Jewish mystical reflection. Second, the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* may be regarded as a conceptual ‘bridge’ which traverses images of the chariot-throne and the heavenly participants around the Throne portrayed in Ezekiel 1, to visions of the

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<sup>731</sup> Mendels, *The Rise and Fall of Jewish Nationalism*, 72.

<sup>732</sup> Ibid.

Temple, angels, and the Son of Man in the Similitudes (*1 Enoch* 37-71), and then to the Throne, the priesthood, and the new Jerusalem depicted in the *Apocalypse of John*.<sup>733</sup> Thus, such a 'bridge' serves to further elucidate the historical and theological process of continuity and renewal, and the indicators of divergence in renewal discussed in this study.

Another Jewish text, approximately contemporaneous with the *Apocalypse of John* and relevant due to the author's treatment of angels and the Throne is the *Apocalypse of Abraham*. Generally regarded as having been written late in the first century CE, it depicts Abraham's vision of angels (*Apoc. Abr.* 15:5-7) and the heavenly Throne (18:1-14).<sup>734</sup> As the text is considerably briefer than the *Songs of Sabbath Sacrifice*, Abraham's vision will be discussed only briefly in terms of its relevance to issues of continuity, renewal and divergence. The archangel Iaoel (Yahoel) leads Abraham's ascension to heaven (*Apoc. Abr.* 15:4) where, in his third vision, Abraham witnesses a throne scene (18:1-4). His vision of the Throne has several parallels with those depicted in Ezekiel; for example, fiery descriptions, four living creatures, chariot wheels surrounded by eyes, and light encircling the throne-chariot. Notwithstanding such parallels, there are differences between the two accounts. In Ezekiel the portrayal of the Throne is more extended than the account in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* in which the description appears to be brought to an abrupt end. Further, Abraham's vision does not include seeing a figure on the Throne: he does hear a voice 'like the voice of a single man' (18:14);

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<sup>733</sup> Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature between the Bible and the Mishnah*, 154. Nickelsburg does not suggest that such 'variants in tradition' conclude with the *Apocalypse of John*: they continue to the later texts of Jewish *merkabah* mysticism (page 154).

<sup>734</sup> The following citations from the text are from R. Rubinkiewicz, 'The Apocalypse of Abraham', *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, ed. Charlesworth, 689-705. Rubinkiewicz is of the view that the *Apocalypse of Abraham* dates from after 70 CE but before the middle of the second century (page 683).



whereas, in Ezekiel the occupant of the Throne is visible (1:26-28).<sup>735</sup> Such differences, however, may be regarded as falling within a spectrum of renewal rather than as indicators of divergence, compared with the *Apocalypse of John* in which chapters 4-5 are devoted to the Throne and John refers several times to the ‘one seated on the Throne’ and to the Lamb sharing the Throne.<sup>736</sup> John’s portrayal contrasts with the Jewish apocalyptic tradition of God being seated alone on the Throne.<sup>737</sup> A further distinction between the *Apocalypse of Abraham* and the *Apocalypse of John* arises from Abraham’s vision of ‘the handsome temple’, the ‘art and beauty’ of the divine glory that lies beneath the Throne, and the images of sacrifice, as an expression of God’s ‘idea of the priesthood of the name of [his] glory’ (*Apoc. Abr.* 25).<sup>738</sup> Such a portrayal of the temple and Throne and notion of priesthood stands in significant contrast to John’s account of a new heaven and a new earth in the new Jerusalem (Rev. 21-22; 5:9-10).

There does appear to be a parallel between the visions of Abraham and John in respect of ‘a new song’. In the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, an angel teaches him a hymn of praise, termed a ‘new song’ (17:8-21), in which descriptive names and attributes of God

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<sup>735</sup> See Rowland, *The Open Heaven*, 86-87. According to Rowland, the absence of a throne-figure in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* may be interpreted as ‘a definite trend within apocalyptic thought away from the direct description of God and his Throne’ (page 87) and the ‘abrupt termination of the description of the throne regarded as a ‘radical paradigm shift’ (page 86).

<sup>736</sup> Russell Morton, in *Once upon the Throne and the Lamb*, regards the depiction of the Throne in *Apoc. Abr.* 18 as an example of a Jewish apocalyptic text in which the imagery of the Throne serves as background to the images of the Throne in Rev. 4-5; pages 1-2; 30 n.8.

<sup>737</sup> For example *Apoc. Abr.* 18:1-4; *1 Enoch* 14:18-25; *Test. Levi* 5:1.

<sup>738</sup> See Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature between the Bible and the Mishnah*, 286. According to Nickelsburg, Abraham has ‘an idealised vision of the temple and its altar’ corresponding to their heavenly counterparts beneath the Throne of God.

are elucidated.<sup>739</sup> Although significantly longer than the ‘new song’ in John’s *Apocalypse* it follows the *merkabah* tradition and its focus is solely on God in contrast to John’s vision of the four living creatures and the twenty four elders singing a ‘new song’ (Rev. 5:9-10) devoted to the Lamb and which contains theological notions of redemption, universalism, priesthood, and a new *basileia*. Thus, a comparison between the two *Apocalypses* suggests a shift from the tradition of Jewish mystical reflection from which Abraham gains participation in heavenly worship of God (17:1-6) to the substantially different dimension of apocalyptic expressed in Rev. 4-5.<sup>740</sup>

As is the case with the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, the *Apocalypse of Abraham* portrays comparable heavenly, angelic liturgy with that of the *Apocalypse of John*, as well as drawing on Judaic tradition and conforming to the pattern of Jewish mystical reflection depicted in the dynamic liturgical roles of the angels. However, as noted earlier in respect of the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, there are distinctions which suggest a degree of divergence between the *Apocalypse of Abraham* and the *Apocalypse of John*. The protagonists singing before the Throne in *Apoc. Abr.* 18 are more characteristic of those described in Ezekiel 1 than those depicted in John’s *Apocalypse*. For example, there is less interaction between them as well as a different level of engagement with the Throne. Further, in John’s *Apocalypse* the nature of the Throne is different: it is occupied by God *and* the Lamb, thus casting the messianic expectations of Judaic tradition to a new level, one in which the status of Jesus Christ as Messiah is established through a shared occupancy of the Throne. The portrayal of the role of angels in the *Apocalypse of*

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<sup>739</sup> For a discussion of angels and the significance of their singing, as well as the ‘new song’, see Barker, *The Great High Priest*, 118.

<sup>740</sup> See Barker, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 247.

*Abraham* conforms to the tradition of Jewish mystical reflection: heavenly angelic liturgy is the basis to the hymn of praise taught to Abraham, who is instructed to recite the song without ceasing (17:6-7). George Nickelsburg notes that the song's 'repetitious recitation of divine names and attributes is paralleled in the angelic songs of later ascent texts of Jewish mysticism'.<sup>741</sup> Abraham is taught the new song by the archangel Iaoel, the angel of God, who is divinely designated to protect and strengthen him (10:3).<sup>742</sup> In contrast to Iaoel is Azazel, portrayed as the chief of the fallen angels (13:6) who, unlike Abraham whose 'portion is in heaven', focusses on earth to exercise his angelic power with the unrighteous (13:7f.) in the 'untrodden parts of the earth' (14:6). As well as 'fallen angels', Abraham's vision includes various categories of angels, such as spiritual, incorporeal, and fiery, inhabiting different levels of heaven (chapter 19). Such a portrayal conforms to the pattern of Jewish mysticism relating to angels, one which is not followed in the *Apocalypse of John*.

From the preceding review of the *Songs of Sabbath Sacrifice* and the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, the conclusion may be drawn that John's *Apocalypse* goes beyond the tradition of Jewish mysticism in respect of the nature and role of angels. In the *Apocalypse of John* angels are more interactive with other heavenly protagonists before the Throne, they interact more directly with the Throne, and they are more proactive in relation to divine communication between heaven and earth and the establishment of the new Jerusalem.

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<sup>741</sup> Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature Between the Bible and the Mishnah*, 286. He also notes that the *Apocalypse of Abraham* parallels *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch*, sharing a common apocalyptic tradition 'that was crystallised after 70 CE in response to that crisis' (page 288).

<sup>742</sup> Rubinkiewicz, 'The Apocalypse of Abraham', 684.

In the concluding chapter of his *Apocalypse*, John draws together the centrality of the Throne, on this occasion in the new Jerusalem, reinforcing the active role undertaken by angels throughout his *Apocalypse*. The final angel's insistence of the 'social' nature of the Throne, the earlier interaction of angels with the elders and living creatures, and the angels being 'fellow servants' with John, the prophets, and those who are faithful to the words of God and the Lamb combine to emphasise the angels' close association with the Throne and its interactive nature. The overall role of the angels in John's narrative, combined with that of the seven spirits of God, indicates the two-way nature of the 'social' Throne, serving to represent the active nature of the divine element of the 'social equation'. Thus, the sociality of the Throne itself is reinforced beyond that which occurs around the Throne and extends, through the active agencies of the seven spirits of God and the angels, to the earthly establishment of God's new *basileia*.

### **The martyrs: included in the Throne**

John's first reference to martyrs is in the letter to the church in Pergamum wherein Jesus acknowledges those who did not deny their faith in him, 'even in the days of Antipas', a faithful witness to Jesus who was martyred 'where Satan lives' (2:13). The third angel poured out the third bowl 'of the wrath of God' into 'the rivers and the springs of water and they became blood'; as divine retribution, those who 'shed the blood of saints and prophets' have been given blood to drink (16:4-6). In the following chapter, John is shown 'a woman sitting on a scarlet beast' symbolising Babylon<sup>743</sup> and John 'saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the witnesses to Jesus (17:3, 6). Although such accounts indicate John's awareness of the significance of the

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<sup>743</sup> John deploys Babylon itself as a symbol.

role of martyrs to his *Apocalypse*, they do not appear to be directly Throne-related.

More directly relevant to the concept of a ‘social’ Throne is John’s account of the Lamb opening the fifth of the seven seals (6:9-11) as ‘the souls of those who had been slaughtered for the word of God and for the testimony they had given’ appeal to God to ‘judge and avenge [their] blood on the inhabitants of the earth’ (6:9-10). John sees them ‘under the altar’ which, even if the altar of sacrifice (θυσιαστήριον), establishes their privileged position at the Throne, from which they appeal to God to avenge their deaths (6:10). John specifies that it is the *souls* of the martyrs which are under the altar, thus making a distinction with the blood of sacrificial victims under the altar in the Hebrew scriptures and the element of life inherent in the word ‘soul’ (ψυχή).<sup>744</sup> Being martyred for testifying to the word of God is a literary formula used by John in 1:2; 19:10; and 20:4, thus suggesting his recognition of the significance of martyrdom for the Christian cause.

Another association between the martyrs, the Lamb, and the Throne is portrayed by John in his vision of the Lamb and the 144,000 standing on Mount Zion (14:1-5), based on the supposition that the martyrs and the 144,000 are either the same group or coterminous.<sup>745</sup> Richard Bauckham is of the view that the 144,000 on Mount Zion with the Lamb are the martyrs, ‘the Lamb’s army, successfully resisting attack on Mount Zion and celebrating their triumph in heaven’.<sup>746</sup> Further, he distinguishes between the 144,000 and the innumerable multitude,<sup>747</sup> contrasting the 144,000 as an army of the

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<sup>744</sup> For example, see discussion by Lupieri, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, 145.

<sup>745</sup> See also discussion in chapter 5.

<sup>746</sup> Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 94.

<sup>747</sup> Rev. 5:9b; 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15.

Lamb, interpreting Rev. 7:4-8 as a census of the tribes of Israel based on the tradition of a census being ‘a reckoning of the military strength of the nation [Israel], in which only males of military age were counted’.<sup>748</sup> In Bauckham’s view, the ‘great multitude’ (7:9-10) are martyrs who, having ‘washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb’, triumph by ‘participating through their own deaths in the sacrificial death of the Lamb’.<sup>749</sup> Adela Yarbro Collins also distinguishes the 144,000 from the multitude, suggesting the 144,000, marked with a seal on their foreheads (14:1b; cf. 7:3-4), ‘constitute a special group within the body of saints and not Christians in general’.<sup>750</sup> David Aune’s view is that the 144,000 at Mount Zion (14:1) are associated with the 144,000 who were sealed on earth (7:1-8) and from every tribe of the people of Israel (7:4).<sup>751</sup> He does raise the issue, however, of ‘whether the 144,000 represent a Christian elite, such as the martyrs or Jewish Christians, or the whole people of God’ and suggests that the 144,000 in 14:1-5 ‘should be understood as the remnant of Christians who survive to the end’.<sup>752</sup> Another possible reading of John’s portrayal in chapter 7 of the 144,000 (7:1-8) and the great multitude (7:9ff.) is that he intends them to be seen as separate groups, given that the 144,000 are servants of God with the seal on their foreheads (7:3b) and are not depicted as deceased. On the other hand, the great multitude appears to be already deceased, and standing before the Throne and the Lamb, are clothed in white, a symbol which may allude

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<sup>748</sup> Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 77.

<sup>749</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>750</sup> Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 127-128. Yarbro Collins bases her view on three factors; first, they are given a specific number (144,000) and thus distinguished from the innumerable multitude described in Rev. 7:9-17 who constitute all the faithful. Second, The 144,000 have an element of exclusivity in that they are the only ones who sing a ‘new song’ before the Throne (14:3); and third, unlike the multitude, the redeemed 144,000 are described as ‘first fruits for God and the Lamb’, an image which distinguishes them from ‘the general harvest of the faithful; *ibid.*, 128.

<sup>751</sup> Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 796

<sup>752</sup> Ibid., 796, 804.

to their existence in heaven (7:9). However, although there are differences in interpretation of the juxtaposition between the martyrs, the 144,000 and the multitude, for the purpose of this discussion all are relevant to John's portrayal of an interactive 'social' Throne and, as noted in chapter 5, also included in John's notions of the Lamb and redemption.

In addition to the souls of the martyrs 'under the [heavenly] altar' (6:9), thus qualifying them for inclusion in the concept of the 'social' Throne, John depicts 'the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God' together with those 'given authority to judge' seated on their thrones (20:4; cf. Dan. 7:9). To the martyrs' plea, 'how long will it be before our blood is avenged?' (6:10), John provides a response immediately before he relates his vision of the descent of the new Jerusalem: the martyrs 'came to life and reigned with Christ ... blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection ... they will be priests of God and of Christ and they will reign with him a thousand years' (20:4-6).<sup>753</sup> John's description of the resurrected martyrs together with the judges seated on their thrones (20:4)<sup>754</sup> portrays a *gesellschaftlich* relationship between them as well as their interaction with God and the Lamb (20:6), one in which they will fulfil a priestly existence within the community of the

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<sup>753</sup> Although I have assumed that those who are to reign one thousand years will do so in heaven, the issue whether such a reign is in heaven or on earth remains unresolved. The unresolved question is discussed by Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, 184-185. Koester is of the view that the issue may be understood in 'relational' rather than 'geographical' terms, a view which conforms to the notion of a 'social' Throne. See also Resseguie, *Revelation of John*, 245-246.

<sup>754</sup> Based on John's earlier references to the twenty-four elders, around the Throne, in white robes seated on twenty-four thrones (4:2, 4; cf. 11:16), it may be assumed that the 'judges' on thrones in 20:4 are the twenty-four elders. If such is the case, John's vision in 20:4 is of the heavenly court and the souls of the martyrs are with the twenty-four elders around the Throne of God.

people of God.<sup>755</sup>

John's reference to the souls of the martyrs and to those who 'had not worshipped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands' (20:4c) raises the question of whether the two groups are coterminous or have separate identities.<sup>756</sup> Rather than focussing on the issue of separate identities, an alternative approach is to assume that John's depiction of the martyrs, particularly in 20:4-6, is intended to be interpreted symbolically. The souls of the martyrs also represent the souls of the faithful who, resisting the beast or its image, *also* 'came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years', distinguishing them from those who engaged in pagan- or Satan-worship who 'did not come to life until the thousand years were ended' (20:5).<sup>757</sup> Richard Bauckham is of the view that the depiction of the martyrs in 20:4-6 'is strictly limited to what contrasts with the fate of the beast' (19:11-21) and that with the destruction of the beast (19:20) and 'the destroyers of the earth' (11:18), 'the earth is given to Christ's people to rule with him' (20:4; cf. 5:10; Dan. 7:18, 27).<sup>758</sup> From a literal interpretation of the text, it would appear that Bauckham is justified in his opinion of the martyrs standing

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<sup>755</sup> See discussion by Boring, *Revelation*, 204-205.

<sup>756</sup> See, for example, Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1088 and Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 106-108 who identify the martyrs and those who did not worship the beast as constituting one group. An alternative view of two groups is expressed by, for example, Ian Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, 284. Yet another view is that John's reference to the beheaded martyrs (20:4b) relates to his depiction of the souls of those martyred under the altar (6:9) and that the same martyrs are simply further identified by John with his description of those who had not worshipped the beast or its image'; see, for example, Resseguie, *Revelation of John*, 246.

<sup>757</sup> The reign of the martyrs for one thousand years also contrasts with the dragon, 'who is the Devil and Satan', locked in a pit for one thousand years (Rev. 20:1f.); see Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 461.

<sup>758</sup> Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 107.



in contrast with the fate of the beast. However, in three respects it would appear that he proceeds to qualify that view. First, his statement that ‘the earth is given to Christ’s people to rule with him’ has a more universal perspective than only martyrs. Second, he cites 20:4 to support his statement.<sup>759</sup> As 5:9-10 refers to ‘saints from every tribe and language and people and nation’ constituting a kingdom and priests serving God, it would seem that John intends that such a kingdom is not restricted to martyrs. Third, the major focus of chapter 20 is on the millennium and related issues rather than the martyrs *per se*. Bauckham does note that ‘the millennium becomes incomprehensible once we take the image literally ... John expected the martyrs to be vindicated, but the millennium *depicts the meaning* (my italics), rather than predicting the manner of their vindication’.<sup>760</sup> Given that the essential meaning of many of John’s images and metaphors are not intended to be drawn from a literal interpretation but are open to imaginative interpretation, it may be assumed that John’s reference to the souls of the martyrs *and* those ‘who had not worshipped the beast’ represent the faithful from every tribe, language, people and nation. They will reign with Christ a thousand years, serving a priestly function in God’s new *basileia*.

### **All tribes, languages, peoples and nations**

The association of martyrs and multitudes leads to a consideration of the significance of the ‘great multitude’ to the concept of the ‘social’ Throne. John refers initially to the great multitude in 5:9-10: those redeemed by the blood of the Lamb comprise saints from every tribe, language, people and nation. By successively specifying people from every tribe *and* language *and* people *and* nation John employs a polysyndeton of four successive

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<sup>759</sup> Cf. Rev. 5:10 and Dan. 7:18, 27.

<sup>760</sup> Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 108.

ethnic classifications, the cumulative effect of which is to suggest an intention to emphasise the universal nature of the redemption offered by the Lamb's sacrifice.<sup>761</sup> John uses the same or similar polysyndetic formulae on seven occasions (5:9; 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6), to whom an eternal gospel is proclaimed, and 17:15. Of the seven verses three (5:9; 7:9; 14:6) are specifically set in heaven. Revelation 5:9 celebrates the Lamb's victory: by the Lamb's blood many people were redeemed. John reinforces the same message in 7:9: 'a great multitude that no one could count' stood 'before the Throne and before the Lamb', thus continuing the victory of the Lamb in 5:9. As well as the link between 5:9 and 7:9, it would also appear that John specifically intended to focus on the redeemed representative 'multitude' included in the 'social' Throne (5:6-9; 7:9-10; 14:1-3).<sup>762</sup> The 'universal multitude' is included in a new song of praise to the Lamb, offered at the Throne by the elders and the living creatures, joined by myriads of angels, and then 'every creature in heaven and on earth'<sup>763</sup> singing to 'the honor and glory and might of the one seated on the Throne and to the Lamb' (5:9-13).

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<sup>761</sup> See Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 361.

<sup>762</sup> Richard Bauckham notes that the seven passages may conform to 'seven' representing the number of completeness; that John's slightly varied polysyndetic formula 'seems to be deliberately designed for a purpose' and that 'John has embodied his central prophetic conviction about the conversion of the nations in the most meticulous detail of his literary composition'. Of relevance to this thesis, Bauckham is also of the opinion that 'the sevenfold use of this fourfold phrase indicates ... all the nations of the world' and that 'in the symbolic world of Revelation, there could hardly be a more emphatic indication of universalism'; *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation*, T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1993, 326. Yarbrow Collins interprets John's vision in 7:9-10 of the great multitude standing before the Throne robed in white as 'a vision of the ultimate, complete salvation and triumph of all the faithful'; again, an expression of universalism; *Apocalypse*, 53.

<sup>763</sup> Because of the act of singing, it may be assumed that John is referring to *human* creatures; otherwise, 'every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them' (5:13a) would need to be interpreted metaphorically; *ibid.*, 366.

That all the peoples of the earth belong to God but that under the Sinai covenant Israel constituted God's chosen people would have been within John's religious worldview may be assumed from his presumed knowledge of Exodus 19:5-6. The essential difference in John's *Apocalypse*, however, is that 'all the peoples' are the new eschatological people of God, those who 'sing a new song', a choral liturgy which recognises redemption through the shed blood of the Lamb (5:9). Such a multitude of the redeemed joins the angels, the living creatures and the elders around the Throne singing to the honour and glory of the Lamb (5:11-12). Indeed, every creature 'in heaven and on earth' joins in singing a doxology of praise to the two occupants of the throne (5:13). Although for most commentators the narrative focus of chapter 5 is on the 'investiture' of the Lamb through the act of taking the scroll from the enthroned God, the Lamb being deemed worthy to open its seals by the elders and living creatures,<sup>764</sup> half the chapter is devoted to cultic, choral worship by the various entities constituting the 'social' Throne, including all the redeemed in heaven and on earth. Thus emphasis is on universal rather than individual redemption, establishing a framework for the arrival of the new Jerusalem in which the home of God will be among (all) peoples (21:3). In 7:9 John actually sees the 'great multitude that no one could count', redeemed by the Lamb and robed in white, an expression that the God of Israel is now the God of all who follow Christ the Lamb, that is those of *all* ethnicities, Jews *and* Gentiles. That the Gospel is eternal, unlike the temporality of Babylon, and is available universally is reinforced by John in his cosmic vision in 14:7.<sup>765</sup>

That the Throne in John's *Apocalypse* evokes multiple layers of meaning is a

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<sup>764</sup> For example, Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 336.

<sup>765</sup> Resseguie, *Revelation of John*, 138, 198.

commonly-held view. However, less frequently acknowledged is not only the central role it plays in John's narrative but also its composite nature as a *gesellschaftlich* Throne. Although discussion of the Throne frequently includes the significance of the Lamb joining the 'one seated on the Throne', the image conveyed is not infrequently held to be that of a theocentric focal point<sup>766</sup> rather than a composite 'social' entity enjoined by a range of heavenly and redeemed beings. The latter includes the more frequently overlooked 'multitudes', all of whom contribute to an increased ontological understanding of God, John's christology, and his explications of redemption. That the 'social' Throne of God stands in contrast with the throne of Satan is discussed shortly; however, notwithstanding the forces of evil reflected in John's depiction of Satan's throne, John portrays God's Throne more frequently and in more depth than the throne of Satan.<sup>767</sup> Underlying the concept of the 'social' Throne is the extent to which John deploys elders, living creatures, angels, spirits of God, martyrs and multitudes of the redeemed as active constituents of the Throne. They serve to acknowledge the Lamb, not only as one who shares the Throne of God, but also one who is central to the realisation of God's purposes for his creation. John's repeated image of the peoples of every tribe, language and nation emphasises the value of all peoples, who constitute God's new *basileia*. Rather than exclusion, redemption is open not only to the tribes of Israel (Exod. 19:16; Isa. 61:6) but to all the peoples of the earth through the sacrifice of the Lamb who shares the Throne with God

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<sup>766</sup> See, for example, Boring, *Revelation*, 103. Boring does note, however, that God 'shares' his Throne with others: 'He does not exercise his rule in an arbitrary unilateral manner that makes automatons of his creatures'; page 106. Such an acknowledgement, however, falls short of the concept of a *gesellschaftlich* Throne which is inclusive and concerted in serving to enhance an ontological understanding of God and Christ and their heavenly Throne-related associations, nor the significance of the 'multitudes' to divine redemption.

<sup>767</sup> John's references to Satan's throne (2:13; 13:2; 16:10) are overshadowed by his portrayal of the Throne of God in ten of his twenty-two chapters.

surrounded by an interactive heavenly court.<sup>768</sup> John's repeated references to the multitudes take on added significance if interpreted in the context of chapters 4 and 5 which conclude on the theme of universalism, undergirded by John's portrayal of the formula of tribes, languages, peoples and nations.

### **The 'social' Throne and celestial cult**

As already noted, John's description of the Throne and the heavenly cult begins in chapter 4 and continues through chapter 7, thus constituting his second 'cycle' of visions which contains the principal entities of the 'social' Throne and which introduces a range of worship sessions at and surrounding the Throne.<sup>769</sup> Such major elements in chapters 4-7 constitute indicators of divergence when compared with the monotheistic Throne and sacrificial cult depicted in the Hebrew scriptures. The throne-room scenes in chapters four and five have an epideictic quality in that the interactive roles of heavenly participants as they express their adoration and praise to God and the Lamb are fulsomely rhetorical.<sup>770</sup> In chapter 5 John introduces the Lamb who, sharing the Throne with God, is portrayed not only as the 'Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David' (5:5) but also as the Lamb, 'standing as if it had been slaughtered' (5:6) who *also* receives the adulation of the heavenly court (5:9-10, 13; 7:10, 17).<sup>771</sup> It is frequently suggested that the singing of a 'new song' by the living creatures and the elders (5:9) may be derived from Psalm 98:1 (O sing to the Lord a new song). Less noted, however, and perhaps of more significance to

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<sup>768</sup> Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, 79-80; Lupieri, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, 141.

<sup>769</sup> Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, 71-92.

<sup>770</sup> See Witherington, *Revelation*, 114.

<sup>771</sup> In the preceding chapter (4:10) the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders sing 'without ceasing' to 'the Lord God the Almighty'.

John may be the psalmist's portrayal of the notion of a 'new' covenant in Psalm 98 which results in 'joyous song' and the singing of praises to the Lord, a covenantal and musical juxtaposition which is evident in John's account (5:7-9).

Another dimension to the celestial cult is introduced by John in chapter 14: at the heavenly Mount Zion the many who were redeemed with the Lamb sing a *new* song before the Throne, the living creatures and the elders (14:1, 3). The song is unique to the redeemed from the earth (14:3b) and sounds like many waters and loud thunder similar to the 'sound of harpists playing on their harps' (14:2). Music and singing are deployed in John's *Apocalypse* not infrequently and sometimes in parallel, as is the case with 4:9-11 and 5:8-12, to undergird his accounts of cultic practice. John witnesses each of the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders 'holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints' (5:8) as well as the martyrs in heaven, 'those who had conquered the beast' standing beside what appeared to John as 'a sea of glass mixed with fire' with 'harps of God in their hands' singing to 'Lord God the Almighty!' (15:2-3). In addition to John's references to harps in four chapters he refers to the trumpets of the seven angels 'ready to blow them' (8:6) to introduce God's judgemental actions on earth (chapters 8-11).<sup>772</sup> Apart from one reference to the harp and the quality of distinct notes in 1 Corinthians 14:7, the *Apocalypse of John* is the only New Testament writing which features harps, their music, and their association with liturgical worship. In respect of the trumpet, apart from one negative reference to hypocrites sounding a trumpet in the synagogues (Matt. 6:2), the only other references to the musical instrument are in

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<sup>772</sup> In noting that trumpets were traditionally used to signalise war as well as being sounded from the walls of the Temple enclosure, the supposition that John may have associated trumpets with heavenly cultic worship remains speculative.

John's *Apocalypse*.<sup>773</sup> Coincidences - perhaps - but considered quite possible that John deployed both the harp and the trumpet to reinforce his association of music with the cult in his narrative of the Throne and its social and interactive character.

Compared with other late first-century texts, the combined chorus of praise from the heavenly host surrounding the Throne of God which the Lamb now shares establishes and reinforces the divine status of Christ. As well, it demonstrates the significance John attaches to the cult, now depicted by collective expressions of worship, in contrast to worship according to the Throne-related Merkabah tradition of mystery and private worship.<sup>774</sup> John's depiction of cultic worship expressed in song involving the concerted and inclusive voices of all the heavenly court contrasts with an approximately contemporary Jewish account of a song of worship in praise of God taught to Abraham by the angel of God, Iaoel (*Apoc. Abr.* 17:4-21). The song delineates the qualities of the 'Eternal One, Mighty One' (17:8-15); depicts the range of God's roles with those in his earthly creation (17:16-19); and concludes with Abraham's petition to God to be favourably received and taught of God's promises (17:20-21). Compared with the shorter and less meditative songs of praise to God and the Lamb sharing the Throne in John's *Apocalypse* which include choruses of many voices, Abraham's song is a personal and individual paean of praise and petition, thus pointing up the innovative, 'social' nature of cultic worship portrayed by John.<sup>775</sup> Also approximately contemporaneous with John's *Apocalypse* and the *Apocalypse of Abraham* is *2 Baruch* in which, although not expressed

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<sup>773</sup> A comprehensive account of the variety of uses of trumpets is contained in the *War Scroll* (1QM III), in which it is noted not all trumpet soundings indicate war, 'massacre' or 'ambush': some signify celebration and call to worship and rejoicing.

<sup>774</sup> See Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 136-137.

<sup>775</sup> Cf. the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, discussed earlier in the context of angels and the 'social' Throne.

in song, Baruch has a long meditative lamentation to God concerning ‘the afflictions of Zion’ and the unrighteousness of human behaviour, including that of priests (10:6-19). There is also a brief but similar lamentation (35:2-4), an extended prayer to ‘the Mighty One’ acknowledging the majesty of God’s creation and an appeal for God’s blessing (48:1-24) and, in the style of a soliloquy, a poetic passage referring to the mystery of God (75:1-8). Such examples of individual lament and prayer, each of a meditative nature, provide a contrast with the loud and collective songs of praise contributing to the christological function expressed in John’s *Apocalypse*.

From the preceding examples elucidating four dimensions of the ‘social’ Throne; namely, composition and participation, interaction and functional nature, spatial dimension, and cultic expression one may conclude that the Throne occupy a ‘centre-stage’ position in John’s *Apocalypse*. As well, it possesses a *gesellschaftlich* character, one which includes a wide range of animated and interactive participants who constitute a heavenly Throne-related divine society which is central to John’s overall narrative. John’s treatment of the Throne as inclusive of a heavenly community, a ‘social’ Throne, also serves to enjoin God and the Lamb with anthropomorphic qualities, breaking with Judaic tradition and projecting a divine protocol of a Throne which is both heavenly, inclusive and interactive.

### **Divergent ontological understandings?**

John’s treatment of the Lamb and the Throne also raises questions regarding an understanding of the essential being and role of the Lamb and its presumed synonymous relationship to the resurrected Jesus, as well as the resurrected Lamb’s relationship to God



and God's Throne. That the Lamb shares the Throne with God who is to dwell with mortals suggests a 'social ontology',<sup>776</sup> one which associates the being of the Lamb (Jesus) with God who, in Judaic tradition, has generally occupied an 'asocial' throne.<sup>777</sup> An exception to such a tradition is provided by Enoch's pre-Maccabean vision of the lofty, crystal-like throne with 'wheels like the shining sun' from which he heard the voice of the cherubim and noted the presence of angels who, however, were not able to 'see the face of the Excellent and the Glorious One' because of the 'flaming fire round about him' (*1 En.* 14:21-22). Although, because of the flames, 'no one could come near unto him from among those that surrounded the tens of millions (that stood) before him', Enoch noted that 'the most holy ones who are near to him neither go far away at night nor move away from him' (14:22-23). The Lord called Enoch 'with his own mouth', lifted him up and brought [him] near to the gate and spoke directly to him (14:25; 15:1). Although the account of Enoch's vision of the Throne has elements of a social character, his narrative is more in keeping with Judaic tradition than with John's apocalypse. The latter includes not only

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<sup>776</sup> An element of the term 'social ontology' in respect of the Throne is its participatory and interactive nature comprising God, the Lamb, elders, living creatures, spirits of God, angels, martyrs and multitudes. Such a composite Throne serves to elucidate dimensions of God and the Lamb including their inter-relationship, their relationship with the range of thronal participants (chapters 4-5) and the 'new' dimension of divine-human relations portrayed in the *basileiaic* nature of the new Jerusalem where 'the home of God is among mortals' (21:3) and where the Throne of God and the Lamb will be (22:3). As well as John's portrayal of the Throne increasing a first-century hermeneut's understanding of the essential nature of God and the Lamb, it increases the hermeneut's comprehension of the complex structure of their relationship. For example, John's association of God and the Lamb (chapters 4-5), their common self-descriptions as the 'Alpha and the Omega' (21:6; 22:13), and his account of God promising to be the God of the redeemed who will be his children (21:7) enhance the divine nature and function beyond that of Judaic tradition. Thus, the term 'social ontology' serves to convey to late first-century Jewish-Christians and Christians a wider, more inclusive appreciation of the divine nature of God and the Lamb and their interaction with humankind in the new *basileia*, the new divinely inspired community, of the new Jerusalem.

<sup>777</sup> The term 'asocial' is used to distinguish the Judaic Throne which, although including 'the heavenly court', contrasts with the 'social' Throne depicted by John in Rev. 4-5.

God *and* the Lamb but also describes their interactive ‘social’ functions: God will shelter and provide for the redeemed and wipe away their tears (7:15-16, 17b). Concurrently, the Lamb, also at the centre of the Throne will, as their shepherd, guide them to the ‘springs of the water of life’ (7:15b-17).

John’s vision in chapters 4-5 of the collective worship of God within the throne-court and his conclusion to chapter five of ‘every creature’ in heaven and earth worshipping God *and* the Lamb serve to increase his readers’ and hearers’ ontological understanding of God. Such an understanding acknowledges that relationships involving social structures are essential to (the concept of) the deity. Although God is not depicted in specific terms, increased human understanding of the *esse* of God is achieved through a recognition of God’s majesty, God’s role in human destiny, and the expressions of appropriate adoration and worship of God.<sup>778</sup> The nature of the Throne combines the concept of a suitable, if metaphorical, locus for God with a functional aspect, namely the site from which God, sharing the Throne with the Lamb, makes his performative utterances; thus, for the reader (or hearer) merging an institutional reality with a performative authority, that of the Voice of God. The Throne, embodying the Voice of God and the presence of the Lamb, surrounded by a participatory heavenly court, serves as the ‘logical’ and ‘ontological’ centre of John’s portrayal of heaven<sup>779</sup> from which myriads of voices sing loudly to the honour and glory of the Lamb (5:11-12). Although John’s portrayal of the Throne has frequent references to the auditory expressions of the ‘one seated on it’ and others in the heavenly court, in describing his vision of the Throne John does not include a description of its chief occupant. His only reference to the occupant of

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<sup>778</sup> See Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, 71-72

<sup>779</sup> Lupieri, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, 141-42.

the Throne is to ‘the one seated on [it]’ who ‘looks like jasper and carnelian’ surrounded by ‘a rainbow that looks like an emerald’ (4:2-3; cf. 21:11), thus using the imagery of precious stones to symbolise the resplendence of a heavenly figure.<sup>780</sup> That ‘the One on the Throne’ is not otherwise depicted by John adds significance to John’s chapter 4 which is devoted to the Throne and its chief protagonists. For instance, the twenty-four elders with elevated status and authority, and the all-seeing and highly symbolic four living creatures, are heavenly beings whose interaction with and worship of God is their *raison d’être*. They all acknowledge the everlasting nature (4:8) and the ‘glory and honor and power’ of their ‘Lord and God’ (4:11).

John develops the complex nature of the Throne in his portrayal of the descent of the new Jerusalem leading to a new dimension of temporality and self-revelation of God. This characterization is expressed by the loud voice from the Throne declaring that ‘the home of God is among mortals’, thus revealing God *and* the Lamb, from the same Throne, open to humankind and the world in their contemporary history (21:2-3). The concept of a ‘social’ Throne is reinforced by John’s account of the prominent role of the twenty-four elders who surround the Throne (4:4-11) as well as myriads and thousands of angels and the living creatures all surrounding the Throne (5:11-13). As John declares to the seven churches that he is ‘in the spirit’ (1:10), he is shown by the angel of the Lord ‘the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb’ in the new Jerusalem (22:1-2) and is told by the angel that ‘the God *of the spirits* of the prophets’ is coming soon (22:6). The role of the angel reveals a proactive divine role which responds to the protagonists’ celebration of the ‘social’ Throne: the angel of the Lord

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<sup>780</sup> Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 32

shows John the river of the water of life in the new Jerusalem which flows from the Throne shared by God and the Lamb, thus reinforcing the two-way interaction of the Throne.

In John's concluding account, he associates Jesus *and* the Spirit inviting the faithful to 'Come' and 'take the water of life as a gift' (22:16-17).<sup>781</sup> From John's reference to the Spirit in his opening and closing chapters and his reference to the 'spirits of the prophets' associated with 'the throne of God and of the Lamb', one may argue that John includes the Spirit with the Lamb and with God in a relationally-ontological Throne. John projects an interactive consequence of the metaphysical Throne of God and the Lamb in the new Jerusalem: not only will God and the Lamb dwell with mortals but those who conquer evil and receive 'the water of life' will become God's children (21:7). Thus, a new dimension and a proto-trinitarian concept of God emerge in which there is interaction between God, the Lamb, and the Spirit sharing the Throne and interacting with both the blessed and the evil as well as those who conquer evil interacting with God as his children. John's treatment signifies a theological shift from Graeco-Roman concepts of God and Man towards a 'trinitarian' theology of personhood and community and the 'hypostasized' God with whom humankind is able to identify.<sup>782</sup> Such an interpretation embodies the Throne playing a central role at the heart of a new religious concept: the trinitarian being of God, one in which God, the Lamb, and the Spirit interact with each other from the Throne as well as with the peoples of God for whom 'death will be no more' (21:3-4). By

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<sup>781</sup> Cf. John's association between Jesus and the Spirit at the conclusion of his narrative (22:16-17) with his opening greeting to the seven churches including his reference to 'grace and peace' from the 'seven spirits' who are before the Throne (1:4).

<sup>782</sup> The reference to 'trinitarian theology' emerging in John's narrative is not to suggest that John was engaging in or debating the terms of a theology of the Trinity. Nor is it suggested that the Trinity is a central feature of John's *Apocalypse*. I suggest, however, that there do appear to be suggestions of proto-typical trinitarianism in his narrative associated with the notion of a 'social' Throne.

sharing the Throne with God, the Lamb demonstrates the significance of the event of the historical Jesus which is relevant to both the being of God and the emerging concept of the Trinity. Further, the death of the historical Jesus may be interpreted as ‘death in God’ rather than the ‘death of God’: an event *within* a social ontology and one which contributes to an emerging dialectic of God and divine fatherhood both in terms of the Lamb and mortals, his people with whom he will dwell (21:3).

John’s inclusive, concerted and interactive portrayal of the Throne and its participants constitutes a new dimension to first-century Jewish and Christian literature and appears to be proto-typical to both the trinitarian history of God and to future Christian trinitarian theology. It represents a significant metaphysical dimension: the practice of traditional Judaic animal sacrifice is replaced by the metaphorical Lamb and traditional Judaic monotheism becomes an extended metaphorical construct: a resurrected Lamb sharing a ‘social’ throne with God. From such a throne the new Jerusalem descends among mortals, the faithful of whom will be the children of God whereas the evil will perish ‘in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur’ (21:3, 7-8). A metaphysical approach, deploying the concept of a ‘social’ Throne, may be challenged as being inadequately explicated and overly speculative in the post-modern politics of interpretation and praxis. However, in terms of the politics of the first century, which were set in a context of imperial (exploitative) rule, the notion of a ‘social’ Throne may serve to strengthen the concept of *basileia* from two perspectives. The first is the likelihood that the *basileia* constituted a movement comprising prophets and messengers whose views were Wisdom-orientated, a first-century Jewish movement which accepted Jesus and his teachings as a primary but not exclusive basis for the emancipation of Israel and Judaic

religion from imperial rule.<sup>783</sup> Second, in John's first-century context his central portrayal of the Throne of God *and* the Lamb, one which is a social-composite throne, establishes a contrast with other contemporaneous thrones; notably the throne of Satan and the thrones embodied in the Caesar cult of Roman rule.<sup>784</sup> Overall, the metaphysical view of a 'social' Throne serves to elucidate something of the wider *esse* of God, new understandings of Jesus, and the interactive nature of the Throne and its central role in John's narrative. Such an interpretation of the 'social' Throne may contribute to a modern reader's expanded repertoire of images of God, the paradoxical nature of God's being and the nature of divine authority, as well as the significance of the Christ-role of Jesus and the Spirit in the experiential nature of revelation. Although such an assertion may be regarded with scepticism by systematic theologians of the doctrine of God, it is more than conceivable that to first-century Christian-Jews and Jewish-Christians, John's text would have provided a dramatic contrast with the monotheistic and Judaic God of Israel.<sup>785</sup>

To the question of whether the Throne in the *Apocalypse of John* contributes to a sense of divergence between early Judaism and early Christianities it is possible to respond affirmatively on three counts. First, the author emphasises that the Throne becomes not only the Throne of God but is also the Throne of God and of the Lamb. Second, the locus and function of the Throne changes from the Throne of God in heaven to a new concept of the Throne: one in the new holy city from which the river of the water of life flows, sustaining the faithful and the righteous with whom God and the Lamb will

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<sup>783</sup> See Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation*, 166-167.

<sup>784</sup> Boring, *Revelation*, 103.

<sup>785</sup> To such a contrast may be added the view that even within Second Temple Judaism monotheism included 'divine diversity'. Such a view is discussed in detail by Alan F. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism*, Brill, Leiden, 2002.

dwell.<sup>786</sup> In terms of the use of traditional images such as throne, lamb, and river one may claim a measure of religious continuity in that the traditional images remain constant although they are reconfigured. Such a view, however, does not take sufficient account of the theological significance of the reconfiguration. For example, there is clearly a substantial difference in meaning between ‘river’ and ‘the river of the water of life’ and the locus of God is no longer a heavenly throne: God’s home is among mortals (21:3) and the ‘river of the water of life’ flows from ‘the Throne of God and of the Lamb’ through the middle of the new holy city (22:1-2). Perhaps of more significance, in terms of divergence, is the difference between ‘lamb’ and ‘*the Lamb*’, as the latter shares the Throne of God and accompanies God in the descent of the new Jerusalem, phenomena not previously recorded in Judaic history. Third, the ‘social’ Throne conveys a sense of God’s transcendence and majesty: God shares his Throne with the Lamb and allows other celestial beings to relate to a majestic God through the agency of the Throne. The central role of the Throne in John’s *Apocalypse*, combined with the active participation of the elders, the living creatures, the angels, the martyrs and the multitudes, serves as a construct of images which would have enabled first-century hearers and readers to establish a linkage between the transcendent God with a heavenly Throne to a new creation of earthly, finite beings among whom the transcendent God of Israel’s history would establish a home (21:3).

### **The Throne of Satan**

Another significant throne-related dimension which may indicate a degree of divergence concerns John’s reference to the throne of Satan (ὁ θρόνος τοῦ Σατανᾶ). The throne of

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<sup>786</sup> That both the Throne of God (and the Lamb) and the Throne depicted in the new Jerusalem are metaphorical is acknowledged. However, the different depictions of each signal divergent images.

Satan is deployed early in his text to establish a significant setting for the representation of evil, with Satan as the protagonist and the throne as his locus and as a symbol of his evil authority<sup>787</sup> in contrast to John's later account of the Throne of the Lamb. For some, however, the throne of Satan is more than the locus of Satan's evil: its contemporary, existential significance is the evil represented by the rule of imperial Rome and the influence of the 'Caesar cult'.<sup>788</sup> The appearance of Satan early in the text (Rev. 2:13) is not specifically articulated. It remains shadowy until the nature and extent of his evil is revealed towards the end of John's account, contrasting with the clearly delineated resurrected Lamb sharing the Throne with God.

In his letter to the church in Pergamum, a centre in which idolatry, expressed in the teaching of Balaam and of the Nicolaitans, was common,<sup>789</sup> for the first time John uses the word 'throne' not in reference to God or the Lamb but as the possession of Satan. The one with the 'sharp, two-edged sword' confirms to the church in Pergamum: 'I know where you are living, where Satan's throne is' (2:12-13a). From such a direct statement, it seems clear that John assigns the city of Pergamum as the location of Satan's throne and the place where Satan rules.<sup>790</sup> However, John's designation of Pergamum as the site of

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<sup>787</sup> Unlike the 'social' Throne of God and the Lamb which is portrayed as a blended metaphor, the throne of Satan is a metonymy, symbolic of evil authority.

<sup>788</sup> See, for example, Boring, *Revelation*, wherein he notes that as the words 'throne' and 'kingdom' are explicitly political terms, 'John's vision of the Throne of God contains an implied political polemic, a claim to reveal who *really* rules', in contrast with, for example, Domitian's insistence on being addressed as 'Lord and God' (page 103).

<sup>789</sup> Rev. 2:14-15. John also refers negatively to 'the work of the Nicolaitans' in his letter to the church in Ephesus (Rev. 2:6).

<sup>790</sup> Specifically, Rev. 2:13. Although John uses the phrase 'synagogue of Satan' when addressing the churches in Ephesus (2:9) and Philadelphia (3:9), it is considered likely that he is referring to his understanding of the urban Jewish community in Pergamum.



Satan's throne is not to suggest that the whole city serves as Satan's throne: he may have had specific temples and shrines in mind in the context of Pergamum's identification with idolatry.<sup>791</sup> Such a view may arise from Pergamum's association with idolatry and the city's various altars and temples. For example, following the excavations late in the nineteenth century of the second-century BCE altar of Zeus and Athena, the site was regarded by some as the location John had in mind when writing to Pergamum about the throne of Satan, with such a view remaining under discussion until recent times.<sup>792</sup>

An alternative hypothesis of more theological significance is that John's 'throne of Satan' represents a theological construct, one which stands in contrast to the biblical images and traditions of the Hebraic throne and particularly as a challenging, adversarial opposite to the heavenly throne he is to describe, one occupied by both God and the Lamb.<sup>793</sup> Rather than a physical construction such as the altar of Zeus and Athena being the site of Satan's throne, John's concept of such a throne may be represented by a metaphorical architecture of evil, one which stands in contrast to the righteousness of God, the sacrifice of the Lamb, and the arrival of the new Jerusalem. John was possibly writing to the seven churches in a period during which they were threatened in general by the imperial power of Rome and the specific persecutions of Domitian. As it is likely that

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<sup>791</sup> For example, the temples to Zeus and Augustus, the Roman acropolis which included royal, military and religious buildings, and the Asklepieion in the periurban area of Pergamum. There does not appear to be convincing evidence, however, that any one edifice served as the basis for John's reference to the 'throne of Satan' in Pergamum.

<sup>792</sup> See, for example, the discussion by Adela Yarbro Collins, 'Pergamon in Early Christian Literature', *Pergamon, Citadel of the Gods: Archaeological Record, Literary Description, and Religious Development*, ed. Helmut Koester, Trinity Press International, Harrisburg PA, 1998, 166-176.

<sup>793</sup> It might also be posited that John's portrayal of the 'throne of Satan', in contrast with the Throne of God and the Lamb, is a consequence of apocalyptic dualism.

each of the seven cities he mentions contained a sanctuary or temple for the imperial cult, he may have been addressing what he perceived as the threat of evil which obtained in all seven cities.<sup>794</sup> However, as he specifically designates Pergamum as the site of Satan's throne, it is reasonable to assume that he was more concerned with the zealous level of cultic Emperor-worship in Pergamum than in any of the other six cities. Thus, it appears possible that John selected Pergamum as an idolatrous city reflecting the presence of evil, rather than a specific edifice, as a location for his metaphorical 'counter-throne' of Satan, one representing his concept of the existence and threat of evil. By designating Pergamum as the location of Satan's throne, John appears to be interacting with evil represented by the specific issue of idolatry which, from a social-historical interpretation, does not appear to be a comparable issue in the other six urban Christian congregations to which he writes. John's reference to the evil of Satan expressed in his attack on the Nicolaitans (2:6) and his criticism of the members of the church in Thyatira who 'tolerate that woman Jezebel' (2:20) who appears to have had access to 'the deep things of Satan' (2:24) indicate his concern with Satan's influence in other churches. Nonetheless, it would appear that John's selection of Pergamum for the location of the throne of Satan is specific to the contemporary characteristics of that city.

A second site suggested as the location of Satan's throne is the Asklepeion<sup>795</sup> in Pergamum, a cultic centre devoted to healing which also contained temples for Apollo and Hygeia. However, apart from the suggestion that John's reference to the serpent as an

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<sup>794</sup> Although there does not appear to be direct evidence that Thyatira and Laodicea possessed such an edifice, they are considered likely to have done so even if not to the extent of the temple of Artemis in Ephesus; cf. Acts 19:28ff.

<sup>795</sup> Otherwise, a shrine of Asclepius, the god of healing.

image for Satan<sup>796</sup> *may* have been drawn from the significance of the serpent in Asklepios cults, a suggestion which has remained entirely speculative, there is no evidence to associate the Asklepeion with the throne of Satan.<sup>797</sup> Considered more likely is that John, in keeping with other New Testament writers,<sup>798</sup> drew upon Hebrew texts in which the serpent is identified metaphorically with sin and evil, not only associated with Satan but also sent and deployed by God.<sup>799</sup>

In lieu of a specific building or complex of buildings as the site of Satan's throne, a third consideration is the city of Pergamum itself, given its significance in the province of Asia as the locus of Roman imperial power<sup>800</sup> up to approximately 30 BCE. However, as John was writing his *Apocalypse* late in the first century CE, at which time Ephesus was recognised as the centre of Roman government in Asia and Pergamum had lost its relative significance, it is considered unlikely that Pergamum was perceived by John late in the first century as the site of Satan's throne for this reason.<sup>801</sup> Steven Friesen points out that although many twentieth-century commentators on the *Apocalypse of John* have opted for the temple in Pergamum dedicated to Rome and Augustus (c. 27 BCE) as the imperial cultic centre in Asia in the first century CE and therefore likely to be the site of the throne of Satan, imperial cults were both varied and located in diverse situations. Thus, as

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<sup>796</sup> Rev. 12:9; 20:2. The serpent metaphor for sin probably originated with the narrator of Genesis 3:14.

<sup>797</sup> See Steven J. Friesen, 'Satan's Throne, Imperial Cults and the Social Settings of Revelation', *JSNT* 27:3 (2005) 359-361.

<sup>798</sup> Matt. 23:33; Luke 10:19. An exception appears to be Matt. 10:16 in which Jesus instructs the twelve apostles to 'be wise as servants and innocent as doves'.

<sup>799</sup> Num. 21:6; Deut. 8:15; Jer. 8:17; Micah 7:17.

<sup>800</sup> See, for example, Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse*, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1984, 101-102.

<sup>801</sup> Friesen, 'Satan's Throne', 361-362.

Pergamum was not the only centre of the imperial cult in Asia, associating Satan's throne with Pergamum as the main locus of the cult has no foundation.<sup>802</sup>

Although the identification of a specific site within Pergamum is not particularly relevant to this study, the literary record stands. John did refer to the throne of Satan in his letter to the early church in Pergamum and identified that city as the location of the martyrdom of Antipas, Satan's throne, and the place where Satan lives (2:13). Assuming that Antipas was martyred in Pergamum, the only city in the Roman province of Asia wherein there is an account of martyrdom, from John's reference to Antipas and the throne and dwelling place of Satan in the same verse, one may reasonably assume that John had a purpose in providing a contextual association between them. He writes that Jesus, who has the 'sharp, two-edged sword' in his mouth (1:16; 2:12), states that the Pergamene church is holding fast to his name and not denying their faith in him, notwithstanding the death of Antipas (2:13). The message from Jesus to the Christians in Pergamum involving the image of a 'sharp, two-edged sword' may be interpreted to reflect the power of Jesus to judge and to do battle by the power of his Word with those who eat food sacrificed to idols and to follow the teachings of Balaam and the Nicolaitans (2:14-16). The challenge in the letter to Pergamum is for Christians to decide between pagan practices and beliefs represented by Satan and his throne, and redemption offered by the sacrifice of the Lamb. Such a choice represents a conflict between assimilation to the manifestation of evil, as perceived by John in the imperial cults of Rome, and the new life offered in the

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<sup>802</sup> Ibid., 362-364. Friesen argues that the two references to Satan and Pergamum in Revelation 2:13 arise from external hostility faced by Pergamene Christians arising from Satan's presence as a consequence of the martyr's death of Antipas, referred to in the same text (2:13), pages 365-66. Such a view is not universal; see, for example, Paul Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?: Prophetic Rivalry and the Rhetoric of Crisis in the Churches of the Apocalypse*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2001, 38-60.

new Jerusalem, an invitation for Christians to share in the ‘marriage supper of the Lamb’ (19:9).

Even if finality cannot be achieved in terms of the association between Pergamum and the throne of Satan, it remains significant that John introduces the throne of Satan early in his narrative, reflecting the views of Jesus who, with his sharp, two-edged sword in his mouth, presumably intends his reference to Satan’s throne to be taken seriously. John’s vision of Jesus and Jesus’ injunction to John to write what he has seen, what is, and what is to take place after the vision (1:19) leads him to refer to the throne of Satan not only early in the *Apocalypse* but before the forty-six subsequent references to the Throne of God and the Throne shared by God and the Lamb. Thus, in considering the significance of the Throne in John’s *Apocalypse* in terms of divergence, the throne of Satan cannot be overlooked.

The socio-political context in which John refers to Satan’s throne is one which John addresses in chapter 13 wherein he takes issue with Roman imperial authority, employing the images of the ‘beast rising out of the sea’ and the ‘beast that rose out of the earth’, both depicting levels of Roman authority.<sup>803</sup> To the beast from the sea, representing imperial Rome, ‘the dragon gave it his power and his throne and great authority’ (13:26). The beast from the earth, exercising ‘all the authority of the first beast ... makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast’ (13:12); namely, Roman imperial power vested in the Emperor. Significantly, the first beast is directly, and the second beast by association, related to the dragon (Satan) and his power, throne and authority. On this occasion, the

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<sup>803</sup> Respectively, Rev. 13:1-3 and 13:11-16.

significance of Satan's throne is not associated with the city of Pergamum but with the two beasts representing Roman imperial power. Although the great dragon 'called the Devil and Satan' is cast out of heaven and 'thrown down to the earth' (12:9), it does not lose its throne. Rather, the throne of Satan and its power is transferred to the beasts, thus associating it with Roman imperial rule. Such an interpretation appears to have more contextual significance than one which addresses the possible association between Pergamene cultic edifices and Satan's throne.

John's inclusion of the two beasts in his vision-narrative may be interpreted as a rhetorical strategy to focus attention on the threats posed by imperial Rome<sup>804</sup> to the new churches particularly in respect of Satan's throne, to the church in Pergamum. He maintains his view of imperial Rome as well as the same rhetorical strategy in chapter fourteen, relating his vision of the third angel's warning: 'Those who worship the beast and its image ... will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured unmixed into the cup of his anger, and they will be tormented with fire and sulphur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb' (14:9-10). With such a warning, John is contrasting the evil posed by worshipping imperial cults and other deities, reflected figuratively with his phrase 'the beast and its image', and the redemption offered to those 'who keep the commandments of God and hold fast to the faith of Jesus' (14:9, 12). The beast of the sea in chapter 13, representing the imperialism of Rome, reappears in chapter 17 as a 'scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names' (17:3). On the beast was seated a woman on whose forehead was inscribed: 'Babylon, the great, mother of whores and of earth's

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<sup>804</sup> John uses the image of 'the beast' to represent what most modern scholars refer to as the imperialism of Rome. Within such an image, John was concerned with issues of evil including idolatry and failure to seek redemption through the sacrificial blood of the Lamb.

abominations' who 'was drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the witnesses to Jesus' (17:3-5). With such imagery, John maintains his critique of the evil of those who follow idolatry, succumb to the religious dictates of Rome, and fail to worship God, now sharing the Throne with the Lamb, through whom redemption is offered to the faithful.

That Satan is accorded a throne in the *Apocalypse of John* may have significance in terms of divergence in three respects. First, John refers to the Throne extensively both as the locus of God as the centre of divine authority and also, for the first time, as the throne shared by God and the Lamb. It is therefore of interest that Satan is accorded a throne, thus emphasising the dualism of apocalyptic between Satan's throne and the throne shared by God and the Lamb. Second, the term 'Satan', identified also as the devil, the great dragon, and the ancient serpent (12:9), appears extensively in John's account. In contrast, the term 'Satan' appears only three times in the Hebrew scriptures. In 2 Samuel, 'Satan stood up against Israel and incited David to count the people of Israel', a text which does not denote the power of evil, nor a place for Satan in the divine presence or any mention of a throne (1 Chron. 21:1; cf. 2 Sam. 24:1). In the two other references, although Satan is located at court no reference is made to a throne (Job 1:6-2:7; Zech. 3:1-1).<sup>805</sup> That John's account accords Satan a throne, even if only on three occasions, stands in contrast to the Hebrew scriptures and Judaic apocalyptic in which although the throne is referred to

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<sup>805</sup> It is not without interest that although christological imagery in the Hebrew scriptures was identified by early Christian writers, they did not focus on the tradition of demonology contained in Judaic writings. They did, however, acknowledge shifts in the Judaic treatment of Satan, adopting the Satan who is the enemy of God and who rules over the forces of evil in contrast to the earlier Satan in Hebrew writings in which Satan serves as a heavenly prosecutor in YHWH's court. Thus, John's account of Satan possessing a throne introduces a new element in the treatment of Satan in both Judaic and early Christian writings.

extensively, not once is it associated with Satan.<sup>806</sup> Third, in John's *Apocalypse* the term 'Satan' assumes a stronger meaning than deployed in the Hebrew scriptures. For Zechariah, Satan is a functionary in the heavenly court standing with Joshua. In the case of Job, Satan accompanies the heavenly beings who 'present themselves before the Lord' (Job 1:6). When asked by the Lord, 'Where have you come from?', Satan responds, 'From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it' (Job 1:7).<sup>807</sup> Thus, if not a heavenly being, Satan may be regarded as a folkloric character who does not give the impression of epitomising evil. Nor is there any suggestion of Satan exercising authority, at least the level of authority which could command the status of a throne, as is the case in John's *Apocalypse*.

In the New Testament, Satan is referred to in the four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, and in six of Paul's Letters but on no occasion is there mention of Satan associated with a throne. Thus, it is possible that John accorded Satan with a throne for a purpose which, although not immediately relevant to modern theological thinking, may well have had significance to his first-century, early Christian contemporaries. Conceivably, John deployed the image of a throne to suggest a kingdom ruled by Satan, within the context of imperial Roman cults. Satan is not acting alone in his representation of evil in the world: when 'thrown down to the earth ... his angels were thrown down with him' and John describes two beasts sharing his evil authority.<sup>808</sup> Rather than the two

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<sup>806</sup> The throne is cited in twenty books of the Hebrew scriptures at least one hundred and twenty seven times.

<sup>807</sup> I acknowledge that in differentiating the *Apocalypse of John* from, for example, Zechariah and Job such texts are significantly older than John's narrative. Such differentiation may not be as evident from comparison with first-century Jewish writings.

<sup>808</sup> Respectively Rev. 12:9b and 13:1-18.



beasts representing only Satan's evil, it is possible that they are deployed by John as symbols of the power, authority and cult of Rome reflecting John's earlier concern with idolatry. The second beast, which 'rose out of the earth' had two horns like a lamb, and performed 'great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in the sight of all', thus deploying powerful religious symbols and deceiving 'the inhabitants of earth' which leads John to refer to the beast subsequently as 'the false prophet'.<sup>809</sup> The effect is to emphasise the danger of idolatry and the 'deception of the nations', a theme which extends through John's *Apocalypse*.<sup>810</sup> Such a treatment of Satan and his throne not only contrasts with other New Testament writings but is also starkly dissimilar to the Throne shared by the Lamb with God.

Satan and his throne are separated in chapter twelve when, described variously as the great dragon, ancient serpent and devil, Satan is ejected from heaven to earth, where he will vent his 'great wrath, because he knows his time is short' (Rev.12:9, 12b; cf. 20:2). John's account of Satan concludes late in his apocalypse when the Devil 'was thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur, where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever' (20:10). John's final reference to Satan's throne is of the 'loud voice from the temple', commissioning the seven angels, when 'the fifth angel poured his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness' (16:10).

From the perspective of apocalyptic-vision narratives, the contrast between the Throne of Satan and the Throne of God (and the Lamb) suggests a degree of

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<sup>809</sup> Respectively Rev. 13:11, 13-14 and 19:20.

<sup>810</sup> For example, Rev. 2:20; 12:9; 13:14; 19:20; 20:3, 8, 10.

Judaic-Christian divergence based on the christological significance of the Lamb sharing God's Throne and the followers of Jesus constituting a throneless kingdom of priests serving God (Rev. 1:6). In John's narrative Satan personifies evil, exercised from a throne which is deployed as a metaphor for evil, idolatrous pursuits rather than obedience to God, and allegiance to the Roman imperial cult. In contrast, John depicts the Throne of God and the Lamb, symbolising the authority of God and the redeeming qualities of the Lamb, to elucidate that, rather than succumbing to the deceptive powers of Satan, religious communities can be redeemed by the resurrected Lamb who shares God's authority in the new Jerusalem, a Satan-free basileic community.

### **From the Throne: The New Jerusalem**

An indicator of divergence, one of significantly more theological consequence, relates to the emergence of the new Jerusalem, the holy city, discussed in chapter five. In terms of the significance of the new Jerusalem in the context of the Throne, it is worth noting that the setting for John's vision of 'a new heaven and a new earth ... the holy city, the new Jerusalem' (21:1a-2) is his return to a vision of the throne, 'a great white throne and the one who sat on it' (20:11a). Although John's description of the Throne has parallels with the throne in Daniel's vision from which the court of judgement sits (Dan.7:9-14), John's narrative covers the final judgement presaging the emergence of the new Jerusalem in which God will dwell among mortals. The focus shifts from the Throne surrounded by the twenty-four elders to one before which he 'saw the dead, great and small, standing before the Throne' (20:12a). A scene of judgement according to people's works is established, with John also emphasising the widespread nature of God's judgement, including those given up by the sea as well as Death and Hades (20:13).

Although modern secondary sources on the historical and theological significance of the Throne in John's *Apocalypse* are far from prolific, it continued to play a significant role in Christian cult, liturgy, and art and has survived to the present time in the Anglican, Catholic and Orthodox traditions as the seat of the heads of their respective churches.<sup>811</sup> Of more significance to this thesis, however, is that the Throne serves as the locus for the risen Lamb, Jesus, and for the first time, Jesus and God share the one throne. That Jesus was a prophet and continued the Judaic prophetic tradition has been argued earlier. However, John's emphasis on Jesus sharing God's Throne endows Jesus with a status far more exalted than any of the prophets in the Hebrew scriptures. Further, the elevation of the crucified Lamb to the identity of Jesus Christ, enthroned with God, signals a dimension of Judaic-Christian divergence before the close of the first century.

### **The 'social' Throne: a summary**

Compared with its depiction in the Hebrew scriptures and first-century Jewish writings, the Throne of God is referred to only on several occasions in the New Testament, apart from the *Apocalypse of John* where it is accorded a central role. John's first vision establishes the Throne as the shared locus of God *and* the Lamb as well as an inclusive and interactive 'social' institution from which the holy city, the new Jerusalem descends and God the Lamb-Messiah dwell with humankind.

John's narrative expresses two dimensions to the 'social' Throne. First, there is the interaction between the protagonists of the heavenly court: the twenty-four elders, the

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<sup>811</sup> For a review of apocalyptic images which include thrones on churches see John Herrmann and Annewies van den Hoek, 'Apocalyptic Themes in the Monumental and Minor Art of Early Christianity', *Apocalyptic Thought in Early Christianity*, ed. Robert J. Daly, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, 2009, 33-55.

four living creatures, the seven spirits of God, the angels, the martyrs and the great multitude, who also interact with God and the Lamb who share the Throne. Second, in addition to the relations between the One on the Throne and the Lamb who, in the new Jerusalem, dwell with humankind, the seven spirits of God and the angels not only join the sociality around and before the Throne but also reflect the Throne itself and its emerging relationship with all peoples in the world and the establishment of God's new earthly *basileia*.

The Throne of God is a central feature of John's narrative in seventeen of the twenty-two chapters. It has a four-fold ontological function. First, it serves to elucidate redemption, available universally through the Lamb-Messiah (7:9-10, 15b-17). Second, it depicts the interaction between and the outreaching of its protagonists (Rev. 4-5). Third, it emphasises the nature of evil, expressed through Satan's throne and, fourth, it is the source of the new holy city, the new Jerusalem, portrayed as God's *basileia* on earth (21:1, 3, 5a). Such key elements of the Throne are expressed through the Throne-related protagonists who interact with God and the Lamb and, especially in the case of the seven spirits of God and the angels, also between heaven and earth. Thus, it is John's portrayal of the *gesellschaftlich* nature of the Throne that serves as an indicator of divergence from the Throne of Judaic tradition.

## CONCLUSION:

### **Continuity, renewal, divergence**

The elusiveness of first-century Judaic-Christian borderlines, discussed in chapter 1, has been painted evidently and deliberately with a broad brush. However, the religious context from which Christianity emerged is complex and diverse as well as one which evidences centuries of self-renewal before the emergence of early Christianity. Neither the pluriform context nor the emergence of Judaic-Christian borderlines can be captured in a small frame: such a broad canvas requires a broad brush! Although apologies are due to any reader wishing for a narrower focus, given many traditional views on Second Temple Judaism and some far from uncommon accounts of early Christianity drawn exclusively from New Testament texts, I have felt justified in exploring a wider and deconstructed view. Such a view draws occasionally on metaphysical and philosophical foundations, and also seeks to give more prominence to the role of continuity and renewal in the identity-formation of each religion.

Some modern Christian scholars have tended to adopt a view of Judaism as a religion before Christianity, thereby serving a role as the ‘other’ in order to reinforce Christianity as a religion of orthodoxy.<sup>812</sup> The early twentieth century witnessed a process of inculturation whereby many scholars of Judaism tended to conform to a process of academic socialisation in which Jews, as the ‘other’, were superseded by the ‘new’ Christians.<sup>813</sup> Thus, first-century Jews were disregarded as the subjects of knowledge or

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<sup>812</sup> See Boyarin, *Borderlines*, 11-13.

<sup>813</sup> See Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, ‘Commitment and Critical Enquiry’, *HTR* 82:1 (1989) 7.

history, remaining as historical objects, viewed through Christian-theological prisms.

Such a perspective stands in contrast to the underlying hypothesis of this study: the extent to which primitive Christianity was a part of first-century Jewish sectarianism both in fact as well as in its own initial awareness and self-identity.

Early stereotypical views of religious differences stand in contrast to the concept of relations between early Judaism and Christianity wherein no clear separation between the two emerging religions is evident in the first or early second centuries but that both centuries reveal the beginnings of a process of disengagement which extended to the fourth century.<sup>814</sup> Daniel Boyarin, for example, in seeking to interpret emerging rabbinic Judaism in the context of early Christianity, reaches the conclusion that Judaism and Christianity ‘were phenomenologically indistinguishable as entities’ until the end of the fourth century.<sup>815</sup> The Judaisms of the Second Temple Period also contributed to the origins of Christianity by providing the religious and cultural context of Jewish civilisation in which the genesis of Christianity is located. Notwithstanding the range of modern interpretations of the emergence of Judaism and Christianity, it remains historically indisputable that the genesis of Christianity draws on Judaic tradition and lies within the Judaisms of the Second Temple Period.

### **Divergence in renewal**

From the discussion in chapters 5, 6 and 7 on the significance of the new Jerusalem, the Lamb and redemption, the priesthood, and the Throne in the *Apocalypse of John* to issues

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<sup>814</sup> Maren R. Niehoff, ‘*Creatio ex Nihilo* Theology in *Genesis Rabbah* in Light of Christian Exegesis’, *HTR* 99:1 (2006), 37.

<sup>815</sup> Boyarin, *Borderlines*, 89.

of continuity, renewal and divergence, I conclude that these represent *prima facie* evidence of divergence in renewal. In the process of renewal in Judaic, and first-century Jewish-Christian and Christian religious expression, the indicators of divergence are such that the *status quo ante* becomes irretrievable. The thesis that there are indicators of divergence in renewal late in the first century is supported by three sets of theological notions expressed in the *Apocalypse of John*. First, from the significance of the Temple in Judaic tradition, John depicts a new *basileia* without a physical earthly temple but one which has God and the Lamb-Messiah as the ‘new Temple’ of the new Jerusalem (Rev. 21:22). John ‘overshadows’ the Jewish Temple with his portrayal of the descent of the new Jerusalem and its association with ‘new’ dimensions of personal and universally available redemption, which contrast with the salvation of Israel of the Hebrew scriptures.

The second indicator of divergence from Judaic tradition concerns John’s new-dimensional and theological notions of the priesthood. The priesthood of the First and second Temples undergoes a significant conceptual change in John’s *Apocalypse* when viewed in terms of its nature and functions. From a hierarchical and Temple-centred priesthood in which the Law and the sacrificial cult are central, John intersperses five passages<sup>816</sup> in his narrative which convey new notions of priesthood: a priesthood in which the redeemed share in Christ’s authority as a universal, priestly kingdom, serving God with a ‘new song’ in the new *basileia*. The forty-seven references accorded to the Throne by John throughout sixteen of the twenty-two chapters of his *Apocalypse* and the centrality of its role particularly in Rev. 4 and 5 represent the third indicator of divergence. The claim of divergence is also substantiated by the *gesellschaftlich* nature of the Throne

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<sup>816</sup> Rev. 1:5-6; 2:26; 5:9-10; 20:4-6; 22:3-5.

and its interaction with a range of heavenly protagonists, thus revealing a greater divine depth, emphasised by the Lamb-Messiah being accorded a place on the Throne with God. In John's narrative God speaks from the Throne, declaring that 'the home of God is among mortals', no longer a home in the earthly Temple's 'holy of holies' but an earthly home, shared with the Lamb-Messiah and peoples of all tribes, languages, peoples and nations in a new divine-human *basileia*.

### **Metaphorical significance**

In chapters 5, 6 and 7 it has been argued that John's portrayal of the new Jerusalem, the priesthood, and the Throne establishes a case for divergence in renewal, noting, however, that John's apocalyptic narrative involves extensive use of metaphor. Metaphor is a primary characteristic of his language, adding considerable depth to the theological notions he wishes to convey. However, in contrast to his use of metaphor in respect of the new Jerusalem, the Lamb, the priesthood and the Throne, the use of the metaphor, 'the parting of the way(s)', discussed in chapter 1, may be regarded more as a cliché which attempts to structure and comprehend a historical sequence of phenomena rather than a term of theological understanding or hermeneutic significance.

The theological significance of John's use of cognitive metaphor is evident in four key aspects of his narrative: the new Jerusalem, the Lamb, the priesthood and the Throne. To portray his concept of the new Jerusalem, John presents a variety of images: a temple, a city, a woman, a bride, trees and water, all of which combine to constitute dimensions of the new Jerusalem metaphor. His blended metaphor serves to convey a more comprehensive notion of divine-earthly interaction in an earthly *basileia* in which God and



the Lamb-Messiah will relate with mortals. It is the Lamb, a central and striking metaphorical figure, which functions to undergird and elucidate John's notions of redemption. The Lamb-metaphor introduces a christological component to John's *Apocalypse*, signifying Jesus as a slaughtered Lamb as well as the Messiah and the revelation of new dimensions of redemption. The faithful are redeemed through the blood of the Lamb, with redemption available to *all* who believe in Jesus as the Lamb-Messiah. John's metaphorical treatment of the priesthood is more nuanced than that of the new Jerusalem and the Lamb, deploying metaphorical allusions to the nature and functions of a 'new' and universal priesthood of the redeemed, serving God while sharing the authority of Christ. The Throne as a metaphor also has a variety of metaphorical allusions, including the locus of God being shared with the Lamb, a range of heavenly protagonists interacting with the Throne and, with the descent of the new Jerusalem, God speaking from the Throne declaring that his home is now among mortals.

The underlying and basic narrative of John's *Apocalypse* is revelation. It is, however, a revelation built on Judaic tradition and Hebrew scriptures to which John adds metaphorical dimensions such as the new Jerusalem, the priesthood and the Throne, which may be interpreted as indicators of divergence in renewal rather than a definitive, climactic 'parting of the ways'. Such indicators are drawn from John's theological notions of redemption, priesthood and the Throne rather than the extensively analysed genre, structure and heavy symbolism of his apocalyptic narrative. In developing his metaphorical concepts of the new *basileia*, priesthood and Throne, John aggregates two historical dimensions of particular relevance to this thesis: the extent to which Christian origins are founded within Judaic tradition and the Judaisms of the Second Temple Period,

and that within late first-century apocalyptic narratives exist relatively unexplored but nonetheless significant indicators of Judaic-Christian divergence in renewal.

## APPENDIX A

### **The Prophet Joel: A Prophetic Window on Apocalyptic?**

According to James Sanders, most Jews did not believe that prophecy ceased in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah.<sup>817</sup> As well as the Dead Sea Scrolls revealing that prophecy had not ceased for the Qumran Community, the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha contain prophetic material produced by Jewish writers who had not forsaken prophecy. Notwithstanding a lower level of prophetic impetus compared with the era of the major prophets, individual prophets continued to appear as, for example, in the fourth century BCE when the cultic prophet Joel exercised his ministry from the Jerusalem Temple. The text of Joel provides descriptive clarity, particularly in respect of the locus plague and its metaphorical association with pagan nations. A relatively brief book of only three chapters Joel, apart from eight verses, is expressed in a predominantly hyperbolic poetic form. In terms of the continuity of the prophetic movement, Joel is noteworthy because, although he prophesises in keeping with the genre of classical prophecy, including the forthcoming day of YHWH, the role of Jerusalem as the Lord's earthly tabernacle, and the restoration of Judah, he introduces new dimensions of apocalyptic and liturgy from a cultic perspective.

Drawing from the natural catastrophe of a devastating plague of locusts, a calamity well within the knowledge and experience of the local population, Joel describes dire consequences: 'The fields are devastated, the ground mourns; for the grain is destroyed, the wine dries up, the oil fails' (1:10). Introducing an apocalyptic element, the prophet

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<sup>817</sup> James Sanders, 'The Exile and Canon Formation', *Exile: Old Testament, Jewish and Christian Conceptions*, ed. James M. Scott, Brill, Leiden, 1997, 40.

warns that ‘the day of the Lord is near, and as destruction from the Almighty it comes’, evidenced by ruined granaries, starving cattle and destruction by fire (1:15, 17-20). His warning is apocalyptically graphic, the locusts serving as transcendental apocalyptic creatures with the appearance of horses and, with the rumbling of chariots, ‘they leap on the tops of mountains, like the crackling of a flame of fire devouring the stubble, like a powerful army drawn up for battle’ (2:4-5). Joel’s depiction of such apocalyptic images may be construed as a warning that the ‘day of the Lord’ is great and terrible and the Y<sup>HWH</sup> calls on his people to repent and return to him by ‘rending their hearts and not their clothing’ (2:12-13a). Although such a call to repentance is reminiscent of the major prophets, it is issued in a cultic context involving a trumpet in Zion, a fast being sanctified, a solemn assembly being convened, and the sanctification of the congregation (2:15-16a). Joel also calls on the priests as ‘ministers of the Lord’ in the inner court of the Temple to weep and to pray to Y<sup>HWH</sup> to spare his people and not to make Y<sup>HWH</sup>’s heritage a mockery, ‘a byword among the nations’ (2:17).

The claim that the book of Joel has a universalistic element is not, however, one of consensus. For instance, a contrary view is that universalist traits are not apparent in Joel; rather, ‘the work bears the character of Jewish particularism: salvation is intended for Israel and the divine judgement will overtake the nations that had attacked Israel’.<sup>818</sup> Such a view contrasts with the most theological aspect of Joel; namely, the manifestation of the spirit of God, descending for all people (2:28-32). It is possible, however, that even if the text of Joel is particularist in respect of Jerusalem and the people of Israel, it

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<sup>818</sup> Th. C. Vriezen, *An Outline of Old Testament Theology*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1962, 68. Vriezen compares the text of Joel with the *Isaiah Apocalypse*, which he claims, unlike Joel, contains ‘both particularist and universalist traits (Isa. 24-27)’; page 68.

does reflect a philosophical shift in that while retaining the prophecies of the earlier ‘major’ individual prophets, it provides two new directions which are relevant to the hypothesis of continuity between prophecy and apocalyptic.<sup>819</sup>

First, according to the major prophets salvation was largely earned by fulfilment of the Law<sup>820</sup> and it was not generally expected that such salvation would be preceded by the destruction of the world.<sup>821</sup> In contrast, the text of Joel suggests that although the day of Y<sub>HWH</sub> is approaching: ‘The Lord roars from Zion ... and the heavens and the earth ‘shake’ ... ‘the Lord is a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel’ (3:16a). Thus, fundamental to the prophecy of the end of the world is the promise of renewal and, in chapter three, the descent of the Spirit. Equally significant, Joel suggests a new window on salvation, one to which the earlier prophetic view of salvation through observance of the Law is added his suggestion that salvation may be achieved through an act of God.

The second prophetically innovative direction suggested in Joel is in respect of the descent of the Spirit of Y<sub>HWH</sub> to earthly circles and the capacity of individual humans to experience the spirit (רוח) of the Hebrew scriptures and experience salvation not only in

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<sup>819</sup> The views of Vriezen, in *An Outline of Old Testament Theology*, are in accord with the hypothesis if this excursus. Referring to the book of Joel which he dates c. 400 BCE, Vriezen is of the view that it displays a clear apocalyptic trend and constitutes a transition between prophecy and apocalyptic. This an early and contrasting view to those of other scholars who give relatively little credit to the book of Joel as a significant historical or theological source. Indeed, more than a few prominent scholars of the Hebrew scriptures, including Shaye J.D. Cohen, John H. Hayes, Doron Mendels, Martin Noth and Richard A. Horsley have not cited Joel in respect of prophecy or apocalyptic.

<sup>820</sup> For example, Jer. 31:31-34.

<sup>821</sup> There are exceptions to this generalisation; for example, Isa. 24.

physical terms but in the context of *Diesseitigkeit* in which salvation granted from God involves a spiritual dimension in the lives of individuals, one that is not restricted to the Temple. According to Joel, salvation will come as a gift from Y<sub>HWH</sub>, who will pour out his spirit on all flesh; sons and daughters shall prophesy, old men dream, ‘and young men shall see visions’ (2:28). With the arrival of the Spirit resulting in young men seeing visions, it is not unreasonable to suggest that Joel is looking beyond his immediate context, indicating a transition between prophecy and apocalyptic.

In keeping with other later prophets, Joel expresses the day of Y<sub>HWH</sub> in eschatological terms, indicating a major historical paradigm shift in which, rather than the coming of an end to the known world, there will be an end to the age in which Y<sub>HWH</sub>’s enemies dominate, thus setting the stage for a new eschatological order,<sup>822</sup> one in which the particularist focus shifts from Y<sub>HWH</sub> as the God of Israel to one of universalism in which God’s salvation is open to all: ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved’ (3:9-14).

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<sup>822</sup> For example, compare Joel’s treatment of eschatology with Zech. 14 and Obadiah 15-21.

## APPENDIX B

### Shared Apocalypses: Ezekiel, the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, and Daniel

In exploring the relationship between prophecy and apocalyptic, the texts of Ezekiel and the *Apocalypse of Abraham* serve to demonstrate the extent to which apocalyptic draws on prophetic tradition as well as something of the degree to which there is an element of apocalyptic in prophetic texts, thus indicating a degree of continuity and renewal between prophecy and apocalyptic within Judaism over several centuries.

In terms of apocalyptic, a significant feature of the narrative of the Jewish pseudepigraphon, *Apocalypse of Abraham*, is the celestial tour undertaken by the eponymous subject of the text, accompanied by the angel Yahoel, during which through seven visions he discovers heavenly mysteries. Compiled after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, but before the end of the second century CE,<sup>823</sup> the *Apocalypse of Abraham* draws on both prophetic and apocalyptic traditions in several respects. For instance, Abraham's vision of the divine Throne in chapter 18 appears to echo Ezekiel's account (chapters 1, 10) as well as continuing the *Merkabah* (chariot) tradition in which the idea-formation surrounding the divine form is expressed.<sup>824</sup>

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<sup>823</sup> A post-70 date of authorship may be assumed because the destruction of the Temple, 'burned with fire', is described in chapter 27. According to Michael Stone, the text was 'probably written in the mid-second century CE'; 'Introduction', *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period: Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Sectarian Writings, Philo, Josephus*, ed. Michael E. Stone, Van Gorcum, Assen and Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1984, XX.

<sup>824</sup> Andre A. Orlov, 'Praxis of the Voice: The Divine name Traditions in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*', *JBL* 127:1 (2008) 54. The notion that the *Apocalypse of Abraham* draws on the *Merkabah* tradition is supported by the parallel between the 'heavenly' songs contained in the *Merkabah* books and the celestial song

As Abraham, accompanied by an angel, watches the fire rise up he sees under the throne, ‘four fiery living creatures ... each having four faces’ comprising the aspects ‘of a lion, of a man, of an ox, and of an eagle’; as well, each one has ‘four heads on its body so that the four living creatures had sixteen faces’ (*Apoc. Abr.* 18:3-5). More than six hundred years earlier, the priest-prophet Ezekiel had a similar apocalyptic throne-vision; from the middle of the fire ‘something like four living creatures ... of human form’ appeared (1:4b-5), each with four faces (1:6a), which were those of human beings, ‘the face of a lion on the right side, the face of an ox on the left side, and the face of an eagle’ (1:10). The *Apocalypse of Abraham* also parallels Ezekiel in respect of the Throne of God upon a chariot with ‘fiery wheels’: ‘Abraham saw behind the living creatures a chariot with fiery wheels’ with each wheel ‘full of eyes round about’ (*Apoc. Abr.* 18:12; cf. Ezek. 1:15-25; 10:6). In similar vein, but long before, Ezekiel had beheld four wheels which appeared ‘like gleaming beryl’<sup>825</sup> and ‘the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels’ (1:20b).

Abraham’s account of the Throne has similarities to Enoch’s vision of heaven, including the ‘tongues of the fire’ and the ‘fiery cherubim’; both descriptions embody a strong sense of the awe experienced by each visionary (*1 En.* 14:10, 12, 14). The visionaries’ shared reference to the fallen angel Azazel reinforces historical and theological links not only between Abraham’s pseudepigraphon and Enoch’s apocrypha but also between them and Ezekiel of the Hebrew scriptures, thus indicating continuity over six

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rendered by Abraham associated with his vision of God (*Apoc. Abr.* 17-18). See discussion by Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1955, 68-69.

<sup>825</sup> Ezek. 10:9; the wheels are described in the Interpreter’s Bible as ‘sparkling chrysolite’ (vol. 6, page 116).



centuries.

Although the throne-chariot vision, common to both Ezekiel and Abraham, reinforces the concept of the deity as a single entity, there is a difference in respect of the depiction or otherwise of God. For example, in contrast with the anthropomorphic portrayal of the deity in Ezekiel: ‘seated above the likeness of a throne was something that seemed like a human form ... this was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord’ (Ezek. 1:26-28), the similar vision of Abraham does not depict God in human terms. However, although Abraham’s vision does not portray God anthropomorphically, both Abraham and Ezekiel hear God’s voice speaking directly to them.<sup>826</sup> Thus, it may be argued that the difference between visual and aural depictions of the deity indicates continuity and renewal in terms of progression within apocalyptic description of the deity away from anthropomorphism, rather than an expression of divergence.

The theophanic tradition of the divine voice is first expressed in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* as ‘the voice of the Mighty One [which] came down from the heavens in a stream of fire, saying and calling, “Abraham, Abraham”’ (*Apoc. Abr* 8:1). For Ezekiel, the divine voice is first heard above the sound of the wings of the living creatures, ‘like the sound of mighty waters, like the thunder of the Almighty’, from which there came the theophanic voice ‘from above the dome over [the] heads’ of the living creatures (Ezek. 1:22-25). Unlike the account in Ezekiel, the divine voice arriving in ‘a stream of fire’ is more characteristic of theophanic expression in apocalyptic writings.<sup>827</sup> In any event, notwithstanding such differences, the divine voice expresses itself quite directly to both

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<sup>826</sup> *Apoc. Abr.* 19:1; 20:1; 21:1; 24:1; cf. Ezek. 1:24-25.

<sup>827</sup> Orlov, ‘Praxis of the Voice’, *JBL* (2008) 57-58.

Ezekiel (Ezek. 2:1) and Abraham (*Apoc. Abr.* 8:1).

In addition to the common elements of the throne-chariot and depiction of the deity in Ezekiel and the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, is the treatment given to eschatology and its theological significance. Ezekiel's eschatological vision, expressed poetically as oracles on the approaching eschaton, follows a series of God's judgements directed at the people of Jerusalem.<sup>828</sup> Ezekiel conveys the word of the Lord to the land of Israel that the end has come: the people will be punished for their abominations and God will have no pity (Ezek. 7). Although both texts deal with Israel's past sinfulness (Ezek. 7; *Apoc. Abr.* 27:4-5) and God's impending judgement, the eschatological narrative in Abraham's apocalypse is more graphic. Abraham's eschatological warning of the final judgement which follows 'twelve periods of impious age among the heathens' (*Apoc. Abr.* 29:2) is that God's judgement will come upon 'all earthly creation [involving] ten plagues through evil and disease and the groaning of the bitterness of [the people's] souls' (*Apoc. Abr.* 29:15).

More specifically, Abraham warns that the plagues will include sorrow, burning cities, pestilence and famine, followed by 'destruction by earthquake and the sword', then hail, snow and hunger, execution by the sword and, finally, 'thunder, voices, and destroying earthquakes' (*Apoc. Abr.* 30:4-8). The ten eschatological episodes described in chapter thirty of Abraham's apocalypse, which are expressed in the hypostatic voice of the deity, stand in contrast to the more anthropomorphic account of Ezekiel's heavenly encounter with the deity. Nonetheless, the eschatological element remains a significant component of both accounts, one which is common to both the prophetic and apocalyptic

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<sup>828</sup> Ezek. 4-6. The word 'Jerusalem' is used to represent the 'four corners of the land of Israel' (Ezek. 7:2).

movements, serving to support the argument for continuity and renewal between prophecy and apocalyptic. In Ezekiel's narrative concerning the ancient promise to Abraham of a future Davidic King (37:24-26), the term 'prince' (נָשִׂיא) is used (44:3; 45:7-16), denoting a tribal leader rather than a 'king' (מֶלֶךְ) in the sense of a David or Solomon. In the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, however, the 'Eternal, Mighty One' responds to Abraham: 'I will send my chosen one, having in him one measure of all my power, and he will summon my people, humiliated by the heathen' (31:1). Although there is not an extant Hebrew or Greek version of the text, and it is therefore impossible to argue a positive correlation between 'chosen one' and 'prince' or 'king', from the concern in both texts that the eternal God will protect Abraham and his descendants through one who will come, the hypothesis of prophetic-apocalyptic continuity is sustained.

From the brief discussion of the two texts, it can be argued that as the visionary Abraham and the prophet Ezekiel shared similar apocalypses and as each was separated by hundreds of years, the case for a prophetic-apocalyptic continuum gains further support. The view that prophetic-apocalyptic continuity is expressed in both narratives is also supported by the similar imagery expressed in the dream-visions of the book of Daniel, written approximately at the midway point between the Ezekielian and Abrahamic accounts.<sup>829</sup>

In Daniel's first of four visions (chapter 7), appear four beasts not unlike those in

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<sup>829</sup> Produced in the name of Daniel, the text could have been written in the context of the persecution suffered under Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164 BCE). Although the date of composition is beyond certainty, 'the more natural understanding of the book is to place it in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, and to interpret it as apocalyptic'; Arthur Jeffrey, 'The Book of Daniel: Introduction and Exegesis', *The Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. 6, 350.

Ezekiel's account of 'four living creatures' (1:5a), with a lion and an eagle common to both texts. As Daniel watches, God, 'an Ancient One', took his throne the wheels of which 'were burning fire' (Dan. 7:9), not unlike the throne-chariot wheels 'like gleaming beryl' seen by Ezekiel (10:9) and the 'fiery wheels' described in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* (18:12). Daniel's portrayal of the 'Ancient One' is in keeping with the concept of a single deity as well as an anthropomorphic dimension: 'his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool' (7:9). Such anthropomorphic representation is more in keeping with Ezekiel's depiction of the deity seeming to be like a 'human form' (1:26b). However, unlike the cases of Ezekiel and Abraham, God does not speak directly to Daniel: the hypostatic voice is expressed through angels, including the angel Gabriel (Dan. 9:22-28).

Daniel's eschatological interpretation is apocalyptic in character in that, unlike the prophetic view of a final judgement which places the kingdom beyond the contemporary world, the wicked will be judged severely while the righteous will be rewarded in the coming of the kingdom, one which will be historically inclusive of empires and countries rather than being restricted to the Palestine of earlier prophets.<sup>830</sup> The context of Daniel's eschatological vision, mediated by an angel appearing as 'a man clothed in linen' whose 'body was like beryl, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze' (10:5-6) is set in the proximate history of nations and rulers, not unlike the prophets' dire predictions for specific cities, peoples and persons, rather than a final eschaton. It is also possible to construe Daniel's depictions of the 'Ancient One' and the 'man clothed in linen' in terms of earlier extensive mythological

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<sup>830</sup> See Jeffrey, 'The Book of Daniel: Introduction and Exegesis', 351.

ideas and images. However, whether or not such depictions are drawn from ancient symbolic traditions, they are part of Daniel's eschatology, one which raises the issue of eternal values: Daniel's 'people shall be delivered' and 'many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt' (12:1-2). Daniel is assured that he too will rise for his reward (12:13). Thus, although from an eschatological perspective the author anticipates the arrival of an earthly kingdom, the book of Daniel does foreshadow issues of resurrection, heaven and hell, issues which receive considerable focus two hundred years later in the Common Era.

From such a brief analysis one cannot claim a syncretistic account between the texts of Ezekiel, the *Apocalypse of Abraham* and Daniel. However, there do appear to be several literary, historical and theological factors which are common to the three texts as well as common imagery; namely, the respective portrayals of dream-visions and throne-chariots, the use of hypostatic voices, theophanic depictions of the deity, and eschatological expectations. Such related and developing narratives support the concept of prophetic-apocalyptic continuity and renewal. More specifically, Daniel's text appears to suggest continuity in that it arises from a traditional Temple-orientated context and yet provides clear indications of the coming of a new religious order, one which presages suggestions of Christian origins. Although the text of Daniel alone does not enable one to draw definitive conclusions, combined with those of, for example, *1 Enoch*, *2 Baruch*, and early *Sibylline* oracles as well as the *Apocalypse of John*, there would appear to be a corpus of writing which evidences a degree of coterminous themes and literary treatments that supports the hypothesis of a prophetic-apocalyptic continuum.



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