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# Sacramental Theology in the Book of Revelation

Charles A. Gieschen

The Book of Revelation is often interpreted as a document that is full of eschatology, namely, it is understood as depicting the gloom of the last days and the glory of eternity. Jewish and Christian apocalyptic literature typically does have eschatological content, but such literature — including Revelation — should not be interpreted as speaking exclusively about end time events.<sup>1</sup> Apocalyptic literature primarily consists of visions about divine mysteries, some of which may be future mysteries and many of which may be past or present. The risen Christ says to John: "Write therefore the things that you have seen, namely *the things that are* and the things that are about to take place after these things" (1:19). The "things that are" include the many worship scenes John sees, like the throne room scene in Revelation 4-5, that depict a reality that is both present and eternal. Since Revelation speaks about Christ's action and presence in the past and present, it is reasonable to assume that it should teach us something about how Christ is present with His church and received in the sacraments of Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Largely because traditional terminology that is associated with Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper is not found in Revelation, it is not a centerpiece in discussions of the biblical basis for teaching the sacraments. This study, however, will demonstrate that Revelation contains a significant amount of imagery that provides evidence of both sacramental theology and practice among first-century Jewish Christians. The imagery that teaches about baptism is primarily the sealing with the Divine Name and the clothing with white garments. Imagery involving dining with Christ in the heavenly sanctuary, the Passover, and Divine Presence worship, teaches about the Lord's Supper.

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<sup>1</sup>This distinction between "apocalyptic" and "eschatological" literature is especially emphasized by Christopher C. Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Jewish Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1982) 1-48.

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## I. Baptismal Theology

One of the reasons that some interpreters overlook evidence of baptismal theology in Revelation is because they do not connect two important actions in early baptismal rites with depictions of similar actions in this apocalypse.<sup>2</sup> These two actions are the marking of the Divine Name on the baptismal initiate and the placing of a white garment on the newly baptized. The crucial methodological question is this: Did mention of marking and giving of names as well as the wearing of white garments in Revelation become the source of this baptismal practice in the early church or do these depictions reflect already existing first century baptismal practice?<sup>3</sup> There are two solid reasons to see these depictions as reflecting already existing baptismal practice. First, these

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<sup>2</sup>Robert H. Mounce, for example, denies any connection between the sealing in Revelation 7 and baptism; see *The Book of Revelation*, revised edition, New International Commentary of the New Testament (NICNT) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 157. In spite of G. K. Beale's excellent discussion of the seal, he only briefly notes that Jewish Christians connected the seal with baptism; see *The Book of Revelation*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (NIGNTC) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 409-416, especially 409, note 105. Even Lutheran commentators are not particularly strong on seeing an allusion to baptism here. For example, Louis A. Brighton generalizes the seal in Revelation 7 to both baptism and the Lord's Supper as "sealing" activities of the Spirit, and also notes that the sealing activity of Revelation 7 does not refer to the initial sealing of believers (for example, conversion); see *Revelation*, Concordia Commentary (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 186-187. Brighton follows the basic approach of R. C. H. Lenski, who states this is a sealing of the heart by the Holy Spirit through word and sacrament; see *The Interpretation of Saint John's Revelation* (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1935), 249. John G. Strelan makes several insightful comments about the relationship of the seal to Christ, but does not mention baptism; see *Where Earth Meets Heaven: A Commentary on Revelation* (Adelaide, South Australia: Openbook Publishers, 1994), 131-135. Other scholars who see an allusion to baptism in Revelation 7 or even a reflection of baptismal practice include: Pierre Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of Saint John* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 283-284; Massey H. Shepherd Jr., *The Paschal Liturgy and the Apocalypse* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1960), especially 85-91; Jean Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964), 147-163; J. Ysebaesart, *Greek Baptismal Terminology: Its Origins and Early Development* (Nijmegen: Dekker and Van de Vegt, 1962), 285-288; and Margaret Barker, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 159-163.

<sup>3</sup>For a broad study of these actions in baptism, see G. W. H. Lampe, *The Seal of the Spirit: A Study of the Doctrine of Baptism and Confirmation in the New Testament and the Fathers* (London: SPCK, 1967).

two aspects of the baptismal rite are not completely new with the administration of baptism among early Christians, but both reflect rites from Israel's past. Second, the scenes of this vision communicate to Christians more readily if their imagery is grounded in the actual experience of the readers.

### A. Sealing with the Divine Name

Revelation shows a great interest in the marking or receiving of a "name" (ὄνομα) or names. There are three primary texts in Revelation that speak about this:

3:12: [Christ says] He who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God; never will he go out of it, and I will write on him *the name of my God* [τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ θεοῦ μου], and *the name of the city of my God* [τὸ ὄνομα τῆς πόλεως τοῦ θεοῦ μου], the new Jerusalem that comes down from my God out of heaven, and *my own new name* [τὸ ὄνομά μου τὸ καινόν].

14:1: Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with Him a hundred and forty-four thousand who had *His name* and *His Father's name* [τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ καὶ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ] written on their foreheads.

22:4: There will no more be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His servants will worship Him; they will see His face, and *His name* [τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ] will be on their foreheads.

How many names do the followers of the Lamb receive? Revelation 3:12 speaks of having the name of God, the name of the New Jerusalem, and the new name of Christ written on those who are faithful. Revelation 14:1 states that the saints had the name of the Lamb and the Father's name written on their foreheads. Revelation 22:4 testifies that the saints have the name of God (the Father) on their foreheads. The fact that these texts exist alongside each other in the same document supports the conclusion that they each are speaking of a singular name that is shared by God (the Father), the Lamb (Christ), and the Church (the visible manifestation of the Holy Spirit).<sup>4</sup> What, then, is this name?

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<sup>4</sup>Some may argue that this conclusion is reading trinitarian theology back into Revelation. However, the explicit use of "trinitarian" language for God in Revelation 1:4-5, the titles shared by God (the Father) and the Lamb, the position of the seven Spirits before the throne, the position of the Lamb upon the throne, and the worship of the Lamb with God (the Father), all support the understanding that the Son and Holy Spirit share the Divine Name.

The place to start in solving this puzzle is Revelation 19:12b-13, which gives insight into the mysterious or hidden name of the Son: "He has a name written on Him that no one except He Himself knows [ἔχων ὄνομα γεγραμμένον ὃ οὐδεὶς οἶδεν εἰ μὴ αὐτός]. [13] He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood and His name is called the Word of God [κέκληται τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ]."

There is solid evidence for the conclusion that the unknown or hidden name of Christ is YHWH, the personal name of God in the Old Testament.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, this conclusion is also supported by the fact that the name by which Christ is known according to this text is "the Word of God" (Revelation 19:13; compare John 1:1, 14; Hebrews 4:11-13). The identification of Christ as the Word is founded upon the identification of Christ with the angel of YHWH, who is present in several theophanies in the Pentateuch, Joshua, and Judges.<sup>6</sup> Exodus 23:20-21 states that this angel has the Divine Name "in him": "Behold, I [YHWH] send an angel in front of you, to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared. Be attentive to him and listen to his voice; do not rebel against him, for he will not pardon your transgression; for my Name is in him." Since this "angel" has the name YHWH in him, he is not from among the myraids of created angels; he is YHWH in a visible form.

It is not surprising that ancient Israelites and pre-Christian Jews, long before and during the first century A.D., referred to this angel who possessed the most important word of the world as "the Word of YHWH," "the Word of God," or simply "the Word."<sup>7</sup> Note the following texts from Genesis, Ezekiel the Tragedian, Wisdom of Solomon, and Philo that evince this phenomenon:

<sup>5</sup>Charles A. Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents and Early Evidence* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 253; see also the broader discussion in Charles A. Gieschen, "The Divine Name in Ante-Nicene Christology," *Vigiliae Christianae* 57 (2003): 115-158, and Adelheid Ruck-Schröder, *Der Name Gottes und der Name Jesu: Eine neutestamentliche Studie* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 199). Some commentators on Revelation have drawn this same conclusion; for example, see Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of Saint John*, 542.

<sup>6</sup>See Jarl E. Fossum, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord: Samaritan and Jewish Concepts of Intermediation and the Origins of Gnosticism* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1985); see also Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology*, 51-69.

<sup>7</sup>Exodus 23:20-21 is a frequent text used by Philo in his discussion of the Word. For further evidence, see Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology*, 103-113.

Genesis 15:1-4: After these things *the Word of YHWH* came to Abram in a vision, "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." [2] But Abram said, "O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" [3] And Abram said, "Behold, you have given me no offspring; and a slave born in my house will be my heir." [4] And behold, *the Word of YHWH* came to him, "This man shall not be your heir; your own son shall be your heir."

Ezekiel the Tragedian, *Exagoge* (second century B. C.): [96] "Stay, Moses, best of men, do not come near [97] until you have loosed the bindings from your feet; [98] the place on which you stand is holy ground, [99] and from this bush *the Divine Word* shines forth to you."

Wisdom of Solomon (circa first century B. C.), 18:14-16: For while gentle silence enveloped all things, and night in its swift course was now half gone, [15] *your all-powerful Word* leaped from heaven, from the royal throne, into the midst of the land that was doomed, a stern warrior [16] carrying the sharp sword of your authentic command, and stood and filled all things with death, and touched heaven while standing on earth.

Philo, *De Confusione Linguarum* (circa first century A. D.), 146: But if there be any as yet unfit to be called a son of God, let him press to take his place under God's Firstborn, *the Word*, who holds eldership among the angels, an archangel as it were. And many names are his for he is called: the Beginning, *the Name of God*, *His Word*, the Man after His Image, and "He that sees," namely Israel.

The identification of the hidden name of Christ as YHWH may appear to go against the clear testimony of Revelation 19:12: "He has a Name written on Him that no one but He Himself knows." This assertion, however, does not mean that Christ cannot or has not revealed His hidden name. This statement is evidence that an important aspect of early Christian teaching, probably pre-baptismal instruction, was the revelation of the true name of Christ, as can be seen already in the foundational Christian creed: "Jesus Christ is Lord" (Philippians 2:11). The significance of this revelation of Jesus' hidden name as the Divine Name is also visible in the prayer that concludes the farewell narrative in John 17:11b, 26: "Holy Father, protect them in your Name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them in your Name that you have given me [ . . . ]. [26] I made your Name known to them and will continue to make it known."

The understanding that the Son and the Holy Spirit share the Divine Name is evident in the baptismal formula (Matthew 28:19): individuals are to be baptized in the singular Divine Name shared by the Father, Son,

and Holy Spirit.<sup>8</sup> The revelation of Jesus' hidden name is also a significant topic in some Gnostic texts.<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, the three references in Revelation to the name on the forehead speak about the Divine Name that is given in baptism. Although 3:12 speaks about the writing of the Name as a future reality ("He who conquers [ . . . ] I will write on him the Name of my God"), both 14:1 and 22:4 imply that the Name was written on the people of God before the eschatological events and certainly before these people entered heaven. This Name gave them identity and protection during earthly tribulations as well as assured them of their heavenly inheritance. Note the relationship between the Name and being faithful to Christ in these two texts from the seven letters to the churches:

Revelation 2:3: I know you have fortitude even to endure on account of *my Name*.

Revelation 3:8: I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied *my Name*.

This language and imagery is grounded in the fact that the Divine Name is written, spoken, and imparted in baptism.

The primary text that supports connecting this language of the writing of the Name on the forehead with baptism is the reference to the "sealing" (σφραγίζω) of the saints in Revelation 7:2-3: "Then I saw another angel ascend from the rising of the sun, with the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm earth and sea, [3] saying, 'Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed [ἐσφραγισμένων] the servants of our God upon their foreheads.'"

The historical background of this sealing imagery in Revelation is Ezekiel 9, where the prophet sees "the Glory," who is the visible image of YHWH, command a man in white linen and his six associates to mark

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<sup>8</sup>See also Charles A. Gieschen, "The Divine Name in Holy Baptism," in *All Theology Is Christology: Essays in Honor of David P. Scaer*, edited by Dean O. Wenthe, William C. Weinrich, Arthur A. Just Jr., Daniel Gard, and Thomas L. Olson (Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 2000), 67-77.

<sup>9</sup>See especially *Gospel of Truth* 38.7-40.29 and *Gospel of Phillip* 54.5-8; see Gieschen, "The Divine Name in Ante-Nicene Christology," 153-158.

the faithful of Jerusalem and then carry out a Passover-like purge of all the unfaithful who do not bear YHWH's mark.<sup>10</sup>

Ezekiel 9:4-6: And the LORD said to him, "Go through the city, through Jerusalem, and put a mark upon the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over the abominations that are committed in it." [5] And to the others He said in my hearing, "Pass through the city after him, and kill; your eye shall not spare, and you shall show no pity; [6] slay old men outright, young men and maidens, little children and women, but touch no one upon whom is the mark."

The Hebrew word translated "mark" here is *תָּ* (*taw*), which also signifies the specific mark made for the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Therefore, the mark to be placed upon the faithful remnant is probably the Hebrew letter *taw*. It was placed upon the forehead for visibility. As the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet, it functioned as a mark of YHWH's ownership because it was considered shorthand for His Name, much like the Greek letter Omega does in early Christian symbolism, including Revelation, where both God (the Father) and Christ are known as the Alpha and Omega (1:8; 21:6; 22:13). Like the blood on the Israelite door posts during the night of the tenth plague, this mark was a protecting sign or seal that shielded its bearer from the purge of the unrighteous that YHWH ordered in the vision of Ezekiel 9. Furthermore, it is not insignificant that in ancient Hebrew script, and even in the first century A.D., a Hebrew *taw* looked like two equal lines crossed, either erect like + or at an angle like X.<sup>11</sup>

This imagery from Ezekiel 9 is the pattern used in both depicting and recording the vision of the sealing of the righteous in Revelation 7. The "angel" who ascends "from the rising of the sun, with the seal of the living God" in Revelation 7:2, therefore, appears to be a depiction of the angelomorphic Glory, since the Glory was to return from the East (Ezekiel 43:1-2) and he bears the seal, which is the Divine Name (Exodus 23:21; compare 28:36).<sup>12</sup> The identification of the Son of Man or Glory as

<sup>10</sup>This relationship with Ezekiel 9 is acknowledged by most commentators; for example, see Beale, *Revelation*, 409-410.

<sup>11</sup>For a discussion of this mark and its transformation into the sign of the cross, see Jack Finegan, *The Archaeology of the New Testament: The Life of Jesus and the Beginning of the Early Church* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 220-260.

<sup>12</sup>See Robert H. Gundry, "Angelomorphic Christology in Revelation," *Society of Biblical Literature Special* 33 (1994): 662-678, and Barker, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*,



the Risen Christ in Revelation 1 makes a christological identification of this angel possible. This sealing in Revelation does not necessarily imply that the name was actually written, but the sealing was probably accomplished with a mark, possibly a Hebrew *taw*, that represented the Divine Name.<sup>13</sup> This conclusion is supported by the observation that the contrasting mark of the Beast represents nothing other than the name of the Beast: "so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name" (Revelation 13:17).

Some have argued against understanding the sealing in Revelation 7 as baptism since it is depicting this group as already Christians who then are sealed before the eschatological tribulations.<sup>14</sup> It must be remembered, however, that John is given a vision that encompasses and collapses a lengthy period of time. Several generations of Christians had already been reborn in baptism, had experienced the chaos of this world as described in John's visions, and then had died in the faith. John is not given multiple individual visions of these Christians, but one encompassing vision that depicts the sealing of the church of various generations with the Divine Name in baptism. In other words, it is precisely in the individual baptismal sealings throughout history that this eschatological sealing dramatized in Revelation 7 is taking place.

Another Christian apocalypse, the second century *Shepherd of Hermas*, provides abundant support for this understanding of sealing with the Divine Name in holy baptism. Note what the following text (*Hermas Vis.* III.3.5) says about the building of the church: "Hear, then why the tower has been built upon the water: because your life was saved and shall be saved through water, and the tower has been founded by the utterance of the almighty and glorious Name, and is maintained by the unseen power of the Master."

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159-163; see also John 6:27.

<sup>13</sup>Daniélou, *Theology of Jewish Christianity*, 329-331. Daniélou details evidence of the sign of the cross as the *Sphragis* (seal) in the early church fathers; see *The Bible and the Liturgy* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1956), 54-69.

<sup>14</sup>For example, Ysebaesart argues that this scene depicts the bestowal of the "eschatological seal" that is a development of the first century "baptismal seal"; see *Greek Baptismal Terminology*, 287. Brighton distinguishes this sealing activity from the "initial sealing" of the saints, namely their conversion; see *Revelation*, 187. Revelation, however, is not depicting a new "eschatological seal," but is portraying the eschatological significance of the seal Christians receive in baptism.

This text is vivid testimony that the church, which is the tower, is built by baptism, which is depicted as water and the utterance of the Divine Name. *Hermas* also specifically speaks of baptism as "the seal" (*Hermas Sim.* IX.16.3-4): "'So these also who had fallen asleep received the seal of the Son of God and entered into the kingdom of God. For before,' said he, 'a man bears the Name of the Son of God, he is dead. But when he receives the seal he puts away mortality and receives life. The seal, then, is the water.'"

There are also several hymns in the Jewish/Christian *Odes of Solomon*, dated between the late first to the third century, that understand the sealing as the marking of the Divine Name with oil in baptism. Although it cannot be determined that the author of *Odes* actually knew the Book of Revelation, the eighth ode is an especially helpful commentary on the scene in Revelation 7:

*OdesSol* 8.13, 19-22: And before they existed, I [Christ] recognized them and imprinted a seal on their faces [. . .]. [19] And my righteousness goes before them; and they will not be deprived of my Name; for it is with them. [20] Seek and increase, and abide in the love of the Lord. [21] You who are loved in the Beloved, you who are kept in him who lives, you who are saved in him who was saved, [22] you shall be found uncorrupted in all ages, on account of the Name of your Father. Hallelujah.

Although Ezekiel 9, with its roots in the Passover, is the primary text shedding light on the vision depicted in Revelation 7, some of the background for the significance of the Divine Name as a protecting agent has its origin in the High Priest traditions of ancient Israel. The High Priest, who entered the Holy of Holies on *Yom Kippur*, bore the Divine Name on his turban (Exodus 28:36-38). This Name was understood as an important element of what protected the High Priest as he came into the presence of YHWH. The protection that the priestly garb (including the Divine Name) provided from the punishing presence of YHWH is especially vivid in Wisdom of Solomon's description of Aaron's intervention on behalf of Israel (compare Numbers 16:41-50):

Wisdom of Solomon 18.22-25: He conquered the wrath not by strength of body, and not by force of arms, but by his word he subdued the Punisher, appealing to the oaths and covenants given to our fathers. [23] For when the dead had already fallen on one another in heaps, he intervened and held back the wrath, and cut off its way to the living. [24] For upon his long robe the whole world was depicted, and the glories of the fathers were engraved on the four rows of stones, and thy majesty [i.e., the Divine Name] on the

diadem upon his head. [25] To these the Destroyer yielded, these he feared; for merely to test the wrath was enough.

The priests of Israel were also anointed with oil as part of their ordination rite (Exodus 29:7). A relationship between priestly rites and early baptismal practices involving the baptismal formula is explicitly expressed in some second and third century texts concerning baptismal practice:

Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition* 22.2-3: After this pouring the consecrated oil and laying of his hand on the head, he shall say: "I anoint thee with holy oil in God the Father Almighty and Christ Jesus and the Holy Ghost." And sealing him on the forehead, he shall give him the kiss of peace [. . .].<sup>15</sup>

Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 7: Then having come up from the font we are thoroughly anointed with a blessed unction, in accordance with the ancient discipline whereby, since the time when Aaron was anointed by Moses, men were anointed unto the priesthood with oil from a horn.<sup>16</sup>

*Didascalia Apostolorum* 16: But where there is a woman, and especially a deaconess, it is not fitting that women should be seen by men, but with the imposition of the hand do thou anoint the head only. As of old the priests and kings were anointed in Israel, do thou in like manner, with the imposition of the hand, anoint the head of those who receive baptism, whether of men or women.<sup>17</sup>

In summary, these texts support the understanding that the texts from Revelation that speak of sealing or writing the Name on the forehead are depicting the baptismal rite and resulting baptismal reality. Jean Daniélou has even argued that early Jewish Christians placed the *taw* upon the forehead of the baptismal initiate with oil as the seal of the Divine Name spoken when the water was poured.<sup>18</sup> It was the sign of ownership, protection, and enlistment into the church. Christians then bore the Name, had the power of the Name, called upon the Name, and willingly suffered on account of the Name.<sup>19</sup> Neither was this seal a mere symbolic abstraction for early Christians; the outer mark was a tangible

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<sup>15</sup>Translation from E. C. Whitaker, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy* (London: SPCK, 1960), 6.

<sup>16</sup>Whitaker, *Documents*, 8.

<sup>17</sup>Whitaker, *Documents*, 10.

<sup>18</sup>*Theology of Jewish Christianity*, 329-331; see also J. Daniélou, *Primitive Christian Symbols*, translated by D. Attwater (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1964), 136-145.

<sup>19</sup>See Gieschen, "The Divine Name in Ante-Nicene Christology," 127-156.

reminder that Christ, the incarnation of YHWH, tabernacles in the Christian even as the Name dwelt in the tabernacle and temple of ancient Israel. This understanding of the Name as the personal reality of Christ dwelling in the believer is evident in the post-communion prayer found in the *Didache*: "We give you thanks, Holy Father, for *your holy Name*, whom you have caused to dwell in our hearts" (10.1). Therefore, the focus on the marking with the Divine Name in Revelation likely reflects extant first-century baptismal practice.

### *B. Clothing with White Garments*

In addition to this focus on the Divine Name, a second aspect of Revelation's testimony to early baptismal practice is evident in the repeated imagery of white "garments" (3:4-5, 18; 4:4; 16:15; 19:13, 16) or "robes" (6:11; 7:9, 13-14; 22:14). Because of the frequency of depictions of saints and angels in heaven clothed in white, it may be argued that the white clothing is simply a symbol of glorification. Revelation, however, appears to make a distinction between the white "garments" (ἱμάτια) worn by the followers of the Lamb on earth and the white "robes" (στολαί) worn by saints and angels in heaven.<sup>20</sup> Several Revelation texts testify that the white garment is already a possession of Christians on earth, long before their glorification in heaven:

3:4-5: Yet you still have a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled *their garments*; and they shall walk with me in *white*, for they are worthy. [5] He who conquers shall be clad thus in *white garments*, and I will not blot his name out of the book of life [ . . . ].

3:18: Therefore, I counsel you to buy from me [ . . . ] *white garments* to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen.

16:15: "Lo, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is he who is awake, keeping *his garments* that he may not go naked and be seen exposed!"

There is clear testimony from the third century forward that the baptismal initiate was stripped naked, washed, and then clothed in a white garment.<sup>21</sup> Anointing with oil was also part of the baptismal rite in some locales. These two texts from very significant church fathers are representative evidence of this baptismal practice:

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<sup>20</sup>The one exception to this distinction is the elders of heaven in 4:4 who wear white "garments."

<sup>21</sup>See Thomas M. Finn, *Early Christian Baptism and the Catechumenate* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Michael Glazier, 1992), 7-21.

Ambrose, *De mysteriis* 34: After Baptism, you have received white garments, that they may be a sign that you have taken off the clothing of sin and that you have been clad in the pure garments of innocence.<sup>22</sup>

Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogic Cathecheses*: Now that you have taken off your old garments and been clad in white garments, you must also in spirit remain clothed in white. I do not mean to say that you must always wear white garments, but that you must always be covered with those that are truly white and shining, so that you may say with the prophet Isaiah: "He has clothed me with the garment of salvation, and he has covered me with the vestment of joy."<sup>23</sup>

It has been already demonstrated that early baptismal practice of anointing is rooted in the priestly ordination rites of ancient Israel. It is very probable that the clothing with white also has its roots in priestly clothing.<sup>24</sup> According to Exodus 29, YHWH commanded Moses that Aaron and his sons be washed with water, anointed, and clothed at the door to the tent of meeting:

Exodus 29:4-9: You shall bring Aaron and his sons to the door of the tent of meeting, and wash them with water. [5] And you shall take the garments, and put on Aaron the coat and the robe of the ephod, and the ephod, and the breastplate, and gird him with the skilfully woven band of the ephod; and the breastpiece, and gird him with the skillfully woven band of the ephod; [6] and you shall set the turban on his head, and put the holy crown upon the turban. [7] And you shall take the anointing oil, and pour it on his head and anoint him. [8] Then you shall bring his sons, and put coats on them, [9] and you shall gird them with girdles and bind caps on them; and the priesthood shall be theirs by a perpetual statute. Thus you shall ordain Aaron and his sons.

These ordination rites clearly informed early Christian baptismal practice and theology.<sup>25</sup> The many divine theophanies of the Old Testament, as well as the careful priestly rituals, all testify concerning the difficulties involved with sinners coming into the presence of a holy God. Like the faithful of ancient Israel, Jewish Christians had a healthy

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<sup>22</sup>Daniélou, *The Bible and the Liturgy*, 49.

<sup>23</sup>Daniélou, *The Bible and the Liturgy*, 49.

<sup>24</sup>White linen appears to be a central aspect of the garb of every priest (Exodus 28:42). This is reflected in Revelation where the priestly elders of the heavenly throne room are clad in white (Revelation 4:4; compare 1 Chronicles 24:3-19; 26:17-19).

<sup>25</sup>Margaret Barker identifies the Name and clothing on the saints in Revelation with the Divine Name and clothing of the High Priest; see *On Earth as It Is in Heaven* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 71.

understanding and respect for the holiness of God. Baptism in Revelation, therefore, can be understood as the salvific event that purifies sinners to be "a kingdom and priests to our God who reign on earth" (Revelation 5:10). This evidence supports the conclusion that later baptismal practice in the church is not rooted primarily in the visions of Revelation, but is a continuation of extant baptismal practice that is reflected in Revelation and was influenced by the ancient ordination practices of the Israelite priesthood. The priestly nature of baptism in cleansing and clothing God's people to enter and serve in His presence is also visible in this text from the Epistle to the Hebrews:

10:19-22: Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the [heavenly] sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, [20] by the new and living way that He opened for us through the curtain, that is, through His flesh, [21] and since we have a great high priest over the house of God, [22] let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

This priesthood of the baptized, according to Revelation, is lived out in gathering around the heavenly throne during worship to sing the unceasing liturgy with the angels and saints, and then going into the chaotic world to be faithful and uncompromising witnesses like Jesus, the faithful and true martyr.

In addition to this priestly background, the white garment imagery in Revelation also reflects how Holy Baptism was understood as a wedding ceremony in which a person is cleansed, clothed as a bride, and joined with the Bridegroom, Jesus Christ. The church as Christ's bride is the prominent image of the closing chapters of Revelation (19:7-9; 21:2, 9). Although Revelation 19:8 states that the fine linen of the bride is "the righteous deeds of the saints," this should not be viewed as distinct and disparate from the understanding of the white garments elsewhere as baptismal. This, rather, reinforces one of the themes of Revelation that the baptized saints indeed bear the fruit of their life in Christ. The white garment of baptism, therefore, shows forth the individual foretaste of the corporate experience of the eschatological wedding between Christ and the church. A similar understanding of baptism is the foundation for Paul's discussion of marriage in Ephesians:

5:25-27: Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her, [26] in order that He sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word [i.e., the Divine Name], [27] that He

present the church to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she be holy and without blemish.

Therefore, the white garment imagery of Revelation probably reflects both baptismal practice and theology. The white garment depicts the purity from sin and the priestly vocation that Christians receive in Holy Baptism. It is a reminder that this baptismal purity allows Christians to live and serve in the presence of God now and is the basis for our future service before the throne in eternity.

## II. Eucharistic Theology

It has already been emphasized that significant portions of Revelation depict the present and eternal worship in which the saints participate, both in heaven and on earth. A central part of early Christian worship was the celebration of the Lord's Supper. This section, therefore, will examine the relationship between the worship imagery presented in Revelation and the eucharistic worship of early Christians. As stated in the introduction above, imagery involving dining in the heavenly sanctuary, the Passover, and Divine Presence worship, teaches us important theology about the Lord's Supper.

### A. Dining with Christ in the Heavenly Sanctuary

The Book of Revelation provides significant glimpses into the reality of the heavenly sanctuary, especially in chapters 4-5. Like several Old Testament texts, this vision affirms that the heavenly sanctuary is where the action truly is; the earthly temple served as a reflection of this sanctuary and even as an entry point to participation in the heavenly sanctuary. A central point of Ezekiel is the assurance that the heavenly sanctuary is real and will continue to exist even after the first earthly temple in Jerusalem is destroyed, as it was by the Babylonians in 587 B.C. The vision of Ezekiel assured those who would see their temple torn down by the Babylonians that God's dwelling place continues in heaven and is accessible to God's people, even when they are exiled from the promised land.<sup>26</sup> In a similar manner, the central vision of the Book of

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<sup>26</sup>The Jewish priests who left the temple and settled at Qumran show in some of their writings, especially *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, an acute awareness of their participation in the heavenly sanctuary even as they are cut off from the Jerusalem temple; see Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology*, 173-175, and C. H. T. Fletcher-Louis, *All the Glory of Adam: Liturgical Anthropology in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

Revelation assured Jewish Christians who had been cut off from the synagogue and the Jerusalem temple that they still had access to God; thus, they participate in the most important worship, that which happens in the heavenly sanctuary. Revelation even calls those who worship Christ "a kingdom and priests to our God *who reign on earth*" (Revelation 5:10). Christians on earth, therefore, are presented as priests who have access to the heavenly sanctuary.

Some scholars have drawn attention to how the reading of Revelation allows the hearers to have an experience that parallels John's vision.<sup>27</sup> There is validity for this assertion in terms of experiencing all the scenes of Revelation. The experience of the Divine Presence, however, does not appear to result solely from the reading of the Book of Revelation. It is not insignificant that John had this experience on the Lord's Day, the typical day for Christians to gather for worship that included the Eucharist.<sup>28</sup> After John beheld the risen Christ on earth and heard the seven letters to the churches, he then enters the heavenly sanctuary via an open door (Revelation 4:1): "After these things I looked, and, behold, *a door* [θύρα] that has been opened in heaven, and the first voice that I heard as a trumpet was speaking to me, saying, 'Come up here, and I will show you what will necessarily happen after these things.'"

Is John the only one who can pass through this open door? The understanding that other faithful Christians can pass through this open door to the heavenly sanctuary in the context of Lord's Day worship appears to be the basis for two invitations of Christ in the seven letters:

Revelation 3:8: I know your works; behold, I have placed before you *a door* [θύρα] that has been opened, which no one is able to shut, because you have little power and you kept my word and did not deny my name.

Revelation 3:20: Behold, I stand at *the door* [τὴν θύραν] and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens *the door* [τὴν θύραν] I will come in to him and eat with him and He with me.

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<sup>27</sup>David Aune speaks of "actualizing" the experience of the vision; see "The Apocalypse of John and the Problem of Genre," *Semeia* 36 (1986): 65-96. Leonard Thompson emphasizes that the use of this book in worship enabled the congregation to experience the eschatological deliverance in the here and now; see *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 53-73.

<sup>28</sup>Richard Bauckham, "The Lord's Day" in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*, edited by D. A. Carsons (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 197-220.



In spite of the fact that these references to a "door" are sometimes understood to have different referents, it will be demonstrated below that all three texts, which are within a few verses of each other, refer to the same door: the entry to the heavenly sanctuary.<sup>29</sup> A ladder, a gate, or an opening are words sometimes used to describe an entry point into God's presence, or His heavenly sanctuary, in biblical and extra-biblical literature. Examples are found in these texts:

Genesis 28: 12, 17: And he dreamed that there was a *ladder* set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven [ . . . ]. This is none other than the house of God, and this is the *gate of heaven*.

1 Enoch 14.15: And behold there was *an opening* before me and a second house which is greater than the former and everything was built with tongues of fire.

*Testament of Levi* 5.1: At this moment the angel opened for me *the gates of heaven* and I saw the Holy Most High sitting on the throne.

But what about the specific word "door" where is this word used for the entry point to the heavenly sanctuary? This usage can be understood by examining the frequent use of θύρα as the word used in the Septuagint for the door to Israel's tabernacle and then their temple. For example, God instructs Moses in this manner: "And you shall make a screen for *the door of the tabernacle*, of blue and purple and scarlet stuff and fine twined linen, embroidered with needlework" (Exodus 26:36). The tabernacle reflects the heavenly sanctuary: if the earthly sanctuary is entered through a θύρα, then the heavenly sanctuary also has a θύρα as its entry point. Of the three references to "door" in Revelation presented above, 4:1 is the easiest to understand. There is no doubt that the door is here an image for entry into the heavenly sanctuary, for John passes through the open door and beholds the mystery of the heavenly sanctuary with the divine throne at the center.

The first usage of door is found in the letter to the church at Philadelphia, which begins with this title of Christ: "the one who has the key of David, the one who opens and no one can close and closes and no one opens" (Revelation 3:7). Jesus is drawing on the language of Isaiah

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<sup>29</sup>Brighton sees the occurrence in 3:8 as a metaphor for mission opportunity, the two occurrences in 3:20 as a metaphor for the heart of Christians in need of repentance, and 4:1 as a metaphor for the entry point of divine revelation given to only a few; see *Revelation*, 89-114.

22:22 where YHWH directs His words to Shebna, chief steward of Hezekiah, whose management role of the king's house, symbolized by the "key of David," will be replaced by Eliakim. Louis Brighton unpacks the significance of Jesus' usage of Isaiah: "Jesus uses the words of Isaiah to proclaim that He is over the household of God, and that He alone has the authority to control entrance into it [. . .]. The key of David symbolizes his authority now by which He has opened to all people the door of his Father's Kingdom."<sup>30</sup>

The "key," "opening," and "closing" imagery of verse 7 has an obvious relationship with the mention of the "door" that immediately follows in verse 8: "I have placed before you *an open door* which no one can close." Furthermore, one of the significant problems that the congregation in Philadelphia was facing was opposition from the Jewish synagogue: "Behold, I am going to hand over those of the synagogue of Satan who call themselves Jews and are not, but rather they lie" (3:9; compare John 8:31-59). One of the lies these so-called "Jews" surely shared with their Jewish brothers who worshipped Jesus is the accusation that Jewish Christians had abandoned YHWH and no longer had access to Him. To such a lie Jesus says: "you have an open door to the kingdom before you." This interpretation is supported by the promise Christ gives to this church at the end of this letter: "I will place him as a pillar in the temple of my God and he will never again go outside" (3:12). The one who is faithful will not only have access to the heavenly sanctuary for eternity, but he will become a vital part, "a pillar," of that sanctuary in which God dwells for eternity. He will never have to go out, but will remain in the presence of God eternally. This text, therefore, is speaking about the fact that Christ is giving this congregation access to heaven in the midst of their struggles: the door is open to them and no one will close it. This interpretation, although not widespread, is by no means new.<sup>31</sup> Pierre Prigent cites several commentators who support the conclusion that this is "the door to the Kingdom, the door of the heavenly Jerusalem that is offered to Christians."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Revelation, 91-92.

<sup>31</sup>Early in the twentieth century Wilhelm Bousset identified this door as the entrance of the community to participation in the Messianic feast in his *Die Offenbarung Johannis* (1906); see R. H. Charles, *Revelation*, Volume I of the International Christian Commentary (ICC) (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1920), 87.

<sup>32</sup>*Commentary on the Apocalypse of Saint John*, 203.

A common interpretation of the second "door" text (Revelation 3:20) emphasizes that Jesus is standing at the door of our hearts, calling sinners to repentance; people must only open their hearts to Him so that He can enter.<sup>33</sup> This interpretation ignores the context and the meal imagery. If this text is interpreted in its immediate context, however, there is a door and a voice described only two verses later: the door to heaven and the voice of the Spirit who calls John to come into the Divine Presence. This text, moreover, echoes Song of Songs 5:2, where the bride states: "the voice of my beloved, he knocks at the door: Open to me, my beloved." Jews of the first century interpreted this book allegorically; the bride was Israel and the groom was YHWH, even the Messiah.<sup>34</sup> Christ uses this marriage imagery and language from Song of Songs to present Himself as the groom, seeking marital union with His bride, the church, specifically the congregation at Laodicea.

This interpretation is congruent with the wider context of Revelation 19-22 where the New Jerusalem, the church, is presented as the bride of Christ, and the last day as the greatest of marriage celebrations that includes a banquet (Revelation 19:7-9). The role of a marriage banquet in celebrating the realization of the prophetic hope of messianic deliverance is well known in the Old Testament (for example, Isaiah 25:6; 62:9; and Ezekiel 39:17) and the Gospels (for example, Luke 14:15-24 and Matthew 22:1-14). The explicit mention of dining is found in the blessing that follows the announced arrival of the marriage of the Lamb: "Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage banquet of the Lamb" (Revelation 19:9). Although it is common to see the marriage banquet as an experience that will commence on the last day, the Book of Revelation certainly understands that these endtime realities have been inaugurated through the death and resurrection of Christ. Worship not only transcends the separation between heaven and earth, but also between the present and the last day.

Finally, how should the eating imagery in Revelation 3:20 be interpreted? Is it merely figurative language for close fellowship? As is obvious from the immediate context, Jesus is calling this congregation to repentance and a restoration of marital union, the intimate union that is most powerfully accomplished in the Lord's Supper, the marriage feast

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<sup>33</sup>For example, Lenski, *The Interpretation of Saint John's Revelation*, 164.

<sup>34</sup>See Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of Saint John*, 218-219.

of the Lamb.<sup>35</sup> This door, therefore, is not a metaphorical door to one's heart, but the entry to the heavenly sanctuary that is accessed here on earth in eucharistic worship when we behold the presence of God in Christ and are united with Him through eating His body and drinking His blood. The question, however, arises: Why is the door to the heavenly sanctuary *open* in 3:8 and 4:1, but here Christ is knocking at a door that is *closed*? The church of Laodicea is a wealthy, "lukewarm" congregation rebuked by Christ because she needs to repent and re-enter the gracious presence of God. The door is not locked to her; she had previously entered Christ's open door and feasted in his presence, but subsequently left. Now Christ invites this congregation to re-enter in order that she dine with Him again at His eucharistic table.

The reference to dining in Revelation 3:20, as well as in 19:9, should not be dismissed as obscure or isolated testimony to the role of the Lord's Supper in the experience of the Divine Presence. These texts, rather, are tangible evidence of a truth that is elsewhere implicit in the worship scenes of Revelation: the real presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper enables worshippers to transcend both space and time.<sup>36</sup> When we participate in such worship, we join in the heavenly reality and foretaste the end time blessings displayed in Revelation: "they will hunger no more, neither thirst any more" (7:16).

### *B. The Passover*

One of the primary images that points towards a relationship between the heavenly worship depicted in Revelation with the Lord's Supper is the recurring Passover imagery, especially Christ as the Lamb.<sup>37</sup> Although it is often the historical event from the Exodus that comes to mind when we hear the term "Passover," it is vital that the annual festival that centered on the Passover *meal*, which recounted the whole Exodus and

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<sup>35</sup>See Oscar Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship* (1958; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 16. See also Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of Saint John*, 219-220.

<sup>36</sup>See Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 53-73.

<sup>37</sup>Most commentaries note the recurrent Passover/Exodus imagery, so a few examples will suffice: the plagues of Egypt inform some the imagery in the cycles of seven (especially the bowls in Revelation 16:1-21); the Exodus through the Red Sea stands behind the image of the saints besides the sea of glass (Revelation 15:2); the "Song of Moses" sung after the Exodus is transformed into the Song of the Lamb (Revelation 15:3-4); and the Hallel Psalms (113-118) used at Passover celebrations are prominent in Revelation 19.

wilderness deliverance, also be kept in mind when interpreting this imagery. Furthermore, the most significant scenes in apocalyptic literature are the depictions of the presence of YHWH in His heavenly throne room. This is also true of the Book of Revelation. It is no coincidence that Christ as the having-been-slaughtered-and-now-standing Lamb is the focus of worship in the heavenly sanctuary according to Revelation, not Christ as the glorified "one like a son of man" who is seen in several other scenes of this vision (1:12-3:22; 14:14-16; see also 10:1-14; 19:11-16). The image of Christ as the Lamb, therefore, is the dominant portrait of Revelation's unveiling of Christ.<sup>38</sup>

The understanding that the *Passover* lamb stands behind the Lamb Christology in Revelation is a subject of considerable debate.<sup>39</sup> Although some influence from Isaiah 53 and apocalyptic tradition (for example, Daniel's use of animal imagery and the so-called "animal apocalypse" of 1 *Enoch* 83-90) is probable, Pierre Prigent notes the value of emphasizing the Passover background:

It is in this way that one can best explain the emphasis on the blood of this Lamb and the effect of his sacrifice, which guarantees mankind's redemption (Rev 5:9), as of old during the first Passover, when Israel was ransomed from the land of slavery. When we recall the eschatological notion in the Passover celebrations, we can more readily accept the possibility of identifying Jesus with the lamb of the eschatological Passover whose blood will guarantee definitive and perfect redemption, that is, one that is worldwide (Rev 5:9).<sup>40</sup>

Prigent points to "blood" as a very significant element in the portrayal of the Lamb: He is a lamb who has been "slaughtered" but now stands (5:6; 13:8), who "has freed us from our sins by His blood" (1:5; compare 5:9) because we have washed our robes and made them "white in the blood of the Lamb" (7:14), and who enables His followers to conquer "by the blood of the Lamb" (12:11). There is other evidence that early

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<sup>38</sup>"Lamb" as a title for Christ is used 28 times (4 x 7), more than any other christological title in Revelation. For a discussion of these titles and the numerology indicated by their usage, see Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 29-37.

<sup>39</sup>See Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of Saint John*, 43-44 and 249-251. The research of Concordia Theological Seminary student Gillian Bond on this topic has influenced and enriched my own understanding of this aspect of Revelation's christology.

<sup>40</sup>*Commentary on the Apocalypse of Saint John*, 250.

Christians combined the themes of Passover and atoning sacrifice. 1 Peter 1:18-19 states: "Knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with *precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.*" Paul, who calls Christ our "Mercy Seat sacrifice [ἱλαστήριον]" in Romans 3:25, also stated: "For Christ *our Passover* [τὸ πάσχα ἡμῶν] has been sacrificed" (1 Corinthians 5:7b). The Gospel of John, especially, presents Jesus as the Passover Lamb: John the Baptist announces Him to be "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (1:29; compare 1:36); Jesus is crucified on the Day of Preparation when all the lambs are slaughtered for the Passover Feast (19:14); and John's quotation of Exodus 12:46 at the close of his passion narrative identifies Jesus as *the* eschatological Passover sacrifice. Furthermore, Jesus' Bread of Life in John 6, which—at the very least—alludes to the Lord's Supper ("he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life" in 6:53), is delivered in the context of the Passover Feast.<sup>41</sup>

Why would the Passover Lamb imagery be featured so much in the giving and recording of this apocalypse? First, it obviously grounds the Christology of this vision in the true humanity and death of Christ. The exalted and reigning Christ is none other than the one who was sacrificed and died on the cross. Second, this Lamb stands in stark contrast with the Beast, the form that Satan takes in order to deceive the nations (Revelation 13:1-18). Even as one has contrast in Revelation between the two cities (Babylon and the New Jerusalem) and the two women (the Harlot of Babylon and the Bride of Christ), there is also a major contrast depicted between the Lamb as the object of true worship and the Beast as the object of false worship. Third, and very crucial for this study, this Lamb Christology is congruent with the way worshippers "saw" Christ in the Lord's Supper. It is vital to understand that first-century Jews remembered the Passover deliverance and anticipated the eschatological deliverance in the Passover *meal* where they ate an unblemished lamb. The depiction of Christ as the Passover Lamb in the heavenly sanctuary helped Christians see that He is one and the same as the Christ whose

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<sup>41</sup>John 6:25-65 should not be understood as speaking solely about the Lord's Supper, but neither should it be interpreted as having nothing to do with this sacrament. The words of Jesus are about "eating and drinking" our incarnate Lord in faith through the means by which He offers Himself to us. See also James W. Voelz, "The Discourse on the Bread of Life in John 6: Is it Eucharistic?" *Concordia Journal* 15 (1989): 29-37.

flesh they ate and whose blood they drank when they celebrated the Christian "Passover" each Lord's Day on earth. It is, no doubt, this strong Passover theme in the Lord's Supper that led the church to incorporate the *Agnus Dei* into their eucharistic liturgy.

There may even be a reference to the atoning blood of Christ found in the Lord's Supper in Revelation 7:14. Since the white baptismal garment could be soiled by sin (Revelation 3:4-5), it is quite possible that Revelation understands the Lord's Supper as the source for the regular cleansing of the baptismal garment in order that one wear a white robe for eternity: "they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Revelation 7:14). The primary Old Testament text for understanding this image is Daniel 11-12, where tribulation comes to the saints "in order to refine, purge, and make them *white* until the end time" (11:35).<sup>42</sup> The testimony of Revelation, however, is not that tribulation leads to this purification, but the source of cleansing is "washing in the blood of Lamb." Once again, Exodus traditions assist in the interpretation of this scene.<sup>43</sup> A priest's garments were sprinkled with blood to signify consecration for service in the temple (Leviticus 8:30; Exodus 29:10-21; compare Exodus 24:4-8).

A similar image is found in the Epistle to the Hebrews.<sup>44</sup> Hebrews 10:19-22 discusses the access of the baptized who dwell on earth to the heavenly sanctuary, as noted above. The author later offers a brief glimpse of the worship within this heavenly sanctuary:

12:22-24: But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, [23] and to the assembly of the Firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to a judge who is God of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, [24] and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel.

Although the "sprinkled blood" here certainly alludes to the Day of Atonement sacrifice offered by Christ Himself (Hebrews 10:12-14), yet it is probably pointing to the presence of this atoning sacrifice in Christ's

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<sup>42</sup>Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 436-438.

<sup>43</sup>Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 438-440.

<sup>44</sup>See Daniel J. Brege, "Eucharistic Overtones Created by Sacrificial Concepts in the Epistle to the Hebrews," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 66 (2002): 61-81.

blood offered in the Lord's Supper since it speaking of the worship in which Christians currently participate ("Mount Zion").

### C. Divine Presence Worship

As noted in the introduction, Revelation 4-5 and the other scenes of worship that follow are visual depictions of the hidden-to-the-naked-eye heavenly worship that the church participates in each Lord's Day as the church on earth. These chapters are not only depicting a past or future reality, they are showing forth a present reality for John and the church of his day. As such, they serve as a vivid commentary on what is happening in worship, especially in the Lord's Supper, where the Paschal Lamb who shed His blood and gave His body is present sharing His victory through this meal. The liturgy of Divine Presence found in Revelation 4-5—especially the use of the song of the seraphim from Isaiah 6 (Revelation 4:8)—may have already been brought over from temple and synagogue worship by Jewish Christians to their eucharistic celebrations at a very early date. If so, its presence in this scene would have helped the original hearers see the relationship between John's Lord's Day entry into the heavenly sanctuary and their entry into the heavenly sanctuary during eucharistic worship each Lord's Day.<sup>45</sup>

This function of Revelation in the life of the church is supported by two pieces of evidence. First, Revelation was meant to be read in worship, at one setting, from start to finish: "Blessed is he who reads aloud the words of the prophecy [the lector] and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written therein [the congregation]" (Revelation 1:3). The contents of this prophecy helped the worshipers to understand the reality they experienced out in the world (for example, the chaos of sin and the activity of Satan) as well as the reality they experienced in worship (for instance, the presence of God and the Lamb, angels, and saints). Second, Revelation ends with a prayer that may be functioning as a "preface" to the Sacrament of the Altar: ἔρχου κύριε Ἰησοῦ ("Lord Jesus, **come!**").<sup>46</sup> After experiencing the "revelation" of Christ through the reading of this prophecy, the congregation then experiences the "revelation" of Christ through His "coming" in the Lord's Supper. Oscar Cullmann has argued that this prayer is an example of the Aramaic *Maranatha* ("Our Lord,

<sup>45</sup>See Shepherd, *The Paschal Liturgy and the Apocalypse*, 92-97.

<sup>46</sup>The use of the present imperative makes this an emphatic prayer (thus, the bold font). Aorist imperatives are typical in prayers.



come!"), which is transliterated in a similar position at the end of 1 Corinthians (16:22) and is also found at the end of the preface to the Eucharist recorded in the *Didache* (10.6).<sup>47</sup> He summarizes its significance and application in this manner:

This ancient prayer thus points at the same time backwards to Christ's appearance on the day of his resurrection, to his present appearance at the common meals of the community and forwards to his appearance at the End, which is often represented by the picture of a Messianic meal. In all three cases a meal is involved. Therefore the *Maranatha* is above all a eucharistic prayer.<sup>48</sup>

The bold prayer: "Lord come! *Maranatha*!" ought to assume again the eucharistic reference that it originally had, and it should express the double desire, which was realized for the early Christians, of seeing Christ descend into the midst of the faithful gathered in His name and of discovering for themselves, in that coming, an anticipation of His final Messianic return.<sup>49</sup>

Finally, what is the relationship between this eucharistic theology and the baptismal theology discussed earlier in this study? If one accepts the relationship between baptism and priestly ordination rites proposed above, then the marking with the Divine Name, washing, and the clothing of baptism prepares for, and leads one into, the experience of the Divine Presence in the Lord's Supper. A congregation who listened to this apocalypse from start to finish is reminded that the heavenly sanctuary is neither a distant "up there" reality nor a future reality "far down the road" of time: it is an accessible and present reality that the baptized on earth enter and truly experience now in worship, especially in the celebration of the Eucharist. In this sacrament, Christians are invited to experience the Divine Presence: the door to heaven is open as Christ, the Passover Lamb, comes to eat with us by giving us His own flesh and blood for a blessed feast.

### III. Conclusion

It may be helpful to reflect briefly on the hermeneutical approach used in the exegesis above. An understanding of the implied reader of

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<sup>47</sup>Early Christian Worship, 13-14; see also Oscar Cullmann, "The Meaning of the Lord's Supper in Primitive Christianity," in *Essays on the Lord's Supper*, translated by J. G. Davies (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1958), 13-15.

<sup>48</sup>Early Christian Worship, 14.

<sup>49</sup>Cullman, "The Meaning of the Lord's Supper," 23.

Revelation is vital to the proper and faithful interpretation of this apocalypse. James Voelz states: "A valid interpreter of a text, then, is that person, that man or woman, who assumes the role 'required,' as it were, by a given text—who becomes the reader 'implied' or called for by that very text. And such a one is formed to assume that role by a community, a community which has assumed that role itself."<sup>50</sup>

In light of the imagery discussed above and our knowledge of early Christianity, the "implied reader" of Revelation was a first-century Jewish Christian who had been baptized and participated in eucharistic worship. I have interpreted several scenes of Revelation by seeking to assume the role of this "implied reader." Although one must be careful not to read later liturgical practices into a text, the opposite problem also exists: an interpreter who does not believe or participate in the sacraments as defined in the Holy Scriptures and celebrated in the early church will have difficulty understanding how these texts communicate sacramental theology. This is part of the danger of Lutheran pastors drinking too deeply from the wells of the many Reformed commentaries on the market.<sup>51</sup> They will not find much baptismal water or eucharistic blood in those volumes, and may even begin to think that such theology is not in the Scriptures being expounded.

The scenes of John's vision were given and recorded for worshipping "communities," which understood that the presence and grace of God is communicated through Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper. The evidence reviewed above certainly confirms this assessment. Revelation both fosters and reflects the understanding that eschatological expectations are experienced in the present through worship. The content of Revelation, therefore, sheds light on sacramental theology and practice among first-century Jewish Christians, light that can also guide the theology and practice of the modern church.

First, Revelation gives us insight on the sacramental practice of first-century Jewish Christians. The sealing with the Divine Name by means of the Hebrew *taw* and the wearing of white garments after baptism were probably prominent aspects of the baptismal rite already in the first

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<sup>50</sup>James Voelz, *What Does This Mean? Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Post-Modern World*, Second Edition (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1995), 220.

<sup>51</sup>See David P. Scaer, "Reformed Exegesis and Lutheran Sacraments: Worlds in Conflict," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 64 (2001): 3-20.

century. Because of this, the sealing and garment imagery used in the giving and recording of this apocalypse was accessible and understandable to John and the churches to whom he wrote. All the discussion of sealing with the Name should move pastors to reflect upon how they mark a baptismal initiate and how the identity of this person is being transformed with the speaking of the Divine Name and the washing of water. Furthermore, the dominant image of the Passover Lamb, as well as the meal invitations, confirms the understanding that the Lord's Supper was celebrated frequently and that it was an integral part of early Christian worship.

Second, and even more significant, Revelation gives us insight into the sacramental theology of both the God who imparted this visionary experience and the Christians who received and were shaped by it. Baptism is not depicted as merely a initiation rite that shows forth repentance and faith. Through the mention of naming, sealing, and garments, baptism is projected on the big screen of this vision as *the* gracious action of God that brings individuals the eschatological deliverance from sin and its consequences won by the Lamb's sacrificial death and resurrection. Baptism transforms us into a priesthood whose life and identity flows from what we receive and confess in worship. The liturgical rhythm of Revelation, especially the dominant scene of chapter 5 that depicts the worship of the Lamb, demonstrates how worship, in which the Lord's Supper plays a major role, unites us with the heavenly and eternal reality.

In this new millennium when Holy Baptism is viewed by some within Christendom as little more than an initiation rite and the Lord's Supper is sometimes marginalized because of its supposed lack of entertainment value, it is refreshing to read these portraits where the sacraments are presented as central to the church's life. The Book of Revelation reminds us that the seer John was not the only one to experience an apocalypse of Jesus Christ. As the church hears these words, the Lamb of God reveals Himself for His church to behold and worship. Even more: as the church is sealed with the Name and washed, as she sings with angels and archangels, as she eats and drinks, she beholds and is united with—already now—this bloodied Lamb whom she will worship eternally in the age to come.