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The Open Door of Heaven: Re ections on the Book of Revelation, chapters 4 and 5

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Introduction

Revelation of John is one of the most difficult books of the Bible. The title is misleading: It gives the impression as if John is revealing his own ideas and theological message. Correctly it should be entitled "Revelation to John" as he is the last in a line of communication beginning with God, continuing with Jesus Christ and an angel[2]: "The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants what must soon take place; and he made it known by sending his angel to his servant John". The book intents to "show to his servants what must soon take place".

The images and literary genre of John's book are hard to understand for modern readers. Its language is full of Jewish and OT allusions[3] which demand scholarly knowledge to understand. In particular sectarian and fundamentalist groups adopt and exploit the ideas for their own purpose. In the Roman-Catholic liturgy Revelation of John is of marginal interest.

In order to achieve an appropriate understanding of the writing it is necessary to ask for the historical background, the intention, and hermeneutical problems. The Apocalypse was written at the end of the first century during the time of Domitian[4] by John the

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[2] M. Eugene Boring, "The Voice of Jesus in the Apocalypse of John". *Novum Testamentum. Leiden* NT 34 (1992): 334–359, 344 points to disorder of this communication in 22,6: „The voices of Revelation, both the variety of those heard in the vision and John's own this-wordly voice, do not remain distinct, but fade into each other. This is not typical of apocalyptic. This phenomenon suggests that John regards the whole of his document in the prophetic perspective as the word of John / angel / Christ / God simultaneously".

[3] Steve Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, Journal for the study of the New Testament Supplement series JSNT.S 115 (Sheffield, 1995); Steve Moyise, „The Language of the Old Testament in the Apocalypse". *Journal for the study of the New Testament* JSNT 76 (1999): 97–113; Steve Moiyse, "Authorial Intention and the Book of Revelation". *Andrews University Seminary Studies* AUSS 39 (2001): 35–40; Steve Moiyse, "Seeing the Old Testament Through a Lens". *Irish Biblical Studies* IBS 23 (2001): 36–42; Jon Paulien, "The Book of Revelation and the Old Testament". *Biblical. Research* BR 33 (1988): 37–53; Jon Paulien, "The Book of Revelation and the Old Testament". *Biblical. Research* BR 43 (1998): 61–69.

[4] Ulrike Riemer, "Domitian – (k)ein Christenverfolger?". *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistes geschichte* ZRGG 52 (2000): 75–80; J. Christian Wilson, "The Problem of the Domitianic Date of Revelation". *New Testament Studies*. London NTS 39 (1993): 587–605.

prophet on the little island Patmos in a time of political oppression for Christians who live in seven cities in Asia Minor[5]. The cities are connected with each other as they are part of an Ancient post road. At the same time they are strongholds of the Roman Empire cult. Revelation responds to the challenging situation in form of underground literature. Its language can be described as a kind of hidden transcript; it is the insider language of subversive resistance to state authority. Therefore its point of view is that of the oppressed (Rev 6:0), it is a realistic point of view.

Hence, John's theology is political theology. It contains a declaration of war against the Roman Empire and the Greek grammar as well. John's Greek contains so many irregularities and grammatical mistakes that it is discussed among scholars. His theology is characterized by dualism, the exclusiveness of good and evil, and by making the enemies to scapegoats. The author remains passive towards political actions and interventions. This kind of thinking does not bear a critical examination even though every situation contains good and evil.

John's theology is prophetic theology (1:3; 22:7, 10, 18f)[6]. John is a member of a circle of prophets (19:10; 22:9). His intention as prophet is to cope with his present time, not to predict the distant future. He wants to give orientation for disoriented readers by revealing God's secret plan; he hopes in the end of times and the beginning of something completely new. John has chosen the literary form of a letter as he wrote from his exile on Patmos[7]. Rev 4–5 is an example of the prophetic dimension of Revelation since prophets were thought able to enter divine councils and proclaim God's plans with human beings[8].

Although the structure of Revelation of John is controversially discussed[9] it is well-organized. The apocalyptic main part (4:1–22:7) is framed by a letter (1:1–8; 22:8–21). Furthermore, seven letters to the seven churches in Asia Minor are fitted in between the epistolary frame and apocalyptic main part (2–3). They gain insight into the historical

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[5]   Edith McEwan Humphrey, *The Ladies and the Cities. Transformation and Apocalyptic Identity in Joseph and Aseneth, 4 Ezra, the Apocalypse and The Shepherd of Hermas*. Journal for the study of the pseudepigrapha – Suplement series JSPE.S 17 (Sheffield, 1995); Roland H. Worth, *The Seven Cities of the Apocalypse and Roman Culture* (New York, 1999).

[6]   David E. Aune, "The Prophetic Circle of John of Patmos and the Exegesis of Revelation 22:16". *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* JSNT 37 (1989): 103–116; Beate Kowalski, "Prophetie und die Offenbarung des Johannes? Offb 22,6–21 als Testfall". In: Joseph Verheyden, Korinna Zamfir, Erik Eynikel, ed. *Prophets and Prophecy in Jewish and Early Christian Literature*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament WUNT II 286 (Tübingen, 2010), 253–293; Jan A. Du Rand, "The Imagery of the Heavenly Jerusalem (Revelation 21:9–22:5)", *Neotestamentica* Neotest. 22 (1988): 65–86, 70 states: „Revelation is an apocalyptic writing in narrative form with a prophetic eschatological aim and a pastoral touch presented in the framework of a letter". Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, „Apocalypsis and Propheteia. The Book of Revelation in the Context of Early Christian Prophecy". In: *L'Apocalypse johannique et L'Apocalypse dans le Nouveau Testament*, ed. by J. Lambrecht, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum theologicarum Lovaniensium BEThL 53 (Leuven, 1980), 105–128; Cf. also the thesis of Michael Douglas Goulder, "The Apocalypse as an Annual Cycle of Prophecies". *New Testament Studies* NTS 27 (1981): 342–367 which thesis remains to be proved; cf. also Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy. Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh, 1993) and the critical response of Marko Jauhiainen, "Apocalypsis Iesu Christi (Rev. 1:1). The Climax of John's Prophecy?". *Tyndale biulletin* TynB 54, 1 (2003): 99–117.

[7]   Martin Karrer, *Die Johannesoffenbarung als Brief. Studien zu ihrem literarischen, historischen und theologischen Ort. Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments* FRLANT 140 (Göttingen, 1986).

[8]   David E. Aune, *Revelation,* Word Biblical Commentary WBC 52A (Dallas, 1997), 277.

[9]   Ugo Vanni, *La Struttura letteraria dell' apocalisse*, Aloisana 8A (Brescia, ²1980).

situation of the church. The main part is structured by three series of seven plagues. The dramatic high point is the vision of the woman and the dragon in Rev 12–13.

In order to understand Revelation properly three hermeneutical principles have to be mentioned beforehand: Firstly, the chapters of the book do not follow a chronological order. There is no linear progress in the narrative which makes the understanding quite difficult. Events are multifaceted without historical evolution or progress. Sometimes discontinuity can be stated (e.g.: the destruction of Babylon is not narrated, there is no war of dragon against Babylon). Images and narrative are often illogical. In particular, Revelation does not develop an eschatological doctrine about the events which will take place in the distant future. Secondly, John presents theological reflections on his visionary experiences in literary form. Rev does not contain visions but visionary narratives. They are based on OT and Jewish theology and writings and need interpretation by the readers. The original visionary experience remains a mystery. Thirdly, John's theology does not ultimately answer all questions. It is one possible world view. More exactly, Revelation has its limitations.

In what follows, the opening vision of the main part of Revelation (Rev 4–5) will be portrayed. Together with 21:1–22:7 it frames the visionary narratives. The beginning and the ending visions give insight into heaven: the heavenly throne room in Rev 4–5 and the new heaven in Rev 22:1–22:7. The function, OT and liturgical background of the heavenly throne vision[10] will be presented now.

1. Rev 4-5 and its position in John's Revelation

 Rev 4–5[11] is a throne-vision report[12] and the opening vision of the apocalyptic main part of Revelation[13]. It is connected with the seven letters to the churches in Asia minor (Rev 2–3) and with the final vision (21:1–22:7) by the words "overcome" ($\nu\iota\kappa\acute{\alpha}\omega$: 2:7,11,17,26; 3:5,12,21; 5:5; 21:7), "receive" ($\lambda\alpha\mu\beta\acute{\alpha}\nu\omega$: 2;17,28; 3:3; 4:11; 5:7,8,9,12; 22:17); the motif of the open door ($\theta\acute{\upsilon}\rho\alpha\nu$ $\mathring{\eta}\nu\epsilon\omega\,\gamma\mu\acute{\epsilon}\nu\eta\nu$: 3:8; $\theta\acute{\upsilon}\rho\alpha$ $\mathring{\eta}\nu\epsilon\omega\,\gamma\mu\acute{\epsilon}\nu\eta$: 4:1) and the description of the actors (white clothes, thrones [3:21], crowns) are mentioned in the last letter to the church of Laodicea. The addressed churches are demanded to overcome the current tribulation by perseverance and clarity as Christians as the Lamb did the same. They are promised to receive salvation.

Rev 4–5 has an important function within the literary framework. Together with Rev 21:1–22:7 it frames the apocalyptic main part. Furthermore, it is connected with three further text segments in which John being in rapture in the spirit is mentioned:

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[10] Aune, *Revelation*, 277 mentions six functions of throne narratives: 1. enthronement scene, 2. judgment scene, 3. commission scene, 4. eschatological heavenly festal gathering scene, 5. vision of God as the goal of Merkavah mysticism, 6. literary throne scenes.

[11] Dean R. Davis, *The Heavenly Court Judgment of Revelation 4-5* (Lanham–New York–London, 1992); Pilchan Lee, *The New Jerusalem in the Book of Revelation. A Study of Revelation 21–22 in the Light of its Background in Jewish Tradition*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament WUNT II 129 (Tübingen, 2001).

[12] Aune, *Revelation*, 276.

[13] Aune, *Revelation*, 275; he also states that 4:1–2 can serve as an introduction just to the sear narrative in 4:2b–6:17. But it seems more likely to regard it as an introduction to the entire visionary part of Revelation as it forms an inclusio together with 21:1–22:7.

1:10: "I was in the Spirit (ἐγενόμην ἐν πνεύματι) on the Lord's day."

4:2: "At once I was in the Spirit (ἐγενόμην ἐν πνεύματι)."

17:3: "And he carried me away in the Spirit (ἀπήνεγκέν με εἰς ἔρημον ἐν πνεύματι) into a wilderness."

21:10: "And in the Spirit (ἀπήνεγκέν με ἐν πνεύματι) he carried me away to a great, high mountain."

Twice the verb ἀποφέρω indicates that one of the seven angels with the seven bowls (εἷς ἐκ τῶν ἑπτὰ ἀγγέλων: 17:1; 21:9) carried John away. In both cases the same direct speech of the angel introduces the rapture in the spirit (ἐλάλησεν μετ' ἐμοῦ λέγων· δεῦρο, δείξω σοι). The motif is taken from the prophet Ezekiel (cf. Ez 2:2; 3:12,14,24; 8:3; 11:1,5,24; 43:5). It is closely connected with a movement to another place and it organizes the structure of the books Ezekiel and Revelation[14].

These four text segments in which John's rapture of the spirit is expressed, are linked with different places with symbolic meaning. The island Patmos and the desert represent the experience of distance from God. Heaven and Zion symbolize the presence and closeness of God.

Patmos (1:9): distance from God
Heaven (4:1): presence of God
Desert (17:3): distance from God
Zion (21:10): presence of God

Patmos is the place where John is at the very beginning. He is brought to the three other places (heaven, desert and mount Zion) by the spirit. Thus, the four texts speak about John's spiritual journeys[15] during which he realizes the connections between Roman Empire and God's Empire in a holistic way. Nowadays, we would assign spiritual intelligence to John[16].

The experience of distance from God and the presence of God is the central theme of Revelation. The every-day experience of Christians in Asia Minor was that of an enormous presence of the Roman Emperor and the experience of the powerlessness and absence of God. However, John wants to convey the opposite message: the chance to come into contact with God's presence. This idea is also underlined in the last vision of

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[14] Sverre Bøe, *Gog and Magog: Ezekiel 38–39 as Pre-Text for Revelation 19,17–21 and 20,7–10*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament WUNT II 135 (Tübingen, 2001) = (Studiebibliothek for Bibel og Mission 5, (Oslo, 1999); Beate Kowalski, *Die Rezeption des Propheten Ezechiel in der Offenbarung des Johannes*, Stuttgarter biblische Beiträge SBB 52 (Stuttgart, 2004) and Beate Kowalski, "Transformation of Ezekiel in John's Revelation". In: *Transforming Visions. Transformations of Text, Tradition, and Theology in Ezekiel*, ed. by William A. Tooman, Michael A. Lyons, Princeton Theological Monograph Series 127 (Princeton, 2010), 279–307; Jean-Pierre Ruiz, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse. The Transformation of Prophetic Language in Revelation 16,17–19,10*, Einleitung in die Heilige Schrift EHS.T 23/376 (Frankfurt, 1989); Dieter Sänger, ed., *Das Ezechielbuch in der Johannesoffenbarung*. Mit Beiträgen von Michael Bachmann, Beate Ego, Thomas Hieke, Martin Karrer, Biblisch-teologische Studien BThSt 76 (Neukirchen–Vluyn, 2004); Albert Vanhoye, "L'Utilisation du livre d'Ézéchiel dans L'Apocalypse". *Biblica. Roma* Bib. 43 (1962): 436–476; Jeffrey Marshall Vogelgesang, *The Interpretation of Ezekiel in the Book of Revelation* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Cambridge–MA, 1985); Lou Wei, *Ezekiel in Revelation. Literary and Hermeneutic Aspects* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Edinburgh, 15.4.1999, unpublished), 232.

[15] Aune, Revelation, 276, 281. Aune He speaks of a divinely guided tour.

[16] Danah Zohar, Ian Marshall, *Spiritual Intelligence The Ultimate Intelligence* (Edinburgh, 1984), 15–16.

the heavenly Jerusalem (Rev 21:1–22:7, especially 21:22: "And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.") which forms a frame around the apocalyptic main part. The heavenly worship in Rev 4–5 anticipates the redemption at the end. It contrasts the distance from God with a "Gegenentwurf" to the Roman Empire.

2. Structure of the text

The text has a clear structure: It consists of two parts which form a unit (diptychon): the first part of the heavenly throne hall (4:1–11) and the second part (5:1–14), in which the Lamb and the scroll are introduced. The climax of the text is the worship of God and the Lamb by all creatures in heaven, on and under earth and in the sea in vv. 13–14. Six worships addressed to God and the Lamb are the recurrent theme of the two chapters. Various places, actors and voices are described which demand interpretation.

4:1	Exposition: Opening of the visionary narrative
4:2–11	Vision of the heavenly throne hall
	WORSHIP OF GOD
	Worship of the 4 living creatures (v. 8)
	Worship of the 24 elders (v. 11)
5:1–5	Vision of the sealed book (vv. 1–4)
	Lion of the tribe of Judah, root of David (v. 5)
	No Worship
5:6–14	Vision of the Lamb receiving the sealed book (vv. 6f)
	WORSHIP OF THE LAMB
	Worship of the 4 living creatures & 24 elders (vv. 8–10)
	Worship of the angels, living creatures, elders (v. 11)
	WORSHIP OF GOD AND THE LAMB
	Worship of the creatures in heaven, on and under earth, in the sea (v. 13)
	Worship of the 4 living creatures (v. 14)

3. Places and actors

Rev 4–5 is a long text segment in Revelation. It is impossible to explore all aspects within a short time. Therefore two main aspects will be looked at: Firstly, the places and actors; and secondly, the liturgical dimension.

3.1. Places

Before we have a look at the different places and the inventory of heaven it is necessary to look at Revelation's world view. The visionary report is based on the ancient world view. The earth is grounded in the underworld and roofed by heaven. It is thought like a disc and not yet like a globe. God is thought to live in heaven, the evil in the underworld, human beings on earth – in between good and evil.

Various places are mentioned and connected with each other in Rev 4–5: Firstly, the heavenly throne hall; secondly heaven, earth, and underworld (5:3) and sea (5:13). According to the ancient world view, all parts of the world are mentioned. In particular, chapter 5 connects the heavenly throne hall with all parts of the ancient world view. Not only the prophet John functions as a bridge but all creatures who worship God and the Lamb. Thus, Rev 4–5 offers two different ways of opening new horizons for the churches in Asia Minor to get in touch with God: The first way is by following John's example and theology, the second is by celebrating and worshipping.

Heaven is exactly described: There is a throne in heaven, and round the throne are 24 thrones with elders, and round the throne four living beings. The order of the heavenly room has a centre in which God's throne is placed. This gives insight to John's theocentric theology. In his theological word view God is the foundation and focal point, but not the Roman Empire. He has his own court with thrones around him. In contrast to worldly powers members of his court participate in his power as they sit on thrones themselves.

God's throne is the starting point of "flashes of lightning, voices and peals of thunder, and seven torches of fire" (Rev 4:5). The motifs belong to a cosmic earthquake which is typical for eschatological theophany (e.g., Ex 19:16)[17].

Another element is described as being part of heaven: before the throne there is something as it were a sea of glass like crystal (4:6). The sea is usually supposed to represent chaotic powers in the Bible. In front of God's throne it might reflect the idea of God having power over the chaos. In the final vision[18] (21:1) it is underlined that there is no sea any more after the first creation has passed away. Earthly chaos has finished[19].

3.2. Actors

Various actors are mentioned as being part of the heavenly events. First of all, <u>John</u> the prophet is mentioned in 4:1f. He discovers an open door in heaven (cf. the epiphany in Gen 28:17 and other OT references) and is invited to come up hither[20]. Captured by the spirit he is enabled to see things in heaven. The NT only knows of two first-personal reports of such a mystical heavenly ascent: Paul in 2 Cor 12:1–10 and Rev 4. Both, Paul and John, describe the journey as an out-of-body experience[21].

He remains a passive observer and reporter who describes very detailed what he sees in 4:1–11. He becomes part of the scene in 5:4 where he reacts with weeping because nobody was found to open the scroll. Furthermore, he is comforted by one of the elders.

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[17] Lee, *The New Jerusalem*, 250.

[18] Du Rand, „The Imagery of the Heavenly Jerusalem (Revelation 21:9–22:5)", 65–86.

[19] Gregory K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*. New international Greek Testament commentary NIGTC (Grand Rapids–Carlisle, 1998), 327 thinks about Solomon's temple, God's hol separateness and splendor, and the heavenly analogue to the Red Sea. He also consideres the cosmis evil and refers to Rev 11:7; 13:1; 15:2; 21:1. This is supported by the understanding of the Red Sea as the home of the sea monster (Isa 51:9–11; Ps 74:12–15; Ez 32:2).

[20] Aune, *Revelation*, 278 maintains that the heavenly ascent motif is characteristic for throne visions. Furthermore, he lists manyfold examples if the connection between an heavenly door and divine epiphanies in the Hellenistic and Roman period (281f).

[21] Aune, *Revelation*, 278, 313.

At the beginning, the role of John is that of an observer, reporter and mediator between God and the churches in Asia Minor. He is not able to intervene or to change any of the heavenly acts. This is exactly the role prophets had.

John the prophet is an observer (I saw: 4:1; 5:1,2,6,11) and listener (4:1; 5:11,13) of the heavenly events; he reacts to the fact that no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it (5:4: weeping). Furthermore, he experiences the whole event in the Spirit (4:2). He is more or less passive within the narrative but most active in the narration of the events.

As we can distinguish between two levels of communication we can define John's role more precisely. On a text-internal level, which is the communication within the narrative, we have to analyse the communication of the narrated figures with each other. On a text-external level, the communication between the narrator John and his historical and real addressees in Asia Minor can be reconstructed.

In the text-internal level, John communicates with a (first) voice[22] that sounds like a trumpet. The voice can be identified by the greater context as the voice of an anonymous angel or by Christ himself: In 1:9–20 the voice is identified by Christ, in 8:2,6,13; 9:14 by angels. Since Christ occurs in the figure of a Lamb it can be stated that the voice might be that of an angel inviting John. Furthermore, he communicates with one of the elders who comforts him (5:5). Thus, John is portrayed as a figure that is human and part of the world as his addressees and at the same time he is able to perceive messages by members of the heavenly court. On the text-external level this has a pragmatic function: The Christians in Asia Minor are invited to join the liturgy and are comforted by the message to John. Hence, John functions as an instrument connecting two realities with each other: the political reality in every-day life and the theological reality of God.

God is the most important actor in the heavenly throne. He is described as someone sitting on a throne in the centre of the court. Neither his body nor his clothes are described, but posture and his radiance: He is sitting, which is the posture of someone who is mighty. His appearance is described with motifs of OT theophany (cf. 1 Kings 19:11b–13a, Isa 6:1–4; Ez 1:1–3:21): jasper and carnelian, rainbow an emerald are mentioned in the narratives of Genesis (Gen 9:13–16) and Exodus (Ex 13:21.22; 14:19.24; 19:9; 33:9.10) when God's presence becomes perceivable. In describing God with OT language John protects the God image from any kind of anthropomorphism. God remains a mystery and secret[23].

A political important predication of God is the title "Lord God Almighty" which is a common description of God from the LXX. It emphasizes that he is sovereign over time and history – and over the Roman Empire. The contrast between God's eternal kingship and temporal powers can be detected at the title "*dominus et deus noster*" in 4:11.

The **Lamb** (ἀρνίον) is the second divine figure which occurs in Rev 5:6 the first time. It is the most common Christological motif in Revelation (27 references) which is introduced in Rev 5:6. Most of its occurrences are to be found in the final vision (Rev 21) and in Rev 4–5, the opening and final visionary narratives. Rev 5 introduces to the figure in

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[22] M. Eugene Boring, "The Voice of Jesus in the Apocalypse of John". *Novum Testamentum. Leiden* NT 34 (1992): 334–359 distinguished between seven different voices in Revelation: 1. reader; 2. text; 3. John; 4. voices in the visionary narratives; 5. messenger formula, 6. interjections introduced with ivdou, 7. unclear identificationen.

[23] Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 319–321.

form of an enthronement or better (as Aune states) an investiture. There is an allusion to Dan 7:9–14[24].

It is standing as though it has been slain. Its wounds remind of the passion. At the same time it has conquered which is expressed with the seven horns and seven eyes. Furthermore, it is called a lion of the tribe of Judah (according to Gen 49:9) and the root of David (according to Isa 11:1–10; 27:6).

In the moment when Christ – the Lamb – appears a connection between the heavenly world and earth is given. Not only the heavenly actors but every creature in heaven, on earth, under the earth, in the sea, and all therein are singing praise to God and the Lord. There is a parallel between the open door in 4:1 and the appearance of the Lamb in 5:1–7. The scroll sealed with seven seals is a medium of communication between the two spheres[25].

Twenty-four elders and four living beings are mentioned as being members of the heavenly court. Exegetes discuss the identity of the 24 elders[26]. The following possibilities are mentioned: they were identified with stars (Babylonian astral deities), angels, OT saints, angelic representatives, patriarchs and apostles, or representatives of the prophetic revelation. It seems most convincing that they are composed of the 12 patriarchs representing the OT people of God and the 12 apostles representing the NT people of God. The same idea can be found in Rev 21. The final visionary narrative (Rev 21:12–14) portrays the heavenly Jerusalem by having the twelve gates with the names of the twelve tribes and the twelve foundations which represent the apostles of the Lamb[27]. The elders are dressed with white garments (cf. 3:5: sign of conquering) and with crowns which indicates their salvation (cf. 2:10: crown of life). Thus, they play a cultic role and have a royal status[28].

The **four living beings** refer to the presence of God. They are modelled according to the living beings of the prophet Ezekiel; nevertheless, John's description differs from Ezekiel insofar the living beings all look differently, they are full of eyes in front and behind (4:6), they have six wings full of eyes all around and within (4:8), and they are located round the throne (4:6). Their main function is to worship God (5:8,14) and they are as restless as the beings of Ezekiel, they are always in motion. Some motifs are taken from Isaiah's vocation narrative (Isa 6:2f): the six wings and the singing of the trisagion (Isa 6:3; Rev 4:8). Each one is identified with a lion, an ox, a human face, and a flying eagle (Ez 1:10) which can be interpreted as the fullness of life and power. They also remind of the symbols of the four evangelists as the early church fathers do[29]. Their main function is to support God on the throne[30] and to represent all creatures in the world.

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[24] Aune, *Revelation*, 332–338.

[25] Aune, *Revelation*, 367–373; see further Loren L. Johns, *The Lamb Christology in the Apcalypse of John. An Investigation into its Origins and Rhetorical Force*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament WUNT II 167 (Tübingen, 2003).

[26] Lee, *The New Jerusalem*, 249 also reminds of the 24 lasses of priests in 1 Chron 24:1–19. See further Aune, *Revelation*, 287–292.

[27] Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 322–326.

[28] Lee, *The New Jerusalem*, 249.

[29] Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 329.

[30] Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 329.

Another group of heavenly inhabitants are **<u>angels</u>**. A strong angel is asking for some-one who is able to open the scroll (5:2). Many angels are singing the praise of God (5:11). The group of angels differs from the elders and living beings[31].

The actors of the first vision narrative are completed by **<u>every creature</u>** in heaven, on earth, under the earth, in the sea, and all therein. Thus, human beings, all creation is included into the heavenly scene.

Last but not least a look at the interaction of the various figures of Rev 4–5 is neces-sary. All actors around the throne re-act to the presence of God and the Lamb. One of the elders includes John, the prophet. More interesting is the interaction between God and the Lamb. Their posture is quite different: God is described as sitting on the throne whilst the Lamb is standing between the throne and the other beings. God's titles emphasize his creative and eternal power, the Christological titles underline the passion, resurrection and the being as Messiah. Both play diverse roles. While God is sitting with a scroll in his right hand, the Lamb is receiving this scroll. Both are addressed with worshipping by the beings in the heavenly throne hall.

God is portrayed as being more or less passive and who receives praise. Even the hand-ing-over of the scroll is explicitly not stated. Christ's role is more active. He is responsible for salvation; he receives and opens the scroll. Furthermore, he participates in the wor-ship of God and in divine symbols. God is described unambiguously as the living one and creator. With the Dreizeitenformel all times are covered: past, presence, and future. Christ's description is quite ambivalent: He is the Lamb and the Lion at the same time, he is slain and victorious.

To summarize: Rev 4–5 is an important visionary narrative that introduces the func-tion of God and Christ within the tribulation on earth during the Roman Empire. Both are presented as powerful, triumphant over all kinds of human attempts of powerful reign. Thus, the opening visionary narrative of Revelation has programmatic function for the reader. It makes clear where real power can be find.

4. Understanding of Liturgy

It is discussed among scholars if Rev 4–5 reflects the liturgy of the synagogue (Prigent[32]) or the early church. Nevertheless, the influence of the OT, especially of Daniel[33] and Eze-kiel cannot be overseen. Allusions to the paschal liturgy are not very precise. The two liturgical concepts of new creation and new exodus (trisagion and new song) are derived from the two OT prophets. It can concluded, that Rev 4–5 contains the idea of enthrone-

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[31] H. Giesen, *Offb* 153 regards the living beings as angels.

[32] Pierre Prigent, *Apocalypse et Liturgie*, Cahiers théologiques CTh 52 (Neuchâtel, 1964). See detailed excursus to hymns in Revelation of Aune, *Revelation*, 314–317.

[33] Gregory K. Beale, *The Use of Daniel in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and in the Revelation of St. John* (Lanham–New York–London, 1984); Gregory K. Beale, "A Reconsideration of the Text of Daniel in the Apocalypse" *Biblica. Roma* Bib. 73 (1986): 539–543.

ment and judgment, but less of a liturgy. Nevertheless, it cannot be ignored that Rev 4–5 contains liturgical elements, which will be analyzed in what follows[34].

4.1. OT and Jewish background

Various songs and liturgical praises run through Rev 4–5. They allude to OT and Jewish liturgy and resemble the heavenly worship[35]. After a survey two examples will be presented more detailed.

There are six interactive praises that are semantically connected with each other by the singers and the content. The singers are the living beings, the elders and all creatures. They remind of the worthiness of God and the Lamb (ἄξιος: 4:11; 5:9,12) and sovereign attributes of God and the Lamb (4:11: δόξα, τιμή, δύναμις; 5:12: δύναμις, πλοῦτος, σοφία, ἰσχύς, τιμή, δόξα, εὐλογία; 5:13: εὐλογία, τιμή, δόξα, κράτος). Two of the praises are repeated in all three songs (δόξα, τιμή). The first time three praises, the second seven and the third time four praises are listed. The central song is dedicated to the Lamb; with its seven attributes it forms the climax of all doxologies. The very first worshipping is a quotation from Isaiah's trisagion (4:9). The third praise is called a new song (ᾠδὴν καινήν) in which the Christ event is composed in form of a hymn (5:9). Songs are just mentioned three times in Revelation: in 5:9 a new song to the Lamb, in 14:3 a new song is delivered by the 144000 redeemed, and in 15:2 the conquerors over the Roman Empire sing the song of Moses and the Lamb. It is remarkable that a song (ᾠδή) is only connected with the Lamb.

The addressees of the worship are God and the Lamb. Three doxologies can be found in Rev 5:9–14 with the following themes: 1. the worthiness of the Lamb, 2. redemption is accomplished, 3. redemption is universal, 4. Lamb made them royal priests, 5. Amen. The third doxology is the eulogy of the creation to God and the Lamb.

1. Four living beings are singing the trisagion to God:
4:9: *"Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!"*
2. Twenty-four elders are praising God's glory, honour and power.
4:11 *"Worthy art thou, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for thou didst create all things, and by thy will they existed and were created."*
3. Four living creatures and twenty-four elders sing together the praise of the Lamb.
5:9,10 *"Worthy art thou to take the scroll and to open its seals, for thou wast slain and by thy blood didst ransom men for God from every tribe and tongue and people and*

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[34] B. Brinkmann, "De visione liturgica in Apocalypsi S. Johannis", *Verbum Domini* VD 11 (1931): 335–342; Allen Cabaniss, "A Note on the Liturgy of the Apocalypse". *Interpretation. Richmond, Virg.* Interp. 7 (1953): 78–86. Klaus-Peter Jörns, *Das hymnische Evangelium. Untersuchungen zu Aufbau, Funktion und Herkunft der hymnischen Stücke in der Johannesoffenbarung*, Studien zum Neuen Testament StNT 5 (Güterlsoh, 1971); Lucetta Mowry, "Revelation 4–5 and Early Christian Liturgical Usage". *Journal of biblical literature* JBML 71 (1952): 75–84; Massey H. Shepherd, *The Paschal Liturgy in the Apocalypse.* Ecumenical studies in worship ESW 6 (London, 1960); Ugo Vanni, "Liturgical Dialogue as a Literary Form in the Book of Revelation". *New testament studies. London* NTS 37 (1991): 348–372.

[35] Lee, *The New Jerusalem*, 251.

nation, 10 and hast made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on earth."

4. Four living creatures and twenty-four elders and many angels sing the praise of the Lamb together.

5:12 *"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing!"*

5. Every creature in heaven, on earth, under the earth, in the sea, and all therein sing the praise to God and the Lamb.

5:13 *"To him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might for ever and ever!"*

6. Finally, the four living creatures the twenty-four elders say amen and fall down for worship.

5:14 *"Amen!"*

In what follows two praises will be analysed more in depth. In particular, the OT and Jewish background of the songs will be regarded. The first example is a worship called trisagion or Qedussah (in Jewish traditions) based on a quotation from Isaiah's vocation narrative[36]:

Isa 6:3	Rev 4:9
"HOLY, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory."	"Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!"
a[gioj a[gioj a[gioj ku,rioj sabawq plh,rhj pa/sa h` gh/ th/j do,xhj auvtou/	a[gioj a[gioj a[gioj ku,rioj o` qeo.j o` pantokra,twr(o` h=n kai. o` w'n kai. o` evrco,menoj

It is obvious that at least the three repetitions of the word ἅγιος and God's title as κύριος are directly quoted by John. He replenishes the citation with his characteristic Dreizeitenformel and the divine title ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ[37]. John alludes to the prophetic vocation of Isaiah which is placed within a heavenly throne scene. The quotation fits very well in John's visionary report as it has the same context. John's theological handwriting is detectable at the image of God as sovereign and eternal being. Thus, John adopts the Isaiah praise to his characteristic theology.

Liturgical praises by angelic groups resemble the heavenly worship. There are parallels in Qumran texts to 1 QM 12.1–2 and the Song of Sabbath Sacrifice (4 Q403; 1:12–29) and Hodayot (4 Q 427; 7,1:8–11,13–15,16–18).

1 QM 12.1–2: "1 For there is a multitude of holy ones in heaven and hosts of angels in your holy dwelling to praise your truth. And the chosen ones of the holy nation 2 you have established for yourself among them"[38].

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[36] Aune, *Revelation*, 302–306.

[37] Jan Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation. Visionary Antecedents and their Development*, Journal for the study of the New Testament Supplement Series JSNT.S 93 (Sheffield, 1994).

[38] Florentino García Martínez, Eibert J.C. Tigchelaar, *The Dead Sea Scrolls. Study Edition vol. I (1Q1–4Q273)* (Leiden–Boston–Köln, 1997).

There are huge parallels; the only difference is that the joint worship between human beings and beings of the heavenly court is more unfolded than in Qumran. John has the idea of a more interactive worshipping performance (esp. the three doxologies in 5:9–14)[39]. His liturgical idea proposes interaction between heaven and earth: the earthly liturgy is the response to the heavenly liturgy which is the response to the presence of God.

4.2. Function of the worship

Liturgical elements are important in Revelation of John. They interrupt the visionary narratives. Furthermore, they have the function to slow down the dramaturgy and to offer another point of view to the readers / listeners. Prayers have the function of show-stoppers[40] which interpret the events from another angle.

Liturgy is only celebrated by heavenly inhabitants and the followers of the Lamb. Thus, a clear decision is necessary in order to praise God and Christ properly. Earthly liturgy is a response to heavenly worship. Its starting point is the presence of God which demands for singing and praising. Heavenly liturgy is able to touch earth. Earthly liturgy reflects God's presence.

Liturgy draws concentric circles. According to the ancient world view it proceeds from heaven to earth, to the underworld and sea. It functions as a mouthpiece in the midst of tribulation and is a dedication to God's plan. In the midst of difficulties and tribulation it gives orientation and direction. The earthly liturgy participates in the heavenly liturgy. The continuous worship is a reaction and response to God's presence. Furthermore, prayer is political. It is a confession and worship of the right Lord.

Summary

Revelation of John is a strange writing. It demands interpretation and critical thinking. Nevertheless, its image of God deserves further reflection. It is free from any kind of anthromorphisms. God is the sovereign and pantokrator who has more power than any earthly authority. The scroll in his right hand is one symbol of his being: He is the only who knows the history and the future. Only God and the Lamb have the plan at their own proposal, it is not available for human beings. The most appropriate response to the majestic God is praise and worship. Liturgy portrays the presence of God and gives Christians the possibility to join with the heavenly liturgy. In particular, the trisagion which we sing at mass is a bridge between earthly and heavenly liturgy.

John, the prophet and seer on Patmos, tries to answer the very challenging theological question: „Where and how can God be experienced in the midst of tribulation and oppression?" It is the crucial God question which includes the theodicee problem as well. With his visionary experience of having access to the apparently hidden God he gives hope to his addressees in Asia Minor. According to John, worship is one possible way of coping

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[39] Lee, *The New Jerusalem*, 251.

[40] James W. Watts, *Psalm and Story. Inset Hymns in Hebrew Narrative*, Journal for the study of the Old Testament Supplement Series JSOT.S 139 (Sheffield, 1992).

with the reality of the Roman Empire and the powerlessness in every-day life. This idea is characteristic for exile theology. It can be found in the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel as well.

John's theology is political and liturgical at the same time. He connects prayer and action, contemplative and active life. Christian liturgy is an alternative and a contrast to the Roman ceremonial. Nowadays, our young generation celebrates liturgical rituals in secular parts of life, e.g. on a football match…

John's method of conveying his theological message is very interesting and worthy to be imitated. He combines various OT texts which each others, connects the motifs with Christian faith and his contemporary situation. Thus, John actualizes the Bible – which is the OT for him – for his current situation. That is the way how the Bible should be read: If John lived today he would have the Bible in his one hand and the newspaper in his other hand. And he were able to link both realities with each other.

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Abstract

The article deals with the opening vision of the main part of Revelation (Rev 4–5). Together with 21:1–22:7 it frames the visionary narratives. The beginning and the ending visions give insight into heaven: the heavenly throne room in Rev 4–5 and the new heaven in Rev 22:1–22:7. The function, OT and liturgical background of the heavenly throne vision will be presented now.

Keywords: Liturgy, OT and Jewish background, Qeduscha, worship, prophetic theology, God, Lamb/Christology

Streszczenie

OTWARTE DRZWI NIEBA: REFLEKSJA NAD APOKALIPSĄ ŚW. JANA, ROZDZIAŁY 4 I 5

Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie wstępnej wizji zawartej w głównej części Apokalipsy św. Jana (Ap 4–5), która razem z rozdziałami 22,1–22,7 tworzy profetyczną relację. Początek i koniec apokalipsy daje wyobrażenie nieba: niebiańskiej sali tronowej w Ap 4–5 i nowego nieba w Ap 22,1–22,7. W artykule zostało przedstawione zadanie, OT i liturgiczne tło/kontekst wizji niebiańskiego tronu.

Słowa kluczowe: liturgia, OT i żydowski/judaistyczny kontekst/tło, Qeduscha, uwielbienie, teologia profetyczna, Bóg, baranek/chrystologia