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Cosmology and Ecclesiology in the Book of Revelation

By
Andrew Lightner

A Project Submitted to
the Faculty of Covenant Theological Seminary
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Theology

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Abstract

The book of Revelation is a highly liturgical book. Hymns appear at important hinges in the narrative, and most every character in the book — including John himself — either participates in worship or receives worship. The three-tiered cosmic setting of the book is sketched with cultic imagery that makes its symbolic world a rich setting for worship. Within this setting, a worship war rages. Heaven and its citizens worship the one who sits upon the throne and the Lamb who has the seven Spirits of God. The earth dwellers — citizens of Babylon — worship the trinitarian parody. Caught between both is the church militant, represented by the seven congregations of Asia, who are called to navigate the treacherous blood-soaked ground of the earth by following the Lamb wherever he goes and participating proleptically, through worship, in the consummate victory of heaven. In summary, this study aims to link in important ways the victory of the church with the worship of the saints.

In this study, the people of God, as they are depicted in the cosmic setting of Revelation, are subject to a literary-rhetorical inquiry. After accounting for the literary and rhetorical methodology of the study and surveying relevant historical matters vis-à-vis the rhetorical setting of the book, an account of Revelation's cosmic setting is offered. The cosmic setting in which the drama unfolds consists in three spatially stacked tiers: heaven, earth, and the sea. Heaven is the governing core, the earth is the theater in which conflict plays out, and the polyvalent image of the sea functions as the abode of evil. Through OT cultic symbolism pregnant throughout the descriptions of the cosmos, John clothes the three-tiered cosmic setting in liturgical dress. This enables him to frame one

of the book's central conflicts as that of worship and allegiances, while setting the stage for his call upon the seven churches to join the worship of heaven.

The address to the seven churches functions as the point of departure for explaining how John sets his readers — in narrative-critical terms, the implied reader (IR) — within the cultic cosmic setting sketched throughout the book. Through several literary trajectories that sprout from address to the churches, John places the IR within the drama itself in order to reveal the nature of their current crisis, root them deeper in their Christological identity, and lead them further into the hope held out for them. Following a careful study of these literary trajectories, the hymnic material of Revelation is explored. The hymns of Revelation, nearly all of which are proclaimed in heaven, interpret the current conflict that rages on earth and portends its ending. The worship of heaven likewise summons the IR heavenward. Through numerous rhetorical cues, the hymns invite the IR to participate in the worship of heaven while on earth, while equipping the IR to navigate their present sojourn from a heavenly perspective. It is partly through their participation in the hymns that the IR proleptically conquers.

Throughout this study, the texts of Revelation are read primarily in their literary context for how they contribute to the unfolding drama of the narrative. Although referential matters of history, notably the events of the late first century CE, are appropriate topoi of investigation, this study leaves many of those matters aside. It is concerned with accounting for the literary portrayal of the church in her worship, and at each juncture explicating the rhetorical significance of the juxtaposition between those themes.

*To Lorri,
for her loving and faithful support.*

“Appearances are deceptive and may hide an unseen reality. The only way out of the dilemma is an above point of view that diagnoses the crisis and provides the healing antidote.”

— James L. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John: A Narrative Commentary*.

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All references to the OT follow the standard English and MT versification, unless otherwise noted by the designation, LXX. Quoted OT Hebrew, where present, follows the standard BHS text. All Greek quotations from the NT follow the text of NA²⁸. Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations in English are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Abbreviations

| | |
|-------|---|
| ANF | Ante-Nicene Fathers |
| BCE | Before Common Era |
| BECNT | Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament |
| CE | Common Era |
| ICC | International Critical Commentary |
| IR | Implied Reader |
| ITC | The International Theological Commentary on the Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testaments |
| L&N | Louw, Johannes P., and Eugene Albert Nida. <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains</i> . New York: United Bible Societies, 1996. |
| LXX | Septuagint |
| NICNT | New International Commentary on the New Testament |
| NICOT | New International Commentary on the Old Testament |
| NIGTC | New International Greek Testament Commentary |
| NT | New Testament |
| NPNF | Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers |
| OT | Old Testament |
| ZECNT | Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament |

Chapter 1

Introduction and Methodology

Perhaps no book of the NT has as jarring a history of interpretation as the book of Revelation. In an attempt to bring order to the winding history of interpretation, modern introductions often catalogue the disparate interpretive approaches by employing labels such as “historicism,” “futurism,” “preterism,” or “idealism,” each of which map the literary space of Revelation slightly differently by drawing different constellations from the same body of fixed stars.¹ The proliferation of the various interpretive camps represented by the labels above suggests, on the one hand, a wide ideological spectrum within the history of interpretation. Indeed, a dispensational-futurist approach yields notably different results from that of Luther’s historicist approach, for example.² But however distinctive in their various approaches to Revelation, many of the diverse spokesmen for these common interpretive approaches share a certain unity insofar as they tend to approach the book’s rich symbolism as a surgeon operating on his or her patient.

In other words, whether interpreters connect Revelation’s symbolic world with past referents or future referents, and whether they tend to approach the symbolism as

¹ Illustration adopted from David L. Barr, who applies it to the variety of approaches that interpreters take toward plot. David L. Barr, “The Story John Told: Reading Revelation for Its Plot,” in *Reading the Book of Revelation: A Resource for Students*, ed. David L. Barr (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 13–4.

² For a brief overview of Revelation’s history of interpretation see Craig R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 1–44, Logos Bible Software.

steno-symbols or tensive symbols,³ many interpretations tend to approach Revelation on the operating table, eager to dissect its symbols so as to anchor John's bizarre world to identifiable historical referents.⁴ To be sure, the symbolism of Revelation *does* operate on a referential level,⁵ and the foregoing project will frequently probe the referential level when relevant. Moreover, this student finds himself in agreement with many advocates of "idealism" or, to use Beale's language, the "Redemptive-Historical Form of Modified Idealism,"⁶ and though the purpose of this project is not to offer an account of such a position, assumptions of that position will occasionally bleed through the arguments presented herein. This project, however, primarily endeavors to press beyond a referential

³ Elisabeth Fiorenza defines "steno-symbols" as those symbols that bear a one-to-one relationship between symbol and referent, whereas "tensive symbols" are symbols that cannot be exhausted by one referent. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 183. According to Edith Humphrey the contrast between steno- and tensive symbols originated with the work of Philip Wheelwright in a 1962 monograph entitled *Metaphor and Reality*. Edith M. Humphrey, *And I Turned to See the Voice: The Rhetoric of Vision in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 21n10. See also Buist M. Fanning, *Revelation, ZECNT* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 35–6.

⁴ David deSilva distinguishes the contemporary-historical approach as a "fifth interpretive key" and one that is preferable to the four approaches above. According to deSilva, the contemporary-historical approach has the advantage of reading Revelation as a historical document and "assumes that John cared most about the readers he actually addressed, and that he wrote Revelation for them rather than any future generations of readers." While deSilva draws attention to an important hermeneutical pillar in constructing a sound interpretation of Revelation, numerous contemporary spokesmen for the four interpretive approaches would still assent to, and give consideration to, this hermeneutical point in their interpretation of Revelation, and deSilva seems to recognize this as well. Moreover, a contemporary-historical approach is still, like the other interpretive approaches (perhaps with the lone exception of idealism, though that also depends on how one defines idealism), highly referential. To be sure, deSilva's rhetorical analysis of Revelation advances his contemporary-historical observations in a fruitful way, and the present project is indebted to many of his arguments, but it is not clear that such a rhetorical analysis is only possible when one jettisons a futurist or historicist approach, or that a contemporary-historical approach is a different species altogether from the common four interpretive approaches, which collectively deSilva seems, in the opinion of this student, to generalize too much. David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John's Way: The Rhetoric of the Book of Revelation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 6–8.

⁵ E.g., G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999), 52–53, Logos Bible Software.

⁶ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 48; see also Dennis E. Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb: A Commentary on Revelation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing), 360–3.

inquiry by probing the literary and rhetorical *function* of Revelation in its first century *Sitz im Leben*. To shift the metaphor above, this project will endeavor to see Revelation as the surgeon while the reader is the patient upon whom the book operates. This approach arises out of the conviction that, as David deSilva puts it, “More than seeking to *be interpreted*, Revelation seeks to *interpret* the reality of the audience, showing them the true character of features of that landscape, identifying the true struggle that they must engage, naming the true stakes of the choices before the hearers.”⁷

In their own day, John’s first readers (or, perhaps more accurately, “hearers”)⁸ faced potent threats from within and without,⁹ and in navigating the province of Asia, with its admixture of political, social, economic, and religious persuasions, John counters the persuasions that saturated their world with an authoritative word from the Lord that aims to clarify cosmic reality, and to persuade his readers to realign and/or strengthen their allegiances to the true ruler of the cosmos. Only then will they conquer as the Lamb had conquered and partake of life in the new, inaugurated but not yet consummate, world to come. Koester’s observation is somewhat true, *viz.*, that modern readers of Revelation “are frequently baffled, since its visions often conceal more than they reveal and confuse more than they clarify.”¹⁰ But for the beleaguered churches to whom John sends out his revelation, we will argue that the visions are intended to reveal more than conceal and to yield palpable change accordingly.

⁷ David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John’s Way*, 14.

⁸ See the subsection “Rhetorical Dimension,” below, for brief comment on the oral setting of Revelation.

⁹ See the section “Rhetorical Setting,” below, for comment on the historical circumstances of John’s first hearers.

¹⁰ Craig R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, 47.

That Revelation functions to the advantage of the churches to whom John writes, rather than his own self-interests, stands in contrast with the approach of some who claim that John is principally interested in securing power.¹¹ Robert Royalty, for example, argues that John's use of the OT arises out of an ideological power struggle with other Jews and Christians within the seven churches of Asia, who simply read Scripture differently than him. Royalty opines, "The intra-Christian tension and the violent rhetoric of Revelation suggest that John and his disciples were part of a radical prophetic community seeking to expand their influence and authority within the Christian communities of Asia Minor,"¹² and for Royalty, John asserts power through the deconstruction of, and subversive reinscribing of, the Hebrew Scriptures. This, however, does not square with John's theocentric and Christocentric concerns throughout the book.¹³ DeSilva is surely correct when he comments, "At issue is not personal loyalty to John, but collective loyalty to the 'commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus' (Rev 12:17)."¹⁴

Ultimately, John is concerned that his readers *conquer* as the Lamb (the proto-martyr)¹⁵ has *conquered* so as to share in the eschatological life of heaven, and the

¹¹ David DeSilva provides a brief overview of these positions in David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John's Way*, 66–7.

¹² Robert Royalty, "Don't Touch This Book!: Revelation 22.18–19 and the Rhetoric of Reading (In) the Apocalypse of John," *Biblical Interpretation* 12, no. 3 (2004): 286, Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials PLUS.

¹³ See chapter 2 below on the theocentric quality of the cosmic space John maps, and chapter 4 below on how the hymns undergird the theocentric and Christocentric quality of the book.

¹⁴ David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John's Way*, 69.

¹⁵ Paul Middleton argues that Jesus is the proto-martyr, whom Christians are expected to follow into martyrdom, and by doing so they will conquer. Middleton comments, "Jesus conquered by his death, and Christians must, by following his example, conquer through martyrdom." Paul Middleton, *The Violence of*

consummate life of the new heavens and new earth, where right worship, in contrast to its earthly parody,¹⁶ abounds. That *conquering* is central to John's rhetorical goals is suggested by the sheer number of times *νικάω* occurs in the book (i.e., 17x), as well as its strategic placement at the end of each of the seven letters (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21). Moreover, Richard Bauckham has observed that conquering language is also used to describe every phase of Christ's kingdom usurping work; "he conquered in his death and resurrection (3:21; 5:5), his followers conquer in the time before the end (12:11; 15:2), and he will conquer at the parousia (17:14)."¹⁷ Precisely *how* Christians conquer as the Lamb has conquered will require, on the one hand, that they follow the Lamb wherever he goes (14:14), even into heaven itself through worship,¹⁸ and, on the other, that they maintain proper boundaries by refusing to soil their garments (3:4) and assimilate to idolatry.

The following project aims to advance the thesis that John propels his readers toward the chief goal of *conquering* by situating them within a cosmic context of conflict.¹⁹ Within the cosmic setting that John maps, there are two paths, and only two

the Lamb: Martyrs as Agents of Divine Judgment in the Book of Revelation (New York: T&T Clark, 2018), 224.

¹⁶ David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John's Way*, 70. It has been widely observed that Revelation is abounding with parodies, one of which is how the dragon, sea beast, and land beast parody the Triune God. See e.g., Laszlo Gallusz, *The Throne Motif in the Book of Revelation: Profiles from the History of Interpretation* (New York: T&T Clark, 2015), 216–7; David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John's Way*, 201; James L. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John: A Narrative Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 43; Craig R. Koester notes specifically that the land beast introduced in Rev. 13:11 rounds out the "demonic 'trinity.'" Craig R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, 129.

¹⁷ Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 70.

¹⁸ See chapter 4, below.

¹⁹ A. J. Beagley comments, "Revelation as a whole work is permeated by conflict, especially the conflict between those who follow Christ and those who oppose Christ and his followers." A. J. Beagley, "Beasts,

paths, open for John's Christian readers to take: either assimilate with the earth dwellers (i.e., οἱ κατοικοῦντες ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς) and face dire consequences, or follow the Lamb and inherit eschatological reward. While the former path may appear to be the way of victory (e.g., 11:7; 13:7), only the latter path produces eschatological triumph (e.g., 12:7; 17:14),²⁰ and throughout Revelation John prods his readers toward the truly victorious path by cementing them in the truth of who they are, where they are, and where they are heading.

First, the apocalyptic mold in which the book is cast, with its concentration on the transcendent dimension, allows John to identify his readers both as a historic people and

Dragons, Sea, Conflict Motif," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Development*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 127; Revelation's setting of cosmic conflict, argues Adela Yarbro Collins, is dualistic insofar as it presents the present time as "a universal struggle between the allies of God and the forces of Satan." Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001), 160. Although Collins buttresses her argument by anchoring certain imagery from Revelation in the mythic world of ANE and Graeco-Roman combat myths, (e.g., Rev. 12 and the Leto myth), the dualistic interpretive construction she posits has been followed, in general, by Sigve K. Tonstad, *Saving God's Reputation: The Theological Function of Pistis Iesou in the Cosmic Narratives of Revelation* (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2012), and Steven Grabiner, *Revelation's Hymns: Commentary on the Cosmic Conflict* (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015). Cato Gulaker, however, seeks to soften the dualistic interpretive constructions above by arguing that Revelation presents more of a monistic depiction of Satan's character. In other words, Revelation's depiction of God as the sole sovereign over the cosmos means that any conflict is subjugated under his authority and cannot, therefore be radically dualistic. See Cato Gulaker, *Satan, the Heavenly Adversary of Man: A Narrative Analysis of the Function of Satan in the Book of Revelation* (New York: T&T Clark, 2021), 19. Gulaker boils down the differences between his approach, and the approach of those like Tonstad and Grabiner, as follows: "The main difference between the studies of Tonstad and Grabiner from this one relates to the choice of perspective: Where the former two see the conflict in Revelation on a cosmic scale presenting itself on earth, I see the earthly conflict presented through a cosmic lens. The former perceive the main conflict, the overarching plot, as one between God and Satan, the latter as the process of dividing and sifting humankind. To the former, Satan becomes the chief antagonist, whereas to the latter as a means, if rather unwillingly, to an end." *Ibid.*, 28–9. While there is much to commend in Gulaker's foregrounding of God's sovereignty, his approach to Satan as a servant of God moderates far too much his adversarial function vis-à-vis God and his kingdom. See also Timothy Rucker, a review of *Satan, the Heavenly Adversary of Man*, by Cato Gulaker, *Themelios* 47, no. 3 (December 2022): 598–600, Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials PLUS.

²⁰ The observation that both paths, at different points in narrative of Revelation, function as subjects of νικῶ leads Bauckham to rightly comment, "The point is not that the beast and the Christians each win some victories; rather, the same event — the martyrdom of Christians — is described both as the beast's victory over them and as their victory over the beast. In this way John poses the question: who are the real victors?" Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 90.

a heavenly people. They are both “inheritors of Israel’s story” while simultaneously lampstands in God’s heavenly sanctuary.²¹ As the narrative unfolds, and the spotlight pans between heaven and earth, John reminds his Christian readers of their already-citizenship in the inaugurated kingdom of God, and he spurs them to participate in the worship of heaven — an activity that befits their heavenly identity — even as they tread the same blood-soaked ground as the earth-dwellers.

Second, through the book’s striking cosmology the historical crisis(es) of John’s first readers (see below) is mapped on a cosmic scale, not to plunge his readers into a crevasse of despair, but rather to underscore the gravitas of life on earth and the reality of the evil they face. To compromise with idolatry is far from an inconsequential decision; it is to follow the beast, to be at home in Babylon, and will lead, not to cries of “Hallelujah” in the end (e.g., Rev. 19:1, 3), but to weeping and mourning (e.g., Rev. 18:15). John’s Christian readers, therefore, must heed the call to stay awake (Rev. 16:10) and come out of Babylon (Rev. 18:4).

Third, as the narrative unfolds, and the end is occasionally recapitulated (e.g., Rev. 8:1–5; 11:15–19; 14:14–20; 16:17–21), the cosmological strata are collapsed and transformed so as to accentuate the consummate hope that awaits those who plod the path of the Lamb. To be sure, John’s focus on heaven before the consummation (e.g., Rev. 4–5; 6:9–11) fortifies the church militant in her confession while also providing consolation for them as they reflect on post-mortem life, already enjoyed by those like Antipas. But

²¹ Joseph L. Mangina, “God, Israel, and Ecclesia in the Apocalypse,” in *Revelation and the Politics of Apocalyptic Interpretation*, ed. Richard B. Hays and Stefan Alkier (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012), 89–94. G.K. Beale notes that John encourages his readers to understand the heavenly dimension of their present existence by, in part, “modeling its worship on that of the heavenly liturgy communicated in the apocalyptic vision.” G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 38.

the climax of their hope nevertheless lies in their vindication in the end. In summary, John anchors his Christians readers upwards in heaven, forward to the new heavens and new earth, and through the book's dynamic cosmology calls believers to "Come further up, come further in!"²²

Direction and Scope

This project seeks to elucidate what John says to the church militant, and what the church in that mode is called to do within, and in view of, the cosmic space on which the church is mapped. The present chapter will expound upon the literary-rhetorical approach that will drive the rest of this project forward. It will also expound upon the rhetorical setting of Revelation and important structural features of the book that are integral to the arguments of this project. The second chapter will concentrate on the cosmic setting of Revelation by investigating the dynamic cosmic map on which the drama of Revelation unfolds.²³ The third chapter will focus primarily upon the portrayal of the church in Rev. 2–3, and particularly how John draws his readers into the main vision section through several important literary trajectories, which in turn underscore the gravitas of the churches' present conflict and present hope. Finally, in the fourth chapter, we will focus on the various hymns of Revelation (4:9–11; 5:9–13; 7:10–13; 11:15–18; 12:10–12; 15:3–4; 16:5–7; 19:1–8), which are intended to guide the church militant in echoing the

²² C. S. Lewis, *The Last Battle* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1984), 196.

²³ It will be argued in chapter 2 that cosmology is not simply the static backdrop for John's narrative drama. Rather, it drives the narrative forward and advances John's rhetorical goals. Similarly, David deSilva comments, "[Revelation] creates a map of spaces and times that lie outside the realm of 'lived' experience, while at the same time 'remapping' and reimagining that landscape and the stories that do fall within the realm of lived experience." David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John's Way*, 93.

worship of the church triumphant, and thus live now, proleptically,²⁴ as conquerors in anticipation of Rev. 21–22.

Literary-Rhetorical Approach

The following project undertakes a literary-rhetorical approach insofar as its concern is to probe John’s persuasive strategies (i.e., rhetoric) as they surface within the narrative of Revelation. Throughout our study sporadic socio-historical concerns may also surface, but the aim of this study differs from that of a socio-rhetorical investigation insofar as its central concern is to understand Revelation in its own right rather than as a window into its socio-historical setting.²⁵ While the rhetorical aims of Revelation are certainly colored by historical realities, this project endeavors to hear the book’s rhetoric predominantly through the unfolding narrative, and only secondarily through socio-historical concerns, much of which, we must admit, remain tentative for the modern interpreter 2,000 years removed from the events in Asia in the late first century CE.

Literary Dimension

A literary or narrative approach²⁶ analyzes the way meaning develops within a text through the coalescence of narrative features such as setting, imagery, plot, and

²⁴ The use of the word “proleptic,” here and elsewhere in the present project, points to the consummate foreshadowing in the churches’ present worship. The church militant foreshadows the church triumphant in its present form and consummate form.

²⁵ Edith M. Humphrey, *And I Turned to See the Voice*, 26.

²⁶ This study uses the term “literary” in “literary-rhetorical” to be synonymous with what others might call a narrative approach, or a “narrative critical” approach.

characterization.²⁷ Rather than atomistically focusing on pericopes in a vacuum, or approaching the text with a historical-critical scalpel, literary approaches “recognize that meaning is found in a text”²⁸ and therefore seek to read texts as unified wholes.

Immediately, however, one may sense tension in applying a literary approach to a book like Revelation that is, in both form and content, quite foreign in comparison with other texts where a literary analysis may appear to be more native. However, when the book’s literary form is considered, and Revelation is investigated through the prism of narrative categories, it is evident that Revelation is a suitable subject of literary analysis. So too Steven Grabiner rightly opines,

Despite the complex theological and historical aspects of the book, Revelation lends itself to a narrative reading. It is an unusual and strange story, one not frequently encountered elsewhere, but a story nonetheless. Revelation's narrative has unique attributes embedded within it, being highly episodic and deep with imagery drawn from the OT and other backgrounds. Still, it lends itself to a narrative reading with its characters and unfolding of an ongoing storyline.²⁹

One of the means by which Revelation encourages such a reading is its literary genre. Although the precise characterization of Revelation’s literary genre is a topic of extended discussion that lies outside the purview of this project,³⁰ it is generally a matter

²⁷ See James L. Resseguie, “Narrative Features of the Book of Revelation,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Book of Revelation*, ed. Craig R. Koester (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 37.

²⁸ Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 200, Logos Bible Software. Mark Allan Powell observes that narrative criticism is “a more text-centered approach” and “in narrative criticism it is less necessary to know the historical situation of the actual readers for whom the text was originally intended.” Mark Allan Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 15; see also James L. Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 19.

²⁹ Steven Grabiner, *Revelation’s Hymns*, 14.

³⁰ For an extended and nuanced discussion of Revelation’s literary genre see David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), lxx–xc, and David E. Aune, “The

of consensus that Revelation reflects a mix of qualities from several literary forms; it consists in apocalyptic and prophetic characteristics that are enclosed within an epistolary frame.³¹ It has also been observed that while other texts that are likewise classified as “apocalyptic” are certainly not homogenous in every respect, they nevertheless share certain qualities, one of which being they possess a “narrative framework.”

In the well-entrenched definition of apocalypse as a literary genre, the 1979 SBL group defines the literary form of apocalypse as “a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.”³² That apocalyptic texts in general, and Revelation specifically, are cast in a “narrative framework” lends further support to a narrative approach to Revelation.³³

Apocalypse of John and the Problem of Genre,” *Semeia* 36 (1986): 65–96, Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials PLUS.

³¹ E.g., Charles E. Hill, “Revelation,” in *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the New Testament: The Gospel Realized*, ed. Michael J. Kruger (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 520–1; G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 37; Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 2; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 170; Craig R. Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), 104; Brian J. Tabb, *All Things New: Revelation as Canonical Capstone* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 4–8.

³² John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2016), 5. For a brief historiography of this definition see Adela Yarbro Collins, “Reading the Book of Revelation in the 20th Century,” *Interpretation* 40, no. 3 (July 1986): 235–8, Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials PLUS.

³³ See Cato Gulaker, *Satan, the Heavenly Adversary of Man*, 33n7. In an attempt to provide more nuance to the genre discussion, David E. Aune argues that definitions of genre should be formulated in terms of (1) form, (2) content, and (3) function. In terms of *form*, Aune declares, “an apocalypse is a prose narrative, in autobiographical form, of revelatory visions experienced by the author, so structured that the central revelatory message constitutes a literary climax, and framed by a narrative of the circumstances surrounding the revelatory experience(s).” Aune applies this specifically to Revelation as well. David E. Aune, “The Apocalypse of John and the Problem of Genre,” 86–7.

A literary analysis of Revelation also assumes that the book *is not* a disconnected compilation of visions, haphazardly stitched together, but rather an essentially unified work. The apparent differences between the prophetic-literary section of Rev. 2-3 and the apocalyptic section of Rev. 4:1–22:5 may appear to call into question the premise of essential unity, but, as it will be demonstrated in chapter 3, Rev. 2–3 foreshadows the main vision section of Revelation in a variety of ways, inviting the reader to place him or herself within the unfolding drama, and thus supporting the overarching unity of the book.³⁴ The book is also unified in theme, content, characters, and in the language of worship that propels John’s readers upward and forward.³⁵

David Barr has also defended Revelation’s essential unity, even as he observes the presence of three distinct stories within the book. The first of these stories consists in what happened to John on Patmos (Rev. 1–3), the second concerns John’s ascent into heaven (Rev. 4–11), and the third consists in the war on earth (Rev. 12–22). While Barr observes that these three stories do not appear to be sequentially related, they are nevertheless mutually interpreting, and together they function to tell one story of Jesus. Barr writes, “The first tells the story from the perspective of Jesus active in the communities of John’s time, as their judge and support. The second tells the story from the perspective of Jesus enthroned in heaven, already ruling the world. The third tells the story of Jesus the suffering savior who defeated evil in the past and future war.”³⁶

³⁴ The shift between the seven letters and the vision section is essentially a shift from discourse/paraenesis to narrative, which is not totally dissimilar to the shift made by numerous NT works.

³⁵ Leonard Thompson argues, for example, “the language of worship plays an important role in unifying the book, that is, making it a coherent apocalypse in both form and content.” Leonard L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 53.

³⁶ David L. Barr, “The Story John Told,” 18–9.

One could, of course, dispute Barr's evaluation that Revelation consists in three "stories," which is language that could suggest an essential division rather than unity, but Barr's approach is laudable in that it ultimately accounts for an overarching narrative unity while still acknowledging Revelation's diversity. Precisely how the various parts are unified is a subject of intense debate (e.g., does Revelation reflect a linear sequential unity, or a recapitulative unity?). Nonetheless, through its literary form and frame the book invites one to read it as a unified whole.³⁷

Rhetorical Dimension

A rhetorical analysis goes hand in hand with a literary approach;³⁸ rhetorical devices are embedded within literary texts,³⁹ and texts are the means by which an author advances his or her literary goals. Edith Humphrey rightly observes, "Rhetorical analysis is interested in speech craft of the writer (sometimes as put into the mouth of a character in the text), in the persuasive power of the speech itself (as encoded in the text), and in the effect on the listener...By its nature, then, the study of rhetoric has an integrative

³⁷ James L. Resseguie suggests that this premise, *viz.*, that the work is a literary whole, prompts the interpreter to situate the problems of Rev. 2–3, for instance, "within the cluster of problems developed and elaborated in Rev. 13 and 17." James L. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, 17; See chapter 3, below, for further elaboration of the integral connections between Rev. 2–3 and the whole of Revelation.

³⁸ Mark Allan Powell observes, "Narrative criticism is similar to rhetorical criticism in that it also is interested in discerning the effect that a work has on its reader and in explicating why it has this effect." Mark Allan Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?*, 15. Powell also notes a difference between both approaches, *viz.*, that narrative criticism interprets a text from the perspective of the implied reader (IR) whereas rhetorical criticism is less text-centric and presumably more concerned with the reader outside the text. However, this need not be the case, and Powell even appears to acknowledge different forms of rhetorical criticism that take a more text-based approach. See *Ibid.*

³⁹ James L. Resseguie identifies the following rhetorical devices in Revelation: Metaphors and similes, two-step progressions, verbal threads, chiasm, *inclusio*, and numbers and numerical sequences. James L. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, 18–32; on rhetorical devices in NT narrative, in general, see James L. Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament*, 41–86.

aspect, for it is concerned with communication.”⁴⁰ In short, “rhetoric” is about persuasion, and rhetorical criticism of a text studies *how* an author persuades.

NT rhetorical criticism traditionally draws its insights from the classical handbooks on rhetoric of antiquity, including Aristotle’s *Art of Rhetoric*, Quintilian’s *Institutio Oratoria*, and *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum* by Anaximenes.⁴¹ Within ancient rhetoric there are three separate genres, each of which fills a different purpose and each of which was, in antiquity, practiced in different contexts.⁴² Forensic rhetoric was the rhetoric of the law court that centered on defense and prosecution; it would seek to assign blame or innocence based on a past action. Deliberative rhetoric was the rhetoric of the council chamber where matters of public interest were debated and decided; it would seek to establish what was laudable and right with an eye toward the future. Finally, epideictic rhetoric was the rhetoric of praise or blame; it sought to honor the dead, elevate virtue, and censure vice, all with an eye to the present. Epideictic rhetoric, in antiquity, was practiced in the public forum.

Classical rhetoric, in addition to its focus on words and enthymemes, also considered the *process* of speechmaking, from how a speech was arranged to how a speech was delivered, to be an important consideration in the art of persuasion. As far as

⁴⁰ Edith M. Humphrey, *And I Turned to See the Voice*, 23.

⁴¹ To be precise, this approach is one of the two ways in which rhetorical criticism is practiced in NT studies. The second approach, with which this project does not interact, is the so-called “new rhetoric” that seeks to investigate the rhetoric of NT texts through the lens of modern rhetorical categories. Ben Witherington III and Jason A. Myers, *New Testament Rhetoric: An Introductory Guide to the Art of Persuasion in and of the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2022), 5.

⁴² The brief, foregoing discussion on ancient rhetoric draws from Ben Witherington III and Jason A. Myers, *New Testament Rhetoric*, 8–24; David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John’s Way*, 18–27; and Steve Walton, “Rhetorical Criticism: An Introduction,” *Themelios* 21, no. 2 (1996), 4–9, Logos Bible Software.

the speech itself (particularly in forensic and deliberative rhetoric), a persuasive speech often followed a certain pattern that was believed to have aided an orator's persuasive goals (i.e., exordium, narratio, propositio, probatio, and peroratio). Finally, classical rhetoric also recognized the need to appeal to an audience with three forms of proof: logos, pathos, and ethos. Logos was the appeal to reason, pathos was the appeal to the hearer's affections, and ethos – which Aristotle considered to be the most important⁴³ – appealed to the speaker's trustworthiness.

The application of classical rhetorical categories to the NT naturally raises some question about the suitability of setting these texts in conversation with each other. Should we expect the NT authors to have read the classical handbooks, and are they consciously applying those categories in their works? Moreover, the classical rhetorical handbooks are geared toward speech, whereas the various books of the NT are *written* works, not speeches. Does that then vitiate the applicability of classical rhetoric to the NT?

Two responses are in order. First, it is not the position of this project that John had consciously sought to apply Aristotle's *Art of Rhetoric*, for instance, nor that he had even read any of the classical rhetorical handbooks. As such, it would be inappropriate to treat Revelation as a procrustean bed for classical rhetoric. However, the insights from classical rhetorical do provide a helpful, heuristic framework for investigating how John

⁴³ Aristotle observes that that the character of the speaker, when it shows itself through the course of the speech itself, "contains almost the strongest proof of all, so to speak." Aristotle, *The Art of Rhetoric*, trans. Hugh Lawson-Tancred (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 75; See also David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John's Way*, 22; Steve Walton, "Rhetorical Criticism," 4.

persuades.⁴⁴ Second, as to the issue of textuality verses orality, it should also be borne in mind that Revelation, as with nearly all NT works, was written to be read aloud and heard in a predominately oral and aural context.⁴⁵ As Witherington and Myers put it, “All sorts of texts were simply surrogates for oral speech. This statement applies to many of the biblical texts themselves.”⁴⁶ There is therefore no insurmountable difference when one investigates a written text verses a transcription of an oral speech when the former was intended for delivery in an oral and aural setting.

The literary-rhetorical approach that this project undertakes does not aim for a comprehensive analysis of John’s rhetorical strategies, nor does it aim to read Revelation according to the specific categories of classical rhetoric. With that caveat in mind, however, Revelation as a whole appears to make use of all three rhetorical genres (i.e., deliberative, epideictic, and forensic), though deliberative and epideictic dominate the

⁴⁴ This is similar to how deSilva employs the classical rhetorical handbooks in his volume on the rhetoric of Revelation. deSilva, on his own work, comments, “The aim of this study is not to force correlations in order to demonstrate Revelation’s alignment with classical rhetoric, but to use the latter as a near-contemporary heuristic devise insofar as it is helpful.” David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John’s Way*, 18.

⁴⁵ See Ian Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, Black’s New Testament Commentary (London: Continuum, 2006), 15, 18, Logos Bible Software. David Barr has argued that “the orality of the Apocalypse is an essential element of its hermeneutic.” David L Barr, “The Apocalypse of John as Oral Enactment,” *Interpretation* 40, no. 3 (July 1986): 243, Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials PLUS. Barr argues that Revelation is fitted for orality within a eucharistic setting (ibid., 252–6) wherein the lector makes Jesus present through the book’s oral performance (ibid., 252). Barr comments, “I suggest that the oral characteristics of the Apocalypse and its oral setting, wherein the lector speaks for the risen Christ who comes to his community, prepared the audience to receive the Christ at the common table, the proleptic messianic banquet. Further, this enactment of the Apocalypse as a finite province of meaning was itself an experience of the kingdom of God.” Ibid., 255. Whether or not Barr is correct that Revelation is intended for a eucharistic setting, his attempt to account for Revelation’s oral setting is welcomed.

⁴⁶ Ben Witherington III and Jason A. Myers, *New Testament Rhetoric*, 2; See also Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy* (New York: T&T Clark, 1993), 2.

landscape.⁴⁷ John likewise employs proofs of logos,⁴⁸ pathos,⁴⁹ and ethos⁵⁰ throughout. The varied rhetorical proofs John employs will be occasionally noted in the current project when they surface.

Rhetorical Setting

A literary-rhetorical approach to Revelation necessitates that the setting which gave rise to the book be probed in brief.⁵¹ In general, prolegomena matters of background yield slightly different labels depending on the investigation pursued. For example, a socio-historical investigation may refer to such material as “social setting,” whereas a study based on relevance theory seeks to uncover the “mutual cogitative environment.”⁵² Each of these approaches is, in general, looking behind the text in order to set the text in its proper historical setting, though each of these approaches carries slightly different aims. The same could be said for the prolegomena survey of this study, which probes the “rhetorical setting” of Revelation.

While an investigation of the rhetorical setting is similarly concerned with issues of authorship, date, setting, and similar introductory matters, it is particularly interested in

⁴⁷ Ben Witherington III and Jason A. Myers, *New Testament Rhetoric*, 241–5; David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John's Way*, 78–89, 231.

⁴⁸ See David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John's Way*, 229–55.

⁴⁹ David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John's Way*, 193–228.

⁵⁰ David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John's Way*, 117–145.

⁵¹ Mark Allan Powell responds to the objection that narrative criticism is “nonhistorical,” noting that “Narrative criticism demands that the modern reader have the historical information that the text assumes of its implied reader.” Mark Allan Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?*, 97.

⁵² See Stephen Pattemore, *The People of God in the Apocalypse: Discourse, Structure and Exegesis* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 51–67.

exploring the historical setting insofar as it is inscribed in the text.⁵³ In other words, a “rhetorical setting” is more targeted than a “socio-historical” setting because it is concerned with the particular historical factors that have generated exigency and urgency in the text itself.⁵⁴ As far as the text of Revelation is concerned, John draws attention to himself (Rev. 1:1, 4, 9; 17:6; 19:10; 22:8), his readers/hearers (Rev. 2–3), and their particular situation of crisis throughout the book. Therefore, the following survey of John’s “rhetorical situation” will consider each of these three topics in brief.

Authorship

The author of Revelation identifies himself as “John” (Ἰωάννης) (1:1, 4, 9; 22:8), a name that has traditionally been associated with John the son of Zebedee, one of the twelve. As early as ca. 160 CE Justin Martyr draws this connection: “And further, there was a certain man with us, whose name was John, one of the apostles of Christ, who prophesied, by a revelation that was made to him...”⁵⁵ This same identification is followed by Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.* 5.30.1) and *maybe* Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 3.18.1).⁵⁶ However, Johannine authorship was not unanimously held among early Christians (e.g., Dionysius), and typically only the most “conservative” of modern interpreters continues to hold a traditional view of Johannine authorship. Alternative arguments posit that the

⁵³ David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John’s Way*, 29–30.

⁵⁴ See Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 192.

⁵⁵ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 81 (*ANF* 1:240), Logos Bible Software.

⁵⁶ Charles E. Hill, “Revelation,” 519; D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 700–1; However, cf. *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.4–6.

John of Revelation is an otherwise unknown early Christian prophet,⁵⁷ a member of a prophetic circle,⁵⁸ or the leader of a Christian prophetic-apocalyptic school.⁵⁹

While it is outside the scope of the current project to offer a comprehensive survey of authorship issues, there do not appear to be any compelling reasons to overturn the traditional understanding of Johannine authorship.⁶⁰ Apostolic authorship is often called into question because the author never explicitly identifies himself as an apostle, and even appears to set himself apart from the twelve in the book (e.g., Rev. 21:14). However, that he can simply identify himself as “John” and wield the kind of authority he does, leans in favor of his apostolic identity.⁶¹ And it is this authoritative self-presentation that helps John establish ethos with his readers.

In classical rhetoric, “appeals to ethos – the attempt to establish and reinforce one’s credibility – were essential for persuasion.”⁶² Likewise Aristotle highlights the importance of an author’s ethos for persuasion: “But since the objective of rhetoric is judgment...we must have regard not only to the speech’s being demonstrative and persuasive, but also to *establishing the speaker himself as of a certain type and bringing the giver of judgment into a certain condition.*”⁶³ Whatever we say about Johannine

⁵⁷ Craig R. Koester, *Revelation*, 68–9.

⁵⁸ David E. Aune, “The Social Matrix of the Apocalypse of John,” *Biblical Research* 26 (1981): 17–22, Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials PLUS.

⁵⁹ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 85–113.

⁶⁰ See the arguments for Johannine authorship in D. A. Carson and Douglas Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 700–7.

⁶¹ D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 702–3.

⁶² David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John’s Way*, 33.

⁶³ Aristotle, *The Art of Rhetoric*, 140.

authorship, the author presents himself as a figure of authority. He sets himself above his readers through the chain of transmission (Rev. 1:1–2), he is a prophetic mouthpiece of rebuke and encouragement throughout Rev. 2–3, and in the book’s epilogue he bears an authority that parallels Moses’ authority in pronouncing a stark warning against syncretism (Rev. 22:18–19; cf. Deut. 4:2–4).

But John is also far from heavy handed in the way he wields authority. In general, it was important in classical rhetoric that a speaker establish rapport with his audience,⁶⁴ and Aristotle discusses the virtue of friendship between both parties as an important contribution to pathos in the art of persuasion.⁶⁵ Throughout Revelation John establishes friendship with his readers by identifying them as his brothers and tying himself with them in their sufferings (Rev. 1:9).⁶⁶ He establishes rapport with them by narrating his own failures (Rev. 19:10; 22:8–9; cf. 17:6–7) even as he warns several of the Asian churches of their failures. And as the narrative unfolds, John grows with his audience in moving from ignorance to knowledge; “John aligns himself with his audiences' ignorance in order to help them gradually recognize Rome's violence and economic idolatry.”⁶⁷

John’s combination of authority over, and solidarity with his readers is a common approach assumed by apostolic authors toward their readers throughout the NT (e.g., Gal. 1:1, 11; Phil. 3:17; 1 Thess. 2:1–16; 1 Pet. 5:1–2), which would seem to lend greater

⁶⁴ David E. Aune, “The Social Matrix of the Apocalypse,” n6.

⁶⁵ Aristotle, *The Art of Rhetoric*, 149–53.

⁶⁶ David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John’s Way*, 132.

⁶⁷ Peter S. Perry, “The People of God in the Book of Revelation,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Book of Revelation*, ed. Craig R. Koester (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 327.

support for an argument of apostolic authorship in Revelation. Nevertheless, his self-identification throughout enables him to advance his rhetorical goals more effectively.

Audience

Central to a literary-rhetorical approach is the role of the implied author, reader, and narrator. In the case of Revelation “the role of the [implied author] and the narrator are virtually blended,”⁶⁸ and enough has already been said above about the author/narrator, and how he presents himself in the text. When it comes to *the reader*, a literary-rhetorical approach recognizes that ancient texts such as Revelation speak to an audience to which modern readers do not have access. Thus, the “implied reader” (IR) fills this role. To avoid eisegetically imposing one’s contemporary concerns onto the text, one should read from the perspective of the implied reader and “identify with the problems and message intended for them.”⁶⁹ James Resseguie notes, “The implied reader is a hypothetical construct of the implied author and is thoroughly familiar with the literary, historical, social, linguistic, and cultural repertoire of the implied author.”⁷⁰ How does one identify the IR’s concerns, problems, and similar interests? One looks for cues in the text itself, and although these cues can be augmented through the study of other sources contemporaneous with the IR, a narrative approach comports well with a rhetorical approach insofar as *both* are primarily concerned with historical circumstances as they come to us through the text.

⁶⁸ Steven Grabiner, *Revelation’s Hymns*, 16.

⁶⁹ Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 211.

⁷⁰ James L. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, 54; See also Mark Allan Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?*, 19–20; James L. Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament*, 30–33.

In Revelation we learn much about the IR through the lens of Rev. 2–3. While the specific crisis these churches faced is considered below, and a more thorough study of the letters will be undertaken in chapter 3, it is sufficient at this point simply to observe that the modern interpreter is provided with far more detail about the IR in Revelation than in other Second Temple apocalyptic works. John addresses seven historical churches in the province of Asia that are located along an ancient communication network,⁷¹ and numerous details of their historical setting surface through Rev. 2–3.⁷²

But as we seek to understand the IR through the seven letters, John also invites all Christian readers to place themselves in the shoes of the IR and identify themselves in solidarity with those churches. It has been observed by many that John’s address to *seven* churches is no coincidence. After all, *seven* plays an important role in Revelation as a number that “symbolizes completeness, plentitude, or perfection.”⁷³ Applied to the churches, John may address seven historical churches, but these churches are “*representative of all* the churches,”⁷⁴ an observation that was likewise recognized as early as the Muratorian Canon: “And John too, indeed, in the Apocalypse, although he writes only to seven churches, yet addresses all.”⁷⁵

In summary, modern interpreters are provided with substantial information about the IR, who will be the subject of further investigation later in the current project.

⁷¹ D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 712.

⁷² For this reason, Powell’s distinction between the IR and “any real, historical reader” is probably too sharp of a distinction for a text like Revelation. Mark Allan Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?*, 19.

⁷³ James L. Resseguie, “Narrative Features of the Book of Revelation,” 47.

⁷⁴ Richard Bauckham, *the Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 16.

⁷⁵ *Fragments of Caius* 3.3 (ANF 5:603), Logos Bible Software; Brian J. Tabb, *All Things New*, 89.

Furthermore, John seems to invite such an inquiry since he invites Christian readers from any city to identify with the IR as he draws all Christian readers together and points them to the heavenly city to come.

A Setting of Crisis

A cursory reading of Revelation strongly suggests that the IR is under potent pressure to conform to idolatry. In the letters to the seven churches, John commends the church in Ephesus for their aversion to the work of the Nicolaitans (2:6), while he likewise rebukes some in the church in Pergamum for holding to the work of the Nicolaitans (2:15), as he does to some in Thyatira for tolerating the false prophet Jezebel (2:20). The seven macarisms (Rev. 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7; 22:14) call upon the IR to pursue the way of the Lamb as opposed to the way of idolatry, the command of 18:4 explicitly calls upon the IR to separate from sin, while the alluring character of the land beast emphasizes the threat of idolatry (Rev. 13:11–18). Collectively, these texts underscore a setting where sin and idolatry lurks everywhere and presents a real threat to the cruciform style of conquering that John envisions for his readers.

Likewise, the potent threat of persecution for following the Lamb hangs over the entire book. John's own exile on Patmos (Rev. 1:9),⁷⁶ the martyrdom of Antipas in Pergamum (Rev. 2:13), and the tribulation of believers in Smyrna (Rev. 2:9) sets

⁷⁶ There are questions about whether John's location on Patmos *διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ* is best understood as an indication of purpose or result. In the former, *διὰ* may express John's free journey to Patmos in order to preach the gospel. In the latter, *διὰ* reflects a sentence of exile to Patmos because of John's proclamation of the gospel. On balance, *διὰ* with the accusative probably expresses result, since this comports with similar constructions elsewhere in Revelation (e.g., Rev. 6:9; 20:4). David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 81–2; G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 202; *pace* Leonard L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 172–3.

Revelation in an atmosphere of persecution that foreshadows the alarming visions of persecution and martyrdom that follow especially in Rev. 12–17. The souls underneath the altar are, in Rev. 6:9, identified by their martyrdom, the two witnesses in Rev. 11 are conquered and killed by the beast, and Babylon is identified as the city that slays the prophets and saints on earth (Rev. 18:24). David deSilva thus observes that “The visions teem with references to martyrdom.”⁷⁷ Whether one understands John’s theology of martyrdom to exclude any who have not been narrowly “slain,”⁷⁸ or one understands martyrdom broadly as the symbolic stock used to identify all faithful Christians, even those who die in the Lord from natural causes,⁷⁹ there is no doubt that Revelation envisions a steep cost for those who eschew idolatry and follow the Lamb.

Though this dual setting of idolatry and persecution betrays a brewing crisis among the churches in their historical setting, there have been various proposals to account for this supposed crisis. The majority of early church fathers set Revelation during the latter years of Emperor Domitian’s reign (90s CE), and connected his reign with a persecution of Christians. Eusebius draws this connection explicitly in his *Ecclesiastical History*:

⁷⁷ David DeSilva, *Seeing Things John’s Way*, 53.

⁷⁸ Paul Middleton argues, “For John, to conquer is to be martyred. Therefore, at a literary level at least, John does not envisage a faithful Christian who will not be martyred.” Paul Middleton, *The Violence of the Lamb*, 224.

⁷⁹ G. K. Beale understands John’s references to the “slain” in 6:9 as a metaphor that includes “all saints who suffer for the sake of their faith (so 13:15–18 and perhaps 18:24; 20:4).” G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 390. This would seem to be supported by Rev. 13:10. Craig Koester argues, “Sometimes, Revelation speaks as if every faithful person will be killed in the war against the beast (13:15). But each line in 13:10 begins with the word ‘if’ (*ei*), which leaves open the possibility that some will be imprisoned or killed and that others will not. As Richard Bauckham notes, ‘Not every faithful witness will actually be put to death, but all faithful witness requires the endurance and faithfulness (13:10) that will accept martyrdom if it comes’ (*Theology*, 94).” Craig R. Koester, *Revelation*, 588.

Domitian, having shown great cruelty toward many, and having unjustly put to death no small number of well-born and notable men at Rome, and having without cause exiled and confiscated the property of a great many other illustrious men, finally became a successor of Nero in his hatred and enmity toward God. He was in fact the second that stirred up a persecution against us, although his father Vespasian had undertaken nothing prejudicial to us.⁸⁰

With Eusebius, the testimony of the early church tends to lean favorably in the direction of a Domitianic date for Revelation (see also Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 5.30.3),⁸¹ and understands that period of time to be marked by burgeoning persecution for the church.

However, the connection Eusebius draws between Domitian and a state-sponsored persecution has, in recent years, been reexamined. Leonard Thompson, for instance, has challenged Eusebius' statement for several reasons. Thompson claims that evidence to corroborate Domitian's cruelty comes from sources (e.g., Pliny the Younger, Dio Cassius) who "had their own axes to grind" against Domitian and were driven by a desire to curry favor with Trajan in the post-Flavian empire.⁸² These standard postmortems on Domitian's reign are, according to Thompson, skewed by a bias that surfaces especially when their accounts are compared with evidence contemporaneous with Domitian's

⁸⁰ Eusebius, *Church History* 3.16 (NPNF² 1:147), Logos Bible Software.

⁸¹ D. A. Carson and Douglas Moo show how external evidence among early Christians testifies to four possible dates corresponding to the reigns of the following four emperors: (1) Claudius, (2) Nero, (3) Domitian, and (4) Trajan. Of these four, a Domitianic date receives the greatest support. D. A. Carson and Douglas Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 707–8.

⁸² Leonard L. Thompson, "Ordinary Lives: John and His First Readers," in *Reading the Book of Revelation: A Resource for Students*, ed. David L. Barr (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 30.

reign.⁸³ Just as Thompson challenges the standard portrait of Domitian as a cruel despot, he likewise challenges the claim that he was particularly cruel toward Christians.⁸⁴

The revised portrait of Domitian vis-à-vis Thompson has fostered a so called “non-persecution paradigm”⁸⁵ wherein the unmistakable tone of persecution in Revelation is explained primarily as a product of John’s apocalyptic vision (i.e., a “perceived crisis”)⁸⁶ rather than a mirror accurately reflecting the reality on the ground. Thus, Middleton explains, “the crisis the Apocalypse reflects is the mismatch between John’s current social reality and what he thinks it ought to be. This discrepancy between the world as it is and the world as it should be creates a crisis in John’s mind, and, as a result, he feels the Christian church is under attack.”⁸⁷ Thompson further argues that the apocalyptic form of Revelation is a suitable vehicle to create the perception of a crisis since the aim of apocalypse is to shape a reader’s perspective on reality.⁸⁸

⁸³ Thompson writes, “Moreover, their maligning of Domitian is contradicted in almost every instance by epigraphic and numismatic evidence as well as by prosopography, the study of biographies and public careers of senators during Domitian’s reign. The standard sources distort virtually every area of Domitian’s public and state activity during the time of his emperorship.” Leonard L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire*, 101.

⁸⁴ Thompson argues, for example, that two of the early Christian sources who advance a unique Domitianic persecution (i.e., Tertullian and Melito) are themselves dependent on the same slanted Roman historians who painted him as a despot. Leonard L. Thompson, “Ordinary Lives: John and His First Readers,” 31. Thompson also argues that while persecution of Christians did occur in Asia, it was primarily from the local populace, not from the empire (nor because of Christian resistance to the imperial cult). Leonard L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire*, 130–1.

⁸⁵ Paul Middleton, *The Violence of the Lamb*, 38.

⁸⁶ Leonard L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire*, 28.

⁸⁷ Paul Middleton, *The Violence of the Lamb*, 38. In context, Middleton is summarizing the position of Adela Yarbro Collins, who promulgates a position similar to that of Leonard Thompson, which Middleton rightly challenges.

⁸⁸ Leonard L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 28–33.

While Thompson convincingly argues that a unique Domitianic persecution of Christians has probably, over time, been exaggerated, and evidence for a state-wide persecution in the late 90s CE is open to challenge, it still appears that Thompson overstates his case. First, although Thompson may be right that the imperial cult was neither more or less a factor under Domitian than any other Flavian or Nerva-Antonine emperor,⁸⁹ the persecution intimated in Revelation in connection with a failure to participate in the imperial cult (e.g., 13:4–8) was still a reality throughout the empire, at virtually any time. Evidence of the so-called “sacrifice test,” which was made explicit in Pliny’s letter to Trajan,⁹⁰ may be evident in other Christian writings during the first century, including other NT books.⁹¹ This would suggest that Christians faced localized persecution throughout the first century, and it is noteworthy that Pliny’s letter to Trajan references Christians who had ceased to be Christians “twenty years ago,” which, according to Beale, “suggests some degree of selective persecution during Domitian’s reign as the probable reason for the apostasy.”⁹² The imperial cult was well established in

⁸⁹ Leonard L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 104–7.

⁹⁰ In Pliny’s letter to Trajan, we are offered a window into this sacrificial test. Pliny writes, “Those who denied they were, or had ever been, Christians, who repeated after me an invocation to the Gods, and offered adoration, with wine and frankincense, to your image, which I had ordered to be brought for that purpose, together with those of the Gods, and who finally cursed Christ—none of which acts, it is said, those who are really Christians can be forced into performing—these I thought it proper to discharge. Others who were named by that informer at first confessed themselves Christians, and then denied it; true, they had been of that persuasion but they had quitted it, some three years, others many years, and a few as much as twenty-five years ago. They all worshipped your statue and the images of the Gods, and cursed Christ.” Pliny, *Letters* 10.96, Logos Bible Software.

⁹¹ Paul Middleton, *The Violence of the Lamb*, 39–64.

⁹² G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 28; See also Thomas B. Slater, “On the Social Setting of the Revelation to John,” *New Testament Studies* 44, no. 2 (1998), 250, Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials PLUS; Matthew Street’s summary of persecution, using Pliny’s letter to Trajan as his point of departure, seems largely correct: “There was not an active programme of persecution, but if the occasion arose then the penalty of death was warranted. The nature of the conflict was one that would not have been perceived by the Romans as a conflict but would have been perceived by Christians sympathetic to John as a great

Asia during the reign of Domitian; both Pergamum and Smyrna were home to two of Asia's provincial imperial temples,⁹³ and all seven cities in Rev. 2–3 were neokorates by at least the early second century CE.⁹⁴ Beyond the imperial cult, Christians in Asia also faced social pressures vis-à-vis the worship of traditional gods, but whatever pressures were more prominent, deSilva rightly asserts, “John focuses attention on both in his survey of the features of the landscape that ought to cause concern for his readers (given the subversive way in which John presents these cults).”⁹⁵

Second, Thompson's argument that Revelation's apocalyptic genre helps to create the perception of a crisis is also questionable. While genre discussions surrounding apocalypses are exceedingly complex, to claim that genre could create a crisis is to claim too much. This is not to say that apocalypses must always reflect a situation of crisis,⁹⁶ but rather than asserting that a situation of persecution is created through an apocalyptic literary form, it is more appropriate to say that the situation of persecution is *augmented* by the selected literary form.⁹⁷ In summary, John's IRs are facing persecution in the present (from the empire, fellow citizens, *and* from Jews), Antipas has already paid with

conflict. Recent arguments to reform Domitian's character notwithstanding, as a conservative Roman he would have felt no qualms about 'keeping the peace' by threatening what he would have perceived as a unpatriotic, upstart religion that had split from Judaism.” Matthew Street, *Here Comes the Judge: Violent Pacifism in the Book of Revelation* (Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2012), 30n133.

⁹³ Steven J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 25–55.

⁹⁴ Thomas B. Slater, “On the Social Setting of the Revelation to John,” 253.

⁹⁵ David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John's Way*, 44.

⁹⁶ See David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John's Way*, 52n76.

⁹⁷ David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John's Way*, 51–2.

his life (Rev. 2:13), and even greater persecution is anticipated in the future.⁹⁸ It is not, however, the situation of persecution that compels John's exhortations to separate from Babylon, but it is in the IRs calling to follow the Lamb that creates anomie, and brings persecution upon them.⁹⁹

Settling on a precise date for Revelation is less important than maintaining that John speaks into a real crisis. After all, for John's rhetoric to have the potency it intends requires that it be tethered to reality. Nevertheless, there do not seem to be convincing reasons that would overturn a Domitianic date for Revelation, and thus this project will assume a Domitianic date provides the best historical backdrop for Revelation.

Structure

In general, how an author arranges his or her material is an appropriate specimen of study for a literary-rhetorical approach.¹⁰⁰ To be sure, the structure of Revelation is quite different from the classical structure of a rhetorical discourse, but John nonetheless advances his literary and rhetorical goals through a unique and layered literary arrangement. However, accounting for the precise ways in which John has arranged his material remains a perennial challenge for interpreters. For one thing, there is no consensus on the question of structure. Fiorenza observes, "One can almost find as many

⁹⁸ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 194; David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John's Way*, 53-5; D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 708.

⁹⁹ Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 38.

¹⁰⁰ David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John's Way*, 24-5; Aristotle, *The Art of Rhetoric*, 245-61.

different outlines of the composition as there are scholars studying the book."¹⁰¹

Additionally, Revelation's layered structure make it "virtually impossible adequately to represent the structure in a diagram";¹⁰² any structural diagram of Revelation will inevitably glaze over certain aspects of the book's intricate shape.

Nonetheless, one can still appropriately generalize the structure in order to foreground central motifs and identify key hinges in the narrative. Many interpreters who provide a general outline of the book identify the importance of *sevens*, and outline the book according to a heptadic structure.¹⁰³ Other interpreters arrange the material chiastically,¹⁰⁴ and some settle on a simpler four-fold structure.¹⁰⁵ While space and scope do not permit a comprehensive analysis of the various structural approaches, the heptadic structure seems to offer more promise, especially when one considers how such a structure is able to foreground the heavenly sanctuary in John's unfolding narrative.

Thematically, the heavenly sanctuary in general, and the throne (θρόνος) in particular, plays a central role in Revelation's unfolding drama. The book's core vision section opens in heaven, before the throne of God, and everything that unfolds in the narrative is rooted in heaven. Beale rightly observes that "all the visions from 6:1 to 22:5

¹⁰¹ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 21; See also Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation*, 8.

¹⁰² Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 21.

¹⁰³ Ernst R. Wendland, "The Hermeneutical Significance of Literary Structure in Revelation," *Neotestamentica* 48, no. 2 (2014): 447–76, Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials PLUS. Beale posits either a heptadic or octadic structure, though he does not decide between the two options. G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 114–5.

¹⁰⁴ Stephen Pattemore, *The People of God in the Apocalypse*, 62–4, 220–5.

¹⁰⁵ Charles E. Hill, "Revelation," 526–7.

flow out of the vision in chs. 4–5,”¹⁰⁶ and throughout the narrative the IR is repeatedly directed heavenward, back to the throne room and its celestial attendants. As the narrative unfolds and the IR progresses through each “conic spiral”¹⁰⁷ the importance of heaven in resolving the cosmic conflict becomes abundantly clear, as does the reader’s burgeoning draw into the worship of heaven. In summary, the heavenly sanctuary and the worship therein “has a controlling influence on the narrative.”¹⁰⁸

In view of heaven’s prominence, Laszlo Gallusz convincingly advances a hepatic structure where each narrative hinge turns on a scene in heaven before narrating the ensuing vision. Thus, excepting the prologue (1:1–8) and epilogue (22:6–21), Gallusz’s generalized outline finds an introductory temple scene in 1:9–20; 4:1–5:14; 8:2–6; 11:19; 15:1–8; 19:1–10; 21:1–8, which lie at the head of ensuing visions in 2:1–3:22; 6:1–8:1; 8:7–11:18; 12:1–14:20; 16:1–18:24; 19:11–20:15; 21:9–22:5.¹⁰⁹ A possible weakness of this proposal is that some of the temple scenes that Gallusz articulates as introductions, seem to function more as conclusions. For example, 8:2–6 (or 8:1–5) and 11:19 appear at first blush to function as conclusions to the seal cycle and trumpet cycle, respectively, rather than as introductions to what follows. However, it has also been observed that 8:2–5 functions as a janus in that the cosmic upheaval closes out the seal cycle (8:5) while the

¹⁰⁶ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 319.

¹⁰⁷ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 6; See also Craig R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, 42; *pace* James L. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, 54–9.

¹⁰⁸ Steven Grabiner, *Revelation’s Hymns*, 2.

¹⁰⁹ To be precise, Gallusz advances a *chiastic* hepatic structure that sees the cosmic conflict vision of 12:1–14:20 as the center of the chiasm. Laszlo Gallusz, *The Throne Motif in the Book of Revelation*, 228–9.

angels in 8:2 introduce the trumpet cycle.¹¹⁰ Something similar may also be said for the conclusion to the seven trumpets in 11:19, which also introduces the bowls in 15:1.¹¹¹ Capturing the nuances of Revelation's structure is impossible in any outline, but Gallusz seems to offer a reasonable sketch that foregrounds an indisputably important motif in Revelation.

The centrality of heaven in Gallusz's proposed heptadic structure also reinforces the centrality of the heavenly hymns, which function both as a commentary on the cosmic conflict,¹¹² and the counter-confession into which the IR invited. This will be the subject of chapter 4, but at this point we will simply note how the centrality of heaven and heavenly worship are structurally arranged so as to support John's rhetorical goals of drawing his readers heavenward.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to lay a historical, methodological, and interpretive foundation for the rest of the project. In what follows, the literary-rhetorical approach will be applied to the cosmological setting of Revelation, to the IR who navigates that space, and to the question of what the IR is called to do in the present so as to conquer. Additionally, historical concerns may occasionally feed into this approach insofar as they illuminate the narrative features and the rhetoric of the book, and demonstrate how John

¹¹⁰ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 454; Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 8–9.

¹¹¹ Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 9.

¹¹² Laszlo Gallusz, *The Throne Motif in the Book of Revelation*, 231; Steven Grabiner, *Revelation's Hymns*.

shapes the imagination of the IR who exists in real time and space, amidst real conflict,
but with real hope before him or her.

Chapter 2

Revelation's Cosmological Setting

Establishing the setting of a literary work is an indispensable part of a literary-rhetorical analysis. Mark Allan Powell observes that in the same way “it is impossible to imagine a play without any setting and all,” so too “settings in literature are as integral to the story as are the events and the characters themselves.”¹¹³ The “setting” of a literary work could be analyzed with its social setting in view (or, in the language of this project, its *rhetorical setting*), but of greater importance for a literary-rhetorical analysis, especially one that has an apocalyptic work like Revelation as its subject, is the book's *spatial setting* and *temporal setting*.¹¹⁴ These categories are interested, not so much in the referential world outside the text, as with the world within the text. In the case of Revelation, John articulates a robust vision of space and time — a cosmology that, though it has no life on its own apart from the characters who fill it,¹¹⁵ nevertheless functions as the dynamic backdrop upon which the drama of Revelation unfolds.

¹¹³ Mark Allan Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?*, 69. Resseguie observes, “Although not all settings are pregnant with meaning, seldom do they merely fill in background detail. Setting may develop a character's mental, emotional, or spiritual landscape; it may be symbolic of choices to be made; it provides structure to the story and may develop the central conflict in a narrative.” James L. Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament*, 88.

¹¹⁴ Powell articulates three sub-categories that are part of the broad category of “setting”: (1) spatial setting, (2) temporal setting, and (3) social setting. Mark Allan Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?*, 70–5. Following Seymour Chatman, Grant Osborne articulates four sub-categories that are part of a work's “setting”: geographical, temporal, social or historical. Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 209.

¹¹⁵ Powell, citing Chatman, observes that “settings” may play a more or less characterized role within a narrative, but “unlike characters, settings are never presented as espousing a particular point of view” (Mark Allan Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?*, 69). A setting may be described as “character-like” (e.g., Rev. 12:16), and settings may even “take on a life of their own” (*ibid.*, 70), but the setting is still properly distinguished from the characters within a narrative.

The dynamism of Revelation’s cosmic setting is perhaps most evident in the narrative’s conclusion. In Rev. 21–22 the consummate realization of which the entire drama has pointed — and foretastes of which have, until that point, surfaced throughout the main vision section (see “The Rhetoric of Revelation’s Cosmology,” below) — is marked by a transformation of spatial setting (e.g., a new heaven and new earth, 21:1) and temporal setting (e.g., the former things pass away, 21:4). By the end of Revelation, all things (including the setting itself) are made new (21:5). But even before that climactic vision the IR, throughout the drama, is transported into a symbolic universe that is alive with worship and rebellion and swept along by the decrees that issue from the throne. It is this cosmic setting that serves to buttress, through the cultic symbolism in which it is clothed, the vision of worship that is part and parcel to the call upon the IR to conquer.

In what follows, we will probe the literary and rhetorical function of John’s animate and highly symbolic cosmic setting.¹¹⁶ This chapter will aim to demonstrate how the setting itself (i.e., Revelation’s cosmology) works in support of calling the IR to conquer proleptically, in part by forsaking the worship of the earth dwellers who reject

¹¹⁶ Grant Osborne observes the following regarding the function of a setting in narrative criticism: “As David Rhoads and Donald Michie state, the setting serves many functions: ‘generating atmosphere, determining conflict, revealing traits in the characters who must deal with problems or threats caused by the settings, offering commentary (sometimes ironic) on the action, and evoking associations and nuances of meaning present in the culture of the readers’ (1982:63).” Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 209. In what follows, we will observe how Revelation’s cosmology serves several of these functions. Unlike the spatial setting in the gospels, where “Scenery is only important insofar as it affects specified actions of the characters” (Mark Allan Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?*, 62), the cosmic setting of Revelation fills a far more robust role in the narrative. That Revelation’s cosmology serves functional ends, whether literary, rhetorical, or theological, seems to be a common feature of cosmology throughout the NT. See Sean M. McDonough and Jonathan T. Pennington, “Introduction,” in *Cosmology and New Testament Theology*, ed. Sean M. McDonough and Jonathan T. Pennington (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 3–4.

Christ (in Revelation’s terminology, οἱ κατοικοῦντες ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς) and joining the worship of heaven.

Overview of Revelation’s Cosmology

A synchronic overview of Revelation’s cosmic setting exposes the importance of heaven (οὐρανός), earth/land (γῆ), and to a lesser extent, sea (θάλασσα). By sheer volume, οὐρανός is referenced 52 times, γῆ 78 times (not including the four occurrences of the phrase ὑποκάτω τῆς γῆς), and θάλασσα 26 times. Additional cosmic space is found in references to the midheaven (μεσουράνημα) (8:13; 14:6; 19:17), toward the end of the book “the lake of fire” (ἡ λίμνη τοῦ πυρός) (19:20; 20:10, 14, 15; 21:8), and then the abyss (ἄβυσσος) (9:1, 2, 11; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1, 3). A careful survey of how these spaces function in Revelation will demonstrate that Revelation reflects a three-tiered cosmology that is quite familiar to the IR who is catechized in the OT Scriptures (see below).

Additionally, these spatial dimensions function diachronically within the narrative according to what Powell refers to as “monumental time,” which contrasts with that of “mortal time.” According to Powell, “Mortal time is measured by calendars, watches, clocks, and sundials. Monumental time, on the other hand, refers to the broad sweep of time that includes but also transcends history.”¹¹⁷ Though the entirety of Revelation is framed by “mortal time” (Rev. 1:10), the visions themselves also contain highly allusive references to time (e.g., Rev. 12:14, “time and times and half a time”), and though several references seem to reflect “mortal time” (e.g., Rev. 11:2, “forty-two months”) they can

¹¹⁷ Mark Allan Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?*, 74; see also chapter 4, below, and the brief discussion of Friesen’s category “worship time.” See Steven J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John*, 157-61.

best be described as chronological anthropomorphisms that ultimately reflect “monumental time.” Monumental time in Revelation corresponds with the inter-advent period, the time between Christ’s two advents, a time that can, in some sense be measured, but cannot ultimately be mapped clearly onto mortal time.

In the following subsections, we will seek to provide a synchronic overview of Revelation’s spatial setting, and observe how, throughout the three major cosmological strata (i.e., heaven, earth, and sea), they are shaped, through Revelation’s unfolding plot, according to the monumental time of redemptive history.

Heaven (οὐρανός)

Throughout Revelation οὐρανός is occasionally used to denote physical space that the human eye can see and observe. It is the space of stars (Rev. 6:13), and the space from which rain (Rev. 11:6) and hail (Rev. 16:21) fall.¹¹⁸ These verses appear to represent οὐρανός as the veil that belongs to “...the complex of sky, earth, sea, and under-earth.”¹¹⁹ However, these verses, rather than presenting οὐρανός as a picturesque panorama that one would find on a postcard, depict οὐρανός as the font of eschatological cosmic upheaval. But though οὐρανός occasionally denotes this space, which we will label “lower heaven,” with much more regularity it denotes the space where worship abounds and the Sovereign rules, which we will label “upper heaven.”¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Gert J.C. Jordaan, “Cosmology in the Book of Revelation,” *In die Skriflig/In Luce Verbi* 47, no. 2 (November 5, 2013): 3, Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials PLUS.

¹¹⁹ Sean M. McDonough, “Revelation: The Climax of Cosmology,” in *Cosmology and New Testament Theology*, ed. Sean M. McDonough and Jonathan T. Pennington (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 180.

¹²⁰ This term, along with its corresponding “lower heavens” (above) is taken from Kyle Greenwood, *Scripture and Cosmology: Reading the Bible Between the Ancient World and Modern Science* (Downers

Unlike “lower heaven,” “upper heaven” in Revelation is visible only to John (Rev. 4:1; 15:2; 19:11) or to the world at the Parousia (Rev. 6:14; 21:3). This is, as Friesen puts it, “the most spectacular stratum in Revelation’s universe.”¹²¹ The visions of “upper heaven” consistently center upon the “throne” (θρόνος), particularly the one who is seated upon the throne, who is “the *axis mundi*, the immovable centre of all reality.”¹²² “Upper heaven” is likewise treated as the source of both salvation and judgment; even though portents of judgment descend through “lower heaven” they are ultimately sourced in “upper heaven” (e.g., 15:1; 16:1).

Within “upper heaven,” John draws none of the complex distinctions that are characteristic of other Second Temple apocalyptic works (e.g., 1 En. 14:8–23; 71:5–9),¹²³ and though “upper heaven” occasionally defies neat and tidy systematization (and this is especially true when the spatial setting and temporal setting converge),¹²⁴ John presents

Grove, IL: IVP Academic), 58, 61. It is presumably with “upper heaven” in mind that N. T. Wright comments, “Revelation is, after all, about heaven.” N. T. Wright, “Revelation and Christian Hope: Political Implications of the Revelation to John,” in *Revelation and the Politics of Apocalyptic Interpretation*, ed. Richard B. Hays and Stefan Alkier (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012), 105.

¹²¹ Steven J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John*, 152.

¹²² Laszlo Gallusz, *The Throne Motif in the Book of Revelation*, 103.

¹²³ Adela Yarbro Collins, *Cosmology and Eschatology in Jewish and Christian Apocalypticism* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 32.

¹²⁴ Paul S. Minear demonstrates this in his chapter “Cosmology of the Apocalypse,” which is found in a *Festschrift* to Otto A. Piper. Minear argues at length that heaven and earth in Revelation “constitute a single, interlocking reality” (25) and rather than viewing heaven and earth as primary axioms in Revelation’s cosmology, Minear argues “first” and “new” (i.e., temporal categories) should have primacy. Indeed, Minear claims, “the adjective ‘first’ is more definitive of the idea than the nouns ‘heaven’ and ‘earth’” (26). Minear’s argument is intriguing, but it leads him to posit some curious claims, such as the existence of an “above the above” heaven in addition to the “first” and the “new” heaven (32). See Paul S. Minear, “The Cosmology of the Apocalypse,” *Current Issues in New Testament Interpretation: Essays in Honor of Otto A. Piper* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962). While Minear’s arguments may not be ultimately convincing, his general caution is laudable, *viz.*, as Beale puts it, that we should avoid “making hard-and-fast ‘temporal and spatial’ judgments, especially with respect to some aspect of John’s eschatology.” G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 194. Nevertheless, this does not obviate the appropriateness of a general systematizing of John’s cosmology. Steven Friesen, for example, while likewise recognizing a thorough systematization of John’s cosmology eludes us, can nevertheless claim,

“upper heaven” as a realm of stability that is both temporally and spatially oriented toward new creation. John begins the main vision section of Revelation (Rev. 4:1–22:5) in Rev. 4–5 by orienting the IR to the center of the cosmos,¹²⁵ which then plays an active role across the rest of the visionary section, frequently bursting through the unfolding visionary section in tantalizing ways (e.g., Rev. 11:15–19; 14:2–4), until the final vision Rev. 21–22 where “upper heaven,” “lower heaven,” and the earth become one.

The apparent distinction between “upper heaven” and “lower heaven” sets Revelation within the *Weltanschauung*¹²⁶ of both Biblical and Second Temple Judaism where “heaven” (οὐρανός) is likewise split into two parts and divided by a firmament.¹²⁷ In Mieke Bal’s categories for spatial setting, these two areas appear to match what he calls “inside setting” and “outside setting.” Powell, commenting on Bal’s distinction, explains, “Inside settings sometimes carry the connotation of protection or security, but they may also suggest confinement. Likewise, outside settings may connote danger in one narrative and freedom in another.”¹²⁸ Within Revelation, “upper heaven” is undoubtedly a place of safety and security for the people of God (i.e., inside setting) whereas

rightly in the opinion of this student, that “there is a relatively coherent imagined geography in the visionary’s world.” Steven J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John*, 152.

¹²⁵ David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John’s Way*, 100.

¹²⁶ Kyle Greenwood, *Scripture and Cosmology*, 24.

¹²⁷ See Kyle Greenwood, *Scripture and Cosmology*, 24–25, 82–94. To be precise, the OT Scriptures often refer to “upper heaven” as the “heaven of heavens” (e.g., Deut. 10:14; Ps. 148:4). David A. deSilva, “Heaven, New Heavens,” in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Development*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 439.

¹²⁸ Mark Allan Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?*, 70–1; See also James L. Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament*, 100–4.

everything else — lower heaven, earth, and sea — are places of danger (i.e., outside setting).

Earth (γῆ)

If “upper heaven” is presented as a place of security and order, “earth” is decidedly the opposite. On occasion, the earth denotes cosmic space in God’s creation while carrying little if any additional freight (Rev. 5:3, 6, 13; 7:1). But the majority of occurrences present γῆ as the realm of conflict and the theater of rebellion.¹²⁹ It is upon the earth that judgments from heaven fall (Rev. 6:13; 8:5, 7; 9:1), to be an “earth dweller” (i.e., οἱ κατοικοῦντες ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς) is to be an object of judgment and it is never used as a designation for the saints,¹³⁰ who, in contrast to the earth dwellers, are repeatedly oriented heavenward.¹³¹ It is upon the earth that the unholy trinity exercises authority over their subjects (Rev. 13:11–14; 17:1–5), who in turn suffer judgment on the earth (Rev. 14:14–20). While the inhabitants of the earth are eventually judged, the earth itself is also affected inasmuch as it sustains life (Rev. 8:7–13). While on one occasion the earth is put into service by God for the church’s protection (Rev. 12:16), it almost always carries negative connotations.¹³²

¹²⁹ In addition to γῆ, there are also three uses of οἰκουμένη (Rev. 3:10; 12:9; 16:14), each of which carries negative connotations.

¹³⁰ Gert Jordaan, “Cosmology in the Book of Revelation,” 5; Sean McDonough, “Revelation: The Climax of Cosmology,” 183; Paul Minear, “The Cosmology of the Apocalypse,” 28.

¹³¹ Paul S. Minear, “The Cosmology of the Apocalypse,” 31–2.

¹³² Gert Jordaan, “Cosmology in the Book of Revelation,” 6.

Though a systematic presentation of the earth often casts that stratum in unfavorable light, it is also (like heaven) spatially and teleologically oriented throughout Revelation to the vision of the new creation in Revelation 21. Judgment is doled out upon the kings of the earth (Rev. 6:15; 18:9), but by Revelation 21:24 a redeemed remnant of the kings of the earth brings their glory into the new heavens and new earth. The earth is corrupted by the great prostitute (Rev. 19:2) and functions as an abode for all manner of uncleanness (Rev. 18:2), but in the new heavens and new earth nothing unclean is permitted to enter (Rev. 21:27). Whether or not the earth is completely destroyed before it is created anew in Rev. 21,¹³³ it is clear throughout Revelation that the earth lies in such disarray that it must be cleansed. But the good news that surfaces throughout Revelation is that “The earth is a passive sphere,”¹³⁴ acted upon by heaven, and held in check by the one who sits upon the throne.¹³⁵

The Sea (θάλασσα)

The third stratum in John’s three-tiered cosmology, the sea (θάλασσα), is undoubtedly the most difficult stratum to pin down. It is occasionally employed in a neutral sense with reference to that part of God’s creation (Rev. 5:13; 10:2).¹³⁶ However, with much greater frequency it is invoked symbolically to denote the source and abode of

¹³³ See Edward Adams, *The Stars Will Fall from Heaven: Cosmic Catastrophe in the New Testament and Its World* (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 238, Logos Bible Software.

¹³⁴ David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John’s Way*, 101.

¹³⁵ Steven Friesen comments, “In John’s text the true center of space is the throne of God in heaven.” Steve Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John*, 163.

¹³⁶ Jonathan Moo, “The Sea That Is No More: Rev 21:1 and the Function of Sea Imagery in the Apocalypse of John,” *Novum Testamentum* 51, no. 2 (2009): 150, Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials PLUS; Gert Jordaan, “Cosmology in the Book of Revelation,” 6.

evil.¹³⁷ This is especially evident in its connection with the abyss (ἄβυσσος). In Rev 13:1 the beast arises out of the θάλασσα, but in 11:7 and 17:8 the beast appears from the ἄβυσσος. This connection strongly suggests a topographical equivalence, or near equivalence, between those locations, which is further reinforced by the OT's frequent connection between watery places and the ἄβυσσος (e.g., Deut. 8:7; Isa. 51:10).¹³⁸ However, while the sea is frequently associated with primordial chaos, evil, and judgment throughout Revelation (e.g., Rev. 8:8; 16:3; 18:19; 20:13),¹³⁹ some have questioned whether the ἄβυσσος and the regions ὑποκάτω τῆς γῆς (Rev. 5:3, 13) function as its synonym.¹⁴⁰

Interestingly, within Revelation, the first reference to the θάλασσα occurs in 4:6 where John sees ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου ὡς θάλασσα ὑαλίνη ὁμοία κρυστάλλῳ, which does not appear to be equivalent with the θάλασσα as the third cosmological strata. Rather, the

¹³⁷ Gert Jordaan, "Cosmology in the Book of Revelation," 6; Sean McDonough, "Revelation: The Climax of Cosmology," 183; Edward Adams, *The Stars Will Fall*, 249.

¹³⁸ Sean McDonough, "Revelation: The Climax of Cosmology," 183–4; Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation*, 166.

¹³⁹ Cf. Richard Vinson argues that the connection between the sea and malevolent forces is often overstated by commentators on Revelation. Richard Bolling Vinson, "The Sea of Glass, the Lake of Fire, and the Topography of Heaven in Revelation," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 45, no. 2 (2018): 128–9, *Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials PLUS*.

¹⁴⁰ For example, Richard Vison suggests that John draws upon an ancient Jewish cosmological perspective that located water at each level of the cosmos. Since John sees a θάλασσα in heaven (Rev. 4:6), the θάλασσα alongside the earth (Rev. 10:8), and often associates the sea with the abyss, Vinson suggests the sea is *not* one of John's three tiers. According to Vinson, the third tier in John's three-tiered cosmology is the place ὑποκάτω τῆς γῆς, which is equivalent to the ἄβυσσος. However, while Vinson is correct that "water" is present at each level in both a classic OT cosmology (see Kyle Greenwood, *Scripture and Cosmology*, 94–8) and in Revelation, even Vinson acknowledges John's language in Rev. 4:6 and 15:2 is different than elsewhere in Revelation. In the former passages the θάλασσα is qualified as a θάλασσα ὑαλίνη, but everywhere else in Revelation θάλασσα stands on its own and almost always stands with the article. Therefore, though Vinson rightly observes the polyvalent symbolic import of θάλασσα, particularly in Rev. 4:6, this does not obviate the observation that ἡ θάλασσα seems to function together with the ἄβυσσος and the regions ὑποκάτω τῆς γῆς as John's third cosmological tier. Cf. Richard Bolling Vinson, "The Sea of Glass, the Lake of Fire, and the Topography of Heaven in Revelation."

immediate referent is likely to the firmament of the throne room, *viz.*, the floor of heaven.¹⁴¹ A similar reference occurs in Revelation 15:2 where John sees a θάλασσαν ὑαλίνην μεμιγμένην πυρί, on which those who conquer stand. Though “fire” is introduced in 15:2, this is the same referent as in 4:6; the fire simply connotes judgment that is about to extend from the throne (See Dan. 7:10) in the bowl plagues that follow.¹⁴² It may also be that the calmed heavenly sea underscores the sovereignty of the one who sits on the throne, and portends the ending of Revelation when all evil will be vanquished.¹⁴³ This is perhaps most clear in the disappearance of the sea in Rev. 21:1 where it, together with six other items with malevolent associations, disappear.¹⁴⁴ Thus, the elimination of the sea in Revelation 21 seems to suggest the elimination of evil forces and the end of judgment.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴¹ Jonathan Moo, “The Sea That Is No More,” 152.

¹⁴² Jonathan Moo, “The Sea That Is No More,” 154. Richard Vinson also connects the lake of fire with the heavenly sea on the grounds that both are located before God (Rev. 14:10; 20:12). Richard Vinson, “The Sea of Glass, the Lake of Fire, and the Topography of Heaven in Revelation,” 131, 134. However, while there may be a sense in which the heavenly sea reminds John’s readers of the primordial sea, the abyss, and the lake of fire, it is probably too far a stretch to collapse all references to θάλασσα together in the way that Vinson imagines. The heavenly sea is not the same realm as the primordial sea, the abyss, the regions under the earth, or the lake of fire. Such debate about the association of the θάλασσα with the lake of fire is, however, understandable in view of Steven Friesen’s sober evaluation that “the lake of fire” is the most difficult space to locate in John’s cosmology. According to Friesen, “The lake of fire cannot be systematically integrated into the three kinds of space. It remains a paradox.” Steven J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John*, 157.

¹⁴³ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 328.

¹⁴⁴ Jonathan Moo, “The Sea That Is No More,” 149; Of those things that disappear, νόξ may be the only item without purely negative connotations. See *ibid.*, 165–6.

¹⁴⁵ Sean McDonough, “Revelation: The Climax of Cosmology,” 183–4. Jonathan Moo further argues that the disappearing sea should be understood against the backdrop of (1) the Isaianic new exodus theme of Isa. 43:16–21 and 51:9–11, and (2) an advance beyond the probationary period *vis-à-vis* the creation account of Genesis. See Jonathan Moo, “The Sea That Is No More,” 162–7.

The Literary Significance of Revelation's Cosmology

OT Cultic Background

Though Revelation is written within a social context that could theoretically allow for influences from Graeco-Roman cosmology,¹⁴⁶ Revelation's three-tiered cosmic setting echoes that of the OT Scriptures in which the cosmos is also depicted as a three-tiered structure consisting of heaven, the earth, and the sea.¹⁴⁷ Beyond the structural

¹⁴⁶ Graeco-Roman cosmology comprises works from as far back as the sixth century BCE to the second century CE and spans Roman and Greek authors of diverse philosophical persuasions. See M.R. Wright, *Cosmology in Antiquity* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 11–36. However, much Greco-Roman cosmology is, according to Edward Adams, “scientific” rather than “theological” and therefore shares little (if any) commonalities vis-à-vis intent with the intent of Revelation's cosmology, which is decidedly *not* scientific in its intent. Edward Adams, “Graeco-Roman and Ancient Jewish Cosmology,” in *Cosmology and New Testament Theology*, ed. Sean M. McDonough and Jonathan T. Pennington (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 5. As far as other possible parallels between Graeco-Roman cosmologies and the cosmology of the NT, Adams suggests the Stoic view of cosmic conflagration vis-à-vis 2 Peter 3:5–7 may be one parallel. See Edward Adams, *The Stars Will Fall from Heaven*, 116–118, 216–30. John Dennis, however, disagrees with Adams, and concludes that the OT and Jewish traditions are enough to account for the language in 2 Pet. 3. There is, according to Dennis, no need to posit any connection with the Roman Stoic notion of cosmic conflagration. John Dennis, “Cosmology in the Petrine Literature and Jude,” in *Cosmology and New Testament Theology*, ed. Sean M. McDonough and Jonathan T. Pennington (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 176. Beyond Graeco-Roman influences, it is also possible that one could find parallels with extant non-Jewish extra-Biblical cosmological thought from Egypt, Babylon, or other ANE societies. However, while ANE source material may helpfully illumine OT cosmological thought, it is difficult to see how it is anything other than a secondary influence (via the OT) on John's cosmology. For reflection on how ANE thought may be a secondary influence on John's cultic cosmology through the medium of the OT see William Riley, “Temple Imagery and the Book of Revelation Ancient Near Eastern Temple Ideology and Cultic Resonances in the Apocalypse,” *Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association* 6 (1982): 81–102, Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials PLUS.

¹⁴⁷ The identity of the third cosmic realm is not consistent in the literature. On the one hand, some scholars (e.g., John Walton), identify the third cosmological realm as “the netherworld.” John Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 132. See also Andreas K. Schuele, “Cosmos and Cosmology: Hebrew Bible/Old Testament,” *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 838, and Edward Adams, “Graeco-Roman,” 20. On the other hand, some identify the third cosmic realm, in OT thought, as “the sea.” Kyle Greenwood, *Scripture and Cosmology*, 71. See also L. Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord? A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 101. If one must decide between the two, the “sea” is probably more foundational than the “netherworld” or “Sheol.” Greenwood explains that the “netherworld” may be the antithesis of “heaven” throughout the OT, but it is often located in the *earth's* depths. Kyle Greenwood, 71n. Whichever way one leans, however, it is probably unnecessary to draw a sharp distinction between the netherworld and the sea because they are often symbolically intertwined in the OT. For example, the sea is sometimes treated synonymously with Sheol. Kyle Greenwood, *Scripture and Cosmology*, 98. Moreover, in cosmologies of the ANE, with which the OT has much in common, the dead enter into the netherworld

similarities, however, is the cultic symbolic and theological mold in which both the OT and Revelation cast their respective depictions of the cosmos. Michael Morales explains that within the OT “...there is a homology between the cosmos and tabernacle.

Throughout the Hebrew Bible the cosmos is described as a tabernacle pitched by God, often employing the architectural features of a house (cf. 78:23, 69; 104; Gen. 7:11; Job 9:8; 26:11).¹⁴⁸ There was a certain congruence between cosmology and the structure of Israel’s religious and liturgical life vis-à-vis the tabernacle and temple.¹⁴⁹ Such a connection is also pointed out by Josephus, who describes the veil of the temple as follows: “It was a Babylonian curtain, embroidered with blue, and fine linen, and scarlet, and purple, and of a contexture that was truly wonderful. Nor was this mixture of colors without its mystical interpretation, but was a kind of image of the universe.”¹⁵⁰

The significance of the cosmos vis-à-vis Israel’s tabernacle and later temple was also wrapped up in the OT’s “monumental time” (i.e., redemptive history). In the original temple (i.e., Eden) Adam was commissioned with expanding Eden’s boundaries so that God’s temple and the entire creation would be one and the same.¹⁵¹ The cosmos was created to be God’s temple, but though God’s chosen priest-king fails in his commission, the OT prophets continue to advance the hope that God will one day extend his heavenly

through the cosmic waters. John Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament*, 145. See also the visual representation in L. Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?*, 101.

¹⁴⁸ L. Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?*, 101; See also David A. deSilva, “Heaven, New Heavens,” 439.

¹⁴⁹ L. Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?*, 40–2; Jack Kilcrease, “Creation’s Praise: A Short Liturgical Reading of Genesis 1-2 and the Book of Revelation,” *Pro Ecclesia* 21, no. 3 (2012): 315–8, Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials PLUS.

¹⁵⁰ Josephus, *Jewish War* 5.4.212, Logos Bible Software.

¹⁵¹ G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 81–122.

temple to fill the earth through a better agent than Adam.¹⁵² In describing this hope, frequent OT themes like Eden, temple, cosmos, and even Zion converge. Thus, in the OT cosmology tells a story and is, at its core, *cultic*. These same themes emerge through the symbolism of Revelation's cosmology, which likewise advances the same protology and eschatology of the OT.

Cultic Resonances in Revelation's Cosmology

In what follows, we will analyze the cosmic strata of Revelation with the above OT cultic background in mind. The following analysis will seek to demonstrate that Revelation's cosmology is clothed in the same symbolic dress as the temple-cosmic complex of the OT, advances the same cosmic story, and in doing so invites the IR to imagine his or her present conflict, present assurance, and future hope in cultic terms.

Heaven as God's Ναός

Perhaps the most explicit connection between Revelation's cosmology and the cultic world of the OT lies in the frequent connection between ναός and the stratum of heaven. Ναός is frequently used in both the LXX and in the Gospels to refer to the Jerusalem temple, and throughout Revelation it nearly always denotes the heavenly archetype of the (already destroyed?) earthly temple, either in its present form above the earth (7:15; 14:15, 17; 15:5–6, 8; 16:1, 17) or in its consummate form when heaven and

¹⁵² G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 123–67.

earth are transformed to become one (3:12; 7:15; 11:19; 21:22).¹⁵³ This heavenly setting is likewise depicted as a space of ceaseless worship and witness.

In Rev. 7:15 a great multitude is clothed in white and located before the throne where they serve (λατρεύω) the Lord in his temple (ναός). There is little doubt that this is the heavenly temple, into which believers enter after they have gone through the great tribulation — a present reality inaugurated by Christ’s death and resurrection¹⁵⁴ (cf. Rev. 3:5; 4:4; 6:9; 19:14).¹⁵⁵ Additionally, through several intriguing literary links, the wider intercalation of Rev. 7:1–17 links with Rev. 14:1–5 and 15:1–8.¹⁵⁶ These connections

¹⁵³ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 562.

¹⁵⁴ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 434; James L. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John: A Narrative Commentary*, 139.

¹⁵⁵ Steven Grabiner, *Revelation’s Hymns*, 113. The presence of the throne in 7:11, and the elder in 7:13 likewise indicate that this is the heavenly throne room of God. William Riley further suggests that the language of 7:9–17 echoes the feast of tabernacles: “The language of Tabernacles intrudes forcefully in the vision of the great multitude in Rev. 7:9–17.” William Riley, “Temple Imagery and the Book of Revelation,” 92. Whether or not this is true, Riley’s observation nevertheless underscores the cultic character of the heavenly temple.

¹⁵⁶ (1) The 144,000 in 7:1–8 are intricately connected with the multitude in 7:9–17, and they are nearly one and the same. Steven Grabiner, *Revelation’s Hymns*, 116–7. Laszlo Gallusz concludes, “Thus, it is appropriate to hold that the two groups of Rev. 7 represent two distinctive experiences of the people of God: the militant church on earth (7:1–8) and the triumphant church in heaven (7:9–17).” Laszlo Gallusz, *The Throne Motif in the Book of Revelation*, 163. See also Andrea Spatafora, “Heavenly Liturgy and Temple in the Apocalypse,” *Theoforum* 46, no. 1 (2015): 190, Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials PLUS; (2) the 144,000 appear in heaven in 15:1–8 where they stand upon the glassy sea, the firmament separating “upper” from “lower” heaven, and they sing the song of Moses in anticipation of the consummation. See Jonathan Moo, “The Sea That Is No More,” 152, 154. See also Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation*, 37–8; (3) In 14:1–5 the same 144,000 of 15:1–8, 7:1–8, and by extension 7:9–17 are located on Mount Zion, where they likewise sing a new song (n.b., the connection of κιθάρα sets 14:1–5 in heaven with 15:1–8 and 5:8). Collectively, these references collapse together the church militant and church triumphant, placing the church militant both on earth and in heaven, and the church triumphant on the firmament, mixed with fire in anticipation of judgment, upon which they sing the victory march of the song of Moses as the heavenly water barrier prepares to be breached and heaven descends to earth. In summary, it appears, for John, that the church militant and church triumphant are so connected that though the former exists on earth and the latter in heaven, each are shaded with hues of the other.

suggest, among other possibilities, that in Rev. 14:1–5 heaven is also designated as Zion,¹⁵⁷ which will eventually descend from heaven to earth as the holy city in Rev. 21.

Another text that likewise reinforces the cultic character of heaven is the complex text of Revelation 11. In Rev. 11:1 John is instructed to “measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there.” In 11:2 further locations are pinpointed, *viz.*, the outer court and the holy city. In identifying the spatial referent(s) various suggestions have been offered. Some insist that the ναός must represent a literal earthly temple, either the Jerusalem temple prior to 70 CE (i.e., a preterist interpretation),¹⁵⁸ or some future temple in Jerusalem just prior to the return of Christ (i.e., a dispensational futurist interpretation).¹⁵⁹ A more preferable approach, however, understands ναός in its figurative sense, either as an image of the church or as the heavenly temple, the latter which is the dominate referent for ναός throughout Revelation.¹⁶⁰ Space constraints

¹⁵⁷ That heaven would be described as Mount Zion is not unusual (e.g., Heb. 12:22), nor is the connection between Mount Zion and the temple. There is a strong symbolic collocation between these terms that collectively denote the dwelling place of God with a variety of cultic nuances, each of which reach back into the OT’s cosmic and cultic story. Beale suggests that the Zion in view could denote heaven: “Accordingly, Zion could be the ideal, heavenly city to which saints aspire during the course of the church age (Gal. 4:25–27; Heb. 12:22–23). Therefore, deceased, glorified saints who have attained standing in that city may be in view here. This is supported by the fact that all the other references to the Lamb place him in heaven (in 7:9–14, with the redeemed multitudes).” In the end, Beale suggests that it is best to see an already-not-yet perspective to 14:1–5, but in view of the literary links that invite a cross-narrative reading, it seems better to see 14:1–5 as the already, and 15:1–8 as the not yet. Cf. G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 732.

¹⁵⁸ Otto Michel insists the Jerusalem temple is in view. Otto Michel, “Ναός,” ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 887–888, Logos Bible Software.

¹⁵⁹ G. K. Beale outlines five traditional views on the question of the identity of the ναός, 557–9. Buist Fanning, a representative of the futurist view, insists that this vision anticipates an earthly temple that will one day, just prior to the Parousia, exist in Jerusalem. Buist M. Fanning, *Revelation*, 328.

¹⁶⁰ Craig R. Koester, *Revelation*, 484. Likewise, David A. deSilva writes, “Every other reference to a temple in Revelation...has the celestial temple in mind rather than the edifice in Jerusalem (cf. 6:9–11; 8:1–5; 14:15, 17; 15:5, 6, 8; 16:1), including one reference integrally related to this passage (11:19). John does not indicate that his focus has shifted away from this heavenly temple or cosmic temple in 11:1–2.” David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John’s Way*, 37. Though he does not deal directly with Rev. 11:1–14, Andrea

inhibit a thorough treatment of this complex text, but it seems best that the *ναός* be understood as the church on earth (i.e., the church militant) in their heavenly identity.¹⁶¹ To invoke Mieke Bal's narrative categories once again, *ναός*, in the people of God on earth, functions as an "inside setting" within an "outside setting,"¹⁶² thus assuring the church militant that even as they sojourn on treacherous blood-soaked ground, they are secured in heaven, and can participate on earth in the worship (11:1) and witness (11:3) of the church triumphant.

Cultic Furniture in God's Heavenly *ναός*

The Altar (θυσιαστήριον)

The identification of heaven with God's *ναός* is further reinforced by the furniture that lies in heaven.¹⁶³ One piece of furniture John often sees is the *θυσιαστήριον*. In the tabernacle and temple of the OT a brazen altar was located outside the holy place (Exod. 38:1–7; 40:29; 2 Kings 16:14), and a gilded altar was located before the entrance into the

Spatafora argues that throughout Revelation *ναός* should be understood "as a symbol of the church." Andrea Spatafora, "Heavenly Liturgy and Temple in the Apocalypse," 188. While this is certainly true of other NT texts (e.g., 1 Cor. 3:16–17; Eph. 2:19–22) and may be partially true of Rev. 11:1–14, it appears that Spatafora has not, at least in the aforementioned essay, sufficiently grappled with Revelation's cosmology nor the OT cosmological discourse with which Revelation is highly conversant.

¹⁶¹ That 11:1 must be connected with heaven is indicated by the close association between 11:1 and 11:19, which contain the only two uses in Revelation of the phrase *ὁ ναός τοῦ θεοῦ*, and in 11:19 *ὁ ναός* is unmistakably located *ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ*. This provides a critical link between the church as temple on earth, and the about-to-be-revealed temple in heaven. See G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 562; Additionally, if the holy city in Rev. 11 also represents the church (i.e., the church under duress), then heavenly connotations may also suggest themselves insofar as this "city" foreshadows the city that will descend from heaven and fill the earth in 21:2. Ibid., 568; G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 331.

¹⁶² See Mark Allan Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* 70–1.

¹⁶³ From a narrative-critical perspective, these heavenly pieces of furniture are "props" in the cosmic setting. Though props, as a narrative-critical category, can be incidental to the plot, the pieces of heavenly furniture function as "MacGuffins," which are props that play a much more important role in the plot. See James L. Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament*, 88.

most holy place (Exod. 37:25–29; 40:5; 1 Kings 7:48). On this basis, it is reasonable to suggest that the association of the altar with fire (Rev. 8:5) and sacrifice (Rev. 6:9) may allude to the heavenly analogue of the brazen altar (i.e., the altar of burnt/ascension offerings), whereas the association of the altar with incense (Rev. 8:3) and gold (Rev. 9:13) may allude to the heavenly analogue of the altar of incense, hence two different heavenly altars. But whether there are two heavenly altars or one heavenly altar,¹⁶⁴ John clearly draws a correspondence between the earthly altars and the heavenly altar(s) and thus continues to sketch heaven as the cultic archetype of the earthly type.¹⁶⁵

The Seven Golden Lampstands (ἑπτὰ λυχνίας χρυσᾶς)

Another piece of cultic furniture found in God's heavenly ναός are the ἑπτὰ λυχνίας χρυσᾶς. In the OT tabernacle, a golden lampstand with seven lamps was set up in the holy place and lit in perpetuity (Exod. 25:31–40; 37:17–24; Lev. 24:1–4). The seven lamps were arranged to shine upon the twelve loaves of shewbread, which symbolized the twelve tribes of Israel. The arrangement was meant to signify the presence of the glory of God that shines upon his covenant people (cf. Num. 6:22–27).¹⁶⁶ In Rev. 1:12–16, John sees the seven lampstands in God's heavenly ναός. That this is a vision of *heaven* is clear from the descriptions given to the Son of Man, and the parallel descriptions given to the angels who emerge from God's heavenly sanctuary in Rev.

¹⁶⁴ Among commentators who claim that there is one heavenly altar, which seems more likely than the existence of two heavenly altars, there are several variations. For a concise summary of positions, see Craig R. Koester, *Revelation*, 398.

¹⁶⁵ Ian Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, 113.

¹⁶⁶ L. Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?*, 15–7.

15:5–8.¹⁶⁷ Iain Boxall rightly notes, “Like Isaiah before him, who saw a vision of the Lord while in the Temple in Jerusalem (Isaiah 6), John is caught up into a vision of the heavenly sanctuary, on which the earthly was modelled (Exod. 25:40; Heb. 8:5).”¹⁶⁸ For the church(es), their symbolic identification in the heavenly temple points upward to the source of their security, and forward to their consummate hope (Rev. 21:23).

The Ark of the Covenant (ἡ κιβωτὸς τῆς διαθήκης)

In the tabernacle and temple of the OT, the ark of the covenant lay at the heart of the most holy place (Exod. 25:10–22), where it functioned as the meeting place between God and his people through the medium of the high priest (Exod. 25:22). The presence of the ark, following the trumpet blasts throughout the previous cycle (Rev. 8:6–21; 11:1–19), recalls the conquest and the advent of judgment.¹⁶⁹ But as the place where atonement was made, the ark also points to the salvation of the saints. Thus, the revelation of the ark of the covenant in 11:19 is temporally directed toward God’s consummative presence for both salvation and judgment. In the context of Revelation, it is the eschatological parallel that is expanded upon in Rev. 20:11–15 and Rev. 21.¹⁷⁰ Moreover, the ark’s metonymical function for the presence of God¹⁷¹ is significant in a context in which boundaries are

¹⁶⁷ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 804.

¹⁶⁸ Ian Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, 41.

¹⁶⁹ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 618–9; Laszlo Gallusz, *The Throne Motif in the Book of Revelation*, 236.

¹⁷⁰ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 619.

¹⁷¹ Richard Bauckham, for example, explicitly connects the ark to the throne of God itself, thus further cementing this connection: “The ark in heaven must be the throne of God which chapter 4 describes.” Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 203.

broken. Heaven is not simply a static *ναός* sealed off from anything unclean; it is also eschatologically directed toward the new heavens and new earth and informs why the new creation is framed as the *ναός* of God (Rev. 21:22; cf. Hab. 2:14).¹⁷²

The Prohibition of Unclean

In Israel's worship in and around the tabernacle, to be "clean" or "unclean" was determinative of whether one could worship in the holy space of God's tabernacle, or even reside within the camp. Those who were unclean were excluded from both the tabernacle and the camp (Lev. 12:1–5; 13:45–46; Num. 5:1–4), whereas those who were clean were permitted to bring sacrifices before the Lord according to the prescriptions for sacrificial offerings (Lev. 1:1–6:7). Another distinction in Israel's worship was between "holy and "common"; only holy things could be used in the worship of God, and God's people were frequently called to consecrate themselves and become holy (Lev. 11:45; 19:2). Only clean things could be holy, and common things were either clean or unclean.¹⁷³

This same OT terminology is called upon in Rev. 16:13, 17:4, and 18:2, and given the cultic symbolism pregnant throughout the cosmic setting, intimates an intentional

¹⁷² Throughout the above sketch of heaven in its cultic dress, Rev. 4–5 has largely flown under the radar. However, at this point it is prudent to note, as Gallusz puts it, that "Although the term *ναός* is not employed in the vision, the cumulative force of the numerous allusions points to cultic symbolism as the major background of chs. 4–5" (100–1). Gallusz proceeds to note, for example, the presence of precious stones (4:3), the number of elders (i.e., 24), and the Sinai wilderness allusions (e.g., 4:5; 5:10) which echo the Book of Exodus just prior to Moses' receiving the blueprints for the tabernacle (101). Gallusz concludes, "In light of these numerous parallels, Paulien rightly concludes that no passage in the whole book contains 'a larger quantity or a wider variety of allusions to the Hebrew cultus' than the vision of the heavenly throne-room. This view points to the intention of the author for understanding the vision primarily against a cultic background." Laszlo Gallusz, *The Throne Motif in the Book of Revelation*, 101.

¹⁷³ See Gordon Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), 18–25.

parallel with these themes. In 16:13 and 17:4 all the major opponents of God in Revelation are collectively described as the source of uncleanness, and in 18:2, in the aftermath of Babylon’s judgment, she is envisioned as a habitation for all manner of uncleanness. It is widely recognized that the announcement of Babylon’s fall in Rev. 18, together with the descriptions that follow, are drawn from a variety of OT prophetic texts. The announcement of Babylon’s fall, alludes to Isaiah 21:9, and the descriptions that follow allude to several prophetic texts, each of which picture the desolation of nations (e.g., Babylon in Isa. 13:21-22; Edom in Isa. 34:11–14; Jerusalem in Jer. 9:11).¹⁷⁴ But though these prophetic passages contribute to the immediate textual background, there may also be a secondary allusion to the unclean space outside the camp in Israel’s cultic life.

For example, in Isa. 13:21–22, in the aftermath of Babylon’s devastation, the fallen kingdom becomes an abode for the “goat demon” (שָׁעִיר) (Isa. 13:21). This word also shows up in Lev. 17:7 in the prohibition against sacrificing to “goat demons” (שָׁעִירִים) outside the camp (Lev. 17:3). It has also been suggested that the Day of Atonement activity of sending one of the two goats into the wilderness, outside the camp to Azazel (אֲזַזֵּל) (Lev. 16:8, 10, 26), may allude to a demon who resides in the wilderness (See 1 Enoch 8:1; 9:6; 54:5).¹⁷⁵ Thus, the association of a demonic dwelling place (κατοικητήριον δαιμονίων) in Rev. 18:2 may also reach back to the cultic conception of unclean space outside the camp in Leviticus. Throughout Leviticus, ἀκάθαρτος things

¹⁷⁴ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 893–4; Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 635–6; Craig R. Koester, *Revelation*, 697.

¹⁷⁵ Gordon Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, 233–5; Baruch A. Levine, *Leviticus*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 102, Logos Bible Software.

belong to ἀκάθαρτος space, which is the collective antithesis of holy things that belong to holy space. In Rev. 18:2, it seems reasonable to map Babylon's devastation on this cultic topographical map; their devastation results in ἀκάθαρτος things occupying ἀκάθαρτος space. It may be that the dragon's heavenly expulsion from God's heavenly temple in Rev. 12:9 is the first stage that precedes the cleansing in 18:2. In one sense, the cosmic story of Revelation is one of God cleansing cosmic space, beginning with heaven itself in the resurrection and ascension of Christ,¹⁷⁶ with the church militant and triumphant adding their voices in praise as a response.

The cultic character of Rev. 18:2 is further reinforced by the association of glory with the angel who descends to the earth (γῆ) and announces the fall of Babylon in Rev. 18:1. Many commentaries agree that Ezekiel 43:2, which describes the glory of God filling his eschatological temple (cf. Ezek. 43:4), is echoed in Rev. 18:1.¹⁷⁷ Beale further suggests that this allusion also points to the fullness of the coming temple-city in Rev. 21, a vision which is likewise indebted to Ezekiel's temple vision in Ezek. 40–48.¹⁷⁸ Thus, in the vision of Rev. 18:1, the eschatological temple is invading the earth, and cosmic space is rearranged. In Rev. 18:2 Babylon becomes a φυλακή for unclean things. This is the same space in which Satan is held during the millennium (Rev. 20:7), which in turn

¹⁷⁶ That Rev. 12, the war in heaven, and Satan's expulsion function as the corollary of Christ's resurrection and ascension see e.g., Craig R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, 121–2. Admittedly, however, how Rev. 12 maps onto a timeline of "monumental time" is a source of debate. See chapter 4, below.

¹⁷⁷ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 893; Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, 635; R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St John*, vol. 2, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark International, 1920), 95, Logos Bible Software.

¹⁷⁸ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 893.

corresponds with the ἄβυσσος (Rev. 20:1, 3).¹⁷⁹ In the devastation of Babylon, therefore, the earth is being cleansed, and the unclean things that once resided on the earth (Rev. 16:13; 17:4) are now relocated outside the camp to make way for the marriage of heaven and earth. In the vision of Rev. 21 that eventually follows, we have already discussed the disappearance of things like death (θάνατος), mourning (πένθος), and crying (κρᾶυγή). But outside of the οὐκ ἔσται ἔτι formula, we also read that nothing κοινός will enter (Rev. 21:27). This reinforces the cultic character of the new creation; the new creation is a temple that is guarded in the most emphatic way (οὐ μὴ εισέλθῃ) from anything unclean (cf. Gen. 3:1ff.).

Cosmological Space as Permeable Space

We have seen above how John's cosmology is clothed in cultic imagery. Heaven is God's sanctuary which eventually fills the earth and, in doing so, casts everything unclean outside the camp. By the end of Revelation these cosmic boundaries are broken. But throughout the inter-advent period, before the consummate vision of Revelation 21, John also imagines this cosmic space as permeable space. In other words, through the ascension of the priest-king into heaven (Rev. 5), boundaries that were once precarious to cross in Israel's cultic environment have been opened at the archetypal level for those who have been sealed by God and have become a kingdom of priests (Rev. 1:6; 5:10). More will be said about the access that believers have, through their worship, into this

¹⁷⁹ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1021.

heavenly space in chapter 4.¹⁸⁰ For now, it is enough to note that images like the sea of glass,¹⁸¹ and transitional space like the midheavens,¹⁸² suggest that Revelation's cosmic setting does not include hermetically sealed space.

The Rhetoric of Revelation's Cosmology

In Ryan Leif Hansen's monograph, *Silence and Praise: Rhetorical Cosmology and Political Theology in the Book of Revelation*, Revelation is read through its so-called *rhetorical cosmology*. Hansen argues that Revelation's dynamic cosmology functions both to deconstruct the cosmology promulgated by Rome, while simultaneously constructing a cosmology that places God and the Lamb at the center.¹⁸³ Through Revelation's cosmology John, Hansen argues, calls the IR to silence (i.e., non-participation in the idolatrous systems of Rome) and praise (i.e., participation in heavenly life as God's people) wherein they participate in the unmaking and remaking of the world. Hansen explains, "Just as the silence of the saints participates in ending the

¹⁸⁰ On this point, Andrea Spatafora summarizes what we will hope to demonstrate in chapter 4, viz., "In the Apocalypse there is a blurring of the boundaries between heaven and earth and this occurs in the liturgy of the Church." Andrea Spatafora, "Heavenly Liturgy and Temple in the Apocalypse," 193.

¹⁸¹ If the sea of glass in 4:6 in some way alludes to the laver that lay outside the tabernacle and temple, where its function was to cleanse the priest prior to entering the holy place, its presence in heaven may likewise suggest that heaven is open for those who have been cleansed. Its stillness, however, further suggests its disuse, not because heaven remains cutoff, but because believers enter heaven through the blood of the Lamb. That is the way the kingdom of priests in heaven are cleansed.

¹⁸² As Ryan Hansen notes, middle spaces, such as the *μεσοῦράνημα*, "serve as the site of traversals across boundaries." Ryan Hansen, *Silence and Praise: Rhetorical Cosmology and Political Theology in the Book of Revelation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 38. Likewise, Steven Friesen categorizes this space as "one part of the earthly realm that has a distinct mediating function." Steven J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John*, 155.

¹⁸³ Ryan Hansen, *Silence and Praise*, 1–3.

contractual arrangement between Rome and her gods, so too John understands the praise of God's people as a participation in the new creation."¹⁸⁴

Throughout his work, Hansen operates on the premise that how John shapes cosmic space is congruent with the argument he presents. This premise is predicated, in part, on the concept of "rhetography," which refers to "argumentative images" that carry significance for the IR and persuades the IR to one course of action or another.¹⁸⁵ Hansen writes, "Once interpreters begin to pay attention to rhetography, many elements of a text not traditionally considered argumentative emerge as crucial for how a text persuades an audience. Rhetography opens the door to considering the rhetorical force of things like space, the body, and orality."¹⁸⁶ Hansen's work, and especially his prolegomena, laudably emphasizes the dynamic role of cosmic space in Revelation, together with the role of the IR in constructing and inhabiting cosmic space. But while Hansen sees Rome's cosmological discourse as the linchpin for John's rhetorical cosmology, it is more promising to root that conversation in cultic cosmology sketched above.¹⁸⁷

John is indeed concerned with the idolatrous systems of Rome, including the Imperial cult, but John's primary concern reaches further back than Rome or Domitian.

¹⁸⁴ Ryan Hansen, *Silence and Praise*, 153.

¹⁸⁵ Ryan Hansen, *Silence and Praise*, 31.

¹⁸⁶ Ryan Hansen, *Silence and Praise*, 31.

¹⁸⁷ Steven Friesen's insightful monograph, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John*, is subject to similar kind of critique. While Friesen helpfully elaborates upon the "three levels of spatial reality in Revelation" (which he identifies as heaven, earth, and underworld) (152), Friesen reads the rhetoric of Revelation's cosmic space and cosmic time primarily in conversation with Roman Imperial ideology rather than from its Jewish OT cultic provenance. See Steven J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John*, 152–7.

Instead, John is fundamentally concerned with sin and idolatry wherever it arises.¹⁸⁸

Thus, John directs the IR to imagine the world in which they live as one that has been overrun by the corrupting influence of sin and idolatry, but also a world that will soon be cleansed and filled with the consummate hope that was anticipated in Eden. The agent who propels this vision forward is the Lamb, Jesus Christ, whose blood cleanses heaven (Rev. 12), his saints (Rev. 1:5; 5:9), and whose ascension (Rev. 5:5–8) marks the final act in the drama of redemption that will culminate in judgment and the reclamation of the earth in consummate salvation. In the end, God’s heavenly temple will fill the earth (Isa. 11:19; Dan. 2:35). In this way, John’s cosmic discourse is the drama of redemptive history (i.e., “monumental time”) *in nuce*.¹⁸⁹

When the IR hears Revelation read, its formative potential is released; deSilva writes, “the hearers are changed as is ‘the common-sense world, for it is now seen as but the partial form of a wider reality which corrects and completes it.’”¹⁹⁰ An apocalyptic cosmology, and Revelation’s cosmology in particular, thus provides significant

¹⁸⁸ Likewise, Steven Grabiner highlights how the broad scope of John’s cosmic concerns reaches beyond Rome. Grabiner writes, “The political issues that might have plagued the first readers of Revelation do not mark the beginning of the conflict, nor are they the sum total of that conflict.” Steven Grabiner, *Revelation’s Hymns*, 172. See also Sigve K. Tonstad, *Saving God’s Reputation*, 9.

¹⁸⁹ Sean McDonough outlines, in broad brush strokes, the drama of Revelation’s cosmology in a similar way. See Sean McDonough, “Revelation: The Climax of Cosmology,” 187–8. Jack Kilcrease argues that Revelation 21–22 present the eschatological fulfillment of the liturgy of creation, reflected in the tabernacle and temple of the OT. By the end of Revelation, “The protological existence of creation is restored and surpassingly glorified in its eschatological fulfillment.” Jack Kilcrease, “Creation’s Praise,” 324.

¹⁹⁰ David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John’s Way*, 116. Earlier in the same chapter, deSilva notes in passing that while the contemporary scholarly impulse is to set Revelation against the backdrop of political and social crises, we cannot forget that “Beyond these issues, many disciples would have been concerned with more mundane challenges, such as providing for one’s family, negotiating the world of business, or dealing with doubt concerning one’s allegiance to this group.” *Ibid.*, 109.

“rhetorical gain” for the reader.¹⁹¹ At a macro-level the cosmology of Revelation challenges the narrative of Rome, and any other seemingly benign institution that arises on the earth, both for the seven congregations, and also for Christian readers who dress themselves in the garb of the IR today. But there are at least two additional considerations in which John’s cosmology adds persuasive force to his rhetorical goals.

Cosmological Recapitulation

One of the frequently debated hermeneutical questions about Revelation is whether the book is best read as a series of recapitulative visions,¹⁹² or as a linear-progressive series of visions.¹⁹³ Unfortunately, it is outside the scope of this project to offer a full defense of one particular view, but this student agrees with the general hermeneutic of recapitulation observed as far back as Victorinus of Petovium (Pettau): “For the sevenfold Holy Spirit, when he has passed in revue the events to the last time, to the very end, returns again to the same times and supplements what he has said incompletely.”¹⁹⁴

Applied to Revelation’s cosmology, recapitulation enables John to rehearse the cosmic story above, while progressively and dramatically expanding that story as the

¹⁹¹ David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John’s Way*, 116.

¹⁹² E.g., Ryan Hansen, *Silence and Praise*, 70–4; Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation*, 32–44.

¹⁹³ E.g., James L. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, 54–9. Resseguie, however, qualifies that his linear view “does not mean that the events of the Apocalypse follow in a neat chronological arrangement, as advocated in some popular approaches.” *Ibid.*, 59.

¹⁹⁴ Victorinus of Petovium, “Commentary on the Apocalypse,” in *Latin Commentaries on Revelation*, trans. and ed. William C. Weinrich, Ancient Christian Texts (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 12.

narrative unfolds.¹⁹⁵ When John repeatedly narrates the end of the present cosmic order (e.g., Rev. 8:5; 11:19; 16:18) he is not following Stoicism's cyclic view of the cosmos;¹⁹⁶ rather, he is recapitulating and each time dramatically expanding the end of the cosmos in order to underscore both the high stakes of conquering in God's economy, while also offering comfort to the IR in that the present order will inevitably draw to a close. Similarly, David deSilva highlights the rhetorical advantage of John's recapitulative strategy, writing, "By means of recapitulation, John keeps holding this crisis before his hearers so that they will, in turn, keep it in view."¹⁹⁷

Incipient Enthronement

The heavenly enthronement of Christ in Revelation 5,¹⁹⁸ following his resurrection and ascension, is strategically placed prior to the cosmic conflict in the unfolding narrative. William Riley explains that in ANE myth, including in much (though not all) of the OT Scriptures, divine enthronement usually *followed* (rather than preceded) cosmic victory.¹⁹⁹ On the one hand, Riley observes how the enthronement of the Lord in

¹⁹⁵ That John can *both* recapitulate and expand visions as the narrative unfolds is captured in Fiorenza's likening of Revelation's unfolding drama to that of a conic spiral. "The dramatic narrative of Rev. can best be envisioned as a conic spiral moving from the present to the eschatological future. It also could be likened to a dramatic motion picture whose individual scenes portray the person or actions every time from a different angle while at the same time adding some new light or color to the whole." Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 6.

¹⁹⁶ Edward Adams explains that stoicism held the cosmos originates in a pure fire, and it eventually returns to its state of pure fire, at which point the life-cycle of the cosmos starts again. Edward Adams, "Graeco-Roman and Ancient Jewish Cosmology," 16–18.

¹⁹⁷ David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John's Way*, 111.

¹⁹⁸ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 357.

¹⁹⁹ William Riley, "Temple Imagery and the Book of Revelation," 90.

Rev. 4 [sic.] uniquely *precedes* the cosmic conflict that follows, but on the other hand, the Lord's enthronement in a new temple (i.e., the new Jerusalem) seems to follow the same ancient temple ideology of the ANE.²⁰⁰ Thus, Riley sees no fundamental difference between the pattern of enthronement in Revelation and that of other ANE temple ideology. However, whatever might be said about Revelation's parallels with ANE temple ideology, the enthronement of Christ in Rev. 5 is not merely a parenthesis to his temple enthronement in the new Jerusalem nor simply a cosmic preview. Rather, John appears to foreground the Lamb's enthronement to direct the IR to the proper source of stability and order before he introduces instability into the cosmos, thus foregrounding assurance for the IR of how things will end.

From another perspective, deSilva observes how John also foregrounds the inevitable coming of God and his Messiah in the opening chapter of Revelation through the phrase, ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος (Rev. 1:4, 8; 4:8). The phrase, deSilva notes, is rhetorically positioned in the exordium, which in ancient rhetoric was where a speaker would set forth the proposition of his foregoing speech, thus magnifying the chief actor in the cosmic conflict that follows.²⁰¹ deSilva writes, "The picture is no longer of a God who exists in static eternity, but a God who will dynamically encounter God's creation."²⁰² Although Christ's enthronement has yet to be narrated, already Rev. 1

²⁰⁰ William Riley, "Temple Imagery and the Book of Revelation," 90.

²⁰¹ David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John's Way*, 109. Whether or not one is convinced that the application of classical rhetorical categories such as "exordium" are appropriate to a work like Revelation which, admittedly, does not follow the structural patterns of a rhetorical speech, the larger point, *viz.*, that the Parousia is foregrounded in Revelation's prologue, still carries significance.

²⁰² David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John's Way*, 110.

previews the enthronement of Rev. 5, the final enthronement of Rev. 21, and centers upon who is responsible for (re)shaping the cosmos moving forward.

Ultimately, God and the Lamb carry the sole responsibility for advancing the cosmic plot of the book. But the saints (in heaven, and then, by extension, those on earth) also participate in the deconstruction and reconstruction of cosmic space indirectly through their worship and witness to God and the Lamb. By bearing witness to the Lamb in worship, God's heavenly temple proleptically invades earthly space. And in their worship, they also challenge the claims of the earth dwellers while they await the earth's cleansing. In agreement with Ryan Hansen, worship and witness of the one who reigns now, and will reign in the future, lies at the heart of John's rhetorical cosmology. But worship of God and the Lamb is not simply framed as the antithesis of idolatrous worship; it is fundamentally the response of those who find the essence of their existence in God's heavenly temple. In other words, worship is not exclusively or even primarily a political act; it is cultic act in cosmologically cultic space, with God and the Lamb at the center, even as cosmic conflict plays out.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to probe John's cosmology, including its structure, its symbolism, and its function. In doing so we have attempted to shine the spotlight on the cultic setting of cosmic space in Revelation, which sets the scene for the worship war that rages throughout the main vision section, and the call upon the seven churches (and by extension, the IR) to join now in the worship of heaven.

Chapter 3

Literary Trajectories in the Seven Churches

The main vision section (4:1–22:5) sets the people of God in the cosmic setting sketched above in chapter 2, and depicts them as a beleaguered (conquered) people (e.g., Rev. 11:7–10; 12:13–17; 13:7), a long-suffering people (e.g., Rev. 6:9–11; 14:13; 16:15), a vindicated people (e.g., Rev. 8:1–5; 19:2),²⁰³ and a victorious (conquering) people (e.g., Rev. 7:9–17; 14:1–5; 15:2; 21:1–8). These vignettes are part of the warp and woof of Revelation’s narrative, so much so that through their story they are united with the protagonist of Revelation (i.e., the Lamb) in his story. As the Lamb was slain (e.g., Rev. 5:6, 9, 12), so too those who follow the Lamb are slain (e.g., Rev. 13:9–10), and as the Lamb was raised in victory (e.g., Rev. 5:7ff.), so too those who follow the Lamb are raised in victory (e.g., Rev. 11:1–13). In summary, the main vision section sketches the people of God in their victory according to the archetypal victory of Lamb; they unflinchingly follow the Lamb wherever he goes (Rev. 14:4).

The people of God, insofar as their story unfolds in the main vision section, are not, however, detached from those who receive John’s Revelation and hear it read in their assemblies in the late first century CE. In other words, the story of God’s people in Rev. 4:1–22:5 is also the story of the churches in Rev. 2–3 (and 1:4–8). By skillfully

²⁰³ Stephen Pattemore argues that the vindication of the martyrs is a concern that occupies much of the main vision section: “seen from the perspective of 6:9–11, the rest of the book is an answer to the cry of the martyrs.” Stephen Pattemore, *The People of God in the Apocalypse*, 113.

integrating the imagery of Rev. 2–3 within Rev. 1:9–20 and 4:1–22:5, and vice versa, John (1) pulls the implied reader (IR) into a setting of cosmic conflict to underscore the necessity of maintaining proper boundaries,²⁰⁴ (2) invites the IR to peer into heaven to appreciate the heavenly dimension(s) of their present existence in Christ, and (3) foreshadows the heavenly and eschatological reward available for those who conquer. Accordingly, John leverages the prophetic–apocalyptic literary form to stress for his readers that beyond the benign, the chilling, the political, the religious, and the local, “*things are not what they seem.*”²⁰⁵

The goal of the present chapter is to explore the literary trajectories in the letters to the seven churches (Rev. 2–3) and how John thus places the IR within the cosmic drama of Revelation accordingly. One of the functions of this literary technique is that the exhortation for each church to “conquer” (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21) is both magnified and expanded. Additionally, while the literary trajectories in the letters function as one of the key means through which John places the IR within the narrative, the seven macarisms and other texts of indirect address throughout Revelation (see Excursus below) function similarly. Finally, by placing the IR within the cosmic drama, this chapter will also prepare the reader for chapter 4, which highlights the cosmic and eschatological worship of the people of God.

²⁰⁴ Paul Middleton argues that the purpose of violence in Revelation is to warn John’s readers to distance themselves from the harlot lest they, like the earth dwellers, subject themselves to judgment too. Paul Middleton, *The Violence of the Lamb*, 14.

²⁰⁵ Jon K. Newton, “Not Who They Seem: Community and Identity in the Seven Churches of Revelation,” *Colloquium* 50, no. 2 (December 2018): 78, Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials PLUS.

Overview of the Letters to the Seven Churches

General Historical & Structural Observations

The so-called *letters*²⁰⁶ to the seven churches address seven genuine congregations located in the province of Asia: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. That the number *seven* carries symbolic freight throughout Revelation undoubtedly explains why *seven* congregations are singled out,²⁰⁷ but the selection of *these* seven congregations is probably explained by their strategic location in Asia.²⁰⁸ Moreover, though each of the seven congregations receives direct address from the exalted Christ, there is no evidence to suggest that the letters circulated

²⁰⁶ That this pericope (i.e., Rev. 2–3) is often labeled “*the letters to the seven churches*” is something of a misnomer. While Revelation contains an epistolary frame (i.e., Rev. 1:1–8; 22:6–21), Rev. 2–3 has more in common, argues Alan Bandy, with the *Gerichtsrede*, viz., the prophetic lawsuit subgenre. Alan S. Bandy, “Patterns of Prophetic Lawsuits in the Oracles to the Seven Churches,” *Neotestamentica* 45, no. 2 (2011): 178–205, Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials PLUS. For example, the repeated expression *Τάδε λέγει* (Rev. 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14) occurs over three hundred times in the LXX and, in a majority of cases, it functions as “a prophetic formula introducing a word from God. Whenever prophets spoke a specific word from Yahweh, they introduced their oracles in Hebrew as *כה אמר יהוה*, which is translated in the LXX as *τάδε λέγει κύριος*” (Ibid., 188–9). See also Craig R. Koester, *Revelation*, 234. David E. Aune argues that Rev. 2–3 represents a mixed genre. As “genre,” the so-called letters belong to the “royal or imperial edict” genre, while their mode is that of “parenthetic salvation–judgment oracle.” David E. Aune, “The Form and Function of the Proclamations to the Seven Churches (Revelation 2–3),” *New Testament Studies* 36, no. 2 (April 1990): 183, 198, Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials PLUS. David deSilva argues that an understanding of the so-called letters as “oracles” in the sense elucidated above by Aune increases their rhetorical potential. “John intends for his audience to hear Christ speaking to them, and Christ’s position in the worldview shared by John and the congregations allows him indeed to command, whereas John, even if a respected leader, could only come alongside to persuade.” David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John’s Way*, 179.

²⁰⁷ See also chapter 1, above.

²⁰⁸ Colin Hemer, following Sir William Ramsay, observes that these seven cities were “the natural centres of communication for an itinerant Christian messenger,” they were located along an important route within the region, and “the seven focal cities on that route had acquired a special importance as organizational and distributive centres for the church of the area.” Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in their Local Setting* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001), 15. This *general observation* is followed by, e.g., G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 204, and Ian Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, 41. Friesen rightly notes that it would be speculative, however, to claim that these churches were important stops in an early Christian postal system. Steven J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John*, 136.

individually, nor that they ever circulated divorced from the rest of Revelation. The literary links between the seven letters and the rest of Revelation lends no support to the source-critical scalpel,²⁰⁹ and it appears that each of the seven churches is privy to the evaluations given to each of their sister congregations, which enhances their rhetorical impact.²¹⁰

The external arrangement of the letters can probably be understood chiastically: A (2:1–7), B (2:8–11), C (2:12–17), D (2:18–29), C' (3:1–6), B' (3:7–13), A' (3:15–22).²¹¹ This is suggested by the placement of the only two churches that receive entirely positive evaluations (Smyrna (B) and Philadelphia (B')), and the sole plural form of ἐκκλησία in the central section addressed to Thyatira (D), a feature that further underpins the observation above, *viz.*, that each of the seven churches are encouraged to hear and heed the message to their sister congregations.²¹² As far as their internal structure, most of the letters include the following constituent parts: (1) commission to John, (2) address

²⁰⁹ After surveying the view that Revelation is a compilation of sources, Fiorenza concludes, “The unitary character of the language and symbol system of Rev. argues against such an arbitrary dissection of the text.” Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 161; cf. David E. Aune, “The Form and Function of the Proclamations to the Seven Churches (Revelation 2–3),” 183–4.

²¹⁰ Rhetorically, deSilva notes, shame and emulation are both evoked as the reputation of each church is publicized for the others. David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John's Way*, 189–92.

²¹¹ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 224–8; Jeffrey A. D. Weima, *The Sermons to the Seven Churches of Revelation: A Commentary and Guide* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021), 10–1.

²¹² See Jeffrey A. D. Weima, *The Sermons to the Seven Churches of Revelation*, 11, 146; David E. Aune, “The Form and Function of the Proclamations to the Seven Churches (Revelation 2–3),” 183–4; Beale further suggests that the churches at the boundaries of the chiasm (i.e., Ephesus and Laodicea) are distinguished from the C, D, and C' insofar as they are in a worse condition than those churches at the center of the chiasm. G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 227. While it is not clear, however, that Ephesus and Laodicea are worse off than Pergamum, Thyatira, and Sardis (Sardis, after all, appears far worse than Ephesus), Beale is probably correct in his general observation that the dominance of churches in relatively poor health, together with their structural enveloping of Smyrna and Philadelphia, suggests “the Christian church *as a whole* is perceived as being in poor condition.” *Ibid.*, 226.

from Christ, (3) positive commendation, (4) complaint, (5) correction, (6) coming of Christ, (7) promise to conquerors, and (8) a call to hear formula.²¹³

While each of the seven letters employs imagery sourced in the OT, and through that imagery links to the main vision section are established (see below), the imagery is also occasioned by the local setting of each congregation. This is the area of inquiry undertaken by Colin J. Hemer. Hemer, whose research advances that of Sir William Ramsey, argues that the imagery in each of the letters reflects local features in each of the cities and would have carried significant rhetorical weight for the original readers/hearers.²¹⁴ Hemer's work offers an important contribution in the study of the seven letters, and though each argument he advances must be assessed on its own merits,

²¹³ Jeffrey A. D. Weima, *The Sermons to the Seven Churches of Revelation*, 5–9. There are, however, exceptions within the seven churches. For example, no commendation is given to the churches of Sardis (3:1–6) or Laodicea (3:14–22), and no complaint is issued to the church in Smyrna (2:8–11) or Philadelphia (3:7–13). David E. Aune likewise identifies eight (8) parts in each of the letters, though he arranges those parts, in summary, as follows: (1) The adscriptio, (2) the command to write, (3) the “thus says” formula, (4) Christ’s self-description, (5) the narratio, (6) the dispositio, (7) the call to hear, (8) the promise to conquerors. David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 119–24. John Kirby takes a slightly different approach to the internal structure of the letters by positing a four-fold rhetorical structure that includes, (1) proem, (2) narration, (3) proposition, and (4) epilogue. He argues further that John appeals to proofs of *ethos* in the proem, proofs of *logos* in the narration and proposition, and proofs of *pathos* in the epilogue. John T. Kirby, “The Rhetorical Situations of Revelation 1–3,” *New Testament Studies* 34, no. 2 (April 1988): 200–3, Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials PLUS. From yet another perspective, William H. Shea, via George Mendenhall’s study on law and covenant that has been influential in Biblical studies throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, applies the structure of a Hittite-suzerain treaty formula to the internal structure of the seven letters. He argues that each of the letters contains (1) A preamble, (2) historical prologue, (3) stipulations, (4) witnesses, and (5) blessings and curses. William H. Shea, “The Covenantal Form of the Letters to the Seven Churches,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 21, no. 1 (1983): 71–84, Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials PLUS.

²¹⁴ Throughout his monograph, Hemer probes possible allusions, and while some allusions are more probable than others (and Hemer acknowledges the more tentative status of some allusions) he presents his argument as a “cumulative” case, *viz.*, that “the strength of the whole case is in the whole argument.” Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia*, 7. David L. Barr, following William Ramsey, notes that the geographic arrangement of the seven cities, combined with the local features connoted within each address, is especially suited to an oral performance: “These places and their associated ideas are not merely historical correlations, as Ramsey saw, but they are an oratorical device which would enable easy memorization of the order and scope of these seven letters.” David L. Barr, “The Apocalypse of John as Oral Enactment,” 245n9.

Hemer is conversant with epigraphic, numismatic, architectural, literary source material, and even modern topographical observations,²¹⁵ each of which lend weight to several of his proposed allusions. Nevertheless, Hemer also operates with a hermeneutic that is predisposed to give more weight to supposed local referents than either (1) their OT background, or (2) the literary significance they carry within Revelation as a whole.²¹⁶ Therefore, Hemer's influential work, while of some value in the present study, must assume a supporting role in the literary trajectories traced below. Nevertheless, before proceeding with that investigation, two other observations about the letters themselves are worth noting.

Trouble Within and Without

Throughout the letters, several troublemakers within and outside the churches are identified. Ephesus has tested "false apostles" (2:2), both Ephesus and Pergamum have met "the Nicolaitans" (2:6, 15), though they have responded differently, some in

²¹⁵ Hemer notes the particular importance of epigraphy and numismatics, and then gives primacy to the latter when he writes, "Coinage is often in fact the most illuminating key to local religion, and so to the formative ideas of the society." Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia*, 25.

²¹⁶ In his discussion on interpretive priority, Hemer argues that even though many phrases in Rev. 2–3 are found in Rev. 1, those phrases in Rev. 1 carry local significance, they anticipate a fuller treatment in Rev. 2–3, and therefore the allusions in Rev. 2–3 should be interpretive primarily according to their local significance. Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia*, 17. Similarly, while Hemer also acknowledges that the relationship of Revelation with the OT "can scarcely be overemphasized" (ibid., 13) he also seems to show some skepticism about its conscious use by John (see ibid., 14). Similarly, Beale offers a mild critique of Hemer's work on these hermeneutical points. Beale's critique is worth citing in full. Beale comments, "Hemer has well demonstrated that John was clearly conscious of a *historical context* but was not John also aware of several Old Testament *literary contexts* from which he cited allusions? It may certainly be the case that the historical particularity of each church motivated John (and the risen Christ) to allude specifically to appropriate Old Testament contexts which would speak to the needs of the situation. Only in the more narrow sense could the historical context have priority. However, paying attention to the literary context of the Old Testament passages, as well as the historical context, should help us better understand the whole paraentic message of chapters 1–3." G. K. Beale, a review of *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting*, by Colin J. Hemer, *Trinity Journal* 7, no. 2 (1986): 108, Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials PLUS.

Pergamum (the locus of “Satan’s throne” (2:13) and the only church with a named martyr [Antipas; 2:13]) have been influenced by “the teaching of Balaam,”²¹⁷ and Thyatira is accused of tolerating “Jezebel” (2:20). Smyrna and Philadelphia have had to endure “the synagogue of Satan” (2:9; 3:9), and though no opponent is identified in Sardis (3:1–6) or Laodicea (3:14–22), both churches receive strong rebuke for their spiritual tepidity.

An extended discussion of each opponent’s identity is outside the scope of the present chapter, but these references collectively suggest an atmosphere of trouble for the churches, which, for some, has blossomed from within, and for others has pressed upon them from outside. The former problem²¹⁸ is suggested by the presence of the false apostles, Nicolaitans, Balaam, and Jezebel, who likely represent some form(s) of teaching

²¹⁷ For these reasons, Matthew Street opines that “The situation in Pergamum is more dangerous than any other crisis in the seven churches.” Matthew Street, *Here Comes the Judge*, 49.

²¹⁸ The internal “problem” is far more serious than simply John’s unease with various “factions of a kind of Christianity that was somewhat different than that of the author.” Paul B. Duff, “Wolves in Sheep’s Clothing: Literary Opposition and Social Tension in the Revelation of John,” in *Reading the Book of Revelation: A Resource for Students*, ed. David L. Barr (Atlanta: Society of Biblical literature, 2003), 65. In other words, what is at stake internally is nothing less than the apostolic gospel, and not simply John’s inability to be tolerant of other Christian factions.

antithetical to the apostolic gospel.²¹⁹ In the case of Pergamum and Thyatira, this teaching is associated explicitly with idolatry and sexual immorality.²²⁰

As for the latter problem (trouble from without),²²¹ the synagogue of Satan (2:9; 3:9) and Satan's throne (2:13) seem to represent external Jewish and Roman pressures which, in the case of Pergamum, have already produced one martyr (i.e., Antipas).²²²

David deSilva comments, "Though it is unlikely that Revelation was written during a period of open persecution, the memory of the Christian holocaust in Rome as well as

²¹⁹ The (1) provenance of each group, (2) content of their teaching, and (3) association of each with the other, are all interrelated matters of debate: (1) Irenaeus traced the origin of the Nicolaitans back to Nicholas, one of the first deacons ordained in Acts 6:5: "The Nicolaitanes are the followers of that Nicolas who was one of the seven first ordained to the diaconate by the apostles. They lead lives of unrestrained indulgence." Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 26.3 (ANF 1:352), Logos Bible Software. This, however, cannot be verified with the paucity of extant evidence available to us today. Little is known about the content of their teaching or their provenance, though their name is associated with *νίκη* and *λαός*, and may imply, as James Resseguie notes, "that they conquer God's people by advocating accommodation to the norms and values of the dominant culture." James L. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, 86, 86n8. Colin J. Hemer concludes "Nicolaitanism was an antinomian movement whose antecedents can be traced in the misrepresentation of Pauline liberty, and whose incidence may be connected with the special pressures of emperor worship and pagan society" and "There may have been a Gnostic element in Nicolaitanism, but in our primary texts it is a practical error and not Gnosticism *qua* Gnosticism." Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia*, 94. (2) The Nicolaitans, Balaam, and Jezebel, were probably syncretistic movements vis-à-vis local pagan and imperial cults, and encouraged the participation in local trade guilds; see e.g., G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 233–4, 249, 261; Jeffrey A. D. Weima, *The Sermons to the Seven Churches of Revelation*, 139–41; contra David L. Barr, there is no justification for positing a radical distinction between John, the author of Revelation, and Paul. According to Barr, the trouble from within the churches that John variously ascribes to Balaam, Jezebel, and the Nicolaitans, stems from Pauline influences against which he is strongly opposed. David L. Barr, "Jezebel and the Teachings of Balaam: Anti-Pauline Rhetoric in the Apocalypse of John," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 45, no. 2 (2018): 153–165, Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials PLUS. (3) While the false apostles in Ephesus seem to be distinguished from the Nicolaitans (see Jeffrey A. D. Weima, *The Sermons to the Seven Churches of Revelation*, 34.), it seems that Jezebel and Balaam are figurative names for the same movement as the Nicolaitans. See e.g., G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 261. Beale also observes the common etymology between the Nicolaitans and Balaam, which links those two teachings. *Ibid.*, 251; See also Jeffrey A. D. Weima, *The Sermons to the Seven Churches of Revelation*, 108–9.

²²⁰ Whether the sexual immorality identified in 2:14 and 2:20 is metaphorical for idolatry, or a literal accusation separate from, but associated with, idolatry, is a matter of debate. For a metaphorical view see e.g., G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 250; for a literal approach see e.g., Jeffrey A. D. Weima, *The Sermons to the Seven Churches of Revelation*, 106–8.

²²¹ For further details see chapter 1, above.

²²² That "the synagogue of Satan" and "the throne of Satan" are external threats, see Cato Gulaker, *Satan, the Heavenly Adversary of Man*, 75, 84.

more local and individual actions against Christians such as Antipas (2:13) has not dissipated in John's mind."²²³

The Goal: To Conquer

Each of the letters conclude with a locally targeted promise to the one who conquers (ὁ νικῶν). It has earlier been argued that “conquering” is central to John's literary and rhetorical concerns,²²⁴ and this is clearly evident in the heptadic refrain in the letters to the seven churches. How each church responds to trouble from within and without will determine whether or not they conquer, and the way in which John connects his readers and their various crises to the main vision section further elucidates conquering in God's economy.

Literary Trajectories in the Seven Churches

It is generally acknowledged that the seven letters are seamlessly integrated into the whole of Revelation through the common symbolism they share with the rest of the book.²²⁵ Various descriptions of the Son of Man from Rev. 1:9–20 are repeated in the

²²³ David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John's Way*, 107.

²²⁴ See chapter 1, above.

²²⁵ E.g., Witherington and Myers rightly opine that the main vision section of Rev. 4–22 consists in corollaries from the exhortations in Rev. 2–3. Witherington and Myers comment, “Basically, John is offering an eschatological and otherworldly sanction for those exhortations, showing what the rewards are for faithfulness and for 'conquering,' and what the punishments are for failing to do so. John will reveal what is happening above and what will happen beyond the present (see Rev 4:1), not merely as a preview of coming attractions to comfort the faithful, though it serves that purpose as well, but as an eschatological sanction for the initial exhortations given to each church. The 'rhetorical function of these assertions [i.e., the visions] is to change the audience's mind in the present.” Ben Witherington III and Jason A. Myers, *New Testament Rhetoric*, 240–1. Leonard Thompson likewise observes the integral connection between the seven letters and the vision section: “By linking the seven letters on the one hand to the initial vision which John saw and on the other hand to the characters and actions of the visions to follow, the seer links the Christians in Asia integrally to his revelatory visions. They become a part of those visions and do not read

Christ address to each of the churches. Many of the concluding promises in each letter are found in their comprehensive fulfillment in the vision of Rev. 21–22. And imagery from the body of each church’s address is likewise found scattered throughout the main vision section.²²⁶ The literary coherence between the seven letters and the rest of Revelation leads Beale to conclude, “It is in this sense that we can call the letters the literary microcosm of the entire book’s macrocosmic structure.”²²⁷

Such textual mirroring sets each church, though immersed within a particular historical, geographical, and situational setting, on the cosmic canvas of Revelation, and calls upon the IR to interpret the present, including the decisions they face about the future,²²⁸ through that same cosmic lens.²²⁹ Moreover, that each church is addressed *by Christ*²³⁰ links the seven letters to the imminent frame of the whole book (Rev. 1:3, 4, 7,

or hear them as ‘external’ to themselves.” Leonard Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 180. Indeed, Thompson continues, “The exhortations, warnings, and comfortings John offers make no sense apart from how he envisions the world.” *Ibid.*, 181.

²²⁶ See also G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 223.

²²⁷ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 224. James Resseguie likewise argues that the shape of each letter reflects the “U-shaped plot” of the entire book. Each letter begins with Christ’s address that echoes the Son of Man vision of Rev. 1:9–20 and points to the stability of Rev. 4–5. Following the Christ address, instability is introduced into the letters, which foreshadows the instability in much of the main vision section, and descends further downward into the U-shaped plot. The address to each church then finishes with a promise that foreshadows the final vision of the book, *viz.*, the “messianic repair of the world in which everything and everyone is put into their proper place (Rev. 19–22),” which functions as the upward turn in the U-shaped plot. James L. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, 84–5.

²²⁸ John T. Kirby opines that the seven letters are primarily deliberative in their rhetoric insofar as “each letter purports to stir its audience to a course of action.” John T. Kirby, “The Rhetorical Situations of Revelation 1–3,” 200.

²²⁹ Likewise, Cato Gulaker comments, “The section on the congregations provides the reader with an earthly point of reference to the largely otherworldly visionary section of Revelation 4–22... In short: what happens in the messages to the congregations relates directly to what happens in the macrocosm of Revelation 4–22, and what happens in the latter in turn elaborates the circumstances of the former.” Cato Gulaker, *Satan, The Heavenly Adversary of Man*, 55.

²³⁰ Cato Gulaker observes the somewhat convoluted manner in which the seven letters are narrated: “it is a narrative about a speech act within a speech act: John writes about Jesus instructing him to write to the seven congregations.” Cato Gulaker, *Satan, The Heavenly Adversary of Man*, 56. This way of addressing

8; 22:6, 20) and helps buttress John’s rhetorical appeals of pathos, particularly that of fear and confidence.²³¹ In other words, the same Christ who is coming quickly, who John sees in Rev. 1:9–20, and who saves and judges throughout the main vision section, also walks among the seven churches that he now addresses. David deSilva comments, “It is this ‘awesome,’ divine figure who confronts the churches in Revelation 2–3. His power and strength stands ready to enforce the warnings (fear), but also to encourage the believers setting before them open doors that no one can close (confidence).”²³²

The remainder of this chapter probes several of the literary trajectories in the letters to the seven churches. It will explore Christological trajectories, conflict trajectories that surface in the body of each letter, and finally heavenly and eschatological trajectories that appear primarily in the conclusion of each letter, though with one importance exception. The survey below is not comprehensive, and there is no particular methodology that explains the selection of one trajectory over another. However, the aim is to demonstrate John’s thoroughgoing placement of the churches in the cosmic and eschatological world narrated in Rev. 4–22.

the churches, however, offers much rhetorical value since it connects God as “the architect of history” (i.e., main vision section) with God as the one who issues commands, and promises rewards, to his churches in the seven letters. *Ibid.*, 59.

²³¹ David A. deSilva explores in depth how, rhetorically, John appeals to *pathos* in the letters to the seven churches. He observes how John establishes “imminence” by narrating the voice of Christ addressing each of the churches, how that “imminence” links with the narrative frame of the whole book, and then how “imminence” functions as “the foundation for appeals to the emotions of fear and confidence.” David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John’s Way*, 181. See also *Ibid.*, 180–5. Similarly, John T. Kirby argues that Rev. 1 “is effective with respect to *pathos* — the rhetorical proof that consists in arousing the emotions of the audience — because, as one of the most impressive *ekphraseis* (descriptive passages) in the NT, it would be able to instill a sense of awe.” John T. Kirby, “The Rhetorical Situations of Revelation 1–3,” 199. The opening Son of Man vision thus aids John’s appeal to *pathos* insofar as it is the same Christ figure of Rev. 1 addresses each of the seven churches that follow in Rev. 2–3.

²³² David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John’s Way*, 182.

Christological Trajectories

The opening address from Christ to each of the churches looks back to the Son of Man vision of Rev. 1:9–20 (e.g., 2:1 and 1:16; 2:8 and 1:17–18; 2:12 and 1:16; 3:14 and 1:5, 18)²³³ and makes use of descriptions that carry local significance for each of the churches. For example, the address from Christ (n.b., “the Son of God”) in 2:18 describes οἱ πόδες αὐτοῦ ὅμοιοι χαλκολιβάνῳ, echoes what John sees in 1:15, viz., οἱ πόδες αὐτοῦ ὅμοιοι χαλκολιβάνῳ, and may also carry local significance vis-à-vis Thyatiran metal production deriving out of a local trade guild along with idolatry associated with that guild.²³⁴ Specifically, it may be that local production of this metallic alloy was connected with Apollo Tyriamnaeus, *the son of Zeus*.²³⁵ That Christ addresses the church in Thyatira as “Son of God” (2:18), and is associated with the compound χαλκολίβανον, likely serves a polemical function and proves to be a persuasive method of pointing the church to the true judge.²³⁶ As Weima explains, “The burnished bronze feet of Jesus further stress his power to stamp and crush any opposition he may face from Jezebel and those in the Thyatiran church who have come under her deceptive influence.”²³⁷

²³³ The opening address to Laodicea is the only address that does not allude back to the opening Son of Man vision from Rev. 1:9–20, though it does link to earlier Christ descriptions in 1:5 and 1:6–7. Jeffrey A. D. Weima, *The Sermons to the Seven Churches of Revelation*, 231.

²³⁴ See Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia*, 111–7.

²³⁵ Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia*, 116.

²³⁶ Jeffrey A. D. Weima, *The Sermons to the Seven Churches of Revelation*, 129–33; G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 259.

²³⁷ Jeffrey A. D. Weima, *The Sermons to the Seven Churches of Revelation*, 132.

Each address seems to carry local freight analogous to the example above and, combined with the high Christology of Rev. 1:9–20,²³⁸ stresses the authority of the one who provides correction and direction for those seeking to conquer. Just as John obediently heeded the instructions of the Son of Man to write (γράφον), so too the seven churches are pulled into the opening vision through these literary trajectories and are encouraged to respond in the same manner as John, their brother and partner (1:9). But crucially, the seven churches do not merely relate to Christ as an impersonal authority; he is also the one who has freed them from their sins and made them into a kingdom and priests to God (1:5–6).²³⁹ The various Christological trajectories that follow from the letters confirms that “Revelation’s ecclesiology is crucially dependent on its Christology.”²⁴⁰

To the church in Smyrna, for example, Christ addresses himself as the one ὃς ἐγένετο νεκρὸς καὶ ἔζησεν (2:8; cf. 1:17–18). Christ’s victory through death is, of course, a central feature in the inaugural throne room vision (see 5:6–7), it prompts the worship of the heavenly assembly (5:9–10), and though the beast eventually mimics this pattern (13:3), he is (unlike Christ) defeated (19:20–21). Like the Lamb, those who truly conquer are consistently portrayed throughout Revelation following the pattern of the Lamb.²⁴¹

²³⁸ The high Christology of 1:9–20 is particularly evident in its use of Daniel 7 and “the subtle mixing of the attributes of the Ancient One and the one like a human being.” Thomas Hieke, “The Reception of Daniel 7 in the Revelation of John,” in *Revelation and the Politics of Apocalyptic Interpretation*, eds. Richard B. Hays and Stefan Alkier (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012), 57.

²³⁹ Rhetorically, through the preface to the seven letters, the exalted Christ establishes “an overarching framework of ‘friendship’ as a dominant pathos.” David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John’s Way*, 186.

²⁴⁰ Stephen Pattemore, *The People of God in the Apocalypse*, 216.

²⁴¹ David deSilva argues that, within the seven letters, and particularly the letters to the church in Smyrna and Thyatira, Jesus’ own career is foregrounded so as to provide, either explicitly (in Smyrna) or implicitly (in Thyatira), a certain way forward — including a certain reward — for those who imitate Christ’s pattern.

Revelation 11 provides a picture of this *in nuce*. The two witnesses, who are collectively a reference to the church militant,²⁴² are slain for their testimony (cf. 6:9; 20:4), only to rise in victory after three and a half days (cf. 20:4). Like Christ, who died and was then resurrected, so too believers in Smyrna (and, by extension, *all the churches*) are privy to Revelations' extensive martyr ecclesiology²⁴³ developed in the main vision section, which follows from the literary trajectory of 2:8.²⁴⁴

One final trajectory is worth noting. To the church in Philadelphia, Christ introduces himself as ὁ ἅγιος (3:7). Throughout Revelation the word ἅγιος is used twenty-five (25) times, thirteen (13) of which are applied to the people of God. Peter Perry explains the rhetorical effect of this application:

John uses the title 'saint' to move audiences from passivity to action. As participants in the 'holy city,' John offers an alternative to Rome, its status and benefits (Rossing 1999). For Laodiceans, it means stopping the trade in gold, clothes, and ointments and giving up the lifestyle they enjoy. For Smyrnans, it means ending ambitions to climb the ladder out of poverty and enduring denunciation and imprisonment (Royalty 1998). To be a saint means to reorient one's priorities, possessions, and purpose toward the Holy One.²⁴⁵

In relation to 3:7 it is significant that this may be the only reference in Revelation where ἅγιος is used substantively for a referent other than the people of God. Although Stephen Pattemore asserts that when ἅγιος is used substantively in Revelation (and in the NT) it

This is one way in which John makes use of a rhetoric of *logos* in the seven letters. David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John's Way*, 240, 245.

²⁴² E.g., James L. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, 162.

²⁴³ See Stephen Pattemore, *The People of God in the Apocalypse*, 68–116.

²⁴⁴ Stephen Pattemore rightly observes, “The descriptions of the people and the outline of their story reflect the nature of the story of the Lamb himself. Their victory, like his and because of his, consists in their lives being offered in sacrifice, the outcome of which is salvation for the world... The goal of their existence is to be united with their Lord.” Stephen Pattemore, *The People of God in the Apocalypse*, 216.

²⁴⁵ Peter S. Perry, “The People of God in the Book of Revelation,” 334–5.

“always refers to the people of God,”²⁴⁶ this is not clear in Rev. 3:7. Matthewson, while noting the possibility that ἅγιος is used attributively, seems to treat it substantively, and takes ὁ ἀληθινός in apposition to ὁ ἅγιος.²⁴⁷ The (likely) substantival use of ὁ ἅγιος in 3:7 thus forms another literary trajectory that embraces the people of God, and ties the faithful in the church to the Christ who proclaims the seven messages through John to the churches.

The various Christological trajectories that ripple out from the letters to the seven churches bind the people of God with Christ such that his story becomes their story insofar as they follow the Lamb wherever he goes (Rev. 14:4). Peter Leithart’s characterization of these implication is, at this point, worth citing in full:

The churches form a set of seven, and are called to portray the sevenfold man that Jesus is. He is the dead and living one, the one living in the life after life after death, and he calls the church at Smyrna to the same. He is the faithful and true witness, the shepherd with the rod of iron, the Bridegroom with the burning eyes of love, and he interrogates each angel for the truth of their witness, their faithfulness in rule, the steadiness of their love. The sevenfold sculptor of humanity intends to carve his image into the sevenfold church.²⁴⁸

The Christological identity of the faithful vis-à-vis the literary trajectories both backward and forward grounds the other two trajectories that follow (see below).

²⁴⁶ Stephen Pattemore, *The People of God in the Apocalypse*, 121.

²⁴⁷ David L. Matthewson, *Revelation: A Handbook on the Greek Text*, Baylor Handbook on the Greek New Testament (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), 44.

²⁴⁸ Peter J. Leithart, *Revelation*, vol. 1, ITC (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2018), 129, Logos Bible Software.

Conflict Trajectories

The trouble faced inside the churches (e.g., Jezebel), the potent threats from outside the churches (e.g., synagogue of Satan), and the judgment portended for those who compromise through syncretism (e.g., removal of lampstand, subject to Christ's double-edged sword), is raised to a higher octave through the trajectories John extends into the main vision section. The cosmic conflict that unfolds in the narrative is the local conflict of the seven churches writ large. These literary trajectories stress the gravitas of the conflict faced by the churches, and they underline the stakes, particularly for those who fail to repent.

The Sword of Christ

In the address to Pergamum, the “sword” (ῥομφαία) is mentioned twice, both in reference to the instrument that Christ wields (2:12, 16). The ῥομφαία can be distinguished from the μάχαρα insofar as the latter was a smaller dagger typically wielded by Roman soldiers, whereas the former was a much longer and much more potent weapon on the battlefield.²⁴⁹ The ῥομφαία comports with the reference to Balaam (2:14) since it was the ῥομφαία that turned back Balaam's donkey (Num. 22:23 LXX) and eventually killed Balaam himself (Num. 31:8 LXX).²⁵⁰ Those in the church of Pergamum are warned that should they continue to embrace the teaching of Balaam, ὁ ἔχων τὴν ῥομφαίαν τὴν δίστομον τὴν ὀξειάν (2:12) will war against them ἐν τῇ ῥομφαίᾳ τοῦ στόματός [αὐτοῦ] (2:16).

²⁴⁹ Jeffrey A. D. Weima, *The Sermons to the Seven Churches of Revelation*, 93–4; Matthew Street, *Here Comes the Judge*, 45n19.

²⁵⁰ Jeffrey A. D. Weima, *The Sermons to the Seven Churches of Revelation*, 94.

In the final battle in Rev. 19, Christ is portrayed as the rider on white horse who has come to strike down the nations with a *ῥομφαία ὀξεῖα* that protrudes from his mouth (19:15), and who eventually slays the servants of the beast *ἐν τῇ ῥομφαίᾳ...ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ* (19:21). The implication for those in Pergamum is clear: those who hold to Balaam’s teaching are warned, like Balaam was warned, by the one who wields the *ῥομφαία*, and should they fail to repent they will be slain by the *ῥομφαία* like Balaam. Moreover, by implication Balaam’s teaching is also associated with the beast and the false prophet (19:19–20). The local setting of Pergamum is thus transferred onto the cosmic plane and the warning of 2:16 is likewise eschatologically foreshadowed in a way that should provoke fear among those who are prone to syncretistic worship.²⁵¹

Jezebel and the Women of Revelation

Jezebel (Rev. 2:20), the self-acclaimed prophetess of Thyatira, is accused by Jesus of *διδάσκει καὶ πλανᾷ τοὺς ἐμοὺς δούλους πορνεῦσαι καὶ φαγεῖν εἰδωλόθυτα*. Though her identity is a source of debate, it is doubtful that “Jezebel” is her actual name;²⁵² whoever she is, the exalted Christ casts her in the mold of the Sidonian princess from 1 Kings who was known for idolatry (e.g., 1 Kings 16:29–34; 18:19) and wickedness (e.g., 1 Kings 21:1–16). To describe a local influence as “Jezebel” is a particularly effective rhetorical strategy for those in the church who may not recognize her true

²⁵¹ While the sword may be “pointed specifically at the Nicolaitans,” its use aids a rhetoric of fear within the congregation. David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John’s Way*, 183.

²⁵² Jeffrey A. D. Weima identifies five (5) interpretive options vis-à-vis Jezebel’s identity: (1) Lydia from Acts 16, (2) the wife of one of the church leaders in Thyatira, (3) a local sibyl, (4) symbolic for the church as a whole, or (5) a prominent woman in the church with wealth and status. In the end, Weima settles on the last option (#5). See Jeffrey A. D. Weima, *The Sermons to the Seven Churches of Revelation*, 135–7.

character. This rhetorical payoff is further amplified when Jezebel is read in association with the other three women in Revelation.

Paul Duff has observed that, beginning with Jezebel, John depicts four women throughout Revelation (Jezebel in 2:19–29; the woman of Rev. 12; Babylon in Rev. 17; Jerusalem in 21:1–22:6), each of whom John links together through “similarities in imagery, words, phrases, or ideas.”²⁵³ On the one hand, Jezebel is linked to the woman in Rev. 12 by way of contrast.²⁵⁴ Though both are identified as mothers, the children of Jezebel are threatened by Christ (2:23) whereas the children of the woman in Rev. 12 are threatened by Satan. Psalm 2:8 is likewise found in both passages (Rev. 2:27; 12:5), but for Jezebel and her children Christ rules against them, whereas in Rev. 12 the Son rules for the woman and her children. And in Rev. 2:20 Jezebel is accused of “seducing” (πλανάω) servants of Christ, an action that in Rev. 12 is embodied by Satan, who is identified as the “deceiver (πλανάω) of the whole world” (Rev. 12:9).²⁵⁵

On the other hand, Jezebel is also linked with Babylon, the prostitute, as her compatriot. Both are associated with sexual immorality (πορνεία; 2:21; 17:2, 4; cf. 14:8), both are assigned a pseudonym from one of Israel’s historic enemies (i.e., Jezebel, Babylon), both are accused of leading astray (πλανάω) God’s people (2:20; 18:23), and

²⁵³ Paul B. Duff, “Wolves in Sheep’s Clothing,” 69; See also Edith Humphrey, “A Tale of Two Cities and (At Least) Three Women: Transformation, Continuity, and Contrast in the Apocalypse,” in *Reading the Book of Revelation: A Resource for Students*, ed. David L. Barr (Atlanta: Society of Biblical literature, 2003), 81–96.

²⁵⁴ See Paul B. Duff, “Wolves in Sheep’s Clothing,” 72–74 for the following contrasts, including others not mentioned here.

²⁵⁵ Cato Gulaker highlights the significance of πλανάω in the narrative of Revelation, and its importance vis-à-vis the trajectories within the letters: “This verbal thread is one of the motifs connecting the seven messages to the rest of the book and affirms the methodological choice of reading them as earthly aspects of the more vertical and visionary part of the book.” Cato Gulaker, *Satan, The Heavenly Adversary of Man*, 80.

both are described through their overindulgence and gluttony (2:20; 17:6).²⁵⁶ These references to eating and drinking suggest another contrast between Jezebel and Babylon, on the one hand, and the bride, the new Jerusalem on the other. With the arrival of the new Jerusalem comes the marriage supper of the Lamb (19:7, 9), “the springs of the water of life” (21:6), and “twelve kinds of fruit” from the tree of life (22:2),²⁵⁷ whereas Babylon’s circle of influence becomes food (Rev. 19:17–21). Rather than committing adultery with Jezebel, the church in Thyatira is urged, through these literary trajectories, to recognize her true nature, reject her works — which are explicitly connected with Satan (2:24; 12:9) — and abstain from her food so that they might conquer and partake of the eschatological food of the new Jerusalem. This, along with other conflict trajectories, remind the IR that they inhabit a world that would seek to divert them from true worship, and that there are consequences for following the way of the beast rather than that of the Lamb.

Heavenly and Eschatological Trajectories

The seven churches have been swept up in the cosmic conflict that John narrates, and the question concerning how the unhealthy churches will respond remains open. However, Jesus, in the conclusion to each letter, assembles several images that, with their literary trajectories, remind the IR of his or her heavenly existence and eschatological hope. In this way, the IR is emboldened to conquer according to who they are, and how redemptive history will culminate in their favor. The first of these trajectories that we will

²⁵⁶ See Paul B. Duff, “Wolves in Sheep’s Clothing,” 74–6 for more on the preceding parallels.

²⁵⁷ Paul B. Duff, “Wolves in Sheep’s Clothing,” 78–9.

survey, however, stands in a unique position in comparison with the other trajectories, but nonetheless points the IR heavenward.

The Angels of the Churches

The introduction to each of the seven letters underscores the heavenly dimension of the churches' present existence insofar as each letter begins with the address, Τῷ ἄγγέλῳ.²⁵⁸ The particular referent behind the ἄγγελος of each church, however, remains an area of debate among interpreters. For the sake of simplicity, there are two major approaches vis-à-vis its referent: (1) a human representative of or to the churches, or (2) a heavenly representative of or to the churches.²⁵⁹

One spokesman of the former view (i.e., human representative), Peter Leithart, identifies the ἄγγελος with either the pastor or bishop of each congregation: “Jesus the Emperor sends edicts to his provincial representatives, the angels, the pastors or bishops of the church in each city.”²⁶⁰ Leithart observes how ἄγγελος is semantically flexible enough to permit an earthly referent such as a pastor or bishop,²⁶¹ and then argues that a

²⁵⁸ See G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 218.

²⁵⁹ Interpreters group the various interpretive options differently. For example, Colin J. Hemer identifies five interpretive options: (1) The angels are the heavenly representatives or guardians of the churches, (2) they are human representatives of the churches, (3) they are personifications of the churches, (4) they are human messengers to the churches, or (5) ἄγγελος is used in some complex way that eludes classification (Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting*, 32). David E. Aune identifies three broad interpretive options, though various positions are also articulated within the three options he identifies: (1) supernatural beings, (2) human beings, or (3) heavenly bodies (David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 108–12). G. K. Beale identifies four interpretive options: (1) heavenly beings, (2) heavenly beings as guardians of the churches (3) human representatives of the churches, or (4) a personification of the churches (G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 217).

²⁶⁰ Peter J. Leithart, *Revelation*, 144.

²⁶¹ Leithart, after observing that ἄγγελος can have a more banal referent such as “messenger,” concludes, “The word cannot decide the issue for us, and we are left to rely on the context.” Peter J. Leithart, *Revelation*, 122.

pastor or bishop makes more sense of John's command,²⁶² while also accounting for the second person *singular* grammatical form that dominates each letter.²⁶³ Citing similar reasons (e.g., the presence of the second person singular, particularly in the closing refrain, Ὁ ἔχων οὖς), another interpreter suggests that John addresses a prophet in each church who presumably serves as the church's tradent, and who would ostensibly be responsible to verify the veracity of the message received.²⁶⁴

It should be acknowledged that identifying the ἄγγελος with a human representative more clearly accounts for the command issued to John, better reflects the chain of transmission from Rev. 1:1,²⁶⁵ and fits naturally with the second person singular grammatical form scattered throughout the seven letters. However, this view also falters in a few ways. For one thing, it requires the reader to understand ἄγγελος differently than anywhere else in Revelation and, in relevance theory (RT) conceptual terminology, requires significant processing effort on the part of the reader.²⁶⁶ Additionally, the idea of celestial corporate representation is not uncommon in apocalyptic literature (e.g., Dan.

²⁶² If the ἄγγελος of each church was a heavenly being, Leithart argues, then the command given by John to "write" to the angel of each church is implausible. Not only is the transmission onerously circuitous, but to press the supposed absurdity of such a scenario Leithart rhetorically asks, "Where do angels receive their mail? And, how does John know the addresses?" Peter J. Leithart, *Revelation*, 123.

²⁶³ Peter J. Leithart, *Revelation*, 123.

²⁶⁴ Henry Clarence Thiessen, ed., "The Angels of the Seven Churches (Rev. 1:20)," *Bibliotheca sacra* 91, no. 364 (October 1934): 433–441, Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials PLUS.

²⁶⁵ As John narrates the chain of transmission in Rev. 1:1, the revelation he receives and distributes to the churches comes from God, to Christ, to an angel, to John, and then to the servants of Christ. Thus, for Christ to command John to write, we would expect the object to be "the servants of Christ" rather than a heavenly angel.

²⁶⁶ See Stephen Pattermore's application of relevance theory to Revelation in *The People of God in the Apocalypse*. According to Pattermore, a more likely interpretation of any given text is the one that has the most optimized relevance. This is produced with a combination of high contextual effect and low processing effort. Stephen Pattermore, *The People of God in the Apocalypse*, 50.

10:13),²⁶⁷ and even in Revelation, celestial corporate representation (i.e., a heavenly angel) is found in the twenty-four elders. This best explains the ἄγγελοι of the seven churches.²⁶⁸

Though identifying the ἄγγελος of each church in this manner seems to make better sense of the text, whatever one says about the *referent* of ἄγγελος, the rhetorical effect of using ἄγγελος is to draw the reader heavenward and identify the church militant with the church triumphant. The essence of Beale's conclusion would seem to hold regardless of how one treats the referent of ἄγγελος. Beale concludes,

The fuller reason for addressing the churches through their representative angels is to remind the churches that already a dimension of their existence is heavenly, that their real home is not with the unbelieving “earth dwellers” (cf. “earth dwellers” in 3:10 and *passim*), and that they have heavenly help and protection in their struggle not to be conformed to their pagan environment.²⁶⁹

The Tree of Life

The closing promise to the church in Ephesus is for the conqueror ... φαγεῖν ἐκ τοῦ ξύλου τῆς ζωῆς, ὃ ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ τοῦ θεοῦ (2:7). This promise may contain a polemical twist vis-à-vis the Artemis cult in Ephesus.²⁷⁰ It is certainly an image based in Gen. 2:9, but within the textual environment of Revelation it also anticipates the appearance of the tree of life in the new Jerusalem in Rev. 22:2, a vision to which John

²⁶⁷ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 219.

²⁶⁸ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 217; see also Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, 99; Craig R. Koester, *Revelation*, 248. The early Greek commentator Oecumenius, in his comments on 2:1, also takes the ἄγγελος of the church in Ephesus to be the church's guardian angel. See Oecumenius, “Commentary on the Apocalypse,” in *Greek Commentaries on Revelation*, ed. Thomas C. Oden, trans. William C. Weinrich, Ancient Christian Texts (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 10.

²⁶⁹ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 218.

²⁷⁰ See Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia*, 42–52.

again alludes in the epilogue of the book (22:14, 19). This promise also extends itself, in the interim (i.e., already-not-yet), heavenward insofar as the tree of life was identified in Israel's cultic life with the lampstand (λυχνία) in the holy place.²⁷¹ So long as their lampstand remains (cf. 2:5) they will continue to participate in heavenly life in the present, and eschatological life when heaven meets earth.

The Heavenly Manna

The conquerors in the church in Pergamum are promised, along with a white stone, τοῦ μάννα τοῦ κεκρυμμένου (2:17).²⁷² Unlike the tree of life reference (see above), the manna does not reappear in the consummate vision of Rev. 21–22. In one sense, this should not come as a surprise since the manna also ceased for Israel when they arrived in the land of promise (Josh. 5:12). Its absence in the final vision of the book, therefore, speaks loudly. This does not, however, address the promise in 2:17 that the conquerors will still receive something, viz., *the hidden manna* (τοῦ μάννα τοῦ κεκρυμμένου). Though the manna does not reappear in Revelation, however, we do find that which is associated with the manna elsewhere in Revelation.

In Israel's cultic life, an omer of manna was kept in a golden jar in the ark of the covenant in Israel's tabernacle and later in the temple (Exod. 16:32–34; Heb. 9:4).

²⁷¹ See Brian J. Tabb, *All Things New*, 96; L. Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord*, 102. See also chapter 2, above.

²⁷² Grant Osborne outlines six (6) interpretations of the “hidden manna” in 2:17: (1) It connects to Jewish tradition about the jar of manna hidden underground prior to the temple's destruction. (2) It connects to a Eucharist motif. (3) It is spiritual or heavenly food that is hidden from the earth-dwellers. (4) It is Christ (cf. John 6:35). (5) It is the bread of angels now given to God's people. (6) Whatever it is, it contrasts with the “granules of frankincense” used in emperor worship. Osborne notes that these interpretive options are not mutually exclusive, and that options 1, 3, and 4 may all be part of the meaning. Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, 147–8. Osborne is correct that several of these options are likely in view, though the primary focus in what follows lies in the first option identified by Osborne.

Eventually the temple, including the ark of the covenant and its contents, was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, though one stream of Jewish tradition claimed that the ark was removed and hidden by Jeremiah in a cave prior to the temple's destruction (e.g., 2 Macc. 2:4–5), and another tradition held that the ark would be revealed again at the coming of the Messiah (4 Baruch 3:11–12).²⁷³ This context may explain the ark's appearance in Rev. 11:19 in connection with the sounding of the seventh trumpet. Though the hidden manna is not mentioned, the traditional connection of the ark with the manna strongly suggests that the promise to the church in Pergamum may be partly in view in Rev. 11:19.

Of course, the allusion to heavenly food also contrasts sharply with the propensity toward idolatry in Pergamum, while also foreshadowing the eschatological food of Rev. 22:1–4, but the combination of its quality of hiddenness, together with its connection with the ark of the covenant, suggests that Rev. 11:19 is primarily in view.²⁷⁴ This literary trajectory functions to galvanize the church in Pergamum to look heavenward to the archetypal temple, forward to the consummate temple, and ultimately to the bread of life who reigns in heaven.

²⁷³ Jeffrey A. D. Weima, *The Sermons to the Seven Churches of Revelation*, 114.

²⁷⁴ On a recapitulative reading of Revelation, Rev. 11:19 can be mapped temporally just prior to the new Jerusalem vision of Rev. 21–22. Thus, while recognizing the most direct literary trajectory connects 2:17 with 11:19, Rev. 21–22 is secondarily in view. Thus, Koester is still correct to say, “In Revelation the hope of eating manna will be realized through resurrection to life in New Jerusalem.” Craig R. Koester, *Revelation*, 290.

An Open Door

Within the commendation to the church in Philadelphia, Jesus alludes to an θύρα ἠνεωγμένην (3:8) set before the church. Though some have understood this as a reference to evangelistic opportunities (Acts 14:27; 1 Cor. 16:9),²⁷⁵ it is best to understand this reference in view of Rev. 4:1 where John sees θύρα ἠνεωγμένη ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ.²⁷⁶ The church is reminded of the heavenly access they have at present from the one who holds the key of David, even as they face, in their local setting, denunciation from the Jewish synagogues before local officials (3:9; cf. 12:9–10).²⁷⁷

While this commendation directs the church heavenward, and literarily to the opening vision of heaven in Rev. 4–5, the final promise(s) anticipate the consummative vision of Rev. 21–22. In 3:12 the conqueror is promised a place as a στῦλον ἐν τῷ ναῷ τοῦ θεοῦ μου, and three names, each of which will be written on either the person or the pillar,²⁷⁸ and each of which are associated with the new Jerusalem that comes out of heaven (21:2). Thus, the literary trajectories in the commendation and promises to the church in Philadelphia offer both heavenly access at present, and a place in the consummate new Jerusalem that will descend from heaven.

²⁷⁵ E.g., R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St John*, 87.

²⁷⁶ Jeffrey A. D. Weima, *The Sermons to the Seven Churches of Revelation*, 201; Ian Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, 72; Craig R. Koester, *Revelation*, 324.

²⁷⁷ Jeffrey A. D. Weima, *The Sermons to the Seven Churches of Revelation*, 204.

²⁷⁸ The question concerns the referent of ἐπ' αὐτόν in 3:12. Jeffrey A. D. Weima suggests the referent is the pillar, rather than the believer. Jeffrey A. D. Weima, *The Sermons to the Seven Churches of Revelation*, 216.

Sitting on the Throne

In the final promise to the church in Laodicea, the conquerors are promised a place on the θρόνος with Christ (3:21). According to Gallusz, 3:21 functions as a “duo-directional passage” that points immediately to what follows in Rev. 4–5, 7. Gallusz comments,

The text refers to the enthronement of the overcomers as an eschatological reward which is paralleled to Christ’s sitting on the Father’s throne. While ch. 4 elaborates God’s throne, and ch. 5 describes Christ’s enthronement, the eschatological victory and reward of the overcomers is the topic of 7.9–17. In line with Paulien, Osborne rightly concludes that these larger sections could be considered in some sense as a commentary on 3.21.²⁷⁹

Though Rev. 4–5, 7 may be immediately in view, the θρόνος trajectory vis-à-vis 3:21 also points forward to Rev. 20:4–6 where the saints are found sitting on thrones and judging with Christ, which is the text Gallusz identifies as “the fulfillment” of 3:21.²⁸⁰

The promise of 3:21, much like the other promises surveyed in this section, points both heavenward and forward, and encourages the saints to expand their vision of where they belong and where they are headed. With this concluding promise, writes Boxall, “The churches have been assessed, their senses heightened and their awareness of Christ’s imminent coming sharpened. They are now ready to attend to the story in detail. When

²⁷⁹ Laszlo Gallusz, *The Throne Motif in the Book of Revelation*, 99. Gallusz earlier remarks how the opening vision of Rev. 4–5 functions in relationship with the seven letters in Rev. 2–3. Referencing Stephen S. Smalley, Gallusz notes how the opening throne vision of heaven looks back to the life of the people of God on earth, and that the contrast between the earthly realities of the latter and the heavenly realities of the former has “the intention of encouraging the church militant through the disclosure of the indisputable supremacy of the heavenly power-centre introduced in the vision of chs. 4–5.” *Ibid.*, 98–9. Similarly, David A. deSilva observes the centrality of the opening chapters of the main vision section, *viz.*, Rev. 4–5. deSilva comments. “Leaving aside the opening vision of the glorified Christ, the major ‘visionary’ portion of the book falls between Revelation 4:1 and 22:5. The first of these visions extends the conceptual map of the hearers outward into the realm beyond the visible heavens, figuratively accessed through a door that must crack open in the dome of the sky before mortals can observe the activity and personnel in that realm (4:2).” David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John’s Way*, 97.

²⁸⁰ Laszlo Gallusz, *The Throne Motif in the Book of Revelation*, 195.

that door is opened, though in rather more symbolic visionary terms, this story will be played out.”²⁸¹

Excursus: Breaking the “Third” or “Fourth Wall” in the Main Vision Section

In theater and film, breaking the so-called “third wall” refers to an actor’s recognition of the stage on which they are set and functions as a way of drawing the audience more directly into the drama. One step beyond this is the breaking of the “fourth wall,” which refers to the boundary between actor(s) and audience being lifted while the former directly addresses the latter. Throughout the main vision section, John breaks the third wall in several ways, and comes close to breaking the fourth wall, as he draws the IR into the cosmic drama and prompts the reader to read his or her world through a different lens. These references constitute additional allusions that expand the IR’s participation in the visionary world of Revelation, including its vision of heavenly worship.

In the seven macarisms (Rev. 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14), blessing is pronounced either by John (1:3; 20:6), or through John (14:13; 16:15; 22:7) upon those who maintain proper boundaries.²⁸² While these gnomic macarisms are not directly addressed to the reader, they temporarily suspend the narrative in order to draw the reader

²⁸¹ Ian Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, 79.

²⁸² In addition to the seven macarisms, one might also identify a “sevenfold” curse in the repeated interjection, οὐαί (8:13; 9:12; 11:14; 12:12; 18:10, 16, 19), though strictly speaking the word οὐαί occurs 14x in seven verses. Whether or not this is intended to balance with the seven macarisms, and thus contribute to a covenantal theme in Revelation (i.e., blessings and curses), one could argue that these have the same rhetorical effect as the macarisms insofar as they draw the reader into the main vision section and assist the reader in the maintenance of proper boundaries. See William H. Shea, “The Covenantal Form of the Letters to the Seven Churches,” 74.

into the vision and elicit introspection in relation to the boundaries drawn throughout the book. David deSilva explains, “By declaring a certain class of people to be μακάριοι, a macarism exerts subtle pressure upon the hearers. The hearers will engage in self-examination, to discern whether or not they fit in with the category of people who are thus beatified.”²⁸³

Another way in which John subtly inserts the IR into the main vision section comes via John’s varied responses to what he sees (Rev. 5:4; 17:7; 19:10; 22:8). In 1:9 John linked himself with his readers/hearers by referring to himself as ὁ ἀδελφὸς ὑμῶν καὶ συγκοινωνὸς ἐν τῇ θλίψει καὶ βασιλείᾳ καὶ ὑπομονῇ ἐν Ἰησοῦ. As their brother (ἀδελφός) and partner (συγκοινωνός), John invites his readers — in the rare instances in which his own voice rises above that of the supporting cast of characters²⁸⁴ — to place themselves in the vision with him. In 5:4 John evokes pathos as he draws his readers into the prospect of hopelessness, but only for a moment before he, and his readers with him, discover relief in the announcement of the elder that follows (see 5:5). Likewise, in 19:9 and 22:8 John establishes ethos with his readers by demonstrating that he is not immune

²⁸³ David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John’s Way*, 275. In subsequent pages, deSilva elaborates upon the rhetorical function and form of a macarism, and then specifically the seven macarisms of Revelation. deSilva notes that a macarism, rhetorically speaking, is “an epideictic statement that can contribute to deliberative rhetoric in the same way that praiseworthy examples support adoption of a particular course of action” (ibid.), and this is, generally speaking, how the seven macarisms function in Revelation. The second macarism (14:13), for example, presents as praiseworthy the one who dies in the Lord (epideictic rhetoric), and is then supported by an enthymeme that persuades the readers/hearers to hold fast to their confession. See Ibid., 277–9.

²⁸⁴ deSilva notes that “John rarely speaks in his own voice, except to narrate what he saw and heard, his responses to the experiences, and to establish the epistolary frame of the whole (1:4, 9),” and ostensibly, in the main, “John causes more authoritative figures to confront his audiences.” David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John’s Way*, 126.

from the potency of idolatry.²⁸⁵ Although John does not, in these instances, address his readers directly, he nevertheless draws his readers into the vision with him as their ἀδελφός and συγκοινωνός (cf. 19:9; 22:9).

Finally, in 13:9–10, between the introductions of the first and second beast, John interrupts the vision with words (i.e., Εἴ τις ἔχει οὗς ἀκουσάτω) that echo the end of each of the letters to the seven churches (e.g., Ὁ ἔχων οὗς ἀκουσάτω).²⁸⁶ This echo draws the reader into the vision and underscores, according to Beale, that “The scenario of vv. 1–8 is not something to occur only at some future time but is happening in the midst of the seven churches.”²⁸⁷ Just as the saints in Smyrna and Philadelphia suffered under the synagogue of Satan, now, in Rev. 13, they see the vile nature of Satan’s minions, but they are still called to conquer by willingly enduring their onslaught. Though the church in Pergamum had already tasted martyrdom at the hands of Satan’s throne, they are now called to conquer by enduring the μάχηρα (13:10) of Satan so that they do not face the fiercer ῥομφαία of Christ (2:12, 16). Once again, John creatively interrupts the narrative’s cadence to draw his readers into the main vision section so that they see their world differently.

²⁸⁵ For more on how John establishes ethos with his readers, see David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John’s Way*, 132; see also chapter 1 of the current project.

²⁸⁶ Rhetorically, deSilva argues that the persuasive power of the arguments within the seven churches are enhanced by using this well-known Jesus logion (e.g., Matt. 11:15), thus building confidence in the authoritative source of the arguments themselves. See David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John’s Way*, 238.

²⁸⁷ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 703.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to show how John creatively maps his readers on the cosmic topography of the main vision section. Though a surface reading of the text may suggest far more discontinuity between Rev. 2–3 and Rev. 4–22, we have seen how, through numerous literary trajectories, John draws his readers into the cosmic drama he narrates and invites them to exegete their current situations, together with Christ’s evaluation of their situations in Rev. 2–3, through a cosmic lens. In this way, cosmology and ecclesiology come together, and more substance is added to the chief exhortation to conquer.

While John offers his readers both a defensive and offensive strategy within the his address to the churches (e.g., defensively, hate the work of the Nicolaitans (2:6); offensively, hold fast to the name of Christ (2:13)), John also offers, in the main vision section, a robust vision for participating in heavenly and eschatological worship. In the next chapter we will explore how John repeatedly directs the IR heavenward throughout the main vision section and prompts the IR to participate now in the worship of heaven, and thus foreshadow the inevitable conclusion to redemptive history.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁸ The relationship between the negative vocation of the church, *viz.*, non-participation in the idolatry that marks the earth dwellers, and the positive vocation of the church, *viz.*, participation in the worship of heaven, is analogous to Ryan Hansen’s argument that John encourages his readers to both silence and praise. See Ryan Leif Hansen, *Silence and Praise*, 83–155.

Chapter 4

The Hymns of Revelation and the Worship of Heaven

The thoroughly cultic character of Revelation's cosmology provides a fertile setting for the worship that unfolds throughout the book, which contributes to Revelation's characterization as "the 'noisiest book' in the New Testament."²⁸⁹ John receives his vision ἐν τῇ κυριακῇ ἡμέρᾳ (Rev. 1:10), which is "the day of Christian worship."²⁹⁰ An extended diptych of worship (i.e., Rev. 4–5)²⁹¹ functions as the fountainhead for the entire visionary section.²⁹² And, as it was previously argued in chapter 1, scenes of heavenly worship function as structurally significant hinges in the narrative that drive the plot forward. These worship scenes are so copious that Ford accurately claims, "One can state unequivocally that, except for the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Apocalypse of John is the most liturgical book in the NT canon."²⁹³

Beyond its sheer volume in the narrative, heavenly worship also plays an important literary and rhetorical role insofar as it interprets the cosmic conflict of the book, it portends the book's resolution, and it invites IR to participate in the grandeur of

²⁸⁹ James L. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, 20.

²⁹⁰ Ian Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, 40. See also James L. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, 72; Jack Kilcrease, "Creation's Praise," 319.

²⁹¹ Resseguie writes, "Revelation 4–5 forms a liturgical diptych that provides the interpretive key to understanding the Apocalypse." James L. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, 105.

²⁹² Beale comments, "Chs. 4–5 introduce and overshadow all the visions in 6:1–22:5, which flow out of this introductory vision and are to be seen as the historical consequences of divine sovereignty in its exercise of redemption and judgment. God and Christ are in ultimate control of all the woes of both believers and unbelievers." G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 172.

²⁹³ Josephine Massyngbaerde Ford, "The Christological Function of the Hymns in the Apocalypse of John," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 36, no. 2 (1998): 207, Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials PLUS.

worship in heaven, even as he or she resides in a tenuous position on earth. The worship of Revelation thus functions as the north star for the IR in navigating life on earth in anticipation of the end. By participating in the worship of heaven, rejecting the worship of Babylon, and embracing the Lamb who lies at the heart of heavenly worship, the IR participates in an activity that marks true conquerors in God's economy.

This chapter will explore the worship of Revelation with a particular interest in the function of the hymns.²⁹⁴ It will be argued that the hymns carry both literary and rhetorical significance in Revelation. Literarily, the hymns interpret the surrounding visions, and they even help advance the drama of Revelation to its inevitable conclusion. As Ford puts it, "the hymns carry the 'story line' of the Apocalypse, and through them the work gradually moves into a crescendo and reaches a climax which becomes the proclamation of the establishment of the Kingdom of God and the enthronement of the Lamb."²⁹⁵ Rhetorically, the hymns connect heaven with earth and thus draw the IR further into the drama, while urging the IR to echo the worship of heaven, while on earth. In doing so, one more path is opened for the IR to take in support of the larger goal of conquering.

²⁹⁴ Generally speaking, "worship" can be used with reference to the informal or private activity wherein an individual believer renders thanks and obeisance to God. In Revelation, however, "worship" seems to carry a more formal and corporate sense, which is further supported by the corporate address in Rev. 2–3. Therefore, when this chapter argues that the saints are invited to join the worship of heaven while on earth, the primary means in which they do so lies in the corporate worship setting. This, however, does not deny the more informal worship that the saints may pursue as an extension, or parallel to, corporate worship.

²⁹⁵ Josephine Massyngbaerde Ford, "The Christological Function of the Hymns in the Apocalypse of John," 208.

Overview of the Hymns

In general, at least eight hymnic units can be identified in Revelation: 4:9–11; 5:9–13; 7:10–13; 11:15–18; 12:10–12; 15:3–4; 16:5–7; 19:1–8.²⁹⁶ Of these units, each one, with the exception of 15:3–4, is antiphonal.²⁹⁷ For example, in Rev. 4, the four living creatures sing an adaptation of the trisagion (4:8), which is followed by the intonation of the twenty-four elders (4:11). Moreover, throughout the various hymnic pericopes those who worship sing (ᾄδω) (5:9; 15:3), shout (κράζω) (7:10), speak with loud voices (φωναὶ μεγάλαι) (11:15; see also 5:12; 7:10; 12:10; 19:1), and several times simply speak (λέγω) (4:8, 10; 5:13; 7:12).²⁹⁸ Their worship on two occasions is also accompanied by harps (κιθάρα) (5:8; 15:2). These descriptions underscore the liturgical character of the hymnic pericopes, which are, in turn, located at critical junctures, thus stressing again the liturgical character of Revelation as a whole.

²⁹⁶ Justin P. Jeffcoat Schedtler, “The Hymns in Revelation,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Book of Revelation*, ed. Craig R. Koester (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 116. This roughly parallels those units identified by David E. Aune, though Aune treats 19:1–8 in two parts (19:1–4 and 19:5–8), and curiously omits 12:10–12, even though he earlier identifies 12:10–12 as one of several “hymnlike compositions.” David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 315. Steven Grabiner, in addition to the units above, also identifies the following as passages that “are generally considered to contain hymnic elements”: 1:5b–6; 13:4; 14:3; 18:20. However, Grabiner does not expound upon those passages in any length within his monograph. Steven Grabiner, *Revelation’s Hymns*, 3n7.

²⁹⁷ Justin P. Jeffcoat Schedtler, “The Hymns in Revelation,” 116; David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 315. Robert S. Smith, following Paul Barnett, refers to this as the “two-beat rhythm of the songs.” But this rhythm, notes Smith, functions beyond the form of the songs (i.e., four living creatures sing first, followed by the twenty-four elders). It also applies to the words and to the theology of the hymns. Smith writes, “This relationship between the two ‘beats’ highlights the theological order of things: revelation comes first, response comes second.” Robert S. Smith, “Songs of the Seer: The Purpose of Revelation’s Hymns,” *Themelios* 43, no. 2 (August 2018): 200, Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials PLUS.

²⁹⁸ The reference to speaking (λέγω) is one piece of evidence called upon by David Seal in his argument that the hymns share commonalities with acclamations given to Roman dignitaries within the Roman Empire. Just as those acclamations were chanted and shouted, so too the hymns of Revelation, introduced by some form of λέγω, suggest one intentional parallel — and Seal draws several additional parallels too. David Seal, “Shouting in the Apocalypse: The Influence of First-Century Acclamations on the Praise Utterances in Revelation 4:8 and 11,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 51, no. 2 (June 2008): 345, Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials PLUS.

Setting and Characters

Each of the hymnic pericopes above is set within the heavenly sanctuary,²⁹⁹ and though Ford identifies 16:5–7 as a possible exception, this seems unlikely.³⁰⁰ The heavenly setting connotes orderliness,³⁰¹ which likewise extends to the worship within heaven, into which the IR is invited, and concurrently contrasts sharply with the worship in which the earth dwellers are engaged. For example, scenes of heavenly worship include the four living creatures (4:6–9; 5:6–14; 7:11–12; 19:4–5), the twenty-four elders (4:10–11; 5:8–10; 7:11–12; 11:16–18; 19:4–5), and a myriad of angels (5:11–12; cf. 7:11–12; 16:5–6) arranged concentrically around the throne.³⁰² Koester observes,

As a stone cast into a pool creates waves that move outward, the presence of God on the throne creates waves of praise that begin with the four creatures beside the throne, then surge outward to a circle of elders, to myriads of angels, and finally to every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth, so that all creation joins in giving praises to the Creator and the Lamb.³⁰³

²⁹⁹ Justin P. Jeffcoat Schedtler, “The Hymns in Revelation,” 117. Steven Grabiner likewise comments, “The heavenly temple provides the setting for most, if not all, of the hymnic portions.” Steven Grabiner, *Revelation’s Hymns*, 33. Though Grabiner leaves open the possibility of hymnic portions set outside of the heavenly sanctuary, he himself sets each of the hymns he explores throughout his monograph in heaven.

³⁰⁰ Ford argues that the two-part antiphonal hymn of 16:5–7 begins on earth (16:5–6), and is then intoned by the altar in heaven (16:7). As a whole, “It is an affirmation by heaven and earth that God’s judgment is just.” Josephine Massynbaerde Ford, “The Christological Function of the Hymns in the Apocalypse of John,” 225. While the judgments throughout Rev. 16 are poured out upon the earth, they are sourced, together with the angels holding the bowls, in heaven (15:8). Ford also notes the uniqueness of Revelation 18 as “the only hymn which is explicitly said to be sung on earth” (ibid.), and while Ford is correct about the setting of the Rev. 18, she also notes that its character is different than that of the other hymns in Revelation: “it forms a contrast to the former hymns in that it is a dirge rather than a song of praise” (Ibid). This “funeral dirge,” which is a different sort of hymn in form and function from the others, will be considered later in this chapter, in connection with Rev. 12.

³⁰¹ David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John’s Way*, 98.

³⁰² James L. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, 40.

³⁰³ Craig R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, 76. See Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1997), 137.

The orderliness of heavenly worship is further reinforced through the symbolic character of the four living creatures. Their description echoes Ezek. 1 and Isa. 6, and they function, in some sense, as a symbolic representation of the creation, and as agents of the creator.³⁰⁴ But their hybrid character is particularly noteworthy insofar as their description combines elements of heaven and earth, and are thus illustrative of “the created world in complete harmony with its creator.”³⁰⁵ On the other hand, the hybrid character of the beast (13:1–2), who is followed (13:3) and worshiped (13:4, 8) by the earth dwellers, “combines characteristics of the world below and this world, representing humanity in collusion with the forces of evil.”³⁰⁶ The hymns are thus sung in the context of rightly-ordered heavenly space, and by an assembly that contrasts sharply with the demonic and disorderly worshipping assembly of earth.

Contents

The contents of each hymn are undoubtedly theocentric insofar as they repurpose confessional language from the OT ascribed to God alone.³⁰⁷ Rev. 4:8, for example, echoes the trisagion Isa. 6:3, though John also refashions the trisagion to integrate it more seamlessly into the drama of Revelation and thus portend its consummate victory. While the trisagion of LXX Isa. 6:3 concludes, πλήρης πᾶσα ἡ γῆ τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ, Rev. 4:8 substitutes, ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος. This substitution by no means dilutes the

³⁰⁴ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 329–30.

³⁰⁵ James L. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, 41, 112.

³⁰⁶ James L. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, 112.

³⁰⁷ See Les Hardin, “A Theology of the Hymns in Revelation,” *Stone-Campbell Journal* 17, no. 2 (2014): 239–41, Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials PLUS.

theocentric character of the trisagion, but it does root that confession within the unfolding plot. As the IR is invited into the theocentric worship of heaven (see below) this particular hymn invites the IR, while remaining sober about the conflict on earth (and to the trinitarian parody; cf. 17:8, 11), to worship with confidence in how that conflict will conclude at the hands of ὁ ἐρχόμενος.³⁰⁸

Likewise, the theocentric qualities of the hymns are also reflected in how the hymns underscore God's unequaled sovereignty³⁰⁹ (even as the unholy trinity on earth challenges his authority), while the frequent prostration of heavenly attendants (4:10; 5:8, 14; 7:11; 11:16; 19:4) mirrors their confession.³¹⁰ Throughout the hymns God is frequently invoked as ὁ παντοκράτωρ (4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7; 19:6). Osborne notes that "this is one of John's favorite titles for God (used nine times in the book), referring to his sovereign power and control over his created universe."³¹¹ Confessions of God's sovereignty, however, do not function in a vacuum; they are professed within a wider narrative context of conflict. In the diptych of Rev. 4–5, Grabiner argues that "God's sovereignty is clearly in view, but it needs to be remembered that it is a sovereignty contested by the attempts of Satan to undermine God's authority. While there is no

³⁰⁸ Steven Grabiner, following Michael Harris and Jan Feekes, argues that the reason for this particular substitution lies in the fact that "Revelation's narrative world is in a state of rebellion. It is not now 'full of his glory, but rather in a state of depravity.'" Grabiner continues, "This world cannot be called 'full of God's glory' but must wait for the time when all that is unholy is removed." Steven Grabiner, *Revelation's Hymns*, 87.

³⁰⁹ Les Hardin, "A Theology of the Hymns in Revelation," 237.

³¹⁰ Justin P. Jeffcoat Schedtler comments, "The act of prostration signals the subordination of those who perform the act (Matt 2:11; cf. 4:9), as does the offering of crowns, which conjures up scenes of subjugated kings presenting their crowns to their conquerors (2 Sam 1:10; 12:30; 1 Chr. 20:2; Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.29)." Justin P. Jeffcoat Schedtler, "The Hymns in Revelation," 120.

³¹¹ Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, 237.

explicit mention of his rebellion in this passage, there are thematic hints that connect the hymns to the larger theme.”³¹² How John links these hymns to the undercurrent of conflict will be explored further below (see Literary Function).

Finally, one can hardly provide extended commentary on the theocentric qualities of the hymns before their Christocentric qualities surface as well. The diptych of Rev. 4–5 begins in Rev. 4 with two hymns offered in praise of God (4:8, 11), the next two in Rev. 5 are directed to the Lamb (5:9–10, 11), and the diptych concludes with a fifth hymn of praise directed to both τῷ καθημένῳ ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ καὶ τῷ ἀρνίῳ (5:13). Of all the hymnic units identified by Ford, she observes that the only hymns in which reference to the Lamb is absent occurs in Rev. 4 (before the Lamb is introduced), Rev. 16:5–7, and Rev. 18.³¹³ Moreover, through the unfolding of the Lamb’s redemptive work pronounced in the hymns, John presents the Lamb as the single fulfillment of several eschatological figures. This, together with the generally high Christology of the Lamb found throughout the hymns, allows John to weave together Christ’s humanity and divinity in proto-Nicene harmony. Ford writes, “John interweaves the humanity and divinity of Christ and shows both to be compatible with the claim of prophetic circles in the early Christian communities that Jesus is both human and divine.”³¹⁴ Indeed, the presentation of Christ in the hymns urges the IR to do what Pliny the Younger reports of Christians in his letter to

³¹² Steven Grabiner, *Revelation’s Hymns*, 70–1.

³¹³ Josephine Massyngbaerde Ford, “The Christological Function of the Hymns in the Apocalypse of John,” 212.

³¹⁴ Josephine Massyngbaerde Ford, “The Christological Function of the Hymns in the Apocalypse of John,” 229. Ford earlier argues that, through the hymns, John describes the Lamb in ways that signal his identity as the Davidic Messiah, a priestly Messiah, one like the Son of Man, a prophet like Moses, Elijah, Melchizedek, a teacher of righteousness, and the servant of the Lord. *Ibid.*, 212.

Trajan in the early second century CE, *viz.*, to sing “in alternate verses a hymn to Christ, as to a god.”³¹⁵

Excursus: The Source of Heavenly Liturgy

Later in this chapter, we will argue that, through several literary and rhetorical cues, John summons the IR to participate in the heavenly liturgy, though he or she at present resides on the earth. The observation that the heavenly liturgy in some way links with worship on earth has been made by several authors. Ford, for example, writes, “The earthly and heavenly worship are inextricably bound together.”³¹⁶ The question that follows, however, is whether John’s depiction of heavenly worship is sourced from known liturgies on earth, in the congregations to whom he writes, which are then projected heavenward, or whether the heavenly liturgy he depicts is the archetypal pattern he has seen in heaven, after which the worship in the seven churches and beyond should be patterned.

The former position, *viz.*, that heavenly liturgy in Revelation’s narrative world is sourced from something on earth, takes various forms. Otto Piper sources the heavenly liturgy in the churches on earth and opines, “the only reasonable explanation for the similarities that exist between Revelation and the early liturgies of the Christian Church seems to be the assumption that the description of the heavenly liturgy as given in

³¹⁵ Pliny, *Letters*, 10.96.

³¹⁶ Josephine Massyngbaerde Ford, “The Christological Function of the Hymns in the Apocalypse of John,” 208. To be precise, this quotation from Ford introduces a section in her article that discusses the heavenly liturgy in Qumran texts, but as her article continues, it is clear that this proclamation for her equally applies to Revelation.

Revelation was patterned after the actual liturgy of the Primitive Church.”³¹⁷ This view, however, has been treated with skepticism in recent years by several authors who find, in the hymns, such a careful integration with the unfolding plot of Revelation that the assumption John simply copied and pasted existing material into the narrative is highly suspect.³¹⁸ Rather, several authors find it more likely that John composed the heavenly liturgy himself,³¹⁹ influenced no doubt by the OT, and possibly by the worship of the Roman imperial court — language that John has weaved polemically into Revelation’s hymns.³²⁰ While some proposed resonances with Roman sources are stronger than others, Grabiner rightly cautions against making too much of these at the expense of the more obvious, and much more potent, OT allusions.³²¹

These literary and contemporary influences upon the hymns, together with their careful integration into the narrative of Revelation, appear to confirm John’s hand in crafting the hymns into the present form in which we find them. But rather than this serving as an impetus to shift the origins of the hymns from the liturgies of the early church to the creative mind of John, the rhetorical potency of the hymns lies in their depiction of the worship *in heaven*. Thus, this chapter takes the somewhat minority view

³¹⁷ Otto Piper, “The Apocalypse of John and the Liturgy of the Ancient Church,” *Church History* 20, no. 1 (March 1951): 18, Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials PLUS.

³¹⁸ E.g., David Seal, “Shouting in the Apocalypse: The Influence of First-Century Acclamations on the Praise Utterances in Revelation 4:8 and 11,” 339; Steven Grabiner, *Revelation’s Hymns*, 6; David E. Aune, “The Influence of Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial on the Apocalypse of John,” *Biblical Research* 28 (1983): 5–7, Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials PLUS.

³¹⁹ E.g., Robert S. Smith, “Songs of the Seer,” 195.

³²⁰ See David E. Aune, “The Influence of Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial on the Apocalypse of John,” 5–26; David Seal, “Shouting in the Apocalypse: The Influence of First-Century Acclamations on the Praise Utterances in Revelation 4:8 and 11,” 339–52.

³²¹ Steven Grabiner, *Revelation’s Hymns*, 11.

that John actually saw and heard what he records, and that the literary and contemporary allusions pregnant within the hymns can likely be explained by John's additional crafting after the fact. Beale captures this very view, writing,

It is possible that John only records what he has seen and heard, without adding any of his own interpretative or stylistic glosses. However, the unique correspondence of the language at different points to different Greek versions, the MT, and early Jewish traditions points to the probability that he depicts what he has seen with interpretative glosses from his learned biblical tradition.²⁰³ It is difficult to know how much is original to the vision and how much of the OT allusive material comes from John as a result of his attempt to understand better the vision.³²²

In summary, rather than earthly projections onto a heavenly canvas, the position of this chapter is that John records the worship he saw and heard, while remaining open to the possibility that interpretive glosses were added by his reflective hand subsequently. It is from this perspective that John invites the churches to join, in the present, the worship of heaven.³²³

The Literary–Rhetorical Function of The Hymns

In isolation, the hymns of Revelation invite the IR through the open door to gaze, with John, upon the heavenly assembly, while impressing upon the IR a proper understanding of God and a high Christology. But the hymns, as fascinating as they are in isolation, are not intended to function in isolation. Rather, within John's narrative world

³²² G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 368.

³²³ From another perspective, Ugo Vanni has argued that the entirety of Revelation — not *just* the hymns — entreats the participation of the hearer in the liturgical context of the early church. Vanni argues that the narrative frame of Revelation (1:4–8; 22:6–21) reflects a dialogue that is intended to be acted out by the lector and the hearers in the worship of the church. This dialogue is also reflected throughout the drama, thus bolstering the hearer's intended participation in the cosmic conflict of the book. Ugo Vanni, "Liturgical Dialogue as a Literary Form in the Book of Revelation," *New Testament Studies* 37, no. 3 (July 1991): 348–372, Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials PLUS.

they both interpret the unfolding drama, and function as a portal for the church on earth to join the assembly in heaven and celebrate, proleptically, the victory of the one who sits upon the throne and the Lamb.

The following section probes the literary and rhetorical function of the hymns that undergirds this thesis. We will first analyze the literary function of the hymns, and specifically the numerous literary links that John establishes to tie the hymns into the unfolding plot. Then, we will explore the rhetorical function of the hymns where John lifts the IR from earth, into heaven, to participate in the victory march captured *in nuce* in heavenly worship.

Literary Function

According to Steven Friesen, the throne of God in heaven — and specifically, the one who sits upon the throne — functions as the center of all space and time in Revelation. Spatially, the throne is presented as the ultimate center of reality, and temporally, *worship time* orients and subsumes all other “time” in Revelation.³²⁴ In contrast to these other “times” that one encounters, “worship time,” in Revelation’s unfolding plot, is “never ending and always moving” and is “unique because it spans heaven and earth.”³²⁵ The centrality of Friesen’s so-called “worship time” in the drama of Revelation is reinforced by several literary considerations that present heavenly worship as an important interpretive linchpin of the whole drama.

³²⁴ Steven Friesen explains that throughout Revelation there are five kinds of time the IR encounters: (1) Worship time, (2) vision time, (3) present time, (4) vindication time, and (5) new time. Steven J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John*, 157–61.

³²⁵ Steven J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John*, 158.

The Interpretive Function of the Hymns

Heavenly scenes of worship function, not merely as interludes or pauses within the unfolding drama, but as an important interpretive lens for the entirety of it.³²⁶ It appears to be something of a consensus in scholarship at this point that the hymns function to interpret the surrounding context(s) in which they are set.³²⁷ Justin P. Jeffcoat Schedtler captures this apparent consensus when he comments, “the hymns interact purposefully and dynamically in relation to the surrounding action, by explicitly framing the allusive vision sequences in precise theological and/or Christological terms.”³²⁸ If “upper heaven” functions as the stable, governing core in Revelation’s cosmology (see chapter 2), the worship that unfolds in heaven makes sense of, and resolves the chaos that unfolds on earth and spills over into the church. In what follows, we will probe two hymns that lie at the literary crux of Revelation (Rev. 11:15–18 and 12:10–12) and survey their robust interpretive function.

Revelation 11:15–18

In Rev. 11:15 the IR is transported from earth, which had served as the setting for both the previous six trumpets (8:6–9:21) and for the intercalation (10:1–11:14), to

³²⁶ Cf. Justin P. Jeffcoat Schedtler, “The Hymns in Revelation,” 119; Leonard L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 53.

³²⁷ E.g., Robert W. Smith, “Songs of the Seer,” 197; Jan A Du Rand, “‘Now the Salvation of Our God Has Come...’ A Narrative Perspective on the Hymns in Revelation 12–15,” *Neotestamentica* 27, no. 2 (1993): 314, Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials PLUS.

³²⁸ Justin P. Jeffcoat Schedtler, “The Hymns in Revelation,” 123.

heaven. It is from this renewed vantage point in heaven that the seven trumpets and three woes are completed,³²⁹ and in the antiphonal hymns that follow (i.e., 11:15, 17–18), the events of the trumpet cycle (including the intercalation), along with the cosmic conflict that will become more explicit in Rev. 12ff., are interpreted.

Throughout the first six trumpets, the IR witnessed the sweeping judgments of God poured out upon the earth, which were couched in imagery suggestive of the ten plagues in Egypt.³³⁰ And in the fifth trumpet/first woe, the locusts of the earth were ἐδόθη...ἐξουσία (9:3) as agents of divine judgment. Throughout the first six trumpets it is clear that the Lord is in control of the judgments, in part because they have their origins in heaven (8:2). But the hymn in 11:15–18 further clarifies that the divine judgment which just preceded the hymn is the necessary harbinger for the consummation of the kingdom. To be sure, the judgment in view in 11:18 is particularly the *final* judgment (rather than the intervening judgments of the first six trumpets),³³¹ but judgment is nevertheless interpreted by the hymn in connection with the consummation of the kingdom and the rewarding of the saints. Moreover, the allusion to Jer. 51:25 in 11:18 connects with the same allusion to Jer. 51:25 in 8:8,³³² thus stressing that judgment throughout the inter-advent period — assuming that as the temporal setting for the first six trumpets — foreshadows the consummate judgment, and ultimately portends the

³²⁹ That 11:15–19 does not merely anticipate the content of the seventh trumpet/third woe, but *is* the content of the seventh trumpet/third woe, see G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 609–10; see also Steven Grabiner, *Revelation's Hymns*, 131; *pace* James L. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, 167.

³³⁰ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 465–7.

³³¹ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 615.

³³² G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 616.

establishment of the kingdom announced in 11:15–19. Throughout the trumpet cycle God remains sovereign, but whereas he gives power (ἐδόθη...ἐξουσία) in 9:3, in 11:17 he takes power (εἴληφας τὴν δύναμιν) at the consummation of his kingdom.³³³

While the antiphonal hymn of 11:15–19 seems to interact purposefully with the first six trumpets (as suggested above), the same can also be said for its relationship with the scene in 11:1–14. In that passage, the nations (ἔθνος) rage (11:18; cf. 11:2, 8) against the two witnesses (i.e., the church), they exercise power (ἐξουσία) for a time (11:6), and though they are eventually killed, and their death is celebrated with glee, they are raised and invited to partake of heavenly life, following which judgment comes on the nations who raged against them. It is this consummate judgment against the nations that is specifically announced in 11:18, while the reward given τοῖς δούλοις σου τοῖς προφήταις καὶ τοῖς ἁγίοις καὶ τοῖς φοβουμένοις τὸ ὄνομά σου (11:18) looks back, in part, to the two witnesses who were explicitly credited with the function of “prophecy” in 11:3.

It might be expected, given the progression of the seven-trumpet cycle, that several literary links between 11:15–19 and what preceded it would surface. However, 11:15–19 also links in several important ways with what follows, thus foregrounding the interpretation of the proceeding conflict in Rev. 12ff. For example, Stephen Grabiner observes that “power” (δύναμις) (11:17) has already been ascribed to God and the Lamb earlier in Revelation (e.g., 4:11; 5:12; 7:12), it will later be ascribed to Christ (12:10) by virtue of his death and resurrection, but it is also ascribed to both the dragon and to the

³³³ While the object of the respective verbs differs between 9:3 (i.e., ἐξουσία) and 11:17 (i.e., δύναμις), there appears to be semantic overlap between them. Louw-Nida, for example, comments that ἐξουσία refers to “the power to do something, with or without an added implication of authority—‘power.’” L&N, s.v. “ἐξουσία.” Even if one posits a more nuanced distinction between ἐξουσία and δύναμις, both texts are still linked by divine sovereignty.

beast (13:2; 17:13).³³⁴ The point, of course, is not that these are equal partners in sharing δύναμις, but rather the parody of δύναμις by the dragon and the beast is already relativized by the acclamation of 11:17, while 12:10 reminds the IR of the paradoxical means of achieving that victory and that the power of the Lamb stands in stark contrast in quality and aim vis-à-vis the power of the dragon and beast.³³⁵ Thus, by the time IR is plunged deeper into the cosmic conflict beginning in Rev. 12:1, he or she is already assured of the outcome via the interpretive hymn of 11:15–19.³³⁶

*Revelation 12:10–12*³³⁷

The hymn of Rev. 12:10–12 is sandwiched between a war in heaven against Michael and the dragon (12:7–9), and the dragon’s subsequent pursuit of the woman on earth (12:13–17). The hymn itself, like all the hymns, is proclaimed from heaven (12:10), but its content interprets the surrounding event(s) in heaven and on earth. As elsewhere in Revelation when what John hears serves to interpret what he sees (e.g., 1:10–16; 5:5–6),

³³⁴ Steven Grabiner, *Revelation’s Hymns*, 138.

³³⁵ Grabiner observes that, in the case of the Lamb, “God’s power does not suddenly become like that of the dragon,” because his is seen “as an expression of divine justice and divine love.” Steven Grabiner, *Revelation’s Hymns*, 138.

³³⁶ Another creative way in which literary links are established with what proceeds may be found in a possible chiasmic arrangement of 11:1–14:5. Grabiner cites the research of Antonius King Wai Siew, who argues that 11:1–14:5 suggests a chiasmic arrangement, within which 11:15–19 (D in the chiasm) is opposed by 13:1–6 (D’ in the chiasm). While 11:15–19 emphasizes the kingdom of God and Christ and the ensuing worship in heaven, 13:1–6 emphasizes the kingdom of the beast and the ensuing worship on earth. While these connections, according to Grabiner, “relate the hymn [in 11:15–19] directly to the war in heaven theme” that is part and parcel of his entire monograph (Steven Grabiner, *Revelation’s Hymns*, 133), it presumably also functions as a way of foregrounding the victory of the Lord and of his Christ before the trinitarian parody ever *explicitly* enters the scene. See Steven Grabiner, *Revelation’s Hymns*, 131–3.

³³⁷ Adela Yarbro Collins offers extended reflection on Revelation 12 in her monograph, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation*, particularly since this chapter, argues Collins, “makes explicit for the first time that the combat myth is the conceptual framework which underlies the book as a whole.” Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation*, 231.

so too the introduction to the hymn (i.e., καὶ ἤκουσα) sets up the vision’s interpretation in the hymn itself.³³⁸

The hymn may be divided into three strophes (12:10, 11, 12)³³⁹ and opens in the first strophe with a celebration of the ἡ σωτηρία καὶ ἡ δύναμις καὶ ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν καὶ ἡ ἐξουσία τοῦ χριστοῦ αὐτοῦ, each of which ἄρτι ἐγένετο (12:10). While the coming of such a victory, and especially that of ἡ βασιλεία, may leave the impression that this hymn celebrates the same, climactic and consummative event celebrated in 11:15–18, this is not the case. The final strophe (12:12) emphasizes that though victory over the dragon has been achieved (12:10–11), the dragon perpetuates the conflict that once raged in heaven, but now upon the earth and sea. The victory achieved in heaven by Michael and his angels (12:7–9) is credited to Christ (12:10), who has achieved victory over the dragon through his death and resurrection, while those who follow Christ (i.e., the woman and the rest of her offspring) may likewise achieve victory by identifying with Christ in their testimony, and more specifically, in “their internalization of Christ’s death that leads them, if the situation demands it, to be willing to experience martyrdom.”³⁴⁰

³³⁸ Steven Grabiner, *Revelation’s Hymns*, 160; James L. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, 173; Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation*, 138.

³³⁹ See Jan A Du Rand, “‘Now the Salvation of Our God Has Come...’ A Narrative Perspective on the Hymns in Revelation 12–15,” 320.

³⁴⁰ Steven Grabiner, *Revelation’s Hymns*, 162. The war in heaven (12:7–9) and the subsequent fall of the dragon, is often interpreted *in toto* with the death and resurrection of Christ. Craig Koester, for example, comments that “Revelation 12 depicts a battle that takes place as a consequence of Christ’s resurrection and enthronement (12:5, 11).” Craig R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, 120–122. However, while victory over the dragon is clearly attributed to Christ’s victory, Steven Grabiner argues that the war in heaven is neither subsequent to, nor simultaneous with, the war on earth, but rather is a “prior war begun in heaven.” Steven Grabiner, *Revelation’s Hymns*, 156. Grabiner’s argument — which fits with the larger argument of his entire monograph — is that the war in heaven is chronologically prior to that which unfolds on the earth, which is signaled in part by the reference to Satan as ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος (12:9), a reference that draws in Gen. 3 and the origins of the conflict (*ibid.*, 156–7). Grabiner also sees, in the repeated use of the passive form of βάλλω to describe Satan’s fall, that “the dragon and his angels are in a free fall” (*ibid.*, 163), which began with Satan’s “fall from innocence” and has now issued in his “fall from

Satan's expulsion from heaven thus corresponds with Christ's subversive victory through sacrifice (i.e., an *inaugurated victory*),³⁴¹ which will also prove to be the roadmap for followers of Christ to chart in what follows in Rev. 13.³⁴²

As with the hymn in Rev. 11:15–18, Rev. 12:10–12 likewise links beyond its immediate context to provide commentary and interpretation on the wider drama too. The ominous warning at the end of 12:12 is that Satan would continue the battle upon the earth (γῆ) and the sea (θάλασσα), and in Rev. 12:13–13:18 we find the dragon marshal a beast from the sea (θάλασσα) in 13:1, and a beast from the earth (γῆ) in 13:11, in pursuit of his ambitions. However, though the events of 12:13–13:18 follow the script of 12:12, these ominous events are likewise tempered by the prior two strophes in 12:10–11. For one thing, ἐξουσία was already ascribed to Christ in 12:10, which means the ἐξουσία attributed to the first beast (13:2, 4, 5, 7) and the second (13:12) is only a parody, and a divinely given one at that (13:7).³⁴³ The IR was also reminded in the second strophe of the oft-repeated emphasis in Revelation that conquering (νικάω) comes through suffering

influence" (ibid., 164–5). See also Sigve K. Tonstad, *Saving God's Reputation*, 75–6. Whether or not one accepts Grabiner's more nuanced reading of the war in heaven, it is nevertheless clear that the hymn which follows is focused on Satan's expulsion from heaven, caused by the victory of Christ through suffering. Du Rand also observes that the defeat of Satan is connected to the saints' martyrdom, and Jesus' martyrdom is likewise linked to the saints' martyrdom. According to Du Rand, the saints thus have a role, insofar as they identify with Christ, in the final defeat of Satan. Jan A Du Rand, "Now the Salvation of Our God Has Come... 'A Narrative Perspective on the Hymns in Revelation 12–15,'" 323.

³⁴¹ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 650.

³⁴² Grabiner comments, "The main point of the child's exaltations to the throne is that Satan's attempts at subverting God's rule ultimately fail. The larger concerns of the narrative clearly indicate that Christ and his people conquer through the means of sacrifice. This is not simply a matter of effective military strategy; rather, it is outworking of the principles at play in the war in heaven." Steven Grabiner, *Revelation's Hymns*, 147. Du Rand comments, "Only those individuals who share in the Christ-event have reason to rejoice!" Jan A Du Rand, "Now the Salvation of Our God Has Come... 'A Narrative Perspective on the Hymns in Revelation 12–15,'" 324.

³⁴³ The passive ἐδόθη could refer to the authority given by the dragon (13:2), but in 13:7 it seems to function as a divine passive; cf. Steven Grabiner, *Revelation's Hymns*, 161.

and death (12:11). Thus, when the IR hears of the beast's conquering (νικάω) of the saints (13:7; 13:10, 15), the IR already understands the parodic fallaciousness inherent in this attribution.

In the final line of the third strophe (12:12) the IR also heard that the dragon knows his time is short. On the one hand, the length of time that Satan is permitted to rage upon earth and sea cannot be mapped onto a timeline that may provide clarity for the IR, but in Revelation's narrative world, the short time seems to correspond with the καιρὸν καὶ καιροὺς καὶ ἥμισυ καιροῦ (12:14), the μῆνας τεσσαράκοντα...δύο (13:5; 11:2), and the ἡμέρας χιλίας διακοσίας ἐξήκοντα (12:6), after which the reign of the dragon and his minions will inevitably draw to a close.³⁴⁴ Eventually, the short time of 12:12 indeed draws to a close with the victory of the 144,000 in 14:1–5 and in the subsequent judgment upon the trinitarian parody and their followers in 14:6–20.

Finally, the woe (οὐαί) pronounced upon earth and sea in 12:12 merits some literary reflection. On the one hand, it may be true that no specific group is identified as the object of the woe (e.g., τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς), but it seems that the earth dwellers are ultimately in view.³⁴⁵ To be sure, those who follow the Lamb in Rev. 13 are subject to the menacing onslaught of the trinitarian parody and its followers, but in Rev. 13:6 it appears that the saints on earth are identified not with earth, *but with heaven*.³⁴⁶ Moreover, the next (and last) set of οὐαί in Revelation comes in Babylon's funeral dirge

³⁴⁴ Grainer also comments on a possible link between the short time in 12:12 and the short time of 20:3. While both periods of time need not refer to the same period of time, "Both passages call for a more reflective activity on the part of the IR." Steven Grabiner, *Revelation's Hymns*, 171.

³⁴⁵ Pace Steven Grabiner, *Revelation's Hymns*, 170.

³⁴⁶ See G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 697.

in Rev. 18 where οὐαί is repeated six times, in three sets of twos (18:10, 16, 19). Rev. 18 not only anticipates the demise of the dragon and his realm, but the worship of earth contrasts sharply with the celebratory and anticipatory worship of heaven. James Resseguie explains,

This earthly worship service is a parody of the heavenly service of Rev. 4 and 5 in which the four creatures, elders, angels, and the whole creation join in praise for the one who sits on the throne and for the Lamb. The counterworship service for the counterfeit god — Babylon and her consort — reverses the service of celebration; it is a funeral dirge in which the celebrants mourn the loss of their ephemeral god.³⁴⁷

Through the specific literary link of οὐαί, and the general link between the worship of heaven verses the worship of earth, the worship of Rev. 12:10–12 anticipates the final demise of Satan upon the earth. He and his minions may appear to gain the upper hand in Rev. 13, but Rev. 12, while providing perspective on Rev. 13, looks beyond Rev. 13 to the end of Satan and his kingdom on earth. From both a heavenly and eschatological perspective those who follow Satan face inevitable defeat. David deSilva rightly remarks, “In John’s vision...the worshipers of idols are now the deviant minority,”³⁴⁸ and the heavenly hymns thus reinforce this perspective.

Eschatological Portents in the Hymns

We have seen above how the hymns interpret the events within their immediate vicinity, and also how they link beyond their immediate vicinity to connect with the larger undercurrent of cosmic conflict that runs through the drama of Revelation. Among these wider literary links, we have seen some of how the hymns connect with the

³⁴⁷ James L. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, 227.

³⁴⁸ David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John’s Way*, 99; David A. deSilva, “Heaven, New Heavens,” 441.

eschatological climax of Revelation, but in this subsection we will briefly probe a sampling of explicit links in the hymns that connect with the eschatological climax of the drama.

At the end of Rev. 5 John hears the universal acclaim of God and the Lamb from *πᾶν κτίσμα* (5:13). While Beale attributes the hymns of 5:9–10 and 5:12 to the “already,” 5:13 is attributed to the “not yet” consummation.³⁴⁹ Likewise, Steven Grabiner writes, “The hymn posits a time when rebellion and injustice will no longer exist and the war begun in heaven will be finished, or at the least, there will be a universal recognition of God and Christ's just authority.”³⁵⁰ Of course, it may be objected that the very stratification of creation (i.e., heaven, earth, under the earth, and sea) cannot *quite* reflect the consummation since, at that time, such boundaries are collapsed and the sea is no more (Rev. 21:1). But the stratification need not mean anything more than a reflection of “what creation was intended for,”³⁵¹ which will be further specified by the end of Revelation.

Within the intercalation of Rev. 7, John sees a great multitude (*ὄχλος πολὺς*) beginning in 7:9,³⁵² described in as “those who are coming out of the great tribulation”

³⁴⁹ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 365.

³⁵⁰ Steven Grabiner, *Revelation's Hymns*, 105.

³⁵¹ Ian Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, 102.

³⁵² David E. Aune argues that the depiction of a “great multitude” here, in Rev. 19:6–8, and in the all-encompassing group in 5:13, functions as a polemic response to so-called *consensus omnium*, or the “argument from universal agreement.” David E. Aune, “The Influence of Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial on the Apocalypse of John,” 18. According to Aune, widespread agreement of the governed, within Rome, was part of the justification used to cement the rule of an emperor. With this background in view, Aune writes, “Indeed, those who proclaim the eternal kingship of God and the Lamb are more numerous and more representative than those who are depicted as participating in the rituals of imperial *accessio* and *adventus*.” *Ibid.*, 20. Aune’s proposal is intriguing, and though he offers viable background music for the IR to hear against 5:13, his overall argument seems somewhat weakened by the fact that the

(οἱ ἐρχόμενοι ἐκ τῆς θλίψεως τῆς μεγάλης) (7:14) worshipping the Lord. While it is probable that this group is, at least in part, a representation of the saints in heaven during the so-called intermediate state,³⁵³ there are also literary links in the surrounding context that anticipate the end. The hymn itself simply proclaims σωτηρία (7:10), and in the intoned antiphonal response, attributes that belong to God at any period of time are ascribed to him. Thus, the hymn itself could apply to the inaugurated victory of Christ, the consummation of the kingdom, or both. But in the surrounding context, there are several literary links that connect the scene with the eschatological finale of the book. For example, Leonard Thompson observes,

Only in the heavenly scene of 7:13–17 and in the New Jerusalem are there references to 'washed stoles' (7:14, 22:14) and to God's dwelling with his people (7:15, 21:3). Only in those two places will people not thirst, for God will give them water from running springs (7:16, 21:6); only in those two will people worship (λατρεύω) God and the Lamb (7:15, 22:3). Finally, only in those two idyllic locations does God wipe away every tear from the eye (7:17, 21:4).³⁵⁴

Although the worship of 7:10–12 is set in heaven (see chapter 2), the narrative portrayal of heavenly worship here and elsewhere in Revelation contains “homologies” with the eschatological climax of the book such that, as Thompson puts it, “The interplay between the spatial transcendence of heavenly worship and the temporal transcendence of eschatological drama establishes one of the most fundamental relationships in the Book of Revelation.”³⁵⁵

waters upon which the prostitute sits in Rev. 17 are described, in part, in 17:15 as ὄχλοι. Depending on which part of Revelation is in focus, the so-called *consensus omnium* could lean either way.

³⁵³ Beale suggests that the so-called inter-advent period is broadly in view, but the particular emphasis lies in the saints enjoying their consummate eternal reward. Thus, the already and not-yet appears to be collapsed together in 7:9–17. See G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 443–45.

³⁵⁴ Leonard L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 68.

³⁵⁵ Leonard L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 69.

In the final hymn(s) of 19:1–8, numerous links with the eschatological conclusion to Revelation are present. In v. 3 the Hallelujah proclaimed in connection with the smoke (καπνός) of the great prostitute looks back to 18:9 and 18:18, where the earth lamented the same eschatological collapse of Babylon. Likewise, the persistence of her burning “forever and ever” (εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων) anticipates the torment of the trinitarian parody in 20:10 who are tormented εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων, and contrasts sharply with the destiny of the saints who, in 22:5, reign εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων. In 19:7 the marriage of the bride and the Lamb links forward to 21:2, 9,³⁵⁶ while the brightness (λαμπρός) and purity (καθαρός) of her linen anticipates the brightness (λαμπρός) of the water of life in 22:1 and the purity (καθαρός) of her construction material (21:18, 21). Indeed, literary links to the eschatological end are so profuse in 19:1–8 that Otto Piper’s observation is surely correct, *viz.*, “toward the end of the book it is hardly possible to dissociate the acts of worship from the visions of the future.”³⁵⁷

Literary Function: Conclusion

The purpose of the preceding survey was by no means to account for every possible literary link between the hymns and the narrative drama of Revelation, but rather sought to establish that the hymns cannot be divorced from the events of the main vision section. The hymns are thoroughly integrated into the drama, and the heavenly perspective they offer via worship functions to provide perspective for the IR. The hymns moderate the unfolding conflict, they interpret the conflict, and they anticipate the

³⁵⁶ Though 19:7 describes the wife of the Lamb as his γυνή, this is only used one other time in the description of the new Jerusalem, *viz.*, in 21:9. She is also described as the νόμψη in 21:2, 9, and 22:17.

³⁵⁷ Otto A. Piper, “The Apocalypse of John and the Liturgy of the Ancient Church,” 10.

conclusion to the conflict. Thus, heavenly worship provides the great clarifying perspective for everything that unfolds throughout the drama. In the final section, we will see how John draws the IR into heavenly worship, not merely as spectators, but as participants, thus summoning the IR to participate proleptically in the inevitable victory and so become, through worship, *conquerors*.

Rhetorical Function

In chapter 3, we explored how John draws the seven churches, and by extension the IR, into the unfolding drama of the main vision section through the intentional crafting of numerous literary trajectories. These trajectories invite to IR to see their present and future through a cosmic lens. Through the hymns, John likewise draws the IR into the drama, but now he offers a robust vision to navigate, in the present, life on earth in anticipation of the inevitable future promised to conquer. That this is one of the central rhetorical functions of the hymns has been widely observed.³⁵⁸ Gottfried Schimanowski, for example, writes the following vis-à-vis the hymns of Rev. 4–5:

The participation of the earthly community in the heavenly liturgy is not mentioned *expressis verbis* in the text, but there are indications that Revelation 4–5 is meant to be understood in this way. Not only is there an atmosphere of worship right from the beginning of the book, but there is also a clear connection between John and the seven congregations of Asia Minor, as well as a promise to transform the believers into a kingdom and into priests (5:10) through the redemptive work of Christ. In addition, the five hymns are suitable for recitation in a liturgical setting. All this suggests that the liturgy of the throne scene serves to re-create the experience of a ritual of worship common to heaven and earth.³⁵⁹

³⁵⁸ E.g., N. T. Wright comments, "The vision of chapter 4 and 5, in other words, is designed to set the context within which the little communities will take heart and, sharing in the worship already on earth, have courage to hold on, to resist those who speak from other throne rooms, and so to become victorious and to share at last in the New Jerusalem." N. T. Wright, "Revelation and Christian Hope," 112.

³⁵⁹ Gottfried Schimanowski, "Connecting Heaven and Earth': The Function of the Hymns in Revelation 4–5," in *Heavenly Realms and Earthly Realities in Late Antique Religions*, ed. Ra'anan S. Boustán and

The porous boundary between heaven and earth (see chapter 2) has suggested that those who follow the Lamb might participate in heavenly life, while on earth, in the present, and this is confirmed through several rhetorical cues in Revelation that invite the IR to join the worship of heaven, just like the conquerors in Rev. 15:2–4.

Uniting the Church with the Worship of Heaven

The presence of the twenty-four elders in various worship scenes (4:10–11; 5:8–10; 7:11–12; 11:16–18; 19:4–5) has already been noted above. They consistently appear as part of the heavenly entourage who worship in heaven around the throne. But an examination of their identity suggests that while they may, in some sense, be celestial creatures ontologically, their symbolic import goes well beyond that identity. Their identification as *elders* (πρεσβύτεροι) suggests their representative role vis-à-vis the people of God, and the number twenty-four further supports their representative identity.³⁶⁰ Beale is probably correct, then, when he opines, “Probably the elders are angels who are identified with the twelve tribes and the twelve apostles, thus representing

Annette Yoshiko Reed (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 82. Similarly, Craig R. Koester writes, “The praises offered in heaven establish the focus for worship on earth. As readers join in worshipping God and the Lamb, their community below is connected to the one above.” Craig R. Koester, *Revelation*, 129. cf. Robert S. Smith, “Songs of the Seer,” 196. G. K. Beale likewise comments, “As in chs. 1–3, the church is pictured in angelic guise to remind its members that already a dimension of their existence is heavenly, that their real home is not with the unbelieving “earth-dwellers,” and that they have heavenly help and protection in their struggle to obtain their reward and not be conformed to their pagan environment. One of the purposes of the church meeting on earth in its weekly gatherings (as in 1:3, 9) is to be reminded of its heavenly existence and identity by modeling its worship and liturgy on the angels’ and the heavenly church’s worship of the exalted lamb, as vividly portrayed in chs. 4–5. This is why scenes of heavenly liturgy are woven throughout the Apocalypse (see further on 1:20).” G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 323.

³⁶⁰ Koester observes that in several passages (e.g., Rev. 12:1; 21:12–14) “Revelation variously uses twelve and multiples of twelve for the whole people of God.” Craig R. Koester, *Revelation*, 368; Leonard Thompson similarly comments, “In the Book of Revelations these elders are, of course, transformed into Christians, and their royal and priestly combinations reflects that of the Christian community (see Rev. 5:10).” Leonard Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 70.

the entire community of the redeemed of both testaments (the songs in 15:3–4 may also point to the inclusion of OT and NT saints).”³⁶¹ Assuming the representative role of the twenty-four elders,³⁶² even though they are distinct from the saints (see Rev. 7:9–17), the saints are reminded of their rightful place in the throne room through their representative twenty-four heavenly attendants.

The invitation for the IR to participate with the worshipping community in heaven is further evident in Rev. 5:13 when the ever-widening circle around the throne expands to encompass all creatures. While, as argued above, 5:13 seems primarily to refer to a time in the future, rather than a time in the present, it also functions to draw the IR into the heavenly worship at present so that they might participate in the worship of that eschatological future,³⁶³ where “The communities in heaven and on earth are united in antiphonal liturgy.”³⁶⁴ While the invitation is implicit in 5:13, it becomes more explicit in 19:5 where those who identify as the Lord’s δοῦλοι are invited to praise God, an identity which connects the worshipping community of heaven with that of earth by way of John (1:1) and the IR (2:20; 22:6).³⁶⁵

³⁶¹ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 322.

³⁶² Pace David E. Aune, “The Influence of Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial on the Apocalypse of John,” 10.

³⁶³ Gottfried Schimanowski, “‘Connecting Heaven and Earth’: The Function of the Hymns in Revelation 4–5,” 82.

³⁶⁴ Gottfried Schimanowski, “‘Connecting Heaven and Earth’: The Function of the Hymns in Revelation 4–5,” 78; See also Josephine Massyngbaerde Ford, “The Christological Function of the Hymns in the Apocalypse of John,” 219–20.

³⁶⁵ See Robert S. Smith, “Songs of the Seer,” 196n19.

The Prayers of the Saints

In Rev. 5:8 the four living creatures and twenty-four elders each hold φιάλας χρυσᾶς γεμούσας θυμιαμάτων, which are identified as the αἱ προσευχαὶ τῶν ἁγίων. Neither these instruments, nor the prayers with which they are identified, receive any further comment in Rev. 5. However, their presence in the throne room of God, within a liturgical setting, suggests a connection between the worship of earth and the worship of heaven. Moreover, Schimanowski even sees in the new song sung in 5:9–11 an equivalence to the prayers that rise from earth. Schimanowski writes, “The interpretation of the song as ‘prayers’ indicates once more the close relationship with the heavenly cult, but also with the worship of earthly believers.”³⁶⁶

Whether or not the new song of 5:9–11 should be as closely connected with the prayers as Schimanowski suggests, the next appearance of the prayers in Revelation more explicitly connects the worship of heaven and earth. In 8:3 the ταῖς προσευχαῖς τῶν ἁγίων πάντων are offered on a golden (χρυσοῦς) altar from a golden (χρυσοῦς) censer.³⁶⁷ The prayers rise before God, before they are eventually hurled back upon the earth (8:5). While the act in 8:3–5 specifically answers the prayer of the martyrs in 6:9,³⁶⁸ it also

³⁶⁶ Gottfried Schimanowski, “‘Connecting Heaven and Earth’: The Function of the Hymns in Revelation 4–5,” 76. Leonard Thompson seems to draw a similar connection, and explicitly cites both the prayers of the saints and the new song sung in 5:9–10 as examples of how “Earth...enters into heaven worship...” Leonard Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 70.

³⁶⁷ Stephen Pattemore, for example, notes that the altar functions “as the point of contact between earth and heaven. Sacrifices and incense offered on earthly altars have effect in heaven and draw a response from heaven.” Stephen Pattemore, *The People of God in the Apocalypse*, 81.

³⁶⁸ David deSilva, *Seeing Things John’s Way*, 289; Craig R. Koester, *Revelation*, 435.

includes the prayers of all the saints,³⁶⁹ so that whether in heaven (6:9–10) or on earth the prayers of the saints are heard in heaven.

Christ as the Connection between Heaven and Earth

The significance of Christ at the center of heavenly worship discloses, not only a high Christology (see above), but also the means by which worshippers on earth enjoy access to that worship. Jan A Du Rand observes that the heavenly participants in worship (e.g., the multitude of 7:9, the 144,000) are linked, by their descriptions, to the “Christ-event.”³⁷⁰ “The martyrs who join in the worship of heaven are selected as the followers of the Lamb who share in his work and witness his conquest. Even the followers’ identity as worshippers is defined by the Christ-event, the victory of the Lamb.”³⁷¹ The heavenly assembly worships the Lamb, they are constituted by the Lamb, and they — together with the Lamb and the one who sits upon the throne — are placed “at the center of the universe.”³⁷² This thoroughly Christocentric view of heavenly worship suggests to the IR that, depending upon how they respond to the “Christ-event,”³⁷³ they might join now, in some inaugurated way, with the “egalitarian *communitas* around the center”³⁷⁴ who have

³⁶⁹ Ian Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, 133–134; James L. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, 143.

³⁷⁰ Jan A Du Rand, “‘Now the Salvation of Our God Has Come...’ A Narrative Perspective on the Hymns in Revelation 12–15,” 314.

³⁷¹ Jan A Du Rand, “‘Now the Salvation of Our God Has Come...’ A Narrative Perspective on the Hymns in Revelation 12–15,” 314.

³⁷² Leonard L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 70.

³⁷³ See also chapter 3 for more on how John connects the seven churches with Christ, and in turn, how John invites the IR to consider his or her identity in relation to Christ.

³⁷⁴ Leonard L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 71.

already gone before them. That Christ constitutes the identity of the heavenly worshipers suggests that if Christ constitutes their identity now, they might join now in the worship of heaven. There is a sense, in the words of Hebrews 10:22, that the church militant has, through Christ, arrived at mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem that will soon descend to fill the earth, and are linked to the celestial community of heaven.

Rhetorical Function: Conclusion

The preceding survey offered several clues in the plot of Revelation that draw the IR into the sweeping and interconnected heavenly hymns that interpret the present crisis faced by the IR. In various ways the IR is invited to join in the worship of heaven, but perhaps the most explicit invitation has yet to be mentioned. In the last major hymn of Revelation, 19:1–8, the reader hears the voice of a great multitude exclaim, *χαίρωμεν καὶ ἀγαλλιῶμεν καὶ δόσωμεν τὴν δόξαν αὐτῷ* (19:7). Ford comments, “For the first time we hear the first person plural imperative ‘Let us rejoice.’ It is an arresting invitation for the lectors and audience of the Apocalypse to join the heavenly liturgy.”³⁷⁵ While grammatically, the three verbs in 19:7 are *subjunctive* (not imperatives), they do function as hortatory subjunctives,³⁷⁶ and as such, Ford’s point vis-à-vis the stunning uniqueness

³⁷⁵ Josephine Massynbaerde Ford, “The Christological Function of the Hymns in the Apocalypse of John,” 228. Ugo Vanni observes a liturgical dialogue throughout 19:1–8, and though he opines that “This mutual exchange of dialogue is recited by the lector” (Ugo Vanni, “Liturgical Dialogue as a Literary Form in the Book of Revelation,” 370) in the context of its oral performance in the early church, he also argues that there is an implicit invitation for the hearer to participate in the repeated acclaims of *ἀλληλουϊά*. Vanni writes, “it would seem probable that in accepting the invitation, which is presented by the lector but which comes from the highest level of transcendence, the group would take it up and associate itself effectively with the joint celebration. Ibid.

³⁷⁶ David L. Matthewson, *Revelation*, 260. In several other texts, the so-called prohibitive subjunctive appears to be used (7:3; 10:4; 11:2; 22:10), though only in 22:10 is this directed toward the IR.

of 19:7 remains valid. By the time the drama draws to a close, the IR is implicitly invited into the worship of heaven.

Conclusion

The worship of heaven offers the IR a vision of cosmic stability amidst their present instabilities, a vision of true power amidst the façade of power projected by the trinitarian parody (a power that is relative, at least in view of who sits upon the throne), and a vision of a joyous future that eclipses the sorrowful funeral lament that inevitably will be voiced by the earth dwellers. But just as John drew his readers into the cosmic conflict through the literary trajectories sketched earlier in chapter 3, through the hymns of heaven John likewise draws his readers into the victorious worship of heaven. It is from this perspective that they are invited, through their participation in the worship of heaven (even as they sojourn physically upon the earth), to join with the heavenly assembly in joyful acknowledgment of the present reign of Christ and in anticipation of the consummate future.

Conclusion

Summary of Results

This study has attempted, through a literary-rhetorical approach, to connect the cosmology of Revelation (setting) with the cosmic conflict of Revelation (plot), and then map the seven congregations, and by extension the IR, onto that conflicted cosmic space. Through these aims, this study has sought to demonstrate the following:

1. Revelation invites the IR to see the world in which they reside as a cosmic temple in need of cleansing. Through the apocalyptic form of the book, the IR is thus invited to see the world differently, while competing narratives about the nature of the world, the source of its power, and its ultimate goals, (à la Rome) are likewise challenged.
2. The IR is assured that, through the Lamb, they rightly have access to the heart of this temple (i.e., the holy of holies), and though they face potent threats at present, they are assured that the one who sits upon the throne, and the Lamb, will, in the end, cement what has already been accomplished.
3. In the present, worship is presented as an important component of conquering in God's economy. As the IR maintains distance from the path of the earth dwellers, and joins the worship of heaven while on earth, the IR proleptically demonstrates an important aspect of conquering in God's economy.

It is the hope of this student that this study has offered a fresh reading of these important themes in Revelation. Additionally, by mapping worship on his cosmic topography, John has emphasized the significance of true worship for modern worshippers who likewise navigate a world where Christ's victory has been inaugurated,

but not yet consummated. The clarion call to true worship is now, just as it was in John's day, an important call for modern believers to hear and heed.

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