

## **Christological Concepts in the Book of Revelation—Part 3: The Lamb Christology**

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Although Jesus as the Lamb was already presented in the second article of this series, we must return to this subject and expand on it, to further study the nature of the Lamb, the activities of the Lamb, and the people of the Lamb. In doing so we need to keep in mind that the Lamb is divine<sup>1</sup> as discussed in the second section of the second article in the series. In this final part, we will try to use only those data which directly relate to the Lamb and largely avoid information that can be derived from other descriptions and titles of Jesus in Revelation. It is true that in one way or another the other designations of Jesus are indirectly connected to the Lamb, since they also point to Jesus. However, they will not be our focus. Therefore, the passages dealing with the nature, the ministry, and the people of the Lamb do not reflect a complete Christology of Revelation, but provide a Lamb Christology of the book.

### **1. The Nature and Character of the Lamb**

No title and image referring to Jesus is used as frequently as is the symbol of the Lamb. In Revelation Jesus is first of all the Lamb. By employing this symbol so often John may have wanted to communicate an important message.

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<sup>1</sup> E.g., it is worshiped (Rev 5:8-14) and together with God the Father it is the temple and the source of light for the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:22, 23).

**a. The Lamb as Sacrificial Animal**

The context of Revelation with its strong emphasis on the sanctuary classifies the Lamb (*to arnion*) as a sacrificial animal.<sup>2</sup> In his Gospel John calls Jesus the “Lamb (*ho amnos*) of God, who takes away the sins of the world” (John 1:29). Paul understood Jesus to be the Passover Lamb (*to pascha*; 1Cor 5:7).<sup>3</sup> The OT background for the lamb in Revelation could be Isa 53:7 (*to probaton*, LXX).<sup>4</sup> There, as in Rev 5, lamb terminology is connected to the word family “to slaughter.” It is true that different Greek terms are used to describe such a lamb. Yet in spite of the different terms for lamb, the concept remains the same.

Johns has discussed the possible background of the lamb in Revelation. He looked at the sacrificial lamb, the Paschal Lamb, the suffering servant of Isa 53 compared to a lamb, Daniel’s ram and goat in Dan 8, the sacrifice of Isaac in Gen 22, called the Aqedah, the lambs of Micah 5:6, the lambs of eschatological peace in Isa 11:6 and Isa 65:25, and the vulnerable lamb (*arnion*) of the LXX.<sup>5</sup> He denies that the idea of sacrifice or substitution is associated or at least is dominant with *arnion* in Revelation. He seems to suggest that none of the OT backgrounds fits perfectly with the lamb in the

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Sophie Laws, *In the Light of the Lamb: Imagery, Parody, and Theology in the Apocalypse of John*, Good News Studies 31 (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1988), 29; Ulrich B. Müller, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, Ökumenischer Taschenbuch-Kommentar zum Neuen Testament 19 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1984), 158. Ben Witherington III, *Revelation*, The New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 120-121, states: “The term chosen, coupled with the emphasis on this being the *slain* lamb, favors the translation lamb rather than ram. But this lamb had horns, and so we have a fusion of sacrificial lamb and ram features, conveying a deliberate paradox. The lamb is vulnerable and is slain, but the lamb is strong like a ram as well.” Steve Moyise, *The Old Testament in the New: An Introduction*. The Continuum Biblical Studies Series (London: Continuum, 2001), 125, notes: “The Lamb is probably the Passover Lamb or perhaps the Lamb of Isa 53.10 (or both) and represents gentleness and self-sacrifice.”

<sup>3</sup> So does G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, *The New Century Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 127.

<sup>4</sup> Nestle-Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27<sup>th</sup> edition (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1995), 641, mentions Isa 53:7 in the margin of Rev 5:6. See also, Mark Bredin, *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace: A Nonviolent Christology of the Book of Revelation* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2003), 181; Laws, 30.

<sup>5</sup> Loren L. Johns, *The Lamb Christology of the Apocalypse of John; An Investigation into Its Origins and Rhetorical Force*. Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe 167 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 127-149.

*JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY*

Apocalypse and that the lamb of Revelation is not a vulnerable lamb but “one who wages war with the sword of his mouth . . . Rather than playing the helpless victim, the Lamb of the Apocalypse is a conquering, *victorious* lamb.”<sup>6</sup> Therefore, Revelation would be a call to non-violent resistance more than a document stressing substitutionary atonement.<sup>7</sup>

However, the concepts of purchasing humans through the Lamb’s blood (Rev 5:9; cf. 14:3,4), the freeing of humans from their sins through Jesus’ blood (Rev 1:5), the washing of believers’ robes and the process of making them white in the blood of the Lamb (Rev 7:14, cf. 22:14) point to the idea of a sacrifice on Jesus’ part. The term “to slaughter” is not just a military term but is also used in connection with sacrifice.<sup>8</sup> Hoffmann talks about Jesus as the Passover Lamb and “the salvific Passover Lamb.”<sup>9</sup> So it is difficult to exclude the concept of sacrifice from the slain Lamb, and it should not be done either. Bredin argues against the thesis that *sphazō* relates exclusively to murder and killing and *thuō* is used in a sacrificial context only:

The Greek word John used for ‘slain’ (σφαζω) can mean both ‘to murder’ and ‘to sacrifice’, but, on the whole, sacrificial slaying is conveyed (Gen. 22:10; Ex. 12:6; Ezr. 6:20; Lev. 1:5, 11; 4:24; 9:8; Num. 19:3). Also, θύω need not indicate a sacrificial death (Jn 10:10; Acts 10:13; 11:7). It is difficult to understand Revelation 7:14 other than as sacrifice. Those who have been saved wash their robes in the blood of the Lamb. . . It is not

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<sup>6</sup> Johns, 149.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Johns, 130 and 202-205. On page 161, he states: “While it is certainly true that the slaughter of the lamb is central to the rhetorical force of the image, it is not true that expiation is. In fact, the logic and language of slaughter as expiatory sacrifice are quite rare in the Apocalypse, while the logic and language of slaughter as political resistance and martyrdom are common. Because ‘sacrificial’ language is imprecise and often implies a sacrificial force, such language should be avoided with reference to the Apocalypse.”

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Ekkehardt Müller, *Der Erste und der Letzte: Studien zum Buch der Offenbarung*, Series: Adventistica Forschungen zur Geschichte und Theologie der Siebenten-Tags-Adventisten, Volume 11 (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2011), 152.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Matthias Reinhard Hoffmann, *The Destroyer and the Lamb: The Relationship between Angelomorphic and Lamb Christology in the Book of Revelation*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe 203 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 249, 250.

*MUELLER: CHRISTOLOGICAL CONCEPTS IN REVELATION*

necessary to say that if the Lamb is a martyred figure, then it cannot be a sacrifice. . . .<sup>10</sup>

This information helps us to describe the nature and character of the Lamb. Since Jesus is compared to a lamb, his unparalleled dedication and self-sacrifice are alluded to. The Lamb is vulnerable.<sup>11</sup> Even the risen Lamb looks as if slaughtered (Rev 5:6). One of the possible OT backgrounds, Isa 53, describes the humility of the servant of God, his suffering and substitutionary death for humanity, his non-violence and gentleness. The servant of God does not defend himself. No evil is found in him. In him truth resides. He is righteous and yet lives for others and is willing to bear their sin and guilt. However, the Lamb is not a symbol of weakness. It is a symbol of strength in suffering.<sup>12</sup> In spite of its vulnerability it is victorious. This is also expressed with the title Lion.

**b. Lion and Lamb**

According to Rev 5:5 the Lion from the tribe of Judah, the root of David,<sup>13</sup> has won the victory and is able to open the scroll sealed with seven seals. The Lion is a symbol for Jesus. The OT background may be Gen 49:9.<sup>14</sup> Jesus as Lion is the victorious king. He carries out his plan and brings human history to his intended goal. However, power and might, assertiveness and sovereignty are only half of the picture. What John has heard in Rev 5:5 is the explanation of the elder who affirms that the Lion is able to break the seals and open the book. However, as soon as John takes a look—Rev 5:6—he does not see a lion but a lamb. Interestingly and surprisingly, even shockingly, the mirror image of the lion is a lamb. Jesus

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<sup>10</sup> Bredin, 182-183. On page 183 he also states that “It is difficult to find evidence of a Lamb as a military leader.” See also 185.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Barbara Rossing, “Apocalyptic Violence and Politics: End-Times Fiction for Jews and Christians,” *Reflections* 92/1 (2005): 19.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Donald Guthrie, “The Lamb in the Structure of the Book of Revelation,” *Vox Evangelica* 12 (1981), 65.

<sup>13</sup> See Johns, 167-168.

<sup>14</sup> Johns, 164-168, takes a look at the various backgrounds of this important symbol. On page 167, he concludes: “The author thus chose the lion to represent the powerful aggressive force inherent in one vision of Israel’s role in the eschaton and the lamb to represent the vulnerability inherent in another vision of the eschaton.”

*JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY*

as a lion is a lamb; he is not a lion in lamb's clothes as Bredin points out.<sup>15</sup> Because Jesus occurs as a lion just once in Revelation but so frequently as the Lamb, undoubtedly, the image of the lamb is the predominant one. Johns suggests that the reversal from the Lion to the slaughtered Lamb of Rev 5:6 "lies at the theological heart of the Apocalypse. It is specifically designed to communicate the shock, irony, and ethical import of his message that *the Conquering one conquers by being a slain lamb*, not a devouring lion."<sup>16</sup> The lion-lamb imagery communicates some important concepts:

(1) *Non-Violent Victory (Rev 5:5-6)*. Oftentimes the Lamb reminds us of defenseless suffering. The change in perspective from Lion to Lamb indicates that Jesus' life and ministry did not end in defeat. Throughout the Apocalypse the victory of Jesus is affirmed. Jesus was victorious, however, not by the use of physical power and violence but through his substitutionary death.<sup>17</sup> His victory was a lamblike victory. Although the Gospel of John describes Jesus' death with different vocabulary, it arrives at a similar conclusion: Jesus' death is not his defeat and shame but his being lifted up and his glorification. What looks like absolute defeat from a human perspective was in reality the greatest victory of all times.<sup>18</sup> And in spite of the plan to kill him, Jesus remained in charge. Jesus did not only suffer his death passively. In the end, it was he himself who gave up his life and took hold of his resurrection. Rossing points out that in the Book of Revelation Jesus as well as the evil powers claim the victory. Therefore, the book contrasts different

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<sup>15</sup> Bredin, 30.

<sup>16</sup> Johns, 159. He also stresses that "the lamb has triumphed in his death and resurrection, not that the lamb *will triumph in the future, subsequent to his death and resurrection*" (161).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Rossing, 16-22; Witherington, 120. Lee Griffith, *The War on Terrorism and the Terror of God* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 23, asks the question whether victory is won by those using violence or those suffering violence. "On the face of it, the question seems absurd. The answer of the Roman Empire (and of many before and since) was clear: Victoria and Pax require Mars. But through a remarkable period of Jewish and early Christian history, the response of some was quite different: Victory is won and violence is transformed, not by those who inflict it, but by those who suffer it. Such was the witness of the faithful woman of 4 Maccabees. And such was also part of the witness of another Jew, Jesus of Nazareth."

<sup>18</sup> See, e.g., John 7:39; 12:16,23.

MUELLER: CHRISTOLOGICAL CONCEPTS IN REVELATION

models of how to gain the victory: the model of violence versus the non-violent model. This is crucial for the theology and ethics of the Apocalypse. John confronts the doctrine of victory through violence with the counter-theology of the victory over evil through suffering love, and he hopes to be able to convince his audience to believe that the model of the Lamb is more powerful than a physical or military victory.<sup>19</sup>

(2) *Absolute Power (Rev 5:6)*. The seven horns which the Lamb has are signs of his absolute power and authority.<sup>20</sup> In Revelation horns are found on various animals. However, apart from those of the Lamb, they are not seven but either ten, as with the dragon, the sea beast, and the scarlet beast of Rev 17, four as with the golden altar (Rev 9:13), or two as with the beast from the earth in Rev 13. While the ten horns are explained as ten kings (Rev 17:12), such a connection is not made with the other numbers. In Lam 2:3 and Ps 132:17 the horn is compared to strength or power. Therefore, the horn, understood symbolically according to its context, signifies political power or power in the general sense of the word.<sup>21</sup> In Rev 5:6 power in the general sense is the preferred understanding. Jesus uses his power for the sake of humanity and especially for the sake of those who belong to him. Even in suffering and dying Jesus was powerful and remained in charge of the situation. Bredin talks about the horns of the Lamb as the power of salvation.<sup>22</sup>

(3) *Omniscience (Rev 5:6)*. The Lamb does not only possess seven horns but also has seven eyes.<sup>23</sup> In addition to his absolute power the

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<sup>19</sup> Rossing, 18, 20. Johns, 168, notes: "At the heart of this switch is the author's conviction that Jesus' death and resurrection represents not only the key to the redemption of God's people, but also the key to God's victory over evil within history."

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Leon Morris, *Revelation*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, revised edition (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 95; U. B. Müller, 156. Nichol, 7:772, suggests that the seven horns of the Lamb represent its perfect power. Kowalski, 58, talks about "nonviolent resistance and almighty power."

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Siegfried H. Horn, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary* (Washington: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2002), 509.

<sup>22</sup> Bredin, 184.

<sup>23</sup> The four living beings or cherubim of Rev 4:5-6 are full of eyes. The image's background is Eze 1:5 and the wheels full of eyes connected to the four living beings (Eze 1:8).

*JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY*

Lamb is omniscient and has complete wisdom and intelligence. Nothing escapes him.<sup>24</sup> He sees the thoughts and intentions as well as the activity of the seven churches and tests hearts and minds. At the same time the seven eyes represent the seven spirits of God, namely the Holy Spirit.<sup>25</sup> Jesus is not only a man of the Spirit, he is also active in all lands through the Spirit. The sending out of the Holy Spirit was predicted by Jesus in his farewell speeches. According to John 16:7-8 Jesus has sent out the Holy Spirit as his representative after his ascension. It is the Spirit who “will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.” Jesus and the Holy Spirit are concerned with the salvation of humanity. Power and omniscience would not be enough, were they not found in the context of Jesus’ absolute self-sacrifice.

(4) *Worthy of Worship* (Rev 5:8-13; 7:10). The Apocalypse stresses the worthiness of Jesus which allows him to open the seals (Rev 5:9). Jesus is also worthy of a sevenfold praise (Rev 5:12). Because of his wonderful character and especially because of achieving the salvation of humanity from sin and death Jesus is worthy of being worshiped.<sup>26</sup>

Power and weakness are connected with the image of the Lion-Lamb. Jesus’ death, which made him look helpless in the eyes of many, has changed the history of humanity fundamentally. With Jesus a new era has come. With him—according to the NT—the time of the end began. His self-sacrifice impresses humans profoundly. His divine attributes cause them to worship him. The term “Lamb” does not exhaust all of Christ’s

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. Morris, 95.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids Baker Book House, 2001), 207 and 82. However, Witherington, 121, sees them as the angels or spirits of the churches.

<sup>26</sup> Morris, 97, notes: “It [the term worthy] certainly ascribes excellence to the Lamb. His worthiness is now not reckoned in terms of his power or of the majesty of his Person, but of his death for us.” Johns, 202: “In the Apocalypse, the author draws from a multi-faceted mine of associations to the lamb in order to create a powerful new Christological statement pregnant with ethical implications. Specifically, the power and authority, or worthiness, to unfold God’s will for humanity are located in the readiness to die a witness’s death. At the heart of this reversal lies an ethical intent; at the surface lies a Lamb Christology.” Therefore Revelation presents a theology of peace, an ethics of non-violent resistance against evil.

qualities. Other designations emphasize his love, faithfulness, truthfulness, and holiness. We now move from an ontology to the functions of the Lamb while still commenting on its nature where appropriate.

## **2. Jesus' Actions and His Ministry**

### **a. Gaining the Victory**

It is part of the ministry of the Lamb to remain steadfast and victorious in conflict.<sup>27</sup> The victory of the Lamb is mentioned in various places. This victory has two dimensions. The original and most crucial victory was won at the cross (Rev 5:5-12). Apart from that victory and yet dependent on it is the eschatological victory as mentioned in Rev 17:14. From our present perspective this victory is still future.<sup>28</sup> As soon as the scarlet beast and the kings of the earth will attack Jesus and his people, their doom has come. The Lamb is simultaneously the King of kings and Lord of Lords. He is victorious even though the victory is not won through the force of arms but through witness and faithfulness and voluntary death.<sup>29</sup> Rev 17:14 is a preview of the battle of Armageddon described in more detail in Rev 19. The victory of Jesus directly influences the destiny and well-being of the believers.

### **b. The Theology of the Cross**

Victory and the cross are related. In Revelation a remarkable theology of the cross is found, although the concept is expressed in other ways than it is in Paul's writings and although the term "cross" does not appear at all. However, the verb "to crucify" is used once in the Apocalypse. According to Rev 11:8 the Lord was crucified. According to Rev 1:7 he was pierced.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Because of this believers may take part in Jesus' victory (Rev 12:11). Cf. U. B. Müller, 238. Harrington, *Revelation*, 195, points out: "As Michael's victory over the dragon was really the victory of the Lamb (12:11), so, here, victory over the beast is his victory alone."

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Witherington, 224; David E. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, Word Biblical Commentary 52C (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 953.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Bredin, 192.

<sup>30</sup> Bruce J. Malina, *On the Genre and Message of Revelation: Star Visions and Sky Journeys* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), 71, suggests: "The point is that to mourn the crucifixion of Jesus is to admit that his death was wrongful, that his execution was an evil and shameful act, marking a disaster for Israel. In this perspective, the purpose of Revelation is to get all the tribes of the land (Israel, of course) to acknowledge publicly the



*JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY*

The Lamb is not mentioned directly in these texts. However, there are other texts which together with the Lamb point to the theology of the cross. They include statements about slaughtering and about the blood of the Lamb, which obviously was shed and is efficacious. Other statements, made in connection with the ones just mentioned, also refer to the theology of the cross, for instance, those using the concept of purchasing. “John’s is a *theologia crucis* as profound and as worthy of Christian theology as any in the New Testament . . . .”<sup>31</sup>

(1) *The Blood of the Lamb*. The blood of the Lamb occurs in Rev 7:14 and 12:11. Rev 5:9 does not employ the phrase “blood of the Lamb” but uses the phrase “with your blood.” The context indicates that this is the blood of the Lamb. In addition John in Rev 1:5 talks about the blood of Jesus.<sup>32</sup> What is debated is the blood stained garment of the rider on the white horse (Rev 19:13). It is possible to understand the blood on his garment as the blood of the enemies who were defeated. This view may be supported by verse 15 and its image of the wine press. The other possibility is to understand the blood as the blood of the Lamb. It is pointed out that the robe of the rider on the white horse was already dipped in blood before he even went to battle. Therefore, it is concluded that it must be Jesus’ own blood. In addition, in the other texts of Revelation in which Jesus and blood are directly connected it is his own blood.<sup>33</sup> However it may be, the blood of the

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wickedness of Jesus’ execution.”

<sup>31</sup> Johns, 204.

<sup>32</sup> As the blood of the Lamb was shed so the blood of his followers will also be shed (Rev 6:10; 16:6; 17:6,6; 18:24; 19:2). Therefore, judgment is connected to blood (Rev 8:7-8; 11:6; 14:20; 16:3,4,6). The verdict corresponds to the crime: “For they poured out the blood of saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink” (Rev 16:6). In Rev 6:12 blood is connected to the signs of the times.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Bredin, 214; Wilfried J. Harrington, *Revelation*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 192-193; Gerhard A. Krodel, *Revelation*, Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1989), 323; Morris, 224; John Sweet, *Revelation*, New Testament Commentaries (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), 283. G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine* (Peabody: Hendrikson Publishers, 1987), 243, suggests that the blood is the blood of Jesus’ followers. Finally, the blood is seen as the blood of Jesus’ enemies. R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John Vol. 2*, The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989), 133, notices the problem and suggests: “Since, therefore, the redness of the

MUELLER: CHRISTOLOGICAL CONCEPTS IN REVELATION

Lamb points to his violent death on the cross through which salvation has become possible for humanity. People can now wash their stained clothes in the blood of the Lamb (Rev 7:14), which is one of the paradoxical images found in Revelation. Obviously this image attempts to express that humans are affected and stained by sin and are in need of cleansing. Cleansing has become an option because of the shedding of Christ's blood. That is, people are able to experience forgiveness of sins and redemption through Jesus' death on the cross.

Cleansing of the people and washing of their clothes was necessary before Israel was able to meet God at Mt. Sinai (Exod 19:10,14). However, in contrast to Revelation atonement is not directly mentioned in this case. In Isa 64:5 and Zech 3:3 symbolical filthy garments occur. According to Isa 1:18 God offers to make scarlet sins as white as snow. Heb 9:22 teaches that divine forgiveness is dependent on the shedding of blood. In 1John 1:7 John underlines the concept that the blood of Jesus cleanses humans from all sin. When in Revelation he uses the paradoxical image of washing robes in the blood of the Lamb, he may have in mind this OT and NT background. Although washing of the robes may express some kind of activity on the part of the believers, nevertheless, it is the blood of Jesus that cleanses. Mounce correctly notes that washing the robes is not a meritorious action but represents

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vesture in 13 is not due to the warfare in 11-21, there remains only one other possible explanation, and this is that the blood on His vesture is that of the Parthian kings and their armies, whom He had already destroyed . . ." Such an interpretation is based on a preteristic approach to Revelation. The Parthian thesis does not convince us. U. B. Müller, 327, considers the interpretation of the blood as the blood of the Lamb as absurd. Cf. also Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8-22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago, Moody Press, 1995), 386; Stephen Smalley, *The Revelation of John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 491; David E. Aune *Revelation 1-5*, Word Biblical Commentary 52A (Dallas: Word Books, Publisher, 1997), 1057; G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 957; Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2002), 682-683; Hubert Ritt, *Offenbarung des Johannes*, Die Neue Echter Bibel (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1988), 97; Jürgen Roloff, *Revelation*, A Continental Commentary (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 218.

*JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY*

faith.<sup>34</sup> Beale talks about persistent faith.<sup>35</sup> Even the present tense in Rev 22:14 pointing to a repeated washing does not change this observation. Mounce compares the repeated washing with the foot washing (John 13:10), which in spite of the complete bath of baptism is necessary and must be repeated again and again and yet is not a meritorious work on the part of humans.<sup>36</sup> Jesus' substitutionary death brings about forgiveness.<sup>37</sup> In Rev 6:11 a similar and yet different picture is used. The martyrs receive white clothes. In any case, forgiveness and reconciliation is a gift of God/the Lamb.

(2) *Slaughtered*. The Lamb looks like it is being slaughtered. According to Rev 5:6 the Lamb was not just killed some time ago in the past. It still looks as if slaughtered. The effect still continues. John uses a perfect tense to describe this continuous effect. Similar to Johns, J. M. Ford argues that it was not a sacrificial death but the death of a martyr that the Lamb suffered. She also holds that the term *sphazō* is not being used with the connotation sacrifice, although this would be possible.<sup>38</sup> However, according to Gen 22:10 Isaac was to be "slaughtered" (*sphazō*) by Abraham, which points to a sacrificial death. Bredin observes that although sin is not mentioned in Rev 5:6, nevertheless Jesus, raised from the dead, has saved us from our sins

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<sup>34</sup> Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, revised edition, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 407.

<sup>35</sup> Beale, 438, states: ". . . the metaphor of washing white robes in blood primarily connotes the objective reality that the saints have been cleansed from their sin by their persevering faith in Christ's death for them . . ." ". . . since 'the blood of the Lamb' refers to Christ's own blood and not that of the saints, the focus is on the cleansing effects of his death on their behalf." Similarly Kistemaker, 258.

<sup>36</sup> Mounce, 407.

<sup>37</sup> Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 475, writes: "The metaphorical character of the white robes is evident in this passage, where they are washed white by the blood of the Lamb, i.e, the sin of those who wear them has been atoned for by the sacrificial death of Christ." Mounce, 164, states: "Their robes are white by virtue of the redemptive death of the Lamb." Morris, 115, talks about "the complete efficacy of Christ's atoning death . . ." This is supported by Osborne, 325-326, mentioning ". . . the completeness of the effects of Christ's blood in its salvific effects."

<sup>38</sup> J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation*. The Anchor Bible 38 (New York: Doubleday, 1975), 90. Normally the term *thuō* is connected with offering sacrifices.

MUELLER: CHRISTOLOGICAL CONCEPTS IN REVELATION

through his blood (Rev 1:5).<sup>39</sup> This statement of the prologue provides the background for the entire Book of Revelation. The same concept is found in Rev 5:9, when it is said that through his blood Jesus has purchased people for God. The perfect tense mentioned above also makes better sense if slaughtering is understood as a sacrifice. In addition, it is difficult to come to grips with Rev 7:14 without the concept of a sacrifice. Furthermore, sacrificial death and death as a martyr do not necessarily exclude each other.<sup>40</sup> The Lamb is not a warrior or a military leader but a sacrificial animal. The issue is the cross, not an earthly-political power struggle. The Lamb stands out by voluntarily laying down his life.<sup>41</sup> Laws observes that although the Lamb looks as if slaughtered, it is standing. Therefore, the Lamb was raised from death and lives.<sup>42</sup>

(3) *Salvation*. In Rev 7:10 salvation is attributed to the Lamb and to God the Father. The book of life of the Lamb guarantees eternal life<sup>43</sup> and citizenship in the New Jerusalem to those who are written therein (Rev 13:8; 21:27). Although they are not saved by works, their conduct differs from that exhibited by those who dwell on earth and worship the beast. The book of life appears six times and in two forms in Revelation: *ho biblos tēs zoēs* (Rev 3:5; 20:15) and *to biblion tēs zoēs* (Rev 13:8; 17:8; 20:12; 21:27). The expressions should be understood interchangeably.<sup>44</sup> Only twice is this book explicitly called the book of the life of the Lamb. However, it can be assumed that the Lamb is

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. Bredin, 182. He points out that *thuō* does not always refer to a sacrificial death (John 10,10).

<sup>40</sup> Bredin, 183, states also: “The placing, also, of the martyrs under the altar of burnt offering (6.9) suggests a correlation between sacrifice and martyrdom.”

<sup>41</sup> Harrington, “Worthy Is the Lamb,” 57, summarizes in the following way: “In his vision John looked for the emergence of a Lion—and saw a slaughtered Lamb! What he learned, and he tells his readers, is that the Lion is the Lamb: the ultimate power of God (‘lion’) is manifest in the cross (‘lamb’). This is why ‘Lamb’ is John’s definitive name for Christ.” See also the discussion on the Lamb as a sacrificial animal above.

<sup>42</sup> Laws, 30.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Morris, 164.

<sup>44</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 223-225, extensively discusses the book of life and understands it as a heavenly citizen registry.

implied in the other instances. Morris understands it in such a way that the Lamb has brought about salvation.<sup>45</sup>

Finally, the song of the Lamb is mentioned (Rev 15:3). It is sung by the overcomers that are standing on the sea of glass. These are the 144,000 who in Rev 14:1 together with the Lamb are positioned on Mt. Zion and who were purchased by the Lamb (Rev 14:3).<sup>46</sup> The song of the Lamb again points to the themes of salvation and liberation.<sup>47</sup>

(4) *Purchased*. Salvation brought about by Jesus is not only expressed with the picture of the washing of robes in the blood of the Lamb and the vocabulary of salvation. The picture of purchasing the redeemed is found repeatedly (Rev 5:9; 14:3-4) and stresses that the Lamb has paid the price for saving humanity through his death.<sup>48</sup> Those who belong to him are free. Revelation points out a contrast: At a certain time in the future the believers will no longer be able to buy (Rev 13:17), but they have been bought by the blood of the Lamb. They may suffer economical boycotts, but they are redeemed. On the other hand, God will reverse the fate of the oppressors so that they cannot sell their goods. Nobody will buy anything from them anymore (Rev 18:11).

### **c. Effects on His People**

The Lamb's sacrifice to redeem humanity affects them, especially those who accept salvation. Witherington states that through his death the Lamb has paid the price for the redemption of the believers and has created a universal people of God.<sup>49</sup> In the seal vision the effect is twofold: (1) The believers form a kingdom and priesthood (Rev 5:10). (2) The Lamb functions as a shepherd and supplies his people with all that is necessary (Rev 7:16-17; 22:1). The picture of the good shepherd known from Ps 23 and John 10 is employed.<sup>50</sup> Hoffmann notes that the role of the shepherd "is

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<sup>45</sup> Morris, 165, 248.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Smalley, 384-385.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. U. B. Müller, 274; Osborne, 563-564.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Witherington, 121; Kistemaker, 210.

<sup>49</sup> Witherington, 121.

<sup>50</sup> Harrington, "Worthy is the Lamb," 59, writes: ". . . in startling and beautiful paradox, the Lamb has become a shepherd. In the Fourth Gospel the Lamb of God (Jn 1:29,36) is also the Good Shepherd (10:14-16)."

*MUELLER: CHRISTOLOGICAL CONCEPTS IN REVELATION*

normally performed by God himself” and together with other phenomena in the book indicate equality between Father and Son.<sup>51</sup>

The people of God as a kingdom and priesthood is mentioned three times in Revelation (Rev 1:6; 5:10; and 20:6). It is always found in connection with Jesus. However, only in Rev 5:10 is Jesus called the Lamb. According to Rev 1:6 and 5:10 the kingly rule and the priestly ministry of the people of God are dependent on Jesus’ death on the cross. While the first two texts describe kingly reign and priesthood as a present reality with Rev 5:10 also containing a future component,<sup>52</sup> Rev 20 applies these roles completely to the future. While the texts in Rev 1 and 5 may include all believers, Rev 20 may limit royal reign and priestly ministry to the end time believers who have not worshiped the beast or his image and have not accepted the mark of the beast (Rev 20:4).

**d. The Lamb and Salvation History**

At the beginning of Rev 5 God the Father is found on the throne of the universe. In his hand he holds a scroll sealed with seven seals which nobody can open, because nobody is worthy to do that. When John notices what is going on, he begins to weep (Rev 5:4). Obviously John is not weeping because of disappointed curiosity, but he weeps because the destiny of humanity and his own destiny are dependent on the opening of the seals. Only when the seals are open is it possible for the plan of

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<sup>51</sup> Hoffmann, 167.

<sup>52</sup> Beale, 363, discusses whether or not the rule of the believers should be understood as a present or a future activity. On one hand he writes that “both 1:5-6 and 5:9-10 make explicit that the creating of saints as a kingdom is a direct result of Christ’s redemptive death, so that it is probable that this kingdom began immediately after this death.” On the other hand, he points to the adjective “new” in connection with the song, namely the “new” song (Rev 5:9) and states that in other places in Revelation the adjective “new” refers to the new heaven and new earth. This would imply a future reign. “Alternatively, if the reign is understood as present, then the kingdom of the new creation has broken into the present, fallen world through the death and resurrection of Christ” (363). “Alternatively, the future tense could well be ‘a future immediately consequent on the act of ransom and appointment as kings and priests,’ which occurs throughout the age preceding Christ’s final coming” (364). Alan Johnson, “Revelation,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, edited by Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 469, suggests: “While not excluding the present reign of believers, the reference to ‘the earth’ is best taken to refer to the future eschatological kingdom reign of Christ.” See also Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 32.

salvation to further unfold and reach its consummation. Fortunately, the Lamb is able to open the seals.

Related to the opening of the seven seals (Rev 5:6; 6:1-8:1) are events which take place on earth leading to the heavenly signs just prior to Jesus' second coming and to the Second Coming itself. Christ's return is described as Day of the Lord. The seven seals seem to reflect the events delineated in the synoptic apocalypse (Matt 24 and its parallels). However, most of them have to be understood metaphorically and spiritually. For instance, the wars in Rev 6 are not literal wars, but rather symbolic wars which affect the message of God and his sanctuary.

Stefanovic understands the book or scroll of Rev 5 as the scroll or book of the covenant.<sup>53</sup> It is found in the hand of the Davidic king who because of it is the lawful king of the entire universe.<sup>54</sup> The destiny of humankind is in his hand. That is, Jesus allows salvation history to take place and be completed.<sup>55</sup>

#### **e. The Lamb and Judgment**

In the Apocalypse judgment is normally attributed to God the Father. He is the judge, and his judgments are just. Only once in Revelation—Rev 19:11—is Jesus directly mentioned as one who executes judgment.<sup>56</sup> He is the rider on the white horse who—according to the context and possibly due to the mention of the blood stained robe—may be linked to the image of the Lamb.

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<sup>53</sup> Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 2002), 201, 203.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 207.

<sup>55</sup> Roloff, 76, states: "This book must have something to do with the world dominion; its acceptance signifies its rightful transfer to the 'Lamb,' and the opening of its seals is a sign for the active execution of the function of lordship. Jesus Christ is seen here as the end-time ruler, who, on the basis of the saving work completed by him, is called to discharge with authority God's plan for the end of history."

<sup>56</sup> Judgment in verbal form (*krinō*) as well as in the form of a noun (*krisis* and *krima*) is associated with God the Father in almost all cases (Rev 6:10; 11:18; 14:17; 16:5, 7; 17:1; 18:8, 10, 20; 19:2, 2; and 20:12, 13). During the Millennium believers will participate in the judgment (Rev 20:4).

MUELLER: CHRISTOLOGICAL CONCEPTS IN REVELATION

In Rev 6:16-17 the wrath of the Lamb is mentioned. Normally, wrath is associated with God the Father,<sup>57</sup> but here is one text in Revelation in which the wrath of the Lamb is pointed out. In addition, Jesus “treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God” (Rev 19:15), and the Lamb is a witness of the torment of those who are lost (Rev 14:10). How should these texts be understood?

The opinions of interpreters differ. Some suggest that the image of the Lamb changes judicial language to such an extent that Jesus is indeed involved in judgment, but this judgment is in a way a non-violent judgment. They remind their audience that Jesus is the Lion as well as the Lamb. So wrath and being the Lamb are juxtaposed.<sup>58</sup> They explain that in the Apocalypse Jesus has one weapon only, and this weapon is the sword out of his mouth.<sup>59</sup> However, the sword out of his mouth is the Word of God (Heb 4:12).<sup>60</sup> The Word of God will cause the destruction of the wicked.<sup>61</sup> According to Rev 12 the satanic powers are not defeated through the terror of the force of arms but through the blood of the Lamb.<sup>62</sup> It is noticeable that in Revelation God’s permissive will is referred to frequently. So God allows the apocalyptic horsemen to come, and he allows for the seven

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<sup>57</sup> *Orgē* (wrath) is attributed to God the Father in Rev 11:18; 14:10; 16:19; and 19:15. *Thumos* is God’s wrath in Rev 14:10,19; 15:1,7; 16:1,19; and 19:15. Apart from God’s wrath there is the wrath of Babylon (Rev 14:8; 18:13) and the wrath of Satan (Rev 12:12).

<sup>58</sup> Bredin, 19, states: “John reinterprets ‘wrath’ by placing it alongside the most non-militaristic image, Lamb. Wrath no longer depicts a military, conquering God on the battlefield; God is not one who slays with the sword. Suffering love is the essence of wrath, and therefore suffering love is that which brings about God’s judgment and kingdom.”

<sup>59</sup> It is used in different formulations in Rev 1:16; 2:12, 16; 19:15, 21.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Ian Boxall, “Violence in the Apocalypse,” *Scripture Bulletin* 35/2 (2005):78-79. Wes Howard-Brook and Anthony Gwyther, *Unveiling Empire: Reading Revelation Then and Now* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1990), 140, suggest: “Throughout Revelation, it is made clear that Jesus’ power is the ‘sword of his mouth’ (1:16; 2:12, 16; 19:15, 21). The Word of God is truly powerful, but it is a power that, unlike the sword of empire, operates without bloody violence.”

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Bredin, 208. He understands the blood associated with the wine press as the blood of the saints (213-216).

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Griffith, 211. He adds: “Bloodshed is the means by which mighty empires and terrorists of all stripes seek to claim their victories, but Revelation unveils that it is precisely their own shedding of blood that is the means by which the powers are defeated. The shed blood of the Lamb and of the martyrs becomes the instrument of God’s victory.” On the other hand, the iron scepter of Rev 19:15 is mentioned. Bredin, 208, perceives it as a parallel to the sword out of his mouth. Therefore, it would also represent the Word of God.



plagues to happen.<sup>63</sup> Following such a line of thought, it is held that essentially the unbelievers destroy themselves, and God allows for this type of judgment.

Other expositors talk about God's justice that would include judgment and direct destruction of the ungodly. For instance, Kistemaker understands Rev 6:17 in the sense that the Lamb can become angry. At the end of earth's history Jesus will confront the adversaries and will bring judgment upon them. However, Kistemaker asks the question whether this wrath should be understood as an emotion on Jesus' part or as an announcement of punishment. The next verse (Rev 6:18) which repeats the term "wrath" and links it with the Day of the Lord and therefore with judgment points to the second option. The wrath of the Lamb has to do with the punishment of the enemies of the Lamb.<sup>64</sup> However, this punishment is reserved to be carried out by the Godhead. Howard-Brook and Gwyther state that God has the exclusive authority to react with violence in the case where justice requires it.<sup>65</sup> His people are not involved in such a judgment. At the same time, God's judgment is an act of salvation.<sup>66</sup> According to S. Moyise the Lamb is not "a gentle figure."<sup>67</sup>

Both groups do not deny the judgment of God and Jesus. One group of expositors understands it in a more active sense, while the others would probably suggest that the separation from God, who is the source of life, would bring along death more or less automatically.

#### **f. The Lamb and the Consummation**

However, the Lamb is not only involved in judgment. It also cooperates with God the Father in bringing about the final consummation. In Revelation this is described with different terms.

The end of earth's history begins with Jesus' second coming. The Second Coming is found in many places in Revelation. It occurs in a literal way in the letter frame of the book (e.g., Rev 1:7; 22:7, 12, 20) and

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<sup>63</sup> Cf. Boxall, 82.

<sup>64</sup> Kistemaker, 238-239.

<sup>65</sup> Howard-Brook, 155.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Laws, 33-34.

<sup>67</sup> Steve Moyise, *The Old Testament in the New: An Introduction, The Continuum Biblical Studies Series* (London: Continuum, 2001), 125.

MUELLER: CHRISTOLOGICAL CONCEPTS IN REVELATION

symbolically expressed in the apocalyptic part,<sup>68</sup> for instance, as the harvest of the earth.<sup>69</sup> Jesus promises seven times his coming or his soon coming.<sup>70</sup> In the sixth seal the Lamb occurs in the context of the Second Coming. The Day of the Lord is preceded by the cosmic signs of the times and a special earthquake. When the Day of the Lord appears, the enemies of God will attempt to hide, but the 144,000 will be able to stand (Rev 6:12-17) and will experience final salvation. The Day of the Lord is already known from the OT to be God's day of judgment (Isa 13:9; Joel 2:11, 31; Zeph 1:14-15)<sup>71</sup> and here symbolizes Jesus' second coming.<sup>72</sup>

Rev 7 briefly summarizes the events prior to the second coming of Christ, before it concentrates on describing the great multitude of followers of Jesus in front of the throne and the Lamb (Rev 7:9-10). In this connection we hear that these believers will serve God in his sanctuary and are cared for by the Lamb as the shepherd. This event presupposes Christ's second coming. On the other hand, it describes a time after the second coming which may be the period of the Millennium.

According to Rev 14:1 the Lamb together with the 144,000 is standing on Mt. Zion. Kistemaker lists different options of interpretation.<sup>73</sup> However, the context explains that the 144,000 are found before God's throne in heaven. Therefore, the first part of Rev 14 is not only an encouragement directed to suffering Christians calling them not to give up, but also a preview of their victory which has become possible through the Lamb. Mt. Zion was the temple mount in Jerusalem (Heb 12:22). It is the place of complete and final salvation.<sup>74</sup>

In Rev 19a the perspective changes. After God has been praised for judging Babylon (verses 1-3), God's rule is being praised and joy is being expressed because the wedding of the Lamb has come (verses 6-7). The

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<sup>68</sup> Rev 4-22a.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Ekkehardt Mueller, "Jesus and His Second Coming in the Apocalypse," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 11/1-2 (2000): 205-215.

<sup>70</sup> This is true, if one investigates the term *erchomai* (Rev 2:5, 16; 5:11; 16:15; 22:7, 12, 20). The first two texts may have in mind primarily a coming for judgment in historical time, although the Second Coming might resonate, too. In addition to *erchomai* the term *haekō* occurs in the Apocalypse which in Rev 2:25 and 3:3 refers to Jesus' return.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Kistemaker, 239.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Stefanovic, 245-246.

<sup>73</sup> Kistemaker, 400-401.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Mounce, 264-265.

wedding can take place only after the bridegroom has returned to his bride.<sup>75</sup> The bride stands collectively for the church. The wedding guests are the individual believers.<sup>76</sup> Jesus' second coming unites him with his own.<sup>77</sup>

Finally, the Lamb together with God the Father are called a temple and lamp (Rev 21:22-23). On the new earth the presence of the Lamb will permeate and sanctify the New Jerusalem with its inhabitants.<sup>78</sup> Due to the labor and activity of the Lamb an unparalleled degree of intimacy between God and his people will be reached. The Lamb has brought about complete reconciliation. The Lamb has led his followers into the immediate presence of God. However, John does not assume that this absolute intimacy with God is completely possible prior to the first resurrection and therefore prior to Christ's second coming.<sup>79</sup> It requires the completion of the plan of salvation.

### **3. The People of the Lamb**

#### **a. Designations of the People of the Lamb**

Closely related to the Lamb is his people. If we talk about the Lamb, we must at least mention his people. His people are described with different terms. In some places it is the end time believers, while the other believers throughout the centuries are not included. In other places it comprises all true believers. Sometimes it is a specific group such as the Twelve. The people of God are (1) the great multitude before the Lamb (Rev 7:9), (2) those who have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb (Rev 7:14;

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<sup>75</sup> Cf. Witherington, 233.

<sup>76</sup> Ronald L. Farmer, *Revelation, Chalice Commentaries for Today* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2005), 120, seems to be correct when stating: "Just as Christ is both the Lamb and the Shepherd (7:17), so here the people of God collectively are the Bride and individually are the Wedding Guests." Cf. Witherington, 233.

<sup>77</sup> Stefanovic, 544, explains: "The much-awaited union of Christ with his bride—the church—at the Second Coming is expressed in terms of 'the wedding of the Lamb.'" Cf. Mounce, 247, who links the Second Advent with the marriage.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Mounce, 395. The New Jerusalem itself will become a temple. "In the earthly Jerusalem, the temple was viewed as the dwelling place of God. The new Jerusalem has no need for a temple, for the sphere of the holy has been expanded to include the entire city (as is indicated in the city's being a cube, like the Holy of Holies)", writes Farmer, 138. Cf. Kistemaker, 572-573.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Witherington, 271.

MUELLER: CHRISTOLOGICAL CONCEPTS IN REVELATION

11:14), (3) those who have overcome through the blood of the Lamb (Rev 12:11), (4) the 144,000 who follow the Lamb (Rev 14:1, 4),<sup>80</sup> (5) the called, chosen, and faithful who are with the Lamb (Rev 17:14), (6) the bride of the Lamb (Rev 21:9), (7) the twelve apostles of the Lamb (Rev 21:10), (8) those whose names were written in the book of life of the Lamb (Rev 21:27) and (9) the servants of the Lamb (Rev 22:3).

**b. Discipleship**

According to Rev 14:4 the 144,000 follow the Lamb wherever he goes. To follow may mean to go behind someone or to accompany someone. The issue is discipleship, to accept the teachings of the master, to apply them, and to further his cause.<sup>81</sup> Farmer suggests that it means to follow Jesus as a soldier or bride.<sup>82</sup> According to the Gospels Jesus invited people to follow him and called them, while he as the good shepherd went ahead of them (John 10:4). Following Jesus is a continuous and not a one-time activity. It means taking Jesus as an example, accepting him as teacher and master, imitating his example, and being completely dedicated and obedient.<sup>83</sup> Followers refrain from lies and exemplify truthfulness (Rev 14:5). They are blameless (Rev 14:4-5). Discipleship may lead to martyrdom and this may be indicated in Rev 14:4 in a specific and yet indirect way. Disciples are faithful until death.<sup>84</sup> Witherington writes: “The soldiers of the cross are expected to follow Christ unto death.”<sup>85</sup>

By calling the 144,000 “the army of the Lamb” or his “soldiers” a false impression can be readily created. Rossing tries to prevent that by stating that the Book of Revelation does not advocate violence and shedding of blood. The people of God suffer violence.<sup>86</sup> They are persecuted and killed,

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<sup>80</sup> Harrington, “Worthy is the Lamb,” 61, notes: “The 144,000 are the ‘army’ of the Lamb, his faithful earthly followers, now ‘redeemed from humankind’ . . .”

<sup>81</sup> Cf. Aune, Revelation 6-16, 813.

<sup>82</sup> Farmer, 100.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. Kistemaker, 405.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Aune, Revelation 6-16, 813-814.

<sup>85</sup> Witherington, 186.

<sup>86</sup> Rossing, 19-20, explains: “Revelation does not advocate the use of violence or bloodshed. Revelation is more a book about terror *defeated* than terror inflicted . . . War is something done *against* God’s people . . . , not something that God’s saints or the Lamb practice in this book. The Lamb never ‘makes war.’ Two verses of Revelation do indeed refer to Jesus as ‘making war’—Rev 2:16 and 19:11—but even here, the *way* he makes war is

*JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY*

not only according to the letters to the seven churches, but, for instance, also in Rev 12-14.<sup>87</sup> They do not react to violence with violence. They win the victory through lamblike suffering. Howard-Brook and Gwyther support this concept by stating that Revelation does not approve of or glorify human violence.<sup>88</sup> Griffith describes a talk by W. Stringfellow in which he reminded graduates of a theological seminary that in this world believers are not “raptured out of terror and into victory” and that the cause of God is not served through the righteous who triumph but through the faithful who are defeated (Rev 13:7).<sup>89</sup> Harrington proposes that the only weapon of the oppressed is patience and endurance. In the end this weapon disarms evil.<sup>90</sup> And Johns reminds us that Revelation does not only support passive suffering but “that Christology will lead to an ethic that embraces a committed, nonviolent resistance to evil.”<sup>91</sup> Witherington demonstrates this

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crucial. Jesus makes war not with a sword of battle but ‘by the sword of my mouth’—that is, his word.”

<sup>87</sup> Johns talks about a “victimization” of Christ’s disciples due to “the dark reality of evil.” However, this victimization will be relativized because of the hope of resurrection and a final judgment” (176).

<sup>88</sup> Howard-Brook/Gwyther, 155, state: “Nowhere does Revelation authorize or glorify human violence. To the contrary, its ceding to God of the exclusive authority to act with violence when required by justice marks off this behavior as forbidden to humanity. Human violence is a sign of the ‘mark of the Beast’ (e.g., 16:2).” Boxall, 79, adds: “For all the violence of its imagery, Revelation never once advocates humans taking up arms or using violence against their fellow humans. What is called for instead is faithful witness to the One who was slain, a continuation of his testimony, and ‘endurance’ or ‘consistent resistance’.”

<sup>89</sup> Griffith, 216.

<sup>90</sup> Harrington, *Revelation*, 195, observes: “There must be a response to injustice, oppression. That courageous response, which may and can demand the ultimate sacrifice, is always non-violent. That word speaks, paradoxically, through the violent imagery of Revelation. The only weapon of the oppressed is *hypomone*. It is the weapon that, in the end, disarms evil. It seems that we have hardly begun to learn the lesson of Jesus. Have we, Christians, *really* learned any lesson of Jesus? Our record is not spectacular, perhaps least of all in our flaccid condoning of the evil of war—not to mention our complicity in ‘religious’ wars.”

<sup>91</sup> Johns, 203. On page 205 he writes: “The ethics of the Apocalypse is thus not one that eschews responsibility in the world, but one that embraces the cross as the key to how that responsibility is expressed. . . . It is not a vision designed to make the community passive or to disempower it or to encourage it to withdraw in a cloistered existence. It is a vision designed to empower the community, to enter the fray with a courageous nonviolent resistance that may well lead to martyrdom. This sort of resistance is as active as any physical warfare.” Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, New

*MUELLER: CHRISTOLOGICAL CONCEPTS IN REVELATION*

approach by pointing to the resistance against Hitler. Dietrich Bonhoeffer must be commended for not supporting Hitler directly or indirectly as many Christians and churches did. But he came to the conviction Hitler had to be stopped by assassination. On the other hand, Martin Niemöller believed that protest and martyrdom are the last means a Christian has to resist Hitler. When a prison chaplain asked him why he was imprisoned, Niemöller responded by asking the question why he, the chaplain, was not imprisoned. Revelation calls for a renunciation and turning away from evil, but does not endorse attempts to assassinate others and commit acts of human violence.<sup>92</sup>

**c. Service**

The people of the Lamb stand out because of their service. While in other NT writings believers are called to serve one another and fellow humans, Revelation even more strongly emphasizes service to God/the Lamb. Undoubtedly, Christians are responsible for others (Rev 3:2), and their service (*diakonia*)<sup>93</sup> is important (Rev 2:19). Yet in a special way service to God and the Lamb is stressed. As in other writings of John love is also mentioned in Revelation (Rev 2:4,9) and seems to be connected to the concept of service.

Two texts in Revelation point to the people of the Lamb and the service of Christ's followers. These are Rev 7:15 and 22:3. In both of them the verb *latreuō* is employed. This word is translated as "to serve" but normally has a cultic and sacral meaning.<sup>94</sup> One serves God in the public worship service

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Testament Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 92, states: "While rejecting the apocalyptic militancy that called for literal holy war against Rome, John's message is not. 'Do not resist!' It is, 'Resist!—but by witness and martyrdom, not by violence.'"

<sup>92</sup> Witherington, 187-188. He also points to the Jewish physician Boris Kornfeld who had become a Christian and who refused to be responsible for the death of prisoners in Soviet camps. Before being brutally murdered he had the chance to witness to one prisoner only. This prisoner was Alexander Solzhenitsyn whose literary work led many to turn away from inhuman politics.

<sup>93</sup> The term *diakonia* is found in Rev 2:19 only and may refer to service for fellow humans. Cf. Kistemaker, 137.

<sup>94</sup> Vgl. H. Strathmann, "λατρεύω, λατρεία," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, herausgegeben von G. Kittel (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 4:60.

*JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY*

or in the inner worship of one's heart.<sup>95</sup> In the LXX of Dan 3:28<sup>96</sup> the verb "to serve" is used in connection with the verb "to worship." However, the term is also associated with love and obedience (Deut 10:12-13). According to Acts 24:14 serving God is not necessarily limited to the worship service. Both Revelation texts describe a time after Christ's second coming in which the redeemed will serve either before the throne of God or in the New Jerusalem. They serve as priests, and indeed they are priests (Rev 1:5; 5:10; 20:6) and will reign with God the Father and Christ.<sup>97</sup> Osborne suggests that here a parallel with the sanctuary in Paradise is formed where Adam "worked"/"served" to keep it (Gen 2:15). The Hebrew term ' *abad* is normally translated *latreuō* in the LXX, although not in Gen 2:15. Nevertheless, a connection between these concepts may exist. The New Jerusalem is the restored Paradise in which God's plan is being realized and his servants will serve him.<sup>98</sup>

In Rev 22:3 the group of those who serve him are called "his servants"/"servants"/"slaves" (*douloi*). The possessive pronoun "his" may refer to God or the Lamb in the preceding sentence. The servants are the servants of God and of the Lamb—emphasizing the Godhead of Jesus.<sup>99</sup> They appear as servants of the Son of God and especially as God's servants in other places in Revelation.<sup>100</sup> There their ministry is not limited to the future. Obviously, they are also actively involved during human history.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

Although the Apocalypse of John is populated by strange beasts, evil powers, and confusing numbers, it is a book from Jesus and also about Jesus. The audience meets Jesus at every turn. He appears in every vision, in some quite frequently, in others less often, but he is always present. Many names, titles, and images are applied to him emphasizing his importance and his multifaceted work. John sees him on the same level as

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<sup>95</sup> Cf. Lothar Coenen, Erich Beyreuther, and Hans Bietenhard (eds.), *Theologisches Begriffslexikon zum Neuen Testament 1: Abraham-Israel* (Wuppertal: Theologischer Verlag R. Brockhaus, 1977), 189.

<sup>96</sup> This then is Dan 3:95 in the LXX.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. Smalley, 510.

<sup>98</sup> Osborne, 774.

<sup>99</sup> Cf. Kistemaker, 582; Beale, 1113; Smalley, 564.

<sup>100</sup> E.g., in Rev 1:1; 2:20; 7:3; 10:7; 11:18; 19:2,5; and 22:6.

*MUELLER: CHRISTOLOGICAL CONCEPTS IN REVELATION*

God the Father. This is quite clear when reading through the hymns in Rev 4 and 5. Whoever encounters Jesus in the Apocalypse, encounters a person of the Godhead. In addition to this emphasis on the divinity of Jesus, the Lamb Christology of the book is unique and is a much needed perspective for Christians today.

In Revelation, Jesus is mentioned as the Creator. The audience hears also about his incarnation and is informed that in spite of living in an evil world, he remained the Holy One and became the Savior. He died, was raised, ascended to heaven, was seated with God the Father on his throne, and has promised to come again. Salvation through his substitutionary death is strongly emphasized. There is no designation for Jesus used more frequently in the Apocalypse than a "Lamb." However, Lamb is not used in the letter-frame of the book. Instead non-symbolic designations such as "Jesus Christ," "Jesus," and "the Lord Jesus" are employed there more often. When the audience is confronted with the Lamb's defenseless suffering it is not understood as defeat. Throughout the Apocalypse the theme of victory is found. Jesus has gained the victory though not through military power or physical violence, but through his vicarious death. The people of the Messiah take part in Jesus' victory by suffering and possibly dying rather than through violence, terror, and armed combat.

In the struggle between life and death, a struggle between the people of the Messiah and the satanic trinity and their followers, the issue is God's truth as opposed to the idolatrous lies of the beast which even becomes an imitation of the Lamb. However, Jesus appears as a revealer sharing with humanity the deep insights found in the Apocalypse. He reveals elements of the plan of salvation. He reveals the nature and work of God the Father, and he reveals insights about himself. In this struggle he also supports his people by being a priest and mediator. Therefore, false compromises are not an option for true Christians. Even if the followers of the Lamb have to die, they are the true victors. The heavenly perspective surpasses the earthly, and this heavenly perspective must shatter all deceptions of the beast.

The suffering and death of the followers of the Lamb is only half of the picture. The Lamb is not only the sacrifice. As such he died on Calvary. This is the historical dimension. The risen Lamb will also return as King of kings and Lord of lords and with the sword of his Word will defeat the oppressors of his people and redeem them from all threats in a new exodus. The Lamb will care for his people on a new earth in which all traces of evil



*JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY*

will be done away with. He will enlighten them and live with them face to face. In other words, because Jesus loves his people he did not only die for them on the cross. He will also guide them home, back into the closest possible relationship with God the Father.

Therefore, when we read the Book of Revelation we need to read it primarily as a book of Jesus, for he is our future. “To him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood and has made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen” (Rev 1:5-6).

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