

# The Sacrificial Symbolism of the Lamb in the Book of Revelation

## Summary

Although ‘the Lamb’ is the most important designation for Jesus Christ in the book of Revelation, the full significance of this sacrificial metaphor is still uncertain. In recent years, some scholars have given up looking for specific allusions to the OT sacrificial cult. However, little scholarly attention has been given to OT cultic allusions which surround the Lamb in the liturgical setting of Revelation. It is proposed that a clarification of the cultic symbolism of these liturgical visions would also help to deepen our understanding of the sacrificial metaphor of the Lamb. To this end, we present a comparison of the main liturgical features of Revelation with accounts of the daily liturgical activity in the second temple at Jerusalem, and with the specific liturgical rites on the annual Day of Atonement. By means of this comparison, we find that the heavenly liturgy described in Revelation represents a simplification of the liturgy that was performed in the Jerusalem temple on the annual Day of Atonement, and that the Lamb corresponds to the first sacrifice on that day—the continual holocaust or *Tamid* sacrifice of the daily morning service.

## Introduction

*“And I saw in the midst of the elders, standing between the throne and the four living creatures, a Lamb (ἄρνιον) like one that had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.” (Rev 5,6)*

In the book of Revelation, ‘Lamb’ (ἄρνιον) is the most widely used designation for Jesus Christ, to whom it refers 28 times, far outnumbering the use of other terms such as Jesus, Christ, Jesus Christ or Lord Jesus. It is more than a name. It is the metaphor that most completely represents the redeeming death and glorified life of Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup> It represents Jesus Christ not only as an atoning sacrificial victim (Rev 5,6.9.12; 13,8; cf. 1,5b), but also as the ruling and conquering Messiah (Rev 5,5.8; 6,16-17; 7,17; 17,14, 19,11-16; 22,1.3). The fusion of these two starkly differing aspects of Christ’s redemptive ministry in the single figure of the seven-horned Lamb is as original as it is striking.<sup>2</sup>

However, whilst the text of Revelation leaves no doubt about the Lamb’s role as the ruling and conquering Messiah, there is still considerable uncertainty over the significance of the sacrificial aspect of this metaphor. In his commentary on Revelation, Aune states the problem like this:

“While it is likely that the figure of the Lamb in Revelation must be understood at least in part on the basis of OT sacrificial ritual, it is not at all clear which type of sacrifice is primarily in view, for sheep or lambs were used as sacrificial victims in several different types of sacrifice in the OT and early Judaism”.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Le Christ se présente avant tout come l’Agneau. Ce titre est plus qu’un nom. C’est une synthèse de toutes les fonctions et de tous les attributs de Jésus selon saint Jean.” J. Comblin, *Le Christ dans L’Apocalypse* (Paris: Desclée, 1965) 10.

<sup>2</sup> “There is no substantial evidence that the Lamb was already established as a symbol of the messianic conqueror in pre-Christian Judaism. . . . The novelty of John’s symbol lies in its representation of the sacrificial death of Christ as the fulfillment of Jewish hopes of the messianic conqueror.” Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1993) 183-84.

<sup>3</sup> David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5* (WBC 52A, Dallas: Word Books, 1997) 372.

To obscure matters even more, some scholars go as far as denying that the Lamb metaphor is either atoning or sacrificial. For example, Johns, who interprets it simply as a symbol of vulnerability, writes:

“The reference cannot be to the lamb as a sacrifice for sin in the sacrificial cult, for the language used is that of butchery and murder, not ritual sacrifice. And there is no interest in the act of sacrifice itself in the Apocalypse. Whatever else was a concern of this author, expiation for sin was not central to it”.<sup>4</sup>

However, Johns’ argument fails to consider other reasons explaining the author’s choice of word for the manner of the Lamb’s death (σφάξειν). Without doubt, the use of sacrificial terminology in this context would strongly imply that the slaughterers were priests—a suggestion that would have been anathema to the author. Furthermore, Johns’ assertion that the author was not concerned with the expiation for sin rashly disregards a whole series of references to the atoning effect of the Lamb’s blood (Rev 1,5-6; 5,9-10; 7,14; 12,11; 22,14), which undeniably includes expiation of sin: “*To him who loves us and freed us from his sins with his blood, and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be the glory and the might for ever and ever, amen*” (Rev 1,5-6).<sup>5</sup>

So starting from the observation that, according to the text and imagery of Revelation, the figure of the Lamb is indeed presented with atoning and sacrificial features, this article proposes a new approach for the confirmation and clarification of this aspect of its meaning. However, before going on to present this approach, it is useful to start with a review of the different kinds of interpretation discussed by modern commentators.

## Modern interpretations

Attempts to explain the sacrificial aspect of the Lamb metaphor are generally based on analogies with specific OT themes and passages, and have usually considered this subject in one of the following three ways:

1. As an allusion to the servant figure of Isaiah 53, who is “like a lamb that is led to the slaughter” (Isa 53,7), and whose life is made a sin offering, bearing the sin of many and making them righteous (Isa 53,8-12).
2. As the eschatological fulfillment of the lambs sacrificed at the first Passover, whose blood ensured the redemption of the Israelites from their slavery in the land of Egypt (Exod 12).
3. As a combination of both of the above.

As noted by Aune, very few scholars take the first approach in order to argue that the Lamb of Revelation should be understood primarily in terms of the servant of Isaiah 53.<sup>6</sup> Prigent sums up the opinion of the majority of scholars when he observes:

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<sup>4</sup> Loren L. Johns, “The Lamb in the Rhetorical program of the Apocalypse of John”, *SBL 1998 Seminar Papers*, Part 2 [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998] 780.

<sup>5</sup> Johns feels free to disregard this part of the text, because of speculation that it was not composed by the author, but drawn from traditional material (op.cit. 780, note 62). Regardless of its origin, or of scholarly opinion about this, we maintain that it is a serious error to overlook the import of any passage that the author has chosen to include in the text.

<sup>6</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 373: “While few have argued that the Lamb of Revelation should primarily be understood against this background, the most detailed argument for this position is presented by Comblin, *Christ*, 17-47; followed by [John] D’Souza, [*The*] *Lamb [of God in the Johannine Writings]*, Allahabad: St Paul Publications, 1968] 27-32. There is a connection between this use of sacrificial metaphor and the notion that martyrdom could be viewed as a means of purification for the sins of the people (2Macc 7:38; 4Macc 6:29).”

“...there is nothing in the book of Revelation which serves to underline this possible correspondence. In quite the opposite direction, one might highlight the fact that the differences between the silent victim of Isa 53 and the Lamb of the book of Revelation are great”.<sup>7</sup>

Similarly Vanni finds that the allusions to Isaiah 53 in Revelation are vague and do not adequately justify or explain either the literary organization or the theologico-biblical significance of the Lamb metaphor in Revelation. At most, he writes, Isaiah 53 can be understood as a source of inspiration, or starting point, for the complex development of the figure of the Lamb.<sup>8</sup>

Regarding the second of the approaches listed above, several scholars explain the sacrificial aspect of the Lamb in Revelation as the eschatological fulfillment of the Passover sacrifice. The arguments they use are based mainly on the prevalence of exodus typology in the visions of Revelation,<sup>9</sup> and on the evident analogy between the Passover sacrifice and the passion of Jesus in other parts of the NT.<sup>10</sup> So, for example, Beasley-Murray writes:

“The Messiah has been slain as a sacrifice. In this book, which is full of the exodus typology, it is virtually certain that the prophet has in view the Christ as the passover-lamb”.<sup>11</sup>

With no less conviction, Bauckham uses the same argument:

“Doubtless the Lamb is intended to suggest primarily the passover lamb, for throughout the Apocalypse, and in a passage as close as 5,10, John represents the victory of the Lamb as a new Exodus, the victory which delivers the new Israel”.<sup>12</sup>

Similarly Prigent finds the allusion to the Passover lamb firmly established, without any need to recall the servant figure of Isaiah 53.<sup>13</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, following Holz,<sup>14</sup> writes that the Greek verb (σφάζειν) used for the violent death of the Lamb

“...probably alludes to the slaughtering of the paschal lamb an image used early in the Christian tradition to interpret Christ’s death, as 1Cor 5:7 (cf. 1Pet 1:18) indicates. This image evokes the memory of Israel’s exodus and liberation, which was considered in Judaism as a prototype for the final eschatological salvation”.<sup>15</sup>

The observations underlying this approach are undeniable: exodus typology is very prevalent in Revelation and the analogy between Jesus’ passion and the Passover sacrifice is certainly found in other parts of the New Testament. However, in Revelation, the redemptive function of the Lamb’s sacrifice explicitly involves the expiation of sins,<sup>16</sup> and it is well

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<sup>7</sup> Pierre Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001) 249.

<sup>8</sup> Ugo Vanni, *L’Apocalisse: Ermeneutica, Egesi, Teologia* (Supplementi alla Revista Biblica, 17, Bologna: Centro Editoriale Dehoniano, 1988) 178.

<sup>9</sup> Useful summaries are given by Håkan Ulfsgard in *Feast and Future: Revelation 7:9-17 and the Feast of Tabernacles* (Stockholm: Almquist and Wiksell, 1989) 35-41, and by Richard Bauckham in *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993) 70-72.

<sup>10</sup> Joachim Jeremias has written extensively on this subject in: “πάσχα”, *TDNT* 5. 900-901; “This is My Body” *ExpTim* (1972) 196-203; *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1966) 220-25.

<sup>11</sup> G.R.Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation* (London: Oliphants, 1978) 125.

<sup>12</sup> Bauckham, *Climax*, 184.

<sup>13</sup> Prigent, *Apocalypse of St. John*, 251.

<sup>14</sup> T. Holz, *Die Christologie der Apokalypse des Johannes* (Berlin: Akademie, 1971) 45.

<sup>15</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “Redemption as Liberation: Apoc 1:5f and 5:9f”, *CBQ* 36 [1974] 220-232, here 228.

<sup>16</sup> As seen above, Rev 1,5b is the passage that most specifically associates the blood of the Lamb with expiation of sin. However, other passages reveal that the Lamb’s blood has a range of actions representing different aspects of atonement: it acquires a people for God (Rev 5,9), makes them a “kingdom and priests” (1,6;

known that the Passover sacrifice was not understood to have an expiatory function.<sup>17</sup> The sacrificial role of the Lamb portrayed in Revelation is therefore not fully explained by its correspondence with the Passover tradition.<sup>18</sup>

Those who explain the Lamb metaphor in Revelation on the analogy of the Passover sacrifice have attempted to overcome this objection by asserting that, although the annual Passover sacrifice was not expiatory, the blood of the lambs slaughtered at the first Passover—which was the subject of remembrance at every subsequent Passover—did indeed have ‘redemptive power’ and restored God’s covenant with the Patriarchs. It is an argument that is suggested by a few late post-New Testament midrashic writings, and was first articulated by Jeremias when discussing Jesus’ self-identification with the paschal sacrifice at the Last Supper.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, it has been adopted by Roloff in the following quote from his commentary, in order to extend the identification of Jesus as ‘the paschal lamb of the new covenant’ to the Lamb of Revelation:

“According to Jewish belief, the blood of the passover lambs, which were slaughtered upon the exodus from Egypt, had an expiating effect for the sins of the people of Israel (cf. Str.-B. 1:85ff.)”<sup>20</sup>

Against this argument, it should be noted firstly that the identification of Jesus with the paschal lamb is only one of many ways of describing his redemptive ministry in the NT,<sup>21</sup> and that, as Stuhlmacher observes, “wherever in the NT Jesus Christ is compared with the Passover sacrifice, the expiatory effect of his blood is deliberately not emphasized”.<sup>22</sup>

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5,10), enables them to purify themselves from their imperfections (7,14; 22,14), and makes them partners in the devil’s defeat (12,11).

<sup>17</sup> E.g., Roland de Vaux: “but the Israelite Passover never had any expiatory purpose” (*Ancient Israel: its Life and Institutions* [London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1961] 488); Aune: “The sacrifice of the Passover lamb was not a means of expiation from sins in early Judaism...” (*Revelation 1-5*, 372); Prigent: “the Lamb of Ex 12 is translated πρόβατον by the LXX, and although it is sacrificed (...) there is never any question in Exodus of the expiatory value of this sacrifice” (*The Apocalypse of St. John*, 43).

<sup>18</sup> The lack of expiatory value is only one of several deficiencies in the explanation based on the Passover sacrifice: neither can it account for the eternal presence of the Lamb in heaven, nor its central role in the heavenly liturgy.

<sup>19</sup> Jeremias, *Eucharistic Words*, 225-26. The midrashic writings he invokes are: *Pirqe R. El.* 29; *Tg. Neb.* Zech 9:11; *Mek. R. Ish.* on Exod 12:6; *Midr. Exod. Rab.* 17.3 on 12:22; 15.12 on 12:3; 15.12 on 12:10. The first of these references simply ascribe the cause of redemption from Egypt to two kinds of blood (the blood of the circumcision and that of the Passover lambs), without mentioning atonement/expiation. Only the last two references specifically link atonement to the blood of the Passover sacrifice. They are both from the same section (15) of the 11-12<sup>th</sup> century *Exodus Rabba*: the first (15.12 on 12:3) refers to the atoning value of the annual Passover celebration (uniformly denied by every authority including Jeremias himself, *Eucharistic Words*, 225), and the second (15.12 on 12:12) links the Lord’s forgiveness specifically to the blood of the first Passover sacrifices (and to the blood of the circumcision) in an expiatory manner. This single reference, in a late mediaeval midrash, hardly justifies the scholarly claims made for the expiatory properties of the first Passover sacrifice.

<sup>20</sup> Jürgen Roloff, *Revelation: A Continental Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993) 79. However, the reference given by Roloff (Str-B 1:85ff) does not in any way confirm his claim that, in Jewish belief, the first Passover sacrifices had expiatory properties. It simply cites some passages from Jewish midrashic literature that speak about a correspondence between the first redemption and the last. One assumes, therefore, that the basis of his claim are those passages previously invoked by Jeremias (see note 18 above).

<sup>21</sup> Other models are presented by C.M. Tuckett in “Atonement in the NT”, *ABD*, 1. 518-22.

<sup>22</sup> Peter Stuhlmacher, “Das Lamm Gottes: eine Skizze” in *Festschrift für Martin Hengel* (3 vols, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996), vol. III, 531 (our translation). He continues: “In John 1,29.36 there is emphasis on the representative bearing, or carrying away, of the sins of the world (according to Isa 53,4.11-12). John 19,36 only refers to Exod 12,46. In 1Cor 5,7, “the phrase ‘for indeed our passover was sacrificed’ is less concerned soteriologically with sacrificial expiation (...), than christologically with the reasoning behind the slaughter of

The second, and more significant, impediment to this argument is that there is no suggestion, or hint of confirmation, in any of the OT or apocryphal references to the first Passover (Exod 12; Ps 78,51; 105,36; 136,10; Wis 18,10-16) that the first Passover sacrifice had an expiatory effect. Stuhlmacher sums it up in the following way:

“From Exod 12,13 to Jub 49,3, down to Heb 11,28, the blood of the Passover sacrifice was understood, above all, to have an apotropaic effect, whereas regarding the expiatory effect of the blood of the passover sacrifice in OT or early Jewish texts, the expression is at most indirect (cf. 2Chr 30,15-17 and Josephus Ant 2.312). Not until post-New Testament times do the rabbinical examples mentioned by Jeremias say something more explicit”.<sup>23</sup>

In summary, although many allusions to the first redemption (exodus typology) are to be found in Revelation, the emphasis in the text on the expiatory properties of the Lamb’s sacrifice<sup>24</sup> throws doubt on the correspondence of the Lamb in Revelation with the ancient Passover sacrifice, and invites further investigation.

In fact, the inadequacy of the Passover analogy alone, as an explanation for the Lamb in Revelation, has prompted the majority of commentators to propose a third approach, which is simply a combination of the first and the second approaches listed above. Prigent states it like this:

“Several exegetes feel, however, that the sole reference to the Passover lamb does not suffice to shed light on the text of Revelation: they imagine a complex concept combining a Paschal allusion with a reference to Isa 53:7”.<sup>25</sup>

The combined approach to the Lamb metaphor in Revelation appears to compensate for the deficiencies of either approach taken on its own. Allusions to atonement for sin (Isa 53, 4-12), to the justification of the many (Isa 53,11b) and the eventual post-mortem vindication (Isa 53,10b.12) of the servant in Isaiah 53 account for analogous features in Revelation, while the Passover passages (esp. Exod 12) form the background to the exodus typology in the text. Beale, who recommends the combined approach, explains its strengths in the following way:

“There are two different proposals for the background of the “slain Lamb.” Some prefer to see it as a reference to the OT Passover lamb, while others favor Isa. 53:7: “he was led as a sheep to the slaughter” (cf. Isa. 53:8ff.). However, neither should be excluded, since both have in common with the metaphorical picture in Rev. 5:6 the central function and significance of the sacrifice of a lamb, which accomplishes redemption and victory for God’s people. The Isaiah 53 background especially highlights the atoning aspect of the lamb’s sacrificial death...”.<sup>26</sup>

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Christ (...) as the Passover Lamb and the attitude of the Corinthian community represented metaphorically by the alternatives of leavened and unleavened bread.” It is uncertain whether ‘the precious blood’ (...) of Jesus in 1Pet 1,19 refers to his blood as that of the Passover lamb, because nowhere does 1Peter refer to Exod 12, and the expression ‘lamb without blemish or spot’ can more easily be related to the stipulations concerning the quality of the lambs required for the *Tamid* offering in Num 28,3 and Ezek 46,13 than with Exod 12,5, where the Septuagint translates the Hebrew word תמים with τέλειος and not with ἄμωμος” (our translation).

<sup>23</sup> Stuhlmacher, “Das Lamm Gottes”, 530-31 (our translation). For the apotropaic function (i.e., designed to avert or turn aside evil) of the Passover sacrifice, see Baruch M. Bokser’s article “Unleavened Bread and Passover, Feasts of”, in *ABD*, 6. 756-7.

<sup>24</sup> See note 16 above.

<sup>25</sup> Prigent, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, 43; elsewhere he writes: “The majority of commentators stop here by proposing that we see in the apocalyptic Lamb the result of a cross between the Passover lamb and the servant-lamb” (*The Apocalypse of St. John*, 250).

<sup>26</sup> G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (NIGTC, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) 351.

However, not all scholars are satisfied with this approach either, no doubt sensing that it still does not fully explain the Lamb metaphor in Revelation. As a result, they seem to have given up the search for an identifiable OT background, or combination of backgrounds, suggesting instead that there is only a very loose association between the Lamb in Revelation and specific OT cultic practices. After listing all the various possibilities, Aune, for example, concludes:

“It seems apparent that the historical *realia* of the Israelite sacrificial cult examined above do not provide anything more than a general context in which the metaphor of the slaughtered Lamb whose blood somehow effects redemption can be understood. The sacrificial features of the Lamb of Revelation are primarily a textual phenomenon with only very loose associations with actual cultic practice”.<sup>27</sup>

In his recent commentary on Revelation, Stuckenbruck sums up the current discussion by noting that none of the main proposals to date appear to help in understanding the heavenly setting in which the Lamb is described in Revelation:

“The image of a slaughtered lamb is no doubt rooted in the sacrificial cult of Judaism known through the Hebrew scriptures. However, it remains unclear whether the imagery derives from any traditions about (a) the daily or tamid burnt offering (e.g., Exod 29:38-46; Num 28:3-8), (b) the Passover sacrifice which brought liberation to Israel (e.g., Exod 12:1-20; Num 9:2-5; Deut 16:1-8; 2Chr 30:1-27), (c) a military ruler (1Enoch 89:45-46, referring to David; cf. T.Jos. 19:8), or (d) the death of the innocent Suffering Servant of God (Isaiah 53). Since several of these elements may be recognized in the Lamb Christology of Revelation, it is possible that the author has engaged in a creative conflation of traditions. If this is correct, the Lamb symbol is meant to evoke a whole range of ideas with which John wishes his readers to identify: innocence, suffering, obedience, and rule. In relation to the Christ event the image of a sacrificed Lamb refers to his death by crucifixion (cf. John 1:29; 1Cor 5:7). However, by locating the slaughtered victim in heaven, John goes well beyond the notion of Christ’s death as an event in history; he transforms Jesus’ crucifixion into a principle of cosmic significance...”.<sup>28</sup>

By drawing attention to the importance of the heavenly setting of the Lamb, Stuckenbruck is actually pointing the way forward to a more complete understanding of the Lamb metaphor in Revelation. It is quite possible that the heavenly setting of the Lamb may provide the information we are lacking in order to make fuller sense of its sacrificial symbolism.

## A new approach

If, in the past, discussion of the sacrificial symbolism of the Lamb in Revelation has tended to focus too narrowly on the figure of the Lamb and not enough on its heavenly setting in St. John’s visions, then the logical way to proceed is to give greater attention to the character of the heavenly setting, and to the Lamb’s role in it.

In fact, just as the figure of the slain Lamb readily evokes Hebrew cultic practice, so also does the heavenly setting that is described around the throne where the Lamb is seen. In numerous passages of Revelation, this heavenly environment is explicitly referred to as

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<sup>27</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 373.

<sup>28</sup> Loren T. Stuckenbruck, “Revelation” in *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* (eds. J.D.G Dunn and J.W.Rogerson, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003) 1535-1572, here 1546.

God's sanctuary (ναός: Rev 3,12; 7,15; 11,1.2.19; 14,15.17; 15,5.6.8; 16,1.17) or dwelling (σκηνή: 13,6), which contains many of the liturgical objects and furnishings that characterized the ancient temple cult: the *menorah* (1,12.13.20; 2,1.5; 11,4), the altar of incense (6,9; 8,3.5; 9,13; 14,18; 16,7), the altar (11,1), the ark of the Covenant (11,19), as well as harps (5,8; 14,2; 15,2), trumpets (8,2) and libation bowls (15,7; 16,1). Similarly, words and actions described in these passages clearly represent liturgical activities corresponding to those performed in the former temple at Jerusalem: offering of incense (8,3-4), blowing of trumpets (chaps. 8-11), pouring of libations (chaps. 15-16), divine worship (4,8-11; 5,12-14; 7,10-12; 12,10-12; 16,5-7), thanksgiving (11,15-18; 19,1-8) and singing of hymns of praise (5,9-10; 15,3-4).<sup>29</sup> Since the slain Lamb is at the center of this liturgical activity in Revelation (5,6-14; 7,17), a deeper understanding of the liturgical setting can be expected to yield further insight into the sacrificial symbolism of the Lamb.

In the Christian tradition, it has long been recognized that parts of the Letter to the Hebrews (Heb 10,19-20; 12,22-23) and the book of Revelation (especially chaps. 4-5, 7, 14-15, 19) describe a heavenly liturgy, in which the angels and the resurrected souls of the saints and martyrs in heaven participate along with the community of the faithful on earth.<sup>30</sup> This liturgical dimension of Revelation has also been acknowledged and studied by modern scholarship.<sup>31</sup>

Recently, similar scenes of heavenly worship have been discovered in other apocalyptic works, in certain Qumranic writings and in the *Hekhalot* literature,<sup>32</sup> presenting a rich variety of material with which to compare the visions of heavenly worship in Revelation. Scholars studying this material generally conclude that the liturgy in Revelation was inspired by a first-century liturgical tradition contemporary with the date of its composition, although opinions differ over which particular background has been most influential.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, it is generally agreed that the hymnic material in Revelation is the author's own composition.<sup>34</sup> Thompson has focused on the function of the liturgical scenes, rather than on their alleged origin, and has concluded that they perform an important role in unifying the separate visions in the text, in a way that allows eschatological events to be celebrated in the present ('realized eschatology').<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> For a full treatment, see Robert A. Briggs, *Jewish Temple Imagery in the Book of Revelation* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999) 45-110.

<sup>30</sup> This tradition is reflected, for example, in *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994) paras. 1137-39.

<sup>31</sup> Vanni, *L'Apocalisse*, 101: "L'Apocalisse ha una sua dimensione liturgica. È questo, un fatto che l'esegesi e la teologia biblica dell'Apocalisse possono considerare acquisito, specialmente dopo gli studi che si sono susseguiti sull'argomento in questi ultimi anni." (The relevant bibliography is given in the footnote to this passage). Useful summaries of this research are to be found in Ulfgard, *Feast and Future*, 21-27, and R. Nusca, "Liturgia e Apocalisse" in *Apokalypsis* (in onore di Ugo Vanni, eds. E. Bosetti and A. Colacrai, Assisi: Citadella Editrice, 2005) 459-472.

<sup>32</sup> For the titles of these works, see Prigent, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, 22-23, 29-32.

<sup>33</sup> Prigent (*The Apocalypse of St. John*, 28-35, 47-49, 233-34, 253-37, 260-61, 648-53) sees here a resemblance with the liturgies of the ancient synagogue and the early Church, both Prigent and Ulfgard (Prigent, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, 34-35) emphasize the similarity with certain Qumranic writings, and Aune (*Revelation I-5*, 314-17) adds the Roman imperial court ceremonial as one of the likely antecedents of the liturgy in Revelation. With respect to the liturgical vision in Rev 4-5, these views are challenged by Beale (*The Book of Revelation*, 312-16), who places Daniel 7 as the primary source of inspiration.

<sup>34</sup> The arguments for this are summed up by David R. Carnegie, "Worthy is the Lamb: The Hymns in Revelation" in *Christ is Lord* (ed. H. Rowdon, Leicester: IVP, 1982) 246-47. See also Prigent, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, 257, n. 6.

<sup>35</sup> Leonard L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (Oxford: OUP, 1990) 53-73.

In summary, apart from a small number of scholars who have been convinced that the liturgy of Revelation corresponds to the ancient temple liturgy of the Feast of Tabernacles,<sup>36</sup> there have been very few attempts to compare the liturgical characteristics of Revelation with liturgical practice in the ancient temple.<sup>37</sup>

As a new way forward, the comparison between the liturgical features of Revelation and liturgical practice in the ancient temple is strongly endorsed by the correspondence that was believed to exist between the original, or archetypal, temple in heaven and its copies, or types, on earth.<sup>38</sup> According to this belief, the heavenly sanctuary that was revealed to the author of Revelation is the same as the one that was revealed to Moses, as a plan for the tabernacle that he was asked to construct (Exod 25,8-9.40; 26,30; 27,8). A true typological correspondence therefore exists between the heavenly sanctuary described in Revelation, the tabernacle built by Moses, and the former temple in Jerusalem that was modeled on this.<sup>39</sup> It is a correspondence that embraces the whole of the legislation attributed to Moses concerning the organization, administration and liturgical activity of the ancient sacrificial cult. On the basis of this correspondence, references to the divine cult in the OT, and even in the Jewish oral tradition recorded in the *Mishnah*, provide information that is fundamental for the interpretation of the liturgical language of the Revelation. For the practical purposes of making this comparison, mishnaic sources are especially useful since they provide abundant details about the liturgical practices in the ancient temple, in contrast to the sparse information on this subject contained in the OT.

It should be noted, however, before proceeding, that this correspondence is not one of simple identity or resemblance, because a fundamental difference has been introduced with the advent of the Messiah. Reflecting the 'typological' relationship between the OT and the NT, the tabernacle and temple represent provisional and preparatory forms of worship, which find their messianic fulfillment in the temple described in the NT book of Revelation. As a

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<sup>36</sup> One thinks especially of Yves M-J. Congar, *The Mystery of the Temple* (London: Burns and Oates, 1962) 210-11, and R.J. McKelvey, *The New Temple: The Church in the New Testament* (Oxford: OUP, 1969) 161-64, following J. Comblin, "La Liturgie de la Nouvelle Jérusalem" *ETL*, vol XXIX (1953) 5-40. However, allusions to the Feast of Tabernacles seem to be restricted to Rev 7,9-17, and have since been clarified by Ulfgard in *Feast and Future*. In the light of this work, Prigent observes: "... this text undoubtedly does intend to evoke the Jewish celebrations of the Feast of Tabernacles and their symbolism. We must nevertheless add a note of caution: each of the symbolical elements retained is susceptible of being understood independently from any reference to that feast" (*The Apocalypse of St. John*, 290).

<sup>37</sup> As one of the few to attempt such a comparison, Paulien notes "A number of scholars have noticed elements of the Hebrew cultus in the Apocalypse. But apart from generalities the role of that imagery in the author's overall structure and/or narrative plot has received only superficial treatment." (Jon Paulien, "The Role of the Hebrew Cultus, Sanctuary and Temple in the Plot and Structure of the Book of Revelation", *AUSS*, vol. 33, no. 2 [1995] 247). He proceeds to scan the text for cultic imagery and succeeds in identifying allusions to the daily *Tamid* service and the Day of Atonement, as well as the main annual feasts of the ancient calendar.

<sup>38</sup> This is the subject of a comprehensive study by Giovanni Bissoli called *Il Tempio nella Letteratura Giudaica e Neotestamentaria* (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1994). See also George Buchanan Gray, *Sacrifice in the Old Testament: Its theory and Practice* (Oxford: OUP, 1925) 148-78.

<sup>39</sup> Congar (*The Mystery of the Temple*, 209) expresses it thus: "If John thus sees the heavenly temple in the shape of the Temple of Jerusalem, it is not so much because he imagines the sanctuary on the model of the sanctuary he had seen on earth at Jerusalem, it is principally because the latter, as the successor of the Mosaic tabernacle, had been constructed according to the heavenly prototype shown to Moses on the mountain". Although it is unlikely that the Exodus passages (Exod 25,8-9.40; 26,30; 27,8) originally meant that the plan shown to Moses involved a vision of the heavenly sanctuary, this is certainly how they were re-interpreted later in the post-exilic period. Through this process of re-interpretation, these and certain other passages (Ezek 43,10-11; 1Chron 28,11-20) lie at the origin of the numerous apocalyptic temple visions (R.H. Charles, *Studies in the Apocalypse* [2<sup>nd</sup> ed, Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1915] 166-67; Gray, *Sacrifice in the OT*, 154-57).

corollary, one should not expect to find identical temple features or liturgical actions in the proposed comparison, but rather analogies whose interpretation can shed light on the eschatological meaning and significance of ancient liturgical elements and practices.

### **Comparison with the ancient temple liturgy: the daily morning service**

The basic structure of the text of Revelation suggests a starting point in the comparison between its liturgical visions and the liturgical activity of the ancient temple: not only do the major liturgical elements of Revelation correspond to those of the daily service (the *Tamid* service) but they do so in the same basic order.<sup>40</sup> With the aim of demonstrating this correspondence, we present below a summary of the essential stages of the daily morning service, in the order in which it was performed in the second temple and recorded in the mishnaic tractate *Tamid*.<sup>41</sup> The daily evening service was almost the same.<sup>42</sup> Each stage is then matched with analogous liturgical elements from Revelation.

1. At dawn, after the necessary preparations (*m.Tamid* 1; 2), the lamb chosen to be the ‘continual holocaust’ was slaughtered at the sound of the opening of the door at entrance of the sanctuary (*m.Tamid* 3:1-5, 7). The blood of the lamb was collected in a bowl: a part was sprinkled over the altar of holocausts and the rest was poured out at its base (*m.Tamid* 4:1).

The analogous actions—the slaughter of the Lamb and the outpouring of his blood—are not recounted in Revelation. Nevertheless, they are recalled in such a way as to indicate that they had already taken place when the author received the revelation: the dawn had broken because the bright morning star had appeared (Rev 22,16); the door of the sanctuary had been opened because the author saw it open (Rev 4,1); the Lamb had been slain because he appeared in heaven with the signs of his slaughter (Rev 5,6); his blood had been poured out because it had acquired for God people from every part of the world (Rev 5,9). Given that the slaughter of the Lamb refers to the death of Christ on the cross, these allusions confirm that the Easter events form the historical background for the visions of Revelation. Furthermore, the fact that the slaughter of the lamb is the starting-point for the daily morning service in the former temple indicates, by analogy, that the death of Christ on the cross marks the start of the heavenly liturgy described in Revelation.

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<sup>40</sup> Paulien also makes this observation (“The Role of the Hebrew Cultus”, 255-56).

<sup>41</sup> In spite of Danby’s warning that “It is a matter of extreme difficulty to decide what historical value we should attach to any tradition in the Mishnah” (*The Mishnah*, trans. Herbert Danby, Oxford: OUP [1933] xiv), the historicity of the tractate *Tamid* is seldom questioned, as, for example, in the accounts of the daily service in Emil Schürer’s *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* (revised in 3 vols, eds. G. Vermes, F. Millar, M. Black, Edinburgh: T.& T.Clark, [1973] vol. II, 299-308) and in the article “Sacrifice” in *EncJud*, vol. 14, cols. 608-10. “Little controversy is recorded here in the Mishnah, a sign of an early redaction, probably from just before or soon after the destruction of the Temple” (from “*Tamid*”, *EncJud*, vol. 15, cols. 785-86). Based on a discussion in the *Talmud* (*b.Yoma* 14b), the tractate *Tamid* is traditionally understood to have been derived from Simeon of Mizpah, a contemporary of R.Gamaliel II, who was alive when the temple was still standing. Furthermore, “The tractate *Tamid* is written in a descriptive, lively, and flowing style, and it may be conjectured that Simeon presented an eyewitness account of the order of the Temple service”(from “Simeon of Mizpah”, *EncJud*, vol.14, cols. 1567-68).

<sup>42</sup> The daily service was performed twice daily, in the morning (at first light) and in the evening (around mid-afternoon). The evening service followed the same order as the morning service (see following text), except that the offering of incense (5) took place after the members of the continual holocaust had been thrown on to the altar (7) and before the libations (9; cf. *m.Yoma* 3:5).

2. Inside the sanctuary of the former temple, the altar of incense was prepared and the seven-branched lampstand (the *menorah*) was trimmed and refilled (*m.Tamid* 3:6,9).

These actions are represented in the introductory vision of Revelation, in which ‘one like a son of man’ is revealed amongst the seven golden lampstands that symbolize seven local churches (Rev 1,9-20). The messages that follow (Revelation 2-3) have a purifying effect that is analogous to that of the trimming and refilling of the seven-branched lampstand inside the sanctuary of the former temple.

3. The body of the lamb that had been sacrificed was dismembered, and its members were carried to the base of the altar of holocausts, to the lowest part of the ramp of access (*m.Tamid* 4:2-3).

In the heavenly liturgy described in Revelation, these actions are recalled in the vision of the souls of the martyrs ‘under the altar’ in heaven (Rev 6,9-10). Just as the members of the continual holocaust were severed from its body and carried to the base of the altar, so also some members have been taken from the pilgrim Church on earth and, by means of their martyrdom, have been placed under the altar that is in heaven. The identification of the Church with the body of the Lamb is implied in this comparison, in a way that recalls the apostolic doctrine describing the Church as the body of Christ (cf. 1Cor 12,27; Rom 12,5; Eph 4,11-16).

4. All the priests gathered to recite some benedictions, followed by the Ten Commandments (Deut 5,6-22), the ‘Shema’ (Deut 6,4-9) and other passages of the Law (Deut 11,13-21; Num 15,37-41). Then they drew lots to decide who should perform the incense offering (*m.Tamid* 5:1-2).

In Revelation the corresponding part of the liturgy is indicated by the sealed scroll taken by the Lamb (Rev 5,7) and by the opening of its first four seals, which launch the missions of the four horsemen (Rev 6,1-8). Just as the theme of the readings in the daily morning service was the affirmation of God’s sovereignty and the importance of observing his commandments, so the mission of the white horse (Rev 6,1-2) represents the victorious force of the God’s kingdom and sovereignty, communicated to mankind by means of the preaching of Christ’s gospel.<sup>43</sup> The missions of the remaining three horses (Rev 6,3-8) represent, in a complementary way, the negative effects of rebelling against God and disobeying his commandments (cf. Lev 26,14-46; Deut 28,15-69; Jer,17-19; Ezek 5,1-17), already touched upon in one of the readings at the corresponding part of the morning service (Deut 11,16-17).<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> In modern times this traditional understanding of the mission of the first horseman as a positive force has been unconvincingly challenged by various interpretations of a negative kind. For a thorough review of the subject and an endorsement of the traditional view, see Luis María Guerra Suárez, *El Caballo Blanco en el Apocalipsis Ap 6,1-2/19,11-16 y la Presencia de Cristo en la Historia* (Gran Canaria: ISTIC, 2004), esp. 720-29.

<sup>44</sup> Of relevance here is the midrashic amplification of the Ten Commandments in the Targums of Exodus, written around the first century BC and expounded by Jean Potin, in *La fête juive de la Pentecôte* (Etude des textes liturgiques, Paris: Cerf, 1971): appended to each of the last five commandments is the mention of an affliction that has entered the world to punish the breaking of that commandment (in order: sword, plague, famine, drought and famine, war and exile). The author is impressed by the evident connection with the missions of the 4 horsemen in Revelation: “Les rapprochements avec l’Apocalypse de Jean sont frappants. En Ap 6,1-7 nous trouvons les mêmes fléaux...Manifestement l’Apocalypse et le Targum sont très proches l’un de l’autre et utilisent les mêmes sources, à moins que Jean n’utilise le Targum lui-même”(ibid., 100). “En reprenant

5. The great sound which was emitted from an instrument called the *magrefah* announced to the neighboring region that the incense offering was about to begin. It was a time of prayer for all the people (*m.Tamid* 5:6). Burning coals were then taken from the altar of holocausts to the altar of incense which was inside the sanctuary; the offering of the incense immediately took place and the priests entered the sanctuary to prostrate themselves (*m.Tamid* 5:4-5; 6:1-3; 7:1).

In Revelation the offering of the incense is directly represented as part of the heavenly liturgy (Rev 8,3-4), but instead of being announced by a great sound, it begins with the breaking of the seventh seal, which is followed by a great silence in heaven (Rev 8,1).<sup>45</sup> Conforming to the ancient tradition (cf. Ps 141,1-2; Jdt 9,1; Luke 1,10), the offering of incense in the heavenly liturgy is also a time of prayer for the faithful (Rev 8,3-4).

6. Whilst the smoke of the incense was rising from the altar, the priests gathered on the steps in front of the sanctuary in order to recite the priestly blessing (Num 6,24-26). During the recital, the Name of the Lord was pronounced as it is written (*m.Tamid* 7:2), thus fulfilling the divine purpose of the blessing: "...in this way they will place my Name on the Israelites and I will bless them" (Num 6,27).

In Revelation the act of placing the Name of God on the Israelites is represented, in a particular way, by the impression of the seal of the Living God upon the 144,000 men chosen from the twelve tribes of Israel (Rev 7,1-8), leaving the Name of God and of the Lamb imprinted on their foreheads (Rev 14,1).

7. The members of the lamb that had been sacrificed were then lifted up, thrown into the fire on the altar of holocausts and burned; at the same time trumpets were blown (*m.Tamid* 7:3).

In the liturgy of the heavenly sanctuary described in Revelation, the analogous action is the throwing of fire from the altar of incense on to the earth (Rev 8,5). There are, however, understandable differences: in the daily morning service the offerings were thrown on to the fire, whereas in the heavenly liturgy the fire is thrown on to the earth, where the offerings are represented by the members of the Church (Rev 8,5). The evident disparity can be easily explained by a fundamental difference between the two settings: in the former temple, a fire was always kept alight on the outer altar (Lev 6,2.5.6) and the fire from this altar was taken to the altar of incense inside the sanctuary, when the moment arrived for the offering of the incense.<sup>46</sup> In the heavenly sanctuary, on the other hand, there is always fire burning on the altar of incense<sup>47</sup> and fire from this altar is thrown on to the earth when the moment arrives to kindle the offerings, and prepare them for martyrdom (Rev 8,5).

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les memes fléaux que le Targum, l'Apocalypse rappelle aussi aux hommes la menace qui pèse sur eux..." (ibid., 297). This provides further support for the correspondence between the reading of the Ten Commandments in the daily service and the missions of the 4 horsemen in Revelation.

<sup>45</sup> The absence of a 'great sound' in heaven, like that of the *magrefah* in the ancient temple, should not be interpreted as a serious breach in the correspondence between the heavenly and earthly liturgies, but rather as a reflection of the fundamental difference between these two settings. Whereas on earth a 'great sound' is needed to call the community to prayer from their worldly occupations and distractions, there is clearly no need for such a signal in heaven, where praise and prayer are continual (e.g., Rev 4,8-11; 6,10). In this context of continual praise, the 'great silence' that follows the opening of the seventh seal creates as much of a contrast in heaven, as did the 'great sound' issuing from the ancient temple in Jerusalem.

<sup>46</sup> See above at III.5.

<sup>47</sup> The fact that, at this altar, there is an angel in charge of the fire (Rev 14,18; cf. Isa 6,6; Ezek 10,2) suggests that the fire there is always kept burning.

As in the liturgy of the former temple, trumpets are blown at this point: seven trumpets are given to the seven angels that stand before God (Rev 8,2), and every time one of these angels blows his trumpet a different kind of disaster afflicts the earth (Rev 8,6 – 9,20).

8. The oblation of cereal was then added to the members of the ‘continual holocaust’ on the altar (*m.Tamid* 3:1; 4:3). The consumption of these offerings in the fire of the altar represented the culmination of the entire liturgy and was referred to as the ‘presentation’ of the offerings before God.

In the heavenly liturgy, this final part of the daily morning service is represented by the vision of the martyrs standing on the glassy sea mixed with fire (Rev 15,2), like offerings presented before God on the altar. Understood as the bulk of the eschatological harvest of grain from the previous vision (Rev 14,14-16), this multitude of martyrs can be identified in a particular way with the oblation of cereal.

9. Finally, the libation of wine was poured out at the base of the altar of holocausts, whilst the Levites played their musical instruments and sang psalms. At every interruption in the singing, the trumpets were blown and the people gathered in the temple prostrated themselves (*m.Tamid* 7:3-4).

Analogously in Revelation, the seven bowls full of the wine of the passionate anger of God are poured out on the earth (Revelation 16), whilst the saints and the martyrs in heaven celebrate with music and song (Rev 15,2-4; cf. 7,9-17; 14,2-3; 19,1-8) just as the Levites used to do at the end of the liturgy in the former temple.

The liturgy described in Revelation, which begins with the sacrifice of the Lamb<sup>48</sup> and unfolds around him in the heavenly sanctuary, corresponds quite closely in form and content to the divine service which took place every day in the former temple. On a closer look, however, it can be seen that certain features of the heavenly liturgy evoke elements of the liturgical rites performed specifically on the most solemn day of the Hebrew calendar—the Day of Atonement. We will go on to compare these features of the heavenly liturgy with descriptions of the liturgy for the Day of Atonement taken from two sources in particular: the Old Testament (Leviticus 16; 23,26-32; Num 29,7-11) and a tractate of the *Mishnah* entitled ‘*Yoma*’, which means ‘the Day’.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> See above at III.1.

<sup>49</sup> Concerning the historicity of the tractate *Yoma*, “it is evident that the Mishnah has preserved *halakhot* which belong to an early period, and it follows that the tractate was composed early. Apparently they had already begun to teach and arrange the *halakhot* of the service of the Day of Atonement close to the destruction [of the second temple], but the editor of the Mishnah had before him a source (apparently from the generation before his) in which the early material was intermingled with his additions” (from “*Yoma*”, *EncJud*, vol. 16, cols. 844-45). The question of which parts of the tractate reflect actual second temple practice, and which are subsequent developments, is dealt with by Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra (*The Impact of Yom Kippur on Early Christianity: The Day of Atonement from Second Temple Judaism to the Fifth Century*, WUNT 163, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck [2003] 19-28), who concludes that “While some mishnaic traditions faithfully describe the temple ritual, others can be explained as rabbinic inventions based on exegesis” (ibid., 27). He considers it likely that “Some ritual details matching later synagogue service may have been projected into the memory of the temple service in order to justify these practices and reinforce the impression of a continuity between temple and synagogue” (ibid., 27-28). Stökl Ben Ezra includes in this category the reading of the Law at the end of the expiatory rite (ibid., 25-26; cf. *m.Yoma* 7:1), which we also find in the heavenly liturgy of Revelation (see text, section IV.7). We suggest that this finding, in an independent source where the case for Day of Atonement allusions is quite strong, tips the balance in favor of understanding the reading of the Law as part of the actual

## Comparison with the ancient temple liturgy: the ritual for the Day of Atonement

1. On the annual Day of Atonement, in the ancient temple, a large number of animals were sacrificed with the intention of making expiation. Apart from the 2 lambs offered as holocausts in the daily services, numerous additional sacrifices were commanded (Num 29,7-11; Lev 16,3.24): a burnt offering for the high priest (1 ram), a sin offering for the priests (1 goat) and several more burnt offerings for the people (1 ram, 1 bullock and 7 lambs). Furthermore, between the morning and evening services, a specific rite of expiation was performed which involved the offering of another three animals: a bullock and a goat which were sacrificed to the Lord, and another goat (the so-called ‘scapegoat’) which was sent out alive into the desert, to Azazel (Lev 16,6-28)

Similarly in the heavenly liturgy described in Revelation there are many sacrifices: starting with the Lamb that was slain (Rev 5,6), progressing to the slain martyrs under the altar (Rev 6,9) and ending with the countless multitude of souls standing before the throne in heaven, celebrating their salvation after being martyred in the great tribulation (Rev 7,9-17; 15,2-4). All these sacrifices, however, are united figuratively to the sacrifice of the Lamb, through their participation in a liturgical sequence that corresponds closely with that of the morning service in the ancient temple, which is based on the sacrifice of only one lamb as a holocaust. As already noted in the previous section, the slain martyrs correspond to the members of the lamb, and the great multitude of souls represent the cereal oblation that was added to this sacrifice upon the altar.<sup>50</sup>

So compared with the additional sacrifices offered on the Day of Atonement in the ancient liturgy, a great simplification has taken place—the heavenly liturgy is based on only one sacrifice, that of the Lamb, which corresponds to the first sacrifice of the day, the ‘continual holocaust’ of the morning service. The blood of this single Lamb has made expiation for sins once and for all, fulfilling the expiatory role of the blood of all the sin offerings that were sacrificed on this day (cf. Heb 10,1-18).

2. On the Day of Atonement, the main ritual actions of the morning service were performed by the high priest himself, including the slaying of the lamb and the trimming and refilling of the seven-branched lampstand (*m. Yoma* 1:2; 3:4).

In fact, the one who carries out the analogous task in the visions of Revelation, the ‘one like a son of man’, corresponds precisely with the figure of the high priest: he is dressed in a long tunic, has bare feet and is girt around the chest like a priest on duty (Rev 1,13.15; cf. 15,6), but his authority is higher than that of an ordinary priest, being equal to that of the Lord himself (Rev 1,17-18; cf. 1,8; 22,13).<sup>51</sup> Given that he is “the living one, who was put to

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second temple ritual, and not just as a “projection of synaogal [sic!] practice onto the description of the temple ritual” (Stökl Ben Ezra, *The Impact of Yom Kippur on Early Christianity*, 26).

<sup>50</sup> See sections III.3 and III.8 above.

<sup>51</sup> The majority of ancient and modern commentators have detected high-priestly characteristics in the figure of the ‘one like a son of man’, especially in his clothing (e.g., Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 208-9; Vanni, *L’Apocalisse*, 126-28; Paulien, “The Role of the Hebrew Cultus”, 249; Congar, *The Mystery of the Temple*, 210), but this is disputed by Prigent (*The Apocalypse of St. John*, 136) and Aune (*Revelation 1-5*, 93-94) on the grounds that the Greek word for his robe, *ποδήρης*, is not specific enough. However, as noted by Briggs: “The presence of the lampstands [in this vision] serves to confirm both this tenet [that the ‘one like a son of man’ is portrayed as the high priest] and the one that Revelation 1 is a temple scene...it was, after all, the

death but is now alive forever” (Rev 1,18; 2,8), he can also be identified with the Lamb that was slain and now lives at the throne of God in heaven (Rev 5,6); both the Lamb and the ‘one like a son of man’ represent Jesus Christ—died and risen—on the one hand as the victim of a ritual sacrifice, and on the other hand as the high priest who offers it (cf. Heb 9,11-14).<sup>52</sup>

3. For the ritual of expiation on the Day of Atonement, the high priest changed into special garments made of ordinary white linen (Lev 16,4; *m.Yoma* 3:6,7). His usual garments were made of fine linen.

The ‘one like a son of man’, who performs the role of the high priest in the liturgy of Revelation, is clothed like the angels who are later given the libation-bowls to pour out (Rev 15,6-7). These are not only “girt around the chest with golden girdles” (Rev 1,13; 15,6) but are also “dressed in clean bright ordinary linen”. We are led to understand that the garments of the ‘one like a son of man’ are also made of ordinary linen on this occasion, just like those of the angels.

4. On the Day of Atonement, the high priest was given a great quantity of incense to burn inside the holy of holies, much more than was usually given to the priest to offer in the sanctuary during the daily services (Lev 16,12-13; *m.Yoma* 4:4).

Similarly, in the liturgy described in Revelation, the angel was given “*much* incense so that he might offer it...on the golden altar before the throne” (Rev 8,3). Furthermore the same angel that carries the censer (or fire-pan) is given the incense to offer, like the priest on the Day of Atonement (*m.Yoma* 5:1). In the daily service, on the other hand, one priest takes the fire-pan and another offers the incense (*m.Tamid* 6:2-3).<sup>53</sup>

5. Between the morning and evening services, the specific rite of expiation was performed which involved the offering of a bullock and a goat which were sacrificed to the Lord, and another goat (the so-called ‘scapegoat’) which was sent out alive into the desert, to Azazel. To perform this rite the high priest entered the holy of holies—the most sacred place in the former temple—and sprinkled it with the blood of the animals sacrificed to the Lord, in order to purify it. With the same intention he sprinkled the altar of incense and the altar of holocausts with the rest of the blood. (Lev 16:11-19).

Given that the Lamb represents both the sacrificial victim and the high priest,<sup>54</sup> his appearance before the throne of God, in the holiest part of the heavenly sanctuary during the liturgy of Revelation (Rev 5,6), corresponds to the execution of the specific rite of expiation for the sanctuary on the Day of Atonement, when the high priest entered the holy of holies with the blood of the victims. The expiation of the heavenly sanctuary appears to be represented, in Revelation, by the defeat of Satan and his angels, and by their expulsion from heaven, in such a way that “there was no longer a place for them in heaven” (Rev 12,7-12).

6. After sprinkling the blood of the two animals sacrificed to the Lord, the high priest then came up to the third animal, the live goat, and placing his hands on its head he confessed the

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high priest’s duty to set up and tend the lamps.” (*Jewish Temple Imagery*, 54). See also the counter-argument of Stökl Ben Ezra, *The Impact of Yom Kippur on Early Christianity*, 196, n.254)

<sup>52</sup> For further confirmation, compare Rev 19,6 with 17,14; 2,28 and 3,21 with 14,1; 3,21 with 7,17; 3,1 with 5,6.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. R.H.Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John* (ICC, 2 vols, Edinburgh: T. & T.Clark, 1920) vol.1, 230.

<sup>54</sup> See section IV.2 above.

iniquity of his people. After this, the animal was led away into the desert to return their sins, intentional and unintentional, to Azazel (Lev 16,10.20-22). In fact, it was taken to the top of a cliff a few miles outside the city and then pushed backwards into the ravine below (*m.Yoma* 6:3-6, 8). This was the place where, according to the account in *First Enoch*, Azazel had been bound and thrown to await his eternal destruction at the final judgment.<sup>55</sup>

An analogous process is at work in Revelation, arising out of the identification of Azazel with Satan,<sup>56</sup> and the correspondence between the scapegoat and the false prophet, described as a beast “having two horns like a lamb and speaking like a dragon” (Rev 13,11)—a description that indicates the false prophet performs a diabolical counterpart to the expiatory role of Christ the seven-horned Lamb.<sup>57</sup> Compelling people to worship the beast (Rev 13,12-17) to whom Satan had given his power, throne and great authority (Rev 13,1-2), the false prophet does indeed cause the removal of sin, not in the way brought about by Christ the Lamb—through the sinner’s repentance and reconciliation with God—but by means of the tragic and eternal condemnation of the unrepentant sinner (Rev 14,9-11; cf. 2 Thess 2,11-12). Finally, the false prophet is captured and thrown *alive* into the lake of fire, along with the first beast (Rev 19,20), to be followed by Satan at the final judgment (Rev 20,10).<sup>58</sup>

7. At the conclusion of the annual rite of expiation, the high priest took the scroll of the Law and read from it to the crowd that had gathered in the courts of the former temple. He read passages which concerned the Day of Atonement and finished with the recital of some benedictions (*m.Yoma* 7:1).

During the liturgy of the heavenly sanctuary, the Lamb takes the sealed scroll in an analogous way, when he appears before the throne of God (Rev 5,7). Further on in the text, the scroll taken by the Lamb is identified as the scroll of Life (Rev 13,8; 21,27) that will be opened and read at the final judgment (Rev 20,12). The only difference between the two situations is that in Revelation there is a substantial delay between the taking of the scroll and the reading of its contents at the final judgment. If the taking of the scroll indicates the completion of the act of expiation, as it did in the ancient rite, then this delay is profoundly significant: it can be interpreted as the time granted for repentance and reconciliation with God (cf. 2Pet 3,9).

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<sup>55</sup> In *1En* 10:4-6,8, the archangel Raphael was commanded to “Bind Azazel hand and foot, and cast him into the darkness: and make an opening in the desert, which is in Dudael, and cast him therein. And place upon him rough and jagged rocks, and cover him with darkness, and let him abide there for ever, and cover his face that he may not see light. And on the day of the great judgment he shall be cast into the fire....And the whole earth has been corrupted through the works that were taught by Azazel: to him ascribe all sin” (R.H.Charles, *APOT*, vol. II, page 193-94). Judging from later interpretation, there seems little doubt that this account in *First Enoch* was widely associated with the scapegoat rite on the Day of Atonement (see Lester L. Grabbe, “The Scapegoat Tradition: A Study in Early Jewish Interpretation”, *JSJ*, vol. 18 [1987] no. 2, 152-67, here 154-56; Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra, *The Impact of Yom Kippur on Early Christianity*, 85-90).

<sup>56</sup> As the leader of rebel angels, and the origin of all sin, as described in *1Enoch* 6-11, Azazel (or Asa’el) becomes an important component (along with Shemihazah, Satan, the chaos dragon, Beliar, and Lucifer) of the developed, first-century ‘Devil-Gestalt’ (see Grabbe, *The Scapegoat Tradition* 165-67). This figure reaches its most fully developed form in the book of Revelation, under the names of Satan, the devil, the dragon, the ancient serpent and deceiver of the whole world (Rev 12,9).

<sup>57</sup> The two horns are typical of a goat, the lamb-like quality identifies him as an expiatory offering and the dragon-like voice matches him with Satan, who is also called the dragon or devil (Rev 12,9).

<sup>58</sup> By way of confirmation, independently of the book of Revelation, Helm arrives at the conclusion that “ancient Jewish traditions appear to be in agreement with the interpretation which finds in the expulsion of the scapegoat a type or model of the eschatological defeat of demonic power” (Robert Helm, “Azazel in Early Jewish Tradition”, *AUSS*, vol.32, no.3 [1994], 217-226, here 226).

8. At the end of the Day of Atonement, the high priest prepared a feast to celebrate his safe return from the holy of holies (*m.Yoma* 7:4), where there was danger of death (cf. Lev 16,2.13).

In a similar way, according to the liturgy described in Revelation, the return of Jesus Christ will be celebrated with a feast: “blessed are those who are invited to the wedding feast of the Lamb” (Rev 19,9). Just as the curtain which covered the entrance of the sanctuary in the former temple (cf. Exod 26,36; 40,28; 1Macc 4,51) was opened at the start of the great feasts, to enable the pilgrims to see inside, so also the feast in celebration of the Lamb’s wedding begins with an analogous action: “And the sanctuary of God in heaven was opened...” (Rev 11,19; 15,5).

### **Results of the comparison: the heavenly liturgy**

In comparing the characteristics of the heavenly liturgy with liturgical practice in the former temple, we find that it not only corresponds to the content and sequence of the daily morning service, but also includes features analogous to specific rites that were performed on the annual Day of Atonement. These observations can best be explained if the liturgy described in Revelation represents a simplification of the liturgy that used to take place annually on the Day of Atonement in the ancient temple.<sup>59</sup> The simplification appears to arise from the fact that the slain Lamb, as the fulfillment of every kind of sacrifice, substitutes all the sacrifices that used to be offered on the Day of Atonement, except for the live sin-offering to Azazel whose role is fulfilled, in a modified way, by the false prophet.<sup>60</sup> The Lamb therefore corresponds to the first sacrifice on that day: the lamb chosen to be the ‘continual holocaust’ for the morning service. As a result, the heavenly liturgy described in Revelation closely corresponds to the morning service on the Day of Atonement, and includes liturgical elements that recall the specific rite of expiation that was performed on that day.

As previously observed, the introductory vision of the seven golden lampstands and the subsequent messages to the churches (Rev 1,10-20; chaps. 2-3) represent the trimming and refueling of the seven-branched lampstand at the start of the morning service in the ancient temple. The appearance of the Lamb before the throne of God in heaven (chaps. 4-5) corresponds to the entrance of the high priest into the most sacred part of the temple on the annual Day of Atonement, in order to perform expiation for the sanctuary with the blood of the victims (12,7-12). The missions of the first four horsemen (6,1-8) represent the part of the morning service reserved for the reading of the Ten Commandments and other parts of the

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<sup>59</sup> This finding underlies the striking doctrinal agreement between the book of Revelation and the Letter to the Hebrews (cf. Albert Vanhoye, “L’Apocalisse e la Lettera agli Ebrei”, in *Apokalypsis* 275). In the absence of any literary dependence, both works present Christ as the high-priestly redeemer and sacrificial victim in a Day of Atonement liturgy “that sees the current period of afflictions as a *Mo’ed Kippur*, a period of atonement, which began with Jesus’ death and will end with his Parousia” (Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra, *The Impact of Yom Kippur on Early Christianity*, 193). Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra argues convincingly for thematic links between the Letter to the Hebrews and pre-Christian apocalyptic traditions which had already employed Day of Atonement imagery to express eschatological realities (ibid., 180-194, 78-101). It should be noted, however, that while Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra comprehensively identifies features of the Day of Atonement ritual in several non-canonical apocalypses, as well as many canonical and non-canonical early Christian works, including the Letter to the Hebrews, he is curiously silent about the occurrence of these elements in the book of Revelation.

<sup>60</sup> See section IV.6 above.

Law. The souls of the martyrs who appear under the altar in heaven (6,9) correspond to the members of the sacrifice, after being transferred to the base of the outer altar in the former temple. The sealing of the 144,000 men that is described in Revelation (7,1-8) corresponds to the pronouncement of the priestly blessing. The offering of a great quantity of incense with the prayers of the saints on the golden altar in heaven (8,3-4) recalls the same action in the morning service of the former temple, which was also considered as a time of prayer for all the community. The angel who throws fire on to the earth from the altar in heaven (8,5) evokes the act of throwing the offerings on to the fire that was always kept alight on the outer altar. The sounding of the seven trumpets (chaps. 8-11) and the outpouring of the bowls (chaps. 15-16) together with the singing of the celestial choirs described in Revelation (7,9-17; 14,2-3; 15,3-4; 19,1-8) are analogous to the use of the trumpets and bowls at the culmination of the morning service, the time when the Levitical musicians used to sing psalms and praise to God.

At the conclusion of the heavenly liturgy, the scroll of Life, which had been given to the Lamb a long time previously (5,7-14), is opened and read out at the final judgment (20,11-12), just as the high priest used to read from the scroll of the Law at the end of the special rite of expiation on the Day of Atonement. In Revelation all the agents of iniquity, including Satan himself, are thrown alive into the lake of fire (Rev 19,20; 20,10), to bring an end to sin forever, whilst in the annual rite of expiation the scapegoat was thrown alive from a cliff, only temporarily removing sins from the community.<sup>61</sup>

In summary, the passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ constitute the starting point of a liturgy that is currently being celebrated in heaven; this liturgy continues up until the end of time and represents a synthesis of the liturgy that was performed on the Day of Atonement at the ancient temple of the Jews in Jerusalem. Being the principal activity in the heavenly sanctuary, the liturgy provides a framework that not only embraces the entire sequence of visions in Revelation, but also determines the course of events on earth. In this way, the heavenly liturgy unites every part of the book of Revelation into a single and coherent vision dominated by the theme of atonement—the love of Christ reconciling mankind with God.<sup>62</sup> The book of Revelation, therefore, can be understood as the revelation of the course of this liturgy for reconciliation taking place in heaven, and of its consequences for the lives of the peoples, believers and non-believers, on earth.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> The heavenly liturgy thus defined includes the majority of the liturgical elements mentioned in the text of Revelation, but not all. For example, the filling of the heavenly sanctuary with the smoke of the glory and power of God (Rev 15,8) is not included, and neither are the allusions in the text to the Jewish Feasts of Tabernacles (Rev 7,9-17) and Weeks (Rev 14,1-5). These and other liturgical themes are identified in John and Gloria Ben-Daniel, *The Apocalypse in the Light of the Temple: A New Approach to the Book of Revelation* [Jerusalem: Beit Yochanan, 2003] 127-211.

<sup>62</sup> The dominant theme of atonement in Revelation, expressed through its liturgical symbolism, merely subordinates, but does not invalidate, the exodus imagery in the text. In this way the full significance of the final messianic redemption is conveyed—a redemption (exodus typology) from sin through divine reconciliation (atonement). As a result, the familiar NT image of Jesus Christ as the Passover Lamb is transformed into the unique and eternal sacrificial figure that is discussed in the next section.

<sup>63</sup> Important implications follow from these findings: (1) as noted by Paulien (“The Role of the Hebrew Cultus”, 261), the liturgical development in Revelation suggests a “linear plot to the Apocalypse”; (2) since the culmination of the heavenly liturgy is signaled by trumpets and bowls and occupies the majority of the book of Revelation (chap. 8 onwards), this part of the text should be interpreted as an eschatological prophecy; (3) since the heavenly liturgy corresponds to the annual Day of Atonement from beginning to end, and “one day with the Lord is like a thousand years” (2Pet 3,8; cf. Ps 90,4), it can be argued that the thousand year reign of Christ (the ‘millennium’: Rev 20,4-6) should be considered as the period of time on earth that corresponds to the duration

## The sacrificial symbolism of the Lamb

According to the norms regarding sacrifices in the former temple, a lamb could be offered in various situations: a common person could offer a lamb as a sin offering in atonement for his sin (Lev 4,32-35), or as part of a rite of purification (Lev 12,1-8; 14,10-32), or as a communion sacrifice (Lev 3,7-10); the Passover lamb was, in fact, a special type of communion sacrifice (Exod 12,1-14.21-28). The various authors of the other books in the New Testament associate the crucifixion of Jesus Christ with one or other of these classes of sacrifice.

However, there was another class of sacrifice which frequently involved the offering of a lamb; since the animal in this class of sacrifice was burnt in its entirety, it came to be called a 'burnt offering' or 'holocaust' (Lev 1,10-13).<sup>64</sup> In fact, a sacrifice of this type formed the basis of the daily service in the former temple (Exod 29,38-42; Num 28,1-8), and the lamb chosen for this purpose was called the 'continual holocaust'<sup>65</sup>—'holocaust' because the whole animal was burnt in the fire on the altar, 'continual' because the smoke from this sacrifice was said to rise up continually before God. It was therefore asserted that the 'continual holocaust' had two essential characteristics: on the one hand its total consecration and return to God, and on the other hand its continual presence before him.

Our new approach to the sacrificial metaphor of the Lamb, through an understanding of its liturgical setting in heaven, has revealed an analogy with the first sacrifice of the day on the annual Day of Atonement—the continual holocaust (or *Tamid* sacrifice) of the morning service on that day.<sup>66</sup> In fact, the Lamb in Revelation not only corresponds to a sacrifice of this kind, but also seems to display its essential characteristics in remarkably literal way: a) the Lamb ascended to heaven where he appears in his entirety (Rev 5,6), thus demonstrating the first essential characteristic of the 'continual holocaust', namely its total consecration and return to God;

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of the liturgy. For further discussion of these implications, see Ben-Daniel, *Apocalypse in the Light of the Temple*, 74-79.

<sup>64</sup> This class of sacrifice is considered the most ancient and elevated of all, for which a variety of male domestic animals could be offered (bulls, bullocks, rams, lambs, goats, kids, and for those without means pigeons or doves were accepted). As for its function, Milgrom writes "The burnt offering then is a gift, with any number of goals in mind, one of which... is expiation" (Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16* [AB Series, New York: Doubleday, 1991] 176). Other biblical motives were entreaty, appeasement, homage, thanksgiving and joyful celebration.

<sup>65</sup> In Hebrew, this is simply referred to as the *Tamid* (the 'continual' or 'perpetual').

<sup>66</sup> Affirming the presence of cultic and expiatory aspects of the Lamb's sacrifice (and noting the incongruence of these aspects with the Passover sacrifice), Stuhlmacher ("Das Lamm Gottes") also arrives at the conclusion that the '*Tamidopfer*' or 'continual holocaust' of the daily temple service is the most appropriate background for understanding the Christ-Lamb in Revelation. Our liturgical approach confirms this finding, at the same time linking it to the annual Day of Atonement. Stuhlmacher's interpretation has been challenged by Prigent (*The Apocalypse of St. John*, 44) for: (1) failing to explain how a sacrificial rite so intimately linked to the temple "could have been the source of a key symbolism several decades after the catastrophe of 70 AD", (2) failing to prove the invalidity of the Passover symbolism. In answer to the first point, we would argue that it is precisely because of the temple's destruction that the author employed this symbolism—thereby showing that the function of the earthly temple had been entirely fulfilled and replaced by the heavenly liturgy for atonement arising out of the Lamb's sacrifice. Regarding the second point, the Passover symbolism is certainly not invalid, it is just that it does not adequately account for several aspects of the Lamb metaphor in Revelation, especially its expiatory function, its eternal presence in heaven, and its central role in the heavenly liturgy.

b) the Lamb that was slain lives for ever at the throne of God (cf. Rev 21,23; 22,3), thus manifesting the other essential characteristic of the ‘continual holocaust’, namely its continual presence before God.

In no other book of the New Testament has the sacrifice of Jesus Christ been so directly linked with the ‘continual holocaust’. In the other books we find this correspondence expressed only indirectly: in the passion narratives it is stated that Jesus died on the cross at the ninth hour, that is to say, at 3 p.m. (Matt 27,46-50 and parallels). This was the time of the slaughter of the lamb chosen to be the ‘continual holocaust’ for the daily evening service in those days.<sup>67</sup>

After the slaughtering of the lamb in the daily service, the priests collected its blood and performed an act of expiation: they sprinkled a part of this blood over the altar on which the members of the sacrifice were later to be burnt, and the rest they poured out at its base (*m.Tamid* 4:1). According to the Law, the blood of a holocaust did indeed have expiatory properties (Lev 1,4; 16,24; in combination with other sacrifices: Lev 9,7; 14,20; cf. Job 1,5; 42,8)<sup>68</sup> and in the intertestamentary book of Jubilees the expiatory effect of the *Tamid* sacrifice is described twice as a continual means of atonement for the Israelites (*Jub.* 6:13-14; 50:11). This background helps to explain how the blood of the Lamb, representing a *Tamid* sacrifice in the heavenly liturgy of Revelation, comes to fulfill an expiatory function analogous to that of the blood of the sin offerings that were slaughtered on the Day of Atonement, as suggested by (1) the fusion of liturgical features of the daily service with those of the Day of Atonement, and (2) the power of its blood to expiate the sins of men and women and reconcile them with God.<sup>69</sup>

Since the holocaust was offered to God in its entirety, on the altar, it came to signify the total dedication of the offerer to God. By similar reasoning, the ‘continual holocaust’ sacrificed during the daily service in the temple, on behalf of the community, represented the total and perpetual dedication of the community to God. As a result, the ‘continual holocaust’ had strong covenantal associations. This appears to be reflected in rabbinical interpretations of the divine command in Num 28,1-6, to perform continually the daily holocaust sacrifice, “like the one offered at Mount Sinai” (Num 28,6). This is understood to refer to the covenantal ceremony at Mount Sinai, at which holocausts were offered along with communion sacrifices, and their blood was sprinkled on the altar and the people as the ‘blood of the covenant’ (Exod 24,3-8). The inference is that the holocausts of Sinai, which symbolized Israel’s total dedication to the terms of the covenant, reappear in the daily temple

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<sup>67</sup> Cf. Acts 3,1; *m. Pes.* 5:1; Josephus *Ant.*, XIV 65. Hamm sees this as only one of several allusions to the *Tamid* service in Luke-Acts, which affirm that “Jesus’ life, death and resurrection, together with the life of Christian discipleship, are the *fulfillment* of Israel’s worship...” (Dennis Hamm, “The *Tamid* Service in Luke-Acts: The Cultic Background behind Luke’s Theology of Worship [Luke 1:5-25; 18:9-14; 24:50-53; Acts 3:1; 10:3,30]”, *CBQ* 65 [2003] 215-231, here 231).

<sup>68</sup> R. de Vaux (*Ancient Israel*, 432) thought that this was a late change: “After the Exile, the special sacrifices for the expiation of sin developed further and in the end an expiatory value was ascribed to the holocaust itself (Lv 1:4)”. However, more recently Milgrom has argued convincingly from biblical, extra-biblical (anterior, contiguous cultures) and post-biblical (rabbinic) sources that originally the holocaust was the only type of expiatory sacrifice to be offered prior to the introduction of sin and guilt offerings, at the time of the institutionalization of the cult around the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C. (Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 172-77). The description of the holocaust as expiatory in Lev 1,4 therefore reflects an earlier usage, which was never completely replaced by the sin and guilt offerings. In ritual terms, one could say that the holocaust retained an important complementary role in the expiation of sin.

<sup>69</sup> See note 16 above.

service as a perpetual reaffirmation of that commitment.<sup>70</sup> The implication for the understanding of the Lamb metaphor in Revelation could not be clearer: by virtue of its analogy with the ‘continual holocaust’ of the daily service, the Lamb that was slain is a perpetual affirmation of the new covenant between God and those people from every nation who have been ‘bought’ by the Lamb’s blood (Rev 5,9; 14,3).

More than any other type of sacrifice, the ‘continual holocaust’ formed the basis of the ancient sacrificial cult of the Jews. Arguing from scriptural references and post-biblical artistic symbolism, Hamm concludes:

“It is safe to say that in the postexilic Jewish imagination, the regular Tamid service was the primary liturgy of the temple”.<sup>71</sup>

Concerning its unrivalled importance, Anderson observes:

“This tamid sacrifice was symbolic not only of the deity’s meal, but by extension, of the deity’s presence among the people. No greater cultic calamity could be imagined than the loss of this sacrifice, since it symbolized the severing of the divine-human relationship”.<sup>72</sup>

So it was an unspeakable tragedy for the Jews when the daily sacrifice was suspended, as happened temporarily after the invasion of Judea by the armies of Antiochus Epiphanes (Dan 8,11-13; 11,31; 12,11; 1Maccabees 1), and then definitively in 70 A.D. when the Romans destroyed the temple:

“It was the true heart and centre of the entire sacrificial worship. In no circumstances could it be dispensed with. In AD 70, when Jerusalem had for long been besieged by the Romans and famine was at its peak, the daily sacrifice was nevertheless regularly offered, and it counted as one of the heaviest of blows when, on the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz, it had at last to be discontinued”.<sup>73</sup>

Under the form of the ‘continual holocaust’ at the center of a liturgy corresponding to that of the most important day of the Hebrew calendar—the Day of Atonement—Jesus Christ reveals himself in the most emphatic way as the fulfillment of the ancient sacrificial cult of the Jews (cf. Matt 5,17-19).<sup>74</sup>

In conclusion, the Lamb that is revealed in Revelation displays the qualities of a unique and perfect sacrifice, in which the power to expiate sin and bring about divine reconciliation (characteristic of the blood of a sin-offering) is united with the continuity and integrity that characterize the *Tamid* sacrifice or ‘continual holocaust’. It is in the form of this unique and eternal sacrifice that the death and resurrection of Christ are recalled and represented in the visions of Revelation.

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<sup>70</sup> This information was gleaned from Joshua Berman, *The Temple: Its Symbolism Then and Now* (Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aaronson, 1995) 135-36.

<sup>71</sup> Hamm, “The Tamid Service in Luke-Acts”, 216.

<sup>72</sup> Gary A. Anderson, “Sacrifice and Sacrificial Offerings (OT)”, *ABD*, 5. 878.

<sup>73</sup> Schürer, *History of the Jewish People*, vol II, 300.

<sup>74</sup> As one of the basic messages of Revelation, Christ’s fulfillment of the ancient sacrificial cult should make us consider whether the real background to the book of Revelation is not the destruction of the second temple in 70 A.D. and the subsequent reformation of Judaism at Jamnia, rather than the Roman persecution of the Early Christian Church, as assumed in the preterist interpretation. The book of Revelation should then be understood as the divine response to the loss of the temple. In this preoccupation with the temple, Revelation is indeed representative of the entire apocalyptic tradition (see John J. Collins, “Jerusalem and the Temple in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature of the Second Temple Period”, *International Rennert Guest Lecture Series: I* [Tel Aviv: Bar Ilan University, 1998] 4).

## Final reflections

The identification of the Lamb in Revelation with a holocaust cannot fail to recall the testing of Abraham's dedication to God, in the command to offer his son Isaac as a holocaust (Gen 22,1-18). On the way up to Mount Moriah, Isaac asked where the lamb for the holocaust was, to which Abraham replied: "God will himself provide the lamb for the holocaust, my son" (Gen 22,8). This reply not only anticipates the ram that providentially substituted Isaac as a holocaust to the Lord, but can also be understood to refer prophetically to God's provision of his own Son, the Lamb of God, as a continual holocaust at Golgotha, only a short distance away from the spot where Abraham had obediently prepared to sacrifice his beloved son. As Abraham's intention to sacrifice his son as a holocaust proved his dedication and brought the promise of divine blessing to the world through his descendents (Gen 22,15-18), so God's offering of his own Son as a continual holocaust evokes this promise to Abraham, and brings it to fruition in the new covenant.<sup>75</sup>

The offering of God's own sacrifice, the Lamb in Revelation, as the fulfillment of all the sacrifices that used to be performed in the ancient temple, invites reflection on the background and significance of this divine gesture. There is little doubt that the need for this fulfillment arose because of the imperfections and abuses in the ancient sacrificial system, already clearly identified by the prophets of the OT (e.g., Isa 1,10-17; Jer 7,21-22; Hos 6,6; Amos 4,4; 5,21-27; Mic 6,6-8). They unanimously accused their leading countrymen of flagrantly disregarding the important commandments of God's moral law, while continuing to offer sacrifices in the vain attempt to obtain God's favor. Through the sacrifice of the Lamb in Revelation, this abuse is brought to an end by replacing the ancient sacrificial system with an entirely new sacrificial liturgy 'from above': the Lord performed the ritual himself as high-priest, provided his own sacrifice (the 'Lamb of God' as a whole and perpetual *Tamid* sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins), and has invited men to participate in the resulting heavenly liturgy for atonement (as represented in Revelation). In this way, the human religious instinct to offer sacrifices is transformed into a way of life that truly leads to divine blessing and approval—self-offering in the loving service of others. Those who willingly participate in this divine liturgy, through the forgiveness of their sins and the celebration of God's merciful love, effectively add their sacrifice to that of the Lamb, like the cereal offering that was added to members of the holocaust on the altar. Revelation describes

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<sup>75</sup> Early Christian writers and artists frequently presented this near-sacrifice of Isaac as a type and foreshadowing of the passion of Christ (for further details see Robin M. Jenson, "The Offering of Isaac in Jewish and Christian Tradition: Image and Text", *Biblical Interpretation*, 2. 1[1994] 85-110), although their shared identification with the holocaust sacrifice has never been commented on in this context, as far as we are aware. This point is particularly relevant for the research surrounding the first-century midrashic elaboration of the binding of Isaac (the '*Akedah*'), which depicts Isaac as an adult who willingly gave himself up as a holocaust sacrifice, at the very place (Mount Moriah) where the ritual sacrifices of the Temple were later performed. Considered as the archetypal *Tamid* sacrifice, Isaac is presented as an eternal source of blessing and atonement for his physical descendents (see Geza Vermes, *Redemption and Genesis XXII*, in *Scripture and Tradition: Haggadic Studies* [2<sup>nd</sup> ed, Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1973] 193-227). The similarity between this post-biblical presentation of Isaac and the representation of Christ as the *Tamid* offering in the liturgy described in Revelation is striking, but has not yet been raised in the scholarly debate concerning the influence of the Jewish midrashic elaboration of Isaac's binding on Christian representation of Atonement, and vice versa (for a middle position in this debate, see Alan F.Segal, "He who did not spare his own son...: Jesus, Paul and the *Akedah*" in *From Jesus to Paul: Studies in honor of F.W.Beare* [Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University, 1984] 169-184).

the whole of this liturgy of atonement in a way that could be described as a complete, and fundamentally classical, representation of atonement.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> This representation fully embodies Aulén's anticipation of a revival of the classic idea of atonement so characteristic of early Christianity: "It is the idea itself that will be essentially the same: the fundamental idea that the Atonement is, above all, a movement of God to man, not in the first place a movement of man to God. We shall hear again of its tremendous paradoxes: that God, the all-ruler, the Infinite, yet accepts the lowliness of the Incarnation; we shall hear again the old realistic message of the conflict of God with the dark, hostile forces of evil, and his victory over them by the Divine self-sacrifice; above all, we shall hear again the note of triumph. For my own part I am persuaded that no form of Christian teaching has any future before it except such as can keep steadily in view the reality of the evil in the world, and go to meet the evil with the battle-song of triumph. Therefore I believe that the classic idea of the Atonement and of Christianity is coming back—that is to say, the genuine, authentic Christian faith" (Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement* [London: SPCK, 1970] 158-59)