

Christological Concepts in the Book of Revelation—Part 2: Christ’s Divinity

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The first part of this article dealt with the Christological designations of the Apocalypse and traced Jesus Christ through the book highlighting his importance for the theology and interpretation of Revelation. This part will focus on his divinity.

1. Humanity and Divinity

A word on Jesus’ humanity in Revelation before we discuss his divinity! It has previously been mentioned that a certain number of the designations used for Jesus emphasizes his human nature such as “male child” and “firstborn of the dead.”

The male child of Rev 12 refers to Jesus’ birth and incarnation, an experience that divinity normally would not undergo. Also by definition, God cannot die. But humans are born and die. Jesus has not only experienced birth but also death and afterwards resurrection. He was truly human. However, he was not a sinner. In Revelation, John does not—like in other places or like other NT authors (2 Cor 5:21; 1 Pet 2:22; 1 John 3:5)—state plainly that Jesus did not sin. But the Apocalypse calls him the Holy One and the True One (Rev 3:7), which is a title for God (Rev 6:10). In the Gospels, Jesus was addressed as the Holy One of God by demons and his disciples (Mark 1:24; Luke 4:34; John 6:69). This title may in a more

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hidden way point out Jesus' sinlessness as a human being while stressing his divinity. "He is the embodiment of absolute sanctity and truth . . ." ¹

In spite of this emphasis on the humanity of Christ, human titles of Christ or those containing a human element are not the predominant ones in Revelation. They are also fewer in number, probably because the Apocalypse presents an exalted Christology. ²

Erickson mentions important practical implications of the humanity of Christ. They include that Jesus died for humanity as one of us and that he can save us. He is able to understand us and sympathize with us. So he functions not only as Savior but also as Revealer of the transcendent God who is no longer only transcendent but has become immanent in Jesus Christ. He is our Mediator, and finally he is the example to be emulated by his followers. He "manifests the true nature of humanity. . ." not only telling us "what perfect humanity is," but exhibiting it. ³

While Revelation stresses Jesus' humanity, a number of the designations and titles used for Jesus highlight his divinity, some because Jesus shares them with the Father, others because they point to a divine being or are attributed to God in the OT. These include the designations "True/Amen," "Son of man," "Son of God," "Word of God," "Alpha and Omega," "First and Last," and "Beginning and End." To these we will turn in a moment.

We agree with Erickson who talks about the complexity of the human-divine nature of Jesus which humans cannot fully comprehend. He writes:

It is also helpful to think of Jesus as a very complex person. We know some people who have straightforward personalities. One comes to know them fairly quickly, and they may therefore be quite predictable. Other persons have much more complex personalities. They may have a wider range of experience, a more varied educational background, or a more complex emotional makeup. When we think we know them quite well,

¹ Smalley, 88.

² James D. G. Dunn, "Christology" in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, edited by David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), I:987.

³ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, second edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1998), 737-738.

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another facet of their personality appears that we did not previously know existed. Now if we imagine complexity expanded to an infinite degree, then we have a bit of a glimpse into the “personality of Jesus,” as it were, his two natures in one person. For Jesus’ personality included the qualities and attributes that constitute deity. There were within his person dimensions of experience, knowledge, and love not found in human beings . . . the person of Jesus was not simply an amalgam of human and divine qualities merged into some sort of *tertium quid*. Rather, his was a personality that in addition to the characteristics of divine nature had all the qualities or attributes of perfect, sinless human nature as well.⁴

2. Designation and Titles that Jesus Shares with God the Father

- (1) *True*. In Rev 3:7 and 19:11 Jesus is called “true.” He is also the true witness (Rev 3:14). The term “true” occurs ten times in Revelation. Three times it refers to Jesus. Four times God the Father is called “true” (Rev 6:10; 15:3; 16:7; 19:2). The Word of God is true, because it comes from God (Rev 19:9; 21:5; 22:6). Truth is connected with God and is the opposite of the deception brought about by Jezebel (Rev 2:20), the dragon/Satan (Rev 12:9; 20:3, 8, 10), the beast out of the earth (Rev 13:14; 19:20), and Babylon (Rev 18:23).⁵
- (2) *Lord*. The term “Lord” (*kyrios*) as used by the LXX often refers to Yahweh, a tradition carried on the NT.⁶ In Revelation “Lord” clearly refers to God the Father thirteen times,⁷ undoubtedly to the Son five times,⁸ and once to one of the 24 elders (Rev 7:14). In two places it is difficult to decide which person of the Godhead is meant (Rev 11:4; 14:13).⁹ One may wonder why one of the elders is called “lord” since in all other places the term is reserved for God and Jesus. However, the

⁴ Erickson, 754.

⁵ See also discussion above.

⁶ Cf. Erickson, 707-708.

⁷ Rev 1:8; 4:8, 11; 11:4(?), 15, 17; 14:13(?); 15:3, 4; 16:7; 18:8; 19:6; 21:22; 22:5, 6.

⁸ Rev 11:8; 17:14; 19:16; 22:20, 21.

⁹ Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John: The Greek Text with Introduction Notes And Indices* (London: MacMillen and Co., 1907), 135; and Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8-22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 90, seem to understand “Lord” in Rev 11:4 as God the Father. Gerhard A. Krodel, *Revelation*, Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House), 271, and Mounce, 275-276, have Jesus in mind when the Lord is mentioned in Rev 14:13.

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term is found in a direct speech of John while he is in vision in the heavenly realm. Possibly he was so overwhelmed with what he saw that he addressed the elder with “lord.” However, when again using the term in another direct speech John knows that ultimately the Lord is the Lord Jesus (Rev 22:20).

- (3) *Alpha and Omega, First and Last, Beginning and End.* The expression “Alpha and Omega” appears three times in Revelation—Rev 1:8; 21:6; and 22:13. “Beginning and end” and “first and last” are parallel expressions. The following picture emerges:

God the Father: “I am the Alpha and Omega.” Rev 1:8¹⁰

Jesus: “I am the first and the last.” Rev 1:17

God the Father: “I am the Alpha and Omega,
the beginning and the end.” Rev 21:6

Jesus: “I am the Alpha and the Omega,
the first and the last, the
beginning and the end.” Rev 22:13¹¹

All three expressions may be used synonymously. In Greek thought “beginning and end” pointed to the eternal existence of God.¹² However, not only God the Father is the Alpha and Omega, beginning and end. The titles belong to the Son as much as to the Father. They are used seven times in these self-designations of God and Jesus. This may not be an accident in the light of the clearly visible as well as the hidden series of seven in the

¹⁰ Rev 1:8 with the description of God as the One who is and who was and who is to come and as the Almighty seems to be a clear reference to God the Father. Cf. Kistemaker, 87; Mounce, 51-52; Smalley, 38; Witherington, 77. Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 79-80 discusses arguments in favor of the God of Rev 1:8 being God the Father and arguments in favor of this person being Jesus Christ.

¹¹ Cf. Kistemaker, 87.

¹² Cf. Bauckham, 27.

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Apocalypse.¹³ Father and Son are equal in nature. Indeed Jesus is God.¹⁴ His is eternal existence.¹⁵ This is not changed by his death as a human being. Jesus' threefold title in Rev 22:13 points to the absolute sovereignty of God, which is his. Yet Jesus is not a second God but is included in the eternal being of the one and only God of Israel, the source and aim of all things.¹⁶ The following diagram shows that important themes are associated with the divine designations Alpha and Omega, First and Last, and Beginning and End.

A Prologue

God the Father: Alpha and Omega (Rev 1:8)
Connection to the Second Coming (Rev 1:7)

B The First Vision of Revelation

Jesus Christ: First and last (Rev 1:17)
Connection to new life (Rev 1:18)

B' The last Vision of Revelation

God the Father: Alpha and Omega
Beginning and end (Rev 21:6)
Connection to new life (Rev 21:5-6)

A' Epilogue

Jesus: Alpha and Omega
First and Last
Beginning and end (Rev 22:13)
Connection to the Second Coming (Rev 22:12)

¹³ The phrase "the first and the last" appears again in Rev 2:8. However, there it is not introduced by "I am." Cf. Bauckham, 26.

¹⁴ Louis A. Brighton, *Revelation, Concordia Commentary* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 660, says: "The high Christology of Revelation is brought to a climax and is comprehensively summarized in Rev. 22:13, where the three divine titles describing the eternal magnitude of the infinite God are applied to Jesus Christ."

¹⁵ Cf. Lioy, 156.

¹⁶ Bauckham, 27, discusses the meaning of these expressions saying: "God precedes all things, as their creator, and he will bring all things to eschatological fulfillment."

Hieke and Nicklas do not necessarily consider the three expressions of Rev 22:13 as parallel designations. They maintain that the description of Jesus in Rev 22:13 introduces Jesus as the one who encompasses Scripture (Alpha and Omega), humanity (the first and the last), and the entire creation (beginning and end).¹⁷ Osborne suggests: “The titles refer to the sovereignty of God and Christ over history. They control the beginning of creation and its end, and therefore they control every aspect of history in between.”¹⁸ However that may be, again and again Rev 22:6-21 transfers to Jesus qualifications and titles, which according to the previous context (OT, NT, Rev) are attached to God. Thus, Jesus is identified with God.

3. Descriptions and Titles Pointing to Jesus’ Divinity

Descriptions such as “strong angel” (Rev 10:1-3) and “Word of God” (Rev 19:13) have been discussed earlier. Obviously, they stress Jesus divinity. But there are also others.

- (1) *Son of Man and Son of God*. The one like a Son of Man (Rev 1:13; 14:14) is a human and yet divine being, most likely the heavenly being of Dan 7. In Revelation, the Son of Man is portrayed with divine characteristics.¹⁹ Harrington concludes: “What is said of the Ancient of Days (God) in Daniel (Dan 7:9) is here said of the one in human form. John, throughout, does not hesitate to use God-language of Jesus.”²⁰ Although the title “Son of God” occurs in Revelation only once (Rev 2:18), it is not unimportant. It is found frequently in the NT, especially in the Gospels. This title points to the peculiar relationship existing between God the Father and Jesus. In John 1:14 the divine Logos of John 1:1 is called son. This son became human. His glory is the glory of the unique and only son of the Father. In John 1:18 the

¹⁷ The one like a son of man is divine as mentioned above. Thomas Hieke and Tobias Nicklas, “Die Worte der Prophetie dieses Buches” *Offenbarung 22,6-21 als Schlussstein der christlichen Bibel Alten und Neuen Testaments gelesen, Biblisch-Theologische Studien 62* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2003), 90. A different position is taken by Smalley, 573.

¹⁸ Osborne, 789.

¹⁹ Cf. Liroy, 116.

²⁰ Wilfrid Harrington, “Worthy Is the Lamb,” in *Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association*, No. 18, edited by M. McNamara (Dublin: The Irish Biblical Association, 1995), 56.

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Son-Father-relationship between Jesus and God is again emphasized. This Son is in the bosom of the Father. He came to reveal the Father, and whoever sees him, sees the Father (John 14:9). This does not mean that the Father is transformed into the Son. There are and remain two distinctive and yet mutually connected persons. According to Matt 11:27 nobody knows the Father apart from the Son and from those to whom the Son reveals him. These statements indicate that we have to reckon with a plurality of persons in one Godhead. John 10:29-36 is very clear. There is a Father-Son-relationship between God and Jesus. Jesus is the Son of God. He is one with the Father. The Jews understood Jesus' claim to divinity and wanted to stone him. Consequently, the title Son designates the divine person which in Jesus of Nazareth became a human being.²¹

In Rev 2:18 Jesus used the title "Son of God" claiming divinity, a close relationship with God the Father, and basic equality with God.²² The divine characteristics of the Son of Man in Rev 1b are connected with the Son of God. The title may also express majesty. There is nobody who would resemble Jesus, and the so-called sons of gods, such as Cesar, cannot be compared to him.²³ His eyes like flames of fire indicate that nothing can remain hidden before him. Jesus is omniscient. He tests hearts and minds.²⁴ His feet like burnished bronze stress his strength, power, and steadfastness with which he is able to carry out judgment.

²¹ Cf. Fernando L. Canale, "Doctrine of God," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, Commentary Reference Series Volume 12, ed. R. Dederen (Hagerstown: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000), 125.

²² Liroy, 115-116, 128. Kistemaker, 136, suggests that Jesus addressed those Jews in the church who questioned or rejected his divinity.

²³ Cf. Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 116-117. He points out that the title "Son of God" reflects Psalm 2:7 and "may be set against opposing religious claims or against a syncretistic attempt to equate the person of Christ with deities recognized by the city. . . . The pretensions of the imperial cult were seen as a Satanic parody of the realities in Christ."

²⁴ Kistemaker, 136, writes: "Into Jesus' holy presence nothing sinful can enter With his eyes of flaming fire he dispels darkness and burns away impurities."

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- (2) *The Amen.* In Rev 3:14 Jesus introduces himself as the “Amen.” John may have in mind the Hebrew text of Isa 65:16, in which God is made known as the “God of Amen.” Amen stresses the faithfulness and truthfulness of God. Jesus guarantees the reliability of all that he has proclaimed.²⁵
- (3) *The Beginning of God’s Creation.* The designation “the beginning (*archē*) of God’s creation” (Rev 3:14) can be understood differently. *Archē* can mean “beginning” (Luke 1:2), “beginner”/“origin”/“first cause” (Rev 21:6), “ruler”/“authority” (Luke 12:11), “rule” (1Cor 15:24), “domain”/“realm” (Jude 1:6), “principle” (Heb 5:12), and “corner” (Acts 10:11).²⁶ In order to determine the right meaning the context must be consulted. The most important shades of meaning are “beginning” and “ruler.”²⁷ In the Johannine literature the term appears 21 times and has—apart from Rev 3:14—always the meaning “beginning.” However, “beginning” can be understood actively or passively, namely “beginner” or “beginning.” In Rev 21:6 the term is applied to God the Father. God is “the beginning (*archē*) and the end.” That does not mean that God has a beginning but that he is the originator of all things. The same is true for Jesus who likewise is “the beginning (*archē*) and the end.” Rev 3:14 should be understood in this sense. Jesus is the beginner, the originator of God’s creation.²⁸ This is confirmed in other texts of the NT. Jesus as creator (John 1:1-3; Col 1:15-16; Heb 1:2) is God. He is also God because in Revelation *archē*

²⁵ Lioy, 130, maintains: “The divine title underscored that Christ guaranteed the certainty of whatever he declared. In a sense, He was God’s ‘yes’ to the believers’ hope of salvation (cf. 2 Cor. 1:20).” Cf. Smalley, 96.

²⁶ The word is found 55 times in the NT.

²⁷ Lioy, 130, suggests that the two meanings are complimentary.

²⁸ Some English translations prefer “ruler,” e.g., the *New International Version*. However, this does not seem to be likely due to John’s use of the term. The meaning “ruler” or “powers” is mostly found with Paul, e.g., in Rom 8:38; 1Cor 15:24, Eph 1:21; 3:10; 6:12; Col 1:16; 2:10, 15; Tit 3:11, however, not in Hebrews (see, e.g., Heb 1:10; 2:3; 3:14; 5:12; 7:3). In addition, John seems to distinguish between *archē* and *archōn* (ruler, authority) in Revelation.

is used in three places for God and Christ only, two of the three times even in the very same phrase (Rev 21:6; 22:13).²⁹

4. Jesus in the Hymns of the Seal Vision

The vision of the seven seals contains seven hymns which are directed to God the Father and the Son. Five hymns appear in the introductory scene to the seven seals (Rev 4 and 5). Two more are sung in Rev 7b, the eschatological description of the seal vision.

a. The Hymns of Rev 4-5

Two of the five hymns of the introductory scene are found in chapter 4 and three more in chapter 5. The first song occurs in Rev 4:8b: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come.” It is sung by the four living beings around God’s throne. After the four beings have presented the “holy” the elders worship God with a second hymn—Rev 4:11: “Worthy are you, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for you created all things, and because of your will they existed, and were created.” The third hymn is no longer addressed to God the Father but to the Lamb, Jesus the Lord. It is a new song being found in Rev 5:9-10. It is presented by the elders and possibly the cherubim: “Worthy are you to take the book and to break its seals; for you were slain, and purchased for God with your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.” The group of worshipers increases. Millions of angels join and sing with a loud voice—Rev 5:12: “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.” The fifth hymn is sounded by the entire creation and is directed toward God the Father and God the Son—Rev 5:13b: “To him who sits on the throne, and to

²⁹ Bauckham, 56, states: “That a reference to Christ’s participation in God’s creation of all things is not out of place . . . is clear from 3:14, where the beginning of the message to the church at Laodicea calls him: ‘the origin (*archē*) of God’s creation.’ This does not mean that he was the first created being or that in his resurrection he was the beginning of God’s new creation. It must have the same sense as the first part of the title, ‘the beginning (*archē*) and the end,’ as used of both God (21:6) and Christ (22:13). Christ preceded all things as their source.”

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the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever.” What is left is to say Amen, prostrate oneself, and worship. This happens in verse 14: “And the four living creatures kept saying, ‘Amen.’ And the elders fell down and worshiped.”

The five hymns consist of three groups. The first two are directed to God the Father, the next two to the Lamb, and the last to both God and the Lamb. The hymns have similarities, for instance, there are similarities between the second and the third hymns. Both employ the second person singular and start the same way: “Worthy are you.” The fourth also uses the adjective “worthy,” but it begins, “Worthy is the Lamb . . .” while the other hymns contain multiple praises of God or a declaration of the holiness of God, the second and the third provide an explanation of the fact that the Father and the Lamb are declared worthy.

The First Hymn (Rev 4:8). As in Isaiah where the seraphim sing a threefold holy (Isa 6:3), so it is in the first hymn of Rev 4 the cherubim sing a threefold holy. Three designations of God are associated with the threefold holy. (1) God is the Lord, (2) the Almighty, (3) the one who was and is and is to come.³⁰ Holy is God; he is the Lord. Holy is God, he is the Almighty who rules everything and everyone. Holy is God, he is without beginning and end.³¹

The Second Hymn (Rev 4:11). After the first hymn the cherubim had given “glory and honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne, to him who lives forever and ever” (Rev 4:9). Two of these elements are also found in the second hymn, namely glory and honor. A new element is added so that the sum is three again. It is the term “power.” Then a reason for the praise is given. God is praised because he is the creator of all things and all beings. Nobody is similar to him and matches him. Praise, glory, thanks, and power are due to him. Rev 4 introduces God on his throne and in his splendor. He is worthy of worship, because he is the creator who has

³⁰ The last designation of God again consists of three elements. In another song in Rev 11:17 the three elements are reduced to two, “. . . the one who is and was.” The reason may be that at that time God the Father may have come.

³¹ Cf. U. B. Müller, 147.

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made everything well. The first hymn praises God because of his nature. The second praises him because of his work.³²

The Third Hymn (Rev 5:9-10). With the third hymn the person that is worshiped changes. In the place of God the Lamb is found. So John's weeping "becomes praise and celebration."³³ While Rev 4 paints a relatively static picture, Rev 5 adds great dynamics. The issue of worthiness permeates this chapter.³⁴ The worthiness of God the Father consists in being the creator. The worthiness of the Lamb consists in being the savior.³⁵ This third song is called a new song. As important as creation is, salvation is a new, breathtaking, earth shaking event.

The Fourth Hymn (Rev 5:12). Once more the topic of salvation is stressed. In the third hymn reasons for the worthiness of the Lamb were given. The fourth hymn emphasizes the praise derived from Jesus' initiative and activity. While the praise of the Father in Rev 4 consisted of three elements, the praise of the Son is increased to seven elements.³⁶ The terms "glory," "honor," and "power" are found in both enumerations which

³² U. B. Müller, 148, points to the parallel passage in Rev 11:17-18 and concludes: "Die eschatologische Aktion Gottes findet ihre Begründung in seinem Handeln als Schöpfer, der alles geschaffen hat. Damals erwies er die ihm eignende Macht, die er nun erneut und endgültig in Wirkung setzt. Endzeit und Urzeit, eschatologisches Handeln and Schöpfertat entsprechen einander. Überblickt man die Darstellung in 4,9-11, so ergibt sich deutlich, daß der Verfasser hier die Situation der eschatologischen Machtergreifung Gottes visionär schaut" (148-149).

³³ Johns, 170.

³⁴ In Rev 5:2 an angel asks: "Who is *worthy* to open the scroll and to break its seals?" John notices that nobody in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open it, because nobody was *worthy*. However, one of the elders points to the Lamb, and when the Lamb appears and takes the book, the song is heard: "*Worthy* are you . . ." and again in verse 12, "*Worthy* is the Lamb that was slain . . ."

³⁵ (1) Jesus was slain—a clear reference to this sacrificial death on the cross. His absolute power and omniscience is complimented by his absolute self-sacrifice. (2) Jesus has purchased with his blood humans from all nations—again a clear hint to his suffering and death with which he has bought us and has set humans free. Therefore, he is the victor (vs. 5). (3) Jesus has made humans a kingdom and priests—a clear reference to the fact that because of his vicarious suffering and death the redeemed have achieved a new position before God. Cf. Alfred Wikenhauser, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, Regensburger Neues Testament (Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 1959), 57.

³⁶ Wikenhauser, 57, thinks: "Daß gerade sieben Gaben aufgezählt werden, wird symbolische Bedeutung haben und die Fülle der himmlischen Herrlichkeit und Macht des Lammes bezeichnen."

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shows that the Son has the same attributes as the Father. The two cannot be separated. Both are being worshiped. The center of the worship of Rev 4 is God the Creator. The center of the worship in Rev 5 is Jesus the Savior.

The Fifth Hymn (Rev 5:13b). This hymn is sung by the entire creation. A fourfold praise is sounded. Again the elements “glory” and “praise” known from the second and fourth hymns occur. The term “blessing/praise,” the last element of the previous list, has now become the first. The hymns are interconnected. The reader notices also an immense crescendo in praise which finally involves all creation and the entire universe. Johns states that this scene “impels the reader to join in recognizing the Lamb’s victory.”³⁷ But the worship of Father and Son clearly point out that the Son is God.

b. The Hymns of Rev 7

In Rev 7, which is part of the same major vision, two additional hymns appear. The first is directed to the Father and Son—Rev 7:10: “Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.” The second refers to God the Father only—Rev 7:12: “Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen.”

The First Hymn (Rev 7:10). In contradistinction to the hymns of Rev 4-5 in which the heavenly beings were involved, this song is presented by the great multitude,³⁸ those finally saved who stand before the throne of God and the Lamb. They attribute their salvation to God the Father and Jesus. This praise, caused by the fact of their salvation, also points to the equality of God and Jesus.³⁹

The Second Hymn (Rev 7:12). The second hymn of Rev 7 containing a sevenfold praise of the Father corresponds with the sevenfold praise of the Son in Rev 5:12.⁴⁰ Six of the seven elements overlap: blessing/praise

³⁷ Johns, 169.

³⁸ These are the 144,000. See above.

³⁹ Cf. Nichol, 7:784. U. B. Müller, 181-182, points out that salvation is the eschatological victory gained through God and the Lamb. Important is the proclamation that this victory of God is already won.

⁴⁰ Cf. U. B. Müller, 182. “Die Siebenzahl will wohl den nie endenden Lobpreis andeuten.”

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(*eulogia*), glory (*doxa*), wisdom (*sophia*), honor (*timē*), power (*dunamis*) and might (*ischus*). “Riches” (*ploutos*) attributed to the Son is replaced with thanksgiving (*eucharistia*) in the list addressed to the Father.

c. Conclusions

Three of the seven hymns are directed to the Father, two to the Son, and two to both Father and Son. These hymns make it abundantly clear that Father and Son belong together and should not be separated. Both are honored as God either individually or together.⁴¹ The issue is clearly worship (Rev 5:14).⁴²

Nevertheless, two times Revelation unequivocally reveals that worship is due to God only. When John, probably mistakenly, tries to worship another heavenly being, namely an angel, he is warned not to do this but to worship God (Rev 19:10; 22:9).⁴³ However, in Revelation, Jesus is worshiped by heavenly and earthly beings, that is, by the entire creation. The conclusion is obvious, Jesus must be God. This result is affirmed by the same vocabulary being used for Father and Son in many places in the hymns. The hymns to God the Father and the Son and the worship associated with them clearly verify Christ’s divinity. Hoffmann writes:

. . . the entire construction of the hymnic parts in Apc 4 and 5, which has been demonstrated to be set highly in parallel, indicates that the author generally wished to put God and the Lamb on par. Equal status is ascribed to God and the Lamb . . . The Lamb is described in terms that make him appear to be close to God and function as his more active counterpart and representative.⁴⁴

5. What Father and Son Share

In the Apocalypse the Father and Son share a number of things including the following:

- (1) The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of God and his Christ (Rev 11:15).

⁴¹ Cf. Liroy, 157.

⁴² Cf. Harrington, “Worthy Is the Lamb,” 69.

⁴³ Cf. Bauckham, 59.

⁴⁴ Hoffmann, 167-168. Dunn, 987, observes “in Revelation, Christ is as much the object of worship as God (5:13, 7:10).”

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- (2) The temple of the New Jerusalem is God the Father and the Lamb (Rev 21:22).
- (3) The glory of God and the Lamb illumine the city (Rev 21:23).
- (4) The river of the water of life comes from the throne of God and the Lamb (Rev 22:1).
- (5) God the Father and the Lamb share a throne (Rev 3:21; 22:3).⁴⁵

Interestingly enough, the mention of God the Father and the Lamb is in some cases followed by a personal pronoun in the singular. Two of the texts just mentioned belong to this category—Rev 11:15 and 22:3-4. “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ; and *he* will reign forever and ever” (Rev 11:15). At first, two persons of the Godhead occur. Then the next phrase reduces the subject to a singular. Nevertheless, “*he*” in the second clause refers to both.⁴⁶ This means that Jesus is God, but he is not a second God next to the first one. Father and Son form one deity. Jesus is included in the Godhead of the Father and yet is distinct from the Father. Therefore, John does not leave behind monotheism as affirmed in the OT and NT.⁴⁷

6. The Trinity

We have already indicated that right at the beginning of the Apocalypse the divine trinity is introduced. “. . . Grace to you and peace, from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ . . .” (Rev 1:4-5).⁴⁸ Throughout

⁴⁵ Dunn, 987, observes: “More significant is the fact that the Lamb is also said to be ‘in the middle of the throne’ (5:6; 7:17), whereas elsewhere it is God who is described as ‘he who is seated on the throne’ (4:9–10; 5:1, 7, 13; 6:16; 7:10, 15; 19:4; 21:5). The one throne is evidently shared by both God and the Lamb (22:1). . . Christ has not simply been exalted alongside God as a second divine power in heaven, but in the visionary imagery of the seer is somehow merged with God.”

⁴⁶ Mounce, 226, holds that “the singular (‘he will reign’) emphasizes the unity of the joint sovereignty.” Kistemaker, 342, commenting on Rev 11:15 notes: “There is one kingdom, not two. There is one God, not two.”

⁴⁷ Bauckham, 61, talks about “a rather sophisticated attempt to use language that includes Jesus in the eternal being of God without stepping outside the Jewish monotheism which for him was axiomatic . . .” See Bauckham’s extensive discussion of this topic on pages 58-63.

⁴⁸ The three divine beings are found next to each other, yet in a different way, e.g., in Rev 2:7, 26-29; 3:5-6, 12-13, 21-22.

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Revelation the one “who was and is and is to come” describes God the Father. Sometimes “was” and “is” are reversed. Sometimes “is to come” is missing. But in the five places in Revelation where this formulation is employed it clearly refers to God.⁴⁹

The “seven spirits before his throne” is a description of the Holy Spirit who under this designation appears in Rev 1:4; 3:1; 4:5; and 5:6. In other places the Holy Spirit is called “Spirit” only.⁵⁰ It is remarkable that there is not only a close relationship between Jesus and the Father but also between Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Thus, the statements about the Holy Spirit found in Jesus’ farewell speeches (John 14-16) indirectly reflect the situation in Revelation. In Rev 5:6 the Lamb is linked to the Holy Spirit. Jesus’ messages to the seven churches are at the same time messages of the Holy Spirit (Rev 2-3). They are also messages for all those willing to listen.

Consequently, Revelation is convinced of the trinity in which Jesus is included. In the center of the book, this divine trinity is confronted with the satanic trinity. To this topic we now turn.

7. The Imitation of Jesus

In the Apocalypse positive powers are often contrasted with negative powers. There are imitations and parodies of entities related to God. The true church of Rev 12 is contrasted with the harlot of Rev 17. The beloved and holy city finds its counterpart in the great city Babylon. The divine trinity of Rev 1:4-5 is imitated by the satanic trinity of Rev 12 and 13 consisting of the dragon, the sea beast, and the beast coming out of the earth. The sea beast of Rev 13 is a parody of the Lamb, Jesus.⁵¹ But it does

⁴⁹ Rev 1:4, 8; 4:8; 11:17; 16:5.

⁵⁰ E.g., in Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 14:13; 22:17. Bauckham, 109, writes: “References to the Spirit fall into two major categories: those which refer to ‘the seven Spirits’ and those which refer to ‘the Spirit’ . . . The four references to the sevenfold Spirit correspond to the seven occurrences of the fourfold phrase which designates all the people of the earth (5:9; 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15). They also correspond to the 28 (7x4) references to the Lamb, which . . . indicate the worldwide scope of the Lamb’s victory. The seven Spirits are closely associated with the victorious Lamb (5:6).” See also page 110.

⁵¹ The dragon who empowers the sea beast and may appear again in Rev 17 under the symbol of the scarlet beast is a parody of God the Father. The scarlet beast which was and is not and comes out of the abyss and goes to destruction (Rev 17:8) attempts to be like God the Father who was and is and is to come, however, it fails. The beast from the earth is a parody of the Holy Spirit. For instance, the fire falling from heaven (Rev 13:13) may point

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not only try to imitate the humanity of Christ but desires his divine privileges. It craves the worship of all humanity (Rev 13:4, 8), although the Apocalypse is very clear about the fact that only God may be worshiped (Rev 19:10; 22:9), emphasizing the validity of the first and second commandments of the Decalogue. The following table compares Jesus with his parody, the sea beast.

Jesus	Sea Beast
The lamb looks as though it had been slaughtered (Rev 5:6, 12).	One of the heads of the sea beast looks as if it had been slaughtered (Rev 13:3).
Jesus has come to life (Rev 2:8; 1:18).	The sea beast has come to life (Rev 13:14).
God the Father granted Jesus authority and participation in his throne (Rev 2:27; 3:21). There is a close connection between God the Father and Jesus.	The dragon gives his throne to the sea beast (Rev 13:2). There is a close connection between the dragon and the sea beast.
Jesus has power and authority (Rev 12:10).	The dragon gives his power and authority to the beast. The followers of the sea beast attribute to it extensive power (Rev 13:4).
Jesus is worshiped by heavenly beings and by the entire creation (Rev 5:9-14).	The beast receives worship from those who dwell on earth (Rev 13:4; 12). ⁵²

to a false Pentecost experience which is in contrast to the real Pentecost initiated by the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, Bauckham, 114, holds that the beast from the earth corresponds to the two witnesses of Rev 11 rather than the “seven spirits” directly.

⁵²Cf. Mathias Rissi, *Die Hure Babylon und die Verführung der Heiligen: Eine Studie zur Apokalypse des Johannes*, Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament, siebte Folge, Heft 16 (Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1995), 33; and Angel M. Rodriguez, *Future Glory: The 8 Great End-Time Prophecies in the Bible* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2002), 106.

Thus, in Revelation Christ is contrasted with the antichrist. Humanity is called to make a decision between these two powers. This is not always easy, because the beast uses deception and is quite successful. The lie of the antichrist is therefore contrasted with the faithfulness and truthfulness of Christ. Jesus is the truth. At the very end of time only two groups will exist, and people have to make a decision between these two alternatives.

A life and death battle between Christ and the antichrist as well as their followers is waging which will intensify the longer it lasts. John predicts its outcome. In this battle the beast and its followers will use force and violence. The followers of the lamb will suffer and will be patient. At the end the Lamb and his people will triumph, as Jesus through suffering triumphed on the cross. Finally, all evil will be destroyed.

8. Implications

The divinity of Jesus is clearly emphasized in John's Apocalypse. It is not an academic question only but affects Christian doctrine and life. The divinity of Christ and the concept of the Trinity are closely linked to other biblical doctrines. To give up one creates problems with other biblical doctrines, for instance, (1) problems with salvation, the plan of redemption, and the love of God, (2) problems with the self-sufficiency of God, (3) problems with the great controversy theme, (4) problems with our relation to God. If, for example, God would have offered his best creature as a sacrifice for lost humanity, yet not himself in the person of Jesus Christ, humans, angels, and the universe might still question his love. But in giving his Son the Father gave himself because the Son together with the Father and the Holy Spirit is the one and only God. Understanding the nature of Jesus helps to accept him as Savior and Lord and grasps some aspects of the Godhead and the concept of the Trinity.

Erickson stresses other significant implications of the doctrine of Christ's deity not only for Christians, but also for humanity as a whole:

1. We can have real knowledge of God
2. Redemption is available to us. The death of Christ is sufficient for all sinners who have ever lived, for it was not merely a finite human, but an infinite God who died
3. God and humanity have been reunited. It was not an angel or a human who came from God to the human race, but God himself crossed the chasm created by sin.

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4. Worship of Christ is appropriate. He is not merely the highest of the creatures, but he is God in the same sense and to the same degree as the Father. He is as deserving of our praise, adoration, and obedience as is the Father.⁵³

The book of Revelation makes an important contribution to biblical theology by emphasizing the divinity of Jesus. Although this concept is found in the Gospels and letters of the NT, Revelation stresses certain aspects such as worship of Jesus in a unique way pointing not only to the fact that Jesus should be and will be worshiped but also that there will be a counter worship and that a decision has to be made by all humans whether to worship the true God or evil powers. Ultimately, the issue of Christ's divinity becomes a question of humanity's loyalty to God.

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⁵³ Erickson, 720.