Worship - The Key to The Book of Revelation?

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Introduction

This article does not claim to cut the Gordian knot of the Apocalyptic mystery. Having said that, however, I hasten to add that the theme of worship provides an unusually transparent window into this intriguing book. It sheds light on what would otherwise remain some of Revelation's darkest and most enigmatic secrets.

The Apocalypse has a particularly rich vocabulary of worship. Time and again in his visions John catches glimpses of celestial choirs and is overwhelmed by the thunderous sublimity of their music. The worshippers sing a new song, the song of Moses and the Lamb (5:9; 14:3; 15:3). They give praise to God (19:5) and glorify His name (15:4). Both the heavenly beings and the redeemed give thanks to God (4:9; 7:12; 11:17) and serve Him in His temple (7:15; 22:3). Elders, angels and living creatures fall down before Him and worship Him (4:10; 5:8,14; 7:11; 11:16; 19:4). The word Amen is found regularly in settings of worship (1:6,7; 5:14; 7:12; 19:4), while the exclamation Hallelujah, found so frequently in the Psalms, occurs only here in the NT (19:1,3,4,6).

Of these various liturgical terms, by far the most significant and frequently used is simply the verb worship (προσκυνέω). It occurs some 24 times in Revelation - far more often than in any other NT book - and makes up almost half of the NT occurrences. This word indicates both the immense scope and the countless number of those who worship God and the Lamb. Like the rainbow encircling the throne (4:1) worship radiates out from this epicentre in ever widening concentric circles. True worshippers comprise

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1 For the benefit of readers who do not have Greek, references to Greek vocabulary and grammar are confined to footnotes as much as possible.

2 In alphabetical order, the Greek terms for worship in Revelation (and the number of times they are used in a specifically liturgical sense) are as follows: φίλος (3), αἰνεῖ (1), ἄλληλου (4), ἄμην (5), δοξάζω (1), εὐχαρίστεω (1), εὐχαριστία (2), λατρεῖω (2), πίπτω (8), προσκυνέω (24), ψήφη (5). These word counts have been checked against the Concordance to the Novum Testamentum Graece of Nestle Aland, 26th Edition, and to the Greek New Testament, Third Edition, third edition, Berlin / New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1987.

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the four living creatures (19:4), the twenty-four elders (4:10; 5:14; 11:16; 19:4), all the angels (7:11), and all the nations (15:4).

At the same time, however, there is a dark underside to the majestic praise of this heavenly orchestra. Worship is not only ascribed to God and the Lamb in heaven. The verb προσκυνέω also describes earthly worship of a rather different nature. The sinister rivals of God and the Lamb for the worship of mankind are demons and idols (9:20), the dragon (13:4), and - most pointedly - the beast and his image (13:4,8,12,15; 14:9,11; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4). The contrast could not have been drawn more sharply. Humanity can worship either the divine or the demonic - there is no middle way. Worship of any creature is expressly forbidden (19:10; 22:8,9), and the recurrent command is to worship God (14:7; 19:10; 22:9).

The antithesis is therefore crystal clear. On the one hand there is God and the Lamb. On the other hand there is the beast and his image pictured as inextricably allied to idols, demons and the dragon. Worship of the beast and his image is thus tantamount to worshipping idols, demons and Satan. To the original readers the message would have been painfully obvious. In their social context emperor worship may have seemed politically correct, but it was ultimately demonic. It was rendering to Caesar what properly belonged only to God. Hence the central message of the Apocalypse is plain enough - worship God! As Paul Barnett has pointed out:

The most urgent challenge by the writer of the Apocalypse to his readers is that men and women worship God the creator and judge and the redeemer-Lamb, not the pseudo and pretentious counterpart, the Roman emperor, by means of the imperial cult which had spread so rapidly throughout the dozens of cities of Roman Asia. The Apocalypse divides mankind into the worshippers of the dragon and the beast and those who will worship God in the heavenly Jerusalem.³

David Desilva has written equally emphatically on this last point: "The imperial cult thus forms an important part of the background to John's

³P.Barnett, "Apocalypse, Parallelism and Prophecy", Society for the Study of Early Christianity, Newsletter 28, June 1997, 4. In an article in issue 30 of the same newsletter (February 1998), "Separation or Participation: The Choice of the Apocalypse", N.H. Young sees the central message of Revelation in very similar terms: "As far as John is concerned, the issue is over the worship of the God who made heaven and earth and the Lamb who ransomed them, and, on the other hand, the worship of a powerful state" (7).
Apocalypse. Participation or non-participation becomes determinative of eschatological destiny.4

The identification of the beast, whose image is worshipped, with a political entity such as the Roman emperor or state lies close at hand. This beast features most prominently in chapter 13 where he is described in graphic detail, especially in vv.1-3. Significantly the description draws heavily upon the vision of the four beasts - lion, bear, leopard, and dreadful, terrifying beast - from Daniel 7:1-8. These four beasts can readily be understood as four world empires - the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek and Roman respectively.5 If the composite symbol of Revelation 13 can be understood in terms of its component parts from Daniel 7, the beast of the sea can certainly be interpreted as a political creature. For John's first readers the Roman emperor and his henchmen would readily come to mind.6

If this is indeed the correct identification, then it pays to trace the development of Caesar worship from the early days of empire till well into the post-apostolic period. It will also be beneficial to determine as closely as possible the extent to which this practice had spread to the seven cities of Asia Minor whose seven churches are specifically addressed in this book.

A. Emperor Worship from Augustus to Hadrian

As we briefly survey the practice of emperor worship during this period (27 B.C. - A.D. 138), two controlling perspectives need to be borne in mind. Firstly, it is legitimate to speak of a certain development or evolution of the emperor cult. It did not emerge in full bloom with the dawn of empire.

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6 According to Robert Mounce, "There is little doubt that for John the beast was the Roman Empire as persecutor of the church. It comes onto the land from the sea, just as the Roman troops did when they invaded the eastern Mediterranean. The beast is that spirit of imperial power which claims a religious sanction for its gross injustices" (The New International Commentary on the New Testament - The Book of Revelation, revised edition, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998, 246). Mounce continues, however, by explaining that the beast is more than the Roman Empire: "John's vision grew out of the details of his own historical situation, but its complete fulfilment awaits the final denouement of human history" (ibid.).
Moreover, there are significant individual differences between the emperors themselves in their attitudes to emperor worship - from mere tolerance through to open encouragement and ultimately to official enforcement. By the end of the first century A.D. it would be fair to say that emperor worship was firmly entrenched and that it had come to stay. Although this development is far from even, throughout the first century there is a gradual but definite shift from tolerance to enforcement.

The second feature to note is that the Roman Empire knew nothing of the modern separation of "church and state". Religion and politics were cut from the same cloth. Hence emperor worship was often a policy pursued for the sake of political expediency. As Desilva explains:

Speaking of the imperial cult exclusively in terms of either its political or religious value fails to grasp the unity of politics and religion in the cult. While the imperial cult would later provide the test of political loyalty under Trajan, it was the religious legitimation of political order which gave the cult its form and peculiar power.  

The political dimensions of the cult can already be seen quite clearly with its inception under Augustus (27 B.C. - A.D. 14). Having firmly grasped the reins of empire following the closing tumultuous days of the Roman Republic, Augustus was quick to realise that there was little by way of a common bond to unite the multiplicity of nations that made up the Empire. What was needed was a common loyalty and a common conception of national destiny. Augustus sought such a common ideal in the field of religion. With his characteristic political astuteness he combined the well-known practice of ruler-worship in the East with the western tendency to revere dead ancestors. In Rome, for example, he encouraged the worship of the imperial house with the worship of the goddess Roma. Hence, as E.T. Salmon has shown:

The [imperial] cult took different forms in various parts of the Empire. In the provinces the provincials paid worship to 'Rome and Augustus', Roman citizens to 'Rome and the deified Julius' (since

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7 Desilva, 188.
Romans, while prepared to honour dead ancestors, would feel the
impropriety of addressing prayers to a man who was still alive).  

Augustus died in August, 14 A.D. In September he was voted divine
honours. He would henceforth be known - to eastern and western subjects
alike - as Divus Augustus, 'the Deified Augustus'. His successor Tiberius
(A.D. 14-37) discouraged worship of himself although, it would appear, not
always successfully. Unlike Augustus, he was not deified at death.

In stark contrast to the official modesty of his predecessor, Gaius (37-41)
had more lofty personal ambitions. Although his reign started moderately
enough and he enjoyed the good will of his subjects, a serious illness in his
first year of office was to take a heavy personal toll. In the words of the
Jewish historian Josephus:

.. in process of time, he went beyond the bounds of human nature in
his conceit of himself, and, by reason of the vastness of his
dominions, made himself a god, and took upon himself to act in all
things to the reproach of the Deity itself.

Gaius' delusions of grandeur, as it turned out, were to pose a greater threat
to the Jews than to the Christians. Following the success of his German
campaign, and now even surer of his divinity, the emperor ordered the legate
of Syria "to march with an adequate legionary force into Judaea and set up a
gigantic statue of Gaius in the Jerusalem Temple." Due to the timely
intervention of Herod Agrippa I, disaster was averted. Gaius' manoeuvrings,
however, were a sobering reminder of the lengths to which emperors might
go in insisting on divine honours for themselves. The terror of those weeks,
when the emperor's threat hung heavy over the province of Judea, was not
quickly forgotten. "The abomination of desolation" spoken of by the prophet
Daniel (Matt.24:15; cf. Dan.9:27; 11;31;12:11) had been a very imminent
danger indeed.

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9 Salmon, 38.
10 Salmon, 124.
Claudius (41-54) was far more restrained in seeking divine honours for himself. However, so humane and efficient was his government that many provincials were eager to deify him during his own lifetime. After his death the Roman world did precisely that, and he was the first emperor after Augustus to be so distinguished.\(^{13}\)

Although Nero (54-68) is best remembered for his cruel persecution of Christians following the great fire of Rome in July of 64, he did not officially seek divine honours nor was he deified at death. This does not mean that divine titles were never bestowed upon him. Coins were struck commending Nero as "Saviour of the World"\(^{14}\) and "his enthusiasm for art made his flatterers hail him as Apollo".\(^ {15}\) He had a desire for fame and immortality but - it would appear - more as an artist than as a god.\(^ {16}\)

The ironies of history already apparent in the Julio-Claudian dynasty come to a particularly sharp focus in the Flavian dynasty. Father and son Vespasian (69-79) and Titus (79-81) did not seek divine honours but were accorded them at death.\(^ {17}\) Titus' hapless younger brother Domitian (81-96) eagerly sought them during his lifetime but was explicitly refused them at his death.\(^ {18}\)

It was Domitian, conscious as he was of being son and brother to deified emperors, who posed the greatest threat to the Christian Church. Writing early in the second century, the Roman historian Suetonius reflects back on Domitian's rule as a reign of terror. Perhaps he was overstating the case, and he may have had his own political agenda, but the evidence that he marshals to demonstrate Domitian's egotistical ambitions seems to be well founded. The emperor officially referred to himself grandiosely as dominus et deus ('Lord and God'). His megalomania did not stop there, however. As Suetonius continues: "And so the custom arose of henceforth addressing him in no other way even in writing or in conversation. He suffered no statues to

\(^{13}\) Salmon, 174.
\(^{16}\) See, for example, Suetonius, Nero, liii-liv.
\(^{17}\) Salmon, 221, 224.
\(^{18}\) Suetonius, Domitian xxiii, reports that at his death the senators "were so overjoyed that they raced to fill the House, where they did not refrain from assailing the dead emperor with the most insulting and stinging kind of outrages. ... finally they passed a decree that his inscriptions should everywhere be erased, and all record of him obliterated."
be set up in his honour in the Capitol, except of gold and silver and of a fixed weight."\textsuperscript{19}

Whether Christians suffered directly as a result of these imperial policies is a matter of scholarly debate. The evidence from Suetonius is tantalising at this point: "Besides other taxes, that on the Jews was levied with the utmost rigour, and those were persecuted who without publicly acknowledging that faith yet lived as Jews as well as those who concealed their origin and did not pay the tribute levied upon their people."\textsuperscript{20} The Loeb edition of Suetonius' works comments in a footnote that "these were doubtless Christians, whom the Romans commonly confounded with the Jews."\textsuperscript{21}

It is therefore likely that Christians suffered the burden of heavy taxation during Domitian's reign. Some may even have been martyred. In the year 95 he executed his own cousin Flavius Clemens on the charge of atheism - "in other words with conversion to a foreign religion (probably Christianity)".\textsuperscript{22} At the same time Clemens' wife, who was also the emperor's niece, was exiled. However, it would be wrong to assume that Domitian's persecution of Christians was on a grand scale. As Merrill Tenney has observed:

\begin{quote}
There is no specific record in the Roman historians of a wholesale concerted persecution of Christians in this period, but there can be little doubt that the social and religious atmosphere of the empire was becoming increasingly unfavorable and that in some localities Christians were brought to trial and martyred for their faith.\textsuperscript{23}
\end{quote}

According to conventional scholarly wisdom, the Apocalypse was written during Domitian's reign.\textsuperscript{24} The state of affairs described above would appear to be directly reflected in this book. This was not a time of mass executions of Christians, as happened, for example, in the second and third

\textsuperscript{19} ibid., xiii.
\textsuperscript{20} ibid., xii.
\textsuperscript{22} Salmon, 235.
\textsuperscript{24} While this view has been challenged, it would still appear to be the most widely accepted opinion among scholars today.
centuries under such emperors as Marcus Aurelius, Decius and Diocletian. Only one martyr is mentioned, namely Antipas of Pergamum (Rev.2:13). However, the pressure is growing. In the persecution under Domitian there are forebodings of more to come. His lust for deity represented a dangerous trend and the prophet was given to see where matters were heading and where the battle lines would be drawn.

If the traditional dating of Revelation is correct, its prophecies were indeed soon to be fulfilled (1:1; 22:6,10), i.e. during the reign of Trajan (98-117). It was c. 112 that he sent Pliny the Younger to Bithynia to reorganise the affairs of the province. Soon Pliny found himself faced with a serious dilemma - what to do with the local Christians. In his predicament he wrote the emperor asking - it would seem - both for his advice and his approval. His letter is highly instructive as to the official state of affairs early in the second century. Salient excerpts from Pliny's letter and Trajan's reply will describe the situation with sufficient clarity:

It is my custom, lord emperor, to refer to you all questions whereof I am in doubt. ... Meantime this is the course I have taken with those who were accused before me as Christians. I asked them whether they were Christians, and if they confessed, I asked them a second and a third time with threats of punishment. If they kept to it, *I ordered them for execution* ... As for those who said that they neither were nor ever had been Christians, I thought it right to let them go, since they recited a prayer to the gods at my dictation, *made supplication with incense and wine to your statue*, which I had ordered to be brought into court for the purpose together with the images of the gods, and moreover cursed Christ - things which (so it is said) those who are really Christians cannot be made to do. Others ... *both worshipped your statue and the images of the gods, and cursed Christ.*  

In his reply Trajan commends Pliny for having "adopted the proper course". Then, in addition to the course of action that Pliny has already taken, he lays down the following procedure for the prosecution of Christians:

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They are not to be sought out; but if they are accused and convicted, they must be punished - yet on this condition, that whoso denies himself to be a Christian, and makes the fact plain by his action, that is, by worshipping our gods, shall obtain pardon on his repentance, however suspicious his past conduct may be.26

While it might be argued that Trajan's ruling worked in the Christians' favour in that it released them from anonymous accusations27, a firm precedent had nevertheless been set. "For long this continued to be the official position", says the Oxford Classical Dictionary.28 By this time the principle has been established that persistence in Christianity after legal challenge is punishable by death. No longer is emperor worship left to the personal preference of the reigning emperor, it is has now become a state policy which citizens resist at their peril.

Trajan was deified at death, as was his successor Hadrian (117-138)29 who also followed him in his policy towards the Christians. Hadrian's case is particularly significant if, as Salmon suggests, "the address which he wrote to his soul on his death-bed indicates that he was well aware that he was no god."30 But now it was too late in history for any such personal qualms. This was no time for a god to doubt his divinity. The die had been cast. Emperor worship was now a fixed policy enforced by the state. F.F. Bruce has well summarised the situation that pertained during Hadrian's reign:

All emperors might not take their divinity so seriously as Domitian did, but the acknowledgment of the Emperor's divinity was a recognized form in which the subjects of the Empire must give evidence of their loyalty if so required, and refusal to make this acknowledgment was condemned as criminal contumacy. It is precisely round this point that many of the accounts of Christian martyrdoms under the pagan Empire centre.31

26 Pliny, Epistles, X.97, in New Eusebius, 16.
27 This is the view taken by Stevenson, New Eusebius, 16.
28 OCD, 666 [sic!].
29 Salmon, 295, 306.
30 Salmon, 306.
B. Emperor Worship in Asia Minor

The Roman province of Asia had been hospitable to the imperial cult from the very beginning. After decades of civil war the cities of Asia were grateful to Augustus for having established the *pax Romana* and saw this as his gift to the world. He was accordingly proclaimed "saviour and god" and, even more lavishly, as "the god Augustus Caesar, son of a god, ruler of land and sea, benefactor and saviour of the whole world". This veneration of the Roman emperor continued to be fervently practiced, even though no emperor was to visit Asia Minor till the second century. Barnett estimates that by this time "there were at least eighty temples for the imperial cult in sixty cities in the region of Anatolia." There is evidence to suggest that emperor worship was well established in all the seven cities of Asia to whose churches letters are addressed in Revelation 2-3. It is to this evidence that we must now turn.

In the New Testament *Ephesus* is best known for its temple to Diana (Acts 19:27). The structure was overwhelming in its beauty, and the apostle Paul witnessed firsthand the citizens' intense devotion to their goddess. More important for our purposes, however, are shrines dedicated to the imperial cult. As early as 29 B.C. two small temples were built to the deified Julius and the goddess Roma. Temples for the later emperors seem to have been far more impressive. A Corinthian-style temple of Hadrian still stands, partially preserved. Earlier a colossal statue of Trajan, more than two storeys high, had been erected to stand in the centre of a fountain. On the hill at Ephesus the most conspicuous edifices to have been uncovered are the temple of Trajan and, opposite it, a six-storey apartment house. Earlier still, and of greatest significance for our understanding of the Apocalypse, was the temple dedicated to Domitian. McRay has carefully described its monumental dimensions:

33 ibid.
35 McRay, 260.
A Temple to Domitian stood adjacent to the state agora on its west side; this temple, surmounting a massive substructure measuring 165 feet by 330 feet, housed a colossal cult statue of Domitian. Sitting, the statue would have been 16 feet high, and standing the figure would have been 23 feet tall. The head and 6-foot-long forearm are preserved in the Izmir Museum.\textsuperscript{37}

The impact that such a construction would have on the church at Ephesus is not difficult to imagine. According to Barnett, "The heat was noticeably turned up at that moment when Ephesus was dignified as 'temple-sweeper', and a temple for Domitian, with giant statue, was erected - some time in the middle eighties."\textsuperscript{38} This new temple appears to have become the focus of emperor worship throughout the province. It is even possible that the Nicolaitans in the Ephesian church were those of its members who had somehow accommodated with pagan society and the imperial cult\textsuperscript{39} - but this must remain a matter of conjecture. Even so, the implications for the believers in this city and beyond must have been enormous. This was the first temple in Ephesus to have been dedicated to a Roman emperor. Cities of Asia competed for the privilege of building a temple for the emperor, and this honour had now been granted to Ephesus. It was in a prominent and central location in the city and was built at great expense. Perhaps Barnett is not overstating the case when he says: "It may well be that the creation of this temple and statue provoked not merely the writing of Revelation 13, but of the whole of the Apocalypse."\textsuperscript{40}

As early as 195 B.C., even before the creation of the province of Asia, \textit{Smyrna} became the first city in the region to erect a temple to the goddess Roma.\textsuperscript{41} Unfortunately little remains of Smyrna from the New Testament period. Hence we are dependent on inscriptions for our knowledge of its temples during this time. One such inscription reads as follows: "The first of Asia in beauty and greatness, the most splendid, the metropolis, three

\textsuperscript{37} McRay, 257.
\textsuperscript{38} Barnett, "Apocalypse, Parallelism and Prophecy", 3.
\textsuperscript{39} N.H. Young, "Separation or Participation: The Choice of the Apocalypse", 5.
\textsuperscript{40} P. Barnett, "Revelation in its Roman Setting", 62.
\textsuperscript{41} Barnett, "Revelation in its Roman Setting", 59.
times temple-warden of the Augusti, according to the decrees of the most holy senate, the ornament of Ionia, the city of the Smyrnaeans."\(^{42}\)

The reference to "three times temple-warden" suggests that the inscription probably originated in the third century, as Smyrna did not receive its third neocorate until the reign of emperor Caracalla (211-217). The city was first given the title of temple-warden under Tiberius, for whom the people erected a statue. During his reign a coin was also issued bearing his name and his figure in front of a temple. Smyrna again received the honour of temple-warden under Hadrian.\(^{43}\) This evidence is sufficient to demonstrate that emperor worship was well established in Smyrna.

From its lofty mountainous position sixteen miles from the Aegean Sea, Pergamum provided a natural site for the worship of the gods. A temple for Dionysius was built on the western slope of the upper city, while a marble altar to Zeus stood at the southern end. The city also became an early focal point for emperor worship. In 29 B.C. Augustus permitted the erection of temples to Rome and himself in Pergamum and Nicomedia. From centres such as these the cult of the living emperor spread rapidly.\(^{44}\) From this evidence Desilva concludes:

This temple [to Augustus] made Pergamum the cultic center of the Commune of Asia, and may have given rise, along with the prominence of temples dedicated to both imperial and traditional divinities on its hill, to its epithet in Revelation 2 as the 'throne of Satan' where Antipas, 'the faithful one and martyr', was killed.\(^{45}\)

Further evidence for emperor worship comes from early in the second century. Hadrian raised a Corinthian-style temple to honour Trajan, a site where extensive excavations have been carried out in recent times.\(^{46}\) Some

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\(^{43}\) McRay, 273.

\(^{44}\) Desilva, 194.

\(^{45}\) Ibid. McRay, *Archaeology*, 267, restricts the reference to Satan's throne and dwelling in Rev.2:13 to Pergamum's temple for Augustus as this was "the first provincial temple built to a Roman Emperor in Asia Minor". Yet it is doubtful whether a choice needs to be made between the altar of Zeus and the temple of Augustus as the precise location of "Satan's throne". In a polytheistic setting such as Pergamum the worship of the emperor was intermingled with that of traditional deities without any sense of contradiction. Such an environment was particularly hostile to the early Christians, as the reference to the martyrdom of Antipas (also in Rev.2:13) clearly indicates.

\(^{46}\) Johnson, "Asia Minor and Early Christianity", 81.
of the most impressive archaeological finds have been the discovery of colossal heads of both Trajan and Hadrian.\(^{47}\) Barnett estimates that the statues of which they were a part would have been five metres tall.\(^ {48}\) All of this suggests that both emperors were worshipped here.

The rivalry between *Ephesus, Smyrna and Pergamum* was proverbial\(^ {49}\), not least in their desire to become prominent seats of emperor worship. The status of each of these centres by the end of the first century has been admirably summarised by McRay:

Worship of the Roman emperor through an imperial cult was authorized for the provinces of Asia and Bithynia in 29 B.C. under Augustus, whose temple in Pergamum was the first in Asia built to an emperor. Tiberius, unlike Augustus, resisted emperor worship, but in his desire to maintain the general policies of his predecessor acquiesced to a request by Asia in A.D. 23 and authorized a temple to be built for him, his wife, and the Roman senate. This temple was raised in Smyrna in 26, after three years of squabbling by the Roman senate. The third temple for the imperial cult was constructed in Ephesus, probably in the reign of Claudius. Sometime in the late first century, probably during the reign of Domitian, Pergamum, Smyrna and Ephesus were honored for their role as seats of emperor worship and were officially designated *neokoroi* ... 'temple-wardens'.\(^ {50}\)

McRay further explains that in the second century the title *neokoros* [νεωκόρος] was conferred by Rome on cities in which there was "a temple founded for the worship of the emperors".\(^ {51}\) It was during this period that Ephesus, Smyrna and Pergamum each built a second temple, and thus were designated as "twice temple-wardens". What is most significant for our investigation, however, is the suggestion made above that these three cities were first honoured as temple-wardens "probably during the reign of Domitian". Coupled with the traditional dating of Revelation, this

\(^{47}\) McRay, 266.
\(^{48}\) Barnett, "Revelation in its Roman Setting", 60.
\(^{49}\) Horsley, 53.
\(^{50}\) McRay, 257.
\(^{51}\) ibid.

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suggestion unveils a very probable reason for the writing of the Apocalypse. Not only was it written against the stark backdrop of emperor worship, but many of its original readers lived in cities where such worship was scaling new heights of official recognition. In such a context the call to faithfully worship God needed to be made more strongly than ever before.

As centres of emperor worship, the other cities mentioned in Revelation 2-3 would appear to have been less prominent than the three already discussed:

_Thyatira_ was famous for its trade guilds, among which the guild of dyers seems to have been especially prosperous (cf. Acts 16:14). There is more evidence of the imperial cult in _Sardis_. A temple to _Augustus_ was built before 5 B.C. but was destroyed by the devastating earthquake of A.D. 17. Because the emperor _Tiberius_ responded to the disaster with generous aid, his grateful subjects at Sardis honoured him with statues, one of which had a base with an inscription feting him as the "Founder of the City". As late as 1982 a hitherto unknown temple was excavated in Sardis, possibly a provincial temple to the emperor _Vespasian_. Perhaps this explains why in the third century, from the time of the emperor _Septimius Severus_ (193-211), Sardis was named "twice temple-warden".

Little is known about the imperial cult in _Philadelphia_ as the site remains unexcavated. Not only does it lie beneath a modern city, but the region is also prone to serious earthquakes.

Like Philadelphia, _Laodicea_ has never been extensively excavated. We are therefore, once again, dependent on such information as can be gathered from coins and inscriptions. One such inscription indicates a significant link between _Zeus_ and _Domitian_. The connection is doubly significant. Not only was _Zeus_ the city's chief deity, but Domitian's association with him shows how easily emperor worship could be integrated with the worship of traditional deities (cf. footnote 45). The inscription for a gate and its towers reads (in part): "To _Zeus_ the greatest, the saviour, and to emperor _Domitianus Caesar Augustus ..._." The dedication to both _Zeus_ and Domitian does not necessarily indicate that both were regarded as equally

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52 McRay, 244.
53 McRay, 262.
54 McRay, 264-5.
55 McRay, 246.
56 Horsley, 58.

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divine (Domitian is referred to as *pontifex maximus*), but the way in which the two are associated is certainly suggestive.

From the above evidence it can be clearly demonstrated that the worship of Roman emperors was well established in Asia Minor in the first century A.D. To a greater or lesser degree the imperial cult would seem to have been thriving in all the seven cities of Asia whose churches are specifically addressed in the Apocalypse. In fact, this was the Roman province most strongly devoted to the empire and the imperial cult. As Sherman Johnson has pertinently observed, "the prophet John is fully conscious of political and economic conditions in Asia, and sees in them signs of the coming crisis".57 Emperor worship was a powerful force in the everyday lives of ordinary citizens. Its influence was ubiquitous. In Desilva's words:

The imperial cult was a powerful and pervasive presence in the cities of Asia Minor. The architecture, sculpture, and cultic activity conspired, along with the less dramatic media of inscriptions and coins, to place the ideology and meaning of the cult in the most prominent and frequented parts of civic life.58

When the gospel, with its absolute claims of a risen Lord, was introduced to the province of Asia, a clash of ideologies would ultimately prove inevitable. To acknowledge Caesar as god implies a denial of Jesus as Lord. In symbolic form Revelation portrays this collision of worldviews in graphic terms. In an environment saturated with the trappings of emperor worship John "develops his counter-ideology and constructs the counter-definitions of reality which seek to provide the churches with some other strong ideological ground on which to take their stand."59 His aim is nothing less than the pushing aside of one world order in favour of another.

Revelation is therefore driven by what might appropriately be called "a theology of power".60 Again and again John gives his readers insights into the realities of power. In the words of Leon Morris:

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57 Johnson, 93.
58 Desilva, 196.
59 Desilva, 195.

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... the future belongs not to the Roman emperor, nor to any human potentate or ecclesiastic. It belongs to no man or group of men, but only to Christ who was crucified for the salvation of mankind. He it is who can open the book of human destiny. ... Real power rests with Christ, the Lion. The appearances may be against it for the present. But reality is not dependent on present appearances.61

The Apocalypse works out its theology of power primarily - though not exclusively - in terms of worship. The emperors' pretentious claims to divine titles are unmasked for what they really are. To the original readers it would have come as a rather shocking revelation to learn that they were nothing less than blasphemous (13:1,5,6; 17:3)! Hence the authority of the emperor/beast is linked with the dragon or Satan (13:2,4). The imperial cult pays homage not to a god but to the destructive forces of Satan.62

In the sharpest possible antithesis to the worship of the beast John places the glorious worship of the Lamb. Humans rightly worship those whom they believe to have ultimate power. The Lamb is fully entitled to the worship of mankind precisely because all divine power and authority have been vested in him, and not in the Roman emperor. The theme of the book is therefore the distinction between true worship and idolatry. But as this theme unfolds, the theology of power is never far from the surface. Ascriptions of praise to God and the Lamb are studded with words depicting their sovereign power.

C. The Worship of God in Revelation

More than any other book in the New Testament the Apocalypse resounds with doxologies. At significant points John's visions ring with affirmations of praise and ascriptions of glory to God and the Lamb. Revelation raises the doxology as a liturgical form to even more glorious heights than the Epistles. It is here that they come to their own and climax in a mighty crescendo of praise.

62 Desilva, 204.
In the Epistles there are a dozen doxologies. They all follow a set formula: "To Him be the glory for ever and ever. Amen" This formula may be expanded in a number of ways, with the addition of words such as honour, might and power (I Tim.1:17; 6:16; I Pet.4:11; 5:11). The most explicit of the epistolary doxologies is Jude 25 which ascribes to God "glory, majesty, power and authority".

Of even greater interest is the identification of the "Him" in these doxologies. With the possible exception of II Tim.4:18, all the doxologies in the Pauline epistles are directed to God the Father (Rom.11:36; 16:27; Gal.1:5; Eph.3:21; Phil.4:20; I Tim.1:17; 6:16). Characteristically a doxology is not to Jesus Christ but through him (Rom. 16:27; cf. I Pet.4:11; Jude 25) or even in him (Eph.3:21). Outside of the Pauline corpus the same tendency can be detected. Doxologies are clearly directed to the Father in I Pet.5:11 and Jude 25, while the grammatical ambiguity in Heb.13:21 and I Pet.4:11 makes it difficult to be certain whether the doxology is to God the Father or to Jesus Christ. The only doxology in the Epistles that is unequivocally directed to Christ is in II Pet.3:18.

This raises a significant question, especially for Pauline studies. James Dunn has recently made the claim that "the sharp antithesis between 'Caesar is Lord' and 'Christ is Lord'.. is not yet in evidence in Paul's time." Dunn supports his case by examining the terms for worship used by Paul, such as prayer, thanks, glorify and worship, and discovers that such language is always directed to God rather than to Christ. Again prayers and thanks are not directed to Christ but through him. "In his exalted state he is envisaged as somehow mediating the praise to God", says Dunn.

Dunn is not the only scholar to have made this observation. Writing for the Messianic Jewish journal Mishkan Paul Sumner gives an overview of the Greek terms for prayer, praise and thanksgiving in the New Testament. Prayer is mostly offered to the Father rather than to Jesus. It is He whom

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63 In each case it is impossible to determine with any degree of certainty whether the antecedent to the relative pronoun ος is God or Christ.
65 Dunn, 258-9.
66 Dunn, 258.

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believers glorify and to whom they ascribe praise and blessing.\textsuperscript{67} Thanksgiving is likewise almost always given to God, except in I Tim.1:12 where it is offered to Jesus directly.\textsuperscript{68} When it comes to hymns Sumner reaches a similar conclusion: "Of those hymns mentioning Jesus, not one is directly addressed to him, but are about him." Very quickly, however, he adds an important qualification:

The Book of Revelation is another matter. It contains the greatest collection of hymns in the New Testament. Sung in the heavenly temple by heavenly powers or by human martyrs, these hymns are directed to both God and the Lamb (the usual designation for Jesus in this book).\textsuperscript{69}

The liturgical observations made by Dunn and Sumner raise important questions for the study of worship in the book of Revelation. Is worship here more Christocentric than elsewhere in the New Testament? Does it perhaps even have a "higher" Christology than the earlier literature? If so, could the emperor worship of the late first century have been a catalyst in such a development? In the face of the rising tide of the imperial cult in Asia Minor did the early Christians in that province more clearly appreciate their confession that Christ is Lord and worship him accordingly? These are potentially provocative questions and for an answer we need to turn to the seven doxological scenes in Revelation.

\textit{First Doxological Scene (1:4-8)}

Not only does Revelation contain seven letters (2:1-3:22), it is itself an epistle. In 1:4,5a there are all the hallmarks of the traditional opening of an epistle. First, the reader is identified - simply as "John". Next the readers are identified - "the seven churches of the province of Asia". Finally a greeting is given, namely "grace and peace to you" from the three persons of the Trinity. No sooner has this been done than the writer breaks out into a doxology (1:5b,6):

\textsuperscript{67} The verbal adjective \textit{εὔλογητος} ("blessed") is used only of God in the NT. The phrase 'blessed be', which could be understood as a doxological type of expression, is found mainly in the Epistles and is used exclusively of God (Luke 1:68; II Cor.1:3; Eph.1:3; I Pet.1:3; cf. Rom.1:25; 9:5; II Cor.11:31).

\textsuperscript{68} P. Sumner, "Worship in the New Testament - Remapping the Land", \textit{Mishkan} 25 (2) 1996, 8-10.

\textsuperscript{69} Sumner, 10.
To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father - to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.70

This doxology expands significantly on the basic formula found in the Epistles. The redemptive work of Christ is a clear focal point. Note that even though the three persons of the Godhead have just been referred to, this doxology is directed unequivocally to Christ, a feature that until now we have found only in II Pet.3:18. Moreover, in the salutation Christ is feted with several lofty titles, the last of which is "the ruler of the kings of the earth." That this title constitutes a direct challenge to the emperor's claims to earthly sovereignty should have been patent to John's readers in the seven churches of Asia. To his subjects he was known as princeps principum ('ruler of rulers').72 So already at this early stage the battle lines are being clearly drawn.

In his sovereign position, and by virtue of his completed work of redemption, Christ has made his people "a kingdom of priests." Both in the church and in the heavenly or eschatological assembly of the people of God (7:9-15) there is the fulfilment of the promise made to Israel at Sinai: "You shall be to me a kingdom of priests, a holy nation" (Ex.19:6; cf. I Pet.2:9).73 The context, however, suggests that this doxology reflects more of the Old Testament than simply indicating the fulfilment of the Sinaitic promise. Immediately following the doxology is the announcement that Christ is "coming with the clouds". This is a strong allusion to the "one like a Son of Man" in Dan.7:13. It is precisely this chapter that is the source of so much of the Apocalypse's imagery. Not only is the description of the beast in chapter 13 a composite picture of the beasts found in Dan.7:3-7, but the one "like a Son of Man" reappears again in Revelation 1:13-18. He is described in terms clearly reminiscent of "the Ancient of Days" in Dan.7:9,10. With such a strong dependence on Daniel 7 for its symbolism, Revelation's kingdom references should probably also be traced back to the same source.

70 Unless otherwise indicated, the translations of these doxologies are from the NIV. For easy recognition all the doxologies are in italics and for completeness' sake all will be included.
71 Mounce, Revelation, 49, has a pertinent insight here: "That this first doxology is addressed to Christ alone has significant theo/christological implications. The redemptive work of the Son is central to the eschatological drama about to open."
72 Desilva, 201.
73 Peterson, "Worship in the Revelation to John", 72.
There the saints of the Most High are promised that they will possess the kingdom forever (Dan.7:18). This possession of the kingdom, however, will not come without struggle and even apparent defeat. The vision continues:

As I watched, this horn was waging war against the saints and defeating them, until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favour of the saints of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom. (vv.21,22)

Ultimately "the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven" will not belong to any of the four beasts but to "the saints, the people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him" (vs.27). The themes of victory and kingdom authority, which will be so strongly developed later in Revelation, are already latent in the opening chapter through its strong links to Daniel 7. The glory and the eternal dominion which the first doxology ascribes to Christ were clearly of the kind that Daniel had in mind.

Second Doxological Scene (4:1-5:14)

In these two chapters Revelation abandons the strict doxological formula hitherto employed in the New Testament. The hymns of praise found here can safely be regarded as doxologies, however. Glory (doxa) is ascribed again and again to the One who sits on the throne and to the Lamb (4:9,11; 5:12,13). This is one of the richest liturgical sections in the entire book. It contains no less than five hymns of praise that radiate out from the throne in ever widening concentric circles:74

(1) The four living creatures, in words reminiscent of those of the seraphim in Isaiah 6, praise God for his holiness (4:8): *Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.*

(2) Then the twenty-four elders worship him because he is the Creator of all (4:11): *You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive honour and glory and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.*

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74 See W. Hendriksen, More Than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1939, 102, for a diagram of the vision described in these chapters.
(3) When the Lamb has been found worthy to open the scroll and break its seals, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders join together in praising him (5:9,10). They worship him first of all because of his work of redemption (5:9): You are worthy to take the scroll and to open the seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. Then, in what almost sounds like a refrain from the first doxology, they add (5:10): You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.

(4) Next it is the turn of myriads of angels who sing in a loud voice (5:12): Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise! The overlap in wording with the praise ascribed to God in 4:11 is significant. As Peterson has aptly observed: "Indeed, the parallels ... make it clear that Christ is being adored on absolutely equal terms with God the creator!" In the very next verse John puts the accuracy of this observation beyond doubt.

(5) The symphony of praise that began immediately around the throne now reaches the outer edges of the universe. Every creature now breaks out in song to God and the Lamb (5:13): To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever! With this resounding finale we are back to the traditional formula for a doxology. For good measure it even closes with a concluding Amen by the four living creatures. This affirmation, coupled with the prostration of the elders, brings the praise of this cosmic orchestra back to where it began - before the throne of God.

The significance and implications of this majestic heavenly scene have been well summarised by Norman Young:

    Chapters 4-5 give the reason why God and his Christ are the only ones worthy of worship: God created all things (4.11) and Christ through his death redeemed humans for God (5.9). As far as John is concerned, the issue is over the worship of the God who made

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heaven and earth and the Lamb who ransomed them, and, on the other hand, the worship of a powerful state.\textsuperscript{76}

\section*{Third Doxological Scene (7:9-17)}

In the previous scene praise was offered by four distinct groups of worshippers: the living creatures, the elders, myriads of angels, and finally by all of creation. There is, however, another group who are referred to in one of the doxologies but are not specifically depicted as worshipping, namely those who were purchased with the blood of the Lamb "from every tribe and language and people and nation" (5:9). It is now precisely this multitude of the redeemed who are pictured at the opening of the third doxological scene (7:9).\textsuperscript{77} Wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands, they cry out in a loud voice: \textit{Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb} (7:10). Since in Revelation the word "salvation" carries the OT nuance of victory (cf. 12:10; 19:1),\textsuperscript{78} this outburst of praise could be interpreted as a victory chant to God and the Lamb - a perspective to which the palm branches of verse 9 would seem to bear eloquent testimony. Once again God and the Lamb are equally the recipients of the praise of this countless host, as was the case in chapters 4-5. And again there would appear to be an implied message for the Roman emperor who was popularly associated with power and triumph. The ultimate victory will not belong to him but to God and the Lamb.

As well as the victory chant of the redeemed, this scene also shows the angels prostrating themselves before the throne and offering a hymn of praise to God: \textit{Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honour and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!} This doxology has many of the features of the traditional doxological formula found in the Epistles. In common with most of those doxologies, it is also

\textsuperscript{76}N.H. Young, "Separation or Participation", 7.
\textsuperscript{77}In 5:10 the multitude of the redeemed are also called "a kingdom and priests", a designation no doubt intended to identify them with the "kingdom of priests" mentioned in the first doxology (1:6). This identification is further reinforced in 7:15 where their priestly role is more precisely described: "they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple". See also 22:3.
\textsuperscript{78}The word "belongs" is not found in the Greek which reads literally: "Salvation to our God ..." It would therefore also be possible to translate, "Salvation be ascribed to our God ..." The Greek dative which is found here can, however, be used to denote possession and this would seem to be the sense intended in the present context. See, for example, J.A. Brooks and C.L. Winbery, \textit{Syntax of New Testament Greek}, Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1979, 35.
\textsuperscript{79}Mounce, 162-3.
addressed exclusively to God rather than to Christ. However, it should also be noted that it is strikingly similar to the doxology that the angels ascribed to the Lamb in 5:12. Of the seven attributes ascribed in each case, six are identical (only 'wealth' in 5:12 is replaced by 'thanks' in 7:12).

Fourth Doxological Scene (11:15-19)

At the sounding of the seventh trumpet loud voices in heaven proclaim: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever" (11:15). Not only was this verse, together with 19:6, the inspiration for Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus", but it also represents the final inauguration of the kingdom in strongly Danielic terms (especially Dan.7:14,27). 80

This proclamation provokes the twenty-four elders to fall on their faces and worship God (11:16-18). Note the use of 'power' words in their thanksgiving in verse 17: We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and begun to reign. At this point the Apocalypse's theology of power and theme of worship intersect in telling ways. These expressions of power prompt the following comment from Robert Mounce:

The song of the elders is a hymn of thanksgiving to the One who with a great display of power will enter upon his eternal reign. The event is so certain that throughout this section it is repeatedly spoken of as already having taken place. 'Great power' does not indicate omnipotence as a divine attribute in a general sense, but points to the final conflict in which God overpowers all his enemies. 82

The elders' thanksgiving concludes with a strong emphasis of God's judgment (11:18): The nations were angry; and your wrath has come. The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the

80 Cf. under "First Doxological Scene" above.
81 This translates the Greek word πανοκράτωρ which occurs 9x in Revelation (1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:6,15; 21:22), but only on one other occasion in the NT (II Cor.6:18). It is equivalent to 'Lord Sabaoth' in the OT and strongly expresses the idea of dominion.
82 Mounce, 226.

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prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great - and for destroying those who destroy the earth.

The relationship between praise and judgment is significant. The elders are grateful, says Peterson, "because God has exercised his power and exercised his reign over rebellious men and women by inaugurating the final judgment." A new element has therefore been introduced into the doxologies at this point. God who has been worshipped as Creator (4:11) and Redeemer (1:5,6; 5:9-14; 7:10) will henceforth also be worshipped as Judge (cf. 15:4; 19:2). This means that when it comes to praising God in Revelation the entire scope of redemptive history is in view - from the creation to the day of judgment. This also determines who precisely the object of worship will be in the various doxologies. Those dealing with creation and judgment will focus mainly on God the Father, while those with redemption as their content will focus primarily on the Lamb.

Fifth Doxological Scene (14:1-5)

Although this section may conveniently be described as a doxological scene, it does not contain a doxology as such. John sees a vision of the Lamb with the 144,000 on Mount Zion (14:1). In vv.2-3 the theme of worship is unmistakable:

And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps. And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No-one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth.

No words to the song are given, nor is the object of worship indicated with any degree of precision, as with the previous doxologies. Nevertheless, this vision has an important role to play within its immediate context. It follows hard on the terrifying scenes in chapters 12-13 that introduce the dragon and the two beasts. If the beast out of the sea (13:1-10), who is worshipped by all the inhabitants of the earth (13:4,8,12,15), was for John's original readers

83 Peterson, "Worship in the Revelation to John", 74.
indeed intended to symbolise the Roman emperor, the heavenly scene of 14:1-5 was meant for the encouragement of those who refused to give him such divine honours. As Peterson points out:

As in chapter 7, John intersperses a glimpse of the final blessedness of God's people among his visions of judgment so as to encourage them to patient endurance and faithfulness in the present. Those who are 'redeemed from the earth' are engaged in the worship of heaven ... The implication is clear: only those who abstain from worshipping the beast on earth will share, by God's grace, in the worship of heaven.\(^\text{85}\)

Sixth Doxological Scene (15:1-8)

This scene is very similar to the last. The 144,000 are now identified as those who have been victorious over the beast. They hold harps given to them by God and sing the song of Moses and of the Lamb (15:3,4):

\[
\text{Great and marvellous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the ages. Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.}
\]

The context makes a clear distinction between the Lamb and the Lord God Almighty. The song is addressed only to the latter, and it is he who to be is feared, glorified and worshipped. The entire song is couched in OT language, but particularly pertinent are the allusions to the Song of Moses in Ex.15. This background casts God in the dual role of Redeemer and Judge - the Redeemer of his people and the Judge of his enemies. Mounce sees all the emphasis as falling on the first of these roles:

The song does not celebrate the judgment of God upon his enemies but the righteousness of his great redemptive acts. As Moses

\(^{85}\) Peterson, "Worship in the Revelation to John", 71. That the 144,000 are the same as the "great multitude that no-one could count" (7:9), but under different imagery, may be inferred from the fact that "the redeemed" are mentioned only on two occasions (5:9 and 14:3,4). That they can be referred to in both ways is quite in keeping with the fluid imagery found throughout Revelation.

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triumphed over Pharaoh, and as the risen Lord was victor over the world (John 16:33), so also the faithful have maintained their fidelity against all the demands of the imperial cult.\textsuperscript{86}

While the current context certainly encourages us to draw connections from Moses to Jesus to the victors over the beast and his image, the element of judgment cannot be easily dismissed. This is clearly implied in the song's reference to God's "righteous acts" which in some other translations is simply rendered "judgments". Morris has argued that "there is reason for holding that the term has to do with legal acts and we should understand it here of the judicial sentences of God in relation to the nations either in the way of mercy or condemnation (Charles). At the last God's judicial sentences will be made plain to all."\textsuperscript{87}

This explanation draws strength from the fact that, as soon as the song of Moses and the Lamb has been sung, the temple is opened and seven angels are given the seven bowls of God's wrath (15:5-7). Hence the context makes it clear that the song not only celebrates God's redemptive acts but also prepares the reader for his judgments. He is to be feared, glorified and worshipped because he is both Redeemer and Judge.

\textbf{Seventh Doxological Scene (19:1-10)}

While the previous doxology praised God in anticipation of his judgments, the set of doxologies in this passage praises him for an act of judgment already accomplished - the destruction of Babylon in chapter 18:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are his judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants. ... Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever} (19:1-3).
\end{quote}

The language makes it plain that God is here being worshipped purely in his role as Judge. In response to these words the living creatures and the elders prostrate themselves and cry out, \textit{Amen, Hallelujah!} (19:4).

\textsuperscript{86} Mounce, 285-6.
\textsuperscript{87} Morris, 189-90.
This spontaneous liturgical outburst is followed by a voice coming from the throne, saying: *Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, both small and great!* (19:5). No sooner has the voice spoken than it is obeyed, with a thunderous response from what sounded like a great multitude:

_Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear* (19:6,7).

The focus remains trained on God rather than on the Lamb. While the Lamb may be the subject of this closing doxology, God remains its object. His judgment of the prostitute Babylon prepares the way for the Lamb's spotless bride. The consummation is at hand.

As the wedding of the bride implies the judgment of the prostitute, and since the prostitute would clearly have symbolised Rome\textsuperscript{88} for the ancient readers of the Apocalypse, the doxologies maintain their consistent critique of the emperor cult and Roman imperialism to the very end. Peterson has therefore well summarised the significance these doxologies would have had for those early readers:

Hymns and acclamations were offered to Roman emperors and governors by people from various social stations and regions, expressing consent to their rule, praise for their achievements, and hope for the continuation of their reign. The hymns and acclamations in the setting of the heavenly throne-room point to God's greater and more powerful kingship. They acknowledge the magnificent benefits of his rule and look forward to its consummation in the overthrow of all his enemies.\textsuperscript{89}

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\textsuperscript{88} This is patent from the clue given in Rev.17:9: "The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits". According to Mounce, 315, "There is little doubt that a first-century reader would understand this reference in any way other than as a reference to Rome". Morris agrees but adds that "this does not mean that Rome exhausts the meaning of the symbol", 209. The further identification given in 17:18 was perhaps even more explicit: "The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth."

\textsuperscript{89} Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 271.

The seven doxological scenes alternate with, and stand in stark contrast to, visions depicting persecution, struggle and judgment. They come at high points in Revelation and therefore serve as symphonies of encouragement to a suffering church. At the same time they are tributaries to the final vision of glory in chapters 21-22.\textsuperscript{90} Although these chapters have no doxologies as such, the entire setting is doxological, or at least liturgical. The symbolism is that of the temple, the tabernacle and Paradise. In bold fulfilment of this Old Testament imagery God himself has become the habitat for the new humanity (21:3).

The mind-boggling dimensions of the New Jerusalem are given in 21:16. Not only are its length and breadth 12,000 stadia, but so is its height! Morris brings home the immensity of these measurements with some comparisons from the geography of the modern world:

Twelve thousand stadia is approximately 1,500 miles, the distance between London and Athens, between New York and Houston, between Dehli and Rangoon, between Adelaide and Darwin. A city of this size is too large for the imagination to take in. John is certainly conveying the idea of splendour. And, more importantly, that of room for all.\textsuperscript{91}

Perhaps even more significant than its sheer size is its shape. It is a perfect cube, as was the holy of holies in the Old Testament tabernacle and temple (I Kings 6:20). Thus the entire city is pictured as the ultimate holy of holies where God supremely dwells with his redeemed people. It is there that "his servants will serve him" (22:3), no doubt in the sense of fulfilling their priestly duties (cf. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6). The verb for "serve" (\textgreek{λατρεύω}), used both here and in 7:15, refers exclusively to religious or liturgical service. The New Jerusalem in its entirety is thus pictured as a sanctuary and all its inhabitants are high priests.

\textsuperscript{90} This point has been well made by Donald Guthrie, \textit{The Relevance of John's Apocalypse}, Exeter: Paternoster / Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987, 88,89: "The liturgical passages are not an end in themselves but lead up to the great crescendo in chapters 21 and 22. ... The climax of the book is in chs. 21 and 22, for which the worship scenes have progressively prepared us."

\textsuperscript{91} Morris, 250-1.
But this majestic imagery will take yet another turn that is designed to stretch our imaginations to breaking point. Not only is the city one gigantic holy of holies, "the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple" (21:22). The word "temple" (ναός) is itself the common word for "sanctuary". So not only is the city pictured as a holy of holies, the same can be said of God and the Lamb. This sanctuary is pictured as absolutely resplendent with glory (δόξα). It shines with the glory of God which gives it light (21:11,23), and the kings of the earth and the nations will bring their glory into it (21:24,26). All the ascriptions of glory to God and the Lamb in the earlier doxological scenes find their fulfilment here. Here is a temple that far outshines the glory of even the most magnificent built for any Roman emperor.

John is so overwhelmed by these visions that he falls down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to him (22:8). This earns him a stern rebuke from the heavenly messenger which ends with the terse command, "Worship God!" (22:9). That such divine worship also implies the worship of the Lamb should be clear from the context. Both the Lamb and the Lord God Almighty are the temple of the city (21:22); they are together its source of light (21:23); they share the throne (22:1,3) and they are worshipped as one (22:3). Furthermore, Christ describes himself as "the Alpha and the Omega ... the Beginning and the End" (22:13), epithets heretofore reserved only for the Almighty who sits on the throne (1:8; 21:5,6). Those looking for a "high" Christology will certainly find it here.

This leads us back to the questions which were asked at the beginning of this section: Does Revelation in fact have a higher Christology than the rest of the New Testament? Is its worship more Christocentric? If so, could the Roman emperors' growing insistence on divine honours have been the catalyst in this development?

The word "development" is always a slippery concept when it comes to questions of this kind. It would probably be more accurate to say that what

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92 The term is found 16x in Revelation, often in a doxological setting (7:15; 11:19; 15:5,6,8[bis]). This is another indication that the doxological scenes are to be understood as anticipating the final vision of these chapters. The frequent references to the temple of God in this book, and the majestic ways in which it is portrayed, take on further significance against the background of an ambitious building programme of imperial temples in Asia Minor in the late first and early second centuries. See above under 'Domitian', 'Trajan' and 'Hadrian'.

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was largely *implicit* in the Epistles becomes *explicit* in Revelation. Yet even here the Christocentric nature of the worship should not be overstated. While Apocalyptic worship starts off on an emphatically Christocentric note in the opening doxology (1:5b,6), and although John's falling down as though dead before the exalted Christ (1:17) could possibly be interpreted as an act of worship, this liturgical focus is not uniformly maintained throughout the book. Already in the second doxological scene (4:1-5:14) only two of the five hymns of praise are directed exclusively to the Lamb (5:9-10,12), while in another he shares the glory with "him who sits on the throne" (5:13). The victory chant in the third doxological scene (7:10) is likewise directed to both God and the Lamb. The remaining doxological scenes direct all their praise to God and make no mention of the Lamb. Only in the final vision does the Lamb again receive worship, but here too it is worship that he shares with God (22:3).

This shift of liturgical focus within Revelation itself is probably best explained by the observation that the worship of this book is closely linked to key events in redemptive history. As has already been noted, the Lamb is worshipped for his role as Redeemer which is clearly in view in the early doxologies. God, on the other hand, is worshipped because he is Creator and Judge. In 14:7 this is made quite explicit: "Fear God and give him glory," says the angel in a loud voice, "because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water." It would probably be fair to say that, in the case of the worship of God, the earlier doxologies lay the groundwork for the later ones. Because he is both holy (4:8) and the Creator of all (4:11) he has every right to act as Judge of all. It is primarily in his role as Judge that God is extolled in the fourth to the seventh doxological scenes. Not only does the wider context verify this, but in some doxologies it is stated quite explicitly (e.g. 11:18; 19:2).

Because the theme of judgment is so well developed in Revelation, with a particularly strong emphasis in chapter 18 on the judgment of Babylon (which the original readers would no doubt have understood as a thinly

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93 A word study of terms indicating "judge/judgment" illustrate this point quite convincingly. The verb κρίνω occurs 9x in Revelation, with 8 occurrences in chs. 11-20, while the nouns κρίσις (4x) and κρίμα (3x) are found only in these chapters. It is in the doxologies in this part of the book that God is worshipped in his capacity as Judge.
veiled reference to Rome\textsuperscript{94}), much of its worship centres on God as Judge. This does not detract from the fact, however, that when Christ is worshipped he is worshipped as God. The ascriptions of praise directed to him are in no sense less than those directed to God. They are worshipped together on an equal footing and, at times, with precisely the same words. A higher Christology than this would be impossible.

But is it higher than the rest of the New Testament? Does the worship of Christ somehow peak in Revelation? Again it is probably most accurate to say that is very explicit here, but certainly not unique. One has only to think of Thomas' exclamation, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28), or of the numerous occasions where Jesus is worshipped in the Gospel of Matthew, to realise that the veneration of Christ as God was not new. Yet in Revelation the suffering church in Asia Minor is given to see in a fresh way that the Christ whom they serve is coequal with God. He - and not some usurping emperor - is worthy of divine honours. Christ, not Caesar, is Lord.

Conclusion

The Apocalypse will not easily give up its secrets. Yet a study of the theme of worship in this mysterious book shows that, to its original readers at least, it must have lived up to the literal meaning of its name. For them it was indeed an 'unveiling'. The pretensions of the imperial cult were unmasked and shown for what they were - nothing more than satanically inspired idolatry. The realities of power were also revealed. Outward appearances notwithstanding, ultimate authority lies not with a powerful state but with God and the Lamb. The heavenly throne, not the city of Rome, is the headquarters of the universe.

\textsuperscript{94} While our interpretation of Revelation must necessarily begin with the understanding of its first readers, it would be an exegetical fallacy of the first order to let it end there. Ross Saunders has issued a timely warning in this regard: "Which city is Babylon? Why, Rome, of course! Of course? Why not Jerusalem? If you check out everything about this Babylon, this first post-flood city according to the Jewish scriptures, it matches exactly how the OT prophets referred to Jerusalem. Why not Byzantium, Berlin, Belfast, Capetown, Sydney, New York, Athens, Venice, Belgrade, Baghdad ... again, the list is endless. The author, once again, is concerned to give his listeners ears to understand the true nature of cities and countries which set themselves up against God." ("The Apocalypse: Pandora's Box, Nostradamus' Horoscope, or the Human Odyssey: How are we to approach the Book of Revelation?" Society for the Study of Early Christianity, Newsletter 29, September 1997, 3.)

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These perspectives in turn have much to say about the meaning of worship. Whatever its focus, it reflects the worshipper's deepest convictions about the nature of reality. For the author of the Apocalypse this was securely anchored in the central events of redemptive history, namely creation, redemption and judgment. Worship accordingly focuses on God as Creator, Redeemer and Judge. At the same time it challenges false views of reality, whether they be emperor worship, totalitarian communism, or even secular humanism. Positively, Christian worship praises God, while negatively it exposes alternative worldviews as being essentially false. For the early Christians, Revelation's doxologies "with their focus on the sovereignty of God and the victory of the Lamb, would have provided every encouragement to honour God, rather than the dragon and the beast." For believers today, worship acceptable to God makes the same absolute claims and means faithfully serving him in the face of every conflicting loyalty.

An obvious feature of the doxologies should not escape our attention. Except for the first (1:5b,6), they were all sung by heavenly choirs. And yet the Christian church has almost instinctively incorporated them into its hymnody. The church on earth has for the most part also regarded it as its right to celebrate the mighty redemptive acts of God, even if only in anticipation. Praise that draws its inspiration from Revelation will avoid the common dangers of being purely subjective, sentimental or man-centred. The worship of God in the church is to parallel the worship of God in heaven or - perhaps more accurately - to blend and harmonise with it (see Heb.12:22-24). So perhaps one of the best ways to read Revelation is to sing it!

I therefore leave the reader with the creative challenge that Vern Poythress has issued to his students:

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95 Barnett, "Revelation in its Roman Setting", 64, asserts: "Worship, then, implies affirmation but also denial. ... As we give our worship of mind and mouth to God/the Lamb it is helpful to reflect that we are also denying our worship to others that seek our worship. We affirm Christ in worship, but we deny, for example, political messiahs and the idolatry of power and wealth."
96 Peterson, "Worship in the Revelation to John", 77.
97 Peterson, Engaging with God, 262.
98 In the words of James A. de Jong, Into His Presence, Grand Rapids: Board of Publications of the Christian Reformed Church, 1985, 13: "... true worship also belongs to the great euphony of angels, humans and the rest of creation praising God together. Through Jesus Christ our limited worship becomes part of the limitless adoration of God which will fill the new heavens and the new earth."
Let the images 'soak into you'. Get involved in the Book. Don't try to puzzle it out. Enjoy it. Sing about it. Cheer for the saints. Detest the beast. Rejoice in God's power and glory. Praise the Lamb.99

99 Poythress, 2.

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