

## **Thrones in the Book of Revelation**

### **Part 1: Throne of God**

Laszlo Gallusz  
Belgrade Theological Seminary  
Serbia

The throne is a constant point of reference in the book of Revelation. A basic statistical overview of the term's use reveals that out of the sixty-two *θρόνος* references of the New Testament forty-seven are in this book spread over seventeen out of the twenty-two chapters.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, it can be argued that the throne motif is not absent even from the majority of the chapters which do not contain explicit *θρόνος* references (chs. 9, 10, 15, 17 and 18), since it is either assumed or referred to by a cognate concept. Ford rightly concludes that the intensive presence of the throne in Revelation "cannot be a coincidence."<sup>2</sup>

The structure of the throne motif is far more complex than the vast majority of the motifs in the book. Revelation is not merely permeated with *θρόνος* references, but the motif is featured with particular care at the central locations in the literary structure of the work. A clear indicator of the complexity is that the throne is applied not only to God, but also to the Lamb, his allies and even adversaries. Thus, thirty-six references link God individually to the throne, while the remaining

---

<sup>1</sup> The throne references are concentrated mostly in the throne-room vision of Rev. 4-5: 4:2(2x), 3, 4(3x), 5(2x), 6(3x), 9, 10(2x); 5:1, 6, 7, 11, 13. The other references are the following: 1:4; 2:13; 3:21(2x); 6:16; 7:9, 10, 11(2x), 15(2x), 17; 8:3; 11:16; 12:5; 13:2; 14:3; 16:10, 17; 19:4, 5, 20:4, 11, 12; 21:3, 5; 22:1, 3. The references outside Revelation include: Mt. 5:34; 19:28(2x), 23:22; 25:31; Lk. 1:32, 52; 22:30; Acts 2:30; 7:49; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:8; 4:16; 8:1; 12:2. Interestingly, no references to thrones are found in any other writings of the Johannine corpus.

<sup>2</sup> J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation: Introduction, Translation and Commentary* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 76.

### GALLUSZ: THRONES IN REVELATION

eleven are ascribed in the following manner: two to God and the Lamb conjointly (22:1, 3), two individually to the Lamb (3:21; 7:17), three to the twenty-four elders (4:4[2x], 11:16), one to the saints (20:4), and in regard to God's adversaries, one to Satan (2:13) and two to the beast (13:2; 16:10). Structurally, the visionary part of the book (4:1-22:5) starts and ends with visions that strongly emphasize the centrality of the throne: the first in a heavenly context (4:1-5:14) and the last in the earthly context of the new creation (22:1-5). This *inclusio* suggests that the work has been organized within the framework of throne visions.

This article is the first in a series of four that examine individually the cardinal components of Revelation's throne motif: the throne of God, the throne of the Lamb, the thrones of God's allies and the thrones of his adversaries. The aim of these articles is not to provide a comprehensive picture on the nature of Revelation's throne motif, its background, development, rhetorical impact or theological significance.<sup>3</sup> I will rather focus in each article on a particular throne providing an exegetical analysis of the key texts and suggesting answers to the main questions that arise in the course of study.

Since the throne of God is the main cardinal component of Revelation's throne motif, it will be the subject of this first article in the series on the thrones. The centrality of God's throne in relation to the other thrones is evident in the fact that 76.6% of the book's θρόνος references (thirty-six out of the forty-seven) are throne of God texts. Almost half of them are concentrated in the throne room vision (chs. 4-5), which is the first vision in the central part of the book (4:1-22:5). In the first part of our examination detailed attention will be given to the heavenly scene of ch. 4, because it introduces the details of the heavenly realm with God's throne at the center. This will be followed by the investigation of the use of the formula "the One sitting on the throne" that runs through the book as the most frequent characterization expression of God. Finally, attention will be given to the dynamics of the throne.

---

<sup>3</sup> For the in-depth discussion of these questions, see Laszlo Gallusz, *The Throne Motif in the Book of Revelation* (LNTS; London: T. & T. Clark, 2013-forthcoming).

1. Description of God's Throne (4:1-11)

The throne room vision of Rev. 4-5 is generally considered to be the pivotal section of Revelation.<sup>4</sup> It provides the most detailed picture of the divine throne and the heavenly realm in the entire work. The concentration of the *θρόνος* references is the highest in the book: the word appears nineteen times in twenty-five verses. As noted rightly by Schüssler Fiorenza, this vision lays “the rhetorical foundation and provides the key symbolic images for all that follows.”<sup>5</sup> The literary and thematic unity of Rev. 4-5 has been often demonstrated.<sup>6</sup> Though these two chapters are clearly linked into a larger passage, at the same time they form two units in themselves. Müller aptly calls this literary phenomenon a “double scene.”<sup>7</sup> While the two basic components of the vision share numerous verbal and thematic parallels, their emphasis is different: the focus of ch. 4 is on God and his throne, whereas in ch. 5 the attention is shifted to the Lamb and his redemptive mission.<sup>8</sup> This literary relation justifies our intention to deal in this article only with God's throne concentrating primarily on ch. 4, while the Lamb's relation to the throne in ch. 5 will be discussed in the second article of this series.

---

<sup>4</sup> Opposed to the majority view, Christopher Rowland (“The Visions of God in Apocalyptic Literature,” *JSJ* 10 [1979], 137-54[150]) views Rev. 4 as “incidental to the overriding purpose of the work as a whole.” For a critic of this suggestion, see Larry W. Hurtado, “Revelation 4-5 in the Light of Jewish Apocalyptic Analogies,” *JSNT* 25 (1985), 105-24 (118).

<sup>5</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World* (Proclamation Commentaries; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1991), 58.

<sup>6</sup> For example, Russell S. Morton (*One upon the Throne and the Lamb: A Traditional Historical/Theological Analysis of Revelation 4-5* [SBL, 110; New York: Peter Lang, 2007], 68-70, 80 n. 149) views evidence for the unity in similar motifs in the chapters, the similarity of the hymnic material and the dependence of 5:1-2 on the preceding scene. He refers to the works of Lohmeyer, Charles, Allo, Kraft, Zahn, Swete, Beasley-Murray, Ladd, Farrer, Murphy, Roloff, Thompson, Beale and Mounce, who acknowledge the unity of Rev. 4-5.

<sup>7</sup> Ekkehardt Müller, *Microstructural Analysis of Revelation 4-11* (AUSDDS, 21; Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1996), 204. For a syntactical display of the two chapters and a comparative table of the recurring words and phrases within the respective units, see pp. 77-83, 94-95.

<sup>8</sup> See, e.g., Isbon T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John: Studies in Introduction with a Critical and Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1967), 262.

## GALLUSZ: THRONES IN REVELATION

### 1.1. Contextual and Structural Considerations

It has been widely recognized that the contextual relation of Rev. 4-5 to the immediately preceding Seven Letters addressed to the churches in Asia Minor (chs. 2-3) is of major significance for understanding the intention of the vision. It seems that the relation is not only thematic, but deeply theological.<sup>9</sup> This view has been argued by Smalley, who claims that the throne room vision “looks back to the life of the people of God on earth, described in the messages to the seven churches of Asia. . . by setting out the theological perspective given to this life by the Church in eternity.”<sup>10</sup> Thus, the earthly and heavenly realities are contrasted with the intention of encouraging the church militant portrayed in chs. 2-3 through the disclosing of the indisputable supremacy of the heavenly power-center introduced in the vision of chs. 4-5.

There has been a considerable variety of suggestions concerning the structure of 4:1-11. While some attempts have been made to discover a chiasm, the interpreters of Revelation are more inclined to follow a more or less detailed outline.<sup>11</sup> Since it seems that everything is portrayed in the chapter in terms of the relation to the divine throne, I hold that it is appropriate to structure the chapter around this thematic center. After the typical apocalyptic opening of the vision (4:1-2a), first, the heavenly throne is introduced with its occupant (4:2b-3), which is followed by the description of the throne’s surroundings (4:4-7) and the hymnic adoration given to “the One sitting on the throne” (4:8-11).<sup>12</sup> The overall

---

<sup>9</sup> Gregory K. Beale (*The Book of Revelation* [NIGTC; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999], 311-12) rightly concludes of the thematic relation of the two visions: Rev. 4-5 “draws into itself the major themes of chs. 1-3.”

<sup>10</sup> Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation to John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 109.

<sup>11</sup> There is a disagreement among the proponents of the chiasmic structure of Rev. 4 concerning the focal point. For example, Müller (*Microstructural Analysis*, 207) views the four living creatures at the center, while Charles H. Giblin (‘From and before the Throne: Revelation 4:5-6a Integrating the Imagery of Revelation 4-16,’ *CBQ* 60 [1998], 500-12) the theophanic manifestation of 4:5-6. Nils Wilhelm Lund’s (*Chiasmus in the New Testament: A Study in the Form and Function of Chiasmic Structures* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1992], 325-26) double chiasm is more complex with the focal points at 4:5b-6 and 4:10a. From these suggestions only Giblin’s view may be considered as possibly viable, because of the emphasis on the divine throne as the focal object of the chapter. However, I am more inclined to follow the majority view that advocates an outline structure.

<sup>12</sup> This outline is similar to that of Morton’s (*One Upon the Throne*, 83) with the minor difference that he views only 4:1 as the introductory statement.

## JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

picture is that of concentric circles made up of a rainbow (ἵρις), the four living creatures (τέσσαρες ζῶα) and the twenty-four elders (εἴκοσι τέσσαρες πρεσβύτεροι) with the “awe-inspiring throne”<sup>13</sup> at the focal point. The series of concentric circles is further expanded in 5:11 and 7:11 including a great host of angels. Such arrangement is suggested by the repeated use of κυκλόθειν (“around in a circle”) and κύκλω (“around in a circle”), the adverbs of place both occurring three times in Revelation—always in connection with the elements or beings encircling the throne.<sup>14</sup> The idea that the heaven is arranged in concentric circles with the divine throne at the center is not unique to Revelation, since it is attested in *1En.* 71:6-8 and in a more elaborate form in *3En.* 33:1-34:2.

### 1.2. Background

The heavenly throne room scene of Rev. 4 encompasses cultic and political aspects.<sup>15</sup> The two aspects should, however, not be divorced by a false dichotomy, because in John’s thought-world the religious was considered part of the political. These two aspects form together the larger interpretive context for the vision. The first interprets the imagery against the background of the Jewish tradition, while the second points to Graeco-Roman practices.<sup>16</sup>

#### 1.2.1. Cultic Symbolism

Extensive evidence has been provided that Rev. 4 is pervaded by cultic imagery.<sup>17</sup> Although the term ναός is absent from the vision, the

---

<sup>13</sup> George R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation* (NCB; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 112.

<sup>14</sup> κυκλόθειν appears in 4:3, 4, 8, while κύκλω in 4:6; 5:11; 7:11.

<sup>15</sup> Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (New Testament Theology; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 33-35; David L. Barr, *Tales of the End: A Narrative Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge, 1998), 63.

<sup>16</sup> For an attempt to understand the imagery of Rev. 4-5 as rooted in the ANE mythology, see Hermann Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit: Eine religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung über Gen. 1 und Ap. 12* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1895).

<sup>17</sup> See, e.g., James Valentine, “Theological Aspects of the Temple Motif in the Old Testament and Revelation” (PhD Dissertation; Boston University, 1985), 210-11; R. Dean Davis, *The Heavenly Court Judgment of Revelation 4-5* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1992), 118-43; Jon Paulien, “The Role of the Hebrew Cultus, Sanctuary and

GALLUSZ: THRONES IN REVELATION

cumulative force of the numerous allusions point to cultic symbolism as the major background.<sup>18</sup> The most exhaustive study of the allusions to the Old Testament *היכל* in Revelation's throne vision is provided by Davis. He connects (1) the heavenly throne with the Most Holy Place; (2) the precious stones of jasper, sardius and emerald with the breastplate worn by the high priest; (3) the rainbow with the covenantal relationship central to the sanctuary; (4) the number and function of the twenty-four elders with the Old Testament priesthood; (5) the lightening, voices and thunder with Sinai, Yahweh's temple/throne prior to the construction of the wilderness sanctuary; (6) the seven torches of fire with the menorah; (7) the sea of glass with the molten sea, the portable laver and the bronze platform; and (8) the four living creatures with the cherubim.<sup>19</sup> Paulien adds to this list another three connection points, while he rightly omits the third and the fifth parallels argued by Davis. First, he suggests that the open door of 4:1 might refer to the door of the heavenly temple, since in LXX *θύρα* occurs scores of times in relation to the Israelite tent/sanctuary, temple and liturgy. Second, he interprets the voice like trumpet in 4:1 against a cultic background, since the trumpets have been used in the Old Testament both in a military as well as a cultic context (Num. 10:8-10). Third, he suggests that the four faces of the living creatures (4:7) should be viewed against a Jewish tradition that associates the lion, calf, man and eagle with the four banners which surrounded the

---

Temple in the Plot and Structure of the Book of Revelation," *AUSS* 33 (1995), 245-64; Ranko Stefanović, *The Background and Meaning of the Sealed Book of Revelation 5* (AUSDDS, 22; Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1996), 202-06; Franz Tóth, *Der himmlische Kult: Wirklichkeitskonstruktion und Sinnbildung in der Johannesoffenbarung* (ABG, 22; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2006), 201-88. See also the following works, which acknowledge the cultic setting without discussing the details: Ford, *Revelation*, 70-76; Kenneth A. Strand, "The Eight Basic Visions in the Book of Revelation," *AUSS* 25 (1987), 107-21; Idem. "The 'Victorious-Introduction' Scenes in the Visions in the Book of Revelation," *AUSS* 25 (1987), 267-88; Bauckham, *Theology*, 33-34; Beale, *Revelation*, 315-16; Dan Lioy, *The Book of Revelation in Christological Focus* (SBL, 58; New York: Peter Lang, 2003), 131.

<sup>18</sup> Surprisingly, Andrea Spatafora (*From the 'Temple of God' to God as Temple: A Theological Study of the Temple in the Book of Revelation* [Tesi Gregoriana Seria Teologia, 22; Rome: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1997], 127-247) in his study of the temple motif in Revelation fails to give attention to Rev. 4-5. The reason for this major omission is methodological, since the study focuses exclusively on examination of the *νάος* passages.

<sup>19</sup> Davis, *Heavenly Court Judgment*, 118-34.

Isrealite camp in the wilderness. Finally, Paulien rightly concludes that no passage in the whole book contains “a larger quantity or a wider variety of allusions to the Hebrew cultus” than the vision of the heavenly throne room.<sup>20</sup> The exhaustive list of the allusions indicates the intention of the author that the vision should be understood primarily against a cultic background. However, the interpretation also needs to take into account the political symbolism present in the vision, which made a lot of sense to the original audience.

### 1.2.2. Political Symbolism

In his ground-breaking study on the topic, Aune advanced a suggestion which attracted much discussion: “John’s depiction of the ceremonial in the heavenly throne room has been significantly influenced in its conceptualization by popular images of Roman imperial court ceremonial.”<sup>21</sup> While he admits that this thesis is difficult to demonstrate, the idea that Rev. 4 correlates with the religio-political context John addresses gained wide support in scholarly circles.<sup>22</sup> Aune points out a considerable number of parallels between the throne room scene and Roman imperial imagery: (1) the twenty-four elders corresponding to the lictors of the emperor; (2) honoring the ruler with the presentation of crowns; (3) the act of prostration; and (4) the hymns with their acclamations that reflect the cultic practices of ancient Mediterranean regions. He argues also that the parallels are most evident in the honorific titles which are in Revelation applied to the Lamb, but in imperial terminology to the Caesar.<sup>23</sup> The most well-known examples are

---

<sup>20</sup> Paulien, “Hebrew Cultus,” 249-51.

<sup>21</sup> David E. Aune, “The Influence of Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial on the Apocalypse of John,” *BR* 38 (1983), 5-26 (22).

<sup>22</sup> E.g., Schüssler Fiorenza, *Vision of a Just World*, 59-60; Sophie Laws, *In the Light of the Lamb: Imagery, Parody, and Theology in the Apocalypse of John* (GNS, 31; Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1988), 76-77; M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation* (IBD; Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1989), 103; Bauckham, *Theology*, 34-35; Craig R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of all Things* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 75-76; Barr, *Tales*, 63-64; Morton, *One upon the Throne*, 180-85. For a critic of Aune’s thesis, see Steven J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 251 n. 12.

<sup>23</sup> Aune (“Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial,” 20) mentions nine frequently used titles of the imperial terminology which are parallel to Christ’s portrayal in Revelation: (1) god; (2) son of god; (3) god made manifest; (4) lord; (5) lord of the whole world; (6) lord’s day;

## GALLUSZ: THRONES IN REVELATION

κύριος and θεός, the employment of which in Rev. 4:8, 11 is interpreted as “an antithetical reflection of the application of those titles to Roman emperors.”<sup>24</sup>

The parallelism between John’s throne vision and the Roman imperial court ceremonial is motivated by a rhetorical purpose on part of the author. Bauckham rightly notes that the point of the similarities lies not in the comparison, but rather the opposition of the two.<sup>25</sup> For this reason it is appropriate to interpret the parallels as ironical indicators of a larger parody.<sup>26</sup>

### 1.3. Interpretation

#### 1.3.1. Ascent to Heaven

John’s ascent to heaven is briefly stated in 4:1-2a, an introductory statement somewhat distinct from the rest of the chapter which sets the stage for glimpsing the heavenly throne room. The vision is opened by the combination of two apocalyptic motifs: the door and the open heaven. The door to heaven is a well-known apocalyptic concept that symbolizes access to God and eternal bliss.<sup>27</sup> Aune notes that the motif occurs only twice in the Old Testament (Gen. 28:17; Ps. 78:23), but it is more prominent in the Graeco-Roman tradition, particularly in southwest Asia Minor. For instance, he points to numismatic and literary evidence from the Temple of Artemis at Ephesus which had a door in the front pediment that was used for the ritual epiphany of the goddess.<sup>28</sup>

The simplicity of the ascent’s description is striking, since after the call into heaven by a “voice like a trumpet” the attention is immediately

---

(7) saviour of the world; (8) epiphany; and (9) emperor. For the use of political language in Revelation reserved for the praise of emperors, see Dominique Cuss, *Imperial Cult and Honorary Terms in the New Testament* (Paradosis, *Contribution to the History of Early Christian Literature and Theology*, 23; Fribourg: Fribourg University Press, 1974), 55-88.

<sup>24</sup> David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5* (3 vols.; WBC, 52A; Dallas, TX: Word, 1997), 310.

<sup>25</sup> Bauckham, *Theology*, 43.

<sup>26</sup> While Aune (“Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial,” 5) employs the term “parody” for the rhetorical phenomenon of Rev. 4, Laws (*In the Light of the Lamb*, 77) uses rather “counter-parody,” because of the reverse flow.

<sup>27</sup> *1En.* 14:10-11; 15:14; 104:2; *T. Levi* 5:1; *3 Macc.* 6:18.

<sup>28</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 281.



*JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY*

shifted to the heavenly throne and its occupant.<sup>29</sup> John does not proceed from outer to inner spheres of holiness, but he is instantly taken to the heavenly throne room. Revelation's concept of a single heaven is in sharp contrast to the elaborate description of the plurality of the heavens widespread in Jewish literature.<sup>30</sup> Interpreting Revelation's concept of heaven Gruenwald suggests that the author may have not been aware of the latest developments in Jewish apocalyptic thought, since his cosmology reflects an outmoded view of only a single heaven.<sup>31</sup> In contrast to this view much persuasive is Hurtado's argument, which claims that the simple description of the heavenly ascent reflects John's conscious choice, because the "description of multiple heavenly layers simply forms no part of his purpose."<sup>32</sup> Namely, the intention of the author lies not in conveying knowledge about the heavenly geography, but rather in his explanation of the nature of the connection between the heavenly and the earthly realities. Since John "spends not a syllable on curiosity-titillating descriptions of the heavenly journey itself," his energy may remain focused entirely on the throne.<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> John's ascent has been connected with the heavenly trips in apocalyptic tradition (e.g., Gerhard Krodel, *Revelation* [ACNT; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1989], 154; Jürgen Roloff, *Revelation* [trans. J.E. Alsup; CC; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1993], 68). However, there is no compelling reason to interpret the expression ἐν πνεύματι as a release of the soul similar to in the Jewish apocalypses. The phrase should rather be understood as an idiom indicating that John's revelatory experience took place in a vision trance (Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of St John: The Greek Text with Introduction Notes and Indices* [London: Macmillan, 1906], 12-13; Robert H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John: With Introd., Notes, and Indices, also the Greek Text and English Translation* [2 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920], I, 22; Heinrich Kraft, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* [HNT, 16a; Tübingen: Mohr, 1974], 95).

<sup>30</sup> The term οὐρανός is used in the singular throughout Revelation, except in 12:12. It has been argued that this may be ascribed to the influence of Isa. 44:23 (Robert H. Mounce, *Revelation* [NICNT, 17; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977], 133 n. 3; Smalley, *Revelation*, 113).

<sup>31</sup> Ithamar Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism* (AGJU, 14; Leiden: Brill, 1980), 48.

<sup>32</sup> Hurtado, "Revelation 4-5," 111.

<sup>33</sup> Boring, *Revelation*, 102.

## GALLUSZ: THRONES IN REVELATION

### 1.3.2. The Throne and Its Occupant

The throne is the very first thing John glimpses in heaven (4:2b). There is no attempt to describe its physical features.<sup>34</sup> It is only stated that the throne “was located in the heaven” (ἔκειτο ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ). Since it is stated in 4:1-2 that both the open door and the throne are located in the heaven, the double reference seems to emphasize the shift to the heavenly realm at the beginning of the vision.<sup>35</sup>

There has been some discussion concerning the meaning of ἔκειτο. It has been argued that this form is a passive of τίθημι (“to place”), which indicates the immediacy of the action, the possibility that the act of placing occurred in heaven at that point.<sup>36</sup> Beale even goes a step further suggesting that ἔκειτο may reflect the setting up of thrones in Dan. 7:9 (θρόνοι ἐτέθησαν).<sup>37</sup> However, it seems more likely that κείμεναι (“to set”) as a verbal copula is in the mind of the author and the prepositional phrase ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ appears as a predicate with κείμεναι. It is not indicated in Rev. 4:2 how the throne got to the place where it stood—the emphasis is only on its heavenly location.<sup>38</sup> Thus, God’s throne is portrayed in Rev. 4 as the *axis mundi*, the immovable center of all reality, unlike the description of the *merkabah* texts in which the throne appears as a dynamically moving object.

The identity of the throne’s occupant is not immediately disclosed. He is referred to by a circumlocution ἐπὶ τὸν θρόνον καθήμενος (“the One sitting on the throne”; 4:2). The avoidance of naming the enthroned figure at the beginning of the vision generates a tension which is resolved in the hymnic section of 4:8-11, where the worshiping of the figure and the reference to his title, κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ (“Lord God Almighty”), unmistakably identifies him as the Father God. While the author is very reserved about the use of any anthropomorphic imagery concerning the enthroned figure, it is made clear that a person is in view

---

<sup>34</sup> Similar to the other throne visions of the Old Testament and Jewish apocalyptic literature. The only possible exception is *IEn*.14:18: θρόνον ὑψηλὸν καὶ τὸ εἶδος αὐτοῦ ὡσεὶ κρυστάλλινον (“lofty throne—its appearance was like crystal”).

<sup>35</sup> Strand, “The ‘Victorious-Introduction’ Scenes,” 271.

<sup>36</sup> Swete, *Apocalypse*, 67.

<sup>37</sup> Beale, *Revelation*, 320.

<sup>38</sup> Robert G. Bratcher and Howard A. Hatton, *A Handbook on the Revelation to John* (UBS Handbook Series; New York: United Bible Societies, 1993), 88.

here, not a principle or an elemental force.<sup>39</sup> The lack of explicit description is made up for by the comparison of “the One sitting on the throne” to three precious stones. He is characterized as “similar in appearance to jasper stone and a carnelian” (ὅμοιος ὁράσει λίθῳ ἰάσπιδι καὶ καρδίῳ), while the rainbow encircling the throne is depicted as “similar in appearance to emerald” (ὅμοιος ὁράσει σμαραγδίνῳ). There is a disagreement concerning the interpretation of the meaning of the precious stones for the vision. While separate significance has been ascribed to the individual stones by some interpreters,<sup>40</sup> the view that they are meant to be taken together is supported by the majority. It has been also recognized that all three stones of 4:3 are part of the twelve jewels in the breastplate of the high priest (Exod. 28:17-21) and they appear also on the list of stones of the paradise (Ezek. 28:13).<sup>41</sup> I concur with Osborne that the concept of God as light probably provides the best explanation for the meaning of the precious stones, because the overall impression of the description is that of majestic splendor.<sup>42</sup> Following the same line of reasoning Beale concludes: “The stones intensify the light around the throne by reflecting the unapproachable brightness, and hence glory, surrounding God himself.”<sup>43</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup> In contrast, Rowland (“Visions of God,” 146) argues that the lack of anthropomorphic terminology is only superficial. He speaks of a “subtly disguised” anthropomorphism, because of the text’s indebtedness to Ezek. 28:13 in which “jasper and carnelian” occur in the same successive order as in the description of the *Urmensch*. Rowland’s argument is inconclusive, since the background of the precious stones of Rev. 4:3 is much wider. For a comprehensive discussion of the question, see, e.g., Davis, *Heavenly Court Scene*, 119-20; Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation* (BECNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 226-28.

<sup>40</sup> E.g., William Milligan, *The Book of Revelation* (New York: Armstrong, 1901), 67-68; John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1966), 104; Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1992), 342.

<sup>41</sup> E.g., Ford, *Revelation*, 71.

<sup>42</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 228. For the concept of God as light, see Ps. 18:12; 104:2; 1 Tim. 6:16; 1 John 1:5, 7.

<sup>43</sup> Beale, *Revelation*, 321. He convincingly argues that the precious stones and the rainbow in Rev. 4:3 are “an incipient hint” of the new creation that already began in heaven by the inauguration of Christ’s redemptive work.

### GALLUSZ: THRONES IN REVELATION

A peculiar feature of the heavenly throne is the rainbow (ἵρις) which directly encircles it (4:3).<sup>44</sup> The term ἵρις appears in the New Testament besides this reference only in 10:1. The image recalls Ezekiel's throne vision in which the radiant light surrounding the figure on the throne was likened to a rainbow (תִּשְׁבַּע; Ezek. 1:28). Since תִּשְׁבַּע is translated in LXX with τόξον ("bow"), Aune argues that John's use of ἵρις reflects intentionality, holding that the choice of a pagan term is probably for the sake of clarity.<sup>45</sup> In spite of the close affinity of the two contexts, there is a significant difference between Ezekiel's and John's use of the rainbow imagery. In Ezek. 1:28 the divine splendor is only likened to the appearance of a rainbow (בְּמַרְאֵה הַקֶּשֶׁת), while in Rev. 4:3 John sees a rainbow encircling the throne, which is likened to an emerald in appearance (ὁμοίως ὀράσει σμαραγδίνῳ). As Bauckham concludes, the rainbow imagery "moves from simile to reality."<sup>46</sup> Though in John's throne vision it evokes primarily the idea of God's glory, at the same time it introduces the theme of covenant developed later in the book.

The brevity of the introduction of the heavenly throne and its occupant as the center of reality in Revelation is surprising in light of the motif's prominence in the book. This feature reflects a theological purpose on part of the author. Namely, the detailed attention to the description of the heavenly throne's surroundings rather than focusing on the occupant implies the protection of the unknowable transcendence of God.<sup>47</sup> The reference to God primarily by the circumlocution "the One sitting on the throne" conveys the same purpose. I would like to suggest that the linguistic style of the chapter not only protects God's transcendence, but stresses the centrality of his throne. Every detail of the vision—all beings, objects and activities—are directly related to the

---

<sup>44</sup> Some MSS mention ἱερεῖς ("priests") instead of ἵρις (κ\* A 1611<sup>2329</sup>). For text critical discussions, see Theodor Zahn, *Introduction to the New Testament* (3 vols.; trans. John Moore Trout et al.; Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1953), I, 319 n. 4; Josef Schmid, *Studien zur Geschichte des griechischen Apokalypse-Textes* (2 vols.; *Münchener theologische Studien*; München: Zink, 1956), II, 73.

<sup>45</sup> He refers to *Ant. 1.103* in which Josephus explains that τοξεία and τόξον mean ἵρις (Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 286).

<sup>46</sup> Bauckham, *Theology*, 51-52.

<sup>47</sup> Jan A. du Rand, "The Transcendent God-View: Depicting Structure in the Theological Message of the Revelation of John," *Neot* 28 (1994), 557-73(569); Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2002), 188.

heavenly throne as the focal point of John's cosmology and find significance only in their placement around this center of the universe.

### 1.3.3. The Surroundings of the Throne

Jewish apocalypses describe throne scenes in varying levels of detail. Some elaborate on a host of beings in varying ranks, while others provide a less complex picture. Similar to these writings John presents "an all-encompassing cosmic map"<sup>48</sup> at the beginning of the visionary part of Revelation, but his description is one of the least elaborate.

Closest to the heavenly throne, though not first in the order of description, are the seven burning lamps of fire that are located in its proximity, in front of it (ἑπτὰ λαμπάδες πυρὸς καιόμεναι ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου; 4:5). The interpretation of this symbol is given in the text: it is identified with the seven Spirits of God (ἑπτὰ πνεύματα τοῦ θεοῦ). The imagery is cultic in nature: just as in the sanctuary the menorah was located in front of Yahweh's ark (Exod. 25:31-38; 2Chron. 4:7), in 4:5 the seven lamps are placed in front of God's throne. The seven lamps have also a background in the Old Testament.<sup>49</sup> In the throne vision of Ezek. 1 "torches" are mentioned as moving "back and forth" (1:13) in contrast with the fixed torches of Rev. 4:5. Likewise, the author may also have been alluding to the seven lamps of Zech. 4:2, 10, which are similarly located before God and are identified with his eyes (cf. Rev. 5:6). The influence of these sources on Revelation's imagery is very likely, but nevertheless the statement that the seven lamps are the "Seven Spirits of God" is considered John's unique contribution.<sup>50</sup>

The identity of the Seven Spirits in 4:5 has generated some discussions. A number of scholars have cautiously identified them with heavenly angelic agents, who hold a specific ministry in connection with

---

<sup>48</sup> David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John's Way: The Rhetoric of the Book of Revelation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 2009), 97.

<sup>49</sup> Gunkel (*Schöpfung und Chaos*, 294-302) suggests astrological influence on the imagery of the seven lamps. His argument is, however, highly speculative. For a critique of this hypothesis, see Morton, *One Upon the Throne*, 94-96.

<sup>50</sup> Ernst Lohmeyer, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (HNT, 16; Tübingen: Mohr, 1926), 47.

### GALLUSZ: THRONES IN REVELATION

the Lamb.<sup>51</sup> Since in the primitive mind fire and flame were generally associated with divinity,<sup>52</sup> it seems more plausible to interpret the imagery as a reference to the Holy Spirit. There is a strong exegetical basis for this interpretation, because the Seven Spirits have similarly been introduced as being in front of God's throne in the book's prologue (1:4). The immediate context of this reference provides a key to identification, because it is given within the Trinitarian context of the epistolary salutation in which the Seven Spirits are referred to between the greetings of God and Christ. The number seven may refer to the fullness indicating the deity of the Spirit, but at the same time it may also be related to his presence in each of the seven churches addressed in the messages of chs. 2-3.<sup>53</sup>

Besides the seven lamps, the preposition ἐνώπιον relates something that appears to be "as sea of glass like crystal" (ὡς θάλασσα ὑαλίνη ὁμοία κρυστάλλῳ; 4:6) to the heavenly throne. There is no consensus concerning the meaning of this imagery. While it has been interpreted symbolically, it has also been viewed as simply adding to the magnificence of the scene.<sup>54</sup> It seems most plausible to argue for complexity in this context, since several Old Testament ideas are alluded to that are not mutually exclusive. First, the "molten sea" of the Solomonic temple is reflected against the cultic background (1Kgs 7:23-26). Similar to the "sea of glass" in Rev. 4:6, the "molten sea" was located in front of the throne/ark, because the court was considered part

---

<sup>51</sup> The seven principal angels standing in God's presence is a well-known motif of Jewish angelology (Tob. 12:15; *I En.* 20; 4Q ShirShabb). The angelic interpretation is advocated, e.g., in Martin Kiddle, *The Revelation of St. John* (MNTC; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1947), 7-8; Charles Homer Giblin, *The Book of Revelation: The Open Book of Prophecy* (GNS, 34; Collegeville, MI: Liturgical Press, 1991), 71-72.

<sup>52</sup> James Moffatt, "The Revelation of St. John the Divine" in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (5 vols.; London: Hodder and Stoughton; New York: George H. Doran, 1910), V, 279-494 (379).

<sup>53</sup> On the Spirit in Revelation, see F.F. Bruce, "The Spirit in the Apocalypse" in *Christ and Spirit in the New Testament, Festschrift C. F. D. Moule*, eds. Barnabas Lindars and Stephen S. Smalley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 333-44; R. L. Jeske, "Spirit and Community in the Johannine Apocalyps," *NTS* 31 (1985), 452-66; J. C. de Smidt, "The Holy Spirit in the Book of Revelation-Nomenclature," *Neot* 28 (1994), 229-44.

<sup>54</sup> For example, Mounce (*Revelation*, 137) views the sea of glass as part of the larger picture heightening "the sense of God's separateness from his creatures" without a precise figurative meaning. While this interpretation of the effect of the sea of glass is basically valid, the background of the imagery suggests a more profound meaning.

*JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY*

of the temple both geographically and theologically.<sup>55</sup> Second, there is an allusion to Ezek. 1:22 where the appearance of the firmament is compared to “crystal” or “ice.” In both contexts the imagery designates the floor of God’s heavenly throne. The description, written using the language of splendor, recalls Exod. 24:10 in which a sapphire pavement undergirding the throne of God is mentioned. The heavenly sea is also a common motif in apocalyptic literature.<sup>56</sup> However, given the lack of association with a throne scene, a direct dependence is hardly plausible.

God’s throne is encircled in Rev. 4 by two groups of beings. First, twenty-four elders are portrayed (εἴκοσι τέσσαρες πρεσβύτεροι; 4:4), whose individual thrones are related to God’s throne by κυκλόθεν.<sup>57</sup> Since the thrones of the elders appear as heavenly thrones distinct from God’s, they will receive detailed attention in the third article in our series on thrones in Revelation (the thrones of God’s allies). I will focus here on the innermost concentric circle, in which there are four living creatures (τέσσαρα ζῶα) whose relation to the divine throne is defined by the preposition κύκλω (4:6). These beings show a close affinity with the cherubim imagery of Ezek. 1. While numerous similarities have been identified,<sup>58</sup> the differences are also significant and need explanation.<sup>59</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup> See, e.g., Gerald A. Klingbeil, *Bridging the Gap: Ritual and Ritual Texts in the Bible* (BBRSup, 1; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 162.

<sup>56</sup> In *T. Levi* 2:7 the first heaven is described as a place where “much water was suspended.” *2En.* 3:3 refers to a “vast heavenly ocean,” while *T. Abr.* (B) 8 indicates that Michael lifted Abraham in bodily form via a cloud over “the river Ocean.”

<sup>57</sup> κυκλόθεν is employed also in 4:3 referring to the rainbow which encircles the throne. In 4:8 it appears in the context of the physical description of the four living creatures which are portrayed as beings “around and within . . . full of eyes” (κυκλόθεν καὶ ἔσωθεν γέμουσιν ὀφθαλμῶν).

<sup>58</sup> William Hendriksen (*More than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1962], 86-87) has observed the following similarities: (1) the beings are called “living ones”; (2) their number is identical: four; (3) the appearance of their faces is compared to that of man, lion, ox and eagle; (4) they are closely associated with the throne; (5) fire moves to and fro among them; (6) they are covered all over with eyes; and (7) a rainbow encircles the throne that is guarded by the creatures.

<sup>59</sup> Charles (*Revelation*, I, 119) notes the following differences: (1) in Rev. the creatures have four faces, while in Ezek. only one; (2) in Rev. they have six wings and not four as in Ezek.; (3) they are standing immediately around the throne in Rev. and not bearing it as in Ezek.; (4) they sing praises contrary to the silence in Ezek.; (5) while in Rev. the creatures are “full of eyes,” in Ezek. the eyes are associated with the rims of the wheels; and (6) in Rev. the throne is fixed and the creatures are not in motion as in Ezek.

### GALLUSZ: THRONES IN REVELATION

Swete and Rowland interpret the differences as a sign of John's tendency to simplify the *merkabah* material of Ezekiel.<sup>60</sup> One of the weaknesses in this suggestion lies in the lack of explanation for the six wings of John's living creatures (Rev. 4:8) as opposed to the four wings of the cherubim (Ezek. 1:6). Also the unceasing praise of God in Rev. 4:8 contrasts with the silence in Ezek. 1. The differences are convincingly explained by Fekkes as the result of John's combination of Ezekiel's cherubim imagery with Isaiah's seraphim (Isa. 6:2-3):

The transition from Ezekiel to Isaiah coincides with a shift from the physical description of the living creatures to a presentation of their function (Rev 4:8b-9). Whereas in Ezekiel the duties of the cherubim are limited to the movement and activity of the divine throne chariot and have no function of worship or praise, the seraphim of Isa 6 serve as close attendants who lead in worship. Thus, while John takes over various physical attributes of Ezekiel's living creatures, their role as *merkabah* attendants is abandoned in favor of the worshipping seraphim of Isaiah.<sup>61</sup>

Revelation's imagery of the living creatures reveals that, in spite of the formative influence of Ezek. 1, the role of Isaiah's throne vision is not relegated to an "ornamental color or liturgical filler" of John's throne vision.<sup>62</sup> It rather functions as an important source for the theological substructure particularly regarding its strong emphasis on God's sovereignty. This conclusion is further supported by the shared motif of the *trishagion* sung both by John's living creatures (Rev. 4:8) and Isaiah's seraphim (Isa. 6:3).<sup>63</sup>

The most confusing detail in the characterization of the living creatures is their position in relation to the divine throne. They are

---

<sup>60</sup> Swete, *Apocalypse*, 71; Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1982), 223.

<sup>61</sup> Jan Fekkes III, "Isaiah and the Book of Revelation: John the Prophet as a Fourth Isaiah?" in *As Those Who are Taught: The Interpretation of Isaiah from the LXX to the SBL*, eds. Claire M. McGinnis and Patricia K. Tull (SBLSymS, 27; Atlanta: SBL, 2006), 125-43 (135).

<sup>62</sup> Fekkes, "Isaiah and the Book of Revelation," 136.

<sup>63</sup> For further details on the use of Isa. 6 in Rev. 4-5, see David Mathewson, "Isaiah in Revelation" in *Isaiah in the New Testament*, eds. Steve Moyise and Maarten J. J. Menken (The New Testament and the Scriptures of Israel; London: T. & T. Clark, 2005), 189-210 (190-91).



pictured in their introductory description as taking place ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου (“in the midst of the throne”; 4:6). The meaning of this prepositional phrase is a well-known *crux interpretum*. It has been suggested by Hall that John’s description is modeled on the ark of the covenant as attested in the Old Testament (Exod. 25:17-22).<sup>64</sup> That would mean that John’s living creatures are situated within the space of the throne as the integral components of the mercy seat.<sup>65</sup> According to this view God’s throne appears as a kind of “living entity.”<sup>66</sup> Although it has been argued that the evidence is insufficient for a verdict on this question,<sup>67</sup> Hall’s thesis can be challenged on several grounds. First, ἐν μέσῳ is clearly used differently in 5:6 as defining the position of the Lamb in relation to God’s throne, the living creatures and the elders. Second, ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου is clarified in 4:6 by the immediately following κύκλῳ τοῦ θρόνου, which is applied to worshiping angels in 5:11 and 7:11 implying separateness from the throne. Third, the living creatures appear twice in Revelation as falling down in worship before “the One sitting on the throne” (4:9; 19:4). The scene indicates a difference between the worshipers and the point towards which the worship is directed. Fourth, the concept of a heavenly throne with heavenly beings as its living components is not attested in earlier or contemporary literature. In Ezek. 1 the cherubim are beneath the throne, while in Isa. 6 the seraphim hover around it. Fifth, the cultic background sheds some light on the double reference to the position of the living creatures (ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου καὶ κύκλῳ τοῦ θρόνου). Whereas the two

---

<sup>64</sup> It is stated by Josephus that to “the cover [of the earthly ark] were affixed two. . . “cherubs”. . . and Moses says that he saw them sculpted on the [heavenly] throne of God” (*Ant.* 3.137). Similarly, *PRE* 4 and *Midr. Rab. Cant.* 3.10.4 claim that the four cherubim were engraved on parts of the heavenly throne itself.

<sup>65</sup> Robert G. Hall, “Living Creatures in the Midst of the Throne: Another Look at Revelation 4.6,” *NTS* 36 (1990), 609-13; cf. Darrell D. Hannah, “Of Cherubim and the Divine Throne: Rev. 5.6 in Context,” *NTS* 49 (2003), 528-42; Wilfrid J. Harrington, *Revelation* (SP, 16; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993), 80; J. Ramsey Michaels, *Revelation* (IVPNTCS, 20; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 93; Edmondo F. Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John* (trans. Maria P. Johnson and Adam Kamesar; *Italian Texts & Studies on Religion & Society*; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 136.

<sup>66</sup> Michaels, *Revelation*, 93.

<sup>67</sup> See, e.g., Dale C. Allison, “4Q403 Fragm. 1, Col. I, 38-46 and the Revelation of John,” *RevQ* 12 (1986), 409-13 (411).

### GALLUSZ: THRONES IN REVELATION

cherubim of the כַּפְרִית have been related to the ark of the covenant as being in the role of guardians, at the same time cherubim are portrayed on the walls of the Most Holy Place (1Kgs 6:23-29). The cumulative force of the evidence suggests that it is more appropriate to interpret Rev. 4:6 in terms of implying the “extreme closeness”<sup>68</sup> of cherubim to the throne, the surrounding of the center of the universe with their presence, rather than being situated within the throne as its living components.

The role of the living creatures needs some further clarification. There have been some attempts to interpret the arrangement set out in 4:6 as reflecting that of the Greek amphitheater.<sup>69</sup> Such an approach is unnecessary in the light of the cultic and political background of the vision. It is clearly indicated in Rev. 4 that the living creatures appear as a distinguished group of celestial beings acting in the role of guardians of the heavenly throne. At the same time their symbolic interpretation is very likely. Though several hypotheses have been proposed in this regard,<sup>70</sup> the most viable is the one that views the living creatures as representatives of the whole created order of animate life.<sup>71</sup> This interpretation sets the divine throne symbolically in the broadest context, portrayed as encircled by all the sentient creation gathered around it. Since the praise of the living creatures is unending, the throne appears in their midst as the epicenter of the praise.<sup>72</sup>

#### 1.3.4. Hymnic Adoration

The throne-room vision of Rev. 4-5 with its five doxological scenes is considered to be one of the richest liturgical sections in the entire

---

<sup>68</sup> Frederick J. Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon: The Revelation to John* (The New Testament in Context; Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998), 183-84.

<sup>69</sup> Beckwith, *Apocalypse*, 501-02; Raymond R. Brewer, “The Influence of Greek Drama on the Apocalypse of John,” *ATR* 18 (1936), 74-92; Ford, *Revelation*, 74.

<sup>70</sup> Osborne’s (*Revelation*, 233-34) list of the different symbolic interpretations is an appropriate representation of the variety of suggestions: (1) the four gospels (church fathers); (2) the four corners of the zodiac (Charles, Farrer, Kraft, Beasley-Murray); (3) the representation of royalty with winged sphinxes or winged lions (Albright, Ford); (4) the divine attributes or spiritual characteristics (Walvoord, Johnson); (5) the four tribes of Israel (Scott); and (6) the whole of animate creation (Swete, Ladd, Mounce, Harrington, Wall, Roloff, Giesen, Beale).

<sup>71</sup> For interpreters supporting this view, see Charles Brüttsch, *Die Offenbarung Jesu Christi* (3 vols.; ZBK, 18; Zürich: Zwingli, 1970), I, 230-33.

<sup>72</sup> Barr, *Tales*, 71.

book. In the throne-scene of ch. 4 the hymnic material is concentrated in the concluding verses in which the adoration of the four living creatures (4:8) is followed by praise offered by the twenty-four elders (4:9-11). The interpretive role of these hymns has been convincingly argued by Beale, who claims that they “make explicit the main point of the vision and of the whole chapter: God is to be glorified because of his holiness and sovereignty.”<sup>73</sup>

The first hymn focuses on the character of the One sitting on the throne.” God’s distinctiveness is emphasized immediately at the beginning by the employment of a *trishagion*, drawn from Isa. 6:3, which is an appropriate opening anthem within a temple setting. The *trishagion* is followed by two complex divine titles: κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ (“the Lord God Almighty”) and ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος (“the One who is and was and is coming”). Though the throne’s occupant has been characterized until this moment only by circumlocutions, the content of the hymn discloses his divine identity. The two divine titles set a theological tone for the entire chapter by highlighting the ideas of God’s absolute kingship and sovereign control over history and time.<sup>74</sup> Thus, the content of the first hymn is consistent with the theological message the throne motif conveys with its strong centrality in the chapter.

While the first hymnic passage contains the praise of the creatures in the concentric circle nearest to the throne, the second hymnic section records the response of the twenty-four elders as the group situated in the second circle. The relationship of the two worship scenes is indicated by the temporal clause of 4:9 introduced by ὅταν (“whenever”), which modifies the main clause of 4:10.<sup>75</sup> These two verses act as an introductory statement for the second hymn’s transcript in 4:11. Still, they contain four references to God within the context of describing the act of worship. He is twice referred to by the circumlocution ὁ καθήμενος ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ, while also twice by the title τῷ ζῶντι εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων, which appears here for the first time in the book and continues the emphasis of the first hymn on God’s sovereignty as rooted

---

<sup>73</sup> Beale, *Revelation*, 331-32.

<sup>74</sup> Beale, *Revelation*, 333.

<sup>75</sup> ὅταν followed by a future indicative (δώσουσιν) is not the classical usage (BDF, §382.4).

*GALLUSZ: THRONES IN REVELATION*

in his eternal nature.<sup>76</sup> In the same texts three acts of the twenty-four elders are mentioned, which clarify their relationship to the occupant of the central throne: (1) they bow down before God vacating their thrones; (2) worship him; and (3) cast their crowns before the throne. All three acts are acts of subordination. Their combination indicates vassalage—the acknowledgment that homage belongs exclusively to the enthroned One. Aune has observed that, while the scene of casting down crowns before the divine throne is without parallel in Jewish literature, it is comprehensible against the ceremonial traditions of Hellenistic and Roman ruler worship.<sup>77</sup> A further parallel has been noted by Stevenson in his examination of the act of placing crowns at the feet of the conqueror by the conquered rulers (Cicero, *Sest.* 27; Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.29). His conclusion about the Revelation scene is set against the Graeco-Roman context:

The performance of the elders should be understood as an imitation of such an act of subordination. By vacating their thrones and casting their crowns at the feet of the one on the central throne, the elders testify either that they have no right to possess for themselves what those objects represent or that they recognize one with greater right. The behavior of the elders thus functions to show that whatever is symbolized by the thrones and crowns belongs to God.<sup>78</sup>

---

<sup>76</sup> Gregory K. Beale (*The Use of Daniel in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and in the Revelation of St. John* [Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984], 196) notes that this phrase occurs five times in different forms in the Old Testament outside of Daniel and in the apocrypha (Deut. 32:40; Esd. 4:38; Tob. 13:2; Sir. 18:1; 37:26). He regards, on the basis of the closest verbal parallels, Dan. 4:34 and 12:7 as the most probable influences on Rev. 4:9.

<sup>77</sup> Aune, “Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial,” 13.

<sup>78</sup> Gregory M. Stevenson, “Conceptual Background to Golden Crown Imagery in the Apocalypse of John (4:4, 10; 14:14),” *JBL* 114 (1995), 257-72(269). He notes that three types of crowns appear in Revelation: (1) the organic wreath (στέφανος; 2:10; 3:11; 6:2; 12:1); (2) the diadem (διάδημα; 12:3; 13:1; 19:12); and (3) the golden wreath (στεφάνους χρυσοῦς; 4:4, 10; 9:7; 14:14). Traditionally, the diadem has been interpreted as a crown of royalty, while the organic and golden wreaths as wreaths of either victory or royalty. Stevenson rightly holds that this categorization is too simplistic. He demonstrates on the basis of literal and archaeological evidence that the golden wreath worn by the twenty-four elders in Rev. 4 is capable of expressing at least four concepts: victory, royalty, divine glory and honor.

*JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY*

The hymn of the elders, similarly to the praise of the four living creatures, shares the focus on God's sovereignty, more specifically the acknowledging of his kingship. The three acts of vassalage finely resonate with the content of the elders' two-segment confession: the first focusing on God's worthiness and the second on the basis of his worship. The transition between the two parts is indicated by ὅτι, which introduces the rationale for the worship as grounded in his universal creatorship (4:11). The hymn of the twenty-four elders, similar to that of the four living creatures, ascribes lordship to God (ὁ κύριος καὶ ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν) and with the emphasis on his creatorship it serves as an indicator of the "natural disproportion between the one who adores and the one who is adored."<sup>79</sup>

It seems appropriate to close the exegetical study of Rev. 4 with the observation of Bauckham, who notes: "Revelation is theocentric because it offers a vision of the world in which God is the central and utterly decisive reality and in which the worship of God and the truth of God are key elements."<sup>80</sup> Though this theological perspective is conveyed by the book as a whole, the idea is nowhere stronger grounded than in the throne-room vision, in which the foundational picture of reality as focused on the divine throne is given. The reader of Revelation is reminded repeatedly of this viewpoint by the recurring characterization of God throughout the book, which pictures him as occupying the sign of his authority, the throne. I turn now to the discussion of this characterization formula.

## 2. Characterization of God by the Throne Motif

From ch. 4 onward God is referred to as the occupant of the heavenly throne twelve times. The references occur in six different grammatical forms: (1) ἐπὶ τὸν θρόνον καθήμενος (4:2); (2) τῷ καθημένῳ ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ (4:9; 5:13; 7:10; 19:4); (3) τοῦ καθημένου ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου (4:10; 5:1, 7; 6:16); (4) ὁ καθήμενος ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ (21:5); (5) ὁ καθήμενος ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου (7:15); and (6) θρόνον . . . καὶ τὸν καθήμενον ἐπ' αὐτόν (20:11). Also the abbreviated ὁ καθήμενος occurs once (4:3) as referring

---

<sup>79</sup> Lupieri, *Apocalypse*, 137.

<sup>80</sup> Richard Bauckham, "God in the Book of Revelation," *PIBA* 18 (1995), 40-53(41).

## GALLUSZ: THRONES IN REVELATION

to the θρόνος in the previous verse.<sup>81</sup> The variations are not significant for the basic meaning of the expression.<sup>82</sup> Aune convincingly argues that the formula functions as “a circumlocution for the name of God,” since generally no other divine names are placed in syntactical connection with any of the mentioned passages.<sup>83</sup> The question of theocentric characterization has been studied extensively by Rotz, who persuasively argues that the expression functions as the key characterization technique for God throughout the book.<sup>84</sup> Since the formula is a theologically loaded expression with an essential role in conveying the theocentric perspective of Revelation, attention will be given here to its background, its use in the book and theological meaning.

### 2.1. Background

The expression “the One sitting on the throne” is not attested in the Old Testament as a circumlocution for God’s name. In Jewish and Christian literature it is rare, but not entirely absent. The closest affinity with Revelation’s circumlocution appears in Sir. 1:8-9 in which the formula is clearly applied to the divine κύριος portrayed as the creator: εἷς ἔστιν σοφός φοβερὸς σφόδρα καθήμενος ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου αὐτοῦ κύριος αὐτὸς ἔκτισεν. . . (“There is one wise, exceedingly to be feared, the One who sits upon his throne. The Lord himself created. . .”).<sup>85</sup> Also God is referred to in the *LAE* 37:4 as a Lord, who sits on a throne which is qualified as holy: δεσπότης καθήμενος ἐπὶ τοῦ ἁγίου θρόνου αὐτοῦ

<sup>81</sup> This categorization is slightly different from Aune’s (*Revelation 1–5*, 284) who groups the text into five groups taking the references in 4:2 and 20:11 as the same grammatical form in spite of the clear differences. He also omits the reference in 4:3.

<sup>82</sup> Charles (*Revelation*, I, 112) in his discussion of the variation of cases suggests an explanation following the lead of Alford and Bousset: “The participle in the nom. and acc. is followed by ἐπί and the acc., and the participle in the gen. and dat. by the gen. and dat. respectively.”

<sup>83</sup> Aune (*Revelation 1–5*, 284) notes that 7:10 (τῷ θεῷ ἡμῶν τῷ καθημένῳ ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ) and 19:4 (τῷ θεῷ τῷ καθημένῳ ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ) are exceptions in which the circumlocution is preceded by θεός. Charles (*Revelation*, I, 112) holds that this longer form is actually the full expression.

<sup>84</sup> Carol J. Rotz, “The One Who Sits on the Throne: Interdividual Perspectives of the Characterization of God in the Book of Revelation” (D. Litt and Phil. Dissertation; Rand Afrikaans University, 1998), 358-407.

<sup>85</sup> The expression occurs also in Sir. 40:3 as καθημένου ἐπὶ θρόνου ἐνδόξου (“from him who sits on the throne of glory”). However, the throne is not related to God here, but it is rather a motif employed in the development of the theme of suffering being the human lot.

(“the Lord who sits on his holy throne”). The expression is applied to human figures in *T. Abr.*, in which Adam and Abel are designated several times as figures occupying thrones.<sup>86</sup> It has been noted by Aune that, in contrast to its scarcity in the Old Testament and Jewish literature, the formula ὁ καθήμενος ἐπὶ appears as a divine epithet with great frequency in Graeco-Roman sources: within the texts of magical formulas and magical papyri, and also as inscribed on magical gems, lamellae and defixiones.<sup>87</sup>

Revelation’s concept of the enthroned God is rooted primarily in the Old Testament throne theophanies. This applies in spite of the absence of a precise verbal parallel to the expression “the One sitting on the throne,” since in three of the four Old Testament throne visions the concepts of the heavenly throne, God and sitting are closely related.<sup>88</sup> The meaning of κάθημαι is rooted in the Old Testament concept of שׁב, which denotes more than the physical posture of sitting. It functions as a technical term for ascension to a throne and the designation of reigning with reference to both human and divine subjects.<sup>89</sup> The theological significance of שׁב as a term denoting Yahweh’s dwelling in heaven is well known. It stresses “the stability and duration of his residence there” as contrasted with the “human experience of God on the earth, where for the most part, Yahweh is said to יָשׁב, dwell, emphasizing the temporary nature of his manifestations.”<sup>90</sup>

God’s repeated depiction as sitting on his throne needs to be also evaluated against the common understanding of the sitting posture as a mark of honor and authority in the ancient world. As France notes, “A king sat to receive his subjects, a court to give judgment, and a teacher to teach.”<sup>91</sup> In materials from ANE and Greece, sitting is often reserved for

<sup>86</sup> *T. Abr.* (Rec.A) 11:4, 6; 12:11; 13:2; (Rec. B) 8:7.

<sup>87</sup> For details, see Aune’s (*Revelation 1-5*, 284-85) concise discussion of the topic and the literature cited in it.

<sup>88</sup> The closest parallels to Revelation’s formula are in Isa. 6:1 (τὸν κύριον καθήμενον ἐπὶ θρόνου) and 1Kgs 22:19 (τὸν κύριον θεὸν Ἰσραηλ καθήμενον ἐπὶ θρόνου αὐτοῦ), where even the present participle is shared. In Dan. 7:9 the three concepts are related even though the participle is lacking, plural thrones appear and God is named by the unique title “Ancient of Days.” Ezek. 1:26 seems to be the furthest away, since κάθημαι is entirely avoided in indicating the sitting position of the enthroned figure.

<sup>89</sup> M. Görg, “שׁב” in *TDOT*, VI, 420-38.

<sup>90</sup> Gerald H. Wilson, “שׁב” in *NIDOTE*, II, 550-51 (551).

<sup>91</sup> Richard T. France, “κάθημαι” in *NIDNTT*, III, 587-89 (588).

## GALLUSZ: THRONES IN REVELATION

deities as a sign of distinctiveness: a god often sits while people stand in front of him in prayer.<sup>92</sup> Revelation's portrait of God as sitting on his throne is closely related to this idea, reflecting the notion of sovereignty as he takes his seat upon a sign of authority exercising permanent rulership.

### 2.2. The Use of the Circumlocution

The examination of Revelation's καθήμενος passages related to God reveals the use of the expression in five different contexts. The circumlocution is most prominently featured in the heavenly temple scenes, but it also appears in contexts elaborating the day of wrath (6:15), the cosmic conflict (12:5),<sup>93</sup> the millennial judgment (20:11) and the new creation (21:5). In the following only the καθήμενος passages in heavenly temple scenes will be discussed, since the circumlocution appears only once in the other contexts and its use in the temple scenes reflect a strong theological purpose as will be demonstrated.

The circumlocution "the One sitting on the throne" appears in two heavenly temple scenes in the book of Revelation. It is the dominant reference to God in the throne room vision used seven times (chs. 4-5), while an additional reference is found in a cultic setting in the context of the Final Judgment vision (chs. 19-20).

The circumlocution appears six times in its complete form in the throne room vision (4:2, 9, 10; 5:1, 7, 13), while an additional reference from 4:3, which is a shorter form of the expression (ὁ καθήμενος), is to be added to this group. Seven as the number of references to God through the throne motif seems to reveal deliberateness on the part of the author since, as Bauckham points out, numerical symbolism concerning the employing of divine titles is one of the ways in which John "wrote

---

<sup>92</sup> E.g., Homer, *Il.* 4.1; *Od.* 16.264; Aeschylus, *Suppl.* 101; Euripides, *Tro.* 884; Pausanias, *Desc. Gr.* 5.17.9.

<sup>93</sup> I suggest that the expression πρὸς τὸν θεὸν καὶ πρὸς τὸν θρόνον αὐτοῦ ("to God and to his throne") in 12:5 functions in a similar manner to the circumlocution of God's name under discussion, since θεός and θρόνος are juxtaposed within the same sentence. For this reason the text in question should rightfully be classified as a characterization throne-texts.



*JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY*

theological meaning into the detail of the composition of his work.”<sup>94</sup> While I concur with this general observation of Bauckham, his suggestion concerning the significance of seven references to the formula ὁ καθήμενος ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ in this grammatical form in the book is highly questionable. He suggests that “it looks that John used . . . variations quite deliberately in order to keep the number of occurrences of the precise phrase to seven.”<sup>95</sup> While the point of such a decision on part of the author would not be very clear, I suggest that John’s numerical deliberateness is probably more evident in the seven καθήμενος references in the pivotal vision of the book in chs. 4-5, in spite of the variations in the formula.

The pervasive nature of the formula’s employment in chs. 4-5 is also informing. Namely, the throne-room vision is the only section of the book in which it appears in different types of materials within a single vision: in the visionary description (4:2, 3; 5:1, 7), in the introductory/explanatory formula for worship (4:9, 10) and in the texts of the hymnic material (5:13). While the nineteen θρόνος references in the vision with the description of the clear arrangement of the heavenly realm around the divine throne is already a strong indicator of God’s sovereign kingship over the created order, this leading theological idea is additionally emphasized by the author’s sevenfold and pervasive use of God’s central characterization formula.

In contrast to the throne room vision in which the circumlocution formula pervades the entire material, in the temple scene of 19:1-10 it appears only as a single reference (19:4). As the introductory scene of the Final Judgment vision (chs. 19-20) the section is dominated by four hymns of praise and the introduction of nuptial imagery in reference to the Lamb’s wedding. It picks up the theme of God’s justice reflected in the elects’ reward and the judgment of their enemies which has been

---

<sup>94</sup> Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1993), 33. Bauckham rightly notes of the complexity of John’s literary technique that some “titles for God which are most characteristic of Revelation and most important for the theology of Revelation occur seven times each. Especially in the circumstances of ancient writing, this would not have been easy to achieve.”

<sup>95</sup> Bauckham, *Climax*, 33.

### GALLUSZ: THRONES IN REVELATION

announced already by the seventh trumpet (11:15-18).<sup>96</sup> The hymnic material of 19:1-10 records praise offered to God for the demonstration of his sovereign reign in the deposing of Babylon and the salvation of the elect. He is referred to by three names in the four hymns of this temple scene: θεός ἡμῶν (19:1, 5), the fuller version κύριος ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν ὁ παντοκράτωρ (19:6) and the circumlocution τῷ θεῷ τῷ καθημένῳ ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου (19:4). Significantly, the reference at the center of our attention appears within the description of worship on part of the beings that appear in the throne-room vision as the setting of the divine throne. The text clearly specifies the throne occupant as the object of worship (προσεκύνησαν τῷ θεῷ τῷ καθημένῳ ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ). The divine throne itself is mentioned again within the same context as a point from which response came in the form of an unidentified voice (φωνὴ ἀπὸ τοῦ θρόνου ἐξῆλθεν; 19:5). This reference will be discussed later in our study of the phenomena emerging from the throne.

#### 2.3. Theological Meaning

In the formula “the One sitting on the throne” two concepts, God and king, are merged into a single powerful rhetorical device which highlights the “embodiment of absolute power.”<sup>97</sup> With the focus on the throne itself, avoiding description and naming of God, it is set forth the idea of the duration of his kingship and the safeguarding of his transcendence. The circumlocution presents an immobile and stable image of God, who is never dramatized as a figure actively involved in the course of events. Nevertheless, the formula does not convey the idea of passivity, but rather a high theocentricity. Johnson rightly notes that the theological purpose of the expression lies in highlighting of God’s control over the development of the affairs in Earth’s history: “Nothing

---

<sup>96</sup> The idea of judgment is closely tied here to the justification of martyrs and to their cry in 6:9-11. It is made clear in chs. 17-18 that Babylon is responsible for the oppression of God’s people and the shedding of their blood (17:6; 18:24). Thus, the text implies the legal action of judging Babylon and avenging the blood of God’s servants (Stefanovic, *Revelation*, 543).

<sup>97</sup> Stephen D. Moore, “The Beatific Vision as a Posing Exhibition: Revelation’s Hypermasculine Deity,” *JSNT* 60 (1995), 27-52(32). Cyril T. Gadd (*Ideas of Divine Rule in the Ancient East* [London: Oxford University Press, 1948], 33) observes that “God and king are two conceptions so nearly coupled in the oriental mind that the distinction is constantly blurred.”

*JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY*

happens, nothing exists in the past, present, or future apart from God's intention. Whatever authority is given. . . is given by God."<sup>98</sup>

The circumlocution reflects the reluctance of naming or describing God directly. There has been pointed out that by avoiding anthropomorphisms God's mysterious transcendence is accentuated, namely the impossibility of expressing his awesomeness. For this reason Raschke cautions that naming God in finality and fullness equals the rousing of the beast.<sup>99</sup> Similarly Rotz and du Rand note: "God cannot be tamed, domesticated or analyzed. The One who sits on the throne can best be described as jasper and sardius (4:3). The mystery remains, yet Revelation is just that: revelation."<sup>100</sup> This understanding is not contradictory to Moore's observation that the book is not entirely free from anthropomorphisms, since in 5:1, 7 God's right hand is mentioned.<sup>101</sup> On the other hand, Boring goes a step further suggesting that avoiding to name God in chs. 4-5 is at least partially due to the book's intention to emphasize the role of Jesus in God's plan. He argues that John intentionally leaves "a blank center in the picture to be filled in by the figure of the Lamb" affirming "that God is the one who defines himself by Christ."<sup>102</sup> The weakness of this suggestion lies in a neglect to give appropriate attention to the Hebraic nature of the circumlocution formula which should not be pressed too far without grounding it on appropriate exegetical evidence. For this reason, more appropriate is to interpret the circumlocution "the One sitting on the throne" against the background of Old Testament throne visions rather than viewing it as an intentional device for emphasizing high Christology.

### 3. Phenomena/Actions Emanating from the Throne

Although God is silent almost throughout the entire book of Revelation, his throne is a dynamic representation of the divine authority,

---

<sup>98</sup> Alan F. Johnson, *Revelation: The Expositor's Bible Commentary with the New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 66.

<sup>99</sup> Carl L. Raschke, "The Image of the Beast, or Theology and the Thought of Difference" in *New Dimensions in Philosophical Theology*, ed. Carl L. Raschke (JAARS, 49; Missoula, MT: American Academy of Religion, 1982), 109-27.

<sup>100</sup> Carol J. Rotz and Jan A. du Rand, "The One Who Sits on the Throne: Towards a Theory of Theocentric Characterization according to the Apocalypse of John," *Neot* 33 (1999), 91-111(97).

<sup>101</sup> Moore, "Beatific Vision," 31.

<sup>102</sup> Boring, *Revelation*, 103.

### GALLUSZ: THRONES IN REVELATION

since different phenomena and actions are recorded as emanating from the throne. These references are most often placed at strategically significant locations within the book as indicators of the decisiveness of the divine involvement. Three aspects of the dynamics of the heavenly throne will be discussed in the following: (1) heavenly phenomena; (2) speeches; and (3) unidentified voices.

#### 3.1. Lightning, Voices, Thunder

The divine throne in Revelation is a place where God's holiness and power are openly revealed. While significant attention is devoted in chs. 4-5 to the description of the throne's surroundings, at the same time heavenly phenomena are introduced as strongly evocative of the awe and mystery related to the divine θρόνος. The prepositions related to the throne are informative in this regard: κυκλόθειν (4:3, 4) and ἐνώπιον (4:5, 6, 10) focus on the surroundings of the throne and ἐν μέσῳ on its center (4:6), while at the heart of the vision heavenly phenomena are pictured as emanating from the throne itself, as indicated by the use of ἐκ (ἐκ τοῦ θρόνου ἐκπορεύονται; 4:5). Aune notes that until this point the vision is recorded in the past tense, but in 4:5 the description changes to the present indicative. The significance of the shift is in emphasizing the continuity of the phenomena emanating from the throne.<sup>103</sup>

The content of the heavenly phenomena is threefold: ἀστραπαὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ βρονταί ("lightning, voices and thunder"; 4:5).<sup>104</sup> As noted by Holtz, the combined imagery generates the impression of might and stirs up fear with a sense of mystery.<sup>105</sup> It is generally acknowledged that these phenomena are linked to the traditional Old Testament theophanies which are often accompanied by lightning, noise and/or thunder. The primary background of Revelation's imagery is in the Sinai theophany. Rowland suggests that specifically Exod. 19:16 "provided material which could form the basis of the belief in the fiery elements which

<sup>103</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 293-94.

<sup>104</sup> It has been suggested the possibility of translating φωναὶ καὶ βρονταί as "peals of thunder," a single event instead of two (Bratcher, *Handbook on the Revelation*, 90). The weakness of this view lies in the fact that the intended combination of the two phenomena is in Revelation expressed by the formula φωνὴ βροντῆς without the conjunction of coordination (6:1; 14:2; 19:6).

<sup>105</sup> Traugott Holtz, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (NTD, 11; Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 56.

*JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY*

proceed from God's immediate presence."<sup>106</sup> At the same time it seems that the author is influenced also by the chariot vision of Ezekiel. Since this well-known *merkabah* scene forms the most prominent background to Rev. 4, it is not surprising to discover that the heavenly phenomena recorded in 4:5 show affinity with the imagery in Ezek. 1:13.<sup>107</sup> On the other hand, Morton has provided a whole impressive list of other possible sources from Old Testament and early Jewish apocalyptic thought.<sup>108</sup> Even so, it seems most appropriate to view these texts as the result of the formative influence of the Sinai theophany.<sup>109</sup>

The theological meaning of the threefold heavenly phenomena emanating from the throne in 4:5 is to be understood in the context of the other related references in Revelation. Namely, the formula appears three more times in progressively expanding versions located at critical junctures in the development of Revelation's story-line. Bauckham convincingly argues that the progress is a deliberate stylistic device which is evident once the following four texts are compared:

4:5: ἀστραπαὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ βρονταὶ  
8"5" βρονταὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ ἀστραπαὶ καὶ σεισμός  
11:19: ἀστραπαὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ βρονταὶ καὶ σεισμός καὶ χάλαζα  
μεγάλη  
16:18-21: ἀστραπαὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ βρονταὶ καὶ σεισμός ... μέγας ...  
καὶ χάλαζα μεγάλη

As suggested by Bauckham, all four references are built on Sinai theophany and they are closely related to the heavenly temple.<sup>110</sup>

---

<sup>106</sup> Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 221-22. While two of the three phenomena of Rev. 4:5 show verbal parallels with Exod. 19:16 (ἀστραπαὶ and φωναὶ), the third parallel is only thematic (βρονταὶ and φωνή ... μέγας).

<sup>107</sup> While the only verbal parallel is ἀστραπή/ἀστραπαί, the moving fiery element of Ezek. 1:13 is strongly reminiscent of Rev. 4:5.

<sup>108</sup> Morton's (*One upon the Throne*, 93) list of parallels includes texts such as Ps. 18:6-15; 29; Dan. 7:10; *IEn.* 14:19; 59:1-3; 60:1-4; 4Q405.

<sup>109</sup> E.g., Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 115; Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 349; Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 294.

<sup>110</sup> Bauckham, *Climax*, 202. This view is somewhat criticized by Aune (*Revelation 1-5*, 295), who holds that the conscious influence of the Sinai tradition is exaggerated. He calls our attention to Est. 1:1d-e, where a similar list of four disturbances is found as part of a dream in which violence against the Jews is anticipated. He also points to the Graeco-Roman

### GALLUSZ: THRONES IN REVELATION

However, a significant difference is that in 4:5 the theophany is limited exclusively to the context of the throne room, while in the other three texts it is related to the earth. The difference concerning the sphere of the phenomena's manifestation is indicated by the addition of the earthquake motif (σεισμός) as the fourth element of the formula in the last three occurrences, which would be inappropriate in the heavenly context.<sup>111</sup> These references are connected to the visions of judgment that appear with increasing severity throughout the book as indicated by the progressive expansion of the formula. Their connection to the primary reference of 4:5 points to God as the source of these judgments. Bauckham rightly concludes: "The progressive expansion of the formula corresponds to the progressive intensification of the three series of judgments. In this way the whole course of the judgments is depicted as the manifestation of the same divine holiness which is revealed in the theophany in heaven in 4:5."<sup>112</sup>

It has been convincingly argued that the repetition of the theophanic formula reflects a pastoral purpose. As noted by Beale, it assures the suffering community that the One from whose throne the phenomena emanate "has not forgotten them because he has not forgotten their persecutors, whom he will surely judge."<sup>113</sup> Thus, the manifestation of the divine holiness in 4:5 anchors the later judgment series in God's throne as their source and interprets them as the "fanfare for the

---

background of the thunderbolt which was closely associated with Zeus and Jupiter and, as attested by numismatic evidence, it was consequently used by several Roman emperors including Domitian (*BMC* 2:381, no. 381; 389, no. 410; 399, no. 443) and Trajan (*BMC* 3:174, no. 825; 190, no. 899). This view is further developed by Morton (*One upon the Throne*, 93-94), who argues for a conscious influence of this tradition on the theophanic references of Revelation under discussion. While I hold that the emperor cults form a significant political background to the argument of the book of Revelation as a whole, this connection concerning the atmospheric-seismic phenomena seems exaggerated.

<sup>111</sup> For the function of the earthquake as apocalyptic imagery in the Old Testament and apocalyptic literature, see Bauckham, *Climax*, 199-202. It has been aptly noted that the imagery had a great rhetorical power as employed in the first-century C.E. Asian context not only because the Graeco-Roman world took earthquakes seriously as signs of divine displeasure, but because of the devastating earthquakes of the first century in Asia Minor. See James S. Murray, "The Urban Earthquake Imagery and Divine Judgement in John's Apocalypse," *NovT* 47 (2005), 142-61.

<sup>112</sup> Bauckham, *Theology*, 42.

<sup>113</sup> Beale, *Revelation*, 326.

## *JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY*

testimony of God's triumph."<sup>114</sup> I would like to suggest that God's sovereign kingship is brought to the attention additionally by relating all four theophanic texts directly to God's throne: (1) in 4:5 it emanates immediately from the heavenly throne (ἐκ τοῦ θρόνου ἐκπορεύονται); (2) in 8:5 it comes as the consequence of throwing a censer to the earth which is filled with fire from the altar standing in front of the throne (ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου; 8:3); (3) in 11:19 it is related to the ark of the covenant, the cultic symbol of God's throne in the Old Testament (ὡφθη ἡ κιβωτὸς τῆς διαθήκης ... καὶ ἐγένοντο); and (4) in 16:18-21 it is the result of the declaration of a loud voice coming out of the temple, more specifically from the throne (ἐκ τοῦ ναοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ θρόνου; 16:17).

### 3.2. Speeches From the Throne

While all the judgments of Revelation are seen as coming from the presence of "the One sitting on the throne," God's direct speaking is limited to only two contexts in the entire work (1:8; 21:5-8). Since both divine speeches are connected to the divine throne as the place of utterance, they will be examined here.

#### 3.2.1. First Speech (1:8)

God's first speech in Revelation appears in the final statement of the prologue (1:1-8). Following the foreword (1:1-3), epistolary greetings (1:4-5a) and a doxology (1:5b-6) the prologue ends with a two-partite thematic motto (1:7-8) which introduces the basic apocalyptic perspective of the book. The first statement of the motto is given in a style of prophetic annunciation (1:8), while in the second statement God himself gives a brief self-revelation. His words are a fitting climax of the prologue (1:8), since they point to the identity of the originator of the book of Revelation and they bring thus back the readers to the opening statement of the book (1:1).<sup>115</sup> God's speaking in the prologue is of critical theological significance, since his short self-declaration appears as the first recorded speech of any character in the book.<sup>116</sup> The fact that

---

<sup>114</sup> Robert W. Wall, *Revelation* (NIBCNT; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 93.

<sup>115</sup> Smalley, *Revelation*, 38.

<sup>116</sup> As Meredith G. Kline (*Treaty of the Great King: The Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1963], 14) demonstrates, the self-identification of the covenant Lord at the opening of the Decalogue (Exod. 20:2) and the ANE treaties reveal a similar pattern of self-declaration.

GALLUSZ: THRONES IN REVELATION

God speaks before anyone and before anything is disclosed highlights his privileged position, worthy of undivided attention. As Resseguie rightly notes, this theocentric speech provides “theological context for all that follows” in the book.<sup>117</sup>

The theme of God’s speech in 1:8 is his own divine nature, as indicated by the presence of the Johannine ἐγώ εἰμι formula (ἐγώ εἰμι τὸ ἄλφα καὶ τὸ ὦ).<sup>118</sup> It has been convincingly argued that the reference to the first and the last letters of the Greek alphabet functions as a merism<sup>119</sup> which is supplemented by additional merisms in two other places in the book, where the original self-declaration re-appears. The meaning of this word-play is illuminated by its Old Testament background in Isa. 41-48, where God is portrayed in the context of a polemic against the idols of Babylon in a similar fashion as the only Creator and sovereign Lord of history.<sup>120</sup> The Jewish alphabet symbolism throws additional light on the merism of Rev. 1:8: the Hebrew אמת (“truth”) has been understood as a way of designating God as the beginning, middle and end, since א is the first, מ the middle and ת the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet.<sup>121</sup> Against these backgrounds, the “Alpha–Omega” merism of Revelation appears as stressing the sovereignty of God, who controls the beginning as well as the end and everything in between.<sup>122</sup> Farrer goes a step further, arguing that ΙΑΩ, the

<sup>117</sup> James L. Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed: A Narrative Critical Approach to John’s Apocalypse* (BibIS, 32; Leiden: Brill, 1998), 106.

<sup>118</sup> In several witnesses ἀρχὴ καὶ τέλος (⋈\* fam 1611<sup>1854 2050 2329</sup> 2351 Andreas it<sup>sig<sup>h</sup></sup> vg cop<sup>bo</sup> Beatus) or ἡ ἀρχὴ καὶ τὸ τέλος (fam 1611<sup>2329</sup> cop<sup>bo</sup>) is inserted after the τὸ ἄλφα καὶ τὸ ὦ self-declaration. Bruce M. Metzger (*A Textual Commentary On the Greek New Testament: A Companion Volume to the United Bible Society’s Greek New Testament* [Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2nd ed., 1994], 663) convincingly argues that these longer variants are scribal insertions, since “if the longer text were original no good reason can be found to account for the shorter text, whereas the presence of the longer expression in 21:6 obviously prompted some copyists to expand the text here.”

<sup>119</sup> Merism is a figure of speech which expresses totality by reference to polar opposites.

<sup>120</sup> Isa. 41:4; 44:6; 48:12.

<sup>121</sup> For the idea in Jewish literature that the first and the last letter of the alphabet denotes the whole extent of a thing, see Hermann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrash* (4 vols.; München: Beck, 1922-1961), III, 789.

<sup>122</sup> For this understanding in the early Christian interpreters, see Tertullian, *ACW* 13.78-79; Jerome, *Ag. Jov.* 1.18, *NPNF* 2.6.360; Oecumenius, *Com. Apoc.*, *TEG* 8.268.



*JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY*

rendering of “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” functions as the Greek form of the יהוה tetragrammaton.<sup>123</sup> This forced hypothesis has been convincingly refuted by Aune, who turns our attention rather to the background of the merism in magical papyri, in which ΑΩ designates abbreviation of a divine name.<sup>124</sup> In spite of Aune’s suggestion, which merits a closer examination in another study, I align myself rather with Beale, who grounds the interpretation primarily in the Old Testament, noting that if Aune’s suggestion is on the mind of the author, it would be only in combination with the Old Testament background.<sup>125</sup>

The “Alpha–Omega” self-designation in 1:8 is clearly attributed to God, who is qualified by three divine names in the same verse: (1) κύριος ὁ θεός; (2) ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος; and (3) ὁ παντοκράτωρ. Bauckham rightly considers these three titles as belonging among the four most important designations for God in the entire book, together with “the One sitting on the throne.”<sup>126</sup> The appearance of these key titles within a single verse underscores the strategic significance of the text. The concentrated package at the climax of the prologue serves the purpose of projecting a basic theological outlook for the entire book. Namely, in the focus of Revelation is the notion of God’s supremacy and absolute lordship over the created order, which is manifested in his overseeing all the affairs of human history and directing them towards their ultimate end. The self-declaration of 1:8 discloses and the unfolding of the events in the rest of the book confirms an understanding of God as “the source and the fulfilment of all things . . . however distant and hidden . . . still one who breaks into human experience in unexpected and surprising ways.”<sup>127</sup>

The throne motif is indirectly related to God’s speech in 1:8. The location from which the divine self-declaration is given is not specified in the verse itself. However, in the same context of the prologue, in the

---

<sup>123</sup> Austin Farrer, *A Rebirth of Images: The Making of St. John’s Apocalypse* (Westminster: Dacre, 1949), 263-68.

<sup>124</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 57-59; Idem., *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic in Early Christianity: Collected Essays* (WUNT, 199; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 361-64.

<sup>125</sup> Beale, *Revelation*, 200. In contrast, Aune (*Revelation 1-5*, 59) gives the advantage to Hellenistic revelatory magic as the primary source of the divine title.

<sup>126</sup> For a detailed study of these titles, see Bauckham, *Theology*, 25-35.

<sup>127</sup> Adela Yarbro Collins, *Apocalypse* (New Testament Message, 22; Dublin: Veritas Publications, 1979), 8-9.

### GALLUSZ: THRONES IN REVELATION

salutary part, God is directly related to the throne which is qualified as “his throne” (1:4). The key for the identification of the speaker in 1:8 with the occupant of the throne in 1:4 is the shared divine title ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος which appears verbatim in both verses.<sup>128</sup> While God’s sitting on his throne is only presupposed in the prologue and there is no direct statement about this, the value of my suggestion that a close theological relation exists between the meaning conveyed by the motif of throne and the content of the first divine speech in Revelation is in no way diminished by this fact. While God’s self-revelatory statement strongly stresses the notion of divine sovereignty, the connection with the throne symbolism provides additional theological force to this central idea which remains the focus of the author’s attention until the end of the book.

#### 3.2.2. Second Speech (21:5-8)

God’s second speech in Revelation is located at the climactic part of the “thesis paragraph” of the new creation vision (21:5-8). It has been rightly noted concerning the significance of this passage that together with the speech of the unidentified voice from the throne in 21:3-4 it “captures in a nutshell the meaning of the entire Book of Revelation.”<sup>129</sup> While God’s second speech in the book is considerably longer than the first, the almost verbatim reappearance of the self-declaration from 1:8 in 21:6 indicates a close connection. The original formula is, however, supplemented here by an additional title ἡ ἀρχὴ καὶ τὸ τέλος (“the beginning and the end”), which function lies in the interpretation of the original divine self-declaration.<sup>130</sup>

The content of God’s second speech in Revelation has not received the attention it deserves in previous studies. While the division of 21:5-8

<sup>128</sup> Leonard L. Thompson (*Revelation* [ANTC; Nashville, TN Abingdon, 1998], 52) notes that the repetition of the divine title ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος in 1:4 and 1:8 exemplifies a ring composition, an envelope pattern, in which “a word or phrase is repeated at the beginning and at the end of a unit and thus forms a ring around the block of text.” This literary technique is the key for identification of the divine speaker in 1:8. For a detailed discussion of the meaning of this *Dreizeitenformel* in Revelation, see Sean M. McDonough, *YHWH at Patmos* (WUNT 2/107; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 195-231.

<sup>129</sup> Michaels, *Revelation*, 235.

<sup>130</sup> Dennis E. Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb: A Commentary on Revelation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2001), 306; Smalley, *Revelation*, 541. The similar ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος title is attributed to Christ in 1:17 and 2:8.

*JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY*

into seven strophic statements has rightly been noted,<sup>131</sup> the significance of the fact that the ἐγὼ τὸ ἄλφα καὶ τὸ ὦ self-declaration is the middle statement of the entire speech has remained unnoticed. I suggest that an investigation of the relationship between the particular statements of the divine speech reveals the possibility of a “sandwich-chiasm.” By a “sandwich-chiasm” I mean joining two minor chiasms into a larger structure with a central statement sandwiched at the middle:

- A21:5a – the promise of the new creation (ἰδοὺ καινὰ ποιῶ πάντα)  
B 21:5b – the trustworthiness of the divine promise (οἱ λόγοι πιστοί ...)  
A' 21:6a – the accomplishment of the new creation (γέγοναν)  
C 21:6b – the guarantee of the new creation (ἄλφα ... ὦ, ἡ ἀρχὴ ... τὸ τέλος)  
A 21:6c – the new creation as a reward (ἐγὼ τῷ διψῶντι δώσω ἐκ τῆς πηγῆς ...)  
B 21:7 – the climax of the divine promise (ὁ νικῶν κληρονομήσει ταῦτα ...)  
A' 21:8 – the new creation as a punishment (τοῖς δὲ δειλοῖς ...)

I would like to suggest that the aim of this “sandwich-chiasm” is the emphasis on the “Alpha–Omega” statement at the focal point of the structure.<sup>132</sup> Even if this proposal remains at the level of possibility regarding the author’s intention, in a wider sense a simpler chiasm of an ABA’ pattern is certainly justified, since the first part of the structure points to the divine side of the new creation promise, whereas in the second part the attention is shifted to humanity’s destiny in the face of this climactic event. The groups of statements on both sides of the chiasm are related to the actions or commands of God, but the focal

<sup>131</sup> See David E. Aune, *Revelation 17-22* (WBC, 52C; Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 1114; Smalley, *Revelation*, 533-34. Whereas the number seven is intentional concerning the division here, similarly to the seven beatitudes scattered throughout the book, there has also been argued a less convincing six-part division of the section (Osborne, *Revelation*, 728).

<sup>132</sup> As an alternative view, the first statement of the speech (21:5a) has been considered the centerpiece of 21:5-8 in Roloff, *Revelation*, 237; Jan A. du Rand, “The New Jerusalem as Pinnacle of Salvation: Text (21:1-22:5) and Intertext,” *Neot* 38 (2004), 275-302 (290). This approach, however, fails to notice a deeper structure of the passage.

GALLUSZ: THRONES IN REVELATION

statement centers on God's character as the sovereign Lord of history, the originating cause from whom the eschatological new creation emanates.<sup>133</sup>

The throne reference is not marginal in God's second speech in Revelation. Contrary to the brief self-disclosure in 1:8, the longer speech of 21:5-8 is introduced by a formula that directly identifies the speaker by the circumlocution related to the throne (καὶ εἶπεν ὁ καθήμενος ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ). Besides the throne-related introductory statement two shorter remarks precede the second (καὶ λέγει; 21:5)<sup>134</sup> and the third statement (καὶ εἶπέν μοι; 21:6) of the divine speech. However, they are without particular significance, as they point back to the speaker introduced in 21:5 referring in this way to his authority. The reference to the divine throne at the beginning of the divine speech of 21:5-8 is motivated by a clear intention on the author's part. It has been convincingly argued that God's speech in 21:5-8 has the effect of divine authentication not only of the new creation's certainty, but more broadly of the entire book.<sup>135</sup> A reference to God by a circumlocution related to the throne is an appropriate introduction for the authentication as it directs the attention to God's sovereign authority, the guarantee of the realization of his plan.

The theological significance of the relation between God's two speeches in Revelation has often been pointed out.<sup>136</sup> The "Alpha–Omega" self-declaration near both the beginning and the end of the book (1:8; 21:6) reveals purposiveness on part of the author. It not only forms an *inclusio* around the work, but frames also its theological message. Yarbrow Collins rightly notes the appropriateness of such a literary strategy, which "implies that all things in time and space are part of divine providence."<sup>137</sup> Beale similarly excludes the possibility of coincidence, arguing that the two opposites underscore God's absolute

<sup>133</sup> The meaning of ἀρχή (21:6) is besides "origin," "source," "ruler" also "an initial cause" (LN §89.16).

<sup>134</sup> Several MSS contain the longer reading καὶ λέγει μοι (ⲛ025 051 fam 1006<sup>10061841</sup> fam 1611<sup>2050</sup> Andreas it<sup>a</sup> vg syr<sup>ph</sup> cop<sup>sa bo</sup> arm eth), but the shorter reading is preferable (TCGNT, 764-65; Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1111).

<sup>135</sup> E.g., Charles, *Revelation*, II, 212; Priegent, *Apocalypse*, 600; Wall, *Revelation*, 247.

<sup>136</sup> See, e.g., Bauckham, *Theology*, 27; Stefanovic, *Revelation*, 579; Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed*, 106.

<sup>137</sup> Yarbrow Collins, *Apocalypse*, 145.

control over the totality of the events portrayed between 1:8 and 21:6.<sup>138</sup> Thus, the “Alpha–Omega” statement functions as “a succinct proclamation of the theocracy,”<sup>139</sup> since “the One sitting on the throne” has the first and the last word in the book, as his purpose is coming to be fulfilled both in the advancement of history (1:8) and in the new creation at eschaton (21:5-8).

### 3.3. Voices From the Throne

Though the auditory aspect of Revelation has been often called to our attention, analysis of the voices appearing in the book has not attracted much scholarly interest.<sup>140</sup> The most profound investigation has been done by Boring, who identified one hundred and forty-one speech units around which quotation marks can be put.<sup>141</sup> The variety of voices is great. Not only are divine voices heard, but also voices of heavenly beings and earthly characters participating in the drama of Revelation. Though even the voices of animals, an altar and the seven thunders are recorded, significantly God’s archenemies, such as the dragon, the beast, the false prophet, Babylon and the prostitute, never speak in the book. Boring convincingly explains their muteness against the background of Jewish polemic contra idols, who in “contrast to YHWH the only God . . . show that they are no gods in that they are unable to speak.”<sup>142</sup>

One of the largest groups among the many speech units in Revelation is that which includes voices that are not clearly identified.<sup>143</sup> The

---

<sup>138</sup> Beale, *Revelation*, 1055.

<sup>139</sup> Ford, *Revelation*, 367.

<sup>140</sup> For a review of the research on the topic, see M. Eugene Boring, “The Voice of Jesus in the Apocalypse of John,” *NovT* 34 (1992), 334-59 (334 n. 2).

<sup>141</sup> The issue is, however, more complex, as noted by Boring (“Voice,” 335): “The text of Revelation can be thought of as several layers of quotation marks, hierarchically arranged.” More specifically, Boring notes three layers of speakers: the lector, the written text and John himself as the author. He demonstrates that these layers often overlap with the voice of Jesus as the source of the book (1:1) to such extent that they cannot be clearly separated.

<sup>142</sup> Boring, “Voice,” 337-38. On the muteness of the idols, see Ps. 115:5; 135:16; Jer. 10:5; Hab. 2:18-19; *3Macc.* 4:16; cf. 1Cor. 12:2.

<sup>143</sup> According to Boring’s classification the following texts belong to this group: 4:1; 6:6; 7:4; 9:4; 9:13-14; 10:4; 10:8; 10:9b; 11:12-13; 12:10; 14:2; 16:1; 16:17; 18:4-20; 18:9-10a; 18:10b; 18:11-13; 18:14; 18:15; 18:16-17a; 18:17b-18a; 18:18b; 18:19a; 18:19b-20; 19:5; 19:6-8; 21:3. Only the angels speak more often in the book (thirty-two references). For a comprehensive list of different voices in Revelation, see Boring, “Voice,” 357-59. For the

### GALLUSZ: THRONES IN REVELATION

identity of these anonymous voices has attracted some scholarly interest. Charlesworth has suggested on the basis of the apocalyptic literature that Jews (at least some religious ones) believed before 100 C.E. in the existence of the voice of God hypostasized as an independent celestial figure. In his study on the topic he argues with particular reference to the identity of the φωνή in Rev. 1:12 that “the author of the Apocalypse. . . took the Jewish concept of the Voice and baptized it. . . placing it in a context with clearly Christian phrases, terms and titles like the Son of Man and the slain Lamb.”<sup>144</sup> For the purpose of our study it is significant to note that φωνή appears in three different contexts in Revelation as related to the heavenly throne. In all three texts the voice is unidentified, but in 16:17 and 21:3 it is a “great voice” (φωνή μεγάλη), while in 19:5 it is without further qualifications.<sup>145</sup> An additional difference between these references is that in 16:17 and 19:5 the relation of the unidentified voice to the throne is determined by the preposition ἀπό (ἀπὸ τοῦ θρόνου), while in 21:3 by ἐκ (ἐκ τοῦ θρόνου). In spite of the different prepositions, there is no discernible difference in meaning between the two expressions.<sup>146</sup> Charlesworth’s hypothesis concerning the identity of the “voice” is not supported in the three mentioned throne texts of Revelation as it will be confirmed by the analysis of these texts, which follows.

In 16:17 the “great voice” announces the eschaton within the climactic seventh bowl plague. The location from which the voice emanates is clearly specified by the reference to the heavenly temple and more specifically the throne located in it (ἐκ τοῦ ναοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ θρόνου). In spite of the lack of the precise identification of the voice as God’s, the cumulative force of the evidence suggests that the speaker is a divine

---

background of the unidentified revelatory voices in the Old Testament, Jewish literature and Graeco-Roman sources, see David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16* (WBC, 52B; Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 561-62.

<sup>144</sup> James H. Charlesworth, “The Jewish Roots of Christology: The Discovery of the Hypostatic Voice,” *SJT* 39 (1986), 19-41(38).

<sup>145</sup> φωνή μεγάλη is also applied to different characters in Revelation: angels (5:2, 12; 7:2; 10:3; 14:7, 9, 15, 18; 19:17; 18:2[φωνή ἰσχυρά]), the souls under the altar (6:10), the great multitude (7:10) and the eagle (8:13). The same expression often appears in a heavenly context without the specification of the speaker (11:12, 15; 12:10; 16:17).

<sup>146</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1027.

being.<sup>147</sup> First, it is hardly possible that within the unique context in which the heavenly temple and the throne are juxtaposed the announcement of the completion of the divine plan (γέγονεν; “it is done”) would come from anyone other than the sovereign Lord of history.<sup>148</sup> Second, at the beginning of the same vision the “great voice” is indirectly identified as God’s, since in 16:1 is stated that it is coming out of the temple and only God is said to be in the heavenly ναός in 15:8. On the basis of the evidence it can be concluded that God must be the speaker in both texts. Third, the voice coming out of the temple is an allusion to Isa. 66:6 in which the identity of the speaker is clarified by a parallel phrase “a voice from the temple, the voice from the Lord repaying his enemies all they deserve.”<sup>149</sup> Thus, the voice coming from the throne in Rev. 16:17 is clearly a divine voice, though it is difficult to explicitly determine whether God’s or Christ’s voice is in view here.

The identity of the φωνή ἀπὸ τοῦ θρόνου in 19:5 is a more complex question.<sup>150</sup> The voice invites within a heavenly praise scene over the fall of Babylon all the servants of God, who fear him to praise “our God” (αἰνεῖτε τὸν θεὸν ἡμῶν). Scholarly opinion is sharply divided over the identity of the speaker, since the reference to God as θεός ἡμῶν within the context of a call to worship seems to exclude God as the speaker. For this reason the voice from the throne has been attributed to the one of the

---

<sup>147</sup> κ identifies the voice explicitly as God’s, but it omits the reference to the throne, replacing ναοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ θρόνου by ναοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ. The same omission is attested also in 051 in which this phrase is substituted by ἀπὸ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ. In spite of these witnesses there is no compelling reason for questioning the validity of the throne reference in the text. In 2027 pc the throne is qualified as θρόνου θεοῦ; however this reading is not supported by further manuscripts, therefore it is unlikely.

<sup>148</sup> The exclamation γέγονεν appears twice in Revelation—both references are connected to the divine throne. In 16:17 it expresses the completion of the divine plan concerning the judgment of evil forces, whereas in 21:6 it points to the new creation as the climactic completion of the divine plan of redemption.

<sup>149</sup> See, e.g., Beckwith, *Apocalypse*, 679; Beale, *Revelation*, 812; Pierre Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John* (trans. Wendy Pradels; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 465.

<sup>150</sup> In 046 Primasius θρόνου is substituted to οὐρανοῦ. These witnesses, however, do not provide a compelling reason for omitting the throne reference from 19:5.

GALLUSZ: THRONES IN REVELATION

four cherubim or the twenty-four elders,<sup>151</sup> while Christ<sup>152</sup> or an angel of the throne<sup>153</sup> have been also viewed as the speakers. Even the fading of several voices into a single voice has been suggested.<sup>154</sup> In the absence of a convincing argument there is no satisfactory answer to this question. As Aune notes, it seems the safest to conclude only that “the phrase “from the throne” at the very least indicates the divine authorization of the speaker.”<sup>155</sup> Thus, the voice functions as “God’s authorized spokesman” in spite of the ambiguous identity.<sup>156</sup>

The last reference in Revelation to the unidentified voice occurs in 21:3 within an introductory statement preceding the announcement which is considered programmatic for the New Jerusalem vision. The statement specifies that the announcement is given in a great voice from the throne (φωνή μεγάλη ἐκ τοῦ θρόνου).<sup>157</sup> Though the identity of the speaker is unclear, it seems that the voice cannot be God’s, since he is referred to in the third person within the announcement (21:3-4).<sup>158</sup> Nevertheless, Beale ascribes the voice directly to God, explaining that the announcement might be seen as expressing God’s “own reflections on Old Testament prophecy as he sees it being fulfilled.”<sup>159</sup> The weakness of this suggestion lies in the lack of conformity to the pattern

---

<sup>151</sup> Beckwith, *Apocalypse*, 721; Charles, *Revelation*, II, 124; Kiddle, *Revelation*, 378.

<sup>152</sup> Wilhelm Bousset, *Die Offenbarung Johannis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 5th ed, 1906), 427; David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Forth Worth, TX: Dominion, 1987), 472-73.

<sup>153</sup> Kraft, *Offenbarung*, 243.

<sup>154</sup> Boring, “Voice,” 352.

<sup>155</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1027.

<sup>156</sup> Priegent, *Apocalypse*, 522. Though Priegent is right in this observation, he supports Marc Philonenko’s (“Une voix sortit du Trône qui disait . . .,” *RHPR* 79 [1999], 83-89) hypothesis, who quotes several texts of the *hekhalot* literature arguing that the voice in 19:5 is that of the throne of God itself. Since this idea is based on later sources and is completely alien to biblical literature, it is highly speculative.

<sup>157</sup> The variant οὐρανοῦ replaces θρόνου in 025 046 051 Oecumenius<sup>2053</sup> Andreas Byzantine it<sup>sig</sup> syr<sup>ph</sup> Tyc<sup>2</sup> Beatus. Aune (*Revelation 17-22*, 1110) persuasively argues that the context favors θρόνου, while οὐρανοῦ may be explained as a mechanical repetition of ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ in 21:2.

<sup>158</sup> The commentators most often hesitate to identify the speaker, though the following suggestions have been advanced: cherubim (Charles, *Revelation*, II, 205), the Lamb (Giblin, *Revelation*, 194) or God (Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation* [New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001], 556).

<sup>159</sup> Beale, *Revelation*, 1046.



of God's two clearly outlined speeches in which he is directly specified as the speaker, speaking in the first person (1:8; 21:5-8). There is no logical reason to suppose a change to this pattern on the basis of an anonymous voice speaking in the third person about God within a larger passage in which "the One sitting on the throne" is already clearly pictured as speaking (21:1-8). Still, this interpretation of the anonymous voice does not discount its divine authority, just as in 19:5.

#### 4. Conclusion

This article has focused on three aspects of God's throne in Revelation: its foundational treatment in Rev. 4, its use in the circumlocution formula "the One sitting on the throne" and its dynamics. On the basis of this study it can be concluded that God's throne as a leading sub-motif within the throne motif of Revelation permeates the entire book and as such it conveys a message not only about the structure of the universe, but also about the function of God within it and the dynamics of human history.

The study of Rev. 4 led us to the conclusion that God's throne is portrayed immediately at the beginning of the visionary part of the book as the *axis mundi* of the universe. Actually, the throne is the very first thing John glimpses in heaven. However, in comparison to the very detailed description of its surrounding, neither the throne nor its occupant is described. I have argued that the reason for this feature lies on the one hand in the protection of the unknowable transcendence of God, and on the other in stressing the throne's centrality as implied by the linguistic style of the description. While it has been suggested in scholarly circles that the cherubim constitute part of the heavenly throne, I offered an argument against this interpretation and suggested that the cherubim should be viewed as representatives of the whole created order. In this sense, their extreme closeness to the throne indicates symbolically the need for a throne-centered orientation of creation. It has been demonstrated that the foundational picture of reality is focused on the divine throne and everything in the creation finds its significance only in its orientation towards the center of the universe, the throne which stands for the One occupying it.

One of the most significant representations of God's throne is found in the repeated characterization of God as "the One sitting on the throne." I have argued that this description is primarily rooted in the Old

*GALLUSZ: THRONES IN REVELATION*

Testament throne visions and it appears in Revelation in five contexts: in heavenly temple scenes, in the “day of wrath” description, in the cosmic conflict setting, in the millennial judgment scene and in the final vision of the new creation. It has been demonstrated that the formula is employed with a clear theological purpose, since the reluctance of naming God directly accentuates his mysterious transcendence, the impossibility of expressing his awesomeness. At the same time it implies his absolute control over the developments in the course of history.

While “the One sitting on the throne” formula presents an immobile and stable image of God, I have demonstrated that the divine throne appears as an object from which phenomena are issued, statements are pronounced and judgment is passed. The examination of the throne’s dynamics revealed God’s active involvement, which is clearly indicated by the theophanic formula featured at strategic locations in the book (4:5; 8:5; 11:19; 16:18-21). Significant attention has been given to God’s two speeches in Revelation and it has been established that both are related to the throne and a theological relation exists between them that highlights the notion of God’s sovereignty. Namely, the fact that God speaks near the beginning and the end of the book indicates that the first and the final word in the human history and all in-between are his—all things are supervised by the providence of “the One sitting on the throne.”

**Laszlo Gallusz** is a New Testament Lecturer at the Belgrade Theological Seminary, Serbia. He completed doctoral studies in 2011 at Karoli Gaspar University of the Reformed Church in Budapest, Hungary. His primary research interests are New Testament exegesis and theology, the Book of Revelation and the apocalyptic literature. He has published two books and numerous articles in English, Hungarian, and Serbian languages. laszlogallusz@gmail.com