SJT 67(1): 33–49 (2014)
doi:10.1017/S0036930613000318

Lex orandi, lex credendi: worship and doctrine in Revelation 4–5[1]

Fergus King
University of Newcastle, University Drive, Callaghan NSW 2308, Australia
fergus.king@newcastle.edu.au

Abstract

A number of New Testament scholars, including John O'Neill and Larry Hurtado, have drawn attention to the prospects which worship texts in the writings of the New Testament offer in revealing the way in which the first Christians thought of Jesus. Whilst the impossibility of separating the Jesus of history from the Christ of faith has contributed to this development and has also been a central impulse in the so-called Third Quest, the ancient principle of *lex orandi, lex credendi*, coined by Prosper of Aquitaine, gives a further theological foundation for such explorations. However, its later distortion, particularly in the aftermath of the Reformation, has privileged doctrine (*credendi*) over experience (*orandi*), and diminished the reciprocity between the two demanded by the classical formulation.

Revelation 4–5 are explored as two texts which are rooted in experience, both of Christian liturgy and the *merkavah* traditions which drew on the heavenly visions of prophets like Ezekiel and Isaiah. Viewed from this perspective, the visions make claims about the divinity of the Lamb and the propriety of its worship on the basis of religious experience, embodied in authoritative claims for both 'altered states of consciousness' and literary tropes. They give pictorial descriptions and visions which should stand as authoritative theological claims in their own right.

However, modern New Testament scholarship, following post-Reformation patterns, attempts to explain these visions in more technical and abstract theological terms such as binitarian or trinitarian. This, it is suggested, is undesirable because of the danger of importing anachronisms, with their attendant theological bag and baggage, of making overly bold claims for our knowledge of the individuals, communities and/or circumstances which produced these texts (given both the oscillation of New Testament writers between binitarian and trinitarian tendencies, and a degree of confusion caused by the role of the Spirit in related discourse), and of shifting the locus of meaning from the texts

[1] An abridged version of this article was presented at 'Bounden to Say: The *Book of Common Prayer* Then and Now', the 3rd St Paul's College Symposium, University of Sydney, 30 Nov. 2011.

themselves to secondary explications (a phenomenon which appears peculiarly attractive to modern scholarship).

Drawing on Wittgenstein's reflections on the study and analysis of religious experience, it is suggested that it may be wiser to leave the texts to stand in their own right, rather than to be interpreted via theological categories which may ultimately say more about the concerns of modern scholars than the producers of the texts.

Keywords: altered states of consciousness, hermeneutics, *lex orandi*, *merkavah*, Revelation, Wittgenstein.

In his 1995 volume, *Who did Jesus Think he Was?* John O'Neill launched a scything attack on the premises which he thought distorted modern biblical studies.[2] New Testament scholarship, he suggested, had swallowed hook, line and sinker the readings of the New Testament developed by Lelio and Fausto Sozzini. Both held to the Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura*, and both argued that the Bible itself gave no basis for belief in the Trinity and the incarnation as classically understood within the traditional creeds of Christian orthodoxy.

It was O'Neill's own contention that the seeds of both trinitarian and incarnational belief were present in Judaism of the Second Temple period, from which Christian faith emerged: he at no point claimed that the formulations of Chalcedon or Nicaea were to be found in the New Testament.[3] It is a thesis, like many proposed by O'Neill, which the New Testament guild has noted, lauded for its idiosyncrasy and scholarship, then politely ignored. That said, more recent work is increasingly and fruitfully exploring the resonances between Judaism and emerging Christianity treated with scepticism by O'Neill's critics.[4]

Some have suggested that classical historical criticism may have overlooked worship material in its analysis of the New Testament data:[5] precisely the material from which O'Neill launched his programme.[6] Such reluctance may

[2] John C. O'Neill, *Who did Jesus Think he Was?* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), p. 1.

[3] Gordon D. Fee, *To What End Exegesis? Essays Textual, Exegetical and Theological* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), p. 330, has argued that 'trinitarian' may be used validly: 'Fully developed doctrine, no, experienced reality, yes'.

[4] E.g. Daniel Boyarin, *The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ* (New York: New Press, 2012) provides a popular level, if somewhat selective, overview of such developments, also Aquila H. I. Lee, *From Messiah to Pre-existent Son* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009).

[5] E.g. John Paul Heil, *The Letters of Paul as Rituals of Worship* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011), p. 3.

[6] O'Neill, *Who?*, p. 2.

stem from personal or confessional prejudices, or the location of modern criticism in the academy rather than the cloisters. It is possible that the guild has been dominated by an understanding of theology in which doctrine comes first, then liturgy and service, or that the 'objectivity' of higher criticism saw worship as overly subjective. It may also be influenced by the 'quest for the Historical Jesus' which demanded a separation of the 'Jesus of history' from the 'Christ of faith', and would immediately have treated passages which smacked of worship as suspect: overtly connected to 'faith'.[7]

Such views can no longer be upheld. Maintaining a divide between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith cannot be sustained.[8] It demands the possibility of 'pure history', and is fraught with complications.[9] A recent major (flawed) attempt to do this was the Jesus Seminar.[10] Alternative strategies have increasingly explored the way in which traditions were transmitted in the ancient world, and their reliability.[11] Among them is Dale Allison's *Constructing Jesus*, born of his frustrations with the old paradigms,[12] which comments:

> Our primary sources are not bereft of some substantial and substantially reliable broad impressions. For if those sources do not in large measure rightly typify Jesus' actions, give us some sense of his situation, accurately

[7] Larry W, Hurtado, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism* (London: SCM, 1988), pp. 10–11.

[8] Sandra M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), pp. 97–111.

[9] Edward H. Carr, *What is History?* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), 2nd edn; Keith Winschuttle, 'The Real Stuff of History', in Hilton Kramer and Roger Kimball (eds), *The Future of the European Past* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1997), pp. 127–52.

[10] E.g. Robert W. Funk, Roy W. Hoover and the Jesus Seminar, *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* (New York: Macmillan, 1993). For a sympathetic view of the Seminar, see Marcus J. Borg, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity, 1994), pp. 160–81. For criticism, see Darrell L. Bock, *Studying the Historical Jesus: A Guide to Sources and Methods* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002), pp. 146–7, 183, 200; Charles Leland Quarles, 'The Authenticity of the Parable of the Warring King: A Response to the Jesus Seminar', in Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans (eds), *Authenticating the Words of Jesus* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), pp. 409–29; Ben E. Witherington III, *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 2nd edn, pp. 42–57. For a lament over the quality of scholarship in the controversies raised by the Seminar, see Maurice Casey, *Jesus of Nazareth: An Independent Historian's Account of his Life and Teaching* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), pp. 20–5.

[11] Thus Birger Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript with Tradition and Transmission in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998) and scholars like Samuel Byrskog, Rainer Reisner and the Uppsala school.

[12] Dale Allison, *Constructing Jesus: Memory, Imagination and History* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2010), pp. 16–17, esp. n. 75.

> exhibit some habitual themes of his speech, capture the sort of character he was, and so on, then what hope is there?[13]

From perspectives such as this rather than the unwarranted scepticism so characteristic of much modern criticism,[14] in which a hermeneutics of suspicion may subtly morph into a hermeneutics of paranoia,[15] the relationship of worship and doctrine needs to be re-evaluated. 'Worship' texts cannot be automatically dismissed as secondary or corrupt.

Further, any view which divorces worship from 'real' theology, even on the grounds of some claimed objectivity, cannot be meekly accepted: it begs a number of questions about whether such objectivity is practical, desirable or even possible. Iain McGilchrist has recently reminded us that pragmatic philosophers,[16] those who see embodiment as a crucial location for philosophy,[17] philosophers of hermeneutics[18] and even neurological researchers all raise serious questions about the possibility of a purely objective 'view from nowhere'.[19] Views are always shaped by the attention which the observer gives to them:

> A mountain that is a landmark to a navigator, a source of wealth to the prospector, a many-textured form to a painter, or to another a dwelling place of the gods, is changed by the attention given to it. There is no 'real' mountain which can be distinguished from these, no one way of thinking which reveals the true mountain.[20]

[13] Allison, *Constructing Jesus*, p. 17.

[14] Eric L. Mascall, *Theology and the Gospel of Christ: An Essay in Reorientation* (London: SCM, 1984), 2nd edn, pp. 70–6; Wolfgang Schadewaldt, 'The Reliability of the Synoptic Tradition', in Martin Hengel (ed.), *Studies in the Gospel of Mark*, trans. J. Bowden (London: SCM, 1985), pp. 89–113; Eckhard Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission: Jesus and the Twelve* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2004), pp. 20–35.

[15] Robin Scroggs, *The Text and the Times: New Testament Essays for Today* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), pp. 217–18.

[16] John Dewey, *The Essential Dewey*, vol. 1, *Pragmatism, Education, Democracy*, ed. Larry A. Hickman and Thomas M. Alexander (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998), p. 206; William James, *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (New York: Cosimo, 2007), p. 17; Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and his Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Modern World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), pp. 141–3.

[17] George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic, 1999), p. 6; McGilchrist, *Master*, p. 149.

[18] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. J. Weisheimer and D. G. Marshall (London: Sheed & Ward, 1989), pp. 302–7; Anthony Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), pp. 16, 53–73.

[19] Nagel, cited in McGilchrist, *Master*, p. 28.

[20] McGilchrist, *Master*, p. 28.

Even the detached, scientific viewpoint is just one among many. McGilchrist also asks whether 'technical excellence' or 'knowing about' (German *wissen*, French *savoir*, Latin *sapere*) and the theological models identified with the Berlin school[21] are actually inferior to more relational forms of 'knowing' (German *kennen*, French *connaître*, Latin *cognoscere*) which explore 'knowing rather as a process or a quest rather than objective'[22] and reveal that:

> Attention . . . intrinsically is a way in which, not a thing: it is intrinsically a relationship, not a brute fact. It is a 'howness', a something between, an aspect of consciousness itself, not a 'whatness' a thing in itself, an object of consciousness.[23]

This is the case for the emerging Christian communities of the first century:[24] theirs was a 'view from worship', not 'from nowhere'. This is true also of Revelation 4–5 which will provide the focus for this study. Their mediation of teaching through worship is fundamental to an ancient principle: *lex orandi, lex credendi*.

Lex orandi, lex credendi

The ancient principle of *lex orandi statuat legem credendi* ('the law of prayer constitutes the law of belief'),[25] popularly abbreviated to *lex orandi lex credendi* (hereafter LO and LC), was coined by Prosper of Aquitaine in 435.[26] In it, both prayer and doctrine have a role to play in theological formulations.

Some have interpreted this principle to mean the primacy of prayer over doctrine.[27] This interpretation is criticised for 'perpetuating a view of the liturgy that is fixed, authoritarian and hierarchical'.[28]

An alternative explanation comes from Geoffrey Wainwright who sees the LO and LC in a dialogue.[29] Doctrine may correct liturgical practice:

[21] David H. Kelsey, *Between Athens and Berlin: The Theological Education Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), pp. 12–19.
[22] McGilchrist, *Master*, p. 96.
[23] Ibid., p. 29.
[24] Heil, *Rituals of Worship*, pp. 2–3.
[25] E. Byron Anderson, *Worship and Christian Identity: Practicing Ourselves* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), p. 25.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Aidan Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology* (New York: Pueblo, 1984), pp. 91, 92, 134; Anderson, *Worship*, p. 26.
[28] Martha L. Moore-Keish, *Do This in Remembrance of Me: A Ritual Approach to Reformed Eucharistic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008).
[29] Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine and Life: A Systematic Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 218–83.

the two are 'mutually formative'.[30] Although liturgy is seen as primary (*theologia prima*) and doctrine as secondary (*theologia secunda*), the danger is that non-verbal liturgical experience becomes subordinate to doctrine, because it needs linguistic expression. In such circumstances, as often occurred in the Reformation, doctrine 'corrects' worship and, therefore, dominates.[31]

The Elizabethan Settlement (1559), which established the worship of the Church of England, may further exemplify this. Kavanagh has suggested that the Elizabethan Settlement divorced the principle from its ancient form: the LO became a means of control imposed by a central authority.[32] Such a shift brought fragmentation and eventually a dislocation between doctrine, prayer and ethics.[33] Whether the strategy ever worked even in the short term is moot, given the ornaments proviso which followed about church furniture and liturgical dress[34] and the later rubrics in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer, drawn from the 1637 Scottish Prayer Book, about the reverent disposal of the consecrated elements – not without doctrinal significance.[35]

The long-term effects were even more drastic. By the 1920s, the Anglo-Catholic movement had won permission for rites and vestments proscribed in the Anglican Reformation.[36] Anglican Reformers were not the only ones to be ambushed by mundane reality. John Calvin's reordering of the church at Geneva, with its elaborate pulpit and trestle table in place of a fixed altar, resulted in the ministry of the Word taking precedence over the regular

[30] Moore-Keish, *Do This*, p. 68. See further Paul V. Marshall, 'Reconsidering Liturgical Theology: Is there a *Lex Orandi* for All Christians?', *Studia Liturgica* 25 (1995), pp. 129–51.

[31] Moore-Keish, *Do This*, pp. 19–22.

[32] Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, pp. 81, 105–6.

[33] Bernd Wannenwetsch, *Political Worship: Ethics for Christian Citizens*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 82–3.

[34] Winthrop S. Hudson, *The Cambridge Connection and the Elizabethan Settlement of 1559* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1980), pp. 124–30; Gary Jenkins, 'Peter Martyr and the Church of England after 1558', in Frank A. James (ed.), *Peter Martyr Vermigli and the European Reformations* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), pp. 47–69, esp. pp. 50–5; Torrance Kirby, '"Relics of the Amorites" or "Things Indifferent": Peter Martyr Vermigli's Authority and the Threat of Schism in the Elizabethan Vestiarian Controversy', *Reformation and Renaissance Review* 6/3 (2004), pp. 313–26.

[35] David N. Griffiths, *The Bibliography of the Book of Common Prayer 1549–1999* (London: British Library, 2002), p. 102. For more details on the Scottish Prayer Book of 1637, and the 1549 version, see Charles Hefling 'Scotland: Episcopalians and Non-Jurors', in Charles Hefling and Cynthia Shattuck (eds), *The Oxford Guide to the Book of Common Prayer: A Worldwide Survey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 166–76, esp. pp. 166–8.

[36] Mark D. Chapman, 'Christ and the Gethsemane of Mind: Frank Weston Then and Now', *Anglican Theological Review* 85/2 (2003), pp. 281–307, esp. pp. 283–4.

celebration of communion which he had intended.[37] In all these cases, practice and practicality undermined doctrinal hopes.

Prioritising either element (LO or LC) is ultimately a betrayal of the principle in its original form. What was demanded by Prosper was a *modus operandi*, which rather saw the LO and LC as 'mutually causative'.[38] Not only that: both need to be connected to what is variously called the *lex vivendi*,[39] agendi[40] or *bene operandi*,[41] that is, ethics.[42] This arises because liturgy should be expressive of the ideals of the community. Consider 1 Cor 11:23–34. *In nuce*, the Lord's Supper should have expressed the non-hierarchical nature of the new Christian family: the practice of the Corinthians served rather to reinforce existing Graeco-Roman preoccupations with status and honour. Paul was less than amused.[43] Thus, the Pauline experience demands links between liturgy, doctrine and ethics. Anderson gives the following succinct summary:

> In such a mutually causative relationship, we begin to discover ways in which liturgical practice does have normative and constitutive consequences in the life of the church. We also discover the ways in which our life together reshapes liturgical practice. If we cannot claim that this particular practice produces that particular belief, we can at least argue for and hope that 'engagement in the church's practices puts us in a position where we may recognize and participate in the work of God's grace in the world'.[44]

[37] John G. Davies, 'The Influence of Architecture on Liturgical Change', *Studia Liturgica* 9 (1973), pp. 230–40, esp. pp. 232–3.

[38] For the interdependence of worship and doctrine in the apostolic and patristic periods, see Paul L. Gavrilyuk, 'Canonical Liturgies: The Dialectic of *Lex Orandi* and *Lex Credendi*', in William J. Abraham, Jason E. Vickers and Natalie B. Van Kirk (eds), *Canonical Theism: A Proposal for Theology and the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), pp. 61–72.

[39] Anderson, *Worship*, p. 27. *Vivendi* is used by Keith Irwin, *Context and Text: Method in Liturgical Theology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1994), pp. 56–7.

[40] Klara Tammany, *Living Water: Baptism as a Way of Life* (New York: Church Publishing, 2003), p. xvi.

[41] Paul Ramsey, 'Liturgy and Ethics', *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 7/2 (1979), pp. 139–71; Wannenwetsch, *Political Worship*, p. 80.

[42] Anderson, *Worship*, p. 27. Don Saliers, 'Liturgy and Ethics: Some New Beginnings', *Journal of Religious Ethics* 7/2 (1979), pp. 173–89.

[43] Fergus J. King, 'There's More to Meals than Food: A Contextual Interpretation of Paul's Understanding of the Corinthian Lord's Supper', in Stephen Burns and Anita Monro (eds), *Christian Worship In Australia* (Strathfield: St Paul's, 2009), pp. 167–79.

[44] Anderson, *Worship*, p. 29.

All of which is a long way of justifying the exploration of worship as part of the theological task, even within academic theology, and that conclusions drawn from its depictions are a valid part of a theological matrix, and not just of anthropological or sociological interest. From this viewpoint we now turn to Revelation 4–5.

Liturgy and *merkavah* in Revelation 4–5

Revelation may be dated to the second half of the first century CE. Whilst many think it was written during the persecutions of Domitian, and thus date it to approximately 96, a strong case can be made for a date *c*.68.[45] This was preferred by the Victorian scholars who ironically developed the catena of texts used subsequently to support the later dating. The earlier 68 CE date may be preferred as based on fresh memory of the persecutions of Christians *in the city* at Rome (Rev 14:20), the belief in *Nero redivivus*,[46] the lack of references to the Destruction of the Temple,[47] difficulties with the Domitianic persecution,[48] and the better earlier date for the Seven Letters (Rev 2–3).[49]

It is also a text which has liturgical concerns. A number of scholars argue that the book is designed, at least in part, for a liturgical setting.[50] It also contains scenes of worship, of which Revelation 4–5 provide classic examples.

These depictions of heavenly worship relate to actual practice.[51] Such heavenly scenes function as idealised depictions of the community which

[45] Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), pp. 403–13.

[46] Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), pp. 407–23; John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (New York: Crossroads, 1998), 2nd edn, pp. 235–6.

[47] John A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1976), pp. 239–40.

[48] J. C. Wilson, 'The Problem of the Domitianic Date of Revelation', *New Testament Studies* 39 (1993), pp. 606–24. See Robinson, *Redating*, pp. 220–6, 232–3.

[49] C. H. H. Scobie, 'Local Reference in the Letters to the Seven Churches', *New Testament Studies* 39 (1993), pp. 587–605.

[50] David Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Bible Commentary, 52a (Dallas, TX: Word, 1997), pp. 28–9; *Revelation 17–22* in Word Bible Commentary 52c (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1998), pp. 1206–8.

[51] Bogdan G. Bucur, *Angelomorphic Pneumatology: Clement of Alexandria and Other Early Christian Witnesses* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), pp. 108–9; Lucetta Mowry, 'Rev 4–5 and Early Christian Liturgical Usage', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 71/2 (1952), pp. 75–84.

produces the text,[52] even in materialist Epicureanism.[53] Larry Hurtado and Charles Gieschen conclude that such idealised expressions are shaped by earthly experience.[54] Indeed, the hymns which feature prominently in these chapters appear consonant with the practice of the time,[55] and may come from the earliest strata of emerging Christianity.[56]

These expressions show evidence of roots not just within Christian practice,[57] but also affinities to Jewish *merkavah*[58] which originate in visions seen in biblical literature:[59] the concepts of the chariot of the cherubim, the heavenly sanctuary, Sabbath Sacrifice and Songs.[60] Such materials overlap with the apocalypses[61] of the Second Temple period:[62] this identification

[52] Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1994), pp. 5–6.

[53] Michael J. Edwards, 'Treading the Aether: Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura* 1.62–79', *Classical Quarterly* 40/2 (1990), pp. 465–9.

[54] Charles A. Gieschen, 'Baptismal Praxis and Mystical Experience in the Book of Revelation', in April D. DeConick (ed.), *Paradise Now: Essays on Early Jewish and Christian Mysticism* (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2006), pp. 341–54, at p. 353; Larry Hurtado, *At the Origins of Christian Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), p. 90. Also, Hurtado, *One God*, p. 103.

[55] Hurtado, *One God*, p. 101.

[56] Hurtado, *One God*, p. 102; Hurtado, *At the Origins*, pp. 63–97; Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), pp.135–7.

[57] Philip S. Alexander, 'Qumran and the Genealogy of Western Mysticism' in Esther G. Chazon, Betsy Halper-Amaru and Ruth A. Clements (eds), *New Perspectives on Old Texts: Proceedings of the Tenth International Symposium of the Orion Center for the Study of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Associated Literature, 9–11 January*, 2005 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), pp. 215–35 at p. 232.

[58] Ithamar Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1979), p. 62; Martha Himmelfarb, 'Merkavah Mysticism since Scholem: Rachel Elior's *The Three Temples*', in Peter Schäfer and Elisabeth Müller-Luckner (eds), *Wege mystischer Gotteserfahrung: Judentum, Christentum und Islam* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2006), pp. 19–36, at p. 30; Pierre Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St John*, trans. Wendy Pradels (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), pp. 29–32.

[59] Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford: OUP, 2005), pp. 67–71.

[60] Rachel Elior, 'The Foundations of Early Jewish Mysticism: The Lost Calendar and the Transformed Heavenly Chariot', in Schäfer and Müller-Luckner, *Wege mystischer Gotteserfahrung*, pp. 1–18 at pp. 2–4.

[61] Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, pp. 2–12. For *merkavah* and the genre of the apocalypse, see David E. Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic in Early Christianity*, WUNT 199 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), p. 57, esp. the bibliography in n. 56; Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic*, pp. 29–72.

[62] For detailed studies of the *merkavah*, in the Second Temple period and beyond, see April D. DeConick (ed.), *Paradise Now*, and David J. Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot: Early Responses to Ezekiel's Vision* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1988).

need not imply exact correspondence with the fully blown *merkavah* mysticism of later ages.[63] These traditions attempt to overcome the distance which exile and displacement appeared to place between God and his people, and reveal God's willingness to be known.[64] They also share a ritual dimension[65] which is seen most clearly in the incorporation of the Isaian hymn (Rev 4:8; Isa 6:3).[66]

In Revelation 4, a number of details resonate with these traditions, specifically the *merkavah* of Ezekiel 1:[67] the open door and heavenly ascent (4:1–2), the throne (4:2), the elders (4:4), the torches (4:5), the glass sea (4:6), the hymnic chanting of living creatures (4:8),[68] and (perhaps) their eyes (4:8) as equivalents of the wheels of Ezekiel 1:18.[69] The vision 'guides the history of the world',[70] depicting God as ruler and creator.[71] *Merkavah* not only gives material, it also gives authority. Whilst there is much debate about

[63] Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, pp. 278–9.

[64] Martha Himmelfarb, 'Revelation and Rapture: The Transformation of the Visionary in Ascent Apocalpyses', in John J. Collins and James H. Charlesworth (eds), *Mysteries and Revelations: Apocalyptic Studies since the Uppsala Colloquium* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), pp. 79–90, at pp. 88–90.

[65] Mortimer Ostow, 'The Psychodynamics of Merkavah Mysticism', in Mortimer Ostow (ed.), *Ultimate Intimacy: The Psychodynamics of Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Karnac, 1995), pp. 152–80, esp. p. 155, Seth L. Sanders, 'Performative Exegesis', in DeConick, *Paradise Now*, pp. 57–79, and Peter Schäfer, 'Communion with the Angels: Qumran and the Origins of Jewish Mysticism', in Schäfer and Müller-Luckner, *Wege mystischer Gotteserfahrung*, pp. 37–66, notes the liturgical and communitarian dimensions of the Qumran materials. April DeConick, 'Jesus Revealed: The Dynamics of Early Christian Mysticism', in Daphna V. Arbel and Andrei A. Orlov (eds), *With Letters of Light: Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls, Early Jewish Apocalypticism, Magic and Mysticism in Honor of Rachel Elior* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), pp. 301–24, explores the breadth of early Christian experience, and its liturgical and sacramental implications (pp. 316–24).

[66] Prigent, *Commentary*, pp. 233–4. This also shows the 'eclectic qualities' of the Johannine vision; Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic*, p. 69.

[67] Prigent, *Commentary*, pp. 223, 225–7, 229–34; Christopher Rowland, *The Mystery of God: Early Jewish Mysticism and the New Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), pp. 65, 72–6.

[68] Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic*, pp. 62–9; Halperin, *Faces*, pp. 87–96.

[69] Cameron C. Afzal, 'Wheels of Time in the Apocalypse of Jesus Christ', in DeConick, *Paradise Now*, pp. 195–209, at p. 208; Prigent, *Commentary*, p. 232. Rowland, *Mystery*, p. 73, sees no such reference.

[70] Afzal, 'Wheels', p. 200. Note that this identification with *merkavah* does not exclude elements of political parody of Rome also being present, see also M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation in Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1989), p. 103.

[71] Afzal, 'Wheels', p. 200. Other interpretations are possible, but may be disputed on methodological grounds: Ostow, 'Psychodynamics', p. 174, considers the *merkavah* represent 'the universal unconscious fantasies of mankind'. See David J. Halperin, 'Methodological Reflections on Psychoanalysis and Judaic Studies: A Response to

whether the depiction is based on revelatory experience or is primarily a literary trope, the fact is that both criteria grant authority, and they are not mutually exclusive.[72] John is portrayed as a writer who has seen the creator: the one who controls the world.[73] In so doing, the *merkavah* tradition is at odds with modern perceptions which would not readily grant authority or privilege to the product of an 'altered state of consciousness', whether real or fictional: modernity treats such phenomena with suspicion, not privilege.[74] Such unease may explain the urge to develop doctrinal expressions rather than let such experiences stand alone. To this we shall return.

The themes of Revelation 4 continue in Revelation 5,[75] but include the Lamb. Liturgical features are seen in the bowls (5:7) and the hymn (5:9).[76] Revelation 4:9–11 is paralleled by 5:8–12: doxology and the hymnic form are reserved exclusively for God in Jewish tradition.[77] The description of the throne which runs throughout the book (Rev 3:21; 5:1, 6–7; 7:9; 14:3; 19:4; 21:3)[78] starts with the *bisellium*, the two-seated throne commonly used

Mortimer Ostow', in Ostow, *Ultimate Intimacy*, pp. 183–99, for the relative merits of psychodynamic, historical and philological approaches.

[72] Michael E. Stone, *Ancient Judaism: New Visions and Views* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), pp. 90–121; Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, pp. 39–40; Rowland, *Mystery*, pp. 84–9. John J. Collins, 'Pseudonymity, Historical Reviews and the Genre of Revelation of John', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 39 (1977), pp. 329–43, at p. 332, suggests that Revelation's departure from pseudonymity is of little consequence. For cultural and neurological foundations for heavenly journeys, see Alan F. Segal, 'Religious Experience and the Construction of the Transcendent Self', in DeConick, *Paradise Now*, pp. 27–40. For the view that apocalypses may be literary constructs, see Himmelfarb, 'Revelation and Rapture', pp. 87–8. For a particular focus on religious experience shaping Revelation, see Christopher Rowland with Patricia Gibbons and Vicente Dobroruka, 'Visionary Experience in Ancient Judaism and Christianity', in DeConick, *Paradise Now*, pp. 41–56.

[73] Afzal, 'Wheels', p. 209.

[74] This exemplifies the earlier discussion on the role of worship texts in historical criticism. For material on altered states of consciousness, see Bruce J. Malina and John J. Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), pp. 41–4; John J. Pilch, 'Altered States of Consciousness in the Synoptics', in Wolfgang Stegemann, Bruce J. Malina and Gerd Theissen (eds), *The Social Setting of Jesus and the Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), pp. 103–15, at p. 105; Charles Tart, 'A Systems Approach to Altered States of Consciousness', in Julian M. Davidson and Richard J. Davidson (eds), *The Psychobiology of Consciousness* (New York: Plenum, 1980), pp. 243–69, at p. 245.

[75] Alexander, 'Qumran', p. 232; Prigent, *Commentary*, p. 239.

[76] Prigent, *Commentary*, pp. 253–6.

[77] Bauckham, *Climax*, pp. 137–8.

[78] Rowland, *Mystery*, p. 92.

of deities in the ancient world: it presumes equal status[79] for those who share it.[80] Significantly, this happens in a text in which 'right-minded' heavenly creatures take great care to ensure that they are not wrongfully worshipped (Rev 19:10; 22:8–9): only imposters allow themselves to be wrongly worshipped.[81] The LO, exemplified here by early Christian experience, liturgical forms and *merkavah*, provides the imagery of the text: the Lamb shares the status of God,[82] a claim earthed in the honour/shame conventions of the time.[83]

This is a powerful statement, but I am wary of developing it further in doctrinal terms (LC). Such hesitation may need to be justified. It starts with the caution which many scholars demand in applying trinitarian terms to the New Testament,[84] and asking if similar rigour needs to be applied to the use of all related terminology.

Description and doctrine

Larry Hurtado has identified these scenes (Rev 4–5), and others in the New Testament, as 'binitarian':[85] a term used to describe theologies in which an identification in nature is made between the Father and Jesus, and from which the Spirit is often conspicuously absent.[86] There are several concerns.

First, the term implies a degree of systematisation inappropriate to the era: it is derived from trinitarianism, which is a terminology from a later period, adapted and applied retrospectively to earlier periods. Philologically, terms may not translate well from one time and place to another, even over short periods of time.[87] Caution needs to be exercised in even using

[79] Jerome H. Neyrey, *The Gospel of John in Cultural and Social Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), pp. 33–7.

[80] Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, p. 262.

[81] Bauckham, *Climax*, pp. 120–32; Fergus J. King, 'Travesty or Taboo: "Drinking Blood" and Revelation 17:2–6', *Neotestamentica* 38/2 (2004), pp. 303–25.

[82] Prigent, *Commentary*, p. 255.

[83] Jerome H. Neyrey, *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), pp. 1–32; Bruce J. Malina and Jerome H. Neyrey, 'Honor and Shame in the Ancient World: Pivotal Values of the Mediterranean World', in Jerome H. Neyrey (ed.), *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), pp. 27–65.

[84] Fee, *To What End?*, pp. 330–1, n. 3.

[85] Hurtado, *One God*, pp. 101–4.

[86] R. P. C. Hanson and A. T. Hanson, *Reasonable Belief: A Survey of the Christian Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 155.

[87] Camille Paglia, 'Junk Bonds and Corporate Raiders: Academe in the Hour of the Wolf', in Camille Paglia (ed.), *Sex, Art, and American Culture* (London: Viking, 1992), pp. 170–248, esp. p. 189.

terminology appropriate to a second-century phenomenon in a first-century context. After all, do we not routinely identify these as different periods within church history?

This is true also of the cultural matrices which shape such terms. The early date suggested for Revelation would put it well before any formal schism between Judaism and emerging Christianity. It suggests a strong Judaic flavour to what is going on. Jewish critics of Christianity, even in later periods, did not use the language of binitarianism, preferring to speak of 'two powers' in their descriptions of claims about the divinity of Jesus.[88] Binitarianism may read the text against the wrong context.

G. D. Kilpatrick has made an analogous point, stressing that the term 'sacrament' as commonly used cannot be simply retroverted back into the New Testament world: its dominant shape is post-Augustinian.[89] It is more historically and culturally appropriate to read the New Testament against descriptions of Jewish *sacramentalia* as:

> a special rite in which supernatural gifts are mediated through natural external means which are often prepared in a special way to have the power they lack in ordinary use.[90]

The substance of the terms is related, but they are not identical. In short: there are both philological and contextual difficulties in applying 'binitarianism' to New Testament documents.

There are also methodological considerations. Such terms gain primacy in the quest for meaning. Annabel Wharton's remarks about the Dura-Europos frescoes being interpreted through texts are pertinent:

> The inevitable result of promoting the text is the effacement of the image. In other words, by identifying the text – not the image – as the locus of meaning, signification is literally moved outside the visual representation.[91]

[88] Alan F. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), p. 2, prefers the rabbinic term 'two powers in heaven', to avoid leaning towards either ditheism or binitarianism. However, he admits this may import dualism instead.

[89] G. D. Kilpatrick, *The Eucharist in Bible and Liturgy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 57.

[90] Christoph Burchard, 'The Importance of Joseph and Aseneth for the Study of the New Testament: A General Survey and a Fresh Look at the Lord's Supper', *New Testament Studies* 33 (1987), pp. 102–34, at p. 117.

[91] Annabel J. Wharton, 'Good and Bad Images from the Synagogue of Dura Europos: Contexts, Subtexts, Intertexts', *Art History* 17 (1994), pp. 1–25, at p. 9.

and

> This priority of the text is again reasserted; meaning is restricted to the written word. This preoccupation with identifying *the* explanatory text seems to be a peculiarly scholarly form of controlling meaning.[92]

Here a similar phenomenon is taking place: words (interpretation) to explain liturgy (the worship of heaven), and a corresponding shift from the event to the interpretative language. If we return to the LO/LC dynamic, it effectively diminishes the significance of the 'picture' of worship (LO) and privileges the doctrinal interpretation (LC), like the anachronistic BCP and post-Reformation pattern.

The use of binitarianism to describe worship further implies that some doctrine lies behind the text. Here, Wittgenstein's *Remarks on Frazer's* Golden Bough are apposite. It dangerous to say that the practice of ritual comes from a theology: 'where that practice and these views go together, the practice does not spring from the view, but both of them are there'.[93] We cannot simply assume that there is a theology which underpins a practice. Sometimes the data are simply not available, as in discerning what the ancients understood as happening in the imperial Roman cults.[94]

Furthermore, to assume the existence of a theology may imply that an exclusive systematic formulation is in place. Not necessarily so. Consider Paul. Romans 15:16 and 1 Corinthians 8:6 show that he alternates between binitarianism and trinitarianism,[95] suggesting that there may be no single 'physics of things'[96] behind his writing. Herein lies the problem: we may construct a chain of cause and effect which demands a foundation in binitarian theology, perhaps even exclusively, when it need not.

A further difficulty comes when we ask what binitarianism is. Hurtado's usage is further compromised in his earlier work since he does not initially define it.[97] Such a lack of clarity is further complicated because 'binitarian' may also be used in a markedly different fashion, as when Martin Buber uses it to describe the divine and human aspects of God revealed in Jesus by the

[92] Ibid., p. 14.

[93] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on Frazer's* Golden Bough, ed. Rush Rhees (Retford: Brynmill, 1979), p. 2e.

[94] S. R. F. Price, 'Between Man and God: Sacrifice in the Imperial Roman Cult', *Journal of Roman Studies* 70 (1980), pp. 28–43.

[95] Michael J. Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), p. 71.

[96] Wittgenstein, *Remarks*, p. 7e.

[97] Hurtado, *One God*, p. 2, introduces a 'binitarian shape' with no further definition.

writer of the fourth gospel.[98] This is also true of 'fine tuning': Hurtado's later work seems to exclude key elements associated with both binitarianism and trinitarianism such as essence and person.[99] Interestingly, Hurtado sometimes places technical terms within quotation marks,[100] suggesting a degree of caution. But this asks whether we might not more accurately talk of proto-binitarian or proto-trinitarian tendencies rather than use the unqualified terms. Still more recently, Hurtado has divorced himself from terms like 'binitarian' or 'trinitarian', opting for alternatives like 'triadic'.[101]

As Wittgenstein further observed, attempts to fit phenomena into distinct categories may say more about observer than observed:

> I think one reason why the attempt to find an explanation is wrong is that we have only to put together in the right way what we *know*, without adding anything, and the satisfaction we are trying to get from the explanation comes from itself.[102]

The use of binitarianism seems to work this way. Part of our problem here may be Western and modern: left hemisphere abstraction and analysis predominate.[103] Yet there is no guarantee that other cultures, including the precursors of modernity, shared this preoccupation. Socio-historical studies remind us of the differences between the ancient world and our own.[104] This also lies at the heart of Wittgenstein's criticism of Frazer, who 'cannot imagine a priest who is not basically an English parson of our times with all his stupidity and feebleness'.[105] Biblical criticism knows similar concerns from both Schweitzer (even the 'German spirit' might make Jesus in its

[98] Martin Buber, *Two Types of Faith*, trans. P. M. A. Goldhawk (London: Routledge, Kegan & Paul, 1951), p. 128.

[99] Hurtado, *At the Origins*, p. 95. Binitarian is used to avoid the impression of ditheism (*Lord Jesus Christ*, p. 53); further, Larry W. Hurtado, *How on Earth did Jesus Become a God? Historical Questions about Earliest Devotion to Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), p. 48.

[100] Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, p. 50.

[101] Larry W. Hurtado, *God in New Testament Theology* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2010).

[102] Wittgenstein, *Remarks*, p. 2e.

[103] McGilchrist, *Master*, pp. 5–14.

[104] Thus Clinton Arnold's introductory comments in Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), p. vi.

[105] Wittgenstein, *Remarks*, p. 5e.

own image[106]) and Tyrrell (liberal critics confuse Jesus with their own reflections[107]).

Yet even Hurtado's own work raises questions about the term (binitarian) being fit for purpose. An elusive 'Spirit of God' is also involved:[108] the relationship of God, Jesus and Spirit remains fraught as in 'the witness of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy' (Rev 19:10)[109] and the language of the Seven Spirits (Rev 1:4).[110] Here, Bauckham's reading leads him to suggest Revelation is rather 'trinitarian'.[111] Hurtado-binitarian; Bauckham-trinitarian: If nothing else, this variety suggests the use of such terms is inconclusive.

This becomes more apparent if other writings are brought under examination.[112] John's Gospel identifies the Spirit as 'another Paraclete' (John 14:16–17): a further stream of identification, and/or potential conflation, with Jesus.[113] Like Paul's writings,[114] Revelation may embrace both the binitarian and Trinitarian.[115] Vagueness about the Spirit means that any talk about binitarianism may be inappropriate or premature: how can we describe a text, writer or community as binitarian if our knowledge about their view of the Spirit is uncertain? To be sure that binitarianism is an accurate term demands greater clarity about the Spirit than we possess.

Concluding remarks

When worship texts are given due place in investigations of emerging Christianity and the history of christology, caution is needed. Terms used should be fit for purpose and avoid importing anachronisms, false claims and

[106] Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, trans. W. Montgomery (London: SCM, 1981), 2nd edn, p. 311, see also Priscilla Pope-Levison and John Levison, *Jesus in Global Contexts* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), p. 14.

[107] George Tyrrell, *Christianity at the Crossroads* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1909), p. 49.

[108] Hurtado, *At the Origins*, p. 94. See also Gerald O'Collins, 'The Holy Trinity: The State of the Questions', in Stephen T. Davis , Daniel Kendall and Gerald O'Collins (eds), *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 1–25, esp. p. 7. For an overview of the Spirit in Revelation see Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 109–18.

[109] Bauckham, *Climax*, p. 134.

[110] Bucur, *Angelomorphic*, pp. 91–104.

[111] Bauckham, *Theology*, p. 111; Bucur, *Angelomorphic*, p. 92

[112] For an overview of Spirit in the New Testament, see James P. Mackey, *The Christian Experience of God as Trinity* (London: SCM, 1983), pp. 66–87.

[113] See further, Pamela E. Kinlaw, *The Christ is Jesus: Metamorphosis, Possession, and Johannine Christology* (Boston: Brill, 2005), pp. 152–61.

[114] Gorman, *Cruciformity*, p. 71.

[115] Bucur, *Angelomorphic*, p. 100.

impressions, or distortions. The importing of doctrinal terms may effectively mean that the phenomena of Christian experience (LO) are diminished, and doctrinal concerns (LC), to which we feel a greater affinity, privileged. The observer dominates, and the event disappears from sight.[116] At such junctures, layers of interpretation obscure or divert attention rather than reveal. As Tambiah says of Wittgenstein:

> Sometimes a description without adding anything is more meaningful than a forced search for an 'explanation' which concept belongs to a framework of 'hypotheses' deriving from 'theory', and their testing for error or truth as 'opinions'.[117]
>
> On occasion, less may actually be more.[118]

[116] I assume here a hermeneutics of 'inter-subjective agreement', see Karl-Otto Apel, *Towards a Transformation of Philosophy* (London: Routledge, Kegan & Paul, 1980), p. 111.

[117] Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah, *Magic, Science, Religion, and the Scope of Rationality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 57.

[118] Scroggs, *The Text*, pp. 219–33, further explores the interplay between dogmatic theology and New Testament theology.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0036930613000318 Published online by Cambridge University Press