

African Journal of Contextual Theology
Published by the Spiritan International School of Theology,
Attakwu – Enugu, Nigeria

African Journal of Contextual Theology
SIST, Attakwu – Enugu
P.O. Box 9696, Enugu, Nigeria
ajtsist2@gmail.com

Editor-in-Chief
Mark Enemali, CSSp
PhD, Notre Dame, Indiana, USA
enemalimark@gmail.com

Associate Editors
Rowland Onyenali, CMF
PhD, Germany
Email: rowlandnnam@yahoo.com

Philip Igbo, CMF
PhD
Email: philigbo@yahoo.com

Azenda Ikyegh, CSSp.
PhD, Dublin, Ireland
Email: azendaikyegh@yahoo.com

Ayodele Ayeni, CSSp.
PhD, Ottawa Canada
aayoayeni@yahoo.com

Editorial Consultants
Bona Ikenna Ugwu, CSSp
STD Gregorian University, Rome
Email: ikennau@yahoo.com or frbona@sistenugu.com

Prof. James Chukwuma Okoye, C.S.Sp
Duquesne University, Pittsburg
e-mail: okoyej@duq.edu

Eugene Uzukwu, C.S.Sp
Duquesne University, Pittsburg
e-mail: ecumenical_nigerian_theologians@hotmail.com,
ecunigeriantheologians@gmail.com

Paulinus Odozor, C.S.Sp
University of Notre Dame, Indiana
e-mail: odozor.1@nd.edu; podozor@nd.edu

Three

DIVINE VIOLENCE IN THE IMAGERY OF SLAIN LAMB IN REV 5:5-6

Regina Komban Francis, CMC, PhD

Abstract

With remarkable frequency, God is the subject of violent verbs, in the Old Testament. However, divine violence views to be related to human sin. Violent human actions lead to violent consequences and is named as divine judgment (Ezek 22:31). Divine violence also becomes the means by which God's people are delivered from violence (Ex 15:1-3), from other people's sins. It is also utilized in order to save God's people from the effects of their own sins (salvation to the exiles, Isa 45:1-8). The Synoptic Gospels have records of divine and human violence. Jesus challenges the authority of sacred violence represented by the Temple by violent acts (Mk 11). The violence of abuse of power of Jewish authorities produced institutional vigilantism and caused death of Jesus. The figure of the slaughtered Lamb in Rev 5:6 seems as a symbol of divine violence of salvation of the redeemed, in whom the elders recognized the Lion of Judah, the triumphant Christ. The divine violence which acted upon Christ, the Lamb, is inevitable for the redemption of a violent world which allowed the Lamb to be sacrificed in order to bring creation along to a point where violence has no existence.

Introduction

Christian Scriptures in some way allow or actively evoke violent readings. Though recent researches, particularly, the modern hermeneutical developments are increasingly verifying the candid and clandestine expressions of violence in the Bible,¹ many contemporary scholars confront the problem of violence by arguing that the ultimate purpose of God is to save the world rather than to condemn it by violent interventions.² The Old

¹ De Villiers Pieter, "The Violence of Nonviolence in the Revelation of John," *Open Theology* 1 (2015): 189-203. John J. Collins, "The Zeal of Phinehas: the Bible and the Legitimation of Violence," *JBL* 122/1 (2003) 3-21, opines that "the Bible has contributed to violence in the world precisely because it has been taken to confer a degree of certitude that transcends human discussion and argumentation." For helpful discussions on violence in the Christian tradition see: Kenneth R. Chase and Alan Jacobs, eds., *Must Christianity Be Violent?* Eugene: Wipf and Storch Publishers, 2003; John Dominic Crossan, *God and Empire: Jesus Against Rome, Then and Now*, San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2007; W. Summer Davis, *Heretics: The Bloody History of the Church*, La Verne, Lightning Source, 2002; G. G. Coulton, *Inquisition and Liberty*, Glouster, MA: Peter Smith, 1969; James A. Haught, *Holy Horrors: An Illustrated History of Religious Murder and Madness*, Buffalo, NY: Prometheus, 1990; Henry Charles Lea, *The Inquisition of the Middle Ages*, abridg. Margaret Nicholson, New York: Macmillan, 1961.

² Some of the modern scholars who confront the problem of violence in the Bible are: Harris, *Understanding Images of Violence in Revelation*, <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/aaad>. Accessed on 14th March 2020; Torence E. Fretheim, "God and Violence in the Old Testament," *Word and World* 24/1 (2004): 18-28; Geroge A. Boyd, *The Crucifixion of the Warrior God*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017; Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*, Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997; Eric A. Seibert, *The Violence of Scripture: Overcoming the Old Testament's Troubling Legacy*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012.

Testament provides a number of motifs, models and narratives that associate God with violence to varying degrees.³ The New Testament might usually be seen as less severe and yet it too provides numerous examples of violence, whether sanctioned, tolerated, promised, accommodated or perpetrated by God.⁴

Images of violence in Revelation must be understood in the larger context of both Testaments since the Book of Revelation appears as the culmination of an all-encompassing narrative of God's ultimate purposes. Rupture of the first revealed purpose of God in Genesis 1-2 had been reinstated in terms of reconciliation through Jesus Christ, as Paul rightly claims in Col 1:20 "God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross." The imagery of "the slaughtered Lamb" in Rev 5:6, who is both an atoning sacrificial victim and who has conquered and victorious is a symbol of reconciliation of humanity with God, as the symbol implies, the violent death of the Son of God on the cross. In this article we attempt to comprehend the canonical context of violence in the Book of Revelation as the final response of God to reconcile with humanity and to redeem it and not to condemn it with violent intrusions.⁵ In this paper I claim

³ E. g. Collins, "The Zeal of Phinehas," 3-21; Crossan, *God and Empire*; Haught, *Holy Horrors*; Charles Lea, *The Inquisition of the Middle Ages*.

⁴ Martyn John Smith, *Divine Violence and the Christus Victor Atonement Model*, <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/42489691.pdf> accessed on 02.05.2020.

⁵ Harris, *Understanding Images of Violence in Revelation*, <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/aaad>. outlines from Genesis to Revelation the purpose of creation, rejection of God's provision, consequences of human sin, Abrahamic promises, and its linkage with

that the imagery of the slain Lamb in Rev 5:5-6 is the key to a non-violent reading of the violent God in the Scripture.

Rationale of Divine Violence in the Old Testament

The Hebrew word for violence *hamas* (חָמָס) means to “treat or act violently,” and it is concerned with ethical, and physical wrong; extreme wickedness; and institutional injustice, etc.⁶ The term is used almost exclusively for human violence. However, with remarkable frequency, God is the subject of many violent actions in the Old Testament literature (flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, command of sacrifice of Isaac, plagues etc.).⁷ We have horrific accounts of Yahweh’s intentionally provocative bloodshed and forbidding his people to show any mercy (e.g. Deut 7:2, 7:16, 13:8). Equally disturbing is the biblical depiction of Yahweh’s rejection of Saul who failed to accomplish the Lord’s fierce anger against Amalek (1 Sam 28:18). Elsewhere in the biblical narrative is the threat of a curse on anyone who is lazy in doing the Lord’s work, namely, to wage the war against the enemies of the Lord and his people (Jer 48:10).

Another word used in the Old Testament for violence is *herem* (חֶרֶם) which originates in the transaction between an army

the Davidic dynasty, the Temple, and Zion, and confronts that the image of God as the divine warrior in the Old Testament is inextricably linked with God the liberator and savior. She opines that Dictionary articles on violence in the Bible can be misleading if they focus only on certain words, emphasizing the face of a violent God.

⁶ It is rarely used God as a subject. See Torrence E. Fretheim, “God and Violence in the Old Testament.” He opines that Dictionary articles on violence can be misleading if they focus only on certain words.

⁷ Cheryl Kirk-Duggan, *Eerdmans’ Dictionary of the Bible*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000, 1358 notes that more cases than human beings (600 texts), God is the subject of violence (1,000 times).

and its tribal deity. People vow to offer up all that had been conquered to their god as a sacrifice rather than taking for themselves as "spoils of war." Hence *herem* is understood as not only divinely sanctioned genocide, but genocide which is an "act of worship to Yahweh."⁸ The Israelites displayed their "fidelity" and "undeserved love for Yahweh" by means of the *herem*.⁹ George A. Boyd supports this view as he remarks "conquest narrative contains portraits of Yahweh commanding genocide as an expression of his people's unique calling and as a demonstration of his people's singular devotion to him."¹⁰

Also, divine violence is linked to human sin. Violent human actions lead to violent consequences and is named as divine judgment (Ezek 22:31). Divine violence also becomes the means by which God's people are delivered from violence (Exod 15:1-3), from other people's sins. It is also utilized to save God's people from the effects of their own sins as in the salvation to the exiles as described in Isa 45:1-8.¹¹ Walter Brueggemann states that God's violence in the Old Testament is purposeful in the

⁸ Susan Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible: A Study in the Ethics of Violence*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 28-77.

⁹ R. W. I. Moberly, "Toward an Interpretation of the *Shema*," in *Theological Exegesis: Essays in Honor of Brevard S. Childs*, ed. Christopher R. Seitz and Kathryn Greene-McCreight, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999, 136. Gordon McConville opines that *herem* in Deuteronomy 7 was associated with "the election of Israel and the consequent radical rejection of other nations" (*Deuteronomy*, ApOTC 5 (Leicester: Apollos, 2001), 102.

¹⁰ Boyd, *The Crucifixion of the Warrior God*, 301.

¹¹ Torrence E. Fretheim, "Salvation in the Bible vs. Salvation in the Church," *Word & World* 13/4 (1993): 363-372. For some theological considerations of violence in the Old Testament see: Fretheim, "God and Violence," 18-28.

service of a nonviolent end. Hence, he rightly asserts: "violence assigned to Yahweh is to be understood as counter violence, which functions primarily as a critical principle in order to undermine and destabilize other violence."¹²

Divine and Human Violence in the New Testament

In the New Testament, the concept of the restriction of salvation only to the elect, or only to believers, renders it violent at its very core, a theme which appears in the Gospels as well as in other parts (Cf. Matt 24:22; Mk 13:27; Jn 6:37; Rom 8:33; Rom 11:7; Tit 1:1; 2 Jn 1:1; Rev 21:7, 22:21).¹³ It is therefore apparent that there is at least an undercurrent and at most a distinct theme of violence running throughout the entire New Testament from the Gospels to the Revelation.¹⁴

The Gospels witness the violent death of Jesus by crucifixion (Matt 27:35-50; Mk 15:13-37; Lk 23:21-46; Jn 19:1-30)

¹² Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*:244. Seibert, *The Violence of Scripture*, is a work on some proposals to deal with the Old Testament's troubling legacy of divine and human violence.

¹³ T.R.Y. Neufeld, *Jesus and the Subversion of Violence: Wrestling with the New Testament Evidence*, London: SPCK, 2011, 6.

¹⁴ "Wrath is an essential and inalienable trait in the biblical and NT view of God." G. Mainzstählin, 'The Wrath of Man and the Wrath of God in the New Testament', in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Volume V, ΘΠα, G.W. Bromiley (ed.), Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967, 419-447, 423. Houtart observes that, "The struggle between good and evil is another source of violence very closely linked to religion. It is largely present in the Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments." F. Houtart, 'The Cult of Violence in the Name of Religion: A Panorama', W. Beuken and K-J. Kuschel (eds.), *Religion as a Source of Violence*, London: SCM Press, 1-9, 1.

which is the central message of redemption in Christianity¹⁵ which can be counted as an exemplification of human violence. Gospels depict divine violence too. All the four Gospels depict Jesus challenging the authority of the Temple leadership by a violent act (Mk 11:15-17; Matt 21:12-17; Lk 19:45-48; Jn 2:13-16). In Matthew 23, we read Jesus' utterances of violent nature. Both these episodes are instances which exemplify divine violence in the New Testament.¹⁶ We shall analyze the scholarly non-violent approaches to the violent texts, namely, Mk 11:15-17 and Matthew 23, as examples from the New Testament.

Mk 11:15-17

Mark's articulation of Jesus' action in the cleansing of the Temple features more detail with more content than the accounts in Matthew and Luke. The targets of Jesus' violent actions are (1) 'those who sold and those who bought' (11:15b) (2) 'moneychangers' and 'those who sold pigeons' (11:15c); and (3) 'those carrying anything through the temple' (11:16). These actions form a chiastic pattern, emphasizing the drama of the event, in which the 'overturning of the tables of the money changers' is the central action. The verb Mark uses in 11:15c to signify the actions of Jesus in the central phrase is καταστρέφω/*katastrefo* (to overturn). This verb appears in the Septuagint to exclusively describe God's divine judgment and destructive

¹⁵ Young, J., *The Violence of God and the War on Terror*, London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2007, 5.

¹⁶ Scholarly works on Violence in the New Testament are: Shelly Matthews and E. Leigh Gibson (eds.), *Violence in the New Testament*, New York: T & T Clark, 2005; Thomas T. Yoder Neufeld, *Killing Enmity: Violence and the New Testament*, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011.

actions as in the case of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:24-25) and Pharaoh at the Red Sea (Exod 14:27-28). Hence, 'overturning' of the tables of the 'moneychangers' and the 'seats of those who were selling doves' has a special implication in Mark. The role of the money changers was to swap foreign coinage for the special Tyrian coinage required by the Temple treasury. Hence, Temple was one of the most secure places for the functioning of a bank, at that time. As J. Dunn noted Jesus overturned the tables which were not solely to do with Temple business,¹⁷ but which had become a place of mere trade, 'a den of robbers' (11:17c; Cf. Jer 7:11). Likewise, doves were the only inexpensive item the 'poor' of Israel society could afford.¹⁸ The rabbis were aware of the fact that cultic operations were hard on the poor.¹⁹ Hence, Mark is implementing a divine destruction of the supposed necessary structures of Temple worship that constitute and perpetuate a barrier of inequality which separates humanity from God.²⁰ Moreover some scholars framed the scene as someone acting as God's plenipotentiary, in executing divine

¹⁷ James Dunn D. G., *The Partings of the Ways: Between Christianity and Judaism and their Significance for the Character of Christianity*, London, SCM Press, 1991, 44.

¹⁸ Doves were offered for the purification of the women (Lev 12:6) and the cleansing of the lepers (Lev 14:22).

¹⁹ Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books, 1998, 301.

²⁰ Gundry H. Horton, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1992, 639. Perrin Nicholas, *Jesus the Temple*, Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2010, 91; Witherington Ben, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 314; Myers Ched, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988, 299.

justice.²¹ Therefore the text plays an important role as curative measures for the prevailing injustice in the Jewish worship system and augments in the establishment of the divine justice for the people of God. Hence we reject the position that the text instigates anger and violence, specifically divine violence.

Matthew 23

Matthew 23 forms a distinct discourse of the Gospel of Matthew, a notorious one, for its vitriolic denunciation of the scribes and Pharisees.²² In the long speech of Jesus in Matthew 23, the first part, 23:1–12, addresses to the crowds and disciples against the Pharisees and scribes in the third person. The second part, 23:13–36, denounces the religious leaders severely with seven prophetic woes and oracles with an appendix in vv.34–36 and the third segment, consists of the lament over Jerusalem (23:37–39).²³ This chapter appears to be as a reverse portrayal of Jesus as meek and humble (Matt 11:29), who teaches about love of the neighbor and enemies (Matt 22:39; 5:44) and the turning of the other cheek while stricken on the one (Matt 5:39). There

²¹ Kenny Burchard, "Was Jesus being violent in the Temple?" <http://thinktheology.org/2014/03/21/jesus-violent-temple>, accessed on 02-08-2020. Bob More, "Did Jesus Use Violence against the Merchants in the Temple?" <https://paxchristimdc.org/post/did-jesus-use-violence>, accessed on 02-08-2020.

²² Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, 653–54.

²³ Only Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, 673–78, considers 23:34–36 as an appendix to the woe section. Others like, Davies and Allison, *Matthew III*, 311, views 23:34–39 as a section of lament on Jerusalem; while Turner, *Matthew*, 543, includes 23:34–36 also as part of woes, Schnackenburg, *The Gospel of Matthew*, proposes this part a separate section titled judgment for persecutors.

are numerous solutions proposed by scholars to approach this violent text of Matthew non-violently.

Matthean scholarship explains the problem in such a manner that an extreme and regrettable corollary of the negative portrayal of the Pharisees in the woes' section (23:13–36) as purely prejudiced and to attribute little or no historical value to his Pharisaic materials.²⁴ Still some other scholars argue that all the categories of opponents of Jesus are often portrayed under the brand of Pharisees and propose the reason for its severity by tracing it to the Matthean redactor, not to the historical Jesus.²⁵ According to Anthony Saldarini, the scribes, Pharisees and elders in the narrative symbolize Matthew's late first-century opponents whose precise historical identity is hard to establish.²⁶

²⁴ France R. T., *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher*, 221–22. In the opinion of France, it was a view predominant in 20th-century. From the Jewish point of view: Winter, *On the Trial of Jesus*, 174–76, 185–89; Neusner, *Judaism in the Beginning of Christianity*, 45–61; Maccoby, *The Mythmaker: Paul and the Invention of Christianity*, 19–44. From a Christian point of view: Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 23–58; 290–92, states that there was “no substantial conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees.”

²⁵ Garland D. E., *Intention of Matthew 23*. NovTSup 52. Leiden: Brill, 1979, 44–46; Jack Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989, 8; Turner, *Israel's Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23*, Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015, 299.

²⁶ Saldarini J. Anthony. “Delegitimation of Leaders in Matthew 23,” *CBQ* 54 (1992): 659–80; Bowker, *Jesus and the Pharisees*, 1, also establishes a similar view regarding the case of Pharisees, following the opinion of Rivkin, “Pharisaism and the Crisis of the Individual in the Greco-Roman World,” 31, who states, “the history of Pharisaism is largely non-recoverable because of the nature of the sources.” A wide range of solid literature has appeared on the historical character of the

Andrew Simmonds considers Matthean woes (23:13–36) as an example of the rhetorical methods of first century world and culture.²⁷ The term ‘woe’ which appears seven times in this section (Matt 23:13, 15, 16, 23, 25, 27, 29) is sarcastic in its usage and is ridiculous. The ‘woes’ are one of the most powerful and effective rhetorical weapons when properly used.²⁸ The woes are in an amazing rhetorical form of public retort, whose purpose was to demonstrate Jesus’ oratorical talent and superiority and to arouse the audience.²⁹ This implies how the author made use of the power of this rhetoric weapon. Simmonds further notices that Jesus’ spiteful vituperation is from a society in which controversy

Pharisees and other Jewish sects of the Second Temple period from the middle of 19th century and the beginning of 20th century: Geiger, *Sadducaer und Pharisaer*; Ginzberg, *Eine Unbekannte Judische Sekte*; Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden*, III; Finkelstein, “The Pharisees: Their Origin and Their Philosophy,” 185–261.

Garland, *Intention*, 63, holds that all of chapter 23 is to be “read not only as a denunciation of Pharisaic Judaism but also a warning to the Christian community—particularly its leaders who are charged as with special responsibilities.” He opines that the chapter warns the Christian disciples against their actions and alerts them and us to the consequences. Instead of dividing Christians and Jews, the text links us in a common vulnerability, in a common desire to serve God, in self-examination and remorse as recipients of God’s steadfast and saving love. Matthew 23 can be regarded as the coloured version of the redactor which emphasizes self-criticism of the Christian community.

²⁷ Simmonds R. Andrew “‘Woe to You ... Hypocrites!’ Re-Reading Matthew 23:13–36,” *BSac* 166 (2009): 336–49.

²⁸ Simmonds, “Woe to You ... Hypocrites!” 349.

²⁹ Simmonds, “Uses of Blood: Re-reading Matt 27:25,” *Law and Critique* 19 (2008): 165–91.

was not viewed as negative and hostile but as didactic mode of discourse.³⁰

The woes in Matt 23:13–36 are much narrower than Greco-Roman or Jewish diatribe and Jesus was just doing inadequate than what others in the Greco-Roman world were doing in their open debate.³¹ Sarcasm in Jesus' woes is part of a rhetorical pattern in which Jesus debated and defeated his rivals (e.g. Jn 8:7; Matt 22:21). These controversies and woes commonly used by the New Testament and rabbinic writers represent a public retort followed by a private explanation given to disciples when the opponents were not present (e.g. Matt 17:19). The opponents of this rhetorical invective are the Pharisees whose role is to be the foil for Jesus' unmatched rhetorical skills. They appear there because they are the most worthy opponents against which Jesus demonstrated his vocal pugilistic skills.³² In fact, the

³⁰ Bassar W. Herbert, *Studies in Exegesis: Christian Critiques of Jewish Law and Rabbinic Responses 70–300 C.E.*, Leiden: Brill, 2002, 6–7; Other examples of vituperative rhetoric are Johanan ben Zakkai's defeat of the Sadducees in Baba Batra 115b1 and nn 7–8 and Paul's attack on his opponents in Galatians 2:11–14; 3:1–4; 5:7–15; 6:11–14. Fredrickson E. David. "Amatory Motifs in Paul's Epistle to the Galatians," *WW* 20 (2000): 257–64.

³¹ Johnson, "The New Testament's Anti-Jewish Slander," 432–39, 440, questions: "If sophists are by definition blind and Apion is blind (Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2. 132, 142) and Alexandrian pagans are blind (Philo, *Vita Cont* 2.10), and Zealots are blind (Josephus, *JW* 5.343, 572), and men of pit are blind (Qumran, IQS 4:9–14), should we be shocked to see scribes and Pharisees called 'blind guides' by Matthew ...?" (Matt 15:14, 23:16, 17).

³² Daube David, *The Collected Works of David Daube*, Edited by Calum M. Carmichael, 3 vols. Berkeley: Robbins, 1992: vol. 2:307. Schlueter J. Carol. *Filling up the Measure: Polemical Hyperbole in 1 Thessalonians 2:14–16*. Sheffield: JSOT, 1994, 98–99, quotes the

author of the Gospel of Matthew was writing not only in modes of highly advanced Jewish rhetoric of the day, interpreting Hebrew Bible, the LXX³³, and Aramaic texts in skilful ways, but was also trained in the higher levels of the Hellenistic progymnastic rhetoric.³⁴ The author of Matthew was living on the margins of two heritages of literary production and rhetorical argumentation³⁵ and Matthew 23 is one of the best examples for such literary architect and should not be seen as a text perpetrating violence.

The violence of abuse of power of Jewish authorities produced institutional vigilantism and caused the death of Jesus (Cf. Matt 26:4, 61; 27:1, 18, 23). Jesus became the victim of the violence of the authorities of the time. The centre-piece of the Christian message of redemption is the crucifixion of Jesus,

opinion of Quintilian that invective by its nature does not depend on whether the statement is true or false, but it has the purpose to demonstrate the orator's talent and arouse the audience, and not to be believed by them.

³³ E.g. one of the woes in Matt 23:35 summarizes the whole prophetic history of the Hebrew people in this phrase: "the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah."

³⁴ Robbins K. Vernon, "A Review of Dennis C. Duling, *A Marginal Scribe*," *Conversations* 32 (2012): 55–69.

³⁵ Benedict T. Viviano, "The Gospel according to Matthew" in *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 630–74, describes the character of the Gospel of Matthew as both Jewish-Christian and the Gentile-Christian. The article exposes Matthew 23 as an example for this dual nature which being "outside the confines of Jamnian Judaism yet still defining itself over against rival forms of Judaism." Santon G. N, "The Origin and Purpose of Matthew's Gospel: Matthean Scholarship from 1945 to 1980," *ANRW* II/25.3, 1890–1951.

which indubitably is an act of extreme violence.³⁶ The violent death of Jesus which is the central theme of the cruciform interpretation of the Scriptures is employed by Gerooge A. Boyd to address the violent depictions of God in the Scriptures. Boyd argues that God's self-revelation on the cross through Jesus gives us a perspective to discern the violent depictions of God in the Scriptures. He detects in these violent portraits that God was bearing the sins of his people on the cross and was thereby taking on an ugly literary semblance that reflected the sin.³⁷ The symbol of the slaughtered Lamb in Revelation contributes an interpretative appendix to the crucifixion of Jesus and serves as an answer to the violence in the Scriptures.³⁸

Violence in Revelation

The Book of Revelation reveals that the final consummation of history which will take place through a great outbreak of divine violence, where evil will be destroyed, before the revealing of a new heaven and a new earth and that God has

³⁶ Young J., *The Violence of God and the War on Terror*, London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2007, 5.

³⁷ Boyd introduces his way of interpretation: "The claim I will be defending throughout this work is that there is a way of interpreting Scripture's violent portraits of God that not only resolves the moral challenges they pose but that also discloses how these portraits bear witness to God's nonviolent, self-sacrificial, enemy-loving character that was definitively revealed on Calvary" *The Crucifixion*, Xxxiv. He seeks for supporters and contends that Torrance understands the cross of Christ is to be the supreme expression of all Scriptures though he did not work on the point that sin-bearing Christ could affect the OT's violent divine portraits (Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine Meaning: Studies in Patristic Hermeneutics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995).

³⁸ Boyd, *The Crucifixion*, 593-614.

the power to destroy both body and soul in hell.³⁹ The protagonist of Revelation, Jesus, presented to us by the author continues the violent Christology we find in the New Testament. Revelation “seethes with images of blood and violence” and a good deal of violence are associated with “the wrath of the Lamb” (Rev 6:16).⁴⁰

The portrayal of violence reaches a summit in chapter 19 where we find Jesus going out to make war (v. 11). He is dressed in a bloodstained robe (v. 13) and has a sword coming out of his mouth “to strike down the nations” while he “treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty” (v. 15). Jesus and his

³⁹ The reception history of the Book of Revelation discloses how often various Christian groups used the book to perpetrate violent actions. Church history exposes that Bernard of Clairvaux used the images of New Jerusalem of Revelation to instigate war by his peasant audience during crusades. See Pedry Andrew, “Bernard Clairvaux’s Writings on Violence and the Sacred,” www.vexillumjournal.org, accessed on 19-07-2020. Hussite Taborites from Bohemia claimed that they were living in the era of the Antichrist that demanded killing of unbelievers as enemies of Christ. As pointed out by Newport Kenneth, *Apocalypse and Millennium. Studies in Biblical Eisegesis*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, 17 and Kaminsky H., *A History of the Hussite Revolution*, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2004, 342. On the violent use of Revelation in the Middle Ages, see Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages*, rev. ed. (London: Temple Smith, 1970). Recently Barbara Rossing discussed that the war in the Middle East is closely linked with Revelation, in her *Apocalyptic Violence and Politics: End-Times Fiction for Jews and Christian*, Yale University Reflections, 2005; [http:// reflections.yale.edu/article/end-times-and-end-gamesis-scripture-being-left-behind/apocalyptic-violence-and-politics-end](http://reflections.yale.edu/article/end-times-and-end-gamesis-scripture-being-left-behind/apocalyptic-violence-and-politics-end), accessed on 3rd April 2020.

⁴⁰ Loren L. Johns, *The Lamb Christology of the Apocalypse of John*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003, 187.

army fight “the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies” (v. 19), capturing the beast and the false prophet—who are then “thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur”—while slaying “the rest...with the sword” (v. 21).⁴¹ Richard Bauckham as well as a number of other scholars, argue that while John employs many traditional violent symbols, he does so in a way that completely subverts their violence. Hence in reversing the violent interpretation of these symbols John contrasts the world’s way of waging war with the nonviolent, self-sacrificial way in which Jesus and his followers wage war.⁴²

The majority of scholars agree that historical context of the Book of Revelation is persecution of Christians under Domitian (CE 81-96). In this context, the depiction of divine judgment in Revelation offers tremendous encouragement for

⁴¹ Boyd, *The Crucifixion*, 594. Hence Revelation expresses the vindictive fantasies of the persecuted Christian community as expressed by the following authors: Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984); David Frankfurter, “The Legacy of Sectarian Rage: Vengeance Fantasies in the New Testament,” in *Religion and Violence: The Biblical Heritage*, ed. David A. Bernat and Jonathan Klawans (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2007); and Michael Grosso, *The Millennium Myth: Love and Death at the End of Time* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 1995).

⁴² Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993); Richard Bauckham, “Revelation,” in *Oxford Bible Commentary*, ed. John Barton and John Muddiman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1287–1306; Richard Bauckham, “The Language of Warfare in the Book of Revelation,” in *Compassionate Eschatology: The Future as Friend*, ed. Ted Grimsrud and Michael Hardin (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011), 28–41.

those experiencing persecution and challenges to those complacent with the Roman Empire. Hence, the question running throughout the book is who controls the universe, the Roman Empire or God? While the description progresses, the reader comes across the reality that the real force behind the Roman Empire is Satanic (Rev 14:8-12). However, the Triune God controls everything in the world, who alone must be worshipped. The audience is encouraged to understand that the true realm is the transcendent dominion of God (Revelation 4 and 5) and not the present, temporary world of evil. Throughout Revelation, this transcendent realm is depicted in symbolic language, which is highly evocative and often intended to elicit a response of worship or repentance (Rev 4:10-11, 5:12-13). Keys for unlocking the symbols are found within the text, in the Old Testament backgrounds,⁴³ or some historical reality of the Roman Empire.⁴⁴ The account in Revelation unfolds in a series of visions which has got cyclical orientation (E.g. seven seals and trumpets from chapters 5 to 10). Hence the progressive intensification of repeated cycles of judgment leads to final culmination of the plot in chapter 21 by the depiction of new heaven and new earth which will be ruled by the Lamb, the Divine Bridegroom. This vision journey has commenced at the first chapter which opened up key images that present Jesus who is the ruler of the kings of the earth (v.5), the faithful and true

⁴³ E.g. Balaam and Balak (Rev 2:14; Cf. Num 22:5-24:25), Sodom (Rev 11:8; Cf. Gen 19:24-25), Egypt (Rev 11:8; Cf. Exod 3:7, 18, 20, 22, etc.), Babylon (Rev 14:8, 17:5, 18:2, 9; Cf. Isa 13:19, 14:22, 21:9; Jer 20:4, 21:2, etc.).

⁴⁴ E.g. Rev 1:8, 11, 12, 17:4.

witness.⁴⁵ These images of Jesus become the basis for the perseverance of martyrs who overcome their ordeals just as the Lamb (Revelation 5; 6; and 12).

The Symbol of the Slaughtered Lamb-Lion in Rev 5:5-6

The vision in Revelation 5 is a continuation of the vision in chapter 4 with a connecting formula, “then I saw” (καὶ εἶδον/*kai eidon*, 5:1). In Revelation 4, the focus is on the holy, transcendent God. The focus is on the other-worldly beings who surround the throne of God in unending worship. A clear implication of this imagery is that the Creator God alone is worthy of worship (Rev 4:8, 11) and that the claims of Roman emperors to be the one worthy of all honor and glory are blasphemous.⁴⁶ This is amplified by the presence of the scroll in Revelation 5 and the inability of anyone in all of creation to open that scroll and thereby accomplish God’s ultimate purposes (5:2). The primary function of Revelation 5 is the introduction of the

⁴⁵ Commentaries and monographs on Revelation: Edmondo F. Lupieri, Maria Poggi Johnson, Adam Kamesar, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006. G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013. Bruce J. Malina, John J. Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2000. Harry O. Maier, *Apocalypse Recalled: The Book of Revelation after Christendom*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2002. Michael Gilbertson, *God and History in the Book of Revelation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997. Christopher A. Frilingos, *Spectacles of Empire: Monsters, Martyrs, and the Book of Revelation*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004. Steven J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins*, Oxford University Press, 2001.

⁴⁶ Harris, “Understanding,” 14.

Lamb, who will break the seals of the mysterious scroll, and hence possesses the cosmic sovereignty that has been given to him. The words "See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah . . . has triumphed" (v. 5) bespeak that power and strength that qualifies one to open the scroll.

In the expression, "the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed" (Rev 5:5), two symbols identified with Jesus: "the Lion of Judah and the Root of David." The motif of the Messiah as a *lion* occurs in early Judaism (4 Ezra 11:36-46) and early Christianity (Justin, *Dialogue* 52:2). In Genesis 49:9, Judah is called a lion and hence the Lion of the tribe of Judah (Rev 5:5) signifies the Davidic Messiah, who is the subject of the verb *νικᾷν* /*nikan* (to conquer). Here is the only one expression designating Jesus as the Lion. The expression "the Root of David" is used in a royal or messianic sense in the Old Testament prophetic literature (Cf. Jer 23:5, 33:15; Zech 3:8). Two parallel expressions are "a shoot" and "a branch" in Isa 11:1. The emphases on the tribe of Judah and on Davidic descent underline the crucial qualifications of the Jewish royal Messiah i.e. he must be a descendant of the royal house of David.⁴⁷

The term "lamb" (ἀρνίον/ *arnion*) occurs twenty-nine times in Revelation and as a title for Jesus. There are mainly two traditional motifs in the designation of the figure of Christ as the ἀρνίον: the Lamb as the ruler or leader and the Lamb as a sacrificial metaphor. These two motives are vivid through the

⁴⁷ Aune, D. E., *Revelation 1-5:14*. WBC Vol. 52A, Dallas: Word, 2002, 351; Lange J. P., Schaff P., Moore E., Craven E. R. & Woods J. H., *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Revelation*, Bellingham: Logos, 2008, 157; See also Achtemeier, P. J. "Revelation 5:1-14," *Interpretation* 40 (1986) 283-88.

expressions of Lamb as the Lion and the Slaughtered Lamb.⁴⁸ The figure of the slaughtered Lamb in Rev 5:6 seems as a symbol of divine violence of salvation of the redeemed, in whom the elders recognized the Lion of Judah, the triumphant Christ. The appearance of the slain Lamb (v. 6) heightens the reality portrayed in Revelation that ultimate victory comes through suffering and sacrifice.⁴⁹

D. E. Aune says it rightly: "The figure of the Lamb in 5:5-6 capture the two complementary aspects of this apocalyptic metaphor, namely, Jesus as the conquering Messiah (v. 5) and Jesus as the atoning sacrificial victim (v. 6)."⁵⁰ According to him, this dual presentation of the salvific function of Jesus as the crucified Messiah, i.e. in terms of a "theology of the cross," and a "theology of glory," pervades various phases of early Christianity.⁵¹

The violent Christology of Revelation is inevitable for the redemption of a violent world which brings creation along to a point where violence is no more. Dana Haris expresses this idea explicitly: "The powerful image of the slain Lamb underscores the reality that divine violence is never gratuitous, but is redemptive."⁵² Haris perceives that divine violence is ultimately

⁴⁸ Aune, *Revelation 1-5:14*, 351.

⁴⁹ Harris, "Understanding," 14-15.

⁵⁰ Aune, *Revelation 1-5:14*, 352. Thompson, L. L. *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990, 48-40, 65 expresses "irony of kingship through crucifixion" is certainly a central theological emphasis here in Rev 5, it is a marginal conception 1:7; 19:13. The same concept appears in the Gospel of Mark, the Letters of Paul, and the Fourth Gospel.

⁵¹ Aune, *Revelation 1-5:14*, 352.

⁵² Harris, "Understanding," 13.

necessary to overcome human violence and sin. Moreover, the image of Jesus as the slain Lamb underscores the shocking reality that God himself offered the sacrifice that would redeem and reconcile sinful humanity. This sacrifice was required to restore the original relationship that existed in the garden (Cf. Gen 3:8).⁵³

John shocks his audience when he goes on to reveal that this Lion is also, at the same time, a little Lamb (ἀρνίον/ *arnion*) that had already been slaughtered (Rev 5:6). And by identifying the Lion as a little slaughtered lamb, John has transformed a "symbol of power and domination" into a "symbol of vulnerability and nonviolence."⁵⁴ The Lion of the tribe of Judah valiantly fights his enemies, but he does not violently fight them. Rather, he wages war and overcomes his foes through the self-sacrificial love that was revealed on Calvary when the Lamb was slain. John has, in effect, "forged a new symbol of conquest by sacrificial death."⁵⁵

It is precisely because the Lamb was willing to wage a nonviolent war of self-sacrificial love that he is worthy to open the scroll (Rev 5:9). No one else in heaven was "worthy" because, absolutely no one else would have solved the cosmic conflict this way." And the fact that the Lamb's victorious sacrifice is revealed in the throne room of heaven, reflecting the divine and true perspective on history, which means that John understands

⁵³ Harris, "Understanding," 14.

⁵⁴ Johns, *Lamb Christology*, 170. Eller Vernard, *Most Revealing Book*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1974, 79, notes that *arnion* could be translated "lambkin" with a connotation of "poor little thing." This image thus provides the strongest possible contrast with the beast (*therion*) who is depicted in chapter 13 as a great big vicious monster.

⁵⁵ Bauckham, *Revelation*, 74.

Calvary to be the definitive expression of God's way of governing the world and overcoming evil.⁵⁶

John consistently draws the closest possible connection between the "Lamb" and "God," and understands the sacrificial Lamb to be the definitive expression of God's true character. So too, John describes the Lamb as having "seven eyes" and "seven horns" (Rev 5:6), depicting the fullness of divine wisdom and power. It is significant that once the Lion has been revealed to be the Lamb, we never again find Christ referred to as a lion. Consequently, the rest of Revelation is an apocalyptic expression of the heavenly truth that through the sacrifice of the Lamb on Calvary, the "kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah" (Rev 11:15).⁵⁷

Conclusion

In the New Testament, God is associated with the cross, whether in terms of a demonstration of His love, of seemingly 'punishing' His Son (Cf. Jn 3:16), or battling with the Devil (Rev 11:17-21) and hence, God somehow is always associated with violence too. Considering the ancient context, God was working in and through human beings, with what was available, including institutions involved in waging of war, with all its violent atrocities. As Brueggemann rightly states:

"This is a passion that lives in the 'loins' of Yahweh, who will risk everything for Israel and, having risked everything, will expect everything and will be vigilant not

⁵⁶ Wilfrid J. Harrington, *Revelation*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993), 87-88; Bauckham, *Revelation*, 74.

⁵⁷ Boyd, *The Crucifixion*, 600-16.

to share the beloved with any other. This is no open marriage. The outcome of passion so intensely initiated has within it the seeds of intolerance, culminating in violence. There is indeed a profound awkwardness in this presentation of Yahweh, but Israel does not flinch in its testimony. The God who has been madly in love becomes insanely jealous, which is Israel's deepest threat and most profound hope."⁵⁸

In the Gospels, the crucial violent act is the brutal murder of Jesus which is portrayed in the symbol of the slaughtered Lamb in Revelation. This imagery of the slaughtered Lamb renders an appropriate answer to the violent portrayal of God who attains final victory by the sacrificial offering of His own Son. Hence the violent portrayal of God commences at Genesis culminates in Revelation, and in the very symbol of the slaughtered Lamb, one finds the key to read the whole scripture non-violently.

⁵⁸ Brueggemann, *Theology*, 384.