

APOCALYPSE (5) HUMAN EVOLUTION IN THE APOCALYPSE OF JOHN¹

“We shall now survey the Apocalypse in an endeavor to see what it has to say concerning *mankind’s Christian progress*” (writes Rudolf Frieling). “This continually changes the scene of its realization between *earth* and *heaven*. Christianity – on the one side embodied on earth, on the other existing in heaven – increasingly develops into an important factor working in the eschatological drama. At the end, upper and lower world penetrate each other. A ‘new earth’, made new by what has come from above, joins a ‘new heaven’, which itself has been rejuvenated by what happened through Christ on earth. Out of this merging of the two there comes the New Jerusalem, which is both ‘heaven’ and ‘earth’. The Christ-Mystery, unifying heaven and earth, has become powerful within a Christendom now ripe for it. John’s Apocalypse shows in the sequence of its visions this process of ripening.” (p 90-91) Frieling adds that “from that survey we shall return once more to reincarnation” – the subject of the book of which “Human Evolution in the Apocalypse of John” is the last chapter.

Here, giving a short impression of this chapter, I will also [in square brackets] refer to the “Structure” of the Revelation to John” by Christoph Rau, which has been added to the second contribution in this series. This overview, far from able to recreate the depth and profound scholarship of Rudolf Frieling in his essay, is here made in the hope that you will, somehow, later, acquire his original text.

The image of the throne in the last of the Seven Letters (3:21) opens the great vision of Chapters 4 and 5, in the midst of which stands the divine throne. [First Throne Vision] John is drawn into the *upper world* by the voice speaking to him: “Come up hither” (4:1). Here, the Lamb of sacrifice brings his own deed before the Father’s throne. This is echoed in the “New Song” which is added to the “Sanctus” of the four cherubim “living creatures” of the innermost circle, in which the twenty-four elders join. This contains an ingredient coming from human beings on earth, in whose midst the sacrifice of the Lamb took place: “the prayers of the saints” (5:8); that is, of Christians living *on earth*. Even when these can’t join the song directly, impulses from their souls are received in the heavens, becoming visible as the smoke of incense, rising up from the golden bowls of the elders together with the New Song.

After the opening of the seals has begun, Christians who have gone through martyrdom on earth now themselves appear in the *upper world*, seen under the heavenly altar (6:9). “Souls” as they are (“psychai” in Greek), in their disembodied, conscious state after death they are not satisfied with their new form of existence, having not yet fully grasped the redeeming consequences of Christ’s death. The “not yet” implicit in the answer they receive, “to rest a little longer”, shows that there will be a further development of their existence after death as a result of their martyrdom. They “were each given a white robe” (6:11), that they may become more active and responsible citizens of the higher world.

When in the pause between the sixth and the seventh seal the 144,000 are sealed, we are again looking at the *earthly scene*. The figure, “heard” in the spirit (7:4) is of course not an “arithmetical” figure but, with its 12 times 12 (thousand), in a divine order showing the sum total of all the nuances possible of “being human”. Standing in the catastrophic and apocalyptic storms which began with the opening of the seals, in a moment of profound divine calm they are sealed on their foreheads by an angel ascending from the rising of the sun. This sealing marks a stage of development towards the resurrection body, to which Christ refers when he speaks about the food the Son of Man will give, food “which remains as life throughout the ages”, because he himself is the one sealed by the Father God (Jn 6:27).² On those devoted to Christ, the sealing begins to work as a preparation for the resurrection of the Last Day.

The next vision [beginning the Second Throne Vision] shows Christians in the *other world* as “a great multitude which no man could number” (7:9) – “after this”. Here, the Greek plural for “this” indicates that

¹ The title of the last chapter in *Christianity and Reincarnation* by Rudolf Frieling, Floris Books, Edinburgh 1977, pp 90-117, here added by Arie Boogert as the last and fifth contribution to the four preceding, dated Summer, 2007. Edited by Muriel Morris.

² This quote from John 6:27 here appears in the translation of Kalmia Bittleston, now in *The Four Gospels – A Translation in Verse*, Floris Books, Edinburgh, 2007.

a greater interval of time may in the meantime have happened, the time of “the great tribulation” out of which these Christians have come (7:14). It’s a great change from the first vision of the dead souls under the heavenly altar; now the dead are privileged to become active in the upper world in the way described to John by one of the elders (7:15-17), singing the great hymn, “Salvation to our God ... and to the Lamb” (7:10). Now that the deliverance brought by Christ has arrived on the earth, has really “come” to human beings, it begins to radiate from truly Christian souls as thanks, returning “to” God in the higher world. When the Lamb “guides them” on their paths, their inner reconciliation with the terrible things they endured on earth can come about (7:17).

Immediately following we are reminded of the Christians living *on earth*, as their ascending prayers are accepted by the angels and as it were interspersed with additional substance (8:5). The progressively destructive catastrophes, that break out as the trumpets resound, afflict the earthly world and mankind itself ever more severely. Before the seventh trumpet sounds the seer is asked to measure with a measuring rod “the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there” (11:1). The court outside the temple is abandoned, the holy city trampled by the heathen. As John sees “temple” and “altar” in the midst of annihilation, the intuition “It will be and is already now” (Jn 4:23, 5:25) more and more becomes a reality within a world, already lost to the profane.

In the destiny of the two witnesses, characterized as Moses and Elijah reincarnated on earth, a preparatory stage of the fall of Babylon appears (11:8). While their corpses are “seen” (11:9), the resurrection and ascension of two witnesses are “perceived” by their foes (11:11, 12), who in spite of themselves participate in a spiritual experience. Here we find one of those moments showing that there are stages on the way to final achievement, as it were stages of a process between the Resurrection happening at Easter and what will occur on the Last Day.

After the sounding of the seventh trumpet [inaugurating the Third Throne Vision] the name of Michael is mentioned (12:7), exactly in the middle of the book. The “war in heaven” between Michael and his angels and the dragon and his angels, ending with the dragon being thrown to the earth, happens in *supersensible realms*. There is no mention of human beings, neither on earth nor in the heavens. But the hymn which the seer hears, sings of the salvation “of our God” (12:10), and shows that even in this supersensible event human beings are a contributory and important factor. Michael’s battle has been won not without human beings: “And they [our brethren] have conquered him [the dragon] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives [psyche] even unto death” (12:11). This is a classical example of how the visions of the seer often one-sidedly include only one aspect and are open to completion. The battle in heaven was fought by Michael and his angels – and those singing with a loud voice sing of their brethren who, Christian souls living on earth, act as it were as Michael’s sword, through “the blood of the Lamb”.

Salvation, the great deliverance, was sung “to our God” when beginning to radiate out from human beings before the seventh (last) seal had been opened. Following the sounding of the seventh (last) trumpet, it has reached the higher world and now belongs to it: “now it has come”. After the pouring out of the seventh (last) bowl [at the beginning of the Sixth Throne Vision] a great multitude in heaven cries out that salvation is God’s, clearly existing and resting in Him: “Hallelujah! Salvation ... belongs to our God!” (19:1) Salvation, finally “belonging to God”, is connected with human beings becoming Christian on earth.

The dragon having been thrown down, the view is again *towards the earth*. “The woman who appears in heaven as mankind’s cosmic soul, adorned with sun and moon and stars”, Frieling writes (p. 102), “now gains a bare living in the ‘wilderness’, and ‘the rest of her offspring’, as Christians are here called in this significant and mystical expression, are exposed on earth to the attacks of the dragon (12:17). It is one of the revealing paradoxes of the Apocalypse that the heavenly jubilation at the victory – as if it had not been at all – is followed by the triumph of the Antichrist on earth. The victory has been decided above, but it still takes a while till it comes into effect below; the phases are not simultaneous.”

The beast from the bottomless pit (11:7) did conquer the two witnesses, and now the beast rising out of the sea “was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them” (13:7). In a comparable way, Pilate had been “given” power “from above” over the life and death of Jesus (Jn 19:11). Having to defend a hopeless position also is part of the process of Christian development towards maturity. Endurance, patience (*hypomonè* in Greek), as well as their confident faith enable the saints on earth to

survive the regime of the Antichrist with its terrible compulsion, able to be part of economic life only with the mark (the name of the beast) on right hand or forehead (13:16-17).

“The saints, patient and faithful, at the same time know that they share a higher level of existence”, Frieling writes (p. 102). “As John beheld the temple in the great city and those praying there as a kind of non-geographical region of the Holy Grail [11:1], so Christians living in the realm of the Antichrist find each other united in spirit in a *higher region* where they are lifted beyond the activities of the beast – this is Mount Zion, which is also part of the still growing heavenly Jerusalem. On this holy mountain John sees Christ in the form of the Lamb in the midst of the 144,000.” [14:1, at the beginning of the Fourth Throne Vision]

Here, those gathered around Christ receive a new higher faculty. Harpers and singers in the higher world now sing the New Song before the throne “to” the living creatures and the elders (14:3), who had begun this song when the Lamb had taken the scroll from the hand of the One sitting on the throne (5:9). The 144,000 are able to hear the heavenly music and even to “learn” the New Song. “While in the realm of the Antichrist all human deeper feelings are threatened with extinction, there dawns in the souls of the saints a whole new realm of feeling as a result of Christ’s sacrifice” (as Frieling writes, p. 103). “By virtue of the sealing in which they shared earlier [7:3-4], the 144,000 have become able to keep themselves free of the imprint, the ‘*charagma*’ of the beast. (This ‘*charagma*’ appears seven times: 13:16,17; 14:9,11; 16:2; 19:20 and 20:4.) The seal on their foreheads is now being transformed into the inscription of the Lamb and the Father God (14:1).” In the promise in the sixth of the Seven Letters (3:12), a first foreshadowing had been given of a threefold naming, which here changes to a twofold one, finally to be combined into the one divine name which unites God and the Lamb (22:4).

For the seventh and last time, in 14:12 we find a reference to “endurance” (*hypomonè*, following 1:9; 2:2,3,19; 3:10; 13:10), which is now near its reward. From 14:13 onwards, an even more forceful apocalyptic series of seven takes its place: the Beatitudes (after 1:3, to be followed by 16:15; 19:9; 20:6 and 22:7,14). The distinctive “now” of the Michael hymn (12:10) here in 14:13 appears in a “from now on”. Whereas the “now” in the Michael hymn had as it were been spoken “in anticipation” (“above”, the victory, which on earth still has to be fought, has been already assured), here in 14:13 the “now” is as it were spoken “in retrospect”: only now, the dead become conscious of the final triumph.

“The motif of the New Song” (as Frieling remarks, p. 105) “occurs, slightly changed, for the third and last time in chapter 15, where preparation is made for the pouring out of the bowls of wrath, which has to precede the final fulfillment” – revealing yet another progression. In 5:8 the highest beings of the innermost circle around the throne sing the song for the first time. In 14:2 its waves have spread to the 144,000 who have risen on Mount Zion and “learn” the song. Now [at the beginning of the Fifth Throne Vision] those appear as harp players and singers, who have conquered “out of” the beast (as the Greek says), who through their victory have freed themselves from his power and the might of his mark (15:2). “They stand beside the sea of glass whose originally pure crystal now appears mingled with ‘fire’ – a higher union of crystal-clear purity and the burning fire of love to which the world’s first form of creation has now advanced” (p. 105/6) – the crystal sea seen for the first time in the great vision of the throne to which John was called to “come up hither” (4:6).

The new song now receives a different name: “the song of Moses” and “the song of the Lamb” (15:3). At the time of the great deliverance at the Red Sea, after the exodus from the plague-ridden darkness of Egypt, Moses and his people sang his great song (Ex 15). This exodus from Egypt, which happened under the sign of the sacrificial Passover Lamb, became the prototype of eschatological events. Now, the exodus from the decaying world under the sway of the beast becomes possible through the sacrifice of the true Passover Lamb.

“In the description of how the victors have won ‘out of’ the thralldom of the beast there is indicated – as well as in the Song of Moses – the great ‘exodus’ still to come, which has its prelude in all the foregoing exodus stories. In the parable of the Weeds and the Wheat both are allowed to grow together until the moment of harvest has come, and with it the separation of one from the other [Mt 13:14ff]. Christians on earth have to suffer the régime of the beast in patience. Men opposed to the divine harden themselves more and more (16:9,11,21). The harlot Babylon [seen in the Interlude] is ‘drunk with the blood of the saints’ (17:6). In the unchristianized world – which appeared as ‘the great city ... Sodom and Egypt’

[11:8], and finally as Babylon falling into the abyss, presenting the counter picture to the heavenly Jerusalem – ‘was found the blood of prophets and saints, and of all who have been slain on earth’ (18:24). The call ringing out from heaven: ‘Come out of her, my people’ (18:4) means the final exodus. Thereafter comes the catastrophe of the ‘great city’, which according to 16:19 had already had its earlier stages.” (Rudolf Frieling, p 106)

The Babylon chapter (18) is followed by the vision of the white rider and its hosts [within the Sixth and last Throne Vision]. Christ, called by his most exalted name, “The Word of God”, is followed on white horses by “the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure” (19:13-14). Already the name “Armageddon” has prophetically occurred as the place of the decisive battle (16:16), and a preview of the battle itself has also been given (17:14). There, the same title appears as in 19:16: “Lord of lords” and “King of kings”, and “those with him are called and chosen and faithful”. These are the “*idioti*” of which the prologue of John’s Gospel speaks, the “*idioti*” to which Christ came: “his own” (Jn 1:11) who, for the very reason of their awakened ego-power, “did not receive him” (Jn 1:11). But this rejection was not total: “all who received him...” as the great selfless Ego, in their innermost being are truly “his own”.

The warriors of Christ are characterized as “called and chosen and faithful”. “Called and chosen” reminds us of the end of the parable of the royal Marriage Feast (Mt 22:14). Here, too, the words are used in connection with a “marriage”, with the “marriage of the Lamb” (19:7) which is proclaimed earlier. “The heavenly Bridegroom” (writes Rudolf Frieling) “joins Himself to mankind on earth. The union is expressed in the picture of a marriage and a meal. ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb’ (19:9). The Bride’s gown is described as ‘fine linen, bright (*lampros*) and pure’, a degree brighter than the white (*leukos*) robe mentioned before. The adjective ‘*lampros*’, radiantly bright, is also used for the crystal river of the water of life in the heavenly Jerusalem (22:1) and for the brightness of the morning star (22:16) – as well as already before, in the description of the angels with the seven plagues who come out of the temple ‘robed in pure bright linen’ (15:6). Christ’s armies are ‘arrayed in fine linen, white and pure’ (19:14). The word ‘*byssinos*’ here used for linen has not so far been used for the white robes of the blessed souls. It means an especially fine linen. This is again an enhancement, and it is the same word used shortly before for the marriage robe of the Bride of the Lamb (19:8).” (p 108). It is remarkable, that that “fine linen” of the Bride’s robe for the marriage (the material of which the garments of the warriors are made, too) is made from the “righteous deeds of the saints” (19:8), that is actually: from “that which made [their deeds] righteous”.

These three descriptions together (17:14; 19:8 and 19:14) allow us to divine a continuous development in the important contribution that must come from human beings, if the redeeming deed of the Lamb is to be truly beneficial. The existence of Christians in the other world is truly enhanced. They have produced the wedding garment, of linen which is only produced in a laborious process. They ride on white horses – those animals which in the imagery of myths and fairy tales are related to intelligence – thus showing how Christ at His “second coming” will be borne by the power of spiritualized thinking. And knowledge of the spirit (in the sense of the Holy Spirit), wields the powerful sword of the Logos. “As there is an ‘eternal feminine’ so there is also an ‘eternal masculine’. Both should serve the Christ.” (Rudolf Frieling, p 109)

A last stage of advancement of the excarnated souls is described in the following chapter, where the promise of the last of the Seven Letters begins to be fulfilled (3:21). “As in the great vision of the throne in the 4th chapter, the seer lets us follow in his words the gradual development of the vision: first the ‘thrones’; then figures appear which take their seats on the thrones; finally they can be recognized for what they really are – the souls of Christian martyrs.” (Frieling, p 109) Once more the word *psychai* is used (6:9 and 20:4), as in the beginning of the whole series of pictures: souls “under the altar”, then those robed in white with palms in their hands, then the harp players and singers of the New Song, then the riders on the white horses; finally, once more “souls”, blessed because sharing in the “first resurrection” (20:6). This is “the life though one dies”, the overcoming of the “second death” which would darken the soul after death, overcome by Christ on the Saturday of Holy Week. Within soul existence, the souls of the saints have gained an ego-consciousness and active existence in *the other world*. Here, at the beginning of the 20th chapter, the final goal of the “second resurrection” overcoming the “first death”, the death of the body, has not yet been reached – death as the last enemy is still wielding power.

Those experiencing the first resurrection “live and reign with Christ as kings’ for a long time (20:4). They are privileged to serve Christ as priests (20:6). By distinguishing between ‘poor souls’ and ‘saints’, Christians have shown themselves aware of the fact that excarnated souls may go through very different conditions. Poor souls are those dead whose loss of the body is not made up for by spiritual riches. The saints are those who live in the light of the spirit and who are able from their blessed existence to send forth help to human beings on earth.” (Rudolf Frieling, p 110) To souls active as kings and priests “judgment is committed” – “just by being what they are they become a measure by which other souls can judge themselves. On beholding a more exalted humanity, some souls experience judgment. This judgment through looking at the wholly righteous ones is, then, only a preliminary stage of the Last Judgment. The picture of the thrones for the saints is metamorphosed into the powerful image of the ‘great white throne’ (20:11).” (Frieling, p 110)

Between the beginning and the end of this chapter, there is still another vision that leads us for the last time to the *earth*, to the Christians still living below in earthly incarnations. “Once more the adversaries rear up in a last effort. The armies of Gog and Magog appear ‘like the sand of the sea’ as one great mass. They march forth like something risen from the underworld, a strange sight in the light of day. ‘They marched up over the broad earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city’ (20:9). The saints on earth do not cling to material existence, settled and enjoying their possessions. They have no settled abode, and live in a camp like soldiers. The puzzling expression, ‘beloved city’ again indicates the heavenly Jerusalem, which has been prepared and announced in various preliminary stages...” (Frieling, p 110-111) The attack, it seems, is easily repulsed this time, the mighty dead apparently helping from above, fire coming down from heaven to decide the battle.

Now follows the picture of “the great white throne”, and before the gaze of the One seated on the throne the world dematerializes: “From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them”. (20:11) Space disappears; human beings alone are left, who have to stand before the countenance of the One who sits on the throne. They can’t anymore even hope to flee into the world of matter, in the way those at the time of the sixth seal cried for cover in the caves and under the rocks of the mountains (6:16). As already in the fourth seal, Death and Hades appear like persons bringing about death and the darkening of souls after death – now they have been completely overthrown (20:14, see 21:8). “Then the realm of the resurrection appears in the heavenly Jerusalem where the New Heaven and the New Earth become one.” (Frieling, p 111-112) [The Final Vision]

Recapitulating, Frieling remarks that “the sequence of pictures in John’s Apocalypse unmistakably shows a development in mankind’s ability to receive Christ”. (p 112) The progress in the way human beings join themselves with Christ, though, is not described in continuity, it reveals itself in separate momentary glimpses – from picture to picture, in a continuous change of scene between earth and heaven. By virtue of the concept of reincarnation, one is able to see each individual Christian fully included in these changes of scene, as well as in the related reciprocal effects of periods of incarnation on earth and of excarnation in heaven, which go on until the Last Day.

Looking back at what Rudolf Frieling described, we find that this progress and its participants can’t be understood by a kind of linear thinking, by thinking in “black and white”. As we have seen, elements of apocalyptic reality are found in the “it will be and is already now” (p 96), as well as in realizing that preparatory stages are recurring (p 97). Visions are often open to completion; one-sidedly as they often are, they include only one aspect (p 101). The analytical approach familiar to us may not yield answers, as Rudolf Frieling shows while describing the importance of the word *arti*, “from now on”, “henceforth”, used in the hymn after the battle in heaven (12:10). Seen from there, “above in heaven”, the victory is already assured. But the Antichrist chapter (13) shows that this is, as it were, “in anticipation”. The second “henceforth” in 14:13 is, by comparison, “in retrospect”. Though it was already true, only now does one become fully aware of the final triumph. – In the light on the vision, described in the hymn (7:15f) before the trumpets began to sound after the opening of the seventh seal, we find that what was already valid, still has to be won overall.

John, in his first letter³, makes us aware that our own human ability to perceive is not something static, anymore than apocalyptic reality itself – the question of the “Second Coming” otherwise would not be relevant. In a different way, people confronted with early apocalyptic stirrings tend to succumb to the lure of a “shortened perspective”: what stretches out over long periods of time seems already to be “just around the corner”, so near that one could almost touch it!⁴

Apocalyptic reality in its progress, as we saw, is not described in continuity; it reveals itself in separate momentary glimpses – from picture to picture, in a continuous change of scene. An example: Frieling remarks on the subtle way in which the Apocalypse describes how human beings are connected with him “who sits upon the throne”. In the all-encompassing promise at the beginning of the Second Throne Vision, John hears that “he who sits upon the throne will shelter them with his presence” (7:15), literally but less poetically the text says: “he will dwell *above* them”, by using the preposition *epi*, “above”. In the New Jerusalem taking shape, this promise has become: “Behold, the dwelling of God is with human beings” (21:3), using the preposition *meta*, “with”. God is not anymore “above” human beings, he is “with” them: now, the incarnation is complete: “it is done”. Looking at the pictures themselves, we observe that the heavenly Jerusalem is without a temple (21:22), no separate sanctuary can there be found. Now the heavenly temple has become identical with the world of human beings, with the human “city”. (p 113)

In the description of the coming fall of Babylon in chapter 11, in the destiny of the “two witnesses” another kind of preparatory stage became visible, as we observed. For three and a half days the corpses of the two witnesses had lain on the streets, for all to see. Then “a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood up on their feet”. Reminiscent of Christ’s ascension, they go up to heaven in a cloud, and the earth answers. “As on Easter morning here, too, comes the great earthquake. The earth vibrates in sympathy when a body which is closely connected with it undergoes such a metamorphosis.” This is not only an indication of “departed souls becoming active in the upper world, it shows something that lies on the way between the Resurrection at Easter and the Last Day”. (p 98) Here, as Rudolf Frieling shows by the use of the verbs, people “saw” the bodies (11:9), but even when they had wanted to deny its reality, they could not but become aware of what happened spiritually when the two “went up to heaven in a cloud” (11:11), “in the sight of their foes” – who “perceived” what happened, in the same way as those who already had been prepared “perceived” Christ’s resurrection and ascension.

“Apocalypse” not only means that heaven and earth are beginning to interact in a different, stronger way. It also means that people will become aware of what happens spiritually, whether they want it or not, whether they are prepared for it or not. Those who have prepared themselves will be able to cope in a better way with all that will happen apocalyptically to human beings and their earth, as well as with “apocalyptic stirrings”, which are signs warning us of what is to come.

³ See “Apocalypse (3), The “Second Coming”, page 2.

⁴ See p. 83f in *Christianity and Reincarnation* (Note 1), in “The Eschatology of the Discourse on the Mount of Olives and of Paul’s First Letter to the Thessalonians (the chapter preceding the one on the Apocalypse).