1 Angels in the Apocalypse: liturgy, judgment and the service of God's justice

1.1 Abstract

The Apocalypse presents angels not as independent cosmic powers but as servants of God and the Lamb: liturgists standing before the throne, messengers conveying revelation, guardians restraining the powers of evil, and executors of judgments that remain derivative of God's justice. This study analyzes their role in the cycles of trumpets and bowls, in the altar scene and the prayers of the saints, in the images of the Abyss, the Euphrates, Babylon, and in the vision of the New Jerusalem. It maintains, at the same time, a fundamental distinction between symbolic language, possible historical context, and the Christological theology of hope.

1.2 Introduction: angels as liturgists, messengers and executors

The Book of Revelation combines descriptions of visions, acts of hearing and liturgical elements; the angelic images and successive sequences of judgment should be read within the literary unity of the book, not piecemeal as a catalogue of future events. In this narrative, angels do not appear as impersonal stage decorations of the heavenly scene nor as autonomous centers of power competing with God. They are an ordered ministry surrounding the throne of God: they worship, convey revelation, present the prayers of the saints to God, restrain destructive forces, announce verdicts and trigger successive stages of judgment. Their activity can be considered in three basic dimensions. First, they have a liturgical dimension — they stand before God, participate in the heavenly cult and give Him honor. Second, they carry out an executive function — they receive means of action, such as trumpets or bowls, and initiate events that in the apocalyptic text are explicitly linked to God's decision. Third, they perform an interpretive function — they explain the meaning of visions to John and confirm the justice of the announced judgments.

The exegesis of Revelation consistently distinguishes several levels: God remains the sole source of judgment; the Lamb is Lord of history; the angels are obedient executors; demonic forces appear as destructive powers subject to limitation; the saints, in turn, appear as witnesses who ask for justice but do not carry out private vengeance. Consequently, angels do not act on their own initiative or out of personal anger; their power is always derivative of the authority of God and the Lamb — they receive trumpets, bowls, keys and commands, and only execute what has been entrusted to them.

Contemporary studies, especially those analyzing the image of the seven bowls, allow for an ecological reading that sees in them a warning against the destructive consequences of human greed and violence. Such a reading can help to understand the literary logic of the text and its critique of corrupt structures, but should not be transformed into a simple prediction of a specific contemporary catastrophe. The eschatological perspective of Revelation remains a hope for the renewal of the cosmos and the healing of nations, not a justification of violence or hatred.

1.3 I. ANGELOLOGY OF THE APOCALYPSE

1.3.1 1. Angel as *angelos* — messenger

Exegesis: The Greek word *angelos* means "messenger" or "envoy" and in the apocalyptic context describes primarily a function, not an ontological definition of being. An angel is one who has been sent to convey or to carry out the will of God. In Revelation, John portrays angels fulfilling concrete roles in the order of revelation: they convey the revelation to John (Rev 1:1), stand around the throne (Rev 5:11; 7:11), restrain the four winds (Rev 7:1), seal the servants of God (Rev 7:2–3), receive the seven trumpets (Rev 8:2), present the prayers of the saints (Rev 8:3–4), execute the trumpet judgments (Rev 8–11), fight under the leadership of Michael (Rev 12:7), announce judgment on Babylon (Rev 14:8; 18:1–3), carry out the harvest and the vintage of the earth (Rev 14:14–20), receive the seven bowls (Rev 15:6–8), pour out the bowls of wrath (Rev 16), explain the mystery of Babylon (Rev 17), show John the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:9–10), and bind the dragon (Rev 20:1–3).

Historical context: Early Jewish and early Christian traditions about angels, present, for example, in texts such as the Book of Tobit or 1 Enoch, shaped the expectations of Revelation's readers regarding the roles of heavenly messengers. John inherits this language of angelic ministry but reworks it in a Christian manner, emphasizing the primacy of the Lamb and the sovereignty of God.

Theological conclusion: The breadth of tasks assigned to angels does not make them independent sovereignties. Their dignity in Revelation derives from their proximity to the throne and from absolute obedience to God. Angels ultimately point to the fact that judgment and the final ordering of history are the work of God and the Lamb, not of other heavenly beings.

1.3.2 2. "The seven angels who stand before God"

Exegesis: After the opening of the seventh seal, John sees "the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets" (Rev 8:2). The Greek phrase *tous hepta angelous hoi enōpion tou Theou hestēkasin* emphasizes a specific group of angels standing in the immediate presence of God. The closest literary parallel is the Zecharian and deuterocanonical language, for example Raphael saying "I am Raphael, one of the seven angels who stand ready and enter before the glory of the Lord" (Tob 12:15), as well as lists of seven chief angels in traditions similar to 1 Enoch 20. Revelation, however, does not give their names; John consciously focuses attention not on the personal identity of these angels, but on their function and position.

Historical context: The image of seven angels standing before God fits within a broad field of Jewish and Jewish-Christian images of heavenly hierarchy. The number seven in these traditions signifies perfection or completeness, which further underscores the symbolic character of the group.

Theological conclusion: "Standing before God" means remaining in His immediate presence, ready for instant action, performing courtly and liturgical functions, awaiting command, and representing the highest degree of availability. The power of these angels does not come from autonomous initiative but from their position as servants in the service of God.

1.3.3 3. The notable passive voice: "it was given to them"

Exegesis: Revelation often uses the formula "it was given" (*edothē*) to describe the granting of means or authorizations to angels: the seven angels were given trumpets, an angel was given a censer, the falling star was given the key to the Abyss, and the four bound angels were released only for an appointed time.

This grammatical and narrative construction clearly emphasizes that God is the initiator and disposer of all power and action.
Historical context: In an apocalyptic text formed within a Jewish-Christian culture conscious of hierarchy and the sovereignty of God, the passive voice was a literary means to show the dependence of heavenly beings and demons on divine authorization.
Theological conclusion: The formula "it was given" reminds the reader of God's rule over the time, scope, and goal of judgment. No angel chooses the object of judgment, sets its time or extent, acts from personal anger, or exceeds the prescribed limits. It is God, not they, who establishes the rules of history and justice.

1.4 II. THE SEVEN TRUMPETS: WARNING JUDGMENT

1.4.1 4. The silence before judgment

Exegesis: Immediately after the opening of the seventh seal, "there was silence in heaven for about half an hour" (Rev 8:1). This silence is not emptiness but a charged hush of the heavenly assembly that had earlier been filled with hymns. It is a moment of expectation and gravity, not of spectacular excitement.
Historical context: The motif of silence before judgment has parallels in prophetic literature: "Let all the earth keep silence before him" (Hab 2:20), "Be silent before the Lord God, for the day of the Lord is near" (Zeph 1:7), and "Let all flesh be silent before the Lord" (Zech 2:17). In this way John situates his vision within the tradition of expectation and fear before the day of the Lord.
Theological conclusion: Heaven's silence before the subsequent acts of judgment reminds us that God's judgment is not a spectacle or entertainment. It is accompanied by solemnity and a deep awareness of the gravity of what is being effected; God himself and his will remain the center of initiative.

1.4.2 5. The symbolism of the trumpet

Exegesis: The trumpet (*salpinx*) in the Bible is a polyvalent motif, and in Revelation it unites several traditions. First, the trumpet can be a sign of theophany: at God's manifestation on Sinai the sound of a trumpet is heard (Exod 19:16–19), announcing God's arrival and stirring holy awe. Second, the trumpet serves as a war alarm; in Numbers 10 it was used to summon the people and to signal the march. Third, the trumpet can be a sign of the fall of a stronghold: in the account of the capture of Jericho seven priests with trumpets preceded the fall of the walls (Josh 6). Fourth, the trumpet announces the day of the Lord, as in Joel 2:1, where a call by the horn proclaims the nearness of the day of the Lord.
Historical context: The use of the trumpet motif in Revelation touches a broad background of Old Testament texts and receives in them a specific apocalyptic application: the trumpets signal the development of judicial acts in history, while at the same time serving as a warning.
Theological conclusion: The trumpets of Revelation not only bring about the effects described in the narrative but also function as a warning and summons to awareness. They proclaim that an order of power opposed to God is not durable and that history is moving toward God's judgment. The trumpets are therefore both an executive instrument and an element of a liturgical call to repentance and recognition of God's rule.

1.5 III. THE PRAYERS OF THE SAINTS AND THE ANGEL AT THE ALTAR

1.5.1 6. The angel with the censer — Rev 8:3–5

Exegesis: Before the first trumpet sounds, an angel appears standing at the altar with a golden vessel full of burning coals and is given much incense to offer as a sacrifice together with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne (Rev 8:3). The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, rises to God, after which the same angel fills the censer with fire from the altar and throws it to the earth; there follow thunder, voices, lightning, and an earthquake (Rev 8:3–5). The scene shows two stages of action: the first is the lifting up of prayer to God, the second — a response from God that comes down as a force effecting judicial consequences.

Historical context: The motif of the mediation of prayer and liturgical sacrifice as an effective appeal to God has roots in ancient cultic theology; the theological image of the censer and the altar as a means of connecting the earthly and heavenly worlds was well known to Jewish and Christian authors and readers.

Theological conclusion: The act of the angel with the censer does not suggest a magical mechanism whereby prayer by itself brings about catastrophes. Rather, it shows that the prayer of the saints, especially the prayer of martyrs, finds a hearing and can lead God to undertake an act of righteous judgment. Prayer here is linked to the memory of sacrifice and to God's response, not to an instrumentalization of violence by human wishes.

1.5.2 7. The altar as a place of prayer and judgment

Exegesis: The altar in Revelation plays a polyvalent role: under the altar are the souls of the martyrs, on the altar the prayers of the saints are offered, from the altar comes the fire of judgment, and from its witness issues a voice that at one point releases four angels over the Euphrates. In the finale of this dynamic, the altar itself confirms the justice of God's verdicts (Rev 16:7). The altar connects the memory of sacrifice with the execution of justice.

Historical context: The symbolism of the altar was central in Israel's cultic imagination and in its reinterpretation in Christianity; the figure of martyrs "under the altar" reflects the experience of persecution of the community and its expectation of justice. In Revelation's narrative arrangement, the altar preserves the memory of sacrifice and becomes the point of departure for God's responsive action.

Theological conclusion: The altar is not the site of abstract or capricious wrath. It is the place of memory of sacrifice and of the blood of the innocent; hence the judgments presented in Revelation are not the result of caprice but a response to evil that has taken structural and persecutory forms. The text calls for a distinction between God's justice and human desires for revenge: divine judgment, though striking, has its source in the restoration of order and in the deep transformation of history, not in legitimizing private violence or hatred.

1.6 IV. FIRST FOUR TRUMPETS: JUDGMENT ON THE ENVIRONMENTS OF LIFE

1.6.1 8. Structure of the first four trumpets

The first four trumpets form a coherent sequence of judgment in which successive blasts strike successive layers of the inhabited world. The text lists in order the earth and vegetation, the sea, the fresh waters, and the sky together with the sources of light. This ordered presentation is not accidental: it indicates the

scope and degree to which creation is affected by the judgment, and, at the same time, the ways in which the created order is disturbed.

Exegesis of this structure directs attention to the fact that the trumpets do not describe a one-time, total destruction, but a series of strikes covering the basic spheres of life. Each trumpet strikes a different element of the cosmos — from the basis of human and plant existence, through the sea as an economic and communicative space, through the sources of water that sustain life, up to the lights of the heavens that regulate time and order. In the literary whole of the Book of Revelation this distribution has theological significance: it shows creation's dependence on the Creator and shows that the misuse of creation, contrary to God's order, brings consequences.

In a historical context these images allude to well-known Old Testament motifs of judgment and the Egyptian plagues familiar to the reader, but also to the economic and ecological realities of the ancient world. Theologically read, the trumpets function as means of warning and partial correction intended to highlight human responsibility for the order of creation and to remind us of its finitude. They are not a simple prediction of a single contemporary catastrophe, but a literary way of showing that the created world will not endure endlessly the exploitation and violence done to it.

1.6.2 9. First trumpet: hail, fire, and blood (Rev 8:7; Exod 9:22–26)

After the sound of the first trumpet there appears an image of hail and fire mixed with blood. This motif immediately brings to mind the seventh Egyptian plague, in which hail and fire fall on the land of Egypt (Exod 9:22–26), yet the author of Revelation adds the element of blood. The addition of blood changes the character of the familiar scene: it is not only a destructive force of nature, but a symbol of the consequences of human violence, a sign of the shedding of innocent blood.

Literarily and theologically, the image of hail mixed with blood signals that judgment is not indifferent to the moral dimension of history. The earth is affected in its condition as a result of human transgressions; nature becomes witness to and participant in the relation between God and humans. At the same time, the text emphasizes the limitation of the effect: the destruction affects only one third. This fraction, repeated in the series of trumpets, shows that the judgment is gradual and admonitory in character, not immediately annihilating the whole world.

The theological conclusion emphasizes that the angel carrying out the sentence acts within the bounds given by the throne of God, not according to his own whim. Such restraint shows the absence of a dualistic conviction about two equal powers; even the catastrophic elements inscribed in the judicial plan remain controlled and purposeful, leaving space for human response.

1.6.3 10. Second trumpet: a burning mountain and a sea of blood (Rev 8:8–9; Jer 51:25; Rev 18:13)

The second trumpet brings the image "as it were a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea" (Rev 8:8). In prophetic tradition and apocalyptic literature, a mountain often symbolizes political power or a kingdom. In this light, the "burning mountain" may signify the fall of an imperial structure, such as Babylon, which the prophets announced as a "mountain of doom" (cf. Jer 51:25). In Revelation, such a fall has a worldwide dimension, because the effects of the mountain's impact touch the sea — the place of trade, transport and wealth.

A historical perspective highlights the economic dimension of the scene: the sea in the ancient world was an artery of trade and a source of imperial wealth. Destruction of ships and changes in the sea therefore

symbolize disruption of economic and commercial order, which is causally connected with the improper use of structures of power. Later in Revelation the system of Babylon will be described as an economy based on exploitation and commerce (Rev 18), which gives the second trumpet both political-economic and moral significance.

From a theological point of view, this trumpet shows that God's judgment strikes not only individual sins but systems that, through ruthless exploitation of creation and people, maintain their power. This does not justify human violence or revenge; on the contrary, the text reveals that evil connected with systemic violence is subjected to God's measured justice.

1.6.4 11. Third trumpet: the star Wormwood (Rev 8:10–11; Jer 9:14; Jer 23:15)

The third trumpet depicts the fall of a great star burning like a torch and bearing the name *Apsinthos* — Wormwood. This star poisons one third of the waters, making them bitter, and many people die. In biblical tradition wormwood is a symbol of bitterness, the consequence of sin and the distortion of goodness. Prophetic announcements speak of feeding the people with wormwood as a punishment for apostasy (cf. Jer 9:14; Jer 23:15).

Exegetically, the image of poisoned springs is read as a metaphor of a situation in which the foundations of social and religious life are contaminated — that which was meant to sustain life becomes a source of death. It is not about the introduction of a wholly foreign substance, but about the revelation of the results of long-term moral decline: idolatrous practices, false teaching, and the exploitation of resources to destroy others morally poison the community.

Theologically the third trumpet emphasizes the order of causality: social and religious sin penetrates the structure of life so that water — an image of what is necessary and purifying — becomes defiled. At the same time the limitation of the judgment to "one third" leaves room for a summons to conversion, which contrasts with absolute determinism. The text appeals for recognition of this poisoning and responsibility for restoring the sources of life.

1.6.5 12. Fourth trumpet: darkening of the cosmos (Rev 8:12; Gen 1)

The fourth trumpet touches the heavens: the sun, moon and stars lose one third of their light. This image combines Old Testament motifs, like the ninth Egyptian plague (darkness), prophetic announcements of the day of the Lord, and the symbolism of the fall of kingdoms. In the description of creation (Gen 1), the heavenly lights were established to order time and the rhythms of life; their partial darkening therefore means disruption of that order.

Literarily and theologically, the motif of dimming contains an element of "partial de-creation": it is not a total reversal of the act of creation, but a reminder that the created order can be disturbed if people use it in rebellion against God. The trumpet angel does not strike matter out of hatred; rather he signals that natural harmony depends on the moral condition of those entrusted with it.

The theological conclusion is a reminder of the bond between the order of creation and social and religious justice. The darkening is not final annihilation, but an invitation to reflection on how human power and decisions affect the stability of the cosmos entrusted to humanity.

1.7 V. THREE "WOES": JUDGMENT ON HUMANS AND DEMONIC POWERS

1.7.1 13. The eagle in mid-heaven (Rev 8:13)

After the fourth trumpet there appears an eagle flying mid-heaven, crying out "Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth" (Rev 8:13). In the narrative, this voice serves as a turning point — until now the trumpets primarily affected the environments of life; now the summons focuses directly on people and the spiritual causes of their downfall. The eagle, as a herald, raises the alarm and announces that the next blows will have a different character.

In theological reading, the term "inhabitants of the earth" does not include all people without exception. In Revelation, the term carries a theological connotation and refers to those who bind their identity to the Beast's order, rejecting the call to faithfulness to God. Accordingly, the eagle does not cry out against humanity as such, but calls the attention of those engaged in structures contrary to God's order.

The practical consequence of such a warning is twofold: first, it intensifies the moral tension of the narrative, indicating human responsibility; second, it emphasizes that the next judgments have not only a natural dimension but also a spiritual and political one. The eagle thus becomes a literary accent shifting from the ecological image of judgment to its personal and spiritual side.

1.7.2 14. Fifth trumpet: the opening of the Abyss (Rev 9:1–3)

The fifth trumpet presents a vision of a star that falls from heaven to earth and is given the key to the shaft of the Abyss, called *abyssos* (Rev 9:1–2). In the text, the "star" most likely symbolizes a certain angelic being, and the fact of its "fall" may indicate a being in a state of fall or moral disintegration. It is important here to distinguish: it is not the trumpet angels who open the *abyssos*, but this fallen star, which prevents identifying it with one of the seven holy trumpet angels.

From the *abyssos* come demonic "locusts," whose description mixes insectile, equine and human features: they have the elements of locusts, the figures of war horses, human faces, women's hair, lion's teeth, breastplates of iron and tails like scorpions. This composite bestiary is not a zoological report but an icon of demonic power: a seeming attractiveness combined with intelligence, military force, and capacity to inflict suffering. Their presence symbolizes an intensifying attack not only on the environment but directly on people and their spiritual orientations.

Theologically, the opening of the *abyssos* shows that the judgment also has a spiritual dimension: God permits the action of demonic powers as a form of experience for those whom people have chosen, but this permission is controlled and marked by judicial intentionality. We do not have here an image of an equal rivalry between divine and demonic powers, but rather a supervised use of evil as part of the process of admonition and judgment.

1.7.3 15. Limitation of the demonic locusts (Rev 9:4–6)

Although the descriptions of the locusts sound terrifying, the apocalyptic narrative specifies the limits of their action. The demonic beings are forbidden to harm the grass and the trees; they may not attack those who bear God's seal; they may not kill people; their time of operation is limited to five months (Rev 9:4–5). Thus they can mainly torment and cause suffering, but they do not have the power to ultimately annihilate creation or to rule unconditionally.

Exegetically, these limitations are significant because they emphasize the supremacy of divine sovereignty: the demonic forces do not gain full agency and are set within boundaries determined by the Creator.

From a literary point of view, such control gives the drama intensity without losing the eschatological perspective of hope. In practical and pastoral terms one must therefore reject the temptation to reduce the text to promoting fear of any "evil" as an autonomous, unstoppable entity.

Theologically, these limits at the same time reveal the truth about responsibility: although God permits the experience of evil, he also limits its destructive power, leaving space for human decision and possible conversion. This does not justify suffering, but shows that in the order of history divine justice and ultimate good remain supreme.

1.7.4 16. Abaddon–Apollyon (Rev 9:11)

Among the demonic leaders, the text names "the angel of the Abyss," whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek *Apollyōn* (Rev 9:11). Both names carry the idea of destruction and ruin. In the literary and symbolic context, the presence of such a figure emphasizes the connection between the demonic nature of the action and the elements of destruction found in the description of the locusts.

Historically it is worth noting that the Greek name *Apollyōn* may also have cultural references that the author could have had in mind, including propaganda and images in the popular imagination associated with cultural figures. However, these references do not change the essential theological observation: the angel of the Abyss is not a holy angel and does not act out of a love of justice, but out of a destructive nature. God may nevertheless permit his action as an element of the judicial process, without thereby replacing his own righteous rule.

In narrative analysis one must therefore distinguish roles: there are the trumpet angels, serving the authority of the Throne; there is the star that falls and opens the *abyssos*; and there is the angel of the Abyss commanding the demonic beings. This distinction counters simplifications and allows for a more precise understanding of the judicial dynamics in the Book.

1.7.5 17. Theology of judgment by permission

The fifth trumpet illustrates a specific form of divine judgment: judgment may take the form of permitting the action of forces that had previously been restrained. In such a scheme God does not necessarily introduce something entirely new, but rather removes certain safeguards, allowing the nature of evil to become visible and to be experienced by those who chose it.

Exegetically, this "permission" has educative and judging purposes — it is meant to show the true face of systems and appetites that once seemed attractive. From the apparent attractiveness of demonic power emerges the true face: a scorpion tail capable of inflicting pain. The apocalyptic author thus shows that what is outwardly appealing may in practice serve destruction.

Theologically, it is important to separate intentions: the demon acts out of hatred and desire to destroy; God permits his action within the framework of judgment in order to mete out justice and ultimately to direct history toward renewal. This distinction eliminates a dualistic scheme of two equal powers and sustains the idea of moral responsibility of spiritual and human beings for their deeds.

1.7.6 18. Sixth trumpet: the four angels at the Euphrates (Rev 9:14–15)

Before the sixth trumpet a voice coming from the horns of the golden altar commands: "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates" (Rev 9:14). The description indicates that these angels were bound and prepared "for an hour, a day, a month and a year, to kill a third of mankind" (Rev 9:15). Binding in apocalyptic literature usually characterizes the imprisonment of dangerous powers, so their release is a deliberate act placed within divine chronometry.

Exegetically, it is important here to stress the precision: the text does not enumerate four different dates, but highlights the complete exactness of God's timing — everything happens "for an hour, a day, a month and a year." This indicates that despite the apparent freedom of evil's actions, authority over time and the calendar of history rests in God's hands. The scope of effect — one third of people — again emphasizes the limited but real impact of the trumpets.

In theological accounting, we have the image of a judgment in which God uses certain instruments as part of a just measure of punishment, always, however, maintaining limits and presupposing the possibility of human response. This shows that divine sovereignty and punishment coexist with a call to conversion.

1.7.7 19. The significance of the Euphrates

The Euphrates River in ancient culture had many meanings: it was the eastern boundary of the Roman Empire, from beyond which armies of Assyria and Babylon often came, and, for Romans, the region was associated with the Parthian threat. In apocalyptic imagination it served as a barrier restraining the flood of invasion. Therefore the release of the angels bound at the Euphrates has not only a geographical but also a symbolic weight — it means the removal of the boundary that until now held back the growing forces of destruction.

Historical references show that this image could resonate with the socio-political experience of the text's addressees: empires that build their power on violence and keep conflicts at the periphery of the center ultimately suffer the consequences of their system. In the literary closure the Euphrates becomes a turning point where the barrier separating the center from chaos is taken away.

Theologically, this scene illustrates the paradox of judgment: a system of power that rests on violence is judged by God through the release of the same violence that it employed. This is not an encouragement to revenge, but a moral diagnosis and a call to transformation, so as not to find oneself on the side of those who cause suffering.

1.7.8 20. Demonic cavalry (Rev 9:16–19)

The release of the four angels is accompanied by a vision of a vast cavalry whose descriptions combine hybrid, monstrous features: the horses have heads like lions, fire, smoke, and sulfur come from their mouths, their tails resemble snakes, and their task is to kill and wound (Rev 9:17–18). The motif of fire, smoke, and sulfur alludes to Old Testament images of judgment, like the judgment on Sodom and the fire of Gehenna, and emphasizes the destructive nature of the blow.

Exegetically, the scene of the cavalry need not be understood as a realistic report about a material army; it is rather an image of war and violence rendered into supernatural dimensions, pointing to their complete dehumanization. In the war presented by apocalyptic iconography there is no glorious, heroic aspect: here war shows its most monstrous, hybrid, and serpentine face.

From a theological point of view, this description reminds us that violence cannot be idealized. War becomes an instrument that reveals spiritual emptiness and the moral collapse of societies. Revelation does not glorify violence, but presents it as one of the effects of turning away from God's order.

1.7.9 21. Lack of repentance (Rev 9:20–21)

After the staggering visions of the sixth trumpet, the author notes a paradoxical and tragic conclusion: despite experiencing judgments, many people did not turn from their practices and did not repent; they did not abandon the worship of demons, idols, murders, *pharmakeia*, sexual immorality, and theft (Rev 9:20–21). The Greek word *pharmakeia* is ambiguous — it can concern magical practices, the use of poisons

or cultic rites connected with ingesting substances — and in the text it is linked with a list of violent acts and religious falsity.

Exegetically, this summary indicates that the trumpets, despite their dramatic form, serve an admonitory function: their limited character leaves space for change and conversion. The tragedy lies in that, instead of recognizing the warning, people increase their resistance and deepen their moral rebellion. The author therefore does not present judgment as a tool of vengeance, but as a moment of accounting that reveals the true consequences of human choice.

The theological message is clear and demanding: experiencing God's judgment should lead to reflection and transformation of heart, not to further hardening. Revelation maintains hope for renewal and healing of nations, reminding that the ultimate perspective is the restoration of creation according to God's design, not the triumph of violence.

1.8 VI. THE SEVENTH TRUMPET: PROCLAMATION OF THE KINGDOM

1.8.1 22. Not catastrophe, but enthronement

Exegesis: When the seventh angel blows the trumpet, Revelation does not immediately present another series of plagues, but a loud proclamation: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev 11:15). In this verse the seventh trumpet functions as a liturgical and theophanic declaration — not so much as a technical signal of the next catastrophe as the unveiling of God's manifest rule. The text lists a number of results of this enthronement: the assumption of manifest rule by God, judgment of the dead, reward for the prophets and the saints, the destruction of those who destroy the earth, the opening of the heavenly temple, and the revelation of the Ark of the Covenant. The culmination of the trumpet sequence is therefore not mere destruction but the revelation of kingship.

Historical context: In Jewish-Christian literature, the moment of proclamation of the kingdom is often a judicial-liturgical scene when God sits on the throne and his rule becomes manifest to all. In Revelation this proclamation refers to the rich temple and messianic tradition: not only to the image of triumph but to the ritual through which the sacred passes to introduce an order of justice.

Theological conclusion: Interpreting the seventh trumpet as enthronement shifts the weight of meaning from a catastrophic spectacle to the theological constitution of the world under God's rule. Judgment and healing are here combined with the liturgical proclamation of the authority of God and his Anointed; it is not exclusively an act of destruction but the revelation of sovereignty that restores justice and order.

1.8.2 23. "To destroy those who destroy the earth"

Exegesis: In the word about judgment recorded in Rev 11:18 the formula appears: the time for "destroying those who destroy the earth." The Greek play on words *diaphtheirai tous diaphtheirontas tēn gēn* underscores a corresponding consequence: those who have been corrupting are themselves subject to destruction. In the text judgment is not directed against creation as such, but against those who abused dominion over the world in ways leading to its degradation and violence against people.

Historical context: From the perspective of antiquity and prophetic Judaism, accusations of "destroying the earth" were addressed to rulers and systems that, through exploitation, war and injustice, devastated the common good. Revelation inherits this logic: the critique is aimed at practices and structures that permit violence, not at creation itself.

Theological conclusion: The text clearly distinguishes God-Judge from the guilty. Angels carry out the command of judgment, but they do not enact divine hostility toward the world; their actions consist in removing what the world has corrupted. This also suggests an ecological dimension of the conclusion: the judgment is directed against destructive human practices, not against creation, which is to be ultimately renewed.

1.9 VII. SEVEN BOWLS: FULFILLMENT OF JUDGMENT

1.9.1 24. "The seven last plagues"

Exegesis: Rev 15 opens the vision of "seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is finished" (Rev 15:1). The author stresses that the bowls are "last" — not necessarily only as a chronological ordering, but as the stage in which the process of judgment reaches its fullness. In the narrative, the trumpets operated partially and admonitorily; the bowls, by contrast, perform the function of completing the judgment.

Historical context: In apocalyptic tradition cycles of judgment are sometimes constructed to reveal increasingly full aspects of God's action. When warnings remain unheeded, the stage of final reckoning arrives. In temple literature, intensification of judgment often accompanies the motif of "last plagues" as the culmination of justice.

Theological conclusion: The bowls show that the period of warnings has reached its end; their pouring out is a dramatic confirmation that God is responding to persistent rejection of the call to repentance. Yet the aim of this action is not a caprice of wrath but the bringing of history to fullness, after which renewal follows.

1.9.2 25. Trumpets and bowls: similarities

Exegesis: The relations between the trumpets and the bowls arrange themselves into systematic pairs: the first trumpets and bowls concern the earth and vegetation or sores; the second, the sea; the third, rivers and springs; the fourth, the realm of heavenly bodies; the fifth, the sphere of darkness and the enemy's kingdom; the sixth, the area of the Euphrates; the seventh in both series concludes with an earthquake and hail and announces the final decision. This striking similarity is too systematic to be considered accidental: the bowls correspond to the trumpets, but are intensified into a more decisive, final action.

Historical context: The motif of parallelism appears repeatedly in ancient apocalyptic literature, where different cycles describe cosmic conflicts from various perspectives. In Revelation such a structure allows the author to show that judgment operates simultaneously in many dimensions of reality: earth, sea, fresh waters, the heavens, structures of power and political boundaries.

Theological conclusion: The comparison of trumpets and bowls indicates that God leads history toward a certain end in multiple ways. Trumpets warn and limit; bowls complete and reveal the ultimate character of the verdict. This narrative orientation suggests a dynamic recapitulation rather than a simple linear calendar of events — judgment gradually reveals its fullness.

1.9.3 26. Succession or recapitulation?

Exegesis: Three main models lie in the interpretive field concerning the relation between the seals, trumpets, and bowls. The first model treats them strictly chronologically: seals → trumpets → bowls, as successive phases. The second model reads them as recapitulations — three images of the same epoch seen from different points of view. The third model combines elements of the previous two and

proposes progressive recapitulation: cycles recur, but each time they grow in intensity, approaching the final fulfillment.

Historical context: All three approaches have precedents in the history of interpretation of apocalyptic. In patristic and modern discussion, these debates have led to different eschatological readings. John's narrative, however, exhibits features that favor the model of progressive recapitulation: systematic parallels between the cycles and at the same time an increase in the radicality of the effects.

Theological conclusion: The model of progressive recapitulation allows reconciling the repetition of images with the growing intensity of judgment and the narrative's orientation toward final renewal. Trumpets warn, bowls complete; both cycles are integral to the full panorama of God's action in history. Such a reading preserves the literary coherence of Revelation and emphasizes that the author does not create a mechanical calendar but a multi-layered vision of judgment and salvation.

1.10 VIII. ANGELS COMING OUT OF THE TEMPLE

1.10.1 27. The Temple of the Tabernacle of the Testimony

Exegesis: Before the pouring out of the bowls the text opens a scene in the heavenly temple: "the temple of the Tabernacle of the Testimony in heaven" is opened (Rev 15:5). This designation strongly corresponds with images of the Tent of Meeting, the Ark of the Covenant, the tablets of the Law and the general context of the revelation of God's will. Judgment issues from the place of God's presence and from the sphere of the covenantal testimony — hence its legitimacy and its connection with the history of salvation.

Historical context: The Tabernacle of the Testimony in the Israelite tradition was the central sign of the covenant between God and His people. The appeal to this image in Revelation places the judicial decision at the center of the covenant and temple cult, not in the sphere of arbitrary wrath. From then on judgment appears as a consequence of breaking covenantal obligations.

Theological conclusion: Because judgment issues from the temple, it is an expression of God's faithfulness to the covenant and holiness, not an act of capricious anger. This important qualification protects the exegesis from reducing God's action to revenge, emphasizing rather its character as justice consistent with the history of promise.

1.10.2 28. The garments of the seven angels

Exegesis: Seven angels come out of the temple "clothed in pure, bright linen, girded at the chests with golden sashes" (Rev 15:6). Their attire alludes to liturgical and priestly garments, as well as to the dignity of royal servants. The image also recalls the robe of the Son of Man in Rev 1:13. The angels in the bowls do not appear as demonic warriors; their appearance indicates a liturgical and ministerial function.

Historical context: In the temple culture clothing had theological weight: it indicated purity, dedication and authority to perform cultic service. Placing the angels in similar garments suggests that the execution of sentences has a sacramental character and is performed within the framework of God's worship, not as an act of external violence.

Theological conclusion: The garments of the angels emphasize that the carrying out of judgments is a holy act subordinated to God. This eliminates phantasms about the heavenly "executioners" taking pleasure in human suffering; instead it stresses purity of intention and total submission to God's will.

1.10.3 29. The golden bowls

Exegesis: One of the four Living Creatures hands the seven angels "seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever" (Rev 15:7). The Greek *phialē* denotes a shallow vessel used in libations and temple rites. In Rev 5:8 similar golden vessels contain incense, which is an image of the prayers of the saints. In Rev 8:3–5 prayers are linked with the fire of the altar. In this series of texts we see a significant juxtaposition: golden vessels of prayers — Rev 5:8; prayers on the altar fire — Rev 8:3–5; and golden bowls of wrath — Rev 15:7. This connection indicates that the bowls of wrath are a response to the prayers of the persecuted Church.

Historical context: In temple practices the libation vessel functioned ritually, and incense was a symbol of sacrifice and prayer. Transferring this symbolism to heaven ties the prayers of the suffering to a divine reaction; it is a literary way to show that God "takes into account" the complaints and cries of victims.

Theological conclusion: The linking of prayer with judgment does not justify violence; rather it shows that God's justice arises in response to authentic suffering. The bowls of wrath are therefore not a capricious outburst, but a liturgical arrival at a response that has a restorative character.

1.10.4 30. The wrath of God — thymos

Exegesis: The bowls are "full of *thymos tou Theou*." The Greek *thymos* can mean violent anger or intense indignation, but in the apocalyptic context it does not signify a loss of God's self-control. God's wrath here is unambiguously moral and purposeful: it answers persecution, is the response of holiness to evil, the defense of victims, the removal of systems of death and the consequence of persistent rejection of the call to repentance. The text consistently shows *thymos* as an element leading to the new creation.

Historical context: In biblical thought God's anger is not synonymous with capricious fury, but forms part of His justice. In Revelation this motif is linked with liturgical images of sacrifice and with the response to wrongdoing, especially the wrong done to martyrs.

Theological conclusion: Treating wrath as a moral determination distinguishes it from human aggression. God's wrath in Revelation is an expression of love opposing what destroys creation and hurts people; in this perspective it is not opposed to love but is a form of its defense against evil.

1.10.5 31. The temple filled with smoke

Exegesis: After the handing over of the bowls the temple is filled with smoke "from the glory of God and from His power," so that no one can enter it until the plagues are finished (Rev 15:8). This image corresponds with Old Testament theophanies: Ex 40:34–35 and 1 Kgs 8:10–11 describe the filling of the Tabernacle with glory, and Isa 6:4 contains the motif of smoke in the presence of the Holy One. In Revelation smoke does not signal chaos but God's presence and the envelopment of the judgments by a theophany.

Historical context: In ancient temple iconography the smoke of incense and the glory of God were inseparably connected with the communication of the divine message and the establishment of cosmic order. The restriction of access to the temple after it is filled with smoke indicates the seriousness of the stage that has begun and its irrevocability.

Theological conclusion: Temple smoke makes the judgment more credible as a decision emanating from divine glory. The inability to enter the temple can suggest that the process that has started has reached a point where the sentence must be carried out to completion; at the same time it reminds that the temple itself is a place of holiness, not a scene of senseless destruction.

1.11 IX. THE SEVEN BOWLS

1.11.1 32. The command from the temple

Exegesis: John hears the command: “Go and pour out the seven bowls of the wrath of God on the earth” (Rev 16:1). The command comes from the temple; the angels receive an explicit mission expressed by the Greek imperative hypagete kai ekcheete. The verb *ekcheō* — “to pour out” — carries the connotation of completely emptying a vessel, which distinguishes the bowls from the trumpets: there the emphasis was on a signal and partiality, here execution and fulfillment occur.

Historical context: In the tradition of temple cult decisions made at the altar had ritual and institutional character. In Revelation the command from the temple emphasizes that the angels act in obedience to a tabernacle decree, which gives order and legitimacy to their actions.

Theological conclusion: The fact that the order issues from the tabernacle underlines that the bowls are not an autonomous supernatural aggression but the execution of divine judgment initiated in the place of the covenant. The angels are servants of that order, and their actions are instruments for carrying out the covenant’s decision.

1.11.2 33. First bowl: the earth and sores

Exegesis: The first angel pours his bowl on the earth and malignant and painful sores appear on the people who bear the mark of the Beast and worship its image (Rev 16:2). This motif recalls the Egyptian plagues, especially Ex 9:8–12, but in Revelation the plague has a clear moral dimension: it touches those who have consciously aligned themselves with the system of the Beast.

Historical context: The mark of the Beast, understood as the sign of belonging to an imperial and idolatrous system, had in apocalyptic perspective a social, economic and religious dimension. In this narrative what was supposed to be an economic safeguard becomes an identifying sign in judgment.

Theological conclusion: The first bowl exposes a false sense of security: signs and systems meant to ensure survival do not protect against God’s justice when they are used to perpetuate violence. The specification of the plague’s target — not a random group but participants in a system of violence — emphasizes the proportionality and morality of the sentence.

1.11.3 34. Second bowl: the sea like the blood of a dead man

Exegesis: The second angel pours his bowl into the sea and “it became blood like that of a dead man, and every living creature in the sea died” (Rev 16:3). Compared with the second trumpet, which affected only a third of the sea, the second bowl encompasses the whole, which shows the degree of completion of judgment. The image “blood of a dead man” suggests congealed, foul blood incapable of sustaining life.

Historical context: The sea in the Bible often symbolizes wealth, trade and cosmopolitan empires. The transformation of the sea into blood is therefore a telling metaphor for judgment upon economic-political structures that feed on exploitation and violence.

Theological conclusion: The second bowl points to judgment upon systems that benefited from injustice. This is not merely an ecological sign but a targeted critique of socio-economic structures that lead to death and degradation.

1.11.4 35. Third bowl: rivers and springs turn to blood

Exegesis: The third angel pours his bowl on the rivers and springs, which become blood. In this scene an “angel of the waters” appears who utters a judicial formula: “You are just, O One who is and who was, Holy, because you have thus judged. For they have poured out the blood of saints and prophets, and you have

given them blood to drink; they deserve it" (Rev 16:5–6). The expression of this utterance is the principle of corresponding consequence: those who poured out blood now drink blood.
Historical context: The pattern of "retribution" as a just consequence has roots in biblical motifs of moral equivalence: violence yields similar fruits. In Revelation this formula functions as a judicial confirmation, not as an expression of satisfaction in suffering.
Theological conclusion: The text does not present sadistic delight; the angel does not say "I rejoice," but "You are just." Judgment is thus narratively presented as the logical moral resolution to guilt, not as barbaric revenge.

1.11.5 36. Who is the "angel of the waters"?

Exegesis: The figure of the "angel of the waters" fits the apocalyptic practice of personifying cosmic forces through angels: earlier in Revelation there appear the four angels of the winds (Rev 7:1), an angel who has power over fire (Rev 14:18), an angel standing in the sun (Rev 19:17) and others. These figures are not gods of natural elements; they are divine messengers representing the ordering of creation under God's sovereignty.
Historical context: In Jewish-Christian literature the personifications of elements by angels serve a literary purpose to show that all spheres of the cosmos are in God's hands. There is no affirmation here of pagan polytheism but a theological placement of nature in a relationship of dependence on God.
Theological conclusion: The "angel of the waters" confirms that nature participates in the moral order of the world. Rivers and seas are not autonomous sources of divinity; their transformation in the narrative is an event that fits into the divine execution of justice upon humans.

1.11.6 37. The voice of the altar

Exegesis: After the declaration of the angel of the waters John hears the voice of the altar: "Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments" (Rev 16:7). This may be the voice of the angel at the altar, a personification of the altar itself, or the symbolic voice of the martyrs under the altar mentioned earlier.
Historical context: The altar in the religious tradition receives the blood of sacrifices and prayers. In Revelation the altar that previously received the blood of the martyrs becomes an element confirming that their prayers were heard and that justice comes in response.
Theological conclusion: The voice of the altar adds a moral and liturgical dimension to the judgment: this is not an anonymous catastrophe but an answer to concrete wrongs and prayers. Thus the verdict is framed within religious and just terms in light of the history of suffering.

1.11.7 38. Fourth bowl: the sun scorches people

Exegesis: The fourth angel pours his bowl on the sun, which is given power to scorch people with fire (Rev 16:8–9). In contrast to the fourth trumpet, where the light of this body was partially diminished, here the sun itself becomes an instrument of intense suffering. The text emphasizes the reaction of people: instead of giving glory to God, they blaspheme the name of God.
Historical context: In the ancient culture the sun could be understood as a powerful cosmic symbol; its role in judgment shows that creation, though given by God, can become a source of danger when humanity rejects relationship with God. The mention of blasphemy highlights human moral stubbornness in the face of revealed sovereignty.

Theological conclusion: This bowl highlights a difficult moral truth: suffering does not automatically lead to repentance. The experience of judgment can deepen hardness if the heart remains closed to truth. It is a warning against a simplistic logic "suffering → repentance."

1.11.8 39. Fifth bowl: the throne of the Beast plunged in darkness

Exegesis: The fifth bowl is poured on the throne of the Beast, and its kingdom is plunged into darkness (Rev 16:10–11). The symbolism of darkness here concerns not only the absence of physical light but the collapse of ideological credibility and the parody of authority that the Beast had established over people. Despite pain and groaning, people still blaspheme, and the idolatrous system proves powerless in the face of judgment.

Historical context: In a politico-religious context the Beast promised order and security; the collapse of the center of power reveals the contradiction between promise and reality. Revelation exposes that the imitation of God's kingdom conceals darkness and inability to save its subjects.

Theological conclusion: The fifth bowl reveals the powerlessness of false structures of salvation and leaves room for reflection on the consequences of idolatry. Even the exposed failures of the center of power do not guarantee immediate repentance; attachment to pastoral-political systems can persist despite obvious collapse.

1.11.9 40. Sixth bowl: the drying up of the Euphrates

Exegesis: The sixth angel pours his bowl on the Euphrates and the waters dry up, preparing the way for the "kings from the east" (Rev 16:12). It is worth recalling that in the sixth trumpet four angels over the Euphrates were already released; in the bowls the very boundary restraining the march of the army disappears, which literally serves to prepare the gathering of forces.

Historical context: Images of crossings and rivers drying are motifs known from Israel's history (the crossing of the Red Sea, the Jordan) and from political events (e.g., the change of the Euphrates' course in the capture of a city). However, in Revelation this motif acquires a symbolic character: the drying of the river does not mean deliverance but the disclosure of a road that will lead to judgment.

Theological conclusion: The drying up of the Euphrates shows that God is sovereign even over political borders and that the mobilization of opposing forces simply fits into the divine scenario of resolution. It is a warning against thinking that geographic or military changes automatically determine the fate of history.

1.11.10 41. Three spirits like frogs

Exegesis: After the sixth bowl three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouths of the dragon, the Beast and the False Prophet, who perform signs and gather the kings of the world for war (Rev 16:13–14). The frog symbolism recalls the Egyptian plagues, but here these animals personify uncleanness, propaganda, demonic imitation of signs and the capacity to mobilize political rulers.

Historical context: In apocalyptic imagination demons appear as "messengers" who deceive nations with word and sign. In this narrative the demons come out of the mouths of the anti-divine figures, which underscores the role of speech and communication (false prophecies, propaganda, rhetoric of war) in organizing resistance against God.

Theological conclusion: The difference between angelic mission and demonic activity lies in the authenticity and source of the message: angels convey the temple's commands, demons deceive kings, leading them to their own ruin. This indication has practical implications for discernment: demonic "signs" may look religious yet lead to violence and judgment.

1.11.11 42. Armageddon

Exegesis: The kings are gathered at a place called in Hebrew *Harmagedon* (Rev 16:16). The name is most often associated with Megiddo, which in Israel's history was the scene of many battles. In the context of Revelation this name functions rather as a symbolic indication of the final clash between the forces of resistance and the authority of God, and not necessarily as a precise geographical specification.
Historical context: Megiddo's history, with its war memories, makes it a literary locus for references to great resolutions. The author of Revelation uses this history to intensify the image of the ultimate conflict.
Theological conclusion: Armageddon is an image of the drama in which evil judges itself, thinking it directs history against God. The text emphasizes God's sovereignty: the actions of evil, though real and destructive, do not exceed His ultimate dominion and contribute to their own verdict.

1.11.12 43. Seventh bowl: "It is done"

Exegesis: The seventh angel pours his bowl into the air, and from the temple, from the throne, a voice rings out: "It is done" — *gegonen* (Rev 16:17). Pouring into the air can symbolically encompass the whole sphere — earth, sea, heaven — because earlier bowls had already affected specific domains. Then lightning, thunder, voices, the greatest earthquake, the splitting of the great city, judgment on Babylon, the disappearance of islands, the removal of mountains and enormous hail follow. The formula "It is done" closes the cycle, confirming the execution of the command that went out from the temple.
Historical context: The use of a formula confirming the completion of events has its place in the literary tradition as a means of communicating the ultimate fulfillment of the divine plan. In Revelation the voice from the throne, not the angel alone, proclaims the fulfillment, which underlines that although the angel carried out the command, the final decree issues from God's throne.
Theological conclusion: The seventh bowl constitutes the literary and theological closure of the judicial process begun in the temple. The decree of completion confirms that history has been brought to a point where divine justice achieves its goal, and a stage of renewal will follow. "It is done" signifies not the triumph of violence but the conclusion of the judgment phase from the perspective of the renewal of creation.

1.12 X. ANGELS, LITURGY AND JUDGMENT

1.12.1 44. Angels of judgment do not fight like demons

Exegesis: In Revelation angelic and demonic images may permeate the same narrative of judgment, but the text emphasizes an essential difference in intention and subject of action. Holy angels appear as beings standing before God's throne who receive a command and confirm God's justice; their mission is subordinated to the authority of the Lamb (Rev 5:6–14). In contrast, demonic forces emerge from the Abyss, try to deceive, aim at expansion of destruction, blaspheme and demand worship; their movement is rebellious and oriented toward self-perpetuating destruction (Rev 9:1–21).
Historical-literary context: The overlap of functions visible within the framework of judgment corresponds to the apocalyptic aesthetic, where external similarity does not necessarily imply identical motivations. In early Christian symbolism, where the narrative connects liturgical language of incense, altar and trumpets with scenes of judgment, the author shows that the same event can engage both obedient and rebellious spirits — yet each group acts from a different impulse. Understanding this multilayeredness is necessary in order not to reduce apocalyptic images to simple moral identifications.

Theological conclusion: The key message is that external similarity of actions does not mean moral similarity. A holy angel executes a just sentence within God's framework; a demon desires destruction for its own sake. This distinction defends theology from conflating sources of authority and motivation and prevents attributing demonic hatred to God.

1.12.2 45. The angel who binds the dragon (Rev 20:1–3)

Exegesis: The scene in Rev 20:1–3 depicts an angel descending from heaven who has the key to the Abyss and a great chain; the angel seizes the dragon, binds him and shuts him in the Abyss. The text places this act in clear contrast to the earlier episode in Rev 9, where the key to the Abyss fell into the hands of a fallen star and the opening of the Abyss brought a limited scourge. Unlike that temporary opening, in Rev 20 we have a singular act of angelic binding and sealing, which reveals the ultimate dominion of God.

Historical-literary context: The motif of a single angel dominating the force of chaos fits apocalyptic images that do not portray God's struggle with an equal adversary but show that even a one-time act of heavenly power is accomplished by authority delegated by God. In Jewish-Christian literature of that period visions often appear in which a key symbolizes the right to establish boundaries and control the powers of the underworld; understanding this symbol allows reading the scene as an expression of God's sovereignty, not the triumph of angels as autonomous powers.

Theological conclusion: This scene refutes any suggestion of parity between God and the adversary and emphasizes that even the task of finally subduing Satan is accomplished by an angel's obedience to the throne. It shows that the eschatological binding of Satan is not the result of a great cosmic battle between equal forces, but the matter of God's will and power using faithful creatures to fulfill His plan.

1.12.3 46. Angels refuse to accept worship (Rev 19:10; 22:8–9)

Exegesis: In scenes where John falls before an angel, the angel firmly redirects worship to God alone: "See that you do not do that! For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus; worship God!" (Rev 19:10; cf. 22:8–9). In the narrative this distinction is set against the Beast, who possesses authority and demands worship. The angel, however, though he has authority, redirects the praise to God.

Historical-literary context: In ancient mentality the cult of angels was a real danger, especially in syncretistic societies where boundaries between supernatural greatness and divinity could be blurred. In apocalyptic discourse the author consistently demarcates the relationship: an angel's power is not identical with divinity, and an angel's dignity appears in refusing to appropriate God's glory. This image also had a catechetical character for the persecuted community, teaching the correct hierarchy of worship.

Theological conclusion: The angel's stance is a criterion of spiritual maturity: true attributes of power do not require worship but return glory to the Creator. This distinction is also ethically important — it guards against sacralizing people, institutions or intermediary forces and reminds that only God is the object of worship.

1.13 XI. THEOLOGY OF GOD'S JUDGMENT

1.13.1 47. Judgment as a response to the suffering of victims

Exegesis: In the cycles of trumpets and bowls the prayers of the saints play a key role. The trumpet cycle begins with the censer and the prayers (Rev 8:3–5), while the bowl cycle contains the explanation: "They have poured out the blood of saints and prophets" (Rev 16; cf. Rev 6:9–11). The text therefore indicates

that divine judgment is not an isolated manifestation of power but a response to concrete histories of violence: the blood of martyrs, the persecution of the faithful, idolatrous practices, murders, magic, sexual immorality, thefts, the destruction of the land and the economic and political oppression characteristic of symbolic Babylon.

Historical-literary context: The community addressed by Revelation experienced real persecutions and systems of exploitation. In this light the judgment portrayed by the author is not an abstract punishment but an act of justice responding to specific human wrongs. Liturgical images — the censer, the altar, the prayers of the martyrs — emphasize that judgment is an answer to their cry where earthly institutions failed.

Theological conclusion: God's judgment in Revelation performs a restitutive and compensatory function: the angels act as executors of justice toward those to whom earthly courts denied it. This message emphasizes the moral dimension of divine action — God responds to suffering, hears the prayers of the persecuted and institutes a restorative order.

1.13.2 48. Judgment as a new Exodus

Exegesis: Numerous images in Revelation refer to the Egyptian plagues — hail and fire, water turned into blood, darkness, locusts, sores, frogs, death — which suggests a typological re-interpretation of Exodus. The comparison is explicit: just as the Egyptian plagues exposed the impotence of the gods of Egypt and broke the power of Pharaoh, so the apocalyptic judgments expose the impotence of the Beast and strike its idolatrous system.

Historical-literary context: Jewish and early Christian tradition often read great salvation through the lens of the Exodus from Egypt. Revelation inserts its harsh images into this tradition, transforming the plagues into instruments of liberation: the aim of the plagues was not destructive annihilation per se but the revealing of the truth about false powers and bringing the people to freedom. In the context of the early centuries, where communities experienced political and religious pressure, such a reading gave hope for the ultimate exit from oppression.

Theological conclusion: Revelation presents judgment as a component of liberation, not only as punishment. Judgment unmasks and breaks idolatrous mechanisms of power, answers the cry of the persecuted and prepares the people of God's exit from Babylon, clearing the way for the coming of the New Jerusalem.

1.13.3 49. Judgment as decreation and preparation of the new creation

Exegesis: Descriptions of successive trumpets and bowls touch elements of the created order: land, sea, rivers, lights, the air, living creatures and humanity. Visually they recall a reversal of the acts of creation from Genesis — the world partially returns to chaos. However, this process is not God abandoning creation but a decreation aiming to remove the corrupted order so that "a new heaven and a new earth" may arise (Rev 21–22).

Historical-literary context: The idea of decreation and re-creation links motifs of cosmic purification with messianic hope of renewal. In apocalyptic discourse, the destruction of elements of the world precedes the forming of a new quality of reality, free from violence and exploitation. In the narrative of Revelation the angels of the bowls are therefore not merely executors of punishment but participants in the cosmic work of purification that leads to the revelation of the Bride — the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:9).

Theological conclusion: Judgment is an instrument of preparing the new creation. The destruction of Babylon and the revelation of the New Jerusalem are two sides of a single plan: the elimination of what enslaves and kills is necessary so that a community of life may appear. The angels, as guides and agents, participate in this transformation, showing that the ultimate goal of history is renewal and healing of the world.

1.14 XII. Major Theological Distinctions

1.14.1 50. The angel is not an autonomous judge

Exegesis: The text of Revelation systematically presents angels as beings who execute authority entrusted to them by God, not as creators of law or judges acting on their own initiative. Angels do not determine guilt or act in personal revenge; their role is executive and subordinate to divine decision.

Historical-literary context: In contexts where there were tendencies to overly sacralize intermediary spiritual beings, the apocalyptic argumentation draws clear boundaries: God remains the only Judge, and the angel is a messenger and executor. This distinction serves both to order the cosmic structure and to guard against theological errors that might ascribe divine attributes to creatures.

Theological conclusion: Recognizing angels as executors rather than autonomous judges emphasizes both God's sovereignty and human responsibility before Him. Angels do not replace God in judgment; they merely carry out His verdict.

1.14.2 51. Not every "*angelos*" in the trumpet cycle is a holy angel

Exegesis: Revelation uses the Greek term *angelos* with reference to both faithful and fallen beings. Therefore it is necessary to analyze the context and a given figure's relation to God's throne before determining its moral status. Examples of diversity include the seven angels standing before God, the angel at the altar, the fallen star with the key to the Abyss, Abaddon (the angel of the Abyss), the four bound angels over the Euphrates, and the demonic spirits coming out of the mouths of the false trinity.

Historical-literary context: In Jewish and early Christian literature the term "angel" could refer to a wide spectrum of supernatural beings. The author of Revelation exploits this polysemy in order to build tension and a multilayered narrative. Hence careful differentiation of figures according to their actions and relation to God is required.

Theological conclusion: The mere designation "angel" does not determine a being's moral affiliation. Recognition requires analysis of context and the character of the action. This helps avoid simplistic identifications and preserves theological distinctions between obedience and rebellion.

1.14.3 52. God's permission does not imply a moral identity between God and the demon

Exegesis: The apocalyptic narrative grants God the possibility of limiting, permitting, or using the destructive action of evil forces within the framework of judgment, while simultaneously emphasizing that this does not make God the author of their hatred. The text maintains two coexisting truths: evil acts according to its own rebellious will, and at the same time evil does not transcend the ultimate bounds of God's sovereignty.

Historical-literary context: Faced with evil that truly appears effective and destructive, apocalyptic theology does not evade the problem of cooperation between parties. However, presenting God as the

one who limits and ultimately removes demonic forces serves to defend God's justice and goodness in the experience of persecuted communities.
Theological conclusion: The fact that God permits the temporary action of evil forces does not make Him morally like those forces. On the contrary, His justice is revealed in that He sets boundaries for evil, judges it, and ultimately eradicates it. Demons do not become "good" merely because their action serves, in the ultimate plan, God's purposes.

1.14.4 53. Judgment is not a sacralization of human vengeance

Exegesis: While presenting angels executing judgment, Revelation simultaneously restrains the emotion of private revenge. The faithful are called to witness, prayer, endurance in persecution, and refusal of the worship of the Beast, but not to assume the role of judge or executor.
Historical-literary context: For a community that might have felt a strong temptation to retaliate against persecutors, the apocalyptic text formulates ethical limits. In times when religion could become an instrument of political violence, the reminder that ultimate punishment belongs to God served to prevent abuse and religious violence.
Theological conclusion: God's judgment cannot be used to justify private hatred, revenge, or violence. Ultimate punishment belongs to God because only He knows the whole truth and judges without sin. This principle has pastoral and ethical consequences for the life of the Christian community.

1.15 XIII. Synthesis of the role of angels

1.15.1 54. Seven dimensions of angelic service

Exegesis: Revelation presents angels in many functions that together form a coherent picture of their service in God's plan. The first dimension is the liturgical dimension: angels stand before God and come out of the temple, which in the narrative emphasizes their connection with heavenly worship (Rev 7:1–3; 15:1–8). The second is the prayer dimension: angels present the incense along with the prayers of the saints, which links the liturgy of heaven with the cry of the persecuted on earth (Rev 8:3–5). As a third dimension, angels perform a signaling function: the sound of the trumpets announces successive stages of judgment, warning and synchronizing actions. The fourth dimension is executive activity: angels pour out the bowls in accordance with the command, carrying out the verdicts. The fifth dimension consists in limitation: angels restrain the winds and control the boundaries of destructive action, which shows their role in setting limits for evil. The sixth dimension is interpretive in character: angels explain the meaning of judgment and its justice, helping John and the reader understand the events taking place. Finally, the seventh dimension is eschatological: angels participate in the binding of the dragon, the fall of Babylon, and the revelation of the New Jerusalem.
Historical-literary context: Such a multidimensional presentation corresponds to the literary design of Revelation, which combines liturgy, prophecy, and the narrative of judgment. Angels as intermediaries between the throne and the world show how the cultic practices and prayer of the community have their echo in the heavenly order, while at the same time heavenly actions affect history.
Theological conclusion: The service of the angels is multifaceted and subordinated to a single goal: the fulfillment of God's plan of salvation. Angels do not function as independent beings, but as participants in worship, communicators, and executors whose defining feature is obedience to the throne.

1.15.2 55. Trumpets and bowls — a fundamental difference

Exegesis: Revelation significantly distinguishes the trumpet and bowl cycles. Trumpets have a warning character and the judgments in that cycle usually have a partial dimension: they often strike one-third of creation and leave room for repentance. The trumpets reveal the demonic nature of idolatry and end with the proclamation of God's kingdom. The bowls, however, are completing in character: the judgments in the bowl cycle are fuller; they respond to persistent refusal to repent and strike directly at the throne and the Beast's system; their culmination is the judgment of Babylon and the formula "It is done."

Historical-literary context: This distinction fits into the ancient expectation of the timing of final judgment; from the perspective of the first Christians, the process of punishment has a gradual character. The trumpets give time for change, which strengthens the moral dimension of the message, while the bowls show the consequence of persisting opposition to God's call. In liturgical and catechetical practice such a division emphasizes God's patience toward sin and at the same time His determination toward those who persist in injustice.

Theological conclusion: The distinction between trumpets and bowls highlights the simultaneous dynamics of warning and judgment: God gives a chance for repentance, but there are limits to patience. The final judgment is at once an expression of justice and a concern for the renewal of creation.

1.16 Conclusion

Exegesis: In Revelation the angels appear as those who confirm that history is not abandoned to chaos. Through the images of seven trumpets and seven bowls, through the censer, the altar, the trumpets and the bowls, the book combines vision, hearing, and liturgy. Angels announce, execute, and interpret judgment, always in relation to God's throne and the authority of the Lamb (Rev 1:1; 5:6–14; 7:1–3; 8:1–13; 9:1–21; 11:15–19; 15:1–8; 16:1–21; 20:1–3; 21:9–10).

Historical-literary context: For the community addressed by Revelation, these images had a consoling and warning dimension. They showed that God hears the prayers of the persecuted, that evil acts within designated boundaries, and that history is moving toward renewal. At the same time, the liturgical language and reminders of the Exodus give these scenes a salvific frame, not merely a sense of catastrophe.

Theological conclusion: The deepest theology of apocalyptic visions does not consist in fascination with catastrophes, but in four key truths. First, God hears the prayers of the persecuted and responds to their cry. Second, evil cannot act beyond the set limits — God restrains and judges its activity. Third, judgment is directed against that which destroys creation; its purpose is purification, not affirmation of violence. Fourth, the removal of Babylon prepares the revelation of the New Jerusalem — a community of life and reconciliation. Angels mediate here between the throne and the world, but their greatness lies not in autonomy, but in subordination to God's power and in refusing to accept His glory.

Synthetic thesis: Angels execute God's verdicts, but they never take His place. Their action demonstrates not heavenly autonomy but God's sovereignty, who hears the cry of victims, limits demonic chaos, judges the destroyers of the earth, and leads creation from Babylon to the New Jerusalem.

1.17 Notes and bibliography

1.18 Glossary of key terms

angelos – **angelos**: the Greek term for messenger or envoy

edothe – **edothē**: the form "it was given," emphasizing dependence on God's gift or authorization

eschatology – **eschatology**: theological reflection on the fulfilment of history in God

Parousia – **Parousia**: the final manifestation of the coming Christ

thlipsis – **thlipsis**: tribulation or persecution in the perspective of Revelation