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## THE IMAGERY OF ANGELIC PRAISE AND HEAVENLY TOPOGRAPHY IN THE *TESTAMENT OF OUR LORD*

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After the publication of the Syriac *Testament of Our Lord* (TD) in 1899, scholars noted that the TD contained an apocalypse and a graphic description of the Antichrist (TD<sub>syr</sub> I.2-14; R 4-19)<sup>1</sup>. More recently Bruno Steimer, following earlier authors, has dismissed the notion that the so-called TD apocalypse, an earlier version of which circulated independently before being incorporated into the TD, has any intrinsic literary relationship to the rest of the document<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The TD survives in Syriac, Ethiopic, and Arabic versions, of which only the Syriac and Ethiopic have been published in their entirety. Citations of the Syriac (TD<sub>syr</sub>), which forms the first two books of the so-called Clementine Octateuch, refer to the page and line number (from the top of the page) of the edition of I.E. RAHMANI, *Testamentum Domini nostri Jesu Christi*, Kirchheim, Mainz 1899 (R). Citations of the Ethiopic version (TD<sub>eth</sub>) refer to the page and line number of the edition of ROBERT BEYLOT, *Testamentum Domini ethiopiense*, Peeters, Louvain 1984 (B). A true critical edition of either version remains to be done; in his review of Beylot's edition (*Journal of Semitic Studies* 31 [1986] 292-295), the late Roger Cowley suggested that the number of errors and questionable textual judgments in Beylot's critical edition vitiated its work as a tool for establishing a text of the TD based upon comparison of the Syriac and Ethiopic. In this paper, I refrain from making critical evaluations of either the Syriac or Ethiopic. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are the author's.

<sup>2</sup> BRUNO STEIMER, *Vertex Traditionis: Die Gattung der altchristlichen Kirchenordnungen* (Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche 63), de Gruyter, Berlin-New

Yet there may be more to the relationship of the TD apocalypse to the rest of that work than simply an old apocalypse poorly fitted into the setting of a larger work. A not insignificant portion of the TD liturgical material points to the influence of apocalyptic imagery on the TD as a whole, not just in its apocalypse *per se*. The TD anaphora, daily prayer texts, and prebaptismal exorcism show the influence of the motif of the angels' worship of God in heaven, a motif which appears predominantly in apocalypses which describe ascent to heaven. The fact that the liturgical acts the TD describes are firmly earthbound suggests a creative appropriation of angelic praise imagery by the compiler or compilers of the TD.

Along with the TD's literary form of a post-resurrection revelation of the Lord himself, this liturgical evidence points to the adoption of features of a religious apocalyptic idiom by the compiler or compilers of the TD. That some of this imagery is juxtaposed with terminology related to fourth-century ascetic theology raises questions about the milieu of the TD's composition.

#### *Angelic and Earthly Praise in the Testament of Our Lord*

Angels, their worship of God, and the vision of the heavenly throne occupy a significant place in the vocabulary of prayer in the TD. Descriptions of the angels' worship, and of the heavenly scene of their praise, appear to have had an impact upon the language of some of the TD prayers. We turn now to a brief look at this imagery in the sections of the TD treating daily prayer, the eucharist, and baptism.

#### *Daily Prayer*

The TD sets down in detail the parameters of daily prayer practice for presbyters, widows, the bishop, and the laity (TDsyr I.32, 42, 21; II.24). The prescriptions concerning the times and content of the presbyters', widows', and bishop's daily prayer draw upon the image of the angels' praise of God in heaven.

York 1992, 102, 104. It may be that the presence of an apocalypse in the TD creates more problems than it solves for scholars who wish to retain the genre of church order as a useful hermeneutical tool.

The bishop, presbyters, and widows are to be "assiduous at the altar" (Syriac *me'emenan lwāt madbhā*, TDsyr I.22, 31, 40). To the extent to which they perform their daily prayer in this fashion, they imitate the archangels who minister assiduously before God's throne. The daily presbyteral prayer (which each of the presbyters prays "at his own time") refers to this "assiduous" prayer of the archangels: "We praise you, Lord, whom the doxologies of the praising archangels assiduously praise, and [whom] the praises of glories and the psalms of dominions continually praise" (R 76.16-18)<sup>3</sup>. The TD admonishes the presbyter to keep the discipline of daily prayer by appealing to his figural relation to the archangels: "Let him not neglect his prayers, for he is the figure (Syriac: *šalmā*) of the archangels. But let him know that God did not spare the angels who sinned" (R 74.15-17)<sup>4</sup>.

The presbyter's daily prayer (I.32) and the two prayers of the congregational synaxis at dawn (I.26) have a tripartite form which may echo the form of the angelic *qedushah*, the triple cry of "holy" (Is 6:3). That this tripartite form is deliberate is clear from the phrase beginning the third paragraph of each of the three prayers: "We treble this praise to you" (Syriac *metaltinan lāk teshbohtā*). Because the TD views the presbyters as the figure of the archangels, it is likely that the presbyters' tripartite prayer is intended to echo the triple "holy" of the angels<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> Note the prayer's depiction of the angels in terms of their *liturgical* functions.

<sup>4</sup> This text clearly echoes 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6, as Bevlot notes (191). However, note that the TD makes the neglect of daily prayer the transgression, a far cry from the biblical writings' evocation of the angels who fell from their exalted status. A similar idea to that in the TD appears in the hekhalot text *Sefer Hekhalot (3 Enoch)* 40:3: "When the ministering angels... do not recite the 'Holy' according to its proper order, devouring fire goes out from the little finger of the Holy One, blessed be He... It falls on their ranks... and devours them at a stroke, as it is written, A fire precedes him as he goes, / devouring all enemies around him [Ps 97:3]". Trans. Philip Alexander in JAMES H. CHARLESWORTH (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Doubleday, Garden City NY 1983, 291.

<sup>5</sup> The same might be said about the dawn prayers, if it can be shown that all three tripartite prayers are the work of the same redactor as the presbyteral prayers.

There is another reference to the *qedushah* in the TD prayer texts. The TD instructs the widow to begin her night prayer (TDsyr I.43) with the sentence, "Holy, holy, without stain, you who have a dwelling in light, God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, God of Enoch and David, Elijah, Elisha, Moses, Joshua and of the prophets and the rest who proclaimed your name in truth" (R 100.22-102.1). This phrase appears to be a variant of the *qedushah*, the angelic song before the throne of God<sup>6</sup>.

In sum, the TD views the presbyters of the church as the figures of the archangels, and instructs the widow to repeat a form of the *qedushah* at the beginning of her night prayer. In addition, the tripartite form of the presbyteral and dawn prayers may reflect the trebled cry of "holy" at the *qedushah*. All of these liturgical elements reflect the motif of the heavenly praise of God by the angels.

#### *Eucharist*

The gathering around the veiled altar for the celebration of the eucharist becomes in the TD a confluence of angelic and earthly worship, a liturgical action at which God and the angels are spectators. While the venue of this worship clearly is earthly, the language of the anaphora evokes the topography of heaven, and prays for the vision of God.

The eucharist begins with the drawing of the altar curtain, explained with a reference to the "straying" of the "ancient people" (i.e., the Jews)<sup>7</sup>. Near the end of the admonition following the drawing of the curtain, the deacon proclaims, "We have

<sup>6</sup> The double, as opposed to threefold, "holy" is not a peculiarity of the Syriac version; it also appears, with no textual variants in the MSS of the Ethiopic version (B 99.5, and apparatus).

<sup>7</sup> "Because the ancient people strayed, when he [i.e., the bishop] offers, let the curtain of the veil be drawn" (R 34.20-21). The Ethiopic version links the eucharistic bread offered on Sunday with the "first people": "And on Sunday, [let there be] four *prospora* when he offers, because of the first people who did not understand the Law" [Ethiopic *hegg*] (B 32.3-6). There is an obvious numerical reference here, but perhaps even more interesting is the explicit association of the eucharistic celebration with "the ancient people." This association deserves to be explored further as an example of the liturgical expression of ancient Christian theologies of Judaism.

our Lord as onlooker, the Father of lights with the Son, the angels who visit" (R 38.1-3)<sup>8</sup>. In the last two members of the pre-anaphoral dialogue, the bishop calls out, "Holy things for the holy," to which the people cry, "In heaven and on earth without cease" (R 38.16-17). The dialogue joins the earthly praise of God with the unceasing praise of God in heaven.

Ancient Christian anaphoras are reticent in their language describing heaven; the TD anaphora is unique in its attention to the heavenly topography. The opening ascription of praise in the TD anaphora evokes the imagery of the heavenly treasures (Syriac *bēt gazzē*, Ethiopic *mazāgebt*, Greek *thesouroi*):

You, Lord, the establisher of the heights and king of the luminous treasures, visitor of the heavenly Zion, king of the archangelic orders of dominions, praises, thrones, vestures, lights, joys, delights, father of kings, you who hold all things in your hand, you who provide by your thought, through your only begotten Son who was crucified for our sins (R 40.12-17; B 36.8-15)<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> The beginning of the diaconal litany (TDsyr I.35) contains a similar admonition: "Angels are looking on" (R 82.23). Note the lack of reference to the Spirit. The Syriac is unclear; it could be interpreted to imply that the Father and Son are identified with the angels who visit the church, although this reading seems unlikely given the well-developed trinitarian language elsewhere in the TD. MS F of the Ethiopic (B 34.11-13) preserves an interesting reading: "Father of lights with his angels," suggesting a text which may preserve readings of this prayer and others which point to the Christianization of Jewish prayers, or to earlier versions of some TD prayers. The TD suggests elsewhere that angels visit other liturgical events of the church, particularly daily prayer. In the list of prescriptions for the bishop's ascetic regimen (TDsyr I.22), the TD upholds the ideal of constant prayer while conceding that praying at fixed times during the night may be all that is possible for the bishop to perform: "But if he cannot abide all night long, yet let him remain these hours that I have said. For then the angels visit the church" (R 32.11-13). It may be no accident, then, that the TD associates the widow's cry of "Holy, holy" with her night prayer. This idea of angelic visitation at specific hours is similar to the idea in some Jewish and Christian apocalyptic literature that each portion of creation worships God at its appointed hour of the night and day. For example, in the horarium of the *Testament of Adam*, probably a third-century Christian redaction of an older Jewish work, the angels worship God at the first, fourth, fifth, and ninth hours of the night (chapter 1) and at the first, second, sixth, and ninth hours of the day (chapter 2).

<sup>9</sup> The Ethiopic text reads "treasuries of light" (*mazagehta berhan*), which suggests the physical light of the sun. The Syriac text is also uncertain; perhaps the idea of salvation as illumination stands behind the phrase.

The idea of heavenly treasuries or storehouses does not appear in the biblical literature. Instead, it appears in speculation about the topography of heaven in hekhalot texts such as *Sefer Hekhalot* (3 *Enoch*). Regarding the idea of heavenly treasuries in 3 *Enoch*, Philip Alexander notes:

In the celestial palaces are many treasuries and storehouses. Some of these contain natural phenomena such as snow (22B:3,4) and lightning (37:2). In others are "spiritual gifts" such as wisdom, peace, and "the fear of heaven" (48D:2, *varia lectio*; cf. 1:11; 8:1). There are also the archives (27:1), where the records of the heavenly law court are kept, and in 43:3 there is a reference to a storehouse of being)<sup>10</sup>.

3 *Enoch* derives its use of heavenly treasuries from 1 *Enoch*, a text probably composed sometime between 100 BCE and 100 CE.

Prayer for the vision of God stands at the heart of the TD anaphora. In the petitions following the oblation, the bishop prays: "[Grant that] *our inner eyes may see you*, praising and glorifying you, commemorating you, serving you, having a portion in you alone" (TDsvr I.32; R 44.3-4; emphasis mine)<sup>11</sup>. This is a striking request, for which I cannot find a parallel in other ancient anaphoras<sup>12</sup>. Parallels to some of its ideas appear in fourth-century ascetic practice and theology; however, a reference in 3 *Enoch* may provide a closer parallel to the content and setting of the TD phrase.

We turn first to the ascetic parallels to the idea of the "inner eyes". Origen first enunciated the influential idea that persons possessed spiritual senses which related to the discernment of the will of God, and which expressed the fullness of the experience of the contemplation of God. Later, this concept became common currency in the writings of Evagrius Ponticus and others<sup>13</sup>. The

<sup>10</sup> ET Alexander, in CHARLESWORTH, *OT Pseudepigrapha* 1, 240.

<sup>11</sup> Ethiopic: "Grant, Lord, to the interior eyes of our heart, that they may see you and praise you and laud you" (B 39.2-5).

<sup>12</sup> One of the petitions of the anaphora of Sarapion comes closest, perhaps, to the broad idea of the TD phrase: "Give us holy Spirit, that we may be able to speak and expound your unspoken mysteries" (*Euchologion* 1; ET in R.C.D. JASPER - G.J. CUMING, *Prayers of the Eucharist: Early and Reformed*, Pueblo, New York 1987, 76).

<sup>13</sup> See KARL RAHNER, "Le début d'une doctrine des cinq sens spirituels chez Origène", *Revue d'ascétique et de mystique* 13 (1932) 113-145, and the

TD phrase seems to echo this idea that persons possess inner senses, of which the inner eyes is one. If this view has influenced the TD anaphora, then the TD appears to intend the bishop to pray the anaphora as an ascetic who desires the grace of God to assist the ascetics of the community in their ascent to God in contemplation. This hypothesis accords well with the ascetic tone and specific ascetic terminology elsewhere in the TD<sup>14</sup>. However, neither Evagrius nor Origen discusses the spiritual senses in connection with cultic activity. For them, the spiritual senses develop in the course of the mind's journey to God in contemplation, performed by the individual ascetic alone.

The much-debated hekhalot literature offers what may be a closer parallel to the passage in question. An ascent narrative in 3 *Enoch* associates the illumination of the eyes and heart with praising God, and provides the heavenly cultic setting for that enlightened sight. After Rabbi Ishmael has been granted entrance to the seventh heaven and the vision of the divine throne, he faints. Once revived, he finds that he has been given the ability to praise God, along with the angels surrounding God's throne:

But after an hour the Holy One, blessed be he... *enlightened my eyes and my heart to utter psalm, praise, jubilation thanksgiving, song, glory, majesty, laud, and strength*. And when I opened my mouth and sang praises before the throne of glory the holy creatures below the throne of glory and above the throne responded after me, saying, Holy, holy, holy, and Blessed be the glory of the Lord in his dwelling place (1:12, emphasis mine)<sup>15</sup>.

Because Rabbi Ishmael's eyes have been enlightened, he is able to offer praise to God. Note that the text does not explicitly

discussion by ANDREW LOUTH, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1981, 67-70.

<sup>14</sup> For example, the "spiritual sign" which the presbyter is to discern in Christians (TDsvr I.32), which parallel the Evagrian list of *logismoi* or dispositions against which the monk struggles. See GRANT S. SPERRY-WHITE, *Daily Prayer and its Ascetic Context in the Syriac and Ethiopic Testamentum Domini*, Diss. University of Notre Dame, Department of Theology, Notre Dame IN, 1993, chapter 3.

<sup>15</sup> ET Alexander, in CHARLESWORTH, *OT Pseudepigrapha* 1, 256-257. Hebrew text in PETER SCHÄFER (ed.), *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum 2), J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), Tübingen 1981, sections 883.24-27, 2.23-26.

state that he himself offered the *qedushah*; it appears to reserve that privilege to the holy creatures (the *hayyoth*). Instead, Rabbi Ishmael offers his own praise, which is followed by the angels' song. This fact might help explain the unusual situation of the TD anaphora, which alludes to the heavenly praise of God, but contains no Sanctus, which by the fourth century had become part of almost all eucharistic prayer<sup>16</sup>. Indeed, the TD may be reflecting apocalyptic traditions in which persons ascending to heaven do not recite the *qedushah*, but instead offer their own praise. Such is the case in *I Enoch* and *The Ascension of Isaiah*.

This reticence toward joining in the angelic hymn may reflect the overall theological tendency of both texts to stress the transcendence of God even in the midst of human participation in the vision of the heavenly Throne. In both texts, the seer's vision of heaven and its topography serves to emphasize the distance between humanity and God. That Enoch is transformed into an angel, or that Isaiah undergoes the same fate suggests not that the gap between humanity and God has been bridged, but that humanity can be taken up into the realm of the heavenly. The transformation of both figures may represent the eschatological destination of all the righteous, a final goal toward which the hope of the readers of these texts could be directed. The text also could be read to mean that the "holy, holy, holy" of the holy creatures was an imitation of Rabbi Ishmael's song.

The vision of God in the highest heaven is found in other hekhalot literature, and in apocalyptic writings. For example, in *Ma'aseh Merkabah (The Working of the Chariot)* we find: "R. Yishma'el said: Thus R. Aqiva said to me: I recited a prayer and beheld the Shekhinah and saw everything that one does before the throne [of glory]" (section 592)<sup>17</sup>. *The Ascension of Isaiah* reads:

And I saw One standing [in the seventh heaven], whose glory surpassed that of all the others... And when I saw him, all the righteous

<sup>16</sup> Note also the similar structure in the account of praise in both texts: an extended series of participles describing the cultic activity in which the subject participates.

<sup>17</sup> Cited in PETER SCHÄFER, *The Hidden and Manifest God: Some Major Themes in Early Jewish Mysticism*, trans. Aubrey Pomerance, State University of New York Press, Albany NY 1992, 87. Section numbers refer to SCHÄFER, *Synopse*.

that I had seen, and the angels also I had seen, approached him, and Adam and Abel and Seth and all the righteous came near him and worshipped him and praised him with one voice<sup>18</sup>; and I too sang praises with them, and my praises were as theirs. And then all the angels came near and worshipped and sang praises. And I was transformed again and became like an angel (39:28-30)<sup>19</sup>.

In praying for the vision of God, the TD anaphora appropriates a central theme of apocalyptic and hekhalot writings. We can set the petition in the larger context of the celebration of the eucharist as the TD portrays it, and see it as the earthly community's analogue to the vision of God in the heavenly temple.

#### *The Pre-Baptismal Exorcism*

Like other baptismal rites of the fourth and fifth centuries, the TD contains prayers of exorcism before catechumenal instruction (TDsyr II.1), and before the baptism itself on the Saturday night of Pascha (II.7-8). This prebaptismal exorcism consists of a long prayer, which Henry Ansgar Kelly describes as beginning with an address to God "as the all-powerful ruler before whom all evil forces flee"<sup>20</sup>. This ruler is seated upon the throne of glory, surrounded by the heavenly attendants:

God of heaven, God of lights, God of archangels who are subordinate to your power, God of angels who are under your jurisdiction, king of praises and of dominions, God of the holy ones, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ... Hear me, Lord, because I call to you in grief and fear, Lord God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ... before whom stand holy powers of archangels and of cherubim and innumerable attendants [or: worshippers], of princes and of seraphim, [you] whose veil is light, and before your face is fire; the throne of your glory is ineffable; ineffable are the mansions [Syriac: *'awwanē*] of your delights which you have prepared for your holy ones, whose garments and treasures are visible to you alone, and to your holy angels (R 122.6-13).

<sup>18</sup> Is there a parallel here to the list of the righteous in the widows's prayer discussed above?

<sup>19</sup> ET in H.F.D. SPARKS (ed.), *The Apocryphal Old Testament*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1984, 805.

<sup>20</sup> HENRY ANSGAR KELLY, *The Devil at Baptism: Ritual, Theology, and Drama*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca NY - London 1985, 140.

This passage contains the most explicit description of the throne of God in the entire TD. Note the reference to the throne of glory, the *kisse ha-kavod*, which figures so prominently in apocalyptic and hekhalot literature<sup>21</sup>. Ultimately derived from the visions of God's throne in Ezekiel 1 and Daniel 7, this image evokes the picture of the awesome power of God, upon which the bishop calls to drive out all evil from the candidates for baptism. The evocation of the image of the throne of God in an exorcism is unusual; I cannot find a parallel in other early Christian baptismal rites. Jewish exorcistic prayers and prayers of adjuration from roughly the same period (i.e. fourth and fifth centuries CE) may provide parallels to this practice.

#### *Ascetic and Apocalyptic Parallels for TD Imagery*

How does one account for the frequent use of angelic heavenly praise imagery in the TD? It is well known that the *loci classici* in the biblical literature for the vision of the throne of God are Isaiah 6, Ezekiel 1 and Daniel 7. The *locus classicus* for the angelic hymn of praise to God is Isaiah 6. Bryan Spinks has chronicled the influence of these texts in Jewish and Christian liturgical practice<sup>22</sup>. The major influence of these texts on Christian worship has been in the form of the Sanctus in the eucharistic prayer, an element missing from the TD anaphora. Therefore, it seems that more is at work in the TD than simply the influence of a set of biblical texts.

In evaluating the liturgical evidence we have been discussing, I believe that it is crucial to bear in mind the literary fiction upon which the TD is built: a post-resurrection dialogue between Jesus and the apostles, containing an apocalypse<sup>23</sup>. This compositional

<sup>21</sup> On the throne of glory, see ITHAMAR GRUENWALD, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, Brill, Leiden-Cologne 1980. The Byzantine version of the Anaphora of St. Basil calls upon the "Lord of heaven and earth and all creatures, visible and invisible, who is seated on the throne of glory and gazes upon the abyss" (A. HÄNGGI - E. PAHL, *Prex Eucharistica* [Spicilegium Friburgense 12], Editions Universitaires, Fribourg 1968, 232).

<sup>22</sup> BRYAN SPINKS, *The Sanctus in the Eucharistic Prayer*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1991.

<sup>23</sup> Apparently a use of the revelation dialogue genre, which appears almost exclusively in Gnostic literature; the second-century *Epistula Apostolorum* is a notable exception.

framework ought to inform any decision made about the literary and theological function of the contents of the rest of the document, which are heterogeneous in origin. This methodology can be called a "canonical" approach to the TD.

With this in mind, let us examine a key text for interpreting the liturgical materials we have been considering. Toward the end of the dialogue, Jesus informs his followers: "The one who knows the power of this commandment and of this testament and acts according to what is written in it, will be *like the angels praising my Father*, and will be holy to God" (R 20.4-7, emphasis mine). Here the TD links discipleship, text, and imitation of the angelic praise, a combination we find in the above examples from the liturgical portions of the document. What can we say about the possible sources of this intriguing conjunction of heavenly and earthly praise?

The language of angelic and earthly worship in the TD may have entered the text from two different sources: ascetic traditions, and the widespread use of the language of apocalyptic by both Christians and Jews in antiquity.

The motif of the angelic life (*angelikos bios*) runs through much early Christian ascetic and monastic literature<sup>24</sup>. Through vigil and the practice of continual prayer the ascetic strives to imitate the angels who, never sleeping, continually praise God. I have argued elsewhere that the TD melds two different traditions in its descriptions of the functions of presbyters and widows of the church: ecclesiastical (embodied in the version of the so-called *Apostolic Tradition* the TD uses as a source); and ascetic, which appears to be closely related to both Cappadocian and Egyptian desert traditions<sup>25</sup>. The TD seems to make use of the ideal of the angelic life in its descriptions of the daily prayer responsibilities of the bishop, widows, and presbyters. The TD thus propounds a vision of the church profoundly colored by the ideals of Christian ascetic practice and theology.

<sup>24</sup> See K. SUSO FRANK, *Angelikos Bios: Begriffsanalytische und begriffsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zum "engelgleichen Leben" im frühen Mönchtum* (Beiträge zur Geschichte des alten Mönchtums und des Benediktinerordens 26), Aschendorff, Münster 1964.

<sup>25</sup> SPERRY-WHITE, *Daily Prayer*, chapter 8.

Precise definitions of the form and content of apocalyptic literature are hard to come by; this continues to be a hotly-debated topic within biblical studies. When viewed from the perspective of the canonical apocalypses of Daniel and Revelation, an apocalypse seems relatively easy to define: a writing focusing upon the end of the world and the vindication of the righteous. However, evaluation of some of the Qumran literature (e.g., fragments of Aramaic Enoch), along with renewed study of other Jewish and Christian writings of the two centuries before and after the turn of the Common Era has suggested that Jewish and Christian apocalypses were concerned with more than the end of the world<sup>26</sup>. Instead, writings which fall in the broad genre of apocalypse include not only revelation of the signs of the end, but accounts of journeys to heaven, in which the secrets of the natural world and human history are revealed. The apex of the heavenly journey often involves beholding and sometimes participating in the angels' worship of God. It seems that the language and literature of apocalyptic was a common idiom in antiquity, if the surviving writings are any indicator<sup>27</sup>. Far from being the preserve of small fringe groups within Christianity and Judaism, it seems that the religious phenomenon of apocalyptic provided a common religious idiom for Jews, Christians, and even pagans in antiquity.

In the so-called ascent apocalypses [the *Book of the Watchers*, the *Testament of Levi*, *2 Enoch*, the *Similitudes of Enoch* (*1 Enoch* 37-71), the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*, the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, the *Ascension of Isaiah*, and *3 Baruch*], an individual ascends to heaven and witnesses the heavenly court and the angels' worship of God<sup>28</sup>. The visitor not only views the angels' liturgical action, but participates in it. Sometimes the visitor

<sup>26</sup> For a brief discussion of the state of the question, see MARTHA HIMMELFARB, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses*, Oxford University Press, New York-Oxford 1993, 3-28.

<sup>27</sup> For discussions of the literary genre of apocalypse, see JOHN J. COLLINS (ed.), *Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre* (Semeia 14), Scholars Press, Chico CA 1979. See also the collection of essays edited by DAVID HELMHOLM, *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East*, J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), Tübingen 1989.

<sup>28</sup> HIMMELFARB, 25-28.

is transformed into an angel, as a result of viewing and/or participating in the heavenly cult. For example, in the *Ascension of Isaiah*, a second-century CE apocalypse containing Jewish and Christian materials, Isaiah is transformed into an angel when he joins in the angels' praise of the Lord (probably Christ) in the seventh heaven (9:33). In the *Testament of Abraham*, composed in the first or second centuries CE, Abraham is taken to heaven, where he witnesses the worship of God by the heavenly multitudes, who appear to Abraham as a fiery, kinetic mass:

And while [the angel] was still speaking, behold the fire coming toward us round about, and a voice like the voice of many waters, like a voice of the sea in its uproar. And the angel knelt down with me and worshiped... And he said, "Only worship, Abraham, and recite the song which I taught you." Since there was no ground to which I could fall prostrate, I only bowed down, and I recited the song which he had taught me. And he said, "Recite without ceasing." And I recited, and he himself recited the song... (17:1-7)<sup>29</sup>.

Accompanying the literary description of the heavenly ascent is a sometimes explicit, sometimes implicit description of the structure of the heavens. The protagonist passes through several heavens (from as few as one to as many as ten), each guarded by an angel who, in some of the literature, attempts to prevent passage. Through the repetition of revealed names, or the use of special hymns, the seer successfully negotiates the journey through the lower heavens to the highest heaven, in which God dwells.

The hekhalot literature, which belongs of the Jewish religious "tendency" known as merkavah mysticism (e.g., *Hekhalot Rabbati*, *Hekhalot Zutarti*, *Sefer ha-Razim*, and *Sefer Hekhalot* or *3 Enoch*), is related to apocalyptic writings and thought, though scholars debate the precise relationship of merkavah mysticism to apocalypticism. These texts, which are rather fluid in form, describe the journey of seers of the tannaitic era (e.g., R. Ishmael and R. Akiba) to the highest heaven, which is composed of sanctuaries or halls (*hekhalot*) in the seventh and innermost of which God dwells. In the seventh sanctuary, the seer beholds the

<sup>29</sup> ET R. Rubinkiewicz in CHARLESWORTH, *OT Pseudepigrapha* 1, 696-697.



throne of God, and the innumerable heavenly hosts who serve and worship God. The climax of the seer's journey (in some of the literature) is participation in the angelic *qedushah*, the cry of "Holy, holy, holy" based upon Isaiah 6:3 and Ezekiel 3:12<sup>10</sup>. For example, *Sefer Hekhalot*, a text which may have been composed in the fifth or sixth century of earlier materials, describes the liturgy of the heavenly *qedushah*:

When the ministering angels say "Holy" according to its proper order before the Holy One, blessed be he, the ministers of his throne and the servants of his glory go out with great joy from under the throne of glory. Each of them has in his hands a thousand thousand and myriads of myriads of starry crowns like the brilliance of the morning star in appearance. They put them on the heads of the ministering angels and the great princes. Those that say "Holy" receive three crowns: one for saying "Holy," one for saying "Holy, Holy," and one for saying "Holy, Holy, Holy, YHWH of Hosts" (40:1-2)<sup>11</sup>.

All of the hekhalot texts contain hymns, some of which conclude with the *qedushah*. In addition, theurgic elements appear in some (but not all) hekhalot texts. As Brian Spinks has noted, it is possible that merkavah mysticism may have been one of the sources or inspirations for the inclusion of the *qedushah* in the East Syrian anaphora<sup>12</sup>.

We have already noted the liturgical element which appears in apocalyptic and hekhalot literature: the angels' praise of God seated upon the throne of glory. In both literatures, individuals ascend to heaven and join the praise of God offered by the angels. The ascent apocalypses analyzed by Martha Himmelfarb describe the journeys of remarkable individuals (e.g., Enoch and Isaiah), elaborating upon biblical and extra-canonical traditions. The hekhalot literature also describes ascent to heaven, but of a different kind from that of the apocalypses. The ascents in the hekhalot literature are voluntary journeys, undertaken at the will of the sage, effected through a variety of prayer techniques. The goal of the heavenly journey, suggests Peter Schäfer in the conclusion to his study of the hekhalot literature, is participation

<sup>10</sup> See SCHÄFER, *The Hidden and Manifest God*.

<sup>11</sup> ET Philip Alexander in CHARLESWORTH, *OT Pseudepigrapha* 1, 291.

<sup>12</sup> See SPINKS, *Sanctus*, 36-39, 113-114.

in the heavenly liturgy. The *yored merkavah* acts not as an individual, but as an emissary for the community of Israel:

His heavenly journey serves the purpose of incorporating the earthly community into the heavenly liturgy and thereby turning it into a truly cosmic event, encompassing heaven and earth, angels and man... The *yored merkavah* is the emissary of the earthly community. This implies further that the new access to God, which is brought about by the heavenly journey and has as its goal the liturgical communion between God and Israel, cannot be an individual mystical experience. The Hekhalot literature does not propagate the *unio mystica*, the unification of the individual with God, but if the expression is allowed, the *unio liturgica*, the liturgical communion of the *yored merkavah*, as emissary of Israel, with God<sup>13</sup>.

We must note here that there are significant problems with suggesting the influence of hekhalot literature on the TD. The most significant is the uncertain date of the hekhalot writings. Although Gershom Scholem argued for an early (II-III CE) date for them, others (for example, Peter Schäfer) have suggested much later dates for their composition. Philip Alexander, the most recent editor of *3 Enoch*, has suggested that it could not have been written before the sixth century. Of course, the hekhalot writings probably are composed of traditions sometimes much older than the date of composition of the final version of the hekhalot text, insofar as it is possible to speak of such a thing. There is also the question of the medium of transmission of hekhalot ideas from Jews to Christians in the fourth or fifth century, after the legalization of Christianity and the ultimate hardening of boundaries between both communities in law and custom.

Given these literary and sociological difficulties, it is more likely that the parallel between the TD anaphora and *3 Enoch* is due to the influence on both texts of traditions which circulated among both Jews and Christians prior to the composition of either the TD or *3 Enoch*. The logical place to look for such a tradition is in the apocalyptic literature which originated in Jewish circles but was preserved by Christian communities of the second, third, and fourth centuries C.E.

<sup>13</sup> SCHÄFER, *Hidden and Manifest God*, 164-165.

### *Concluding Questions*

The TD is cast in the form of a post-resurrection dialogue between Jesus and his disciples. That dialogue contains an apocalypse. The TD also incorporates imagery of the angelic praise of God, and of the topography of heaven. It associates these images with the daily prayer of ascetic women and men, and with the symbolic ascent to heaven in the eucharistic prayer. That these elements are juxtaposed in the TD is not coincidental, but the result of an appropriation of apocalyptic motifs common to Jews and Christians in antiquity.

#### *TD: "Censoring In" a Common Apocalyptic-Mystical Idiom?*

I do not wish to suggest a direct literary parallel between the TD and any of the apocalypses or hekhalot literature. Rather, it seems that the above parallels represent an example of what Lawrence Hoffman describes as the liturgical "censoring in" of a common religio-cultural backdrop<sup>14</sup>. In the study in which he put forward this idea, Hoffman suggested that in the tannaitic period, "gnosticism" was the backdrop, and that Merkavah mysticism was the result of the censoring in by the tannaitic rabbis of a significant portion of that backdrop. He writes,

at the center of [the merkavah] perspective was a master image of a God of light enthroned on a chariot surrounded by bands of praising angels; and the liturgy of the Tannaim became an exercise in emulating the angels<sup>15</sup>.

The dynamic Hoffman describes is useful in our discussion of texts which contain ideas and motifs similar to those found in apocalyptic and hekhalot literature. In other words, we can view the TD as a text which has censored in a number of ideas from the broad religious backdrop of apocalypticism: not only the TD apocalypse, but also the motifs of Christ as revealer of heavenly things, and the words and images discussed in this essay.

<sup>14</sup> LAWRENCE A. HOFFMAN, "Censoring In and Censoring Out: A Function of Liturgical Language", in JOSEPH GUTMANN (ed.), *Ancient Synagogues: The State of Research* (Brown Judaic Studies 22), Scholars Press, Chico, California, 1981, 23.

<sup>15</sup> HOFFMAN, "Censoring In", 23.

Because the religious phenomenon the apocalyptic and hekhalot literature describe is so diverse, it is conceivable that Christian censoring in of elements of that phenomenon could have taken place differently in various locales. Bryan Spinks has suggested that in East Syria, the presence of merkavah traditions and the hymns they contained may have contributed to the inclusion of the angelic hymn in the anaphora. Perhaps the angelic and heavenly topography imagery of the TD represents another trajectory of the larger complex of images and ideas that surrounded the mystical use of the angelic hymn in Jewish communities in antiquity, a trajectory in which the component from the tradition included in the TD was not the angelic hymn, but the angelic and heavenly topography imagery that surrounded it.

#### *Provenance of the TD*

This hypothesis suggest a provenance for at least some of the sources behind the TD. Earlier scholars thought that one of the sources of the TD was a so-called Montanist church order. Given the apparently late date of compilation, that claim is untenable today. However, it does pick upon the apocalyptic tenor of the text. Asia Minor, with its long history of apocalyptic Christian movements, obviously stands out as a possibility in this context. In addition, the existence of vigorous Jewish communities in that part of the Roman Empire might make the transmission of Jewish apocalyptic or merkavah traditions more likely than in other regions. In this regard it may be worth recalling the canons of the Council of Laodicea, held sometime during the second half of the fourth century. Canon 11 proscribes the ordination of female presbyters, of which the TD female presbyters or widows "who sit in front" may be an example. The thirty-fifth canon proscribes the "abandonment" of the glory of God and God's church, for the "naming" or "invocation" of angels, and gathering together or holding services, perhaps for that purpose (*angelous onomazein kai synaxeis poiein*). On the surface, the activity described so briefly by the canon seems similar to the naming of the angels which stands at the heart of some apocalyptic and merkavah traditions, as a means of controlling the angelic gatekeepers who restrict access to the various heavens. Perhaps

both the TD and the persons condemned by the Council of Laodicea represent two different Christian options for censoring in aspects of a common tradition.

### *Relationships between Asceticism and Apocalypticism*

This passage from the TD and its parallel in *3 Enoch* is particularly intriguing because of the questions it raises about the relationships between apocalypticism and asceticism. The TD combines ascetic motifs with apocalyptic imagery and language, in the form of the heavenly praise of God by the angels, and its description of the topography of heaven. The illumination of the inner eyes clearly is an element in Origenian ascetic theology as well as in hekhalot traditions.

### *The Genre of the TD*

The presence of angelic and earthly worship motifs increases the number of connections the TD has with apocalyptic literature. In Jewish and Christian apocalypses, a revealer unveils hidden mysteries to the protagonist: the secrets of the natural world, the signs of the end of that world, and (the most hidden of all) the worship of God by the heavenly hosts. The ways in which the TD parallels that formula are striking: Jesus reveals the signs of the end of the world, and shows his followers a way to imitate the angels in heaven. Because it is intended as the revelation of the Lord himself, the church order which makes up the bulk of the TD ought to be read as an extension of that apocalyptic motif. Does that make the TD an apocalypse? At the very least, it appears that the church order genre was more flexible than has been assumed, and that the boundaries between these different genres of literature were somewhat fluid at the time of the composition of the TD. Whatever is decided about the question of genre, we can read the liturgical texts of the TD as examples of what its compiler thought the Christian community's worship would be like if all Christians imitated the angels worshipping God in heaven<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>36</sup> I wish to thank Professor Harold C. Washington of Saint Paul School of Theology for his assistance in matters pertaining to the Hebrew language, and for his encouragement of my work on this project.