

# Fostering Interreligious Love through Reflecting upon the Dual Metaphor of Christ in Revelation 5:5-6

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**Abstract—** Religion always teaches about love, however, violence in the name of religion is keep occurring, in which Christianity is not exempted. Jesus Christ is the center of the Christian faith, and love is the centre of his teachings. Unfortunately, many religious people committed violence, even those who confessed to being Christians. Religion has contributed to the development of violence in this world. This article attempts to present a Christian theological reflection might help to fight violence through reflecting upon the Christology of Revelation 5:5-6. This article is a qualitative research that uses practical theology approach to engage with the text. The main argument is that the dual metaphors of the lion and the lamb in the text show an ethical implication that God, through Jesus Christ, has chosen love over violence as the way to restore the fallen creation. The true religion is the one that promote love and fight violence, especially violence in the name of religion.

**Keywords—** *Christian theology; ethics; religious metaphors; religious pluralism; religious violence.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

All religions teach love, including Christian religion. However, cases of violence in the name of religion are always occurring in the world. The world is growing toward a more

complex plurality, including a plurality of religion. Religious pluralism is a rich and invaluable thing in the history of humanity. However, on the other side, history records how religious plurality often leads to religious violence both at the local and international scale [1], and the number of cases for religious violence keeps increasing in the digital era [2].

Christians are also prone to religious violence. History has shown how Christianity has contributed to violence in the name of religion; one example is the crusade. Religious violence could come from doctrinal differences and other aspects of life such as politics, social status, economics, others. There is also religious violence committed by other religious adherents, even by the adherents of indigenous religions. Religious violence could be done communally by religious institutions. Religious violence might also occur verbally and non-verbally [3]. This fact could be both a threat and a chance for every religions to teach love. For Christian religion, this is a chance to proclaim that God's love is not limited to Christians alone, but extended to all humanity, even to the whole cosmos [4].

This article to show that an ethical-theological reflection on the Christology in Revelation 5:5-6 could motivate believers to foster interreligious love. Biblical Christianity leads its adherents to love others who belong to different faith communities, even to those who oppose the Christian faith. Toward that end, this article will use the symbolic Christology

of Revelation 5:5-6 to fight violence in the name of religion through advocating an attitude of love toward adherents of other religions. The metaphor of the lion and the lamb shows how God has chosen the path of love to restore the fallen cosmos. Thus, this fact becomes a ground for Christians to love people from other religions.

## II. METHOD

This article uses a qualitative research method to explore the problem, collect and analyze the data through practical theology. This approach comprises of two steps: 1) Identify a real-life problem and interpret the word as it is from the perspective of those who have committed violence in the name of religion; 2) interpret the world as it should be and interpret our contemporary obligations by making the Bible and Revelation 5:5-6 in particular as the normative source. Revelation 5:5-6 will be exegeted structurally, from one verse to another, to present a systematic understanding of the text through discussing some relevant elements from the particular text to the present context [5].

## III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### A. *The Reality of Religious Violence*

Religious violence is the fact that the world has to fight. Practically, perpetrators of religious violence could be done individually or communally as groups of people [6]. This reality gets more complicated, considering some religious leaders consent to violence in the name of their religions [7]. Geographically, the perpetrators of religious violence are spread both locally and internationally [1].

### B. *Metaphor of Christ in Revelation 5:5-6 and the Interreligious Love*

Revelation 5:4 describes how John was crying because there was no one worthy to open the scroll. Verse 5 narrates how one among the elders asks John not to cry anymore, for there is the Lion of Judah, the Root of David, who has won. He is worthy to open the scroll. "Lion" itself has been referred to 6 times in the book of Revelation, including this part (Revelation 4:7; 5:5; 9:8, 17; 10:13; 13:32). The lion metaphor could be interpreted both positively and negatively. For John (the insider group), it signifies something positive, but for the Devil and his followers (the outsider group; Revelation 11:11, 13), the lion is interpreted negatively [8]. Therefore, the usage of the lion metaphor signifies a great deal of similarity with the lion metaphor in the Old Testament. The lion metaphor is related to violence, for it is a symbol of strength and aggressivity [9].

Revelation 5:5 shows the identity of the lion as the lion of Judah, the root of David, and the one who has won; thus, worthy to open the scroll. The lion of Judah retrospectively refers to Genesis 49:9 and the root of David to Isaiah 11:1-5, 10. The lion metaphor refers to the Messianic figure of Christ. These two Old Testament texts are prominently understood as an essential part

of the Messianic expectation in the Jewish tradition and literature. The Messiah will be the king who sits on the throne of David and will show military power. Thus, the combination of the lion of Judah and the root of David emphasizes the new David that will emerge victorious over the enemy of Israel [10]. The word *ἐνίκησεν* (he conquered), the aorist form of *νικάω* which means "has won" clarifies this nuance. According to Beale, the word *νικάω* (overcome) introduces these OT titles while the word *ἐνίκησεν* (he conquered) shows the climax of the action [10].

Rhetorically, Jesus Christ has fulfilled the prophecies about the Lion of Judah and the root of David through his victory. He is the promised Messiah. He is worthy to open the scroll. The word open (*ἀνοίξαι*) is repeated five times in Revelation 5. Opening the scroll is emphasized through an infinitive verb that expresses a purpose or a result [11], and this refers to the sovereignty of God in Christ, how He fulfills His plan through Christ's two-fold mission, to redeem and to judge. This theme could be seen as the climax of Christ's work in bringing about the Kingdom of God [10]. Thus, the lion metaphor acts as an emphasis on who is worthy to open the sealed scroll. The lion metaphor still has an element of violence, and this element is often misunderstood by many. This metaphor could be easily associated with the Jewish eschatological hopes for a political Messiah that will help Israel to fight the Gentiles [9]. Nevertheless, in Revelation 5:6, John proclaims that he does not see a lion but a lamb. This event is a unique vision because the elder proclaims a lion, but he sees a lamb. This is a spectacular vision [11]. Johns argues that the purpose of this change of vision is to communicate the shocking experience and the ethical significance that Christ who conquers do so through being "a slain lamb," instead of being "a devouring lion" [9].

The term "lamb" (*ἀρνίον*) in the book of Revelation occurs 29 times as referring to Christ. The lamb in Revelation 5 is depicted as standing amid the throne and the twenty-four living creatures and twenty-four elders; identified as "had been slain," with seven horns and seven eyes This depiction might be an allusion to the new exodus motif in Exodus 12 [12], to the lamb who was slain in Isaiah 53 as it is gradually understood as the redemption of Christ [10], and the lamb that God had provided as the substitute of Isaac in Genesis 22. Jesus is the Lamb of God, provided by God as "the ultimate substitute," which biblically parallel with the Passover Lamb in Exodus 12 and the suffering servant in Isaiah 53 [13]; The Lamb is also correlated with the perspective of the temple liturgy. In Revelation 5, this relationship is shown in the context of the sacred song in heaven instead of referring to animal sacrifice as it is in the Old Testament. The Lamb is depicted as a victorious figure in this text [14].

There is a tendency to identify the metaphor of the Lamb with disability and being a victim of others' cruelty. But, in the context of Revelation 5:6, the Lamb is depicted as standing, even though had been slain. He has seven horns that show how he lives as it is correlated to the resurrection of Christ from the dead. The horn shows power and seven horns signify that the Lamb is powerful and almighty. The Lamb also has seven eyes

that signify God's Spirit that is sent to the whole earth (Revelation 1:4). This description refers to the omnipresence and omniscience attributes of God [10]. Mueller explains that the sending of the Spirit was foretold by Christ in his farewell, the Holy Spirit will be Christ's representative on earth after his ascension. Both Christ and the Holy Spirit are on the mission for human salvation. This signifies that "power and omniscience" are grounded in the Jesus' "absolute self-sacrifice" [15].

Therefore, the Lamb metaphor functions to show the identity of the person of Christ and his works that make him worthy to open the sealed scroll. Jesus is the promised Messiah found in the Old Testament. The author of Revelation believes that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are not just the key for redemption, but also to the victory over evil on earth [9]. Historically, this reference is about Jesus' mission on earth based on his crucifixion and resurrection proclamation. The two-fold metaphor of the Lion and the Lamb is both complement and contradict one another. That is the way Apostle John combines Jewish apocalyptic understanding with the concept of early Christianity concerning Jesus from Nazareth [12].

He is the Messiah, sovereigns over judgment and salvation of humanity. He is worthy to open the sealed scroll to accomplish the mission of restoring the fallen creation. The metaphor of the Lamb here does not signify weakness but power, wisdom, and victory. The Lamb that had been slain refers to his atoning death, his sacrifice at the cross. The Messiah has won, and all his followers join him in his victory. Christians do not need to go for a religious war. The Messiah has won; it is the call for all Christians to partake in that victory. Loving people from other religions and nations as depicted in the book of Revelation through the prophecy that many nations will be saved (Revelation 5:9). Although John states in Revelation 2:9 that both the Jews and non-Jewish people have committed violence to Christians, the picture of the followers of Christ that choose to love is salient in the book of Revelation. The task of Christians is to share the gospel with love to others, without hate nor violence.

### C. Decision to Love

The Bible, especially the book of Revelation, narrates the change of metaphor from the Lion to the Lamb as God's plan to bring about his salvation on earth. This dual metaphor shows how in the history of salvation, God has chosen a different strategy than his enemies. This plan is realized in history through the work of Jesus Christ. Sin is the source of all evil, including the evil of committing religious violence. People should understand that it is not God's plan for the people to fight one another in the name of religion; instead, it is Satan's plan. If the people are to follow Christ, they should follow Christ on defeating violence through love. The victory is achieved through love in Christ Jesus, so there would be no space for violence on earth. As long as sin is still polluting the world, it is impossible for the world to be totally free from violence. However, religions can be agents of love to fight violence in this world, especially Christian religion. For one to witness the goodness of God, dialogue should occur. Furthermore, such an interreligious

dialogue should occur without coercion or violence. The primary role of believers is to witness the Word of God, and it can be done through doing interreligious dialogue in a loving and friendly way.

## IV. CONCLUSION

Love is the way that God has chosen to defeat violence. Through love, God brings about peace upon the earth. Thus, it is ironic to see religious people commit violence, including Christians. Our task as religious adherents, especially Christians, is to foster interreligious love to fight violence in the name of religion. There should be no space for violence, whether orally or physically; instead, mutual respect between diversity should be promoted. Religious adherents, especially Christians, should be God's agents to realize love and to fight violence in the name of religion.

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