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THE REVELATION OF GOD IN THE
REVELATION TO ST. JOHN

A thesis presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Exegetical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Sacred Theology

by

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June 1968

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CHAPTER I

REVELATION AS A PROBLEM

Revelation, A Modern Problem

Christianity has been a religion of revelation from the start,¹ but revelation as a problem within Christianity is of relatively recent origin. There was a time when it could be generally agreed in western Christendom at least that revelation had to do with information and was the activity of God by which He had caused individuals to learn certain facts which they had not known previously and which they could not have discovered by themselves. John Baillie observes:

Throughout the greater part of Christian history the question (of revelation) was not thought to be a difficult one. It was answered in terms of the distinction between revealed and natural or rational knowledge. . . . [It was said that] there are two sharply contrasted ways in which men have gained knowledge of God and things divine--by the unaided exercise of their own powers of thinking, and by direct communication from God Himself.²

At times there might be argument about which writings were God's revelation and there might be differences concerning the understanding and use of the facts, but it was information, facts, which were revealed.

One may contrast with this a more recent expression:

A new conception of revelation has appeared. . . . According to this view, religious revelation does not consist of the communication of propositions about God to be believed; it consists of the confrontation of God and man through actual historical events.

¹J. N. D. Kelly, Early Christian Doctrines (New York: Harper and Brothers, c.1958), p. 29.

²John Baillie, The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought (New York: Columbia University Press, c.1956), pp. 3-4.

. . . What is disclosed in such events is "not truth concerning God, but the living God Himself."³

There is, on the one hand, an understanding of revelation which is interested in what has been produced and is concerned about the dynamics of the revelation only insofar as they affect the dependability of the facts recorded. Over against this there is a concept of revelation which is interested in the revealing itself and is concerned with the recorded results only insofar as they may shed light upon the nature of the activity. The first sees revelation as complete; the second tends to think of revelation as something which happens here and now.

Some of the modern emphases are advanced by John Baillie. Revelation takes place in a person-to-person, subject-to-subject relationship.⁴ Revelation finally is not a body of information and it cannot be equated with Scriptures,⁵ for what God reveals is Himself and not merely a body of propositions about Himself.⁶ Scriptures are the response to revelation and not the revelation itself.⁷ When God reveals Himself it is always through events, which appear as God's mighty acts.⁸ In the Bible we have the record of some of these, but it is a record which

³Walter M. Horton, "Revelation," A Handbook of Christian Theology, edited by Marvin Halverson and Arthur A. Cohen (New York: Living Age Books, c.1958), p. 327.

⁴Baillie, pp. 25-27.

⁵Ibid., p. 29.

⁶Ibid., p. 33.

⁷Ibid., p. 36.

⁸Ibid., pp. 50, 78.

presents not only fact but also interpretation of the fact.⁹ Revelation calls for response, which is faith (fiducia),¹⁰ and it is real and complete only when apprehended in fellowship in the present.¹¹

These emphases have been criticized, and recently some new possibilities have been suggested. In 1941 Paul Althaus expressed dissatisfaction with what he called the "inflation" of the concept of revelation in modern theology.¹² The New Testament concept of revelation, he insisted, could not be equated with Heilsgeschichte, but was more general, including God's dealing with man both before and after creation. The revelation of which it spoke was not only one of God's grace but was also a revelation of God's wrath.¹³ The New Testament, moreover, had used many concepts besides that of revelation to explain the significance of Christ and His story.¹⁴

⁹Ibid., pp. 66-68.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 85-87.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 105-8.

¹²Paul Althaus, "Die Inflation des Begriffs der Offenbarung in der gegenwärtigen Theologie," Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie, XVIII (1941), 134-49.

¹³Ibid., XVIII, 136-37. In connection with the latter point he acknowledges his debt to Werner Elert's discussion of this in his book, Der christliche Glaube.

¹⁴Ibid., XVIII, 139-40.

Werner Elert called attention also to the fact that the New Testament never states that God reveals Himself and therefore urged caution in making the revelation of God the primary question of Christian theology.¹⁵

Two Recent Critics

More recently there have been two treatments of revelation which have attracted attention and caused discussion. Both of these are critical of some of the emphases mentioned by John Baillie and listed above.

The first is in an address delivered by James Barr.¹⁶ Here Barr asks whether biblical evidence "fits with and supports the assertion that 'history' is the absolutely supreme milieu of God's revelation."¹⁷ He answers the question in the negative because of three facts he feels will not fit this idea. First, there are parts of the Old Testament which are not history and are difficult to locate in history, primarily the wisdom literature, but also the Psalms. Second, those texts which present the basic acts of God in history "represent God as communicating freely with men . . . before, during, and after these events," and this

¹⁵"Jedenfalls aber sollten die Theologen, die die 'Offenbarung Gottes' als das Kernproblem der Theologie bezeichnen, mit dieser Formulierung doch etwas zurückhaltender sein." Werner Elert, Der christliche Glaube (Hamburg: Furche Verlag, c.1956), p. 135.

¹⁶James Barr, "Revelation through History in the Old Testament and in Modern Theology," New Theology No. 1, edited by Martin E. Marty and Dean G. Peerman (New York: Macmillan Company, c.1964), pp. 60-74.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 61.

communication is a part of the events and not merely a commenting on them. Finally, he feels, there is much narrative concerning divine activities which can be called history "only if we stretch the word far beyond any normal received usage,"¹⁸ as the account of the flood.

The other treatment of the idea of revelation comes from a group of German theologians whose most significant member is Wolfhart Pannenberg.¹⁹ Pannenberg disagrees with the idea that what God reveals is Himself,²⁰ an idea which he traces to Hegel.²¹ God, he says, does not reveal Himself directly or fully in His acts.²² While the revelation of God will be complete only at the end of all history, a single act of God may shed light upon Him indirectly.²³ Still, the end of

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 64-66.

¹⁹An expression of their position is to be found in a book written by Wolfhart Pannenberg et al., Offenbarung als Geschichte (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1963). See also Pannenberg, "Heilsgeschehen und Geschichte," Probleme alttestamentlicher Hermeneutik, edited by Claus Westermann (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, c.1960), pp. 295-318. "Hermeneutics and Universal History," History and Hermeneutic, edited by Robert W. Funk and Gerhard Ebeling (New York: Harper and Row, c.1967), 122-52. "Revelation of God in Jesus of Nazareth," Theology as History, edited by James M. Robinson and John B. Cobb, Jr. (New York: Harper and Row, c.1967), 101-33. "Response to the Discussion," Ibid., pp. 221-76. There are discussions and critiques of Pannenberg's ideas in the latter two volumes and in the following: Carl E. Braaten, "The Current Controversy on Revelation: Pannenberg and his Critics," The Journal of Religion, XLI (1967), 225-37. Carl E. Braaten, History and Hermeneutics (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, c.1966), passim. Robert T. Osborn, "Pannenberg's Programme," Canadian Journal of Theology, XIII (1967), 109-22.

²⁰Pannenberg et al., p. 12.

²¹Ibid., p. 8.

²²Ibid., p. 15.

²³Ibid., p. 20.

history is not in doubt, for the goal of history has become evident "proleptically" in Christ Jesus. This, he feels, is the position taken by the New Testament, received as a heritage from apocalypticism. The position is summarized in seven dogmatic theses:

1. According to the Biblical witnesses God has not revealed Himself directly, somewhat in the manner of a theophany, but indirectly, through His acts in history. . . .
2. The revelation does not take place at the beginning but at the conclusion of history.
3. In contrast with special appearances of the deity, the revelation in history is open to everyone who has eyes to see. It has a universal character.
4. The universal revelation of God's deity is not realized in the history of Israel yet but first in what happened to Jesus of Nazareth, inasmuch as the end of all that is taking place has been anticipated in Him.
5. The Christ-event reveals the divinity of the God of Israel not as an isolated event but only insofar as it is part of God's history with Israel.
6. The universality of God's eschatological manifestation of Himself in what happened to Jesus is expressed in the development of non-Jewish ideas of revelation in the gentile Christian churches.
7. The word is related to revelation as prediction, as instruction, and as report.²⁴

Objectives of This Study

The question to which this present paper addresses itself is that concerning the nature of revelation as this is reflected in the Revelation to John. It asks whether God's revelation in that writing is of Himself or of facts concerning Himself; what the source of the

²⁴Ibid., pp. 91-112.

revelation is and in what manner it takes place; and whether revelation is an event of the past, the present, or the future. The Apocalypse is examined first to determine if its message can be clearly enough understood today to provide evidence for this investigation. The investigation then turns to the language describing revelation and the activity of revealing in the writing. Conclusions are drawn in the final chapter.

Some Assumptions

The author will operate with the following assumptions concerning the Apocalypse.

1. The Apocalypse of John has some of its roots in the Jewish apocalyptic tradition, but it uses the methods and views of apocalypticism judiciously. Its primary background is Christian.

"Apocalyptic" is the word used to refer to literary works which exhibit certain characteristics. Four characteristics were listed by D. S. Russell: it claims to be the revelation of God to certain elect individuals; through it an individual is led to understand secrets concerning God's purposes; it stresses the conviction that the end is very near; and it makes extensive use of symbolism.²⁵ While these marks can be found in various writings from the time of the Maccabees in the second century before Christ until beyond the end of the second century

²⁵D. S. Russell, Between the Testaments (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, c.1960), pp. 95-101.

of the Christian era,²⁶ it is not possible to establish precisely the sources and development of apocalyptic.²⁷ Philipp Vielhauer feels that three traditions have made contributions to apocalyptic: Iranian thought, the prophetic tradition of Israel (which apocalyptic considers itself to be continuing), and wisdom literature.²⁸

However, there are important differences between prophecy and apocalyptic. Rowley comments: "Speaking generally, the prophets foretold the future that should arise out of the present, while the apocalyptists foretold the future that should break into the present."²⁹

Although so far as is known today *ἀποκάλυψις* is used as a title for the first time in the work of St. John,³⁰ there are still reasons to ask, as Marxsen does, whether the work should be classified as apocalyptic.³¹ There are apocalyptic elements in it but there are also important divergences.³² Some interpreters have been persuaded that the

²⁶Dates within this range are suggested by H. H. Rowley, The Relevance of Apocalyptic (London: Lutterworth Press, 1947), pp. 51-134.

²⁷Philipp Vielhauer, "Einleitung," Neutestamentliche Apokryphen in deutscher Übersetzung, edited by E. Hennecke and W. Schneemelcher (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1964), II, 417.

²⁸Ibid., II, 417-20. The latter two influences are mentioned also by Willi Marxsen, Einleitung in das Neue Testament (Gerd Mohn: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, c.1963), p. 228.

²⁹Rowley, p. 35.

³⁰Vielhauer, II, 408.

³¹Marxsen, p. 229.

³²Ibid., p. 231.

work is not in the tradition of apocalyptic at all and they have preferred to call it a prophetic book.³³

The Apocalypse of John is not in the mainstream of Jewish apocalyptic tradition and it does not use some of the methods of that tradition, such as pseudonymity and the fiction that it was written centuries before it appeared. The idea of a writing to be sealed and kept for future generations is specifically rejected (22:10).

The fact that John calls the writing *προφητεία* (1:3; 22:19) and that it exhibits some of the characteristics of apocalyptic can be accounted for if the description of the place of the prophet in the early church given by Vielhauer³⁴ and Lietzmann³⁵ is correct. According to Vielhauer, the Christian prophet, in contrast to the Jewish prophet of that time, had an official position within the church, and together

³³For example, Adolph Schlatter, Das Alte Testament in der johan-
nischen Apokalypse (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1912), p. 7. Theodor
Zahn, Introduction to the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel
Publications, 1953), III, 387. Paul E. Kretzmann, "Das Verhältnis der
Apokalypse zu den prophetischen Schriften des alten Testaments,"
Concordia Theological Monthly, VI (May 1935), 341. Ruurd Jan van der
Meulen, De Openbaring in het Laatste Bijbelboek (Utrecht: N. V. Druk-
kerij P. den Boer, 1948), pp. 350-51.

³⁴Vielhauer, II, 425-27.

³⁵Hans Lietzmann, A History of the Early Church (New York: World
Publishing Company, 1961), I, 142-45.

with other Christians³⁶ shared some of the outlook of apocalypticism and used some of its language.³⁷

The theology of the Apocalypse is Christian theology, which in some of its emphases parallels Jewish apocalyptic; the style of writing is patterned on both Old Testament prophecy and Jewish apocalyptic writing.

2. The writer of the Apocalypse is John, but not John the apostle. The writer's mention of his name is a rejection of apocalyptic pseudonymity in favor of the style of the literary prophets. Since apostolic authority is emphasized in other writings of the New Testament and since it is reflected also in the Apocalypse (21:14), it is unlikely that if the writer were an apostle he would fail to mention that fact. It is worth noting also that the style and vocabulary of the Apocalypse is different from that of other Johannine writings in the New Testament, but the parallels in thought and certain terminology suggest some relationship.

³⁶Elements of New Testament thought which seem to reflect apocalyptic thinking are listed by R. Schütz, "Alttestamentliche Apokalyptik," Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, c.1957), I, cols. 467-68.

³⁷He writes, "Hier findet sich erstmalig die Verbindung von Prophetie und Apokalyptik, eine Verbindung, die sich dann noch einmal und besonders eindrucksvoll in dem Verfasser der Johannes-Offenbarung darstellt." Vielhauer, II, 426.

3. The work is best dated at the time of the Emperor Domitian. Conditions at that time seem to fit best both the message of the Apocalypse and the picture of Rome and its recent history in the beast of chapter seventeen.

CHAPTER II

PURPOSE AND STYLE OF THE APOCALYPSE

Intention and Ability to Communicate

A question which has been raised repeatedly is whether the Apocalypse is intelligible at all. A history of bizarre interpretations has become attached to it, and the limited liturgical and devotional use today suggests that it is not generally regarded as a book with a great deal to say to Christians.¹

The judgment that this book did not speak clearly was the chief reason Martin Luther doubted it should have a place among the holy Scriptures of the Christian faith. In the introduction to the book in 1522 he wrote his own well-known judgment, "Mein Geist kann sich in das Buch nicht schicken," and he gave as his reason "daß Christus darinnen weder gelehrt noch erkannt wird . . ."² In his 1530 introduction he conceded it provisional status as a prophecy which pictured the world's

¹Lutheran propers for worship make use only of the following parts of the Apocalypse: 2:10b (Gradual, St. Stephen's Day), 3:1-6 (Epistle, Day of Humiliation and Prayer), 4:8 (Gradual, St. Michael's Day), 7:2-17 and 7:14-15a (Epistle and Introit, All Saints' Day), 12:7-12 (Epistle, St. Michael's Day), 19:6 (Introit, First Sunday after the Epiphany), 21:3 and 22:13 (Introit, Last Sunday after Trinity), 22:17, 20b (Gradual, Last Sunday after Trinity). Luther D. Reed, The Lutheran Liturgy (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, c.1947), pp. 438-514, passim.

²Martin Luther, Die Deutsche Bibel (Weimar: Hermann Böhlhaus Nachfolger, 1931), VII, 404.

history from the first Christian century to its consummation.³ This he prefaced with an analysis of prophecy, dividing it into two sorts, prophecy which speaks of situations contemporary with the prophet, and prophecy which speaks of the future. The second he subdivided according to form: some prophecies speak clearly about the future without pictures and figures; others make use of pictures but also explain their meanings; and still others (The Apocalypse of John is included here) describe the future in figures and pictures and provide no key to their meaning. Of this sort he says:

Und so lange solche Weissagung ungedeutet bleibt, und keine gewisse Auslegung kriegt, ist's eine verborgene, stumme Weissagung, und noch nicht zu ihrem Nutz und Frucht kommen, den sie der Christenheit geben soll.

Wie denn auch diesem Buche bisher gegangen. Es haben wohl viel sich daran versucht, aber bis auf den heutigen Tag nichts Gewisses aufbracht, etliche viel ungeschicktes Dinges aus ihrem Kopf hinein-gebräuet. Um solcher ungewissen Auslegung und verborgenen Verstandes willen haben wir's bisher auch lassen liegen. . . .⁴

There are two possibilities. First, the author may have intended to communicate with people other than those of his day. It has been suggested that he was describing the course of the world's history under God's control until the final judgment and that the visionary figures are to be identified with historical persons.⁵

³Ibid., VII, 409-19.

⁴Ibid., VII, 407-9.

⁵Luther identified the seven angels of chapters eight to eleven as Tatian, Marcion, Origen, Novatus, Arius, Mohammed, and the papacy. Ibid., VII, 410-12. Johann Dannhauer and Johann Olearius saw Luther as the child of the woman in chapter twelve. Pierre Prigent, Apocalypse 12, Histoire de l'exégèse (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, c.1959), p. 57.

The second possibility is that the seer intended to communicate to the people of his own time and it is for them that he describes the times, both those in which they live and those which are to come. If he writes for his contemporaries, he may be addressing people of his time in general or he may wish to be understood only by a certain group of people who understand this special kind of language. His writing would then intend both to explain and to hide, to be a revelation to those who are ready and will welcome and use it properly, and at the same time to conceal information from those outside the group who could only misuse what they would learn.

The choice of one of these options will determine the method or even the possibility of interpreting the Apocalypse. If the writer addressed himself to his contemporaries, then the language should have been clear to people of his day for whom it was intended and similar literature of that time may provide clues to the meaning of the language it uses. If the author wrote primarily for the future church, then the history of the interpretation of this book should reflect a growth in understanding its meaning as point after point finds fulfilment. This does not seem to have happened.

The Apocalypse does, however, show an intention and a desire to convey a message. The opening verses (1:1-3) are best understood as an extended title, which would already reflect a will to communicate. Most commentators have noted also that the Apocalypse uses the form of a letter, the greeting in 1:4 being of the epistolary sort in use at the

time and found regularly in Paul's letters.⁶ Since a letter by its very nature is an attempt to communicate with others, the use of this form here gives the impression that the writer was producing this work to be understood by other people.

The address of the letter is particularly significant in this connection: "To the seven churches that are in Asia" (1:4). Those who are to receive and read this letter are identified even more precisely than the recipients of 1 Peter, for the seven churches are named in 1:11 and described in chapters two and three. Here the Apocalypse of John differs from other apocalyptic writings of its time, the Syriac Baruch, for example. The writer of that work also sends a letter, but it is to a fictitious group, the nine and a half tribes on the other side of the Euphrates (Baruch 79:1); and it is sent by a very unlikely messenger, an eagle (Baruch 87). The Book of Enoch presents its message not for the generation in which it claims to have been written but for generations far in the future (Enoch 1:2). Most apocalypses, in fact, do not even address themselves to a specific audience.

One may note further evidence of desire to communicate in that there are elements of the apocalypse which need no explanation at all in order to make perfect sense to anyone familiar with the New Testament. For example, the sons and praises (4:8b; 5:9-10; 11:17f.; 15:3f.; 16:7) use a language with meaningful terms and phrases which say something

⁶Concerning the epistolary form of the Apocalypse see Adolf Deissmann, Light from the Ancient East, translated by Lionel R. M. Strachan (New York: Harper and Brothers, n.d.), p. 244.

about God. Most of the warnings and directions of the letters to the seven churches make good sense today.

Nor are these intelligible statements simply bright spots in a confusion of private and meaningless symbolism. There is a plan to the book and movement from one point to the next. An examination of some of the recent commentaries on the Apocalypse shows general agreement concerning a logical division of the book. For example, almost all find a major division between the first three chapters and those which follow, and most of them agree that a new section begins with chapter twelve.⁷

To this may be added other elements which will be examined more closely: the stated intention to "show" something (1:1; 4:1; 17:1), the many parallels with New Testament concepts and terminology, a language of symbolism shared with some Old Testament writings of the prophets, apocalyptists, and Eastern cultures in general.

To summarize then, the writer of the Apocalypse declares his intention to communicate, he uses phrases and pictures which have parallels in other literature, he makes use of a style which has links with both the prophetic and the apocalyptic traditions,⁸ and he agrees with the

⁷Cf. the chart appended to this paper. Infra., p. 92.

⁸Adolph Schlatter felt that the Apocalypse of John had no roots in Jewish apocalyptic. The similarities were, he felt, the result of common roots in Old Testament prophecy. The development therefore was parallel but separate. Das Alte Testament in der johanneischen Apokalypse (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1912), pp. 7-8, 106-7. General opinion now is that the Apocalypse did grow out of the apocalyptic tradition and that the eschatology of the entire New Testament owes much to this tradition, but it is also emphasized that there are features of the Apocalypse which set it apart from other apocalypses of its era.

rest of the New Testament in his statements about Christ and His activity.⁹ A comparison of later apocalypses such as the Greek Baruch or the Apocalypse of Paul demonstrates that John's message is more easily understood than theirs.

A Document for Its Own Time

Some maintain that the message of the Apocalypse was not primarily for its own day. This is the sort of interpretation for which André Feuillet uses the terms "the history of the universe" and "application of the data of the Apocalypse to contemporary events."¹⁰ Some elements in the book may seem to justify such an interpretation. The revelation is "to show . . . what must soon take place" (1:1. Cf. 4:1). The letter to the angel of the Philadelphia church speaks of an "hour of trial which is coming on the whole world" (3:10), and of the advent of Christ which will end that trying period (3:11). The references to various periods of time, particularly from 10:6 on, seem to be to times in the future when delay would end and God would begin His victory. The millennial binding of Satan (20:1-3) is almost an invitation to speculate about the future far beyond the lifetime of any who would hear the first reading of the Apocalypse. In fact, it was just such an interpretation

⁹G. B. Caird, The Revelation of St. John the Divine (New York: Harper and Row, c.1966), p. 300. Eduard Lohse, Die Offenbarung des Johannes (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1960), p. 108.

¹⁰André Feuillet, The Apocalypse (Staten Island, N. Y.: Alba House, c.1967), p. 11.

which caused some Christians to associate this work with Montanism and for that reason, particularly in the East, to neglect or reject it.¹¹

The phrase which seems to hint most strongly at a multitude of generations yet to come is the word spoken to the seer after he has eaten the little scroll. The angel tells him at that point, "You must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and tongues and kings" (10:11). This seems to speak of a series of kingdoms, one succeeding the other. However, the phrase is used in 5:9; 7:9; 13:7; and 14:6 to refer to kingdoms scattered throughout the world at the time of John rather than to successions of kingdoms and dynasties. Accordingly, the extension here too may be spatial rather than temporal.

While it is true that the Apocalypse speaks a great deal of the future, there is evidence that this future was considered to be very near. The events are to take place "shortly" (ἐν τάχει 1:1; 22:6), and Christ is coming "soon" with judgment and deliverance (1:3; 2:16; 3:11; 22:7,12,20; 12:12). On this basis John urges preparation upon his hearers (1:3; 22:7).¹²

The use to be made of the Apocalypse also indicates that it was written for its own generation. The introductory words of the

¹¹C. H. Charles, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), I, c.

¹²Regin Prenter suggests that this momentary expectation of the end is not so much a characteristic of the first decades of the church as it is of Christian doctrine in any era. Its basis is not apocalyptic expectations but, in fact, it is what he calls a "de-apocalypticizing" of eschatology. He says, "Precisely because the second coming is the end of the history of this world, it is always equally at hand; it will not come as the result of some historical development." Creation and Redemption (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, c.1967), p. 551.

Apocalypse suggest that the work was to be read as a part of the congregational worship or in connection with it.¹³ In 1:3 the writer speaks a blessings upon both the reader¹⁴ and hearers. The situation reflected in these words appears to be a Christian continuation of the synagogue practice of a reader reading aloud from the Scriptures in front of the congregation.¹⁵ This tradition emphasized understanding, for the readings in the synagogue were frequently followed by an explanation and suggested application of the passage,¹⁶ and even, where necessary, by a translation of the passage into the common dialect of the hearers.¹⁷ If John is writing for public reading, then, like Paul in his letters, he is writing with the intention to make sense to the people who will be hearing his words in the congregations.

The warning at the close of the Apocalypse is not at variance with this picture (22:18b-19) for a written message is not the only kind

¹³Massey Shepherd emphasizes this, finding in the plan of the Apocalypse a reflection of the liturgical order of that day. The Paschal Liturgy and the Apocalypse (Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1960), p. 83.

¹⁴Called ὁ ἀναγνώσκων, the title which designates a public reader. Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, c.1957), p. 51.

¹⁵Henry Barclay Swete, The Apocalypse of St. John (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1951), p. 3. Charles, I, 6.

¹⁶Werner Foerster, From the Exile to Christ, translated by Gordon E. Harris (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, c.1964), p. 145.

¹⁷Aage Bentzen, Introduction to the Old Testament (Copenhagen: G. E. C. Gad Publisher, 1959), I, 68. Ernst Würthwein says the same may have been done in Alexandria using Greek rather than Aramaic. The Text of the Old Testament, translated by Peter R. Ackroyd (New York, 1957), p. 36.

which can be changed. The warning is addressed to "every one who hears (πάντι τῷ ἀκούοντι) the words of the prophecy" (22:18a). It seems also that memorizing a spoken message was much more common at that time, particularly among Jews and perhaps also among Christians.¹⁸ If John's message was to be spoken and memorized, then a warning to those who would listen to the message telling them not to change the wording would be very much in place.

The close tie of the Apocalypse with the world of its own time can be seen also in the letters to the seven churches (chapters two and three). It is impossible to say whether in all cases the descriptions reflect actual conditions at that time, for the conditions prevailing then in some of the congregations are known only from the Apocalypse.¹⁹ However, where it is possible to compare John's description with that of others of about the same period there does seem to be agreement.

Charles points out:

We know that the Ignatian Epistles to Ephesus, Smyrna, and Philadelphia substantiate certain statements of our author bearing on the inner life of those Churches. In the case of the Church of Laodicea the external evidence is fuller. Thus in iii.17-18 the contrast drawn between the deplorable spiritual condition of Laodicea and its material and intellectual riches cannot be accidental, since we know from external authorities that Laodicea was pre-eminent in these latter respects.²⁰

There is certainly the ring of reality in some of the phrases:

"You hate the works of the Nicolaitans" (2:6; cf. 2:15); "You did not

¹⁸Birger Gerhardsson, Memory and Manuscript (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, c.1961), pp. 67-70, 130-36.

¹⁹Pergamum, for example. Lohse, p. 25.

²⁰Charles, I, 46-47.

deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you" (2:13); "You tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and beguiling my servants to practice immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols" (2:20); "Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments" (3:4); "You have kept my word of patient endurance" (3:10); "I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot" (3:15).²¹ The feeling common to most recent commentators is that the letters do speak of conditions actually existing in those places at that time.²²

The message and terminology of the Apocalypse also have parallels in other New Testament writings. John was using a language and bringing a message which could be understood by Christians of that period.²³ Some of the parallels with other parts of the New Testament are these: Christ is called the first-born of the dead (1:5; cf. Col. 1:18; 1 Cor. 15:20); one who died and rose again (1:18; cf. Rom. 6:9 and many other passages in the New Testament); one who has received power from the Father (2:27; cf. Acts 2:33). He was pierced (1:7; cf. John 19:37); He has freed men from their sins by His blood (1:5; cf. 1 Peter 1:18-19);

²¹William Barclay has taken such statements and with the help of extra-biblical materials has presented a living, credible picture of these seven churches and the cities in which they were active. Letters to the Seven Churches (New York: Abingdon Press, c.1957), passim.

²²Lohse, p. 21. Feuillet, p. 48. He notes that Lohmeyer believes the letters to be a fiction. Ibid., p. 38. If they are fiction and do not actually describe those places, it is still likely that they reflect conditions in the church at that time.

²³Feuillet's survey of the doctrine of the Apocalypse shows that a comparison can be made with other New Testament writings. Ibid., pp. 63-88.

He will come in the clouds and be seen by all (1:7; cf. Matt. 24:30) suddenly and soon (3:3; 16:15; cf. Matt. 24:43f.; 1 Thess. 5:2,4). It is said of the Christian that Christ has made him a king and priest (1:6; 5:10; cf. 1 Peter 2:9) and that he is a son of God (21:7; cf. 1 Cor. 6:16,18).

The Imagery of the Apocalypse

One of the stumbling blocks in understanding the message of the Apocalypse is the imagery used in it and it seems to have been so since the early centuries of the church.²⁴ Russell says of apocalyptic literature, "The whole of this literature abounds in imagery of a fantastic and bizarre kind, to such an extent that symbolism may be said to be the language of apocalyptic."²⁵ Animals and other creatures of nature are used, usually representing men and governments. Elements of nature such as fire serve as representations of God.

The Apocalypse is rich in the symbolism of numbers, a symbolism which has many parallels both in the Old Testament and in extracanonical writings. Numbers such as seven and twelve have a special significance throughout the Old Testament and apocalyptic writers frequently use the

²⁴Dionysius of Alexandria, Luther, and Semler are mentioned as examples by Paul Feine, Johannes Behm, and Werner Georg Kümmel, Einleitung in das neue Testament (12th edition; Heidelberg: Quelle und Meyer, c.1963), p. 347. They observe here, "Die Apk. ist also in allen Zeiten der Kirchengeschichte wegen ihres im Rahmen des NT ungewöhnlichen visionären und bildhaften Inhalts und ihrer Schwerverständlichkeit theologisch umstritten gewesen. Und das ist bis heute so geblieben."

²⁵D. S. Russell, Between the Testaments (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, c.1960), p. 98.

number one thousand and its multiples as well. In its imagery the Apocalypse of John seems closer to Jewish apocalyptic than to later Christian apocalypses.²⁶

In addition to using figures and symbolical numbers common to apocalyptic writings, the author of the Apocalypse also explains the meanings of some of the symbols and thereby he gives evidence of an intention to make sense to people of his own time. He explains that the stars and lamps which surround the throne in the opening vision are the churches to which he is addressing himself (1:20). In the pause between the openings of the sixth and the seventh seals the people in white robes praising God in His presence are identified as people who have gone through the great tribulation and washed their clothes white in the blood of the Lamb (7:13-14). For people familiar with Old Testament imagery there is no need for further identification. Those who wear white robes are Christians who have died for their faith; the dragon is said to represent the Devil (12:9); the children of the woman in chapter twelve are called "those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus," again, a clear reference to Christians (Cf. 1 John 5:2,10); and in 14:3-5 Christians are identified as the one hundred forty-four thousand. After seeing the harlot, the seer hears the promise of the angel that he will tell him the "mystery" of the woman and the beast (17:7). The angel then continues with a

²⁶The Apocalypse of Peter and the Apocalypse of Paul, for example, both exhibit a fascination with the sufferings of sinners being punished. The symbolism is of another order, less concerned with the broad sweep of history than with the fate of individuals. See M. R. James, The Apocryphal New Testament (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), pp. 505-55.

description, which, while it is still symbolic, contains unmistakable references to Rome and the Roman government. This is particularly clear in his statement that "the seven heads are seven hills" (17:9) but also in other identifications: the horns are kings (17:12), the waters are people (17:15), and the woman is a city (17:18). In this vision a simple substitution of people and institutions for symbols produces a meaningful statement about an oppressive and persecuting government. In fact, it is only when such a "translation" is made that the real picture is formed. An attempt to depict the visions graphically, such as that of Albrecht Dürer, shows the difficulties involved here. How is one to draw ten horns on seven heads? There is no difficulty, however, in saying ten kings have been connected with the city of seven hills.

If the symbols can make sense now when the Apocalypse is read as a first-century description of its own day, then it is probable that they made sense to the Christians of that time who heard the visions described. It is even likely that a symbol such as the number 666 (13:18), which defies definite identification today, may have posed no difficulty for the Christians who first heard these words. The possibility of its representing Nero has been suggested,²⁷ but one must still admit with Swete that "although the challenge *ὁ ἔχων νοῦν ψηφισάτω τὸν ἀριθμὸν* has been accepted by the scholars of many generations, no solution hitherto offered commands general assent."²⁸

²⁷Ernst Lohmeyer, Die Offenbarung des Johannes (2nd edition; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1953), p. 74.

²⁸Swete, p. cxxxviii.

If the possibility of persecution drove Christians underground and led them to develop some expressions which outsiders would not understand, they still retained the need to communicate to others within the group. The language of the Apocalypse could serve just such a dual function of hiding and revealing. To anyone acquainted with the situation in which the Apocalypse was written and to which it was addressed who was also familiar with the expressions of apocalyptic prophecy there was probably little difficulty understanding the message of the book. But to those separated from that Christian communion it posed and still poses problems. Non-Christians of that day could miss its significance because they lacked understanding of the Christian Gospel. Christians of later centuries have failed to understand it because the church ceased to use this type of expression soon after the Apocalypse was written.²⁹

Conclusion

The Apocalypse does make sense and it does communicate a message. The fact that greater knowledge of its times and acquaintance with other literature of the same sort makes it more easily understood increases the certainty of this. Feine, Behm, and Kümmel say of it,

Die Apk. ist ein Buch ihrer Zeit, aus dieser Zeit und für diese Zeit geschrieben, nicht für ferne Generationen der Zukunft oder

²⁹Vielhauer thinks that because the Gnostics used this method of expression the mainstream of the Church had relinquished it generally by the end of the first century. Neutestamentliche Apokryphen in deutscher Übersetzung, edited by E. Hennecke and W. Schneemelcher (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1964), II, 427.

gar der Endzeit. Sie ist eine Gelegenheitsschrift so gut wie die Briefe des NT, die darum grundsätzlich zeitgeschichtlich verstanden sein will, womit sich der Blick für ihre apokalyptische Traditionsbestimmtheit und ihre neue christlich-prophetische Schau zu verbinden hat.³⁰

The caution of Johannes Munck concerning interpretation of the New Testament speaks to this point. Stephen Neill paraphrases him:

Historical study of the New Testament has been long and widely distorted by the acceptance of assumptions which rest on no evidence whatever. The truly historical reconstruction of the story of the primitive Church is still in its very early stages.³¹

³⁰Feine, Behm, and Kümmel, p. 338. Johannes Behm uses almost the identical words in his commentary on the Apocalypse. Die Offenbarung des Johannes (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1953), p. 3.

³¹Stephen Neill, The Interpretation of the New Testament 1861-1961 (London: Oxford University Press, c.1964), p. 59. This, he says, is the main point of Munck's study, Paul and the Salvation of Mankind (1959), a translation of Paulus und die Heilsgeschichte (1954).

CHAPTER. III

THE LANGUAGE OF REVELATION

John uses a number of words to refer to actions which could be called revelation. The purpose of this chapter is to investigate the terminology John uses, its meaning and the senses in which it is employed in the Apocalypse. The study will be organized about the verbs and their cognates.

ΑΠΟΚΑΛΥΠΤΕΙΝ

The noun ἀποκάλυψις is used in the title and it is this position rather than frequency of use which gives it its importance. Etymologically this word suggests that something is brought out of hiding, and this meaning is supported by the New Testament use of both verb and noun forms. The verb describes what takes place when what has been hidden is revealed (Matt. 10:26), when something unknown is made known somehow (Matt. 11:25,27; 1 Cor. 3:13), or when something which has not been recognized becomes clear (Luke 17:30; John 12:30). When the verb appears in the New Testament in the active voice its active agent is always God,¹ but what is revealed may vary from thoughts (Luke 2:35) to a person (Matt. 16:17).

The revelation of a person or thing does not always mean it is appearing for the first time, but it may indicate the point at which

¹Where the passive voice is used divine action is usually implied. Matt. 10:26; 11:27; Luke 10:22; 12:2; 17:30; John 12:38; Rom. 1:17; 1 Peter 1:5, and others.

a person becomes aware of its presence or its significance. This can be seen in the revelation of Jesus' messiahship which called forth Peter's confession (Matt. 16:16) and in the revelation of the "son of lawlessness" mentioned by Paul (2 Thess. 2:8). The person revealed was present before the revelation but was not recognized. Similarly God's judgment at the end of the present age can be called a time of revelation (1 Cor. 3:13; cf. Sir. 11:27) because one's actions and their significance will become known.²

Revelation of a *μυστήριον*, mentioned in Rom. 16:25 and Eph. 3:5, is of interest here. The first passage is a reference to the Incarnation, presented thus as the time when that which had been promised but was hidden from the world appeared and was seen. In the second passage the revelation is more than the Incarnation. It means not only Christ's becoming flesh but also the prophets' and apostles' grasping the significance of the event.

Although the noun *ἀποκάλυψις* came to be used for a certain type of literature, there is no sure evidence of its having been thus used before the time the Apocalypse of John was written.³ There are some earlier writings which exhibit the features of apocalyptic writing (Daniel, for example), but they do not carry the title or make the claim to be apocalypses. On the other hand, the fact that the work of John carries the title of an apocalypse is not in itself proof that it

²There are three other verbs in this verse which convey very similar ideas: *φανερὸν μνέσθαι*, *δηλοῦν*, and *δοκιμάζεσθαι*.

³R. H. Charles, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), I, 4.

belongs among the apocalyptic writings.⁴ The assertion that it is of the apocalyptic type of literature is based not upon its title but upon its style and subject matter, both of which closely parallel works of this type.⁵

R. H. Charles says that the noun ἀποκάλυψις "signifies a vision and its meaning." He offers as evidence the use of the word in such New Testament passages as Gal. 1:12 and 2 Cor. 12:1, where Paul mentions the appearing of Christ Jesus to him.⁶ Although, according to Charles, there are no parallels to this in pagan literature, there is a very close one in Amos 3:7, where the prophet states that when God acts He "reveals His secret to His servants the prophets." Having heard God speak, they can do nothing but proclaim what God has said.

The message of a prophet might be concerned not only with events which were past but might also be an explanation of events which were yet to come, marking them out beforehand as warnings or as signs of God's favor. Moses, for example, went to the Egyptians with warnings before the catastrophes took place so that they would know that the God of the Israelites was responsible for them and would recognize His purpose in sending them (Ex. 7:17).

In the Apocalypse of John there are examples both of revelation before and of revelation after the event. The letter to the Christians

⁴Adolph Schlatter contended that there was no direct link between this work and Jewish apocalyptic tradition. Das Alte Testament in der johanneischen Apokalypse (Güterloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1912), p. 104.

⁵Cf. supra, pp. 7-9, and such works as H. H. Rowley, The Relevance of Apocalyptic (London: Lutterworth Press, 1947), p. 132.

⁶Charles, I, 5..

of Pergamum (2:13) speaks of a difficulty through which they have already gone and indicates that it was not simply the working of a blind fate but was the result of Satan's fighting against God and His witnesses. Furthermore, it is revealed to them that in permitting the eating of food offered to idols or some such action (2:14) they have revolted against God, and unless they repent they will suffer the consequences. The letter to the church in Smyrna speaks of imprisonment yet to come which will follow their faithful service to God (2:10).

Other events from the past are mentioned in other passages. John describes the "Lamb who was slain" as one who has won a victory by His death (5:6,9-10). The martyrdom of Christians is a liberation (7:14-17). There are meaningful events which are to take place in the near future. They are bound to come either as the inevitable result of a present situation (2:9-10, 19-23) or as part of the ending of time (1:1; 22:6). When the prophecy speaks of the future it is not significant because it can predict what is coming but because it explains the cause and purpose of the events it describes. In fact, when the seer speaks of any events in the past, present, or future his purpose is the same, to help understand their aim and purpose. It required no supernatural revelation to know what had happened in the past or what was going on in the present. The readers of the Apocalypse were familiar with the fact that Jesus had died and risen, that persecution had taken place and was still occurring. What was revealed or brought out into the open was the fact that these happenings were acts of opposition directed against God Himself and that the ultimate end of it all would be victory for God and His people rather than defeat, for the events themselves might have led one to

believe that they were lost. The suffering of Christians was not defeat but a time of waiting. What was novel was not the report of the events but the word concerning the significance of the events. What was revealed was not the information that Christians had suffered but the news that the end of it was final victory and life.

Interpretation of the word ἀποκάλυψις in 1:1 may be guided by the fact that the noun is linked with two other words in the text, with the name Ἰησοῦς Χριστός and with the verb ἔδωκεν by means of the relative pronoun ἣν. Although there has been some difference among interpreters, the majority have been of the opinion that the genitive is subjective,⁷ the revelation is given by Jesus. This interpretation is reinforced by the relative clause following, ἣν ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ ὁ Θεός, for this indicates what is the pathway for the revelation from God to the final hearers of the message. The revelation was to be one given by Jesus Christ, one which was given to Him by God.⁸ Context must guide in the

⁷Charles, I, 6; Eduard Lohse, Die Offenbarung des Johannes (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1960), p. 10; Johannes Behm, Die Offenbarung des Johannes (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1953), p. 6; Joseph Bonsirven, L'Apocalypse de saint Jean (Paris: Beauchesne, 1951), pp. 81-82; Henry Barclay Swete, The Apocalypse of St. John (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1951), p. 1.

⁸Bonsirven feels that the force of both objective and subjective genitives may be present: it is the revelation which Jesus received from His Father, but He is also the essential object of this revelation. So he terms it "Révélation de Jésus-Christ sur Jésus-Christ" (pp. 81-82). Support for this thought might be found in Swete's partial approval of the objective genitive as a meaningful choice, perhaps even the preferred one were it not for the clause which follows (p. 1). While Bonsirven's suggestion is interesting, there is not really enough evidence to make it the probable interpretation.

choice between objective and subjective genitives,⁹ and context suggests that it is a subjective genitive, that Jesus Christ is the revealer.¹⁰ Whether the revelation originates with Him or not cannot be determined on the basis of the genitive.¹¹

The relative clause attached to the noun further defines this revelation as something given. The giver was God and His purpose in giving it to Jesus was that He in turn could "show to His servants what must soon take place."

ΔΕΙΚΝΥΝΑΙ

The term *δεικνύναι* is associated with *ἀποκάλυψις* at the very beginning (1:1), where the revelation is given "to show" (*δείξει*) what must soon take place. The basic meaning of the verb in the New Testament literature is to "point out," to cause someone to see something by drawing his attention to it.¹² In the temptation account Matthew says that the devil shows (*δείκνυσιν*) Jesus all the kingdoms of the world (Matt. 4:8). When Jesus was asked about paying taxes to a pagan government he said, "Show (*δείξατε*) me a denarius" (Luke 20:24). The verb may

⁹Cf. C. F. D. Moule, An Idiom-book of New Testament Greek (Cambridge: University Press, 1959), p. 40.

¹⁰Moule points out, "The Subjective Genitive merges indistinguishably into the possessive Genitive." Ibid.

¹¹Contrast this with the objective genitive of 2 Thess. 1:7.

¹²Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, c.1957), p. 171. In classical usage the first meaning is "bring to light" and "point out" is second. Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, and Henry Stuart Jones, A Greek-English Lexicon (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), p. 373.

also be used metaphorically, as Matthew did when he said that Jesus began to show (δεικνύειν) His disciples what was going to happen to Him (Matt. 16:21), or as Peter did when he said to Cornelius: "God showed (ἔδειξεν) me that I ought not call any man common or unclean" (Acts 10:28). In the LXX it is the usual translation of the Hiphil of הִאֵר, meaning "to cause to see." It is often used with reference to God's revelation, as in Amos 7:1 and Ezek. 11:25. That which is shown varies and may be objects or events or ideas.

John's understanding of the word is reflected in his use of it in the Apocalypse. In 1:1 it is not immediately apparent who is doing the showing. The infinitive is probably best classified as one of purpose,¹³ but that does not make clear whether it was God's purpose that He show something to the servants or whether it was His purpose that Christ show the revelation to the servants. Nor is it clear whether the servants belong to God or Jesus Christ. The options may be outlined thus:

The revelation	about from belonging to	Jesus Christ, which God gave to Him so
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that God could thus show to God's servants what must soon take place.
Jesus could Jesus'

In any case the one making the revelation is divine.

Those to whom it is shown what must happen are "His servants" (τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ). The designation δούλος τοῦ θεοῦ or τοῦ Χριστοῦ is used in the New Testament for Christians in general (Eph. 6:6;

¹³Swete, p. 2.

1 Cor. 7:22; 1 Peter 2:16), as well as for apostles and other leaders (Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:10; Phil. 1:1; 2 Tim. 2:24; James 1:1; 2 Peter 1:1; Jude 1:1). In the Apocalypse the word is used to refer both to prophets (10:7; 11:18; 15:3) and to John, the writer (1:1). The context indicates that in other passages the word is used also in the literal sense of slave (6:15; 13:16; 19:18) and with reference to other Christians (2:20; 7:3; 19:5; 22:3). There are three instances where the term may refer either to Christians in general or to Christian prophets (1:1; 19:2; 22:6), for either interpretation would make sense. While interpreters have differed in identifying them, they have usually agreed that all three passages refer to the same figures.¹⁴

Three facts argue for understanding these as references to Christian prophets. First, the phrase, "His servants the prophets," is used frequently in the Old Testament¹⁵ and twice by the seer (10:7; 11:18). "His servants" may suggest prophets because it was a familiar designation of prophets.

Second, what is shown to these servants is what must take place shortly (1:1; 22:6). Prophets are the persons to whom God shows what

¹⁴Charles, I, 6; II, 121, 218. Lohse, pp. 10, 92, 104. These have preferred to consider them references to Christian prophets. Behm, pp. 6, 97, 112, and William Barclay, The Revelation of John (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), I, 30; II, 219, have seen them simply as Christian people. G. B. Caird, The Revelation of St. John the Divine (New York: Harper & Row, c.1966), p. 282, thinks they are Christian martyrs; and Swete, pp. 2, 243, 303, considered them references to Christian prophets, noting also that other Christians are not thereby excluded.

¹⁵Among others, 2 Kings 9:7; 17:13; 24:2; Ezra 9:11; Amos 3:7; Zech. 1:6; Jer. 26:5; 35:15; Ezek. 38:17; Dan. 9:6, 10.

must take place so that they can warn and instruct the people who would be affected by the action (Amos 3:7).¹⁶

The third point is the use of this phrase in 22:6. In these closing words of the book the angel calls God *ὁ θεὸς τῶν πνευμάτων τῶν προφητῶν* and says that God has now shown "His servants" what must happen soon. This suggests strongly that prophets are meant. It is intended for the rest of God's people, but that is the function and calling of a prophet, to pass on to the people of God what God has shown to him. The one to whom this particular revelation has been shown is one of the prophets.

One must entertain the possibility that the term, "his servants," refers to Christians in general rather than only to the prophets, for the term is used in this sense several times in the Apocalypse. In 7:3 the 144,000 are called "the servants of our God"; 19:5 addresses "all you his servants who fear him, great and small"; and those gathered before the Lamb in the glorious city are called His servants in 22:3.

¹⁶J. Burnier finds the unique character of the Christian prophecy in its being "a direct message in relation to the situation of the brother or of the community to which it is addressed," and in "its reference to a particular divine revelation." It may be prediction or the answer to a problem growing out of the faith. "Prophecy. N. T." Vocabulary of the Bible, edited by J.-J. von Allmen (London: Lutterworth Press, c.1958), p. 348. See also the article on prophecy by O. S. Rankin in A Theological Word Book of the Bible, edited by Alan Richardson (New York: Macmillan Co., c.1950), pp. 180-82. He feels the function of the prophet in the early church is shown by the use of the verb *προφητεύειν* in the New Testament "(1) to announce as a revelation made by God . . . ; (2) to reveal that of which the evidence has been hidden . . . ; (3) to foretell the future." Amos 3:7 is the classic Old Testament statement concerning this function of a prophet, and it is seen in Agabus in Acts 21:10-11.

When Jezebel is called a prophetess beguiling God's servants (2:20), it is obviously a reflection of 2 Kings 9:7, where two groups, the prophets and "all the servants of the LORD," are mentioned. The original hand of the Codex Sinaiticus, which reads ἀγίοις rather than δούλοις in 1:1, indicates the two terms could be considered synonymous. The use of the plural in 22:6 might also be seen as an argument for understanding the servants as simply Christians since only one prophet is receiving this revelation. However, the message of this revelation, what must happen soon, would also have been the burden of other Christian prophecies. For the reasons given above then the identification of the "servants" as Christian prophets seems preferable in the three passages mentioned.

The importance of the verb δεικνύναι is reflected in its uses together with the phrase ἃ δεῖ γένεσθαι (ἐν τάχει). The first such use is at the beginning of the revelation (1:1), the second at the start of the second major portion of the book (4:1), and the third is among the closing statements about what has taken place (22:6). It thus provides another description of what was taking place in the course of these events described by the writer.

We conclude above¹⁷ that a divine figure is doing the showing. In 4:1 the speaker is described simply as a voice which speaks like a trumpet. The simile indicates that this speaker also is a divine

¹⁷Supra, p. 33.

messenger,¹⁸ perhaps God Himself.¹⁹ When the voice speaks in 1:10 the seer turns to see a scene with the Son of man in the center, but when this obviously messianic figure speaks His voice is described as "like the sound of many waters" (1:15). While some interpreters have felt the difference important and have concluded from it that there must be two different speakers here,²⁰ most have interpreted it as the voice of a divine figure.²¹ There is nothing in the text which says clearly whether it is the voice of God, of Christ, or of an angel. Also, the voice of 4:1, described as "like a trumpet," cannot be certainly identified with the voice in 1:10, though it is described in the same way. Interpreters have identified the voice of chapter 1 as the voice of Christ,²² of God,²³ and of an angel.²⁴ Once again, interpreters note

¹⁸Cf. Is. 58:1.

¹⁹Cf. Ex. 19:16, where a trumpet is associated with God's speaking.

²⁰Düsterdorf and Alford held this, says Charles, I, 24; cf. Swete, p. 13, and Behm, p. 12.

²¹Barclay understands it as the voice of God. I, 55. To Wilhelm Bousset it is the Son of man. Die Offenbarung Johannis (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1906), p. 193. Austin Farrer takes note of the different description in verse 15 and goes on to say, "But the conflict disappears if we turn from the images employed to the things they signify." He seems to think it is the same voice in both cases, but in verse 10 it is heard as a voice from a visible speaker and is a call to receive a revelation as Moses did in Ex. 19:13,19. It is the voice of the "divine Person." The Revelation of St. John the Divine (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), p. 65.

²²Charles, I, 108; Bonsirven, p. 134; Bousset, p. 243; Farrer, p. 87.

²³William G. Heidt, The Book of the Apocalypse (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, c.1962), 11.

²⁴Behm, p. 29; Lohse, p. 34; Swete, p. 66.

the difficulty in identifying the speakers.²⁵ All agree, however, that it is either God or a spokesman of God.

This voice speaks a command and a promise to John: "Come up hither and I will show you what must take place after this." The promise is fulfilled in the events which follow in the rest of the book.

When this showing is concluded, it is called something which "must soon take place" (22:6). According to the context preceding this statement the speaker is the angel who has been guiding the seer to various sights; but if the words which follow (22:7) are the clue to the identity of the speaker, then it is Christ.²⁶ Here, as in 1:1, the infinitive, *δειξάναι*, probably indicates purpose. There is nothing to show whether the primary agent of this action is God or the angel. Did God send His angel so that through him God might show this, or did God send His angel so that the angel might show it? In either case God stands behind the action, for He has sent His angel. In a sense it was the angel who did the showing,²⁷ but, as Farrer comments, "The angel no more stands between man and God than a telescope stands between the eye and the star."²⁸ The angel is a tool of God and cannot take credit for the message, as he tells John when John wants to worship him (22:9). To speak of the angel as independent of God is impossible. It is God who is showing this revelation.

²⁵Charles, I, 108; Bousset, p. 243.

²⁶Cf. 1:7; 2:16; 3:11; 22:20.

²⁷This is clearly the case in the remaining uses of the verb in the Apocalypse: 17:1; 21:9,10; 22:1,8.

²⁸Farrer, p. 60.

In the other uses of the verb *δεικνύει* it is an angel who shows something (17:1; 21:9f.; 22:1,8), and in each of these instances it is the seer to whom it is shown. That which is shown and the methods of showing vary.

In 17:1 the angel promises to show John τὸ κρίμα τῆς πόρνῆς τῆς μεγάλης and fulfils this by carrying him away into the wilderness ἐν πνεύματι. There John sees the woman, Babylon the great, the mother of harlots (17:3-6), sees her fall and its effects upon various people. The description of the surroundings, the explanations of the angel concerning the vision (17:7-18), and predictions by voices out of heaven concerning the fate of this woman (18:1-24) all help make the meaning clear. The action of showing includes a vision which is seen, an accompanying spoken explanation, and a spoken prediction of what is to come. Both action and comment upon the action are involved.

The angel who offers to show John the other woman, the bride (21:9), is the same angel mentioned above²⁹ or one like him,³⁰ and the action of showing is exactly parallel to that of chapter 17. The contrast is in what is shown:

17:3 καὶ ἀπήνεγκέν με εἰς ἔρημον ἐν πνεύματι καὶ εἶδον γυναῖκα
 21:10 καὶ ἀπήνεγκέν με ἐν πνεύματι ἐπὶ ὄρος . . . καὶ ἔδειξέν
 μοι τὴν πόλιν . . .

²⁹Behm, p. 109; Lohse, p. 101; Bousset, p. 446; Barclay, II, 226-27.

³⁰Caird, p. 269; Farrer, p. 214; Swete, p. 283. That they are similar is certain; that they are the same angel is not. Cf. Charles, II, 155.

In the latter instance the angel shows John the city and provides a measuring rod to measure the city rather than telling about it (21:15-17). The seer himself describes future conditions in this city (21:24-27). There is not always a clear distinction made between the present and the future in speaking of this city, perhaps because it is in the process of arriving (21:10) and marks both the end of the present age and the start of the age to come.

When *δεικνύγει* is used next (22:1) there has been no major shift in scene. John seems now to be viewing the interior of the city he had seen from the outside in the previous chapter. There is no explanation by the angel, only the vision and a statement whose source is not named, describing future conditions in this city (22:3-5).

In 22:8 John calls the angel *ὁ δεικνύων μοι ταῦτα*. The things the angel has shown him are presumably those to which John refers earlier in the verse: *Κἀγὼ Ἰωάννης ὁ ἀκούων καὶ βλέπων ταῦτα*. The action of showing has reached John through both sight and sound, the explanations by the angel being inextricably bound up with it.

Thus the word *δεικνύγει* is used eight times in the Apocalypse, and in four of them John's attention is directed to a figure or happening which he can see or hear in his vision: he is shown the condemnation of the harlot (17:1), the bride of the Lamb (21:9), the holy city coming down (21:10), and the river of the water of life (22:1). Besides this he is also shown the truths or historical events pictured by the vision, the things "which must soon take place" (1:1; 22:6).

This latter usage is particularly significant for this paper. In 1:1 and 22:6 it is the entire revelation which is shown to John; and in

4:1, where the same verb is used, it is the vision which John is about to receive, presumably that of chapters 4-22. In each instance the seer is not only made aware of the figures and action which unfold before him in his vision, but the meaning of the vision, "what must take place" in the physical world, is also shown to John. These visions are not literal depictions of the things which are to happen. In fact, the setting and action of the vision often defies visual reproduction.³¹

Nor does the revelation consist only in the seer's witnessing of the vision, for interpretive speech is also included. One of the seven angels tells him that he will be shown "the judgment of the great harlot" (17:1), but this showing includes the explanation by the angel concerning the characters in the scene and finally the identification of the woman as "the great city which has dominion over the kings of the earth" (17:18). We agree with Swete: "The words leave no doubt that Rome is meant."³² The purpose of the vision is to show the things which are to take place soon, and the action of showing means not only exposing the seer to the visionary activity but also explaining to him the meaning of what he is seeing and hearing.

³¹No additional clarity is achieved by the picture made by Albrecht Dürer. The Complete Woodcuts of Albrecht Dürer, edited by Willi Kurth (New York: Dover Publications, 1963), plate 117.

³²Swete, p. 226.

ΣΗΜΑΪΝΕΙΝ

Basically *σημαίνειν* means "to show by a sign."³³ It is used only once in its verbal form in the Apocalypse (1:1), but it is used several times in the Gospel of John (12:33; 18:32; 21:19) when the Evangelist says that Jesus showed beforehand the sort of death He would die. It is used also of the prophecy of Agabus concerning a famine (Acts 11:28).³⁴ A close parallel is found in the LXX in Dan. 2:23. Here Daniel declares in a prayer that God has made known³⁵ the knowledge for which Daniel asked. Later, when he tells Nebuchadnezzar the meaning of the dream, he says the mystery was revealed (*τὸ μυστήριον τοῦτο ἐξεφάνθη*) to him not because of any wisdom of his own, but it had been made known (*ἐσημάνθη*) to Daniel so that he could explain it to the king (2:30). When he has completed his explanation of the dream Daniel says, "A great God has made known (*ἐσήμανε*) to the king what shall be hereafter" (2:45).

The word can mean something other than prophetic utterance. When Festus explained to King Agrippa his dilemma in dealing with Paul (Acts 25:27), he said that even though Paul had made an appeal to be heard in Rome, Festus did not know what charges to indicate (*σημᾶναι*).

³³Liddell, Scott, and Jones, p. 1592. It is used by Heraclitus (V B.C.) of a pronouncement by the Delphic oracle and by Xenophon (IV B.C.) concerning omens.

³⁴When Agabus predicted the capture of Paul he used a symbolic act (Acts 21:11). It is possible some sign was involved also in this prophecy.

³⁵*ἐσήμανας*. Hebrew: the Hiphil of *שׁוּט*.

When the verb is used in the Apocalypse (1:1) the agent of this action is called $\delta \acute{\alpha}\gamma\gamma\epsilon\lambda\omicron\varsigma \alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\upsilon$. In this context the angel belongs to God or Jesus Christ. There are places in the Apocalypse where angels are said to belong to Michael (12:7) or to the seven churches (1:20). Charles notes that in 22:6 Christ speaks of the angel as God's angel, but he feels that the same angel is described in 1:1 and 22:16 as Christ's angel. It is his opinion that the statements are incompatible.³⁶ Most other commentators feel this presents no real problem. Lohse comments that there is no conflict, for Christ stands immediately at God's side, so that they work and act together with one another.³⁷ Farrer also finds a connection:

"The Lord God of the spirits of the prophets" echoes "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (xix. 10)--the spirit, or breath of inspiration, in any prophet, and so the "spirits" in them all In every act of prophetic inspiration we have to recognize (1) the God who speaks, (2) the Christ who is his living word, (3) the breath of spirit which passes to the prophet, and (4) the angel who communicates it.³⁸

So the general opinion among commentators is that the angel of 1:1 is the servant of Jesus Christ and the source of the action is Jesus.³⁹

³⁶Charles, II, 218.

³⁷Lohse, p. 104.

³⁸Farrer, p. 224.

³⁹This is discussed by Bousset, who says that the subject of the verb $\acute{\epsilon}\sigma\eta\mu\alpha\nu\epsilon\nu$ is probably not God but Christ. He sees a difficulty in the statement that Christ made this known through His angel because this is not a procedure consistent throughout the Apocalypse. He proposes as a solution that the statement of 22:16 was actually written first and that this influenced the phrasing of the prologue, which was written later, (p. 182).

The participle, ἀποστείλας, shows the method Jesus used to indicate to John what must soon take place.⁴⁰ The action is initiated by Jesus, it is directed at John, and it is accomplished through the agency of an angel who is sent from Jesus to John. That which is shown may be called either ἀποκάλυψις or ἡ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει.

The noun σημεῖον is used seven times in the Apocalypse. Twice a "great sign" (σημεῖον μέγα) which appears in the heaven is mentioned (12:1; 15:1). The first is the woman about to bear a son and the second is the seven angels with the seven plagues. Both represent critical confrontations of the two opposing sides in the struggle which is the concern of the Apocalypse, and both show the pattern and result of that struggle. It is reminiscent of the use of the word in Matt. 24:3,30, where the disciples of Jesus ask Him what will be the sign (σημεῖον) of His coming and the close of the age.

This noun is used in two quite different ways, perhaps even with different meanings, in the Apocalypse. It is used three times as the object of the verb ποιεῖν (13:13,14; 16:14; 19:20), and twice with the verb ὁρᾶν (12:1,3; 15:1). When the word is used with ποιεῖν it is in the plural and the reference is always to some activity of the enemy of God. The second beast of chapter 13 is described as making signs such as fire from the sky. In this way, he deceives people and causes them to worship the first beast (13:13-14). The same description is used of

⁴⁰Burton calls it the Adverbial Participle of Manner. Ernest De Witt Burton, Syntax of the Moods and Tenses in New Testament Greek (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1903), p. 171.

the false prophet in 16:14 and 19:20.⁴¹ If the beast of chapter 13 represents the Roman government, then the second beast and the false prophet are probably the cultic organization which guided and propagated Caesar worship.⁴² Extensive use was made of miracles and signs, even to the point of contriving these⁴³ to convince people of the genuineness of the cult. This followed the pattern of the court of Pharaoh (Ex. 7:11-12) and the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18; cf. Mark 3:22; 13:22; Deut. 13:1-2) in the history of Israel. *σημεῖα ποιεῖν* therefore seems to mean to perform supernatural acts to convince people who witness them that the one performing them has divine authority. The plural refers to miracles called "signs which deceive" (*σημεῖα . . . ἐν οἷς ἐπλάνησεν*) in 19:20 (Cf. 13:14), because they cause people to follow someone who is not true God. Undoubtedly the signs which are performed by these enemies of God are intended to give the impression that divine power and therefore victory are on the side of the beast, while in reality the victory belongs to God.

In contrast, the signs of 12:1,3 and 15:1 are authentic signs. The woman and her child are protected by God (12:5-6,14-17) from God's enemy, the dragon. In chapter 15 the sign is seven angels who usher in the final operation of God's wrath, which ends in victory over the dragon and all his allies. It is not specifically stated who is

⁴¹Very likely because both figures represent the same thing. Charles, I, 357; Barclay, II, 171; Boussett, p. 433.

⁴²Charles, II, 139; Barclay, II, 171; cf. Swete, p. 257.

⁴³Charles, II, 139.

responsible for the appearing of these signs, for the appearance of the sign in the heaven may not be the same thing as seeing heaven opened (4:1). Here οὐρανός may mean the sky as the background for this drama rather than the place of God's dwelling.⁴⁴ The outcome of the vision, however, leaves no doubt that the source of the vision is God. Its message is of a piece with all those which are said to have preceeded from God.

In the Apocalypse, then, the idea of showing by a sign is present in the noun σημεῖον as used by the writer. It is likely also that this thought is expressed through the verb σημαίνειν, the sign being the vision John received.

ΑΝΟΙΓΕΙΝ

Another verb which indicates revelatory action in the Apocalypse is ἀνοίγειν, "to open."⁴⁵ The revelation of the seven seals is introduced in chapter 5 by the search for someone fit to open the seals (5:2-3). The need, which can be filled only by the Lamb, is for a revealer rather than for a person who can receive and witness a revelation. John has been called only to witness. Once someone has been found who can open the seals, the revelation proceeds. The action which follows is witnessed by John and explained by the angel. Here the idea

⁴⁴Lohse points out that in apocalyptic literature a sign in the sky introduces a unique sight which has cosmic and eschatological significance (p. 62). Bonsirven feels that here heaven as in Eph. 6:12 means the superterrestrial region, the habitation of spiritual powers (p. 213).

⁴⁵Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, p. 70.

of opening stresses the importance of the agent of revelation. Neither the angel nor John can open the seal. But as the scroll is opened seal by seal John can then record, "and I heard . . . ," "and I saw . . ." (6:1-2 and elsewhere). The problem is not who can know but who can reveal.

The second part of the Apocalypse begins in 4:1 with the opening of a door in heaven. From it comes an invitation to the seer to come up and be shown what must happen after this. The initiative is God's and by this action He indicates, as Behm says, that He wants to reveal Himself.⁴⁶ Similarly, at the climax of the series of seven trumpet revelations God's temple in heaven opens to reveal that the ark of the covenant has been restored to the place from which it was missing, to which it was to be restored when God would gather His people at the end.⁴⁷ The mighty sounds of nature which accompany the opening make clear that this is God's action.

The final series of seven, the seven angels with plagues, begins with an opening which is analogous to the opening of heaven; it is an opening of the sanctuary of the tent of witness in heaven (15:5). This final activity of the wrath of God, which has its climax in the destruction of Babylon and her allies (16:19), has its source and beginning with God. The appearance of Christ to fight and win the final battle of

⁴⁶Behm, p. 29.

⁴⁷Behm cites 2 Macc. 2:4ff. and Apoc. Bar. 6:5ff. Ibid., p. 61.

the eschatological war also begins with the opening of heaven itself (19:11).⁴⁸ Thus the opening of heaven is an act of revealing, for it is evident in each instance that the heaven opened is the home of God.⁴⁹

The role of Christ in the opening of the seals must be emphasized. This vision suggests that while the goal and meaning of history are determined by God, its significance is not immediately apparent to everyone who observes it, but can be understood only through Christ. The seer has been told that he will be shown what must take place after this (4:1), and now it seems that this promise will not be fulfilled, for "no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it" (5:3). John is saddened by this turn of events (5:4). There is only one who has made it possible for John and others to learn what is the meaning and end of history, and His capability is based upon the fact that He has won the victory (5:5) and ransomed sinners by His death (5:9,12).⁵⁰ Only in the light of this event does it become possible to understand that God's good purpose may be worked out even in war, international strife, famine, pestilence, persecutions, and cosmic disasters,⁵¹ for at the end all God's people will

⁴⁸Charles, II, 131; Behm, p. 99; Lohse says it describes the return of Christ (p. 93); Caird, p. 240; Swete, p. 250.

⁴⁹The heavens may in another instance be used as a background for revelation (6:13; 12:1-4).

⁵⁰Cf. 4:2,8,11.

⁵¹See Charles's analysis of the six seals of 6:1-17. Charles, I, 158.

be able to glorify Him (7:14-17). In this connection Charles's notes concerning the phrase ἰδοὺ ἐνίκησεν in 5:5 are pertinent:

It states that once and for all Christ has conquered: cf. iii.21, *ὅς καὶ ἐνίκησα*, and the object of this conquest was to empower Him to open the book of destiny and carry the history of the world throughout its final stages. Thus the ἀνοίγει is to be taken as an infinitive of purpose.⁵² The victory has been won through His death and resurrection.

The revealer is Christ, whose ransoming death both accomplished and demonstrated God's victory for people (1:6,17; 2:8; 3:21; 5:6,9). This is not the first time He acted as revealer, for in His victorious death and resurrection He revealed God's love and power (1:6).⁵³ But His activity is not ended (1:18). Having conquered, He sits down to rule (3:21; 5:10), and one of His present functions is to reveal to His servants that His victory is now having its effect in the world about them (1:1). Thus the Lamb, introduced first as the ransom of men (5:6,9), appears also as the one who is now conquering the enemies of God and of His people (12:11; 17:14) and will finally rule in victorious peace (21:22; 22:1) with His people (anticipated in 14:1-5 and complete in 21:9). This He reveals to the seer and through him to others (1:1-3; 22:10-20) in the words of this writing, and He will also continue to reveal it by His activity into eternity.

Another scroll appears in chapter 10 when an angel comes from heaven with a scroll (βιβλιαρίδιον) already open (ἀνεωγμένον) in his hand (10:2). Its contents are to be revealed to John's readers, as is shown by several things: it is open, in contrast with the message of

⁵²Ibid., I, 140.

⁵³Cf. Rom. 5:8; Col. 2:15.

the seven thunders, which is to be sealed and not written down (10:4); and the direction to prophesy comes immediately after John has eaten the scroll (10:11). This revelation is given by an angel, but it is noted that the angel has come from heaven and he is described in terms reflecting divinity.⁵⁴

The opening of books in 20:12 seems to be a revealing in reverse, from man to God. The contrasts, however, are greater than the similarities. To be sure, what is written in the books is the production of the dead who are being judged, for the books record what they have done,⁵⁵ but those who have done these things have no part in deciding when these records should become available to anyone else or when they should be opened. Nor have they any authority to forbid their being read. Thus if one is to speak of this opening of books as a revelation, it is again God's act.⁵⁶

ΠΡΟΦΗΤΕΥΕΙΝ

In both classical and biblical literature the verb *προφητεύειν* and its cognates refer to an essentially religious activity, the

⁵⁴Caird notes also the cloud of the divine presence, the rainbow of divine mercy; "he bears the delegated attributes of deity," but he is also the angel of Jesus Christ, whose face John has seen shining like the sun. Caird, pp. 125-26.

⁵⁵Ἐκ τῶν γεγραμμένων ἐν τοῖς βιβλίοις is taken as synonymous with *κατὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτῶν*. The idea is found in Apoc. Bar. 21:1 and the Testament of Abraham, according to Swete, p. 272; cf. Charles, II, 194.

⁵⁶If indeed there is any parallel with the judgment scene of Matt. 25:37-39,⁴⁴ it would seem more of a revelation to those who have done the acts than to the Judge.

revealing and/or interpreting of the divine will.⁵⁷ The characteristic activity of prophets is, of course, speaking a message from God to people. Even when the prophet is a literary prophet he may present his production as a recorded version of the message which he spoke (Hos. 4:1; Ezek. 31:2; Dan. 7:1). What he speaks is not something devised by himself but it is given to him by God (Jer. 1:2; Deut. 18:18-20) so he can inform the people (Is. 37:21; Jer. 2:1-2; Hag. 1:3).

John refers to his writing several times as a *προφητεία* (1:3; 22:10,18-19), and he says that it came to him from God (1:1). It is possible also that he speaks of it in this way because he was one of the Christians who served a function known as that of a prophet.⁵⁸ He calls the prophets his *ἀδελφοί*. (22:9). The angel at the end of the vision

⁵⁷Liddell, Scott, and Jones, pp. 1539-40. Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, p. 730.

⁵⁸1 Cor. 12:28 lists *προφήτης* together with other titles. Selwyn traces Christian prophecy through Jewish prophecy at the dawn of the Christian era and the classical period to its roots in two prophetic traditions, the enthusiastic *נביא* and the contemplative *חזן*. The first Christian prophets were Jewish prophets who were convinced that the Messiah had come in Jesus. Their task in the church became that of finding and explaining Old Testament messianic prophecies and fortifying believers against temptation and persecution. Barnabas, he believes, was typical. Edward Gordon Selwyn, The First Epistle of St. Peter (London: Macmillan & Co., 1952), pp. 260-62. Vielhauer stresses a contrast between Jewish and Christian prophets: "Die Christliche Prophetie Palästinas steht in schroffen Gegensatz zu der gleichzeitigen jüdischen . . ." for they rejected national eschatology and messianic hope and embraced apocalypticism. Still, the prophets were not chiefly seers but charismatic leaders of the churches, and it was not because of his calling as prophet that John wrote but because of the direct command of God. Later apocalyptic and prophecy became completely separate. Philipp Vielhauer, "Einleitung," Neutestamentliche Apokryphen in deutscher Übersetzung, edited by E. Hennecke and W. Schneemelcher (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1964), II, 426-27.

tells John that the one who has sent the angel to show what must soon take place is the "God of the spirits of the prophets" (22:6). The activity to which John is told he must devote himself is that of prophesying (10:11).

The *προφητεία* of 1:3 is the *ἀποκάλυψις* of 1:1, which has come from God. The blessing of those who will convey the message or hear and keep it also indicates that the source is divine.⁵⁹ The same blessing is found in 22:7 where God's spokesman declares the Apocalypse authoritative, saying that God has sent His angel with the message about what must happen shortly (22:6). The writing claims to have a divine origin, and this is underlined by the warning of 22:18-21 that tampering with the message will bring the wrath of God down upon the one guilty of such. The implication is that it is a message which God continues to consider His own. Not only has it come from Him in the past, but in its repeated use it continues to proceed from Him.

When the seer in chapter 10 has made the message of the little scroll his own by eating it (10:10), a voice which cannot be precisely identified but which speaks with authority⁶⁰ tells the seer, *Δεῖ σε πάλιν προφητεύσαι*. Bonsirven compares this with Amos 3:3-8 and finds here the same irresistible impulse of the divine word which will not

⁵⁹Cf. Luke 11:28 *Μακάριοι οἱ ἀκούοντες . . . καὶ φυλάσσοντες*. Charles suggests the seer is using this statement of Jesus, replacing the Lucan *φυλάσσειν* with a Johannine *τηρεῖν*. Charles, I, 8.

⁶⁰Cf. Swete, p. 131.

permit a person to hold back.⁶¹ Thus whenever the writer refers to his message as a prophecy this emphasizes its divine origin.

The prophets of 10:7 are men whose predictions will be fulfilled because what they have said was first announced to them by God.⁶² God is the source of their message.

The message of God is delivered first to prophets. The mystery of God which will be fulfilled when the final trumpet sounds has been announced to God's servants the prophets (10:7); Christ's witness has become the possession of the prophets (19:10); the Lord has shown to the prophets what must soon take place (22:6).

But the prophet receives this revelation from God only in order that he may convey it to others. The man who reads the words of the prophecy so that others can hear and heed it is called "blessed" (1:3); anyone who withholds some of it by taking away its words is cursed (22:19). A prophet with a message is unable to keep silent, for those who have God's message must (δει) prophesy (10:11). It may mean speaking the truth to those who will hate both the message and the messenger (11:3,7-10), or it may involve speaking to God's people (οἱ τηροῦντες τοὺς λόγους τοῦ βιβλίου τούτου 22:9), but it cannot mean silence (22:10).

⁶¹Bonsirven, p. 191. "Amos (3:3-8) avait senti cette impulsion irrésistible de la parole divine au'il ne pouvait retenir en lui-même."

⁶²Reminiscent of Amos 3:7 as well as of Old Testament references to "his servants the prophets" and of the New Testament use of εὐαγγελίσει-θαι. Charles, I, 266.

ΜΑΡΤΥΡΕΪΝ

The word *μαρτυρεῖν* means to give evidence, to bear witness,⁶³ and it was used both of formal witness in a legal setting and of the informal telling of what one knew.⁶⁴

In a sense, witnessing involves two actions. In order to be a witness one must first see or hear something. The witness has no control over the activity; his understanding of what he is witnessing does not change the object of his observation.

The other activity of a witness is that of bearing witness to what he has heard and seen. The witness does have control over this activity, and it is here that he must choose to be a faithful witness or a lying witness. But even if he desires to be a faithful witness he may err, for description involves interpretation. The Apocalypse reflects an awareness of this, for the seer is not only presented with scenes to see and hear, but the significance of what he is seeing is often explained in accompanying statements (1:17-20). In writing down a description of the things he has witnessed John is serving as witness in this second sense.

Witnessing is an activity of both Jesus and Christians in the Apocalypse. In 1:5 and 3:14 there are clear references to Christ as witness. The sequence in 1:5 suggests that the activity of witnessing

⁶³Liddell, Scott, and Jones, p. 1082.

⁶⁴Ibid. James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1952), p. 389.

referred to there was Jesus' suffering and death, followed by His resurrection and exalted ruling. This series of events in His life was a witness to the truth of His mission and message, open in a sense to all who were present to witness it or who heard about it from others.⁶⁵

The activity of witnessing is linked with Jesus in the phrase, μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (1:2), raising a question concerning the role of Jesus Christ in this process. The grammatical question is whether this is a subjective or an objective genitive. Jesus may be either the witness or the one whose actions are witnessed by others. The New Testament centrality of Jesus Christ as Redeemer predisposes one to understanding the witness here as the activity of people who bear witness concerning Jesus. The genitive τοῦ Ἰησοῦ would then be objective. However, there is reason to question this interpretation because of the other uses of the phrase in the Apocalypse. In 1:2; 1:9; and 20:4 μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ occurs together with ὁ λόγος τοῦ Θεοῦ, and in 12:17 with αἱ ἐντολαὶ τοῦ Θεοῦ, and each of these is a subjective rather than objective genitive. The word is that which God speaks and the commandments are those which are given by God. If the parallel is significant, then the μαρτυρία is that which comes from Jesus Christ. That Jesus does function as a witness is indicated by a reference to Jesus in 22:20 as ὁ μαρτυρῶν τὰῦτα and in 1:5 as ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστός.

⁶⁵ Tim. 6:13 speaks of Jesus as a witness when He was before Pilate. Of course, some who watched Jesus refused to see the significance of His actions. John 18:37; 19:21; Mark 15:29.

The μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ of 1:2 is understood by several commentators to be a reference to the Apocalypse itself,⁶⁶ even though the same phrase in other places signifies the entire Christian revelation.⁶⁷ It is a revelation given by God and witnessed by Christ (λόγος τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ).⁶⁸

The phrase ὁ λόγος τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ, in 1:9 parallels 1:2 but is not identical, for exile to Patmos was not a result of his writing the Apocalypse nor did he go there simply to write.⁶⁹ The two elements of this phrase are used in reversed order in 20:4, apparently referring to martyrs killed because of faithfulness to the Gospel. Martyrdom for the Gospel is also the topic of 6:9, where it is called being slain διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ διὰ μαρτυρίαν ἣν εἶχον. Charles interprets λόγος as the word given by God and μαρτυρία as the witness borne by Jesus, both of which are the "objective possession of the faithful," a testimony given to them by Christ and preserved by them.⁷⁰ The μάρτυρες Ἰησοῦ of 17:6 are those who bring this message from Jesus, and, considering the parallel with 16:6,⁷¹ it may be a

⁶⁶Charles, I, 7: Bonsirven, p. 83; Swete, p. 3; Bousset, p. 183.

⁶⁷Charles, I, 7. Louis Arthur Vos interprets μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ as the tradition which derived from Jesus. The Synoptic Tradition in the Apocalypse (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1965), p. 2.

⁶⁸The genitives are subjective according to Charles, I, 7; Swete, p. 3.

⁶⁹Cf. Charles, I, 22.

⁷⁰Ibid., I, 174. Vos agrees (p. 198).

⁷¹17:6 ἐκ τοῦ αἵματος τῶν ἁγίων καὶ ἐκ τοῦ αἵματος τῶν μαρτύρων Ἰησοῦ
16:6 αἶμα ἁγίων καὶ προφητῶν ἐφέχεον

designation of prophets in the Christian church. Therefore Antipas of Pergamum, whom Christ calls *ὁ μάρτυς μου ὁ πιστός* (2:13), was not killed simply because he was a faithful Christian but because as a Christian prophet he would not keep silence concerning Christ. The two witnesses of chapter 11 derive their title from the fact that they speak a message from God or Christ⁷² and not from the fact that they are executed. The speaker who calls them *οἱ δύο μάρτυρές μου* also calls their activity prophesying (11:3).⁷³

In 12:17 the dragon wages war against the offspring of the woman, who are characterized as people who bear testimony to Jesus (*καὶ [έχοντες] τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ*). Here again, the *μαρτυρία* appears as something objective which they possess, the testimony of Jesus and not simply what they saw about Him. The phrase in 19:10a is parallel to this, for the angel describes John's brothers as *οἱ ἔχοντες τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ*. This may be a reference to all Christians, or, as the parallel with 22:9 indicates, to the Christian prophets. In either case, the genitive is best taken as subjective.

Charles feels the phrase which follows requires that this be understood as an objective genitive, "the witness to Jesus."⁷⁴ in the statement *ἡ γὰρ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ ἐστὶν τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς προφητείας*, he

⁷²Charles says the speaker is either God or Christ. Charles, I, 280. Swete feels it is either Christ or His angel. Swete, p. 134.

⁷³The use of *μαρτύριον* in 15:5 need not be considered here since it is simply the translation of a term for the tabernacle; cf. Swete, p. 197.

⁷⁴Charles, II, 130.

understands the angel to declare that he is a fellow-servant with John and others who share the spirit of prophecy, and the proof is that he is bearing his testimony to Jesus.⁷⁵ On the other hand, Caird feels that it is not likely John would here use a phrase in a different sense, so he considers it a subjective genitive.⁷⁶ In other passages, he says, the *μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ* is the witness which Jesus bore to God's plan for defeating evil, the witness of His own life and teaching, a witness borne "above all in his death."⁷⁷ He translates the phrase: "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit that inspires the prophets."⁷⁸ Behm and Lohse⁷⁹ point out that the testimony of Jesus continues in the present witnessing because the witnesses speak what Jesus said and did. Their position is much like that of Barclay, who suggests that perhaps both objective and subjective senses must be retained,⁸⁰ and like the idea of Swete that the life of witness to Jesus perpetuates His witness to the Father and to Himself.⁸¹

⁷⁵Ibid.; Swete, p. 249, and Bousset, p. 429, agree with this.

⁷⁶Caird, pp. 237; Behm, p. 98; Lohse, p. 92; cf. Barclay, II, 227-28.

⁷⁷Caird, pp. 237-38; cf. Lohse, p. 97.

⁷⁸Caird, p. 238.

⁷⁹Behm, p. 98; Lohse, p. 92.

⁸⁰Barclay, II, 227-28.

⁸¹Swete, p. 249.

The λόγος and μαρτυρία of 1:2 are further defined in the phrase ὅσα εἶδον. John is described as the one whose witnessing of this action of Jesus is through sight. But the subsequent activity of John is also called witnessing (1:2).⁸² In this case John is not viewing but communicating with Christians in a congregational setting through an official reader who is reading to them what John has written (1:3). John's activity of witnessing includes his writing and sending, the lector's reading, and the people's hearing and heeding the word.

At the close of the Apocalypse (22:16) Jesus speaks of a witnessing activity in which His angel is involved. If the infinitive μαρτυρήσασθαι is epexegetic, then it means that sending the angel was Jesus' way of bearing witness; if it is consecutive, then the angel was to bear witness, to convey the sights and sounds John had seen and heard.⁸³ In either case, the movement is from Jesus through an angel to the hearers of the message (22:16). There is no mention of John's place in this, but it has already been made clear that he is to write what he has heard and seen (1:1-2; 2:1; 10:4; 14:13; 19:9; 21:5).

⁸²John is called ὅς ἐμαρτύρησεν here.

⁸³Charles, II, 219, favors the consecutive use, as do most translators. Of interest might be the Philoxenian Syriac, which Charles, I, clxxix, calls "perhaps the most valuable of all the versions." This has ʿenāʿ yeshūaʿ yeshādreth lʿmālʿākhi dānšāhedh: I, Jesus, sent my angel, who bore witness. Theodore Beza translated it, "Ego Jesus misi angelum meum, ut haec vobis testificaretur in ecclesiis." Novum Testamentum Domini Nostri Jesu Christi (Philadelphia: George S. Appleton, 1848), p. 291. C. F. D. Moule remarks, "How thin the boundary wears here and there between epexegetic . . . Infinitives and consecutive Infinitives" (p. 127), and this is a case in point.

This statement of Jesus marks a change in the method of presenting His message. Although He has been making use of an angel, now He speaks for Himself.⁸⁴ With the elimination of this link, the path of the revelation becomes more direct. The seer and the reader still stand between God and the ultimate recipients of the revelation, but John is not the creator of the message, for he calls himself a witness (22:20).

ΠΡΟΦΗΤΕΥΕΙΝ and ΜΑΡΤΥΡΕΙΝ

Three of the passages establish a connection between prophecy and witnessing. At the start John is called *ὁς ἐμαρτύρησεν τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ* (1:2). John's witnessing is called "prophecy" in the next verse (1:3). John is serving as witness in the sense of seeing and hearing as well as in relating faithfully what he has seen and heard.

In 11:3,6-7 the two individuals whose activities are recounted are called witnesses at one point (11:3) and prophets at another (11:10). Their activities also are described as prophesying (11:3,6) and witnessing (11:7). The terms seem to be interchangeable. Their divine authority is demonstrated by the fact that the divine speaker refers to them as *μάρτυρές μου* (11:3) and by the fact that they possess powers over nature which remind one of Elijah, who withheld rain (1 Kings 17:1), and Moses, who turned water to blood (Ex. 7:17ff.). This is further shown by the opposition from the beast and the people of the

⁸⁴Swete, p. 309.

earth (11:7-10). God shows His approval by reviving them after they have been killed and taking them up into heaven (11:11-12). This, say Swete⁸⁵ and Behm,⁸⁶ is not a picture of any one set of witnesses but it is a monumental portrayal of the course of the witness of Christians at any time.⁸⁷

In 22:16-20 the author alternates between the two terms. Jesus declares that He has sent His angel to the hearers "with this testimony for the churches" (*μαρτυρήσαι ὑμῖν ταῦτα ἐπὶ ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις*). When the warning is given that nothing is to be added to or deleted from this message, it is called "this prophecy" (22:18-19). Finally, Jesus is called the one "who testifies to these things" (*ὁ μαρτυρῶν ταῦτα* 22:20).

The two terms are tied together in a most interesting way in the pronouncement of 19:10: "For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." Here John has made the mistake of treating the angelic bearer of the "words of God" (19:9b) as though the words were from the angel and the angel were God Himself, and the angel objects that he too, like the people of God, is God's servant. As servants and messenger of God, Christians also may be called people who have the testimony of Jesus or people who have the spirit of prophecy. It is the Spirit who

⁸⁵Swete, p. 134.

⁸⁶Behm, p. 59.

⁸⁷Behm, p. 58, remarks, "Das apokalyptische Bild dieser zwei bekannten Gestalten an unserer Stelle . . . ist über den herkömmlichen Umriß ins Übergeschichtliche und Überpersönliche gewachsen."

brings the Word and it is the function of both witnesses and prophets to speak what they have seen and heard.

The witnessing which began with the witnessing action of Jesus in His death and resurrection has continued in the witnessing of Jesus through an angel to John, using visions of sight and sound. It has gone on in Jesus' witness through John, using the words of the document John wrote. Finally it has included also the witnessing of Jesus through the public readers who did not alter the message as they read it to their hearers.

Summary

This chapter has been organized about verbs and their cognates which describe several aspects of revelation. It paid attention to basic meanings and to use in the Apocalypse. The particular emphases of the words are as follows.

Ἀποκαλύπτειν stresses the fact that something which was not seen or recognized becomes known. The knowing which results from revelation is recognition and understanding. That which is revealed may be either past, present, or future. Revelation is the act of God and Jesus in the Apocalypse.

Δεικνύειν is used concerning the activity described in the Apocalypse and carried out by God, Christ, or angels. It means not only the sights and sounds of the revelation but also the explanations of their significance.

Σημαίνειν describes an activity in which the revealer uses the agency of some creature to reveal what he wants known. It is important

to pay attention to the source of the sign, for it can come from either God or Satan. False signs proceed from Satan and trustworthy signs from God.

Ἀνοίγειν emphasizes the fact that revelation cannot be accomplished by anyone except one with authority to do so. In this instance it is Christ, who died and is alive.

Προφητεύειν makes the points that the revelation is from God, that it is to be passed on to other people, and that it is not to be altered in this process.

Μαρτυρεῖν also emphasizes that God is the source of the revelation and that it is not to be changed. But another emphasis in its use is that the witness of Christian revelation is a witness to Christ's experience rather than to the experience of the Christian. The witness to be borne is therefore a gift, and the chief witness is Christ.

Προφητεύειν and *μαρτυρεῖν* are connected in the argument of the Apocalypse and underline the conclusion that when Christians become witnesses, they witness to Christ's experience rather than to their own.

CHAPTER IV

THE ACTIVITY OF REVELATION

The Method of Investigation

In the previous chapter the investigation of various words which connote revelation did not exhaust the data from the Apocalypse. Revelation for the writer of the Apocalypse was not so much a subject for discussion as an event which had taken place that Lord's day on the island of Patmos. His writing was not a discussion of the topic of revelation but was the description and result of the experience of revelation.

The picture of this activity of revelation is reflected not only in the author's choice of words to depict the event itself but also in what was happening when the revealing was going on. It will be the purpose of this chapter to examine what John says was happening in the course of the revelation, who was involved in it, and what was being revealed by this activity of revelation.

In doing this several levels of activity must be distinguished. The first level is the activity of the original vision, for the evidence does not force one to conclude that John's talk of a vision was simply a literary device to help him present his message. The time of the vision and the place where it was experienced are both mentioned (1:9-10), and these details suggest that John is reporting a vision which actually occurred.

But the history of the revelation did not end that day on Patmos, for John's record of the events of the vision was finally included in the New Testament canon. One may ask then if John considered this second level of activity, the writing and sending of his work, to be an act of revealing.

John wrote so that his writing might be read before a listening audience (1:3), therefore it may be asked if his idea of revelation included this activity of reading and hearing also.

The modern practice of thousands of people reading the message privately and individually for themselves does not seem to have been envisioned by John, so the question whether revelation occurs in these circumstances can expect no direct answer in the Apocalypse.

1:9-3:22

In the opening vision (1:9-20; 2:1-3:22) John describes the person with whom he is first involved as someone with a voice loud and overpowering like the sound of a trumpet (1:10). Charles suggests a parallel with Ezek. 3:12, where the prophet is caught up by the Spirit and hears behind him *φωνὴν σεισμοῦ μεγάλου*.¹ Charles identifies this voice with the son of man (1:13ff.) because the direction to the seer to write what he sees is spoken again by this figure. Charles calls this "the natural interpretation,"² noting, however, that other interpreters do not agree with him. Because the first voice is compared to a

¹R. H. Charles, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), I, 23.

²Ibid., I, 24.

trumpet while the second is compared to the sound of many waters and identified as that of the son of man, Swete feels that the voice of verse 10 is that of an angel.³ Behm favors this interpretation also because it fits the statement of 1:1 that the revelation had involved the sending of an angel.⁴

Even though the Apocalypse may not be full-fledged apocalyptic there are obvious connections.⁵ Contemporary Jewish apocalyptic writings often picture their authors being summoned and guided by angels (Enoch 1:2; 2 Esdras 4:1-4; Greek Apoc. Baruch 1).⁶ This parallelism, together with Behm's evidence, provides strong evidence that the voice which summons John is that of an angel.

The next voice is identified as the voice of "one like a son of man" (1:13-17), who is Jesus Christ. This is evident from his statement: *εφενόμην νεκρὸς καὶ ἰδοὺ ᾤων ἐπι εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων* (1:18).⁷ He is also called *ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος* (1:17; 2:8), *ὁ ᾤων* (1:18), and he has the keys of death and Hades (1:18; cf. 3:7). He is *ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ* (2:18) and *ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινός* (3:14).

³Henry Barclay Swete, The Apocalypse of St. John (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1951), p. 13.

⁴Johannes Behm, Die Offenbarung des Johannes (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1953), p. 12.

⁵Supra, pp. 7-10.

⁶Both the Apocalypse of Abraham and the Testament of Abraham tell of angels who serve as guides for Abraham in his visions. H. H. Rowley, The Relevance of Apocalyptic (London: Lutterworth Press, c.1947), pp. 111, 113.

⁷This is repeated in the letter to Smyrna: *ὁς ἐφένετο νεκρὸς καὶ ἔζησεν* (2:8).

The other individual involved in the activity is the seer himself, who is active in seeing and hearing and then in writing and sending his communication to the seven churches (1:11).

John describes himself: *ἔγενόμην ἐν πνεύματι* (1:10). According to Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich the preposition *ἐν* is used in Johannine writings to designate a close personal relationship, for example, to be under the influence of the Spirit.⁸ John describes himself as *ἐν πνεύματι* here and in 4:1, where it is the immediate result of his summons by the same voice. Later in the book John uses the phrase *ἐν πνεύματι* to describe the manner in which the angel transported him to view the desert scene (17:3) and then to see the holy city Jerusalem (21:10). Accordingly, it would seem to be a special state of ecstasy in which one becomes more receptive to the Spirit's message. The seer is passive; he is seized by the Spirit; he does not lay hold on Him. The initiative belongs to the possessing Spirit, and the most the subject can do is be ready for the unpredictable experience, ready to hear and see.⁹

What is revealed to John first in this episode is a person. When the summons causes him to turn, his attention is caught by a figure who remains the center of his attention throughout the scene. He is described in typical apocalyptic metaphors which picture Him as a

⁸Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, c.1957), p. 259.

⁹Compare Paul's inability to describe fully an experience which seems very much a parallel to this (2 Cor. 12:1-4). Paul can boast of this experience because it is not really his own doing at all.

powerful, authoritative, divine person. This figure is Jesus Christ. He is depicted in action and described by the activity rather than in abstractions. When used of Christ adjectives do not remain adjectives but must be turned into verbs. And this is what the letters to the seven churches do. The attributes of Christ become specific and personal action. His authority among the seven churches is exercised directly through His own presence among them: He is in the middle of the lampstands (1:13), walking among them (2:1). He therefore knows the situation in Ephesus (2:2-4,6), having witnessed it Himself. What will follow if they do not repent will be the action of Christ (2:5b), not simply the outcome of their own activity.

While the vision is specific in saying that Christ will be active, no exact times are mentioned for the threatened or promised action. Even the description of the action is left general. The "ten days" of suffering for the church in Smyrna (2:10) is a short time rather than a literal length of time.¹⁰ Other expressions of time and numbers are also general: *ταχύ* (2:16; 3:11), *ὀλίγα ὀνόματα* (3:4). The revelation is the revelation of Christ and not the revelation of future events. In this section of the Apocalypse there is no difficulty identifying the person of Christ Jesus, but one cannot identify dates and events in the future to which the revealing Christ refers. There are references to the general directions developments will take: there will be

¹⁰Charles, I, 58; Swete, p. 32; Eduard Lohse, Die Offenbarung des Johannes (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1960), p. 24; G. B. Caird, A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine (New York: Harper and Row, c.1966), p. 35.

tribulation in Smyrna (2:10); "Jezebel" and her followers will be destroyed in Thyatira (2:22-23); in Philadelphia the opponents will be humbled (3:9), and all people will experience a time of testing (3:10). While the vision makes clear that Christ has in mind definite action which He will take personally, it does not indicate exactly what form that action will take. As prophecy it is a foretelling, but even more, it is a forth-telling.

4:1-8:1

The next section of the Apocalypse describes the revelation through the opening of the seven seals (4:1-8:1). Here again the voice like a trumpet is identified with the first voice John heard (4:1), probably that of an angel.¹¹ The angel summons John to the vision, but it is not stated clearly if this is the same one who later explains to John what is taking place.

The center of the vision is a divine figure, God as Creator and Ruler (4:2-3,11; 6:10), separate from Christ, the Lamb (7:10). He is shown holding in His right hand the scroll which will be the source of the revelation in this section (5:1,7). His place is on a throne at the center of the heavenly scene (4:2-6;9-10); He is called divine names and

¹¹The same facts cause Charles to identify it as the voice of Christ. He recognizes the difficulty, that the object of the vision also serves thus as the angelus interpres, and he suggests, in keeping with his theory of the Apocalypse as the production of several editors, that the final editor inserted the phrase *ἡ φωνὴ ἡ πρώτη ἣν ἤκουσα ὡς σάλπιγγος ἀλλούσης μετ' ἐμοῦ, λέγων* in order to make clear that this vision came from the same source as that in chapters 1-3, but he failed to notice that he thus introduced the inconsistency mentioned. Charles, I, 108.

ascribed divine attributes: $\delta \text{ } \gamma\omega\upsilon\upsilon \text{ } \epsilon\iota\varsigma \text{ } \tau\omicron\upsilon\varsigma \text{ } \delta\iota\omega\upsilon\upsilon\alpha\varsigma \text{ } \tau\omega\upsilon\upsilon \text{ } \delta\iota\omega\upsilon\upsilon\omega\upsilon\upsilon$ (4:10) and $\delta \text{ } \kappa\upsilon\upsilon\text{ } \rho\iota\omicron\varsigma \text{ } \kappa\alpha\iota \text{ } \delta \text{ } \theta\epsilon\omicron\varsigma \text{ } \eta\mu\omega\upsilon\upsilon$ (4:11). In 4:8 holiness and eternity are connected with Him and He is called $\kappa\upsilon\upsilon\text{ } \rho\iota\omicron\varsigma \text{ } \delta \text{ } \theta\epsilon\omicron\varsigma \text{ } \delta \text{ } \pi\alpha\upsilon\text{ } \tau\omicron\kappa\text{ } \rho\alpha\tau\iota\upsilon\alpha$.

Another figure is the Lamb ($\lambda\omicron\upsilon\text{ } \nu\iota\omicron\upsilon$), who is called by other names: "the lion of the tribe of Judah" (5:5)¹² and "the root of David" (5:5).¹³ In the New Testament the word $\lambda\omicron\upsilon\text{ } \nu\iota\omicron\upsilon$ is peculiar to the Apocalypse although the idea is not. The picture of Jesus as the lamb ($\lambda\omicron\upsilon\text{ } \nu\omicron\varsigma$) is used by Luke (Acts 8:32), Peter (1 Peter 1:19), and John (John 1:29,36), no doubt with the sacrificial lambs or Passover lamb of the old covenant in mind. Either this or the fact that Jesus was killed can be seen in the description of this lamb as $\omega\varsigma \text{ } \epsilon\sigma\phi\alpha\gamma\mu\epsilon\text{ } \nu\omicron\upsilon$, and it probably reflects both ideas. The identification of the lamb with Jesus fits perfectly the idea that His blood is able to make white the robes of those who are God's (7:14) and that He will be among the people of God to care for them in God's presence (7:17).

Various individuals and groups make their appearance in the vision and sometimes they speak. In general, their speech is a reaction to the scene or the events of the vision and frequently they make explicit by their words what is implied in the action or setting of the scene. In 4:10-11, for example, the elders perform an act of worship and then sing

¹²A reflection of Jacob's description of his son (Gen. 49:9) and of the fact that Jesus was born from the line of Judah (Cf. Matt. 1:2; Heb. 7:14).

¹³In 22:16 the name Jesus is attached to this title and reflects Isaiah's thought if not his words about the branch which was to grow out of the stump of Jesse (Is. 11:1,10), applied by Paul to Jesus (Rom. 15:12).

that God's creation is the reason for their worship.¹⁴ Angels are the spokesmen of God in this vision (4:1; 7:3), as are the beasts at the throne (6:1,3,5,7); at other times angels ask questions (5:2) or make statements (5:12; 7:12) which help make clear the meaning of the vision.

The central activity of this section, the opening of the seals, is performed by the Lamb. By its nature this suggests revealing, for the breaking of the seal on a scroll makes it possible to read its contents. Here the contents of the scroll are not read but they are acted out in the vision as each of the seals is broken, and in this way the contents become known. No one except Christ is capable of making known the contents of the scroll, which indicates, according to Caird, that the revealing action is not merely a telling of what has happened but includes also the doing of the action: "Until the scroll is opened, God's purposes remain not merely unknown but unaccomplished."¹⁵ In a sense then, the revealing is not simply telling what has already taken place, but it is an on-going activity of Christ for His Church and through His Church. Caird comments, "But the once-for-all fact of the Cross is not for John an isolated incursion of the divine into history, with repercussions only in heaven. It has its factual continuation in the earthly life of the church."¹⁶ The events of Good Friday and Easter can be called the full revelation of the victory of the cross; the rescue of the

¹⁴The same happens in descriptions of the Lamb in 5:9-10,12,13; 7:10.

¹⁵Caird, p. 73.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 76.

individual and the final victory of the whole Church over world and Satan reveals nothing separate from the first victory but is a restating of the one victory in other terms.

In the entire vision the initiative remains with God. It is His angel who summons the seer, the scroll which will provide the revelation comes from His right hand (5:1), and one of the points of chapter 7 is that control over the course of the future is His. Revelation in the Apocalypse is never something which can be wrested from the hand of God. It is and remains His; He gives it when and where He pleases. John's receptiveness to the vision¹⁷ follows rather than precedes God's call. The seer follows and does not lead. He is not carrying on an investigation based upon his own theories of what can be learned about God but he is following the course of the vision. At one point a question must be put into his mouth by an elder (7:13), whose answer helps John interpret the vision. The activity of John in the revelation remains predominantly passive; he hears and he sees,¹⁸ but he is not responsible for producing the revelatory vision. The hearing and the seeing are so closely bound together that John not only mentions them together (5:11; 4:1; 6:1,5) but seems to consider them one action, for he sees rather than hears the proclaiming angel (5:2).

The description of the vision also presents the reader with a number of features which are impossible to picture. The position of the

¹⁷Expressed by the phrase *ἐν τῷ πνεύματι* (4:2).

¹⁸In this section John writes *ἤκουσα* nine times and *εἶδον* fourteen times.

four living beasts is described in 4:6 as ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου καὶ κύκλῳ τοῦ θρόνου.¹⁹ The scroll is sealed with seven seals (5:1), but it is not necessary to open all seven of the seals before the first part of the message becomes readable (6:1-2). The Lamb is described as already sacrificed (ὡς ἐσφαγμένον 5:6), yet it is alive and standing. John says of the four beasts that their speaking God's praises never stops (καὶ ἀνάπαυσιν οὐκ ἔχουσιν ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτός 4:8), yet he describes them doing other things as well (6:1). The problem is not that of the significance of the descriptions, for if there are features of the visions which are incongruous, many of these difficulties disappear in the interpretation, demonstrating that the meaning of the vision and not the vision itself is primary. The act of revelation is an action of making clear, of causing to understand, rather than of simply exposing to fact. That which is revealed here is more like propositional truth than simple event. It may be called "event plus interpretation."

There is a pattern of revelation in the opening of the seals. A seal is broken by the Lamb and immediately thereafter the action begins. The action is described not only in terms of event and results, but the intention of the action also is made clear at times (6:2,11). In some

¹⁹Swete says, "The exact position assigned to the ἴψα is not easy to grasp. . . . The words must therefore be interpreted independently. As they stand here, followed by καὶ κύκλῳ τοῦ θρόνου, they seem to imply that the figures are so placed that one of the ἴψα is always seen whether stationary or moving round in rapid gyration." Swete, pp. 70-71. Lohse suggests that one may not have to be able to picture it: "Der Platz vor dem Thron Gottes kann wieder nur mit einem nicht ganz zureichenden Vergleich beschrieben werden, in dem ein altes mythisches Motiv verwendet wird." Lohse, p. 35.

instances the meaning of the event may be declared by a voice which accompanies it (6:6-7,10; 7:2,14-17) and identifies figures and meanings. In others the seer himself knows the identity of the figures (6:8; 7:9) and identifies them for the readers.

8:2-11:19

In the next portion of the vision the personae dramatis include a group of seven angels (8:2), another angel (8:3-5), the saints (8:3-4), an eagle (8:13), a star (9:1-2), a group of four angels (9:14), a voice from the altar (9:13) or from heaven (10:4,8; 11:12), a mighty angel (10:1-3,5-10), two witnesses (11:3-11), loud voices (11:15), and twenty-four elders (11:16-18). It is evident that angels play an important part in this section of the Apocalypse. In fact, the section is structured about the seven angels "who stand before God" and to whom trumpets are given. This description of the seven seems of a piece with the tradition which produced Tobit 12:15;²⁰ Enoch 20; Dan. 10:13; Luke 1:19;²¹ Jude 9; and 4 Esdras 4:36.²² Their function in these other writings is to be messengers of God. In John's vision, too, they act as God's representatives, as is indicated by the delivery of trumpets into their hands (8:2) and the fact that what follows each of their trumpet blasts is caused by God. One must notice also the parallels of these

²⁰Raphael describes himself as εἷς ἐκ τῶν ἑπτὰ ἀγίων ἀγγέλων, οἱ . . . εἰσπορεύονται ἐνώπιον τῆς δόξης τοῦ ἁγίου.

²¹Gabriel describes himself as ὁ παρεστῆκώς ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ.

²²Swete, p. 107.

plagues and those of the Exodus and the fact that when the seventh trumpet sounds the kingdom of the world becomes the kingdom of the Lord and His Christ (11:15), for these indicate divine acts. The trumpets herald God's action, they do not cause it.²³

The "strong angel" (ἄγγελος ἰσχυρός) is mentioned three times in the Apocalypse. It is such an angel who asks, "Who can open the scroll in God's hand?" (5:2). In chapter 10 a strong angel comes from heaven with marks of God.²⁴ In 18:21 it is the angel who performs a symbolical casting of a millstone into the sea and explains its meaning.

There are the seven thunders which reveal something John is not allowed to record. There is no further explanation of the identity or nature of the thunders, but if the background is that of the Old Testament it would indicate that their message is a divine one since thunder is usually associated with God (Ex. 19:16).

Several times in this part of the vision statements are made to John and the speaker of them is not identified (9:12; 10:11; 11:1).

The activity of revealing takes place in several ways in this section. At times the message is acted out: the angel burns incense in the golden censer (8:3-5), each trumpet blast is followed by action, a

²³Caird, p. 111, reconstructs the possible associations with trumpets for John and his readers and concludes, "John himself has told them clearly enough that the trumpets were an escort for the ark, a proclamation of the divine sovereignty, and a summons to general repentance; and by placing them in the hands of the Angels of the presence he has indicated their close association with worship."

²⁴Cloud, rainbow, shining face, and fiery feet recall Ex. 13:21; 19:9; Gen. 9:13; Ex. 34:30; Dan. 10:6.

scroll is eaten (10:8-10); and two witnesses testify, are killed, and are raised again (11:1-13). In this section familiarity with the language of symbolism is assumed, but there are also accompanying statements which provide clues to the meaning of the action. The comment of 9:6 on the torturing of people by the creatures from the bottomless pit suggests that even if this torture had already begun at the time the Apocalypse was written, it was not ended. The naming of the king of the pit in 9:11 identifies the source of this torture as satanic. An angel says the seventh trumpet will mean the time of fulfillment (10:7).

The seven thunders are pictured speaking, but the voice from heaven instructs John to put a seal upon what they have said and not write it down (10:4). There is a revelation to John which is not to be passed on to the hearers of the Apocalypse, and this action of forbidding is a reminder that not only the original action of revealing to John but also the recording is under the control of God.²⁵ This passage is important also because it indicates that John's procedure was, at least part of the time and perhaps throughout, to write down immediately at the end of a section of a vision what had been transmitted to him. This was his obedience to the command at the beginning, "Write what you see in a book" (1:11).

²⁵The reason for the sealing can only be conjectured, and most commentators feel the best reason is also Paul's in 2 Cor. 12:4, that it is not suitable for expression in human speech. Charles, I, 262. Joseph Bonsirven, *L'Apocalypse de saint Jean* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1951), p. 189. Swete, p. 128. Some feel it indicates that the revelation is not impossible to express, but it is not intended for other people, as the command not to write demonstrates. Cf. Behm, p. 55. Lohse, p. 56. Caird goes even further and says that the sealing means God has cancelled the doom they symbolized. Caird, p. 126.

Another method of revealing in the vision of John is consuming of a scroll (10:8-10). The fact that a command to prophesy follows his eating the scroll indicates that eating the scroll represents making the message of the scroll his own so that he can then give it to others.²⁶ The scroll is brought by the same angel who came from heaven and spoke with authority about the consequences of the final trumpet. Again the source is ultimately God.

The vision of the two witnesses in chapter 11 is one for which John is directed to prepare by marking the contrast between the inner confines of the temple and the area outside it where the drama is to be enacted (11:1-2). Part of this is presented as a prediction of what will happen and uses the future tense (11:2-10); but with verse 11 there is a sudden change to the aorist and the presentation becomes the account of a vision which John has seen. The distinction between hearing a description of an event and witnessing it as a visionary event seems so small that John can pass from one manner of presentation to the other without disturbing the flow of the account.

The episode of the seventh trumpet and third woe involves the angel who blows the trumpet (11:14), the loud voices in heaven which describe the time (11:15), and the elders who react in words of worship (11:16). In all three cases their behavior reflects the involvement of God, and no room is left for doubt when it becomes clear that heaven is the source of the voices and the elders are described seated on their

²⁶Cf. Ezek. 2:8-3:1, where Ezekiel is told to eat a scroll and go speak to Israel with God's words.

thrones before God. John has been using his senses of hearing and sight in the revelation, but now he views a sight whose significance is not explicitly given, the temple in heaven with the ark of the covenant in it and storms surrounding it. The voices have said that God at this point is beginning the full exercise of His ruling power and is fully restoring His people to their proper position in the world, therefore the revelation of the lost ark of the covenant in its own place again becomes the sign of the final victory of God's covenant. Of the various meanings this might have had,²⁷ the idea of a restoration of God's rule fits best the words of the voices and the elders. The meaning of the action is made clear by the words.

12:1-14:20

The start of the next section (chapters 12-14) indicates the source of the vision only by noting that the signs of the woman and the dragon appeared in heaven. However, for a culture which fully expected to see portents in stars and meteors no source except a divine one could be imagined when the sky was the stage and the voice which explained what was taking place was a voice in heaven (12:10). Here too the revelation has a divine source.

The activity on this heavenly stage is important, of course, but one must also take note of the very important contribution of the

²⁷It could mean God's covenant had been removed from the earth and no longer applied; that the heavenly temple had been broken into and the ark exposed; that John had been chosen as the genuine high priest of God who could view the ark of the covenant.

speaker from heaven. It is only from his words that one learns that the ejection of Satan is not the final victory over him. Actually, it means even greater danger for the earth and sea, to whom the Devil has come down in great fury (12:12). In the light of these words it becomes clear that the dragon's subsequent pursuit of the woman depicts danger to the Church on earth and to her children, the Christians (12:17).

The next picture of the beast from the sea (13:1-10) and the beast from the earth (13:11-18) would leave little room for hope, were it not for the comments upon the situation by an unidentified source (13:8, 9-10, 18). The most likely source is the writer, John, but if he is being faithful to his calling (1:11; 1:2; 22:18), he is not expressing his own ideas but is telling only what he has learned to be God's truth. Again, the full meaning of the vision is made clear by a comment provided by God.

The drama of chapter 14 presents the scene of the Lamb with the 144,000 on Mount Zion, proclamations by three angels (14:6-11), a voice from heaven (14:13), and a statement by the writer (14:12). The second scene shows harvestings by one like the son of man and by an angel, both of them representing a divine source. The statements of the three angels and the voice from heaven clarify both the scene which precedes and that which follows, for they speak of the condemnation of God's enemies (14:7-8, 10-11) represented in the harvesting, and of the safety of God's people (14:13) shown in the Mount Zion scene.

15:1-16:21

In the vision of the seven bowls (chapters 15-16) the actors are God (15:1,7), the angels who represent Him (15:6; 16:1-4,8,10,12,17), the living creatures (15:7), and the voice from the sanctuary (16:1,17). John is the witness who sees and hears this (15:1,5; 16:1,5,13).

17:1-19:10

In 17:1-19:10 there is a sequence in which a guiding angel accompanies John, pointing out to him what he should see and explaining the sights to him. No room is left for doubt concerning the identity of the harlot and the beast; their pretence to divinity (17:8), their location on seven hills (17:9), and the description of them as "the great city that holds sway over the kings of the earth" (17:18) make clear that this is Rome.²⁸ The title "Babylon" fits this perfectly. The guiding angel enunciates the message of this section in words which are clear: "They will wage war upon the Lamb, but the Lamb will defeat them, for he is the Lord of lords and King of kings, and his victory will be shared by his followers, called and chosen and faithful" (17:14).

The fall of Rome remains the topic throughout this section. The fact and its meaning are presented in words of angels (18:2-3,21-24),

²⁸Caird remarks here, "It has sometimes been thought that apocalyptic writers resorted to symbolism because they were writing tracts for the resistance movement and wanted to make their seditious contents undecipherable by the secret police. In John's case this explanation of his symbolic language is patently absurd, for any Roman soldier who knew how to read Greek could find the answer to a conundrum as easy as this one." Caird, pp. 216-17.

of a voice from heaven (18:4-8), of people who mourn her fall (18:9-19), and of those who rejoice in it (19:1-8).

The angel has one more message for John before the close of this section on the fall of Rome and it is a message which anticipates the closing revelation of the vision. Several features are particularly interesting. First, the angel gives a special direction to John to write the words which he is quoting to him (19:9); second, the angel attests to the fact that the words are God's (19:10); and third, the angel makes clear the distinction between God and one of His messengers (19:10b). All these reflect an awareness of the responsibilities of a messenger of God. God is the source of the revelation, and it is He who determines the form the revelation takes. In describing the vision he saw that Lord's day, John picked his own vocabulary to write of the visual part of the revelation; but the words of the pronouncements are words he heard rather than words he selected.²⁹

19:11-22:21

The drama of the final battle, defeat, and judging of God's enemies (19:11-22:21) finds Christ the principal actor;³⁰ but the symbolism

²⁹According to Birger Gerhardsson, such an interest in words may be part of the Christian tradition. Memory and Manuscript (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, c.1961), passim.

³⁰Among the names by which the rider is called are some from the letters to the seven churches: πιστός καὶ ἀλήθινος (19:11; 3:14), οἱ δὲ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτοῦ ὡς φλόξ πυρός (19:12; 1:14; 2:18). One feature was seen before in the other divine figure: ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ ἐκπορεύεται ῥομφαία ὀξεῖα (19:15a; 1:17).

and the course of the drama seem, as Caird says,³¹ to be derived from Ezekiel, whose picture of his time fit the situation John and his fellow Christians faced in their day. But if the plan and some of the details owe something to Ezekiel, the vision has been changed and reconstructed. John says, "And I saw . . ." (καὶ εἶδον), and thereby implies that the reconstruction was God's and not his own (19:17; 20:1; 4:11).

The final vision of the new heaven and new earth appears to the seer. Comments upon it are made from the throne (21:3-7) and by a figure on the throne who may be identified as God.³² One of the seven angels of the bowls again serves as John's guide, this time to show him the New Jerusalem (21:9-10).

The same angel says that God has sent His angel to show His servants, presumably the prophets, what must soon take place (22:6). He thus pictures the course which the words and sights from God have followed. But there is another step to be considered, for the revelation to John has been recorded by the one who heard and saw the events of the vision (22:8). Others now will hear these words (22:7b). Though it has come through the angel and is now going to others as John writes, it is still God's revelation (22:9,18-19).

John can also say that Jesus has sent the revelation (22:16), confronting the reader with what is either a confusion or a *μυστήριον* of the unity of God and Jesus Christ. The fact that the question of the

³¹Caird, pp. 247, 256.

³²Even though He calls Himself "Alpha and Omega" (21:6; cf. 1:8).

relationship of Jesus Christ and God provided a difficulty for the Church by its resistance to logical expression³³ and the fact that the writer of the Apocalypse does have a consistent theology in his work³⁴ indicate that there is no confusion here, but it is the expression of a relationship which cannot be made clear.

The *μαρτυρία* which John has received has come from Jesus through the angel to John, and from him it must go to the churches (22:16). There is no single stage of this course which is designated revelation. The concern, in fact, is with what results from this activity, for John appends the warning that the words of this writing must be respected and not altered by anyone who has something to do with their transmission to others. So far the witnesses have been faithful to their call: Jesus has been *ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστός* (1:5); twice a revealing angel has rejected John's attempts to give him credit for the revelation (19:10; 22:9); John has called himself God's slave, *ὃς ἐμαρτύρησεν τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὅσα εἶδεν* (1:2); and now he warns that there must be faithfulness also in the next stage, as people hear

³³J. N. D. Kelly shows the development from the first and second centuries, where there was no emphasis upon reconciling various attempts to picture God, to the third century, when the attempt to achieve clarity produced the controversy between "economic trinitarianism" and "monarchianism." Early Christian Doctrines (New York: Harper & Brothers, c.1958), pp. 83, 107-10.

³⁴There is substantial agreement concerning the theology of the Apocalypse. Cf. Caird, pp. 289-301. Paul Feine, Theologie des Neuen Testaments (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1953), pp. 373-79. Eduard Lohse, pp. 107-11. E. F. Scott, The Book of Revelation (London: SCM Press, 1949), pp. 107-46.

the words he has written and carry them on. If this is done, God will continue to speak His blessing upon and through this message.

The Nature of Revelation

Throughout the course of the vision recorded by John the initiative remained with God. He was the one who called John. Since the angels are servants of God, their activity finds its source in God, so the summons to John through angels was the call of God and the explanations given by angels were God's. The revelation proceeded from heaven, the home of God, and it was there that John saw and heard most of the action he recorded. God gave the command to write, forbade the recording of one statement, and ordered that the scroll on which John had recorded the revelation not be sealed. Therefore it remained under God's control, and the activity of revelation may properly be called the activity of God even when it involved His servants.

The written scroll which remained when the experience of John was over was not merely the residue of revelation, but it was rather the extension of that revelation to other people. Its purpose was not only the creation of a mood, but transmission of information as well. Its message can be stated.

The revelation to John is the description of events in the past, present, and future, as they should be viewed by God's people. What John recorded is what he saw (1:11), but at the same time it describes present conditions of the period and what must soon take place (1:1,19; 4:1). It says that God's people will ultimately reign on earth (5:10). Christians may be sure that those who have died for their faith are not

suffering now and will not in the future (7:14-17). Bad times are coming (9:6), but in the end the fulfillment of God's mystery will become evident (10:8). Already the world has become the property of God and Christ (11:15) and God's enemy has been beaten (12:10; 18:21-19:2). The Christians' faithfulness to God, trusting Him, will therefore finally result in their victory as well (14:13). The full enjoyment of this victory will come with Christ's sudden return (16:15), when the victory over Satan will have its full effect (17:14) and God will be the only ruler (19:6; 21:3-4). The time for this is near (22:10) and it makes it imperative that people direct their lives in terms of this victory, present in Christ's victorious death and in His coming again in victory and judgment (20:12).

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

1. God takes the initiative in revelation and maintains His complete control over it.

The course of revelation, it has been seen, always leads from God to man. From the calling of the seer to the final promises and warnings, God is in control of the proceedings in the Apocalypse. God does not show Himself in answer to a search for Him; the revelation begins with God's call to John. The activity of John is one of witnessing: watching, hearing, and relating the action and words of God.

God's initiation and control of revelation is reflected especially in such words as ἀποκαλύπτειν, δεικνύειν, ἀγγεῖν, προφητεύειν, and μαρτυρεῖν. The examination of the activity of revelation in the Apocalypse has shown repeatedly that the movement of revelation is from God to man and that it is God who initiates it. It is ἡ ἀποκάλυψις, ἣν ἔδωκεν . . . ὁ Θεός (1:1).

2. The revelation of the Apocalypse provides a picture of God in action and shows the nature of God by His acts in history.

The subject matter of the Apocalypse is its own time and the events of that time. These events were the various episodes of confrontation between the Church and the Roman Empire. God, as the Apocalypse reveals Him, had shown Himself to the readers of the writing already in Christ Jesus and in the events of His life, death, and resurrection; but events at the time of writing must have seemed at variance with the nature of God as they had come to know Him through the actions of Christ. The

Apocalypse was a retelling of current events, which showed also the ultimate outcome of those events. The whole of the present and the future is thus presented and not merely a part of it.

An important difference between the picture of history in the Apocalypse and that given in the idea of revelation in God's mighty acts must be noted. Where the "Acts of God" concept of revelation sees man confronting God in events which demonstrate on their own that they are God's acts, the events which Christians were witnessing at John's time caused perplexity because their very nature seemed to demonstrate that the enemies of God were more powerful than He. The message of the Apocalypse is not that its readers should take another look at current events, because the evidence is there in the events themselves that they are under the control of God. It is rather that Christians should know that the same God who won victory in Christ is still acting with all His power and grace in spite of appearances.

3. God reveals Himself but not completely. He gives a limited vision, and the knowledge about God which results from this is limited but practical.

The titles, pictures, and messages have indicated that God stood behind every vision and proclamation to John in the Apocalypse. The appearances of God and the statements made about Him in connection with them make clear that John's revelation was from God and was about God.

However, the result of the vision was not a complete knowledge about God which would enable John or his readers to know precisely what God would do in every situation they might confront; nor was the result a personal acquaintance with God which assured total trust in God from that point on. There was something yet to come.

The knowledge of God which the Apocalypse imparted was sufficient, however, and in that sense it was practical. Its aim was to strengthen Christians in the particular situation of that time, and out of it could come a new appreciation of what it means to have this God as one's God in the turbulence of persecution.

4. God's revelation of Himself is not only in action, but it is in actions as explained by the accompanying word and in word within the context of God's action at the time it is spoken.

One cannot understand the whole message of the Apocalypse without some knowledge of the historical setting to which it was addressed. The events of the vision and the words accompanying them would often make no sense without that knowledge. But the accompanying words also shed light upon the nature of the events by showing the judgment of God upon the events or upon the people involved in them.

The message of the Apocalypse does not become completely clear by simply comparing its account of the Church's confrontation with Rome with an account of the same thing by a pagan historian. Not only the events but also the words of the account show what God's will and action really was in those happenings. This supports the contention of James Barr that the dichotomy between word and event is a false one.

5. The central revelatory act of God has taken place in Jesus Christ and particularly in His death and resurrection. The coming victory is not radically new but is the working out of that first victory.

The references in the Apocalypse to Christ's death are unmistakable. By context and by terminology the Apocalypse also makes clear that this death was a victory and not a defeat. In the description of history as the struggle between God and Satan, the Apocalypticist's

message is that the outcome is not in doubt at all; God will be the victor! The figure of victory in the Apocalypse is the Lamb who was slain. Thereby a connection is drawn between the victory of Christians and the death of Christ, a relationship explained as one of cause and effect.

This provides some support for the thesis of Pannenberg that in Christ God's revelation is present "proleptically." However, there is no idea in the Apocalypse that something completely startling and different will be revealed at the end of time. The picture of the end in this book suggests a fuller enjoyment of the salvation won by Christ but not a new and different relationship. The Martyrs are pictured already enjoying the results of Christ's victory. The revelation is complete then and not merely promised.

6. Revelation in the Apocalypse is objective and includes propositional revelation of God, His nature and work.

The objectivity is that of the Gospel, the news of a redemption which has already been accomplished by Jesus Christ. The purpose of the Apocalypse is not primarily to create a mood or set the stage for an experience, but it is to announce that God's visitation to rescue man has taken place. There are references to Christ and His work which are unmistakable.

The apocalyptist did not leave it to the reader and hearer to find the meaning of Christ's work for their own life and times. The purpose of the book was to make that connection clear. In doing so, the writer made use of propositional statements about God and His activity.

One can say that God continues to reveal Himself in His activity in history, but the objective and even propositional truths about God illuminate those acts. Perhaps there is need to speak of two aspects of revelation, fundamental and derivative revelation. For John, as for every Christian, the fundamental revelation was the Incarnation, whose significance was made clear to man not in the event alone but also in the words about the event. God continues to reveal Himself and His will in events, but their significance is clear only in the light of God's fundamental revelation of Himself and His unchanging purpose. The Apocalypse of John showed the meaning of Christ's death and resurrection for a time of persecution under the reign of Domitian.

7. History is the working out of God's will of law and grace in a world turned against Him and therefore doomed. The final end of history is not in doubt, for Christ's victory has assured it.

The message of the Apocalypse does not enable one to know God so that he can predict what God will do in every circumstance. No dates are given for future events and the descriptions are given in general terms.

What does become perfectly clear is the will of God for man and the world, which enables one to be certain that the future and, ultimately, the end of all things will mean punishment for the enemies of God and salvation for the people of God. This is a description of the will rather than the essence of God.

8. The word which resulted from the experience of John is the word of God, but it is also the word of the writer.

The Apocalypse is the word of John. His greeting and his closing make that clear. The phraseology and language give clues concerning

his background and circumstances. He speaks of himself in the first person. In that sense it is the revelation of John.

Yet when he closes, he demands respect for the words he has written like the respect due God's pronouncements. The punishment for misusing the words is the punishment meted out for opposing God.

John expresses this best by calling his activity witnessing. As a witness he is the speaker of the words, but his task in describing what he has heard and seen is that of being faithful in his choice of words, so that God's message will be conveyed and not merely John's reaction to God's revelation.

Chapter

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
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Behm, Die Offenbarung des Johannes

Seven Letters	Seven Seals	Seven Trumpets	Dragon vs. Lamb	Seven Vials	Fall of Babylon	Consummation
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Bousset, Die Offenbarung Johannis

Ermahnender Teil	Siebensiegelvision	Siebenposaunen-vision	Höhepunkt	Siebenschalenvision	Das Ende	Nachtrag	Schluß
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Bowman, "Revelation, Book of," Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible

ACT I Church on Earth	II God's Purpose in History	III Church in Tribulation	IV Salvation of the Church	V World in Agony	VI Judgment of the World	VII Church in Millennium	Close
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Farrer, The Revelation of St. John the Divine

Seven Messages LORD'S DAY	The Book LION OF JUDAH	Seven Seals WOES OF	1 st 2 nd 3 rd WOE THE EAGLE	Evang. THE	Seven Bowls HEAVENLY	Babylon LAST THINGS M A N	Jerusalem
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Feine, Behm, and Kümmel, Einleitung in das neue Testament

	Prelude in Heaven	Seven Seals	Seven Trumpets	Interlude	Seven Vials	Fall of Babylon	Christ's Coming + the End	Concl.
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Lohmeyer, Die Offenbarung des Johannes

III Ermahnender Teil	IV Einleitung	A Sieben-siegelvision	B Siebenposaunenvision	C Reich des Drachens	D Mensch-ensohn	E Sieben-schalen-vision	F Fall Babylons	G Vollendung
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Marxsen, Einleitung in das Neue Testament

Letters to the Seven Churches	Coming Judgment	Fight with opponents + Fall of Babylon	Final Eschatological Triumph
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Rissi, Time and History

MESSAGE TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES	God + Lamb V I	Seven Seals SIGNS OF THE	Seven Trumpets END	Adversary + Lamb T I	Seven Bowls T I	Dabylon + Beast M E	Return of Christ	New Creation
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Scott, The Book of Revelation

Pro-logue	Messages to Seven Churches	Vision in Heaven	Three Series of Woes	Appearances of the Beast	Fall of Rome	Consummation
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Shepherd, The Paschal Liturgy and the Apocalypse

Scrutinies	Vigil	Lesson	Initiation	Law	Prophets	Gospel	Vials	Eucharist
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Caird, The Revelation of St. John the Divine

Call	Letters to the Churches	Heavenly Council	Seven Seals	Seven Trumpets	Great Ordeal	Seven Bowls	Last Days of Babylon	Reign of God	New Jerusalem
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The Structure of the Apocalypse

APPENDIX

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