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# "The Apocalypse- Its Sources and Content"

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The Prevailing idea in respect to the Apocalypse is that it is a book without any apparent plan or visible purpose, full of dark sayings and inexplicable mysteries. For such an opinion we must admit there is some justification. The book revels in much imagery that was no doubt familiar to an earlier world, but which is totally unfamiliar to the world of this present time. It uses symbolism which, perhaps, was clear as the noon-day sun to the contemporaries of the writer of the Apocalypse, but which veils rather than unveils truth to the reader many centuries removed from that time. It belongs to a type of literature much in evidence before the Apocalypse was written, literature that brought an inspiring message to its readers in days of gloom and despair; while, on the other hand, to the average modern reader it stands isolated and unapproachable.

It is the purpose of this thesis to show that the Apocalypse is not a book to be passed over as being too difficult and dark and mysterious for the reader of to-day, but rather one whose evident purpose is stamped on every page; one that professes an unwavering trust in the "larger hope", an unshakeable conviction in the triumph of right, an unflinching faith in the victory of the cause of Jesus Christ; one that exalts spirituality over materialism, that glorifies the martyr spirit, and that brings its message of hope and cheer to the people of every age and every clime.

In fulfilling this purpose no minute analysis or explanation of petty details will be attempted. Such a course would be impossible in a treatise of this kind; furthermore, it tends to obscure the beauty and significance of the whole. Rather will the present writer follow the broadest and sanest lines of interpretation, seeking in the literature with which the author was familiar, in the

events of his own time, and in his own personal experience the key to unlock the secrets of the Apocalypse.

But this alone will not sufficiently fulfill the purpose of this thesis. Having discovered in the Apocalypse the meaning it bore to the people of its time the writer hopes to indicate its wider message, its endorsement of the great principles of human conduct and Divine government that know no limit of time or place. According to the "Futurist" method of interpretation the Apocalypse had little, if any, interest for the immediate present, its interest was purely eschatological. According to the "Continuous-Historical" method it was a prediction of definite events yet to be fulfilled; and men have taxed their ingenuity for centuries in seeking the identification of the first Beast with some historical character of their own time, now finding it in the Pope of Rome, now in the leader of the Protestant Reformation, at one time in Napoleon Bonaparte, in our own day with the German Kaiser. Needless to say such a method has fallen into well-deserved disrepute. The "Preterist" method confined the scope of the Apocalypse mainly to the author's own time. Accordingly the book would have no interest for the student of to-day save that which it held in common with any record of purely past events. The method that will be followed here is that of the "Contemporary-Historical" combined with the Spiritual. In other words the writer expects to find in the Apocalypse the reflection of a situation past or present to its author; but he also expects to find in it prophecy, not prophecy of petty details and exact prediction, but prophecy in the highest and truest sense of the word, the enunciation of mighty principles of God in stern and arresting tones.

The Apocalypse is by no means to be considered a "laborious

piece of patch-work" or a "mosaic of earlier fragments," and yet a close comparison of it with the Scriptures of the Old Testament leads to the conclusion that the author did use "sources" in the presentation of his message to the churches of Asia Minor and to the church at large. Swete declares: "No book in the New Testament is so thoroughly steeped in the thought and imagery of the Hebrew Scriptures".<sup>1</sup> Again: "No writer of the Apostolic age makes larger use of his predecessors".<sup>2</sup>  
<sup>3</sup>  
 From another authority we learn that out of the four hundred and four verses of the Apocalypse two hundred and sixty-five contain Old Testament language, and about five hundred and fifty references are made to Old Testament passages. And yet one cannot help but feel that in using such material with a free hand the Apocalyptist first made it his very own. Rarely, if ever, are the

1. The Ap ocalypse of St. John "Intro. p. 53.

2. " " " " " " " 140.

3. Westcott & H ort "

exact words of an Old Testament writer used; and when the imagery is appropriated it is used with perfect consistency to the thought of the author and to the purpose of his book. Even where the thought of an earlier writer appears our author has, undoubtedly, used this not slavishly but creatively. In reality the old is fashioned into new.

No exhaustive illustration as to the dependence of the Apocalyptist on Old Testament literature can here be attempted, nor is it necessary. In conjunction with what has already been stated in a general way three or four illustrations will suffice. First of all it should be noted that the p lagues which followed the blowing of the Trumpets' and the plagues which followed the pouring out

of the Bowls<sup>2</sup> have a marked resemblance to the Egyptian plagues recorded in the Book of Exodus. The destruction of the vegetation by hail and fire, the turning of the sea into blood, the darkening of the luminaries of heaven, the curse of the locusts upon the fruitful land, have a conspicuous similarity to the judgments of God which fell upon Pharaoh and his people. "And

1. Apocalypse VIII

2. " XVI.

the Lord said unto Moses, stretch out thine hand over the land of Egypt for the locusts, that they may come up upon the land of Egypt, and eat every herb of the land; even all that the hail hath left." Each of the other plagues of the Apocalypse might be traced to its source in a similar way, and so traced can be interpreted. For should any doubt prevail in the mind of the reader as to why these things followed the Trumpets and the Bowls all doubt is dispelled when he finds that originally they meant God's judgments, stern and terrible, upon the oppressors of God's children.

Or, to take another illustration, the "measuring of the temple"<sup>2</sup> was in all probability, suggested by the vision of Zechariah: "I lifted up mine eyes again and looked and behold, a man with a measuring line in his hand"<sup>3</sup>. And not only is there a similarity in expression noticeable here, but in the thought, as well. The object of the measuring in both cases is undoubtedly that of "preservation."

A like similarity is also discernible between the "Sealing of the One Hundred and Forty-four Thousand" in the Apocalypse and the account given by Ezekiel of the safeguarding of the righteous

1. Ex. X<sup>12</sup>.

2. Apocalypse XI<sup>1</sup>.

3. Zech.<sup>1&2</sup>.

in Jerusalem by the mark of the Lord placed on their foreheads <sup>1</sup>.

Finally, a comparison between the section of the Apocalypse that refers to the "Little Book" and a second vision of Ezekiel will help to prove what has been stated already as to the way our author uses his "sources." "And the voice which I <sup>h</sup>heard from heaven spake unto me again and said: 'Go and take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel '----- and I took the little book out of the angel's hand, and ate it up ; and it was in my mouth sweet as honey ; and as soon as I had eaten it my belly was bitter. And he said unto me. 'Thou must prophesy again before many peoples, and nations and tongues, and kings". <sup>2</sup> The earlier writer described his vision thus: "And when I looked behold a hand was sent unto me, and lo, a roll of a book was therein;----- Moreover he said unto me----- eat this roll and go speak unto the house of Israel.' So I opened my mouth and he caused me to eat that roll ----- Then did I eat it and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness. And he said unto me, go, get thee unto the house of Israel and speak with my words unto them" <sup>3</sup> This comparison

<sup>4</sup>  
1. Ezek. 1X  
8-11

2. Apoc. X  
9 4

3. Ezek 11 - 111

will serve to illustrate the fact that the thought of our Apocalyptist is not limited by that of his "source". Ezekiel is bidden to prophesy to the "house of Israel;" but the New Testament Prophet, to "many peoples, and nations, and tongues and kings",- a commission infinitely wider.

No further comment is necessary to show that the writer of the Apocalypse drew freely upon the Scriptures of the Old Testament for

his material, for words, for imagery, and for thought.

Another evident "source" from which the writer of the Apocalypse drew freely was that of Apocalyptic literature. A few words regarding this literature will be in place here. The voice of the Old Testament prophet ceased to be heard when the idea became current that the Law was the infallible and final utterance of God. Thenceforth there was no room for the Prophet among the Jewish people. Nevertheless, inspiration had not ceased,- prophetic activity was simply manifested in a different form. No longer did the prophet appear in personal form denouncing in thunderous tones the vices of the times, and, with herald's voice recalling the people to their allegiance to the Most High,- he would not thus have been received. But he spoke to the people of his time in literary form, he wrote under the aegis of some great name of the past, he sought the aid of pseudonymity. The period between the writing of the last prophetic book of the Old Testament and the gospels of the New Testament has often been referred to as a "period of silence". This "period of silence," however, has been narrowed down into smaller and smaller limits by much scholastic research,- in fact it has been proved conclusively that it never existed at all. The period referred to was a period of great spiritual development and great literary activity. The proof of this is found in the Apocryphal and Apocalyptic literature. With the latter we are especially concerned here. The apocalypticist was the successor of the prophet. He learned the will of God in the same way through vision, trance and spiritual communion. He, too, had a message that he must communicate, although the mode of his communication was of necessity, different to that of the prophet. He sent out in literary form his message of comfort and



hope, and bade the God-fearing be of good cheer. To those hard-pressed in life's battle he promised the speedy deliverance of the Great Deliverer, the ushering, in by supernatural means, of a new heaven and a new earth. When the existence of evil seemed an incongruity in a world governed by a righteous God the apocalypticist foretold a time when evil would be defeated and right would triumph, when the unjust would be punished, and the just would be rewarded.

Small portions of this literature may be found in various prophetic books of the Old Testament, but the great Apocalypse in the Hebrew Scriptures is the Book of Daniel. This book appeared in the early days of the Maccabean struggle, a time of mingled hope and despair, with a piercing exhortation to endure all, and with a promise of near and full salvation. The "Book of <sup>Enoch</sup> ~~Enoch~~", the "Assumption of Moses", the "Apocalypse of Baruch," the "Fourth Book of Esdras" are only a few examples of an extensive non-canonical apocalyptic literature. The message of this type of literature was adorned with abundant imagery and much supernatural coloring, but sublime conceptions and eternal truths were there also.

The first Christian Apocalypse "came on the crest of this long wave of apocalyptic effort" <sup>1</sup> Unlike the other literature of its class it bore the author's name; the Law had been dethroned by Christianity and the prophet could now fling aside the guise of pseudonymity. A natural inference would be that our Apocalypticist drew much of his inspiration and material from preceding apocalypticists. In fact one is not surprised that so thorough a student of Apocalyptic as Dr. Charles pronounces the writer of the New Testament Apocalypse to be "steeped in Apocalyptic literature". With this verdict the impartial student

can hardly refuse to concur. Yet one is also constrained to admit that in spite of our authors indebtedness to Jewish sources he produces a product that surpasses them all. The Substantiation of this statement may be found by a comparison of some of the doctrines common to both. In Jewish Apocalyptic Particularism contests the field with Universalism. Again and again the world is spoken of as the especial heritage of the Jewish people, in fact created for that purpose. "He hath created the world on behalf of His people" <sup>2</sup> In the Christian Apocalypse

1. Swete "The Apoc. of St. John, p. XXVlll

2. "Assumption of Moses 1" <sup>12</sup>

the wider and more universal outlook predominates: " And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people." <sup>1</sup>

A Further comparison might be made in respect to the Messiah doctrine, and a corresponding development can be perceived. Many see a reference to the Messiah in the vision of Daniel, <sup>2</sup> where mention is made of "one like the Son of man. " The connection, to say the least, is uncertain. However the "Son of Man" in Daniel may be the germ for the Enochic "Son of Man" who is "the Christ," "the Righteous one," " the elect one",. Here a wonderful development has taken place. And yet, though in phraseology the writer of the Apocalypse may revert to Daniel and the Book of Enoch, the Christ portrayed in the last book of the New Testament transcends all previous conceptions and predections regarding the Messiah of God.- He is a victorious risen, glorified, personal Saviour.

Nevertheless, it must still be admitted that our Apocalyptist is under a large debt to his predecessors in the field of Apocalyptic. The similarity in phraseology is very distinct. In the opening vision

- <sup>6</sup>  
1. Apoc. XLV  
9-13  
2. Daniel Vll

of the Apocalypse Christ is described as "one like unto the Son of man clothed with a garment down to the foot and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; and his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength"<sup>1</sup> Unquestionably the great original for the above description is found in the Book of Daniel: "And I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like fiery flame and his wheels as burning fire.----- one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him,"<sup>2</sup>

Enough has been said to show that, in the opinion of the writer of this treatise, the author of the Apocalypse used, and used freely the Apocalyptic literature with

- <sup>13-16.</sup>  
1. Apoc. l  
9-13  
2. Daniel Vll

which he was familiar, both canonical and uncanonical. But at the same time he did not use it slavishly, he did allow his "source" to

circumscribe his own imagination and thought. He reinterpreted the material that he found at his hand, and sent it forth to bring its message of hope and comfort to a persecuted people, even as the Old Testament Apocalypse had done in the sad days of Antiochus Epiphanes.

But no consideration of the "sources" of the Apocalypse would be complete without taking account of the personal experience of the writer, the contemporary influences and events, the compelling inner spirit which made the task a sacred obligation. Without attempting to enter into any discussion as to the authorship and date of the Apocalypse it should be stated that the position herein adopted is that the Apocalypse was written by the Apostle John, "the disciple whom Jesus loved," the one on whom the mantle of St. Paul had fallen so far as work among the churches of Asia Minor was concerned. As confirmation of this position there might be cited the evidence of the Apocalypse itself, where the name of the author is mentioned in both the opening and closing chapters, the evidence, almost unanimous, of the early church, the evidence of much modern scholarship; while the tone and temper of the book harmonize well with the gospel portrait of the son of Zebedee. Also, the view taken here is in favor of a late date- 96-97 A.D., at the close of the reign of Domitian. The Apocalypse looks back over a period of persecution and the immediate purpose of it is plain, it was intended to strengthen the faith of a people sorely tried under the strain and stress of a relentless persecution. And while it is true that persecution of Christians took place as early as the reign of Nero, yet that persecution was spasmodic and localized, while under Domitian it became widespread and a settled policy. The internal evidence of the condition of the Asian

churches supports this view, for laxity and degeneracy and spiritual languor characterized in a marked degree some of the churches addressed by John. All this presupposes a date not earlier than 96 A.D.- before that time the Apocalypse would have been an historical impossibility.

It now becomes possible to seek to determine the contemporary influences which moulded the conception of the Apocalypse. Dr. Milligan gives first place in this regard to the discourse of our Lord upon the "last things" in response to the questions: "when shall these things be?" and "what shall be the sign of Thy coming and of the consummation of the Age?" And in his opinion although the destruction of Jerusalem may occupy the foreground, the words used have a wider reference to the "great tribulation" which was to come upon the world. That view accords well with the prevailing idea in this thesis; for if our Lord dealt with great principles rather than with concrete future events we should expect to find the same attitude in "the disciple that Jesus loved." At any rate in listening to the teaching of Jesus, in marking His attitude toward evil, in beholding His life of unflinching faith in God, John had, without doubt, a valuable preparation for his work as a writer of the Apocalypse.

Allusion has already been made to the persecution which had fallen upon the church of Christ. This also impelled the Apostle to his work. Christianity in its earlier days may have been looked upon as a religion of little consequence so far as the Imperial cult was concerned. That day soon passed; for the vitality and aggressiveness of the new religion placed it ere long in the very

forefront of antagonism to "Caesar-worship". And when John wrote his Apocalypse the Church and the Empire stood opposed "in declared in-expiable war." The time had come when the Christian suffered for the "Name", when to belong to this sect meant an offence worthy of death. In the letters to the Seven Churches Antipas alone is mentioned as a martyr, but it is certain that Antipas was only one of many. Time and again throughout the Apocalypse the Christian martyrs are mentioned and the impression is given that they were legion. Little wonder that the disciple whose Master had been crucified by Roman soldiery and whose brethren were scattered and slain by the stern mandate of a pitiless power was prompted to raise his voice and deliver words of judgment against the "Babylonish harlot" who sat upon the "Seven Hills".

Further, John had felt in a personal way the heavy hand of heathen Rome. He was not only a brother but a "companion in tribulation" to the persecuted people of his time. Not death but banishment had been his portion, banishment to Patmos, a lonely island in the Aegean Sea, "far the word of God and the Testimony of Jesus Christ."<sup>1</sup> And if, as Rahisay declares,<sup>2</sup> banishment was preceded by scourging, and marked by perpetual fetters, scanty clothing, insufficient food, and hard labor under the Dash of military overseers, then surely his was a punishment to which death itself would have been preferable. All this served to constitute a formative influence which fitted John for the writing of the Apocalypse. It is a real "source". For his book was not the result of a vision of a day, but united the contemplation and insight and suffering of years, which sufferings ended only when the tyrant Domitian was assassinated and,

his acts being declared invalid, John was permitted to return to Asia.

Nothing that has been said above should be construed as antagonistic to the idea that John wrote under the inspiration of God. For he himself looks on God as the author of the revelation he is about to make, a revelation transmitted through Jesus Christ; "The Apocalypse ("Revelation") of Jesus Christ which God gave unto him to show unto his servants things which must shortly

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1. Apoc.1

2. "Letters to Seven Churches", p. 85.

come to pass, and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John"<sup>1</sup> John's book implies a knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures and the Apocalyptic literature of preceding days; it implies a personal knowledge of the life and teaching of Jesus; it implies a personal and sympathetic contact with the history of the time in which he lived; but it implies also the strong impulse of the Spirit that dwells within the heart of the faithful servant of Christ Jesus, and it implies that personal communion with the Living God which is the highest form of inspiration,

The general content of the Apocalypse is as follows:- A reference at the very outset to the source, contents and importance of the book is followed by the salutation, and the description of a vision in which John at Patmos receives a commission from Christ to write to Seven Asian Churches. He writes words of commendation or censure or both as the individual case requires. Reward is promised to "him that over cometh" in the great tribulation which will fall very soon upon the whole world. The next vision reveals to John a sight of Heaven. God is seated on His throne and around Him are four and twenty elders,

seven spirits and (1 Apoc <sup>1</sup>1) four living creatures symbolic perhaps, of creation. All these give glory to God. Again he sees a book sealed with seven seals which no one could open until the Lamb appears, to whom great glory is ascribed by those around the throne. The opening of four seals brings forth the judgments of God upon the earth- war, pestilence and famine. The next seal having been opened the martyred saints are seen beneath the throne, and their blood calls for vengeance. When the sixth seal is removed cosmic disturbances follow and scenes of fear. While the last seal <sup>s</sup>Still remains unbroken <sup>and</sup> ~~too~~ consolatory visions are given to the seer- the Sealing, for preservation, of the "One Hundred and Forty-four Thousand" from Israel, and the Triumphal March of the Innumerable Multitude arrayed in white and bearing palms. When the seventh seal is opened silence prevails in heaven that the prayers of the saints may be heard, then fire from a censer is cast upon the earth and volcanic phenomena occur. Angels with seven trumpets having already appeared four trumpets are blown in succession with disastrous effects upon the earth, water and heavenly bodies. The fifth and sixth trumpet blasts are followed by awful woes, -locusts which torment the men unsealed, and hordes of cavalry from the Euphrates River. Then the seer beholds an angel with a book This book he eats at the angels command, whereupon a new and world-wide commission is given unto him. The measuring of the Temple follows and the vision of the Two Witnesses. On the sounding of the seventh trumpet angelic hosts announce the establishment of the Kingdom of God and of His Christ. God's temple is opened and storm and earthquake follow. A blood-red Dragon now appears as the first great enemy of the Church. Vainly he attempts to destroy the Messiah at His birth; cast to the earth he persecutes the woman and her seed. Two more



enemies of the Church appear,- a Beast from the sea equipped with all the authority of the Dragon, and another Beast from the land who stamps men with the seal and number of the first. Once more the seer is consoled by a vision of the Lamb on Mt. Sion, and near Him the multitude undefiled. Angel hosts announce the fall of Babylon (Rome), retribution for the wicked, and blessedness for the faithful. Then the Messiah reaps the earth with a sickle, and an angel gathers the grapes into the great wine-press of the wrath of God. The victorious saints sing praises to the Most High, and seven angels pour out seven bowls. Plagues follow representing the judgments that immediately precede the coming of Christ in all His power; remote nations are gathered at Har-Magedon, and an earthquake divides the great Babylon into three parts. The seer beholds the city as a woman; he is astonished as he sees her destroyed by the Beast,- a verification of the great facts of Divine judgment and Divine victory. Angelic proclamations are made over the fallen city doomed for its persecution of the saints and martyrs: "Babylon the great is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird"<sup>1</sup> Whereupon a great heavenly multitude sings Hallelujah Psalms; the Messiah appears as a crowned warrior; the Beasts are overthrown and perish in a lake of fire, and their followers are destroyed. The binding of Satan ( the Dragon ) ushers in a time when the saints reign with Christ. Loosed again Satan stirs up a great and final war but all in vain. Visions of the General Resurrection and Last Judgment and of a New Heaven and a New Earth follow, the latter being described with considerable detail. The book closes (<sup>1</sup> Apoc. XVIII <sup>3</sup>) with a series of solemn assurances and

a final benediction upon the saints.

A study of the content of the Apocalypse in greater detail involves first of all a consideration of its symbolism. John's love for symbolism is apparent even on a superficial examination of the Apocalypse,- he uses it in abundance. "The imagery of the Apocalypse lays under contribution all the departments of nature and life. The animal kingdom lends its horses and its beasts; ----- the vegetable kingdom its trees and herbs and grass. Earth, sea and sky bring their tribute. Agricultural operations such as harvest and vintage, the life and trade of great cities, the march and clash of great armies are all depicted on its canvas. A sea of glass is spread before the Throne in Heaven; a river flows through the Holy city----- Human life supplies an abundance of imagery. We see the mother and her child, the harlot and her lovers, the bride arrayed for her husband." In the use of so much symbolism there was evident purpose. To the reader of today such may seem to heighten the obscurity of the book, but it was otherwise in the days when

1. Swete: "The Apoc. of St. John " Intro. p. 131.

John wrote. Ramsay says: "He regards the symbolism merely as a way of making spiritual ideas intelligible to the ordinary human mind after the fashion of the parables of Christ"<sup>1</sup>. Thus we can accept without hesitancy. Without a doubt the symbolism of the Apocalypse is based on imagery familiar to the ordinary mind in the time of John; imagery applicable to personages and events in contemporary history, perhaps, but certainly not intended by him to designate specific persons and remote events of far-off ages. And it has been through failure to apprehend this truth that a "riotously imaginative " interpretation of the Apocalypse has been made possible, an interpretation concerned

with petty details and utterly unworthy of the book. Unquestionably the book has a value for all time, but that value does not consist in the identification of its numbers and figures with persons and events in every age of history so much as in the fact that the great principles of one time have also a significance for every time as well. The letters to the Seven Churches were intended to right certain wrongs and quicken the spiritual life in the very Churches addressed; they were written by one thoroughly familiar with the past history and present conditions of<sup>(1)</sup> "Letters to the Seven Churches" p. 72.) of those churches. But they have a message of universal import in so far as the conditions existent in the Asian Churches in the time of John may be reproduced in the Church of Christ at any place and in any time. So also in regard to the symbolism. Primarily it had an immediate application; only indirectly could it have reference to the remote future.

Referring to this symbolism in a more detailed way mention should be made of John's use of numbers of a symbolic character. No one who has read the Apocalypse can have failed to notice the frequent recurrence of the number seven. The book is addressed to seven churches over which are seven angels: John speaks of seven spirits, seven seals, seven trumpets, seven thunders, seven bowls, and seven plagues. The number occurs fifty-four times in the Apocalypse. Commentators are generally agreed that seven signified "totality" or "completeness" to John and to the people to whom he wrote. Consistency to this interpretation requires that the "twelve hundred and sixty days," the "forty-two months," the "three and one-half years," being the half of seven, would mean "incompleteness" or "the broken imperfect nature of that which opposes itself to the Divine". 1. Church Quarterly Review" Vol.37,

No. 74, P. 466.

Again, if the mystic seven represents "completeness<sup>s</sup>" or "perfection" then the number six falling short of seven, must have been a portent of failure. This may explain the significance of the number of the Beast - 666. "To the Jew there was a doom upon the number six even when it stood alone. Triple it let there be a multiple of it by ten and then a second time by ten until you obtain three mystic sixes following one another, 666, and we have represented a potency of evil than which there can be none greater, a direfulness of fate than which there can be no worse"<sup>1</sup>. Other favorite numbers with the Apocalyptist are ten and twelve and multiples of them. The idea of "definiteness<sup>s</sup>" or "completeness<sup>s</sup>" seems to attach to these also.

Respecting the remaining symbolism of the Apocalypse it may be said that the historical allusions are very often discernible and in such cases the interpretation is plain. The "Babylon" of the Apocalypse is plainly the city of Rome, resplendent in pomp, sated in luxury, and drunken with the blood of the saints, Therefore Rome must perish; so also any "form of world-power which takes captive the Church and tries to make her children forget Jerusalem and sing the Lords song in a strange land"<sup>2</sup>

1. Mulligan "Book of Revelation", p. 235.

2. Church Quarterly Review, Vol. 23, No. 46; p. 425.

The Beast that "was and is not and is about to come up out of the abyss" is undoubtedly Nero. "The Beast which in the vision was a general figure for the imperial power is interpreted of one personality in whom that power had once lodged and through whom it should again be exercised; and there is little reason to doubt that the form which the prediction takes is moulded by the expectation of a return of

Nero to life and power."<sup>1</sup> It may be said further that the expectation of Nero's return from hiding, and later his return from the underworld" with Parthian hordes at his back to take vengeance on the city which had thrown off his yoke"<sup>2</sup> was an expectation especially strong in Asia Minor. With John it may have represented a "revival of Nero's persecuting policy under Domitian." The fate of the Beast, however, is symbolic of the fate which ever awaits material force in antagonism to spiritual power. Again it is not difficult to fix an historical application for the "Two Witnesses".<sup>In</sup> All probability the reference is not to Old Testament saints, Moses and Elijah, or Elijah and Enoch; neither can they be spiritualized into the "polity" and "evangelical spirit" of the Church. These witnesses, on the field of history, in

1. Anderson Scott, "Revelation", p. 263.

2. A. Scott "Revelation" p. 57.

all likelihood were the great witnesses of the Christian faith who were crucified in Rome, - Peter and Paul.<sup>1</sup> Such an allusion, at least; would be plain to the Christians of early days and John's symbolism would declare to them that not death but life indeed is the portion of all faithful witnesses such as Peter and Paul.

It is not claimed here that each and every part of the symbolism in the Apocalypse can be traced in definite fashion to its original application. That is not necessary to insure a lasting value to the book. Its dominant note is sounded again and again in clearest tones; and although minute details may evade the grasp of historical student or skilled exegete yet earnest souls ever find in it a word of comfort and of hope. Further, the historic application, when such is possible and definite, does not exhaust

the meaning of John's visions, they have a grandeur all their own, a sweep and range that are timeless and universal.

The truth of the previous statement will appear in clearest form in connection with the doctrinal teaching of the Apocalypse; for "he who runs may read" this teaching, read it

1. Church Quarterly Review, Vol. 37, No. 74 P. 468.

with understanding and appreciation. The fundamental doctrinal teachings of the Old and New Testaments are here combined and set in a place of prominence. This is true especially of John's doctrine of God and Christ, of his universalism, and his eschatology.

His doctrine of God does not differ materially from anything that is taught in the Old testament or in Apocryphal or Apocalyptic literature. He is the Just, the Holy, the Unchangeable, an awful Judge, a mighty King, the Lord God Almighty" who was, and is and is to come". And if one should be surprised that the idea of God as Father, which prevails elsewhere in the New Testament, seems to be relegated to the background in the book which in many respects forms the climax of biblical teaching, it must be remembered that God as set forth by the Apocalyptist was a God that was needed in those days when blasphemy was heard on every side, and heathenism hoped for victory in the war against the saints. Nothing but a God of wrath and judgment would have suited the conditions of the time in which John wrote, for God cannot be indifferent to sin. Besides if anything is lacking, according to New Testament teaching, in John's doctrine of God this lack is supplied in his conception of Jesus Christ. John had known intimately the Christ of history. The impression that had been made at that time upon the Apostle could never be obliterated. Nevertheless, it is a risen glorified, victorious Christ, who is "alive for evermore" and has "the keys of Hades

and of Death" which John<sup>e</sup> emphasizes here . No other teaching would fulfil the purpose of the Apocalypse, no Christ but a Living Christ, active and present in the midst of His struggling followers, could avail to give them hope of victory in the struggle with Satanic powers of which Rome at that time was the incarnation. No other Christ could have met the needs of His Church in those days of storm and stress. He must of necessity be a Christ of Power and a Personal Presence, and John depicts Him holding, "the seven stars in His right hand "<sup>1</sup> and walking "in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks,"<sup>1</sup> an image that represents eternal strength and eternal vigilance well-becoming the "crowned warrior" of a later vision.

Again John pictures Him as a "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world"<sup>2</sup>, the centre of a group around the throne of God. In this description the idea of Christ's sacrificial and redemptive work are

1. Apoc.<sup>1</sup>11
2. Apoc. XIII<sup>8</sup>

uppermost in the seer's mind. To him Christ is the one "that loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood"<sup>d 1</sup>. He saves those that put their trust in Him. "These are they which came out of great tribulation and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb"<sup>2</sup>.

Further, John emphasizes that redemption through Christ Jesus is for all the world. "Thou was slain and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests."<sup>3</sup> And throughout the whole book the note of Universalism is sounded and sounded strongly. If the action of the Beast is to be world-wide, if power is given unto him over, "all kindreds, and tongues and nations"<sup>4</sup>,

in other words if sin is universal in its scope redemption also must be world-wide in its grasp, and thus John pictures it to be. The great multitude arrayed in white and with palms in their hands are not Jews only, but the "spiritual Israel" gathered from the four corners of the earth.

No discussion, however brief, of the doctrinal teaching of the <sup>5</sup> 1. Apoc. <sup>1</sup> <sup>14</sup> 2. Apoc. Vll 3. Apoc. V <sup>9</sup> 4. Apoc. XlII <sup>7</sup> Apocalypse should omit a reference to its Eschatology. For the Apostle was bidden to write "the things which shall be hereafter". One of these, certainly, was the "coming of the Lord." "Behold, He cometh with clouds" <sup>1</sup> was John's declaration. The promise of a speedy coming- "Behold, I come quickly" <sup>2</sup> reveals the expectation and need of the church of that day, and is also an attestation of the fact that what John wrote he believed would "shortly come to pass."

Judgment is also at hand. At times, as in the plagues, judgment seems to be retributive in character; the ungodly are unconverted by their suffering. Again men are judged "according to their works" <sup>3</sup>; the portion of the wicked is the "second death" and the "lake of fire." Later the idea appears that each sin brings its own appropriate punishment: "He that is unjust let him be unjust still, and he that is filthy let him be filthy still" <sup>4</sup>. The righteous, on the other hand, gain great final rewards; they have "a right to the tree of life, they eat the "hidden manna", they possess the "new name", they wear the "crown of life," they reign with Christ" <sup>5</sup> "forever and ever".

A fitting conclusion to such teaching is the picture of a



transformed world,

1. Apoc. <sup>7</sup>1      2. Apoc. <sup>12</sup>XXI      3. Apoc. <sup>13</sup>XX      4. Apoc. <sup>11</sup>XXI      5. Apoc. <sup>5</sup>XXI

and a new city of God. The outward garb of the description may be Jewish but beneath this is found Christian thought and Christian hope. Obviously it points to a time when no part of God's great plan for the redemption of mankind will be unfulfilled.

The spiritual significance of the Apocalypse has been referred to already in this thesis, but it should now be emphasized in a more especial way. This can be done only by a clear statement of the conditions which called forth the Apocalypse, its purpose in respect to the people of that time, its message for every age. The Apocalypse was conceived and born in a time of strife and bloodshed. It was a herald of good tidings in times of war. For war, bitter, extirpating war had been launched and was maintained with the avowed purpose of wrecking the cause of Christ and exterminating His followers wherever found. In such a time the Apocalypse appeared as a champion of a "forlorn hope", according to the judgment of the world. The Church of Christ faced two dangers. The first may be called internal, - it was insidious and deadly. John knew the condition of the Asian Churches and his letters reveal a state of things deplorable and disheartening in the extreme. Backsliding, hypocrisy, lewdness, fornication and lukewarmness were the deadly sins charged against them. Gnostic teaching was evident and still worse, Gnostic practice as well. Persuaded that what was done in the flesh was a matter of entire indifference to the real man many fell an easy prey to sensual sins. Others were taken captive by the specious doctrine of compromise propagated by the Nicolaitans. <sup>See</sup> ~~Fake~~ Jews and "followers of Balaam" also

sought the spiritual death of the members of the flock of Christ. And if such influences waged <sup>an</sup> active warfare in the churches addressed, one can be sure that the case was not materially different with the church of Christ wherever that church might be found.

But there was another enemy, external but aggressive, forceful, determined and implacable. That enemy was the Roman State. The Empire had sought for a bond of unity for its heterogeneous races and states in "Caesar-worship". Against this Christianity had taken an uncompromising and irreconcilable stand. Therefore Christianity must be uprooted, and for this purpose the Roman State engaged in a hand-to-hand struggle with the Christian Church in which one of the two combatants must die. The sternest measures were enacted, the most rigorous methods adopted, and it was decreed that "as many as would not worship the image of the Beast should be killed."<sup>1</sup> "The accused were required to prove their loyalty by performing an act of religious worship of the statue of the Emperor which (as Pliny mentioned to Trajan) was brought into court in readiness for the test; if they performed the ritual they were acquitted; if they refused to perform it they were condemned to death. No other proof was sought; no investigation was made; no accusation of any specific crime or misdeed was made as had been the case in the persecution of Nero"<sup>2</sup>. In other words the savagery of Nero had become the relentless and settled policy of Domitian. Verily, indeed, John saw before him a state of war: "the kingdom of God being set against the kingdom of Satan, Jesus the Saviour against Apollyon the Destroyer, the Bride against the Harlot, the Trinity of Heaven against the Devil, the Beast, and the Fake<sup>1s</sup> Prophet-the Anti-trinity of Hell"<sup>3</sup>. In the face of this mighty and

1  
Apoc. XIII 15

2. Ramsay, " Letters to the Seven Churches", p. 98.

3. Church Quarterly Review Vol.23, No. 46, P. 422.

pitiless power arrayed against them in deadly combat could anything save from defeat and death the persecuted followers of Christ Jesus?

Our Apocalyptist was confident of the existence of such a Saving Power. Therefore he sent forth his message of comfort and assurance and deliverance. He insists on the preservation of the spiritual Israel. Such a lesson would his companions in tribulation read in the vision of the "Sealing of the One Hundred and Forty-four Thousand." These were sealed with the seal of God for protection, - not protection from physical harm else "the sealing must have taken place before the first seal and not in the midst of the cosmic catastrophies of the sixth"<sup>1</sup>. But the sealing was "to secure the servants of God against the attacks of demonic powers coming into manifestation, for the powers of Satan are about to make their last struggle for the mastery of the world." Furthermore the vision that follows reveals the triumph and blessedness of those who are thus accorded the Divine protection. Physical suffering might, in all likelihood it would, come upon the faithful servants of God; their ranks might be depleted by awful,

<sup>1</sup>  
Studies in the Apocalypse "(Charles)" p. 122.

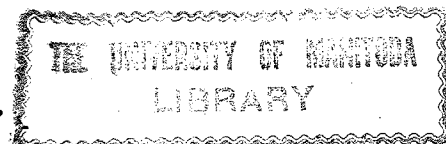
" " " p. 130.

persecution and inhuman butchery, but no embodiment of Satanic power could ever avail to cast down to the "second death" those sealed with the signet ring of the Living God. Victory, sure victory would be their portion forevermore, while Rome drunken with the Blood of the saints and martyrs of Christ would soon go down in the dust and ashes of defeat.

Fear not, faint not in the struggle," the Apocalyptist says in effect, "for the time is at hand, the time when God shall judge evil and Christ shall come for the salvation of His people." Clearly such a message in such a time must have abundantly heartened the people of God in their warfare, and strengthened and encouraged the faith of Christ's Church in those dark days of stress and strain.

Further, the Apocalypse produced under special circumstances has a permanent message for the world. It ever speaks comfort and cheer to the individual heart that turns to it for solace and encouragement; it still champions the cause of Christ and still emphasizes the "triumphant issue of His conflict with evil;" it sets forth, even to-day, in clearest possible form, the way of endurance and sacrifice as the road to God and a blessed future life.

Therefore the hope should be cherished that the time may come when the Apocalypse no longer shall be passed by as a book difficult, obscure and unapproachable, but one whose content, in its larger outlines, constitutes an imperishable possession. So long as there is found in any place a single mortal who is hard-pressed in the battle of every day, so long as man in the stress and strain of life is tempted to exchange hope for despair, so long as there is a tendency to exalt the force of materialism in preference to spiritual power, so long as there is an inclination to doubt the strength of Jehovah's arm, and the eternal justice of His providence, just that long will there be need for such a book as John's Apocalypse, with its gospel of hope and comfort, its supreme confidence and its unfaltering faith, its hold on God and its assurance of eternal victory.



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