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THE BOOK OF REVELATION (APOCALYPSE)

1) Introduction

*Revelation*¹ or *Apocalypse*² is a unique, complex and remarkable biblical text full of heavenly mysteries. Revelation is a long epistle addressed to seven Christian communities of the Roman province of Asia Minor, modern Turkey, wherein the author recounts what he has seen, heard and understood in the course of his prophetic ecstasies. Some commentators, such as Margaret Barker, suggest that the visions are those of Christ himself (1:1), which He in turn passed on to John.³ It is the only book in the New Testament canon that shares the literary genre of apocalyptic literature⁴, though there are short apocalyptic passages in various places in the

¹ *Revelation* is the English translation of the Greek word *apokalypsis* ('unveiling' or 'uncovering' in order to disclose a hidden truth) and the Latin *revelatio*. According to Adela Yarbro Collins, it is likely that the author himself did not provide a title for the book. The title *Apocalypse* came into usage from the first word of the book in Greek *apokalypsis Iesou Christon* meaning "A revelation of Jesus Christ". Cf. Adela Yarbro Collins, "Revelation, Book of", pp. 694-695.

² In *Codex Sinaiticus* (4th century), *Codex Alexandrinus* (5th century) and *Codex Ephraemi* (5th century) the title of the book is "Revelation of John". Other manuscripts contain such titles as, "Revelation of John, the one who speaks about God", "Revelation of Saint John, the one who speaks about God", "Revelation of John, the one who speaks about God, [the] evangelist" and "The Revelation of the Apostle John, the Evangelist". In the second century the work may simply have been known as "Revelation". When the book was copied onto scrolls a brief title was added at the end of the work, probably "Revelation of John" and when the work began to be copied on book-like codices with pages, this title was placed at the beginning. In the course of transmission the older, brief title was expanded in various ways. Cf. Adela Yarbro Collins, "Revelation, Book of", pp. 694-695.

³ Cf. Margaret Barker, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pp. xi, 71, 78. The work of Barker referred to here, breaks new grounds in the study of Revelation and challenges many of the traditional views about the book.

⁴ Just as there exists historical writing, poetic writing, letter writing and novel writing, there exists apocalyptic literary style. This literary genre is marked by certain distinctive features, especially prediction of future events,

Gospels and the Epistles. It is also the most quoted work in extant second century Christian writings⁵, which is remarkable in view of the difficulty encountered during the canonization process. There are approximately 230 Greek manuscripts available for the reconstructing of the original reading of the Book of Revelation. But the major texts used are the uncial scripts found in *Codex Sinaiticus* (4th century), *Codex Alexandrinus* (5th century), and *Codex Ephraemi* (5th century).⁶ Revelation is missing in *Codex Vaticanus*.⁷

2) Language, purpose and style

According to Margaret Barker, since the language of the Jerusalem Christians was Aramaic and their scriptures were in Hebrew, it is unlikely that the original language of Revelation was Greek.⁸ She prefers to believe that it was originally written in Aramaic or Hebrew and was later translated into Greek.⁹ The Greek manuscript contains the poorest Greek in the entire New Testament.¹⁰ The purpose of the book is to overcome the spiritual deterioration affecting the people of God, strengthen the resolve of the faithful enduring persecution, probably during the reign of the Roman emperor Domitian (81-96 AD)¹¹, and instil hope in the final triumph of God and his saints over the forces of evil, just as the first offspring of the Woman, Christ, become victorious over evil, the rest of her offspring (Christians) will also become victorious like Him.

narration of visionary experiences or journeys to heaven, often involving vivid symbolism. Apocalyptic literature was a vital part of the literary movement in the ancient Near East. The age of this style of writing covers approximately four hundred years, 200 BC to 200 AD. Such writings flourished when the Jews or the Christians were suffering for their faith. In the Bible we have two great works written in apocalyptic style, Revelation and Daniel. Outside the canonical books of the Bible there are many other extant apocalyptic works. Cf. Patrick J. Sena, *The Apocalypse: Biblical Revelation Explained*, pp. 7-8.

⁵ Cf. Columba Graham Flegg, *An Introduction to Reading Apocalypse*, p. 44.

⁶ Cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Revelation Accessed on 14 June 2012; Adela Yarbro Collins, "Revelation, Book of", p. 694.

⁷ Cf. Lee M. McDonald, *The Formation of the Christian Biblical Canon*, p. 225.

⁸ Cf. Margaret Barker, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. xii.

⁹ Cf. Margaret Barker, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 73: See also *The Eastern-Greek Orthodox Bible. New Testament*, p. 518.

¹⁰ Cf. Patrick J. Sena, *The Apocalypse: Biblical Revelation Explained*, p. 27.

¹¹ Cf. Ibid. 5, 7; E.F. Siegman and J. Winkler, "Revelation, Book of", pp. 183-184.

Revelation can be described as a kind of ‘pastoral letter’ meant to be read publically in a liturgical setting in the Churches of Asia Minor.¹² The text is also written in prophetic and apocalyptic style.¹³ Thus the book shares, in varying degrees, three literary forms, namely, apocalyptic, prophetic and epistolary.¹⁴ Most scholars are convinced that there is unity both in form and content of the book.¹⁵

3) Sources

The most obvious source of the ideas and images in the Book of Revelation is the Old Testament. The author draws much from the books of Ezekiel and Daniel, and in a lesser degree from Zechariah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Joel, Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Numbers and Psalms.¹⁶ Some speak of as many as 24 canonical books of the Septuagint as the source of Revelation.¹⁷ It has been discovered that the influence of the Old Testament on Revelation is so great that out of 404 verses in the entire book there are only 126 which contain no allusion to the Old Testament. But the author does not quote the Old Testament anywhere.¹⁸ Some say that the writer may have been familiar with the Jewish apocalyptic literature.¹⁹ Others argue that he may have also used the Gospels of Mathew and Luke.²⁰ Some have proposed ‘compilation theories’²¹, ‘revision

¹² Cf. Roland J. Faley, *Apocalypse Then and Now. A Companion to the Book of Revelation*, p. 6.

¹³ Cf. Patrick J. Sena, *The Apocalypse: Biblical Revelation Explained*, pp. 7-8, 18.

¹⁴ Cf. Jean-Louis D’ Aragon “The Apocalypse”, p. 467.

¹⁵ Cf. E.F. Siegman and J. Winkler, “Revelation, Book of”, p. 185.

¹⁶ Cf. Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction, New Testament Introduction*, pp. 965-966; Patrick J. Sena, *The Apocalypse: Biblical Revelation Explained*, p. 15; Columba Graham Flegg, *An Introduction to Reading Apocalypse*, p. 4.

¹⁷ Cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Revelation Accessed on 15 June 2012.

¹⁸ Cf. Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, p. 966.

¹⁹ Cf. Ibid. But there are some major differences between Jewish apocalyptic literature and Revelation: a) the author of the latter does not use a pseudonym but writes in his own name; b) he does not focus attention on past history but concentrates on the present and future; c) he is well aligned with the Old Testament prophets in the denunciation of evil and in the moral exhortations to noble living; d) the spiritual grasp of the writer is far removed from the pedestrian and often gloomy approach of the Jewish apocalyptic literature; e) the book has a Christological concept of history. Cf. Ibid, p. 967; Jean-Louis D’ Aragon “The Apocalypse”, p. 468.

²⁰ Cf. Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, p. 955.

theories'²² and 'incorporation theories'²³ in order to explain the source of Revelation. There are also many other theories proposed to explain the source of the book.²⁴ But the traditional view denies these theories and supposes that the **author was directly responsible** for all the material in the book.²⁵

But contrary to the traditional position, Margaret Barker argues that the secret teachings of Jesus to His disciples based on His visions, which are not recorded in the Gospels, form the main source of the Book of Revelation. His visions were not entrusted to John alone, but to a group called "his brethren" (19:10) who were to be the "keepers" of this secret knowledge. Later, an angel spirit was sent to John to make known the revelation which Jesus had seen, and to interpret them for his own time. This was the second stage in the formation of the book, which is indicated by the second command to write (1:19). The third and the final stage in the formation of the book was after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD. At this stage, while at Patmos, John was commanded to write what he had seen, and send it to the Churches (1:9), and it was no longer restricted to an exclusive group but for all to read and hear. It was this final form of the book that was translated into Greek.²⁶

²¹ The compilation theories say that an editor (or editors) has taken over some independent sources and welded them into a unity. Under the compilation theory there are 'two-source theory' and 'three-source theory'. Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 968-969.

²² The revision theories suppose that the basic source has been worked over. The original was a Jewish apocalypse which was revised by an editor for Christian purpose. Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 969.

²³ The incorporation theory holds that there must have been an original apocalypse in which are incorporated various fragments of Jewish apocalyptic writing. Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 970.

²⁴ Some of them are: the patchwork theory, poetic theory, symbolism theory, drama theory, sevenfold design theory, transposition theories, liturgical pattern theory, concentric theory, historical-prophetic theory, etc. Although some element of truth may be found in all these theories, it is difficult to be certain which theory is correct for a complete understanding of the book. For a detailed discussion on these theories see *Ibid.*, pp. 970-977.

²⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 970.

²⁶ Cf. Margaret Barker, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pp. 67, 71-72, 74-76, 90-91. Barker says that the third stage of the book which incorporated the letters to be sent to the Churches of Asia was during the 50s, the first crisis caused by Paul's Gentile mission. Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 91.

4) Date and place

Different hypotheses have been proposed in an effort to provide a satisfactory solution to the problem of the date of the Book of Revelation. A few authors have proposed a date **as early as** the reign of Claudius (41-54 AD) and **as late as** the reign of Nerva (96-98) or of Trajan (98-117 AD).²⁷ Today the majority of scholars follow the lead given by Irenaeus of Lyons (died 202 AD) and other Fathers of the Church in placing the date of the book in the **last decade of the first century AD** in the reign of Domitian (ca.81-96 AD).²⁸ But there is a body of opinion which argues that internal evidence suggest in the reign of Nero (ca. 68 or 69 AD).²⁹ There is a proposal of a Vespasian date (ca. 70-80 AD) owing to the identification of him as the sixth emperor.³⁰ There is also a suggestion of a ‘very late date’ during the reign of Trajan (ca.98-117 AD) because John was exiled under him.³¹ Another view is that the present Book of Revelation resulted from the fusion of two earlier apocalypses or John resorted to the popular apocalyptic device of antedating his work, i.e, writing under Domitian he adopted the standpoint of the time of Nero or Vespasian.³² But the most widely held view is that the book was written during the reign of Domitian, more precisely towards the end of his reign, ca. 90-95 AD.³³ The earliest and the

²⁷ Cf. Jean-Louis D’ Aragon “The Apocalypse”, p. 469; John Sweet, *Revelation*, p. 21.

²⁸ Cf. Columba Graham Flegg, *An Introduction to Reading Apocalypse*, p. 48. This date is attested by Irenaeus who had personal acquaintance with Polycarp bishop of Smyrna, the disciple of John the Apostle. Hence his testimony has a special weight of its own. Jerome ascribed Revelation to the fourteenth year of Domitian’s reign, which would mean 95 AD. Cf. Francis Gigot, *The News Testament*, p. xiii. See also John Sweet, *Revelation*, pp. 21-22.

²⁹ Cf. Columba Graham Flegg, *An Introduction to Reading Apocalypse*, pp. 48-49. Some of the arguments in favour of a Neronian date is based on such evidences as, the identification of the sixth king (Rev.17:8) and the number 666 (Rev13:18) as Nero, the argument that at the time of writing the book the temple of Jerusalem as still standing (Rev.11:1ff), etc. Cf. Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp. 957-961.

³⁰ This is a weak argument since Vespasian did not take seriously the idea of kingly divinity, and as far as known was not a real persecutor of the Church. Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 961-562.

³¹ Cf. *The Eastern-Greek Orthodox Bible. New Testament*, p. 519.

³² Cf. E.F. Siegman and J. Winkler, “Revelation, Book of”, p. 184.

³³ Cf. Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, p. 948. The demand for universal emperor worship, bearing the ‘mark’ of the emperor, the idea that the persecution has either just commenced or is immediately impending evident in the book, allusion to the myth of the ‘reincarnation’ of Nero in Domitian, etc., are some of the arguments

weightiest external witnesses attest to it, especially the early Fathers of the Church. Attempts have been made to reconcile the early and late date theories by placing the writing at a **very early date** (41-60 AD) in Aramaic or Hebrew, and then widely published in Greek to the **end of the first century AD**. This is the position of Eastern Orthodox Bible,³⁴ and it appears to be a strong possibility.

The general consensus among the scholars is that Revelation was composed in the west coast of Asia Minor. But there are some who argue that it was written in the island of Patmos, while others think that it was produced at Ephesus³⁵ or its first form in Palestine at a very early period.³⁶

5) Authorship

The author of the Book of Revelation calls himself John four times (1:1,4,9; 22:8) and presents himself as part of a group persecuted for its faith (1:9), and at Patmos, a Roman penal colony.³⁷ But we have no indication whatsoever that this is John the Apostle. He seems to have known Aramaic and Hebrew better than Greek, and his writing is rough and full of semitisms.³⁸ In the early centuries of Christianity there was an **almost unanimous agreement** among the Fathers of the Church that the author of Revelation is **John the evangelist**, the writer of the

for a Domitian date. The fact that considerable interval of time is expected between the founding of the Churches and their internal deterioration, the non-existence of the Church of Smyrna until 60-64 AD, the presence of certain heretical sects, the probability of the author having used the Gospels of Mathew and Luke, also would favour the Domitian dating. For a detailed discussion on these issues see *Ibid.*, pp. 948-956.

³⁴ Cf. *The Eastern-Greek Orthodox Bible. New Testament*, p. 519. An early date and the composition of Revelation in Aramaic or Hebrew, can better account for the evidence of Semitic words, phrases, images and symbols used in the text.

³⁵ Cf. Adela Yarbro Collins, "Revelation, Book of", p. 701.

³⁶ Cf. Raymond E. Brown, *Introduzione al Nuovo Testamento*, p. 1049.

³⁷ Cf. Roland J. Faley, *Apocalypse Then and Now*, p. 5. But Barker argues that there is no evidence that Patmos was used as a penal settlement in the first century AD: Cf. Margaret Barker, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. xii.

³⁸ Cf. Roland J. Faley, *Apocalypse Then and Now*, p. 6.

fourth Gospel and the three Epistles. Justin Martyr (c.100-165)³⁹, Melito the bishop of Sardis (died c.180), Theophilus of Antioch (died c.183), Irenaeus of Lyons (died 202)⁴⁰, Clement of Alexandria (c.150-215), Tertullian of Carthage (c.155-230),⁴¹ Hippolytus of Rome (c.170-235), Origen of Alexandria (c.185-253), Cyprian of Carthage (died 258), Methodius of Olympus (died 311), Lactantius (c.240 -320), Athanasius of Alexandria (c.296-373), Ephrem the Syrian (c. 306-373), Epiphanius (c.315-403), Gregory of Nazianzus (c.329-390), Basil the Great (c.330-379), Hilary of Poitiers (c.300-368), Ambrose of Milan (c.337-397), Quodvultdeus of Carthage (died c.450)⁴², to mention a few, strongly upheld the apostolic authorship of the book. Thus there is a **remarkable convergence of patristic witness to the apostolic authorship of Revelation.**⁴³ The Muratorian Canon (end of 2nd century) also showed that there was no doubt about the apostolic authorship.⁴⁴

The major dissident view regarding the apostolic authorship of Revelation goes back to Dionysius of Alexandria (died c. 264/265). He questioned the apostolic authorship on the basis of a comparison of the book with the Gospel of John, and concluded that both could not have been written by the same author.⁴⁵ After him Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 263-339) shared his view. Marcion of Sinope (c 85-160) rejected the claim of apostolic authorship. There was doubt about the authorship in the Council of Laodicea (ca.360). Jerome (347-420) doubted the book and

³⁹ Justin is credited with the honour of being the first among the early Fathers of the Church to witness to the apostolic authorship of Revelation. He was born shortly after the death of John and lived for some time in Ephesus, the city in which the Apostle is believed to have spent the latter part of his life. Cf. Francis Gigot, *The News Testament*, p. x. See also Austin Farrer, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, pp. 1-3.

⁴⁰ Irenaeus is considered as the most important witness among the early Fathers of the Church to the apostolic authorship of Revelation. Cf. Francis Gigot, *The News Testament*, p. xiii; John Sweet, *Revelation*, pp. 21, 36.

⁴¹ Cf. Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp. 930-931; Columba Graham Flegg, *An Introduction to Reading Apocalypse*, p. 46.

⁴² Cf. Columba Graham Flegg, *An Introduction to Reading Apocalypse*, 46; Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp. 930-931.

⁴³ Cf. Columba Graham Flegg, *An Introduction to Reading Apocalypse*, p. 46.

⁴⁴ Cf. Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 931.

⁴⁵ Cf. Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 932; Columba Graham Flegg, *An Introduction to Reading Apocalypse*, 46

relegated it to second class, but even he showed vacillation about his own position.⁴⁶ It was also argued that there were two Ephesian Johns who could easily be mixed up or that John of Ephesus was the Elder (Presbyter) who was later mistaken for John the Apostle.⁴⁷ Hence names such as John the Elder (Presbyter), John the Prophet and John Mark were proposed as authors of Revelation. Some have argued that John was simply an intentional pseudonym. Others have suggested a Johannine school or an 'unidentified John' as responsible for the book.⁴⁸ The Alogi⁴⁹ and Gaius (Caius) of Rome (third century) attributed the Book of Revelation to Cerinthus.⁵⁰ There are some scholars who argue that the entire book originated from the circle of John the Baptist and reflect his ideas.⁵¹ Barker holds that since the book was written over many years, there was no one author, and that the name 'John' refers to his status as the chief of the prophets and authorised interpreter of the tradition and compiler of the final form of the book.⁵² In the sixteenth century Erasmus (c.1466-1536) questioned the apostolic authorship.⁵³ Since the end of the eighteenth century many biblical scholars increasingly tend to deny the apostolic origin of the book.⁵⁴

A powerful internal argument in favour apostolic authorship is the **pastoral authority** with which the author addresses the Churches. The author definitely is a **man of considerable authority** who can expect the Churches to receive what he has written as a revelation from

⁴⁶ Cf. Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, p. 931.

⁴⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 933.

⁴⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 945-947.

⁴⁹ A group of Christian heretics who flourished in Asia Minor around 170 AD. They were also known as 'alogans'. It was Epiphanius of Salamis who coined the name 'Alogi' as a word play suggesting that they were both illogical (*anti-logikos*) and against the Christian doctrine of the Logos. Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 931; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alogi> Accessed on 14 June 2012.

⁵⁰ Cf. Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, p. 931. For a discussion on the arguments against apostolic authorship, both external and internal see *Ibid.*, pp. 938-945.

⁵¹ Cf. J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation. Introduction, Translation and Commentary*, p. 3.

⁵² Cf. Margaret Barker, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 76.

⁵³ Cf. Jean-Louis D' Aragon "The Apocalypse", p. 468.

⁵⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 469.

God.⁵⁵ John addresses each of the seven Churches of Asia Minor **as if he were their bishop**. Columba Graham Flegg says: “A highly powerful argument confirming the apostolic authorship of the Apocalypse is the pastoral authority with which it is introduced and concluded. Surely, only an apostle would express such authority to the Seven Churches of Asia”.⁵⁶ According to tradition, Apostle John was the greatest authority in Asia until about the end of the first century.⁵⁷ Other internal evidences like, the use of word “Lamb” (Jn 1:29; Rev 5:6), “Word of God” (Jn 1:1; Rev 19:13) and “Shepherded” (Jn 10:11; Rev 7:17) to refer to Christ, the image of “the spouse” for the people of God, life symbolised by water, absence of a temple in the New Jerusalem and so on also indicate that the fourth Gospel and the Book of Revelation had a common origin.⁵⁸ The Church formally accepted the traditional view of authorship and rejected the argument of Dionysius. The **Council of Carthage** (397 AD) explicitly ascribed the book to John the evangelist.⁵⁹

Thus so strong is the evidence in favour of apostolic authorship of the Book of Revelation that it is difficult to believe that all the Fathers of the Church who supported this view made a mistake in confusing the John of Revelation with the Apostle. Here the argument of Donald Guthrie seems very apt. He says: “If all this evidence is due to a mistake it would be an extraordinarily widespread case of mistaken identity. It must be conceded that taken as a whole it points very strong to the probability that the John of the Apocalypse was, in fact, John the apostle”.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Cf. Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, p. 935; Jean-Louis D' Aragon “The Apocalypse”, p. 468.

⁵⁶ Cf. Columba Graham Flegg, *An Introduction to Reading Apocalypse*, p. 49. For an elaborate discussion on the internal evidence for apostolic authorship of the Book of Revelation see Cf. Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp. 935-938.

⁵⁷ Cf. Jean-Louis D' Aragon “The Apocalypse”, p. 469.

⁵⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 469.

⁵⁹ Cf. Columba Graham Flegg, *An Introduction to Reading Apocalypse*, p. 46.

⁶⁰ Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, p. 933.

Therefore, the arguments and scholarship denying the authorship of John the Apostle is not strong enough to overthrow the orthodox tradition.

6) Canonical status

The Book of Revelation was recognised from earliest days as having the **stamp of inspiration** upon it.⁶¹ It is significant that the *Letter of the Churches of Vienne and Lyons* cites Revelation in one place as Scripture.⁶² The Muratorian Canon shows that no doubts existed over the Book of Revelation in the Roman Church towards the ends of the second century.⁶³ Clement of Alexandria accepted the apostolic authorship and cited the book as Scripture.⁶⁴ The same goes for Origen⁶⁵ and Tertullian.⁶⁶ Athanasius of Alexandria (c.296-373) unhesitatingly accepted the book of Revelation as part of his biblical canon.⁶⁷ The Book of Revelation was accepted into the canon at the Council of Carthage (397 AD). Papias of Hierapolis (2nd century) referred to Revelation, Melito of Sardis (died c.180) wrote a book on it, Theophilus of Antioch (died c.185) alluded to it, Appollonius of Hierapolis (2nd century) used its testimonies. Epiphanius of Salamis (end of 4th century) included it in his list of the New Testament books as did Jerome (c.347-420), *Codex Alexandrinus*⁶⁸ and *Codex Sinaiticus*.⁶⁹ The *Codex Claromontanus* (a Greek and Latin manuscript dating from the 5th to the 6th century) places Revelation before the Acts.⁷⁰ The Trullan Synod (692) held by the Eastern bishops included the book of Revelation in its list of canonical

⁶¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 967.

⁶² Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 931.

⁶³ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 931.

⁶⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 931; Lee M. McDonald, *The Formation of the Christian Biblical Canon*, pp. 199, 216.

⁶⁵ Cf. Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, p. 931; Lee M. McDonald, *The Formation of the Christian Biblical Canon*, pp. 201, 203, 216.

⁶⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 205.

⁶⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 222.

⁶⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 216-217.

⁶⁹ Cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Codex_Sinaiticus Accessed on 21 June 2012

⁷⁰ Cf. Lee M. McDonald, *The Formation of the Christian Biblical Canon*, p. 224.

scripture.⁷¹ Thus Revelation was **cited and accepted as scripture both in the East and in the West** until the end of the fourth century and the beginning of the fifth.⁷² Hence Donald Guthrie affirms: “There is no need to cite further evidence in support, for there are few books in the New Testament with stronger early attestation.”⁷³

In the East, a sustained criticism was brought to bear upon the Book of Revelation, because of the comments of Dionysius, though he still regarded the book as inspired.⁷⁴ A significant rejection of the Book of Revelation did not occur in the East until the end of the fourth century, and Cyril of Alexandria was the first to exclude Revelation without comment.⁷⁵ Eusebius of Caesarea was uncertain whether to place the book among the ‘undisputed’ or ‘disputed’ or ‘spurious’ books.⁷⁶ Revelation was definitely rejected by the Eastern Syrian Church.⁷⁷ It is not included in the Peshitta Version (an early New Testament in Aramaic, early 5th century), although the later Philoxenian Version (early 6th century) included it. Strong doubts about the Book lingered in the Syrian Church. Cyril of Jerusalem (c.313-386) and Gregory of Nazianzus (c.329-389) left out the book. Amphilochius of Iconium excluded the book from the canon. Chrysostom never alluded to this book.⁷⁸ Marcion did not accept the book. The Council of Laodicea (ca.360) omitted the book from its list of the books of the New Testament. A vigorous attack was made on the book by Alogi as did Gaius of Rome.⁷⁹ Revelation is missing in *Codex Vaticanus*.⁸⁰ The

⁷¹ Cf. Adela Yarbro Collins, “Revelation, Book of”, p. 695.

⁷² Cf. Lee M. McDonald, *The Formation of the Christian Biblical Canon*, p. 216.

⁷³ Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, p. 931.

⁷⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 932; Cf. Lee M. McDonald, *The Formation of the Christian Biblical Canon*, p. 223.

⁷⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 217.

⁷⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 206-207.

⁷⁷ Cf. Adela Yarbro Collins, “Revelation, Book of”, p. 695. It is said that disturbed by the excesses of chiliasm, a heresy based on the 1000-year reign mentioned in Revelation 20:1-6, most of the bishops of Syria and Asia Minor rejected the book. Cf. Jean-Louis D’ Aragon “The Apocalypse”, p. 468.

⁷⁸ Cf. Lee M. McDonald, *The Formation of the Christian Biblical Canon*, pp. 222-223.

⁷⁹ Cf. Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, p. 931.

Byzantine list of scriptures (ca.810) omitted Revelation.⁸¹ Thus the inclusion of the book in the canon continued to be challenged from time to time, most notably in the East, until at least the sixth century. Even as late as the eleventh century there were doubts expressed as to its appropriateness within the canon of the New Testament.⁸²

Martin Luther (1483-1546) initially placed the book of Revelation in his list of ‘questionable’ or ‘disputed’ documents (*antilegomena*) but in later life he retracted his view.⁸³ John Calvin (1509-1564) believed the book to be canonical, yet it was the only New Testament book on which he did not write a commentary. It remains the only book of the New Testament that is not read within the Divine Liturgy of the Eastern Orthodox Church, though it is included in Catholic and Protestant liturgies.

7) Overall plan of the book

Revelation is divided into four basic sections:⁸⁴ In each section there is a vision which sets the tone for the remainder of that division.

Part one (chapters 1-3). There is an introduction in 1:1-7 followed by the inaugural vision of 1:8-20: Chapters 2 and 3 treat of the seven letters to the seven Churches: Ephesus 2:1-7; Smyrna 2:8-11; Pergamum 2: 12-17; Thyatira 2:18-29; Sardis 3: 1-6; Philadelphia 3: 7-13; Laodicea 3:

⁸⁰ Cf. Lee M. McDonald, *The Formation of the Christian Biblical Canon*, p. 225. The *Codex Vaticanus* is defective at the end and is missing the Pastorals, Philemon and Revelation. Hence McDonald says that it is difficult to argue a strong case on canonicity from defective codex. Cf. *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Cf. Adela Yarbro Collins, “Revelation, Book of”, p. 695.

⁸² Cf. Columba Graham Flegg, *An Introduction to Reading Apocalypse*, p. 50.

⁸³ Luther’s *antilegomena* (disputed books) are: Hebrews, James, Jude, 2 Peter, 3 and 3 John and Revelation. The modern Lutheran Church consider them to be canonical. But they are not quite on the same level as the other books as complete expressions of evangelical truth, and should be used with care. Cf. <http://www.bible-researcher.com/antilegomena.html> Accessed on 14 June 2012.

⁸⁴ It is to be noted that exegetes have not been able to reach complete consensus regarding the overall structure of the book.

14-22. Because of the prominence of the seven letters this section is often called “**The Seven Letters to the Seven Churches**”.⁸⁵

Part two (chapters 4-11). There is an inaugural vision in chapters 4 and 5, the opening of the seven seals in chapters 6 to 8:1; the sounding of the seven trumpets in chapters 8:2-11:20. This has sometimes been called “**The Apocalypse for the Jews**”, especially since it ends with the Ark of the Covenant being made visible for all to see (11.19).⁸⁶

Part Three (chapters 12-20). There is again an inaugural vision in chapter 12 which begins the seven signs (12:1,3; 13:13, 14; 15:1; 16:14; 19:20). This section is often called “**The Apocalypse for Gentiles**”, especially since it ends with Christ being proclaimed King of kings and Lord of lords (19:16) over all the peoples of the world.⁸⁷

Part four (chapters 21-22). There is once more an inaugural vision of the new heaven and the new earth and the New Jerusalem (21:1-8). It is followed by a description of the New Jerusalem (21:9-22:5); a conclusion of authentication, warning and hope (22:6-21). Because of the prominence of the New Jerusalem this section often goes by the name of “**The New Jerusalem**”.⁸⁸

8) Content

The revelation proper begins at chapter 1:9 and continues till chapter 22:5, which forms the body of the book. It is preceded by a title, an initial salutation to the seven Churches and a prologue. It is followed by an epilogue and a final salutation to the recipients.

⁸⁵ Cf. Patrick J. Sena, *The Apocalypse: Biblical Revelation Explained*, p. 6.

⁸⁶ Cf. *Ibid.* 6.

⁸⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

⁸⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 7. According to J. Massyngberde Ford, chapters 12-22 were probably written later by a disciple of John. Cf. J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation*, p. 38.

John received two divine communications in **two ecstasies** (1:10; 4:2). He then united them into a single work in virtue of a command which was given to him (1:19). In the first, the prophet hears behind him a voice bidding him to put into writing what he is about to see (1:10-11). In the second ecstasy the same voice invites him to come up to heaven. This time a visual phenomenon accompanies the voice (4:1-2). In the first ecstasy, from the outset, the vision puts John face to face with a personage standing in the midst of seven golden candlesticks (representing the seven Churches), one who resembles the **Son of Man**. In the second ecstasy the seer has the sensation of being in heaven, before the **throne of God** and before the **Lamb** (Jesus Christ). John is remembered as a high priest wearing a mitre by Polycarp of Ephesus. The vision appears to reflect John's mystical experience while serving the Liturgy in what would be a Temple-inspired pattern used in Asia Minor.⁸⁹

In the seven letters to the seven Churches in Asia Minor all the letters have the same components: a) a salutation which is identical for all seven cities except for the name of the city; b) the identification of Christ which is the same for all the seven Churches; c) compliments are bestowed upon five of the Churches, but there is no word of praise for Sardis or Laodicea; d) rebukes are bestowed upon five of the Churches, but there is no reprimand for Smyrna or Philadelphia; e) an exhortation to either repent or remain faithful, as the case may be, always ending with the phrase "he who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the Churches"; and finally, f) a promise in every case for he who are faithful.⁹⁰

The main plot of Revelation is the **battle between good and evil**, God and Satan, and their followers. A series of events lead to the resolution of the main problem, which is the **defeat of evil** and the **establishment of a New Jerusalem** and **return to paradise**. The protagonist is

⁸⁹ Cf. *The Eastern-Greek Orthodox Bible. New Testament*, p. 520.

⁹⁰ Cf. Patrick J. Sena, *The Apocalypse: Biblical Revelation Explained*, p. 19.

Jesus, and **Satan** is the antagonist, and the ultimate adversary. The author conveys his messages through archetypal imageries and symbolism.

9) Complex symbolism

The Book of Revelation employs a complex symbolic language to convey spiritual truths. The recourse to symbols is intended to suggest the ineffable mystery that is spoken of.⁹¹ The symbols also evoke the transcendence of the truths proposed. The symbolic language in the book is very much Hebrew⁹² and related to the Old Testament. One needs to “decode” the images and symbols in order to understand the meaning of the text.⁹³ Barker states that Revelation was intended for a small group of initiatives who were able to understand the symbolism.⁹⁴ In the book, even the names of the seven Churches of Asia can possibly be understood as symbolic.⁹⁵ Traditionally, the four living creatures (lion, ox, human angel and eagle), each with six wings and full of eyes, have been associated with the four evangelists.⁹⁶ But in the context of the book they represent divine attributes.

The numbers used in the book have a symbolic meaning. While several numbers stand out, 7 appears to have a special significance as it expresses perfection and totality. It is explicitly used 43 times in the Book of Revelation.⁹⁷ The structure of Revelation itself is built around seven great

⁹¹ Cf. Jean-Louis D' Aragon “The Apocalypse”, p. 468.

⁹² Cf. Columba Graham Flegg, *An Introduction to Reading Apocalypse*, p. 45. Matthew = human angel; Mark = Lion; Luke = ox; John =Eagle.

⁹³ Cf. Roland J. Faley, *Apocalypse Then and Now*, pp. 2,7.

⁹⁴ Cf. Margaret Barker, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 63.

⁹⁵ For example, Ephesus means ‘desirable’ (appropriate for the Christian Church faithful to apostolic faith and order); Smyrna means ‘myrrh’ (symbol of suffering and death); Pergamum means ‘exaltation’ (seeking of worldly approbation); Thyateira means ‘toil’ (signifying corruption of the faith through doctrinal inventions); Sardis means ‘that which remains’(reduction of the Church to a state of almost complete spiritual poverty); Philadelphia means ‘love of the brethren’ (the faithful remnant); Laodicea means ‘worldly values’ (those contaminated by worldly values).⁹⁵ Cf. Columba Graham Flegg, *An Introduction to Reading Apocalypse*, pp. 79-81.

⁹⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 86.

⁹⁷ Cf. Patrick J. Sena, *The Apocalypse: Biblical Revelation Explained*, p. 12.

sections comprising of seven Churches, seven seals, seven trumpets, seven signs in the heavens, seven vials, seven heavenly voices and seven visions of the end.⁹⁸ There are also hidden uses of number 7 in the book.⁹⁹ There is a case of **777** which is a triple 7, and it indicates a perfect number. It is the transliteration in Hebrew or Aramaic of “King of Kings and Lord of lords” (19:16).¹⁰⁰

Number 3 shares in the perfection of 7, and is used explicitly 31 times. There are also clusters of threes. For example, the use of the triple woe (8:13) and the triple holy (4:8).¹⁰¹ One half of seven (11:9) is also a conspicuous number in Revelation. Number **4** shares in the perfection of 7 and is used explicitly 29 times. It is also used in clusters of fours. For example, four attributes of the Lamb (5:13) and four angels (14:6,8,9,17).¹⁰² The number **12** being a multiple of 3 x 4 shares in the perfection of 7. It is used 22 times and is also found in conjunction with 1000 (7.5-8).¹⁰³ The number 6 is a symbol of incompleteness and hence of evil, and specifically evil masquerading as good, because 6 is almost 7.¹⁰⁴

The number **1000** and all numbers with zeroes indicate an unlimited number.¹⁰⁵ Thus 12,000 signifies a perfect unlimited number; the same can be said of 144,000 (7:4). The number 1000 is explicitly used 27 times in the Book of Revelation. The number 666 (in some manuscripts 616) is

⁹⁸ Cf. R. J. Loenertz, *The Apocalypse of Saint John*, p. xiii.

⁹⁹ Cf. Patrick J. Sena, *The Apocalypse: Biblical Revelation Explained*, p. 12.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.

¹⁰¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁰² Cf. *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ Cf. *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Columba Graham Flegg, *An Introduction to Reading Apocalypse*, p. 98.

¹⁰⁵ Throughout history individuals have predicted the 1000 year reign as immanent, but it never came in the way in which it was predicted. One must understand the millennium within the context of the persecution of the Christians by Emperor Domitian. The number 1000 signifies a limitless reign with the Lord. Cf. Patrick J. Sena, *The Apocalypse: Biblical Revelation Explained*, pp. 16-17.

used only once (13:18).¹⁰⁶ There are many other uses of numbers in the book, like, 1260 (11:3), 42 (11:2), etc.

Besides these symbols mentioned above, there are also other important symbols, like, seven-sealed scroll, little scroll, throne, Lamb, bride of the Lamb, 24 elders, lampstands, book of life, second death, woman clothed with the sun, heavenly city, New Jerusalem, paradise, tree of life, river, ark of the covenant, hidden manna, rainbow, open door, beasts, harlot, trumpets, fire, thunder, light, bowls, locusts, colours, Babylon, Balam, Jezebel, East, Dan, wormwood, fallen star, silence, dragon, ancient serpent, horn, ten horns, seven heads, etc.

10) Interpretations

The book of Revelation has been given **wide variety of interpretations**, ranging from the simple to the complex. Today most of the interpreters of the book fall into one of the following categories: *Historicists*, who interpret Revelation as presenting a sequence of events from the time of the apostle to the consummation of history; *Preterists* (from Latin *praeter* meaning ‘past’ or ‘beyond’) who interpret the book in relation to the apostolic era (1st century AD). According to this view, most of the events it relates have already taken place (mainly the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD); the *Futurists* who interpret the visions primarily as events to take place in the future and the second coming of Christ; the *Idealists* who view Revelation as symbolic pictures of such timeless truths as the struggle between good and evil and the victory of the

¹⁰⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 13. In some manuscripts the number is “616” and not “666”. In the Hebrew or Aramaic alphabet, the expression “Nero Caesar” Hebrew would be written in transliteration thus: N-50, R-200, W-6, N-50 (Neron) Q-100, S-60, R-200 (Caesar). In Hebrew and Greek “Nero” is spelled “Neron” with a final “n”. This is not the case in Latin. For this reason some manuscripts read “616” instead of “666”. Cf. *Ibid.*, 14. See also Robert Kugler and Patrick Hartin, *An Introduction to the Bible*, p. 514; Craig R. Koester, “Revelation, Book of”, in *The New Interpreters’ Dictionary of the Bible*, p. 795.

former.¹⁰⁷ Finally there is a *poetic view* which says that the author of Revelation simply described by means of his power of artistry the sure triumph of God over evil powers.¹⁰⁸

11) Theology of the book

Revelation is a carefully written biblical book of profound theology. It has a theocentric vision of the coming of God's universal Kingdom. We may also hold that it is the book a Christian theology in the 'final form' with regard to many theological ideas, such as, the Trinity, Christology, eschatology, Ecclesiology, Mariology, Liturgy, Angelology and Christian meaning of history. Seen from this perspective, Revelation is a **very important theological text and the indispensable conclusion of the biblical corpus**. Below we shall examine some of the key theological ideas contained in the book, without being exhaustive.

a) *Trinity*

One of the great permeating themes of Revelation is the Triune nature of the Godhead. In the book there are three divine persons, and various names, titles, and designations are used to describe them. They are also presented in close relationship to each other, along with their complementary functions.¹⁰⁹

God the Father

God the Father is the Sovereign Almighty God, who remains on the throne directing the affairs of the universe. The Father is the God of heaven (11:13; 15:11), Lord of the earth (11:4), and the Father of Jesus Christ (2:28; 3:5; 3:22). Although the Father shares His throne with the Son (3:21; 22:1,3), it is usually depicted as His throne (1:4; 4:2-3; 7:15; 12:5). He is God

¹⁰⁷ Cf. *The Eastern/Greek Orthodox Bible. New Testament*, pp. 520-521.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. G.F. Beasley-Murray, "The Revelation", p. 1279.

¹⁰⁹ http://www.atsjats.org/publication_file.php?pub_id=236&journal=1&type=doc Accessed on 15 June 2012

Almighty (1:8; 4:8; 11:7; 15:3; 16:7; 19:6; 21:22), the heavenly temple belongs to Him (7:15; 11:19; 13:6; 15:5,8), He is One who is and who was and who is to come (1:4;4:8) and He is the Alpha and the Omega (1:8; 21:6). There are about 124 separate names, titles, or identifying designations for God the Father in Revelation. Of these, the most common one is the simple designation 'God', used some seventy-four times in the book.¹¹⁰

God the Son

In Revelation, there are about eighty references to Jesus Christ by various designations, though He is never called *theos* (God). The most common of these is 'the Lamb' used twenty-eight times. Second is 'Jesus' or 'Jesus Christ', used twelve times. God the Son has a variety of functions in Revelation that are not shared by the Father. But some of the functions of God that He shares include, sitting with God on His throne (3:21;22:1,3), exercising wrath and judgment against sin and sinners (2:5,16, 22-23; 6:16-17; 19:11,15), rewarding the overcomers (1:7,10,17,26-28;3:5,12, 21), etc. More explanations about God the Son will follow below under Christology.

God the Holy Spirit

God the Holy Spirit receives significantly less attention in Revelation than the Father and the Son, with only eighteen references made, four of which are expressed symbolically. The Spirit is an integral part of the triune Deity from whom grace and peace are communicated to the readers and hearers of the Book of Revelation (1:4-5). He also plays an essential role in establishing God's rule. References to the Spirit fall into two major categories: those which refer to 'the seven Spirits' (four references) and those which refer to 'the Spirit' (fourteen references).¹¹¹ In the

¹¹⁰ http://www.atsjats.org/publication_file.php?pub_id=236&journal=1&type=doc Accessed on 15 June 2012

¹¹¹ Cf. Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, pp. 109-110.

introduction (1:4) he is referred to as ‘the seven Spirits’ who are before God’s throne’. Elsewhere too He is depicted symbolically as ‘seven spirits’ (3:1; 4:5; 5:6).¹¹² Seven of the references to ‘the Spirit’ are related to the messages to the Churches (2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22), four in the phrase ‘in the Spirit’ (1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10), two citing words of the Spirit (14:13; 22:17) and one in the phrase ‘the Spirit of prophecy’ (19:10).¹¹³ The relation between Jesus and the Spirit is so close that the things Jesus says to the Churches are described as being spoken by the Spirit. “Whoever has an ear should listen to what the Spirit is saying to the Churches” (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). In Revelation the Spirit is never portrayed as sitting on a throne, ruling, or receiving worship and adoration. But it should not be interpreted to imply that He is not ontologically equal with God.

b) Christology

The Book of Revelation has a high Christology. The author without any possible doubt believes in the dual nature of Jesus as **God and Man**. Jesus, besides being the Son of God (2:18, 27; 3:5, 21; 14:1), is ‘one like a son of man’ (1:13;14:14), that is, like a human being. He redeemed people to God from every nation by His blood (5:9; 12:11), and He has washed us from our sins in His own blood (1:5; 7:14). He died and came back to life (1:18; 2:8) as the Firstborn from the dead (1:5). He shares God’s throne (3:21; 22:1, 3). The crucified and resurrected Lamb upon the throne is a clear proclamation of the **divinity of Christ** and His **unity with the Father**.¹¹⁴

Christ as Lamb is the most common designation for Jesus in Revelation. There is hardly any chapter that does not have some reference to Christ as the victorious Lamb. A Lamb standing as

¹¹² The significance of ‘seven spirits’ before God’s throne is disputed. Some say that it can mean seven angels, while others argue that it means sevenfold fullness of God’s Spirit. Cf. Craig R. Koester, “Revelation, Book of”, p. 793.

¹¹³ Cf. Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 110.

¹¹⁴ Cf. Columba Graham Flegg, *An Introduction to Reading Apocalypse*, p. 85.

though it had been slain (5:6) is Jesus Christ (an image that is used as many as 28 times in the book) who has **conquered death** and stands erect, having gloriously arisen and ascended to the heavenly Father. He is glorious and has **full power** (seven horns) and **fullness of knowledge** (seven eyes). His taking of the seven sealed scroll (Old Testament) indicates that God's plan of creation has been fulfilled in his redeeming act involving His Incarnate Son.¹¹⁵ The **rule of Christ** has been inaugurated and he reigns now (11:15). He is the **eschatological figure**, one who is seated on the white clouds of heaven which a golden crown on his head (14:14). Jesus is the **new leader** of the pilgrim people who led the faithful Christians dry-shod into heaven and they sing the song of the Lamb (15:3-4). He will come in glory in the clouds, riding the white horse (19:11) to judge the world. He is the mediator between God and man and the one who opens the door into the heavenly places.

The **kingship of Christ** is already proclaimed by virtue of his resurrection from the dead. He is clothed in vestments signifying both **priesthood** (ephod) and **kingship** (golden belt). He appears like the **Son of Man** and **Ancient of Days** (human and divine natures of Christ). The sharp two-edged sword coming from the mouth of Christ represents the **Word of God**, and the description of his countenance echoes the transfiguration on Mount Tabor, which John himself witnessed.¹¹⁶

Various titles or names are given to Christ throughout the book. He is called faithful and true witness (1:5; 3:14); the first and the last (1:17); the true one (3:7); the Amen (3:14); the beginning of God's creation (3:14); the Lion of the tribe of Judah (5:5); the root David (5:5); one whose blood ransomed men for God (5:9); Lamb (7:10); Messiah (11:15;12:10); the bright morning star (22.16); the Alpha and Omega (22:13); the King of kings and Lord of lords (19:16), Word of God

¹¹⁵ Cf. Patrick J. Sena, *The Apocalypse: Biblical Revelation Explained*, p. 50.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Columba Graham Flegg, *An Introduction to Reading Apocalypse*, p. 67.

(6:6; 19:13), ruler of kings on earth (1:5); one like a son of Man (1:13); the Son of God (2:18); the holy one (16:6); one who shall reign for ever and ever (11:15); one who has authority to open and to close (3:7-8), Lord (22:20), etc.

The word 'Christ' (Messiah) occurs seven times (including occurrences of 'Jesus Christ'). The idea of Jesus as fulfilment of the Jewish hope of the Davidic Messiah is prominent in Revelation.¹¹⁷ There also good evidence in the book that worship of Jesus was part of early Christian practice from a relatively early date.¹¹⁸

Columba Graham Flegg affirms that nowhere in the New Testament is the divinity of Christ more comprehensively expressed than in Revelation.¹¹⁹ The text brings the various concepts about the Messiah to their fullest expression and in all its richness. Hence we may rightly maintain that the emphasis the Book of Revelation gives to Christology is the most striking thing about the book.¹²⁰

c) Eschatology

Revelation has a well-developed eschatology. The book proclaims the victory over death, which encouraged the courting of martyrdom by the early Christians.¹²¹ In fact, in the patristic period, Revelation was considered as a principal source of Christian eschatology.¹²² Revelation assures that those who have suffered and died for their Christian faith will live with the Lord. Their names are written in the book of life of the Lamb that was slain (13:8). They are the ones

¹¹⁷ Cf. Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 66.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 61.

¹¹⁹ Cf. Columba Graham Flegg, *An Introduction to Reading Apocalypse*, p. 44.

¹²⁰ It may be recalled that, initially in 1522 Martin Luther he did not consider the book of Revelation as prophetic or apostolic, since he said that 'Christ is neither taught nor known in it'. But in the completely new preface that he composed in 1530, he reversed his position and concluded that Christ was central to the book. Cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Revelation Accessed on 19 June 2012.

¹²¹ Cf. Columba Graham Flegg, *An Introduction to Reading Apocalypse*, p. 44.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 50.

who share in the first resurrection (20:5), and will not experience a second death (20:6) which is the destiny of the wicked. Those who are raised in the first resurrection will function as priests of God and of Christ, and will reign with Christ for a thousand years (20:6).

The heaven will be opened (19:11) for those who have suffered and died for their faith. They will be nestled under the altar of heaven (6:9) and will be given protection under Christ, symbolised by the altar. They will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads (22:4). It was God's plan for the faithful to lose their lives for the sake of Christ in order that they might gain a continuous new life in heaven.¹²³ Hence the faithful Christians are called to live for heaven, where is the permanent dwelling.

The Book of Revelation clearly states that the dead will rise and will be judged by God based on what is written in the book of life and by what they had done (20.12). The great multitude in heaven will be from every nation, tribe, people and tongue (7:9). They will be dressed in white robes and carry palm branches in their hands (7:9). For those who have arrived in heaven at the end of their pilgrimage to the heavenly city, the Lord will do seven things: a) he will shelter them with his presence, b) they will hunger no more, c) they will not be thirsty, d) the sun shall not strike them nor any scorching heat, e) the Lamb will be their shepherd, f) he will guide them to springs of living water, g) and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes (7:15-17).¹²⁴

Thus the fundamentals of Christian eschatology, like, certainly of life after death, resurrection, judgement, reward for the good and punishment for the wicked, and endless life with God in heaven for the just and faithful, are clearly taught in Revelation.

¹²³ Cf. Patrick J. Sena, *The Apocalypse: Biblical Revelation Explained*, p. 80.

¹²⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 59.

d) Ecclesiology

The author of the Book of Revelation communicates a profound ecclesiology. The basic concept of the Church is that of a community of believers in Christ, and that both individual believers and groups of believers together form the universal Church. The members of the Church are addressed as brothers, fellow servants and saints. The word Church (*ekklesia*, 1:4; 2:1; 3:1; 22:16) is used twenty times in the book, and in each case it stands for a group of believers. The term is used both in the singular and plural (2:23; 22:16). The Church is a local entity and also a communion of Churches. There is both independence and interdependence of the Churches. Revelation speaks of the importance of the Church as visible and invisible, militant (Church on earth struggling against sin and evil) and triumphant (Church in heaven). The Church triumphant is described as a great multitude which no one can count, and belongs to all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues (7:9). This expresses the universality of the Church.

The book presents the Church as belonging to God. The holy city of Jerusalem with the name of the twelve tribes inscribed on the city gates (21:12), and the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb engraved on the foundations of it (21:14), seem to emphasise the **apostolic foundation** of the Church.

The Church is saved from sin by the blood of the Lamb, and is therefore a community of the saved. This community is on a pilgrimage towards the heavenly New Jerusalem. It is a **worshipping community** where liturgy is seen an important means to bear testimony to Jesus and worship God. The absence of a sanctuary in the New Jerusalem (21:22) is the symbol of Christianity which is no more tied to the temple as in Judaism. Now people will worship God in spirit and truth (Jn 4:23-24).

Many images of the Church are found scattered throughout Revelation. One of the most powerful images is that of the **woman clothed with the sun** and in travail of childbirth (12:1-2). The Fathers of the Church like, **Hippolytus of Rome** (c.170-235), **Clement of Alexandria** (c.150-215) **Terullian of Carthage** (c.155-230), **Methodius of Olympus** (d. 311 AD) and (2) **Victorinus of Pettau** (d. 303 or 304), **Andrew of Crete** (8th century) and **Bede** (7th century) identified the **woman with the Church**¹²⁵, and her travail as a symbol of the Church bringing forth new members in torments and suffering. The woman is also interpreted as **Israel-Church** which gives birth to the Messiah.¹²⁶ Raymond Brown maintains that the woman is primarily a personification of Israel. But it could also be the Church.¹²⁷ Her crown of twelve stars is the emblem of victory. Some of the other images of the Church are: the lampstands (1:20), the remnant (2:24), the saints (5:8), the bride of the Lamb (19:7; 21:9), the holy city (21.10), the great multitude (19:1), the elect and faithful (17:14), etc. The relationship of the Lamb to his bride reminds one of the relationship between Christ and His Church in Paul's letter to the Ephesians (5:24-25).

Revelation presents the Church as having privileges and responsibilities, inner strength and being affected by spiritual deterioration. It is a Church faced with external challenges and internal difficulties. The structure and hierarchy of the Church is not clearly mentioned in the book, though there are numerous references to **presbyters** (4:4; 4:10; 5:5-8, 11,14; 7:11,13; 11:16; 14:3; 19:4) and they can imply the **priestly office in the Church**. There is mention of an **angel** (1:20; 2.1; 2:8; 2:12; 2:18; 3:1; 3:7; 3:14) for each Church, which is sometimes interpreted as the 'guardian angel' of the Church who could be the **bishop** in-charge of every local Church.

¹²⁵ Cf. *Mary in the New Testament*, p. 235 footnote 512; <http://www.christianforums.com/t6846417/> Accessed on 24 June 2012.

¹²⁶ Cf. Roland J. Faley, *Apocalypse Then and Now*, p. 108; Angelo Amato, *Maria la Theotokos. Conoscenza ed esperienza*, pp. 358-359.

¹²⁷ Cf. *Mary in the New Testament*, pp. 232, 234.

e) *Mariology*

The author of Revelation does not mention Mary, and definitely he did not state that the ‘woman clothed with the sun’ of chapter 12 is Mary. But the understanding of this chapter would be incomplete without a complementary Marian interpretation.¹²⁸ Since the time of the early Fathers of the Church one of the important interpretations given to the ‘woman clothed with the sun’, and in ‘anguish for delivery of her child’ is that, the woman is the Virgin Mary, Mother of God, and her male child is Christ, since he is destined to ‘rule all nations with a rod of iron’ (12:5). Thus the main argument for a reference to Mary is that the narrative refers to the woman as the mother of the Messiah.¹²⁹ This passage also point to certain historical facts about Mary and Jesus.

Our first known mariological interpretation dates to the fourth century. Epiphanius (died in 403) and Andrew of Crete state that some individuals (unnamed) were identifying the woman with Mary. The first known writers to make this identification were **Oecumenius** and **Pseudo-Epiphanius** (sixth century) followed by **Ambrosius Autpertus** (died 784) and **Alcuin** (died 804).¹³⁰ On the other hand it is argued that it was Tychonius (flourished 370/390), a lay theologian among the Donatists, excommunicated by his own sect, who seem to have identified Mary with the woman of Revelation.¹³¹ Some of the other ancient witnesses to the Marian interpretation of Revelation 12 include, Quodvultdeus (a disciple of St. Augustine, 5th century) and Cassiodorus (6th century).¹³² The Roman Catholic tradition assigns the identity of the woman clothed with the sun to the Virgin Mary after her assumption into heaven, where she is honoured

¹²⁸ Cf. Angelo Amato, *Maria la Theotokos. Conoscenza ed esperienza*, pp. 358-359.

¹²⁹ Cf. *Mary in the New Testament*, p. 235.

¹³⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, footnote 512.

¹³¹ <http://www.aomin.org/aoblog/index.php?itemid=3213> Accessed on 24 June 2012

¹³² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Woman_of_the_Apocalypse Accessed on 16 June 2012

as the ‘Queen of Heaven’, ‘Mother of God’, and ‘Mother of the Church’.¹³³ In 1904 Pius X in his Encyclical Letter *Ad Diem Illum Laetissimum*, (1904) referred to the woman clothed with the sun as Virgin Mary.¹³⁴ Pope Pius XII in Apostolic Constitution *Munificentissimus Deus* (1950) defining the dogma of the Assumption, recognized that the early Church Fathers looked to “the woman clothed with the sun” when providing the New Testament foundation for the belief.¹³⁵ On the feast of the Assumption of Mary (15 August), the liturgical reading of the Roman Catholic Church is taken from the Book of Revelation.

Another interpretation of the ‘woman’ is that, as the Old Eve was the mother of the people of the old creation, so the Mother of God (New Eve) is the mother of all who belong to the new creation. The **New Eve** typology was presented early in the Church by Justin Martyr, Irenaeus of Lyons, Tertullian, Jerome, Augustine, Peter Chrysologus, just to name a few.¹³⁶ Again, Mary with Christ in her womb can be seen as the type of the Church bringing forth a faithful remnant with the expectation of the Parousia, thus linking the two comings of Christ, in humility (at Bethlehem) and in glory (at the Parousia).¹³⁷

Some interpret the **woman clothed with the sun** as the **Lady Wisdom**¹³⁸ thus establishing a **close link between** the Woman Clothed with the Sun, Lady Wisdom and Virgin Mary. In the Book of Wisdom, Lady Wisdom is described as “radiant and unfading” (Wis 6:12), and “more beautiful than the sun, and excels every constellation of the stars” (Wis 7:29). This has a parallel in the woman clothed with the sun with the moon under her feet and on her head a crown of twelve stars (Rev 12:1). Mary as virgin and mother is Wisdom who gave birth to and formed the

¹³³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Woman_of_the_Apocalypse Accessed on 16 June 2012

¹³⁴ Cf. Pius X, *Ad Diem Illum Laetissimum*, no. 24.

¹³⁵ Cf. Pius XII, *Munificentissimus Deus*, no. 27.

¹³⁶ Cf. Walter J. Burghardt, “Mary in Western Patristic Thought”, pp. 110-117.

¹³⁷ Cf. Columba Graham Flegg, *An Introduction to Reading Apocalypse*, p. 94.

¹³⁸ Cf. *Eastern/Greek Orthodox Bible. New Testament*, p. 519.

Logos who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron (Rev 12:5). Wisdom as sitting beside the throne of God (Wis 9:4) reminds one of Mary's place in heaven after her assumption as queen of heaven. St. Bernard of Clairvaux says that it is with reason that Mary is presented as clothed with the sun because she profoundly penetrated the abyss of divine wisdom.¹³⁹

The 'woman clothed with the sun' may have also pneumatological implications.¹⁴⁰ First of all because we have said that the woman of Revelation can be interpreted as Lady Wisdom, and wisdom is one of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. Secondly, as Margaret Barker argues, early Christian tradition remembered the Spirit as the Mother, and as the one enthroned in heaven.¹⁴¹ If this interpretation is accepted, the woman clothed with the sun, who is also a mother, strengthens the pneumatological implications of Revelation chapter 12.

f) Divine Liturgy

Liturgical worship is a constantly recurring theme in the book of Revelation. It is said that together with the Epistle to the Hebrews this book is one of the two most liturgical of the New Testament writings.¹⁴² The vision of worship described in the book made a significant impact on the liturgy of the early Church, particularly Eastern Christian worship.

In Revelation the author is transported to the heavenly throne room (chapters 4 and 5) to get a glimpse of the worship which is being conducted there. For the celestial liturgy, some are vested in priestly attire, they fall down in worship, sing hymns, offer incense, present the prayers of the saints, play their harps and proclaim the mighty acts of salvation. There are many hymns and

¹³⁹ Cf. Bernardo, *Sermone 12, de praerog. B.V.M.*, n.3, as cited in Domenico Bertetto, *Maria Madre Universale*, p. 104.

¹⁴⁰ This insight was shared by Prof. Laurent Cleenewerck, Professor of International Administration and Theology, USA, in his correspondence (e-mail) dated 24 June 2012.

¹⁴¹ Cf. Margaret Barker, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 209.

¹⁴² Cf. Patrick J. Sena, *The Apocalypse: Biblical Revelation Explained*, p. 20.

prayers scattered throughout the book. For most part they are songs of praise directed to God or the Lamb. The total person is involved in worship: voice, smell, sight, sound, movement, body, mind and spirit. Every creature gets involved in the song, in heaven, on earth, under the earth and in the sea (5:13). The song that begins in heaven goes forth to all universe. Thus the heavenly liturgy is a cosmic event and no longer limited to a chosen people or place.

Hymns, doxologies, acclamations, the wedding supper of the Lamb, and communion are the five major components of the celestial liturgy as recorded in Revelation. One can see a development from the Jewish temple liturgy of the sacrificial ritual to the Eucharistic liturgy of the Christian Church.¹⁴³ Nowhere this is truer than in the celebration of the Eucharist. Tradition holds that the ecstasy that John experienced was during a Sunday celebration of the Eucharistic liturgy among the colony of persecuted Christians on the island of Patmos. In fact the entire activity of the book occurred on the Lord's day (1:10).

The Book of Revelation provides great insights into the Eucharistic celebration of the early Church. In fact, we can find in the book many elements of the Eucharist. For example, Jesus is clothed as the High Priest (1:13); the presbyters wear special vestments (4:4, 6:11, 7:9, 15:6, 19:13-14); there is use of incense(5:8; 8:3-4), recitation of the 'Alleluia' (19:1,3-6), 'Gloria' (15:4), 'Amen' (7:12), chant of the 'Holy, Holy, Holy' (4:8), opening of the scroll of God's word (6.1), intercession of the saints (5:8), silent contemplation (8:1), eating from the tree of life (2:7) and partaking of the hidden manna (2:17). Revelation also contains many symbols of the liturgy of Baptism.

Thus in Revelation, the liturgical images and symbols are very rich and numerous. They convey the message that the Church's worship on earth corresponds to that of the heavenly

¹⁴³ Cf. Columba Graham Flegg, *An Introduction to Reading Apocalypse*, p. 89.

worship, and that every true liturgy is an eschatological event where the past, present and future coincide, and earth and heaven are united. When we worship here below, we are united to those who are gone before us and are in God's presence worshipping Him. In this sense, heaven breaks into our present existence and communion of saints is established. The Christians who were being persecuted understood this.¹⁴⁴

Revelation also reflects the concern for pure and true worship patterned on the heavenly worship, in imitation of what was celebrated in the first temple of Jerusalem. In this sense the book is a timeless and encouraging vision of the restoration and victory of true worship.¹⁴⁵

g) Angelology

The Book of Revelation has a developed angelology. It is a text full of angels, and there are as many as 67 references to them. Some have called Revelation an *Engelbuch* (Book of Angels). The angels are seen as having a relation to God, to human beings and to cosmos.¹⁴⁶ They are ministers of God and Christ, and participate in the Divine Liturgy. Angels of the Churches (mentioned eight times) can mean the 'guardian angels' of each Church. In the remaining 59 occurrences they are understood as celestial beings. The angels are clearly not worshipped. In fact when John prostrates himself before the angel who mediates the revelation to him, the angel protests that he is no more than a fellow servant of God and directs John to worship God (19:10; 22:8-9).¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Patrick J. Sena, *The Apocalypse: Biblical Revelation Explained*, p. 21.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. *The Eastern-Greek Orthodox Bible. New Testament*, p. 520.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Giancarlo Biguzzi, *L'Apocalisse e i suoi enigmi*, p. 171.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 59.

h) New creation and new paradise

In the last chapter of Revelation we see a picture of paradise, an elevated and glorious version of the original paradise where the human race began, complete with heavenly river of the water of life, having on its banks the tree of life, apparently not a solitary growth but more like a forest. To have access to this garden is the privilege of all believers, and the picture given is of a paradise of joy and peace which shall never end.

The chapters 21-22 of Revelation form an antithesis of Genesis chapters 1-3. In Genesis 1-3 the **paradise is lost**, but in Revelation **it is regained**. There is a new creation for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea, which symbolises chaos and evil, is no more (21:1-2). There is now a new world. The New Jerusalem is not an earthly city but God's own city. **God dwells with his people** and there will be no more sorrow, for God himself will wipe away tear from the eyes of his faithful (21:4). There will be fountain of **water of life** given freely (21:6). The **curse of sin** has been entirely removed (22:3), and **death has been overcome**. Here one is reminded of the river which flowed through the Garden of Eden in the first paradise (Gen 2:10). The same can be said of the tree of life. Adam and Eve ate from the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:17) for they wanted to become like God, and the eating caused death, not life. But the tree of life in the new paradise is with the abundant fruit of twelve kinds, and producing its fruit each month, and the leaves of the tree are for healing (22:2). Return to paradise also means return to Wisdom, as the tree of life was one of her ancient symbols.¹⁴⁸

Thus the first earth has been **transformed** and everything is **renewed** and made perfect (there is no total destruction). "Behold I make all things new" (21.5), is a clear reference to a renewal of

¹⁴⁸ Cf. Margaret Barker, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 330.

all creation.¹⁴⁹ The eschatological day has no night. It is perpetually bathed in the light of the Sun of Righteousness.¹⁵⁰ The conquerors will eat of the tree of life in the paradise of God (2:7; 22:2). All the promises of God are thus fulfilled. Satan who is a deceiver has been overthrown (20:10) The ancient serpent who is called the devil is defeated, and life now take on a new dimension. Thus the book of Revelation is the consummation of human existence, human aspirations, human history and culture, and is a fitting conclusion to the entire Bible, and the faithful ones of God are given a glimpse of the glory which is to be.

12) **A book with a permanent message**

The Book of Revelation had a historical meaning when it was written for a specific readership in mind. But much of what it says is as **relevant for the Christians of every age** as was relevant for the first century Christians. In other words, it has a message relevant for every age and contains many spiritual truths irrespective of the original historical context. Hence it has a **permanent value**.

In the first centuries the message of Revelation possessed such a universal application that it readily spread its influence beyond the boundaries of Asia Minor.¹⁵¹ The ideas in the book offer great **flexibility in application**. According to Columba Graham Flegg, in the middle ages the book became associated with revolutionary and charismatic groups of oppressed peasantry, particularly in times of war, plague and famine. These people were essentially anarchists calling for the downfall of both Church and State, armed with a literal interpretation of Revelation. They were for the most part also violently anti-Semitic. The Reformation provided ample opportunity for the identification of the papacy with the antichrist and the Roman Church with Babylon.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Columba Graham Flegg, *An Introduction to Reading Apocalypse*, p. 103.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ Cf. Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, p. 929.

Some attributed the number 666 to one of the popes or papacy in general. This crude, popular exposition can be found among certain Protestant denominations even today. Luther had a pessimistic view of the future seeing it as the age of increasing tribulations to be relieved only by Christ's second coming. Calvin's followers were optimists. They saw the Millennium as a time in the future when peace and prosperity would be brought to all the world by the efforts of righteous people. Only after this had been achieved would Christ return to claim His kingdom. The Roman Catholic Church adopted a largely futurist view of Revelation, relating to times far in the future. But some Roman Catholic writers in the 17th century identified the two great evils as the Turkish invasion and the Reformation, and the number 666 as referring to Martin Luther. In the 18th century the French Revolution with its regicide and proclamation of atheism was interpreted as the onset of tribulation and the herald of the Last Days.¹⁵²

Donald Guthrie has summarised some of the permanent messages of Revelation as follows: First, that **faith triumphs over might**. All the antagonistic forces, whether personified in Rome or Jerusalem (Babylon)¹⁵³ or the beast or antichrist, which seemed irresistible and too powerful will be laid low at the end. Second, that **final judgement is inevitable**. Sin and evil in all their manifestations will be subject to final judgement. Third, that the Christian approach presents a **philosophy of history**, which looks at the present in the light of the future as well as in terms of the past.¹⁵⁴ The book is therefore one of encouragement and exhortation. To those who combat the great forces of evil with apparently little success, the book brings **optimism**. Those who are

¹⁵² Cf. Columba Graham Flegg, *An Introduction to Reading Apocalypse*, pp. 50-53.

¹⁵³ There is problem in identifying Babylon the Great of Revelation (chs 17-18). Some say that it is the apostate Jerusalem. Cf. Margaret Barker, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. xii; *The Eastern-Greek Orthodox Bible. New Testament*, p. 520. Others say that is imperial Rome. Some of the Fathers of the Church like, Tertullian, Hippolytus, Victorinus and Jerome interpreted Babylon as Rome. Cf. <http://www.babylonforsaken.com/rev12.html> Accessed on 24 June 2012. Donald Guthrie also supports the later view. Cf. Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 979.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, p. 979.

inclined to forsake their faith because the odds against them seem to be too great, the book issues a powerful challenge to **endurance**.¹⁵⁵

The book of Revelation instils **courage, hope and consolation**. The message given by the author is one of hope to a suffering and persecuted Christian community. It is the same message of hope which pertains to every generation of Christians, for in every generation there has always been some form of suffering and persecution.¹⁵⁶ The image of the Lamb is the apt image of victory and hope. We know that Jesus is alive even though He once died (5:6).

Revelation reminds one of the **perennial struggle that exists between good and evil**, and that **ultimate victory belongs to God and the righteous**. The Last Judgment is an essential part of the great drama of life, and there is reward and punishment. The catastrophes, earthquakes, hail, fire, plagues, lightning, and disintegration of the heavens, show that God is in control. He is the provident one and his enemies will be defeated. Evil will have no absolute power over the people, even though for a time it may seem to have gained the upper hand.¹⁵⁷

The Book Revelation is relevant for the **whole Church**: for the 'lukewarm' Church, and the 'fervent' Church; the Church that enjoys freedom as well as the Church under persecution. It has a message for **individual Christians** who are exemplary, and for those who have been once fervent believers, but have grown tepid in their faith. Finally, the book has a message for all **States and governments** that they should base their policies on sound moral principles which have their foundation in God's law, and not to be agents of the evil one (Rom 13:1-7).

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Ibid., pp. 979-980.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Patrick J. Sena, *The Apocalypse: Biblical Revelation Explained*, p. 18.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. Ibid., p. 20.

13) Conclusion

It has often been said that Revelation is one of the most debated and obscure books of the New Testament with expressions and categories that are strange and even disconcerting: wars, bloodshed, beasts, dragons, harlots, jarring images and frightening contrasts.¹⁵⁸ Among many Christians it is a book that is somewhat neglected because of its apparent obscurities and remoteness from current methods of thought and expression. But this was not the case in its earliest history. It was one of the most encouraging books of the New Testament revelation which presents a **God-centred view of history** and final redemption. It is **apologetic** in the sense that it defends itself against the problems of everyday faith. It is **theological** in the best sense of that word because it presents a well-developed doctrine on the Holy Trinity, Christology, Eschatology, Ecclesiology, Angelology and Divine Worship. The book **links beautifully the Old Testament and New Testament**. It is argued that Revelation also inspired the writers of the Dead Sea texts.¹⁵⁹ In the last twenty centuries the Church has sought and found in Revelation comfort in her trials, and the assurance that truth, justice and virtue will triumph. Therefore, as Columba Graham Flegg says, we may call Revelation the great **crown and climax of the Holy Scripture**, and without this book the **Christian scripture would be incomplete**, and consequently, our understanding of the Christian faith would be equally incomplete.¹⁶⁰ And Margaret Barker adds: “If ‘apocalyptic’ was the mother of all Christian theology’, then the Book of Revelation should be put at the centre of New Testament study”.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ Cf. Roland J. Faley, *Apocalypse Then and Now*, p. 183.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Margaret Barker, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. xii.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. Columba Graham Flegg, *An Introduction to Reading Apocalypse*, pp. 3, 44.

¹⁶¹ Margaret Barker, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. xi.

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