

### *The Apocalypse— Verbal and Visual Revelations—Part 1*

**W**HILE AMONG GOSPEL writings pivotal points in the life of Jesus have inspired the imagination and devotion of artists during the last two millennia (notably the Annunciation, Nativity, Baptism, Transfiguration, Last Supper, Gethsemane, Stations of the Cross, Resurrection and Ascension), the book of *Revelations* has presented a singular challenge and fascination for painters with its wealth of images that are peculiarly visual. The problem it presents is that its visual nature is visionary, some would say phantasmagorical, consisting, as they do, of visions in the supersensible world.

As its author, John the Evangelist, says, “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him,” was sent and “signified” to his servant John through his angels; that is, set out in pictures. John also “gave witness” to the Word of God in his Gospel. To witness is to see, but it is also to know. John’s seeing is a higher discerning, a supersensible knowing, the fruit of initiation. The imminence of the parousia or reappearance of Christ is again a matter of suprasensible seeing: “Behold, he cometh with clouds” (1:7); that is, in the realm of the etheric.

The author of the *Apocalypse* (Greek for “uncovering”) is a divinely appointed link in the chain of transmission of God’s Word through its revealer and testifier, Christ Jesus, as mediated by His angel, to general humanity. While John’s record is a series of prophecies, almost wholly given over to what is not yet but shall come to pass, more than any other scriptural document it assumes and draws



Hans Memling (1430/40-1494), Oil on oak panel. Right wing of St. John Altarpiece, Memling Museum, St. John's Hospital, Bruges, Belgium

#### *The Vision of St. John*

*The painting sets forth the entire sequence of apocalyptic events. Note the seer kneeling before the throne of God.*

on a deep understanding of Earth’s prior occult evolution.

In order to enter the world of the *Apocalypse*, we as readers cannot assume the onlooker consciousness with which we live in the diurnal world, viewing from outside, detached. We must eat this book, and it will disturb our standard digestion, upset our normal understanding of things, be bitter in the

belly. Over and again John is enjoined to act, to “come up hither” and “see.” His active participation is required. We as readers are also rallied to be actors. Not just to see but to take part in, live into the disclosures which so fundamentally affect us. Our *will* is addressed.

Since initiation makes possible the attainment of a condition that humanity will experience at a later time by natural evolutionary means, an initiate can perceive events in archetypal form in the spiritual worlds well in advance of their material manifestation. Such are the visions of the Apocalyptist, not the Apostle John, who was martyred in Jerusalem in 56 A.D., but the Elder John, the presbyter John, who lived in Ephesus and was the raised Lazarus. The *Apocalypse* was written on the Greek island of Patmos toward the end of the first century (around 95 A.D.) during the persecution of Domitian. This tradition is documented by the second century writers Justin, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Tertullian, and has been confirmed by clairvoyant investigation.

Whereas pre-Christian initiations were directed to the past, to age-old wisdom, esoteric Christian initiation reveals the future. Man is initiated not only for his wisdom and feelings, but for his will. To set goals based on knowledge of the Christ Principle and to work for their realization through the activation of will is to grasp Christianity esoterically. The *Apocalypse* provides us with an instrument for the initiation of the will, an impulse given for the future, for action.

Whereas the Gospels are certainly eternal in the truths they set forth, their profound impact is based on their being grounded in the *historical* reality of Christ Jesus, on the assumption of physical form in a specific time and place by the highest spiritual principles in our cosmos. *Revelation*, on the other hand, is not primarily bringing all things to our *remembrance* (John 14:26), but disclosing that which *will be*. We, as readers and hearers of this apocalyptic word, may thus alert and align our wills to the very end of Earth evolution (Earth Period) by living in accordance with the principles and plans it sets forth.

Earliest (pre-Christian) initiation focused on thinking. The nearer Christian times were approached,



From *Book of Hours (Très Riche Heures)*, Jean Duc de Berry

### ***The Revelation of St. John on the Island of Patmos***

*In the presence of the iconic eagle, here symbolizing divine inspiration, St. John “hears” what he sees. The four beasts are depicted as four Cherubim. The Lamb is in the Throne.*

initiatory exercises trained the forces of feeling. In modern times, Rosicrucian exercises activate the element of will. But all occult training commences by organizing and subduing the desire body through the mental control, moral discipline, and physical focus. Mystic masonry and Jesuitism also strengthen the will through the Ego’s work on the physical instrument, which generates the conscious soul. Here, cross-carrying is paramount.

Simply stated, initiation awakens capacities and powers slumbering in the soul. The *Apocalypse* sets forth spheres of initiation which designate both actual and figurative future events (as well as implied past events) and levels of higher consciousness. There are three modes of supersensible cogni-

tion—seeing (imagination), knowing (inspiration), and being as (intuition). All such cognition must be preceded by purification of the desire body, “preparing the way of the Lord,” which results in *catharsis*, technically denoting activation of clairvoyant faculties. The desire body then imprints its wisdom in pictures on the etheric body as *illuminations*—one “sees.” In a further step, one ascends to Second Heaven where one “hears” and knows what one sees. Finally, in the Third Heaven, one identifies with what one knows, becomes it.

So does John record his own seeing, knowing, and being as he presents pictures, hears wisdom, and the “eats” this wisdom, making it part of his spiritual body. Such are

the spheres of initiation set forth by the Apocalypticist as he delivers letters to the seven Churches, which signify the seven categories of the physical (including the etheric) as a preparatory stage. The first stage, the seven levels of the desire world (the world of images), is designated by the seven seals. The second stage, the seven levels of the world of thought (the world of tone), is signified by the seven trumpets. The third stage, the seven vials of wrath, identifies what must be cast off before one can enter into the world of life spirit, the true world of the Christ.

As John is caught up in the spirit and summoned by his initiators to “come up here,” his vision expands to encompass ever wider reaches of the evolution of form, life, and consciousness. *Revelation’s* opening vision pictures the New Man, future Archetypal Man as He has been created by virtue of the forces won by Christ through living in the body of Jesus. The Being is described as “one like unto the Son of man.” In the Gospels only Christ uses this phrase to designate Himself. Here, we are to visualize Ideal man who has been recreated or restored by the indwelling Christ, the “human form divine” (Blake), the form described by Coleridge in “Ode to the Departing Years”:



Tobias Verhaeght, 1561-1631, Oil on Panel, 1598, Antwerp, Hermitage

***Landscape with John the Evangelist Writing the Book of Revelation on the Island of Patmos***

*Apocalyptic scenes here depicted include the Woman Clothed with Sun (top) who seeks refuge from the Red Dragon in the wilderness (left), and the casting down of “that old serpent” and his host out of heaven by the Archangel Michael.*

Now I recenter my immortal mind  
In the deep Sabbath of meek self-content;  
Cleansed from the vaporous passions that bedim  
God’s Image, sister of the Seraphim.

Archetypal man, as “sister of the Seraphim,” is, in his physical person, the creation of the living substance of the highest creative hierarchies. A close analysis of this visionary Being shows that It is comprised of nine-fold light and attributes deriving from the nine ranks of spiritual beings, from angels to Seraphim, who have contributed of their spiritual substance to its creation. As God’s image restored, Adam regenerated, this Christ-fashioned Form is a “blending of the Glory of Eternity with the Masterpiece of Time” (Balfour).

The seven candlesticks (a variation on the Jewish menorah) encircling the Son of Man are a representation of the vibratory powers which have been assimilated and mastered on the microcosmic level as the seven planetary energies, signified by the seven stars, and on the ecclesial level as the seven churches or communities of each Ray type.

The sharp two-edged sword is the Ego, whose highest manifestation is the creative word. The Ego is capable, in its lower expression, of selfishness, possessiveness and inhumanity; while in its highest

expression it radiates love and creative good will. The Ego can exalt man by enabling him to choose to give love as an entirely free gift, or it can tempt man to serve purely selfish interests, thus plunging him into the abyss.

Christ Jesus brought full Ego-consciousness to man and is represented as the One Who has the sharp two-edged sword coming out of His mouth. In the *Apocalypse* the planetary form of this two-foldness is the civilization of Babylon (materialism) and the civilization of New Jerusalem (spiritual community), which are both represented as cities and personified as women.

On the most literal or mundane level, the seven letters to the Churches are assessments of the status of the seven most active centers in Asia Minor and provide clear evidence that, historically, an *organizationally* unified Church is not a Christian idea but a Roman idea which was applied to the Church through Constantine in 313 A.D. The seven original Churches of *Revelation* constitute the vision of a social pattern of Christianity. They are seven equal archetypes having a unified spirit and a unified law, but differentiated in background and character. They constitute a seven-fold manifestation of the Being Who speaks to John.

The letters are addressed to the angels of each Church, the spiritual group soul of a wide variety of individuals who together comprise an ecclesia whose character or consciousness was held in the soul of the angel of the Church. On another level, the seven letters to the Churches are characterizations of the seven developmental phases of the Fifth (First Post-Atlantean) Epoch of the Earth Period. The angel of each Church is its guiding influence or presiding genius.

Specifically, since the Bible, and *Revelation* in particular, are a product of the First Post-Atlantean epoch, their symbolism pertains to this time frame, according to which the seven stars symbolize the seven beings who are the spiritual (angelic) leaders of the seven cultural ages of this epoch. During these ages humanity can obtain particular powers and aptitudes, occultly indicated by each letter's content.

What is said of our current fifth sub-epoch, Sardis? "Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art



Woodcut, Albrecht Durer, 1496-98, State Hall of Art, Karlsruhe

### ***John sees the Seven Candlesticks***

*The Son of Man, with sunburst countenance, flaming eyes, and the Sword of Justice coming out of his mouth, holds in his left hand the Book of Life and in his right hand the seven Star Angels, who inspire the seven churches in Asia, signified by the Seven Candlesticks. The clouds represent the suprasensible worlds. John falls at His feet, as if dead.*

dead" (3:1). How dead? Dead to spirit. Yet we may strengthen what remains (of knowledge) and repent, that is, change our minds, our material orientation, so that we may be "clothed in white raiment."

During the sixth cultural sub-epoch, Philadelphia, the intellectuality of the West will marry the spirituality of the East, most notably (as Max Heindel predicted) in Russia, and will foster brotherly love. The seventh sub-epoch will be lukewarm. Then will follow the War of All against All, wherein each non-evolved ego will pit itself against every other ego, after which begins the sixth Epoch, New Galilee.

The proper and full utilization of the energies (star) given each Church (candlestick) will result in the overcoming of the physical through Him Who has the keys of hell and of death. Egoic conscious-

ness shall be fully invested in the etheric body through the activation of its seven occult centers, as indicated by the letters' seven promises. Redeemed humanity shall: 1) "eat of the tree of life"; 2) "not be hurt of the second death"; 3) "eat of the hidden manna" and be given "the white stone"; 4) receive "the morning star"; 5) be "clothed in white raiment"; 6) be made a permanent "pillar in the temple of God"; and, 7) "sit with me [Christ] in my throne."

As befits a manual on the initiation of the will, John is kept in a state of continuous activity and dynamic concentration. He is told: "What thou seest, write in a book and send it"; "write the things which thou hast seen"; "come up hither, and I saw and I wept...and I beheld"; "and I went unto the angel...and I took the little book...and ate it up"; "rise and measure the temple of God"; "And I stood upon the sand of the sea"; "he carried me away in the spirit"; "and I fell down at his feet."

For his second vision John is summoned by a trumpet-like voice, and immediately he is in the spirit and passes through a door in heaven and enters the desire world where he sees and records perhaps *Revelation's* most resplendent vision—the throne of God with a Lamb in its midst, surrounded by four beasts, and ranged before it seven spirits, twenty-four elders, and a host of angels.

The four living creatures surrounding the throne are the four *zoa*, the "raw material of humanity," the four Archangelic Group Souls, now the four Recording Angels. Macrocosmic God-Man (Adam Kadmon), who comes forth from Spiritland, first appears to clairvoyant vision as proceeding from four creative human prototypes, the forces forming him appearing as here represented—the septenary rainbow. The present day lion, bull, eagle and proto-human forms bear a similitude to the ethereal bodies which early mankind assumed. And they possessed a consciousness and group soul nature appertaining to each type.

Man owes every soul quality he now possesses to his rejection, during his evolutionary development,



Woodcut, 1496, Albrecht Durer, State Art Hall, Karlsruhe

#### *John before God and the Elders*

*John, "in the spirit," enters a door in heaven and sees God aureoled in glory, the Lamb with seven eyes and seven horns, the seven lamps, the six-winged, myriad-eyed, Cherubimic beasts, and the twenty-four Elders casting down their crowns in praise and adoration before the Throne.*

of a particular animal form, while retaining the spiritual equivalent of that form. By analogy, sediment is the precipitation of coarse matter from turbid water, leaving a clear, light liquid. The mystic art of alchemy extensively utilizes this separative and sublimating process, which is emblematic of transformation to the higher and sacrifice or throwing off of the lower. Specifically, astral (desire body) man is composed of eagle (head—thinking), lion (heart—emotion), bull (gut and limb system—will), and man (in an early form of the coordination and synthesis of the three).

The ego-ensouled individual is a whole animal species unto himself, whereas animal group egos are in the desire world and have not descended to the physical.

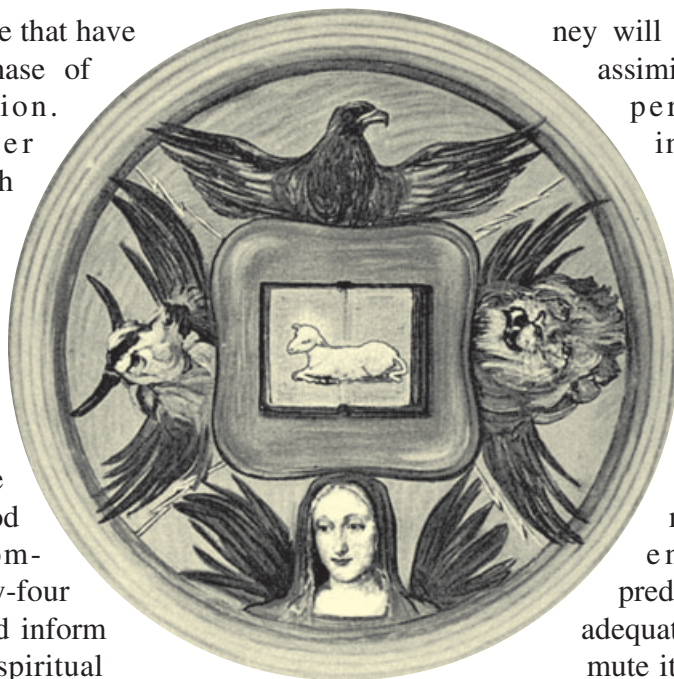
The mystical Lamb in the midst of the Throne, the sign of the Redeemer, is the group soul for the higher manifestation of men, the Christed Ego.

The twenty-four Elders are embodiments of the experience obtained from the twenty-four rounds of

evolution or cycles of time that have preceded our current phase of planetary manifestation. During that time other beings passed through their human stage: Lords of Mind during the Saturn Period (7 phases); Archangels during the Sun Period (7 phases); Angels during the Mood Period (7 phases); and humans during three stages of the Earth Period (the fourth is not yet completed). These twenty-four Elders can thus guide and inform man's evolution from spiritual realms as the directors of time (twenty-four planetary hours of the cosmic clock, each "hour" or revolution ruled by a "time-king").

Having lived and died in a human body and spiritually rejuvenated the earth with His solar vitality, Christ is able to loose the seven seals of the Book of Life held by the Father. Prior to His Advent, the Book had become "sealed" and humanity lacked sufficient power to overcome material forces and penetrate consciously into the worlds of soul and spirit. Through the Lamb's sacrifice, the essence of eons of formative experience can be inherited and imprinted on the human soul

At the end of the Fifth (First Post-Atlantean) Epoch, following upon the War of All against All, the seven seals will be unloosed and all that is "written" therein will be opened and the book of the individual spirit's jour-



Clara Rettich, 1907, after sketches by Rudolf Steiner, from *Occult Pictures in Signs and Symbols*, Dornach, 1975

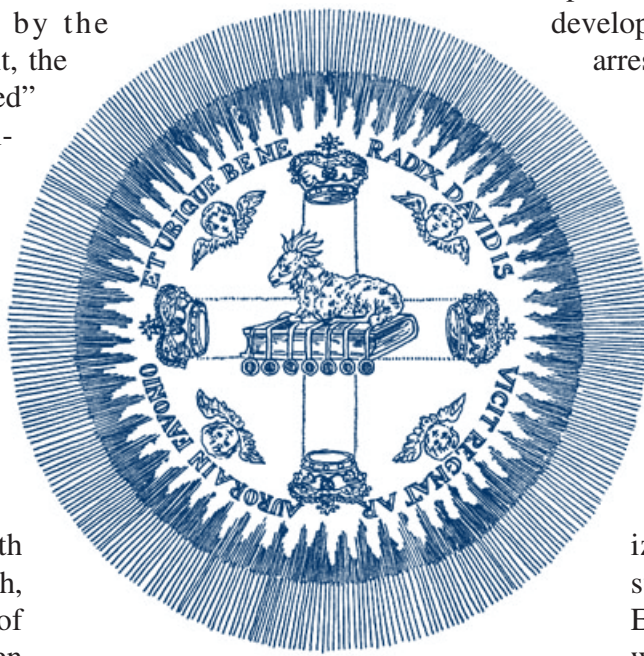
*Human archetypes, past and future: the four Zoa and the Lamb.*

ney will be read and available for assimilation. This content will pertain to the soul's incarnations during the seven cultural sub-epochs wherein it obtained particular powers and aptitudes as indicated in part by the seven letters to the churches.

Had not the Christ Impulse been given to Earth and its humanity, mankind would have encountered the dire predicament of being unable to adequately learn from and transmute its earth experience into the luminous substance of the soul body. The Lamb redeems what otherwise would have been lost and reveals what else would have remained hidden, giving the freedom to understand and the strength to act on that understanding and rise up out of the age in which human development had become sealed or arrested.

While experiences represented by the seals were laid down in the Fifth Cultural Epoch (Ancient Indian, Persian, Egypto-Sumarian, Greco-Roman/Semitic, Teutonic/Saxon/Celt, Sixth, and Seventh sub-epochs), they will be loosed as usable soul powers and will characterize the seven consecutive sub-cultures of the Sixth Epoch of New Galilee, whose emphasis will be on conscious development of the etheric body. (Continued) □

—C. W.



From *Secret Symbols of the Rosicrucians*, Altona, 1785

*"And they sang a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof... [and] to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing."*