

02. Apocalypse 1:1-11



Prologue (I:I-II)

A Prophetic revelation from the throne of the Almighty

a: Introduction I:I

The revelation (Ἀποκάλυψις, apocalypsis) **of Jesus Christ**

I. The Greek word Ἀποκάλυψις denotes the removal of a veil (kalumma), as does the Latin revelatio (velum). The veil that is being removed is that which comes between the divine and the human. It is important to realise that it is we who are veiled, not God. ‘The earth is full of God’s glory’ (Isaiah 6:3); it is we who are unable to see God. When, in response to grace, we open our mind and heart to God’s grace and gain some insight into the wonder of the divine (when heart speaks to heart), a revelation occurs.

Revelation is happening in partial ways all the time. In the words of the prophet Amos (3:7): ‘The Lord God does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets.’

Some individuals, because of the purity of their intelligence and the intimacy of their communion with the divine, penetrate the divine more deeply than the rest of us. When they share their inspired insights with us, we recognise that revelation is taking place, for some of the veil hiding God from us is being drawn aside.

The revelation of Jesus Christ

In the Judeo-Christian religious tradition, Moses and the prophets stand out as mediators of revelation. Transcending them all, for the disciples of Jesus, is Jesus himself. The mystery of his human intimacy with God is the continuous object of Christian contemplation.

Our author is sharing with the Christians of Asia Minor the fruits of his inspired reflection upon the exalted Christ and on the significance of Christ for their present and future experience. He wishes to communicate to them the meaning of their experience as he has come to grasp it through his communion with Christ, the one who has full access to the divine.

The revelation of Jesus Christ

No New Testament writing speaks more eloquently of the revelation made to and through Jesus than does the Gospel of John, for whom Jesus is the incarnation of the very Word of God. We find Jesus making statements such as the following:

‘I have not spoken on my own, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment about what to say and what to speak’(John 12:49).

‘The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority; but the Father who dwells in me does his works’(John 14:10).

‘I have given them the words which you gave me’(John 17:8).

a: Introduction 1:1

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants what **must soon take place**.

In our text, the author seems to be alluding to the following statement from the Book of Daniel (2:28):
'There is a God in heaven who **reveals mysteries** and who has shown what **must take place** in the after-days.'

a: Introduction 1:1

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants what must soon take place.

He is not necessarily claiming that a prophet sees future happenings, as it were, in a vision, and then describes to others what he has seen. It is not a matter of simply taking a look.

The language is symbolic. He is inviting his audience to share his insight by sharing his prayer. They will need all their intelligence and all their wisdom to interpret his words accurately. For revelation to occur, there must be a penetration of intelligence in response to grace.

a: Introduction 1:1

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants what **must soon** take place.

‘**must**’ is not denying freedom; rather it is viewing things from the transcendent perspective.

‘**soon**’ is not fixing on time as we experience it; rather it focuses on an assurance that God is always close.

This commandment that I am commanding you today is not ... too far away ... No, the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe’(Deuteronomy 30:11-14).

a: Introduction 1:1

He made it known by sending his angel to his servant, John.

Eusebius HE 3.24

Of the writings of John, not only his Gospel, but also the former of his epistles, has been accepted without dispute both now and in ancient times. But the other two are disputed. In regard to the Apocalypse, the opinions of most men are still divided.

Eusebius HE 3.39

‘There were two persons in Asia that bore the same name, and that there were two tombs in Ephesus, each of which, even to the present day is called John’s. It is important to notice this. For it is probable that it was the second that saw the Revelation, which is ascribed by name to John.’

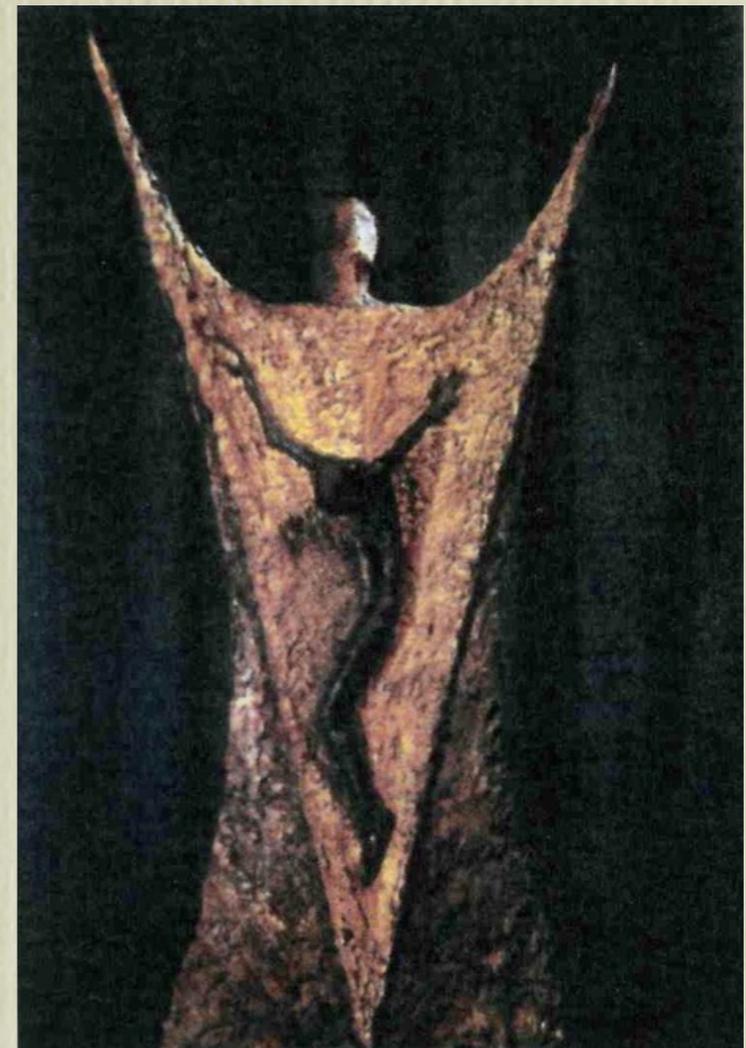
a: Introduction Apocalypse 1:2

his servant, John, who testified to the word of God
and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.

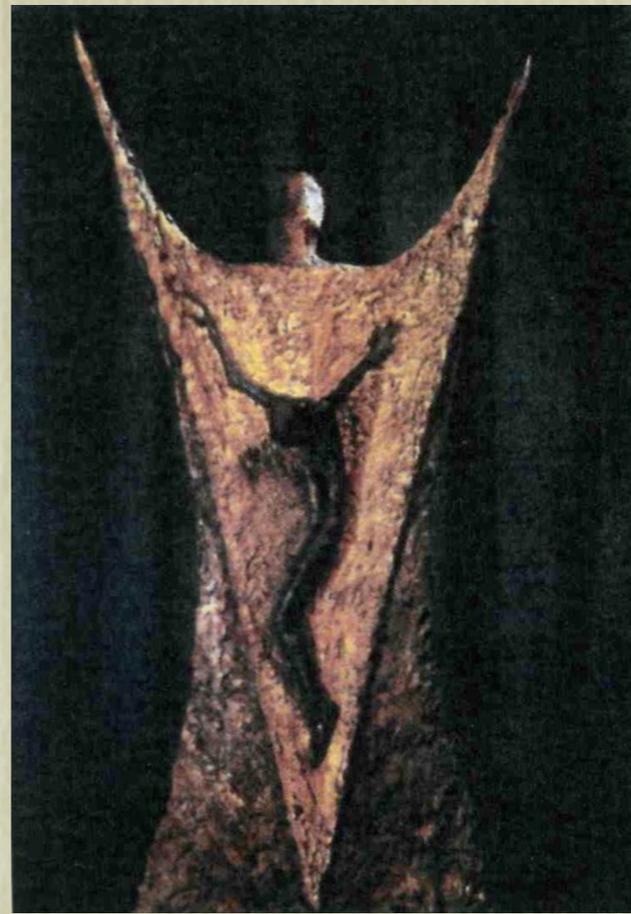
↓
[enlightened in faith]

‘He who comes from above bears witness to what he has seen and heard. He who receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true. For he whom God has sent utters the words of God’(John 3:31-34).

‘For this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth’(Jn 18:37).



God's word, God's self-revelation, was made in Jesus, and completed in the testimony to God which Jesus gave on the cross. In making of his death a self-offering to God in faith and a gift of himself to us in love, Jesus witnessed to the depths of his faith in God's love. The resurrection revealed God to be as Jesus constantly portrayed him.



a: Introduction Apocalypse 1:3

Blessed and happy [Μακάριος; 1st of 7] is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it; for the time is near.

We have an indication here of the proper context in which we are to read this work. It is intended to be read out solemnly by a narrator to the assembled community during the liturgy. We will grasp the literary genre of this work only if we place ourselves among the assembled faithful and listen as the narrator shares the revealed insights which he has been given into their situation.

a: Introduction Apocalypse 1:3

Blessed and happy is the one who reads aloud [at the assembly]
the words of the prophecy

1. John refers to his work as **words of prophecy**. Because of the way the word prophecy is commonly understood, we are not surprised that some people expect to find in the Apocalypse all kinds of predictions concerning the future. These same people tend also to see the predictions as coming true in their own day. This, however, is to distort the true function of prophecy as found in both the Old and New Testaments.

- The prophet ('seer') is primarily concerned with the overarching providence of God which transcends the plain of human decision, but is always present to it, gracing it.

a: Introduction Apocalypse 1:3

Blessed and happy is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it

- Whether or not we will enjoy its blessings depends on whether or not we choose to respond to grace.
- From the perspective of prayer, and in the light of his divinely inspired insight, he wishes to focus their attention beyond the human plane to the transcendent truths that are at the heart of their faith.

When he speaks of his work as being ‘**prophecy**’, he is asserting that he is proclaiming to the assembled community what he has come to see as he has reflected on their present experience in the light of faith. He is concerned with what is happening in Asia Minor, and he is concerned to challenge those Christians who are giving in to the seductive temptation to compromise with the Roman system and enjoy its apparent benefits, and to support those who are trying to be faithful to the way of life they learned from Jesus, even though they are being disadvantaged and even persecuted because of it. He is not communicating mysterious information which could only be discovered by people in the year 1000AD, or 2000AD, or any date in between: information which would have meant nothing to those for whom he was writing.

a: Introduction Apocalypse 1:3

‘The time is near’

Their present is difficult, and their immediate future seems to be without hope. John sees that this is not true. From the perspective of prayer, and in the light of his divinely inspired insight, he wishes to focus their attention beyond the human plane to the transcendent truths that are at the heart of their faith.

They need immediate reassurance, and so he speaks of what must take place ‘soon’(1:1). ‘The time is near’(1:3), because the risen Christ in whom they have placed their trust is always present to them, always coming to them with his supporting grace, inspiring them to persevere and holding out to them the promise of salvation.

b: Liturgical Dialogue 1:4-8

Apocalypse 1:4

John to the **seven churches** that are in Asia.

In the symbolic framework of the Apocalypse, numbers have a qualitative and not a quantitative function. The number **seven** occurs here for the first time. We are familiar with its use in sacred literature in the narrative of the seven days of creation, in the seven-branched candlestick kept in the temple sanctuary, in the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, and, in Christian theology, in the seven sacraments. It is based on the four seven-day phases of the moon and stands for completeness, fullness, perfection. The seven churches will be named shortly: they are representative of all the churches in Asia Minor and indeed of the universal church.



Apocalypse 1:4

{ Presider }

YHWH

in our history

Grace to you and peace

from the One who is [Exodus 3:14] and who was and who is to come,
and from the seven spirits who are before his throne

The ‘**seven spirits**’ refers to the Holy Spirit in whom the fullness of God’s creative power is manifest – the Spirit who will shortly be identified with the Spirit of the glorified Christ.

The ‘**throne**’, here and throughout the Apocalypse, symbolises the stable centre of God’s dynamic influence in history. God’s commands issue from the throne, and it is from the throne that God’s will is carried out, that God reigns.

Apocalypse 1:5

{ Presider }

and from Jesus Christ

the faithful (πιστός, pistos) witness (μάρτυς, martyrs)

the firstborn of the dead,

and the ruler of the kings of the earth (Psalm 2)

The Trinitarian reference is complete

The One who is (1:4)

the sevenfold Spirit (1:4)

Jesus Christ (1:5)



Apocalypse 1:5

{ Presider }

from Jesus Christ the faithful (πιστός, pistos) **witness** (μάρτυς, martyrs)

‘Faithful’ translates the Greek pistos, which, besides the idea of being faithful, encompasses also the notion of believing (Jesus puts his faith in God) and being trustworthy (we can rely on him because he is a faithful mediator of divine revelation).

The Christians of Asia Minor were being accused of being unfaithful to the values that supported the Roman Empire. John is calling them to true fidelity.

Apocalypse 1:5

{ Presider }

and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness
the firstborn of the dead,
and the ruler of the kings of the earth (Psalm 2)

The risen Christ is ‘**the firstborn of the dead**’ – a reference to his resurrection along with an assurance that others will follow him.

He is ‘**the ruler of the kings of the earth**’. The expression ‘kings of the earth’ always has negative connotations in the Apocalypse. It refers to the centres of political power which attempt to determine the lives of others in ways contrary to the will of God as revealed in Christ. From the outset John makes the point that the reign of the risen Christ transcends any power these earthly kings might wield.

Apocalypse 1:5-6

[Assembly]

To him who is loving us and freed us from our sins by his blood and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion unto the ages. Amen.

1. This is a hymn exulting in the love which Christ continues to pour out upon them and how Jesus gave his life to liberate them from all the ways in which they had been under the dominion of sin. This same Jesus is still loving them, and so will assuredly liberate them also from the evils which now oppress them.

‘You shall be for me a priestly kingdom’(Exodus 19:6)

Apocalypse 1:5-6

[Assembly]

To him who is loving us and freed us from our sins by his blood and made us to be a kingdom

2. The kingdom of God is brought about by the redemption effected by the blood of Christ, that is to say, by his pouring out himself in love, culminating in his life-giving on the cross. The assembly recognises that it is in the Christian community that Christ reigns as Lord, and so it renews its commitment to live his life, and to carry on his mission of bringing about God's reign on earth.

Apocalypse 1:5-6

[Assembly]

made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father

3. In continuing Jesus' mission, Christians are continuing his **priesthood**. John gives expression here to one of his central themes. Priesthood is about mediating the sacred. The Old Testament priest carried out his functions in the sanctuary. There he brought God to the people by mediating to them God's word, God's will and God's blessing expressed in the Torah. He brought the people into communion with God by offering to God the sacrifices through which their lives were sanctified. The priest of the imperial cult claimed to mediate the 'blessings' of the Roman way of life to the populace.

PRIEST

SANCTUARY

Presence to God

**Action
towards
US**

**Action
towards
GOD**

WORD

MEDIATION

**SACRI
FICE**

God's Way

US

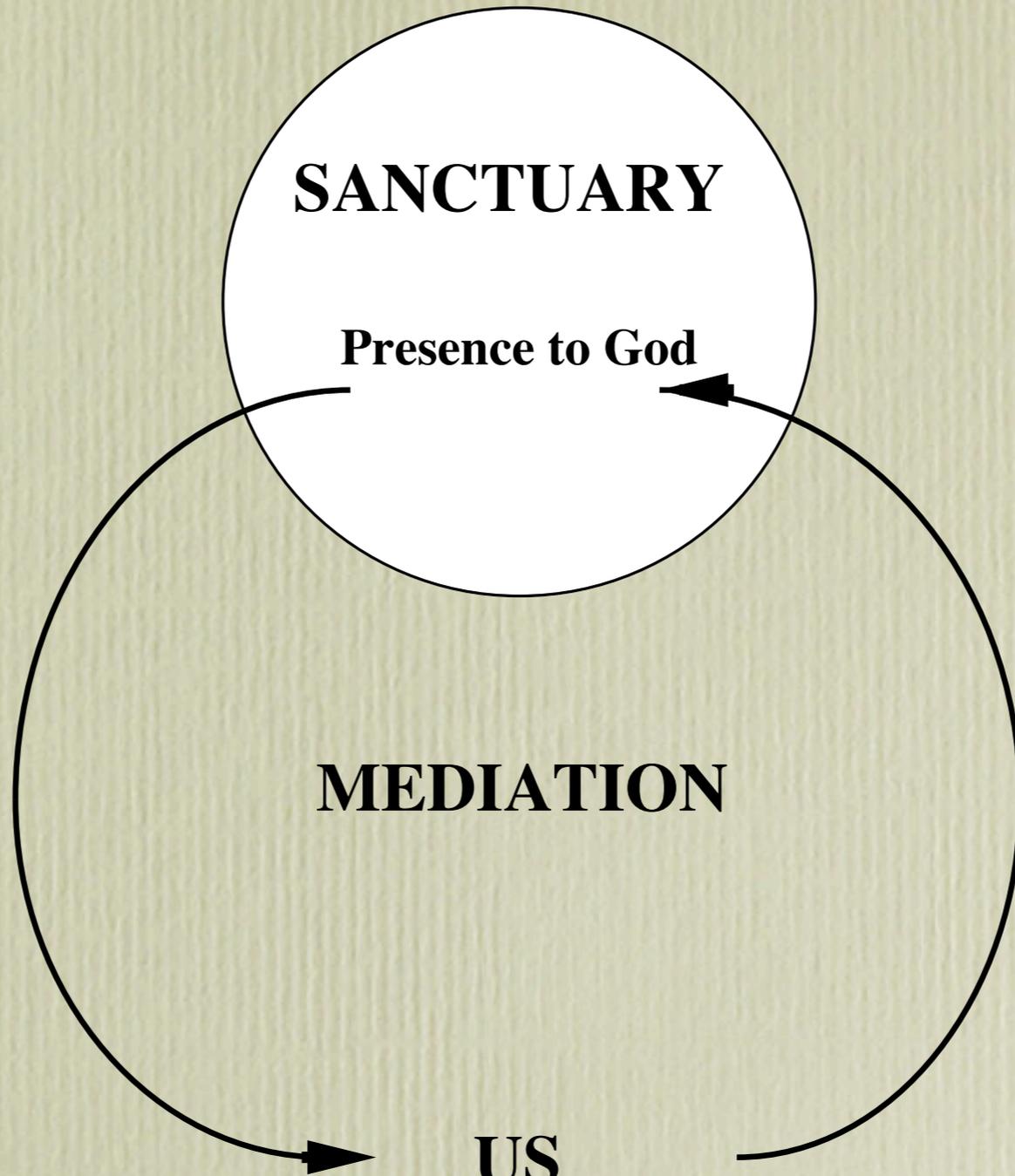
Self-offering

Will

Prayer

Blessing

forgiveness



Apocalypse 1:5-6

[Assembly]

made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father

4. For Christians there is only one priest, one mediator, the exalted Christ. From the sanctuary of heaven, Jesus speaks God's word and draws everyone to himself that we might make of our lives, as he did of his, a self-offering to God. His priesthood fulfils the functions of the Levitical priesthood, and transcends them, for his is the priesthood of the king: a royal priesthood 'according to the order of Melchizedek' (Hebrews 5:10). His priestly role is to mediate the sacred to the whole of creation, bringing about the will of God 'on earth as in heaven' (Matthew 6:10).

Apocalypse 1:5-6

[Assembly]

made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father

5. John reminds his listeners that Christ has chosen to exercise his priestly mediation through them. Christ has chosen to live in us. We are to live our lives in union with him in the presence of God. We are called to mediate God's word, God's will, and God's blessing to the world. We are called to offer prayer and praise to God, to offer ourselves as a spiritual sacrifice and to draw others into communion with God. We are to show that God delights in all that he has made. We are to mediate God's forgiveness, to reconcile the world with God, to draw people to a life of obedient faith in God and of love for each other, and so, throughout all the epochs of time, to effect redemption for humankind.

Apocalypse 1:5-6

[Assembly]

To him who is loving us and freed us from our sins by his blood and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion unto the ages. Amen.

6. We are able to carry out this priestly function thanks to the grace and peace from God given us by Christ through the Spirit. Those who are listening to John's proclamation are suffering discrimination but they are not to be on the defensive. They are to resist the prevailing culture and continue to mediate the love of Christ and so convert their contemporaries to a life of grace.

The assembly concludes its response with the liturgical 'Amen'.

[Presider]

Apocaypse 1:7-8

bringing Transcendent into history



Look! He is coming with the clouds (Daniel 7:13)

every eye will see him, even those who pierced him;
and on his account all tribes of the earth will wail.

‘I will pour out a spirit of compassion and supplication
on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem,
so that, when they look on the one whom they have pierced,
they shall mourn for him’(Zechariah 12:10).

‘They will look upon the one whom they have pierced’(John 19:37).

[Assembly]

Yes. Amen.

Apocalypse 1:8

[Presider concludes]

‘I am the Alpha and the Omega’ says the Lord God,
who is and who was and who is to come,
the *Almighty* (παντοκράτωρ, pantokrator).



c: Prophetic Commission Apocalypse 1:9

I John, your brother, who share with you in Jesus
the persecution and the kingdom and the patient endurance,
was on the island called Patmos
because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

‘They will will hand you over to be
tortured and will put you to death;
and you will be hated by all nations
because of my name’(Matthew 24:9).

‘If they persecuted me, they will
persecute you’(John 15:20).

‘In the world you face persecution.
But take courage, I have
conquered the world’(John 16:33).



c: Prophetic Commission 1:10-11 (see Daniel 10:2,5)

I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day
and I heard behind me [unexpected] a loud [powerful] voice [intelligible]
like a trumpet saying,
“Write in a book [fixed, dependable]
what you see [insight in the Spirit]

The word ‘**Lord’s**’ (Greek κυριακή, kyriake) occurs only twice in the New Testament: here, and when Paul speaks of ‘the Lord’s supper’ (1 Corinthians 11:20). John is referring to ‘the first day of the week’, the day on which the Christians assembled to celebrate the resurrection of Christ through a communal sharing of the Eucharist.

Apocalypse 1:11

and send it to the 7 churches,
to Ephesus,
to Smyrna,
to Pergamum,
to Thyatira,
to Sardis,
to Philadelphia,
and to Laodicea”.



clockwise along Roman ring road.