

The Apocalypse, in keeping with the apocalyptic tradition, has a penchant for symbolic representation of persons and events. It also abounds in allusions.

The Apocalypse is the 'revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants... and he made it known by sending an angel to his servant John (1:1). The term, 'servant', as we have seen, is used for great OT personages, to Abraham, Moses, Jacob, Caleb and Joshua, David, Elijah, Isaiah, Job, and the prophets; in the NT, it is applied to the apostles, and all those who believe in Christ. Thus its use here alludes to the continuity of Judaism in Christianity, and at the same time the authority and position of the seer as well as the believers being equal in dignity to these great persons. It also means that all great people are servants of God. It is from this text that the Papal official address formula, 'servant of the servants of God', originates.

John writes to the 'seven churches that are in Asia' (1:4). The number 7, in the Bible signifies considerable measure, fullness or perfection (Gn 4:15; Prv 24:16; Mt 18:21; Mk 16:9; Lev 4:4,17; 8:11; 14:7; Num 19:4; 2 Kgs 5:10; Num 28:11; Ez 45:23; Jb 42:8; 2 Chr 29:21; Tob 12:15; Zech 3:9; Dan 9:2,24). Hence, 'seven churches' would mean the universal Christian community. The number 7 appears 54 times in The Apocalypse. There are seven churches (1:4); seven spirits (1:4, 3:1); seven candlesticks (1:12); seven stars (1:16); seven lamps (4:5); seven seals (5:1); a Lamb with seven horns and seven eyes (5:6); seven angels standing before God, who were given seven trumpets (8:2); seven thunders (10:3); seven angels with seven plagues (15:1,6,8); seven golden bowls (15:7); the beast with seven heads (17:3,7,); seven mountains corresponding to seven heads (17:9), and so on. John sends greetings to the churches from 'him who is and who was and who is to come (1:4); the Lord God identifies himself as the Alpha and Omega (1:8 also in 21:6). Alpha and Omega are the first and the last letters of the Greek alphabet. So

the phrase, 'alpha to omega' indicates the beginning and the end, completeness. The Jews expressed it as 'aleph to tau', the first and the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet. We, too, use the expression 'A to Z', to indicate entirety. 'Alpha and Omega' suggests, therefore, that God is eternal and perfect; He is the source of all that is and the last resort of all the living. God revealed Himself to Moses as 'I AM WHO I AM' (Ex 3:14). The Greeks spoke of Zeus who was Zeus who is, and Zeus who will be. The Orphic worshippers said: 'Zeus is the first, and Zeus is the last; Zeus is the head and Zeus is the middle; and from Zeus all things come.' The title is given to the risen Christ elsewhere (22:13). Thus, through the imagery of Alpha and Omega, John wants to show the divine nature of risen Christ. By projecting himself as 'brother and partner' of his fellowmen 'in tribulation, in the kingdom, and in that steadfast endurance' (1:9), John alludes to the passion and death of Christ himself before his glorification, thus driving home the point that all those who suffer for their faith in Christ will also be glorified. 'A loud voice like a trumpet' (1:10) alludes to a theophany (Ex 19:16-19). It also alludes to the eschatological time (Mt 24:31; 1 Thes 4:16). The expression 'son of man' is an allusion to Jesus Christ (Mk 8:31; Mt 8:20; Lk 6:5). The imagery of the 'seven golden lampstands' (1:12) drawn from the OT sources (Ex 25:31-37; 1 Kgs 7:49; Zech 4:2) is an allusion to God's presence among his people and the essential unity of the Jewish and Christian faith. The picture of 'a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden girdle round his breast' (1:13) is composed from the attire of the High Priest (Ex 28:4; 29:5; Lev 16:4), of the royalty (1 Sam 18:24; 24:5,12; Ez 26:16), of the divine messenger (Dan 10:5) alludes to the status of Jesus: he is the supreme mediator, majestic king, and God's messenger par excellence. The description of the head and hair of the risen Christ as 'white, as white wool, white as snow' (1:14), taken from the description of 'the ancient of days' in Daniel (Dan 7:9), is a symbol of Jesus' eternal existence and unmatched purity. From his 'mouth issued a sharp 'two-edged sword' (1:16). We come across this expression in the message to Pergamum, too (2:12,16). It symbolises the power of his word and the finality of his judgement (Is 49:2; Prov 5:4; Wis 18:60). Under the Roman government, there were two categories of Roman governors: those who had the right of the sword and those that had not. The

former had the power of life and death, i.e., on their order a man could have been executed on the spot. But the sword that Christ has is double-edged, that is, more powerful than that of the governor who persecuted the Christians, and therefore, they had nothing to fear from him. He had the 'keys of Death and Hades' (1:18). This is an allegory of the ultimate defeat of the evil powers and the establishment of the sovereign rule of Christ. In his 'right hand he held seven stars.' The stars here symbolise the seven churches to which the message is addressed. Holding the churches in the hand is an allegory for full control over as well as complete protection to the churches. God had used such an imagery to express His care for Israel (Is 50:15-16).

Ephesus comes first in the list of seven churches addressed in the Apocalypse. It was because it had a preeminent position in the time of John. It was the greatest harbour in Asia. All the roads of the Cayster Valley converged upon it. Ephesus was the meeting point of the roads from Euphrates and Mesopotamia via Colossae and Laodicea, the road from Galatia through Sardis, and the road from the southern rich Maeander Valley, and was the gateway to the Mediterranean. It was the highway to Rome for all the travellers and merchants from the above places. It made it the wealthiest and the greatest city in Asia. The Church of Ephesus is given a warning: I will move your lampstand from its place (2:5). The allegory of the lampstand suggests that Ephesus had a prominent position among the Churches, too, and in the event of their failure to remain faithful to Christ they would lose their place of importance in the hierarchy. 'Nicolaitans' (2:6,15) are the followers of Nicolaus. Nicolaus is made up of two Greek words, 'nikan' meaning 'to conquer' and 'laos' meaning people. They are closely connected with those who hold the teaching of Balaam mentioned in the letter to Pergamum. Balaam is derived from two Hebrew words, 'bela' meaning 'to conquer' and 'ha'am' meaning 'people'. 'Nicholaitans', therefore, serves as an allegory for 'conquerors of people' viz., those misleading them with their false teaching. Those who will not go astray will be granted 'to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God' (2:7). It is an allusion to the tree of life in the Garden of Eden the access to which was prohibited (Gen 2:8-9; 3:22-24). The Jews

believed that in the new age the Messiah would restore the tree of life and those who had been faithful would freely eat its fruit. Thus, the tree of life allegorically describes eternal life.

The church of Smyrna comes second on John's list. The message to the church in Smyrna is termed as the words of him 'who died and came to life' (2:8). It is an allusion to the history of Smyrna, which was said to be the loveliest of all Asian cities, a Greek colony founded about 1000 BC. It was situated at the end of the road to the Far East via Lydia and Phrygia, and commanded the trade of the rich Hermus valley. Built at the end of the long arm of the sea, it was the most convenient and the safest of all harbours. Its setting was equally beautiful. Beginning at the harbour, it extended across the narrow foothill and behind the city there rose the Pagos, a hill covered with magnificent temples and splendid buildings. This flourishing city was destroyed by the Lydians c 600 BC. For almost four centuries it was in ruins until about 200 BC when Lysimachus had rebuilt it as a planned city with great, broad, straight streets. The Christians in Smyrna, therefore, would clearly understand that the opening statement of Christ alluded to their own history. By 'your poverty' (2:9) the author may be alluding to the refugee status of the Christians in Smyrna. They were probably the immigrants from Galilee or Judea uprooted by the Jewish war (66-74 AD). A T Kraabel mentions a 2nd century inscription from Smyrna which refers to a group called 'the former Judeans'.¹ The Roman authorities who persecute Christians are referred to as 'devil'; the persecution is going to last 'for ten days,' i.e., a brief period, and the faithful would be given 'the crown of life' (2:10). A crown was presented in recognition of some meritorious work. It was presented to a victorious athlete, and to a magistrate, at the end of his term, for diligent and faithful performance of his duties; it was worn at banquets as a sign of festal joy; at times, the Greeks wore crowns when they approached the temple of their gods. Thus, through the imagery of the crown, John wants to allude to the victory of the faithful, their joy, and their proximity to God. The victorious 'shall not be hurt by the second death' (2:11). The 'second death' is a phrase which occurs nowhere in the NT except the Apocalypse. It comes again, thrice (20:6,14; 21:8). The Sadducees held that after death there was absolutely nothing

(Eccles 9:4-5); the wise and the fool would meet the same end (Eccles 2:15-16; 9:2). The Epicureans, too, shared this belief. But many of the Jews and the early Christians could not accept this. Yet they knew that death befell all. So, they believed that there were two deaths - physical and the spiritual. The first, every one invariably undergoes, the second one, those found unfaithful at the judgement of God. Hence, the 'second death' is clearly an allusion to the eternal damnation, the death of the soul (Mt 10:28; 1 Enoch 108:3-4) as contradistinguished from bodily death at the hands of the persecutors.

The third letter is to the church of Pergamum. The 'sharp two-edged sword' (2:12) and the 'sword of my mouth (2:16) allude, as we have seen, to the efficacy and authority of the word of God. Pergamum is the throne of Satan (2:13). Scholars give different interpretations of this allegory: the temple of Zeus, the temple of Roma and Augustus, the shrine of Asclepius, and the seat of the Roman governor. Pergamum was not on par with Ephesus and Smyrna as a great commercial centre but it was one of the greatest religious centres of the ancient world. About 240 BC, in memory of the victory against the invading savage Gauls, a forty feet high magnificent altar was erected to Zeus in front of the temple of Athene which stood eight hundred feet up on the conical hill of Pergamum. Standing on the projecting ledge of the rock it look exactly like a great throne. Whole day smoke went up from it from the sacrifices offered to Zeus. Pergamum was also famous for the worship of Asclepius, the god of healing. From all over the world people flocked to his temples for healing. Charles calls it the 'Lourdes of the ancient world.' Pergamum was the administrative centre of the province of Asia. Therefore, it was the centre of Caesar worship for the entire province. It was the first to erect a temple to the godhead of Caesar, as early as 29 BC. That meant that the Christians in Pergamum lived under constant danger of death. This was the place where a Christian had to choose between Caesar and Christ; call Caesar the Lord instead of Christ under penalty of death. Antipas was executed for refusing to participate in Caesar worship (2:13). For a Christian there could not be anything more satanical than giving the title and worship due to Jesus to Caesar, or any one else for that matter. Hence, we can conclude that 'Satan's throne' is an allusion to the

seat of the Roman governor. The stumbling block of Balaam and Balak (2:14) is an allusion to the Israelites' sin of intermarrying with the Moabites and worshipping their gods under the influence of the persons of the same name (Num 25:1-2; 31:16). Sexual immorality is a metaphor for idolatry (14:8; 17:2,4; 18:3,9; 19:2). The conqueror is promised 'some of the hidden manna' (2:17). 'Manna' is the miraculous food provided by Yahweh to the Israelites during their sojourn in the desert (Ex 16:11:15; Num 7:7-9). In memory of this, a pot of the manna was kept in the ark and was placed in the Holy of Holies in the Jerusalem Temple. The rabbis had a legend that when Jerusalem fell in 587 BC and the Temple was destroyed, Jeremiah had hidden the pot of manna away on mount Sinai, and that, when the Messiah came, Jeremiah would return and the pot would be recovered. According to the Jewish apocalyptic tradition the heavenly manna would descend upon the earth in the Messianic age (2 Apo Bar 29:8). Thus, eating of the hidden manna, is an allegory to the receiving of the blessings of the Messianic age. Further, the manna was called 'the heavenly food, 'the bread of angels' (Ex 16:15; Ps 78:24,25). In this sense, giving manna would be an allegory of sharing in the heavenly banquet. Also, Jesus had declared that he was the bread of life and that whoever would come to him would never hunger and whoever believed in him would never thirst (Jn 6:32:35). Hence, a share in the hidden manna would mean fellowship with Jesus himself. The 'white stone' with a 'new name' which 'no one knows except the one who receives it' may be an allusion to the current magical practices, especially the custom of wearing an amulet or charm with the belief that the god whose name was inscribed upon it would aid the bearer in times of difficulty.²

Christ has a complaint against the church of Thyatira, they 'tolerate the woman Jezebel... (2:18-20). Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, king of Sidon, was the wife of Ahab, king of Israel (1 Kgs 16:31). She brought her own gods with her and induced Ahab and his people to worship Baal. She killed the prophets of the God of Israel (1 Kgs 18:13) and supported four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal (1 Kgs 18:19). She was the cause of 'the harlotries and the sorceries' in Israel (2 Kgs 9:22). Jezebel, therefore, in the Apocalypse is an allegory for seduction. Her teaching (2:20) is an allusion to leading people astray by

advocating practices untenable with Christian principles, seriously compromising their faith. In the Bible, 'immorality' and 'adultery' are often allegories for infidelity to God (Ex 34:15,16; Deut 31:16; Ps 73:27; Hos 9:1; Mt 13:39; 16:4; Mk 8:38). By 'deep things of Satan' (2:24), the author may be alluding to 1 Enoch ch 8 where the author describes the knowledge imparted to people by the fallen angels. It may also be an allusion to the teaching that a Christian need not insist on strict ethical and moral standards but accommodate himself to the world, and that there was nothing wrong in taking part in social or business practices. The promise to conquerors of 'power over the nations' to 'rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces' recalls the imagery of one of the psalms:

Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage,
and the ends of the earth your possession.

You shall break them with a rod of iron,
and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. (Ps 2:8-9)

The granting of the authority to the Christians who remain faithful till the end over others is to impress upon them that they should keep aloof. The 'morning star' is promised to those who persevere till the end (2:28). The imagery may be an allegory for resurrection; just as the morning star rises after the night, a Christian will rise after the death. The morning star is also called Lucifer, lightbearer. In this connection, giving of the morning star would suggest complete power over evil and devil. It is also possible that the author of the Apocalypse had Dan 12:3 at the back of his mind while using this imagery:

And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever

in which case 'morning star' would serve as an allegory for the glory of the faithful.

The Message to the church of Sardis records, 'you have the name of being alive, and you are dead' (3:1). 'Death' is an allegory for sin. When the Prodigal Son returned, his father says, '... for this my son was dead, and is alive again...' (Lk 15:24). According to Paul faith in Christ frees one from his sins and makes him

righteous which is a passage from death to life (Rom 6:13; Eph 2:1,5), and one who is 'self-indulgent is dead even when she lives' (1 Tim 5:6). The statement is an allusion to the very history of Sardis, as we shall see. The key word is 'awake' (3:2). About seven hundred years before John wrote the letter to Sardis, Sardis, the capital of king Lydia's empire, was one of the greatest cities in the world. Its wealth was legendary. Its geographical location made it literally impregnable. The Hermus Valley is bounded on the north by the long Tmolus ridge from which a series of hills go out like spurs, each of them forming a narrow plateau. On one such plateau, about fifteen hundred feet high, stood the city of Sardis. The sides of the ridge were smooth and precipitous. Croesus was the greatest of the Sardian kings. He embarked upon a war with Cyrus of Persia, which turned out to be disastrous. His army was routed. Croesus beat a hasty retreat and took shelter in the safe citadel of Sardis. Cyrus besieged Sardis but could not enter the city. So, he announced a reward to anyone who would find an entry into Sardis. One of his soldiers named Hyeroeades discovered a fault in the rock and led an attack party. They found that all the battlements were completely unguarded. Sardians had thought themselves too safe to warrant any guard. So, Sardis fell. Cyrus made sure that there would be no attempts at rebellion. He forbade Sardians to possess any weapon and ordered them to teach their sons music, dance, and the art of playing lyre. Sardis lost its importance for almost two centuries under the Persian rule. In time it became a part of the Greek empire. After the death of Alexander, there were many claimants for power. Antiochus became the ruler of Sardis but he had to contend with Achaeus who had sought refuge in the impregnable city. Antiochus laid a siege for a year but in vein. Then one of his soldiers, Lagoras, repeated the feat of Hyeroeades. Sardis had not learnt its lesson. It fell because it was not awake, not watchful. In due course Sardis recovered. Then came the Romans. It became a Roman assize town. In 17 AD, it was devastated by an earthquake. When John wrote the letter to Sardis, the city was wealthy, but degenerate. The once great citadel was in ruins, the once great Sardians were slack and listless. They had lost their city twice because they were too lazy to be awake and on guard. Thus, by alluding to the history of the city, John wants the Christians there to realise what laziness, want of watchfulness can cost, and, therefore, be on

their guard. If they are not watchful, they will not be prepared for the attack of the devil. To 'come like a thief' (3:3) is an allegory for sudden unexpected arrival, happening. The few who had been watchful, had not soiled their garments and they would walk with Christ in white (3:4). 'Soiled garments' is an allegory for sinfulness. It should be understood with reference to white garments symbolising the victory and the glory of the faithful. The privilege to walk with Christ may be an allusion to Enoch walking with God and being taken into heaven (Gen 5:22,24); the imagery may also have a Persian background. In Persian court the king's most trusted ones were given the privilege to walk with the king in the royal garden, in which case the expression would mean fellowship with Christ. The names of the faithful would not be wiped out from the book of life (3:5). The 'book of life' motif occurs often in the Bible (Gen 32:32,33; Ps 69:28; Phil 4:3; Ap 20:15; 21:27). In the ancient world, kings kept registers of their subjects. The names of those who committed crimes against the state, or died would be struck off the register, which meant that they lost their citizenship and the corresponding rights. Hence, the names not being wiped out from the book of life is an allegory for citizenship of heavenly kingdom and eternal life.

The next letter is addressed to the church of Philadelphia. The message to the church of Philadelphia is the words of him 'who has the key of David, who opens and no one shall shut, who shuts and no one opens' (3:7). The allusion here is clearly to the prophecy of Isaiah where the prophet foretells the rejection of Shebna in favour of Eliakim as the king's steward (Is 22:22). John uses this prophecy to refer to the risen Christ as the sole mediator between God and man. The message says, 'I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut' (3:8). In the NT, the 'open door', is an allegory for missionary activity, spreading of the good news of Christ. Referring to an opportunity to preach Christ, Paul says, 'But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, for a wide door for effective work has opened to me (1Cor 16:9); in his second letter to the Corinthians he writes, 'When I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, a door was opened to me in the Lord' (2 Cor 2:12); he asks the Colossians, 'and pray for us also, that God may open to us a door for the word' (Col 4:3); in Antioch he tells the gathering how God 'had opened a

door of faith to the Gentiles' (Acts 14:27). As in the previous cases, the allegory is based on the history of the city itself. Philadelphia was founded by colonists from Pergamum during the reign of Attalus II (BC 159-138). Attalus loved his brother, Eumenes, so much that he was called Philadelphos, i.e., one who loves his brother. The city bordered on Mysia, Lydia, and Phrygia. It was so founded with the express purpose of spreading Greek language and culture to Lydia and Phrygia, and it succeeded remarkably well. The Jews who hate and slander the Christians would be made to 'come and bow down' before the Christians (3:9). We have seen how the Jews expected God to vindicate them in the Messianic age by making all nations to pay homage to them (Is 45:14; 49:23; 60:14; Zech 8:22-23). Now Christ promises his faithful that all nations including the Jews, who are instrumental in causing suffering to them would be subjected to them. The Christians in Philadelphia are exhorted, 'hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown' (3:11). The allusion here is to losing one's position due to unworthiness: Esau lost his place to Jacob (Gen 25:34; 27:36); Reuben, to Judah (Gen 49:4,8); Saul, to David (1 Sam 16:1,13); Shebna, to Eliakim (Is 22:15-25); Joab and Abiathar, to Benaiah and Zadok (1 Kgs 2:25); Judas, to Matthias (Acts 1:25-26); the Jews, to Gentiles (Rom 11:11). Christ also promises to make those who conquer the pillars of the temple, the New Jerusalem (3:12). The High Priest played a mediatory role in the earthly temple. But the heavenly temple will be built of the faithful. Thus the 'pillar in the temple' suggests not only the prime place (Gal 2:9) but also the direct personal relationship with God. The words, 'never shall he go out of it,' suggests eternal bliss. It is also an allegory for total security by allusion to the city of Philadelphia itself. Subsequent to the earthquake of AD 17, which destroyed Sardis and many other cities, there were constant tremors felt in Philadelphia and people had to flee into the open country to escape from the collapsing buildings; they lived under constant threat of being buried alive under the debris. So, the Philadelphians knew very well what is meant by not having to go out of the city every now and then: total security.

The last letter is addressed to the church of Laodicea. There were at least six cities known by that name in

the ancient world. The Laodicea of the Apocalypse was called Laodicea on the Lycus to distinguish it from the rest. It was founded c 250 BC by Antiochus of Syria and named after his wife. Laodicea was one of the greatest commercial and strategic cities of the ancient world. Three major routes passed through it: the road from Ephesus to Syria; from Pergamum and the Hermus valley to Pisidia and Pamphylia to the coast of Perga; from eastern Caria to central and west Phrygia. It gloried as a great centre for banking and finance, manufacture of cloth, and medical care. The message to the church of Laodicea is 'the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation' (3:14). The word, 'Amen' coming at the end of a solemn statement emphasised the truth and reliability of that statement. Therefore, the title, 'Amen' is an affirmation of the truthfulness and certainty of Jesus' words. The one who is an eyewitness to an incident and is honest and truthful in describing it is a faithful and true witness (Jn 21:24). Hence, this title implies that Jesus can reveal the divine secrets because he came from God (Jn 1:18,34). The last title alludes to the preexistence of Jesus: according to the Nicene Creed Jesus is 'the Son of God, the Only-begotten, begotten of the Father before all the ages... through him all things were made.'¹³

The message to Laodicea is the severest: Christ finds nothing praiseworthy among the Christians there. They are 'neither cold nor hot' (3:15). This is an allegory to their attitude of indifference for Jesus wants his followers to be the light of the world (Mt 5:14, Mk 4:21; Lk 8:16; 11:33; Eph 5:8; Phil 2:15; Jn 8:12) and the salt of the earth (Mt 5:12; Mk 9:50; Lk 14:34-35). It is also an allegory for neutrality (Mt 6:24; Lk 16:13). Laodicea thinks, 'I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing,' not knowing that it was 'wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked' (2:17). This description alludes to the general situation of Laodicea. It was a wealthy city, so wealthy that when it was devastated by an earthquake in 61 AD, it refused outside help to rebuild it. The people thought that they were so rich that they were not in need of anything. But they were spiritually bankrupt. They dressed in good clothes, their woollen clothes were famous all over the world. But their life was shameful in the sense that their riches made them slack in

their faith. 'Nakedness' is a metaphor for humiliation or shame (2 Sam 10:4; Is 20:4; Ez 16:37-39; 23:26-29; Nah 3:5). Therefore, the Christians of Laodicea are counselled to buy 'gold refined by fire' and 'white garments' (3:18) implying that they should bear testimony to their faith amidst tribulations and persecutions and as a reward for this testimony earn their victory. Genuine faith likened to gold tested by fire is also a picture used by Peter (1 Pet 1:7). Laodicea was also famous for its eye-salve, which was exported all over the world as a sure remedy for many eye diseases. But this salve did not help them to open their eyes to their own spiritual poverty and nakedness. So, Jesus exhorts them to buy the salve from him which will cure them of their blindness. Christ reproves and chastens all those whom he loves (3:19). The statement is an adaptation of Proverbs 3:12. Reproving and chastening is a recurring theme in the Bible (Prov 13:24; 23:13-14; 27:6; 29:15,17; Sir 30:1; Ps 94:12; Job 5:17; 1 Cor 11:32; Heb 11:7-8). It is an allegory for corrective action leading to mending of ways and being saved. The imagery of standing at the door and knocking (3:20) suggests that Christ is nearby and implies the need of being ready on the part of the persons to receive him without delay. We find similar allegorical descriptions in other books of the NT, too (Lk 12:36; Mk 13:29; Mt 24:33). It may also be an allegory to the yearning of a lover: Christ yearning for the love of his faithful. It is quite possible that John drew this picture of a lover knocking at the door from the Song of Songs (5:2-6). Dining with those who open the door is symbolic of a close fellowship between the Lord and his followers. Those who remain faithful till the end will sit with Christ on his throne (3:21). Christ conquered sin and death and God made him sit on his right giving him all authority. So, sitting on his throne is a symbol of sharing in the power of God and Christ over the new creation as referred to in 2:26-27; 5:10 and 22:5.

The vision of the heavenly court (4:1-11) has close links with the visions in Isaiah (6:1-4) and Ezekiel (ch 1). It is also analogous to the visions in 1 Enoch (14:8-25; 71:5-14), 2 Enoch (chs 20-21) and the Apocalypse of Abraham (ch 18). John sees 'in heaven an open door' (4:1). An open door signifies unrestricted access. Here it is an allegory of revelation of the heavenly secrets. The seers often use the

expression in describing a vision of the heavenly beings or surroundings: Jacob has a vision of heaven and exclaims, "This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven" (Gen 28:17); During his tour of the heavens, Baruch passes through 'very large doors' of the first heaven (3 Bar 2:2), 'a door similar to the first' in the second heaven (3 Bar 3:1) and sees a closed gate in the fifth heaven (3 Bar 11:1); God opens 'heaven's gates' and sends two angels to save the Jews from being trampled by the elephants of Ptolemy (3 Mac 6:18). The seer beholds a throne and one seated on it (4:2). God seated on his throne is a common OT picture (1 Kgs 19:22; Ps 47:8; Is 6:1). It is a symbol of the majesty and power of God. The one seated on the throne 'appeared like jasper and carnelian, and round the throne was a rainbow that looked like an emerald' (4:3). The three precious stones mentioned here were part of the rich dress of the king (Ez 28:13); they were among the precious stones that adorned the breast plate of the High Priest (Ex 28:17). Thus, they symbolise the elevated rank of the person wearing them. According to Charles, the rainbow surrounding the throne (4:3) is an allusion to the divine nature of the one who is seated on the throne.⁴ But the allusion to the rainbow of Genesis signifying God's everlasting covenant with his creatures (9:8-17) cannot be overlooked. John says, 'Round the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders...' (4:4). In the Apocalypse, the twenty-four elders are mentioned frequently. They perform various actions: (4:4; 14:3; 4:10; 5:11,14; 7:11; 11:16; 14:3; 19:4; 5:5; 7:13). D.E. Aune opines that the vision of the twenty-four elders seated on the thrones may have been influenced by the practice in the Roman court. When the emperor heard the legal cases orally, he was seated and was surrounded by senators, men of consular rank, friends and advisors.⁵ While this may be so, we must bear in mind that John may have derived this picture from many other sources. In the OT we come across the picture of God's council (1 Kgs 19:22; Job 1:6; 2:1; Is 24:23); and so also in the Jewish apocalypses, but there, God is depicted as seated but all heavenly beings remain standing (3 Enoch ch 16). In Babylonian astrology, 24 stars, 12 to the north and 12 to the south of the zodiac, were called "judges of the All". Accordingly, the imagery may point out to cosmic order and governance. But it is also possible that John made use of the OT organisation of the priests into twenty-four divisions for offering

offering sacrifice in the Temple (1 Chr 24:7-18).

The Levites, too, were divided into twenty-four groups. Their work was to play the musical instruments (lyre, harp and cymbals) and sing psalms during the worship. In Ap 5:8 the elders are presented as performing both these duties: the priestly work of presenting the prayers of the faithful to God, and playing the harp and singing a song. Lastly, the twenty four elders may be the twelve patriarchs and the twelve apostles, as seen in the vision of the new city of Jerusalem. The 'flashes of lightning, and voices and peals of thunder' (4:5) are associated with a theophany, they are the manifestations of divine presence. And before the throne, there was something resembling 'a sea of glass, like crystal' (4:6). This picture may be drawn from the Biblical conception of the universe. The Jews thought that beneath the firmament lies the earth and above it, the heaven. In the creation story the waters above and below the firmament are mentioned (Gen 1:6-10). Psalms also echo this belief (Ps 104:3; 148:4). Even the sight of the Aegean Sea reflecting the sun rays on a hot summer day could have influenced this imagery. John may have also used the popular conception of the palace of Solomon. There is in the Koran a mention of a floor of glass in the palace of Solomon, which was exactly like a sea so that when the queen of Sheba came to visit him she picked up her skirts thinking that she had to wade through water. The imagery of the 'four living creatures' (4:6) is influenced by Ezekiel (ch 1) and Isaiah (ch 6). The Apocalypse of Abraham also speaks of 'four fiery living creatures' (Ap Ab 18:3-5). The creatures depicted by John symbolise the best in nature, the lion symbolising the noblest, the ox, the strongest, the man, the wisest, and the eagle, the swiftest. There is another interesting allegorical interpretation of the four creatures. Irenaeus (c AD 140-202) identified them with the four aspects of Jesus' ministry enunciated in the four Gospels. The Gospel of John is symbolised by the lion because he presents the effective and powerful working of the Son of God, his leadership and his royal power; the Gospel of Luke, by the calf because he stresses the priestly side of Jesus' work; the Gospel of Matthew, by the man because he begins with the genealogy of Jesus and depicts his humanity; the Gospel of Mark, by the eagle because he begins with the Spirit of

prophecy and emphasizes the prophetic work of Jesus. The creatures and the twenty four elders praising God symbolise the universal praise rendered to him. The triple 'holy' is derived from the vision of Isaiah (6:3). John's description of 'the twenty-four elders' who 'fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him' (4:10) is an allusion to the Persian court ritual which became a part of the ceremony of ruler cult in Hellenistic kingdoms and eventually of the Roman imperial cult.⁶ This gesture is a symbol of total submission.

John sees 'a scroll, written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals' (5:1). Scrolls or books are often the means of knowing divine mysteries. In this context the scroll is akin to the book of destiny containing the eschatological secrets. Daniel is shown 'the book of truth' (Dan 10:21) while Enoch, 'the tablet of heaven' (1 Enoch 81:1). The seven seals symbolise the highly obscure and profoundly mysterious nature of the details to be revealed. Also, under the Roman law seven witnesses were required for a will to be valid. They sealed it with their seals and the will could be opened only in the presence of all the seven witnesses or their legal representatives. John was aware of this legal procedure and it is quite possible that he wanted to present the scroll as the will of God depicting the ultimate destiny of man and the universe. One of the elders tells John that 'the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David' can open the scroll. Both are messianic titles, the first occurs in Genesis (Gen 49:9-10) and the second, in Isaiah (Is 11:1,10). They allude to Christ. He 'has conquered'. Here the expression points out to Jesus' death and resurrection by which he has won a final victory over sin and death. Jesus is referred to as the Lamb of God. The symbol is derived from Isaiah (ch 53) and Exodus (ch 12). The Lamb was 'standing, as though it had been slain' (5:6), which is an allusion to the sacrificial death of Jesus. It had 'seven horns' symbolising fulness of power. The symbol of horned sheep or ram is found in other apocalyptic writings, too. Daniel speaks of a horned he-goat (8:8,20-21); Enoch describes the Maccabees who took up arms to liberate the Jews from the Hellenistic domination as horned lambs (1 Enoch 90:9-12). The symbol of ram is also used for Judges in Enoch (1 Enoch 89:42ff). We find the symbol of horns in the OT used to describe might

(Deut 33:17; 1 Kgs 22:11; Ps 75:4; Zech 1:18). Horns stand for honour, too (1 Sam 2:1; Ps 89:17; 112:9; 148:14). The Lamb also has seven eyes, i.e., omniscient. Thus the picture is complete: Christ is the fulfilment of the hopes of Israel; through his death and resurrection he has saved all men from the power of the Satan; he is mighty, and none can conquer him; he is all-knowing, and no one can escape his scrutiny. The acclamations and the act of worship by every creature (5:11-14) is, according to Aune, derived from the Roman imperial cult.⁷ We should note here that in the OT there was a belief that there was no scope for the dead to praise God (Ps 6:5; 30:9; 88:10-12; Is 38; 18) but John has not excluded any one, even the dead, from the reign of Christ. This universal worship brings to our mind Psalm 148 and The Song of the Three Children in the apocryphal section of the book of Daniel.

Chapter six concerns the visions of the seals. The Jews believed, as we have seen, in the dual age: the present is totally evil, and beyond repair; the coming, the golden age, an age filled with justice, righteousness, peace, and prosperity. In between, there would come a time of terror and judgment and it is this, the terrible signs and catastrophic events preceding the end, that John sees in his vision. The first four seals depict war and famine symbolically. The 'white horse' is associated with victory in war. The general on a victory march often rode a white horse. The horseman held 'a bow'. In the OT, bow was a symbol of military power (Jer 51:56; Hos 1:5; Ps 46:9). The bow was the characteristic weapon of the Parthian army. Parthia was the successor of Persia and the greatest rival of Rome in the East. In fact, a Roman army had surrendered to Vologeses, the Parthian king in AD 62. The Jews looked to Parthia as their potential liberator from the Roman dominion. In the light of ch 17, this vision may be considered as an allegorical depiction of Parthian invasion of Rome. The white horse was followed by a bright red one, and 'its rider was permitted to take peace away from the earth, so that men should slay one another' (6:4). The Jewish apocalyptic literature, as we have seen, had envisaged a total disintegration of human relationships, characterised by strife and discord. Added to this John must have had the historical facts before him, too. In the last century before Christ in Palestine alone more than 1,00,000 men had died in

abortive rebellions. The Romans had crushed the British revolt under queen Boadicea in 61 AD. Boadicea is said to have committed suicide and about 1,50,000 men had perished in that campaign. The red horse of bloody rebellion and revolutions was let loose, indeed. The black colour represents darkness, and is associated with 'sheol' the place of the dead according to the Jewish belief. The 'black horse' (6:5), therefore, is a symbol of death. Its rider 'had a balance in his hand.' The balance in the hand is an allegory for severe scarcity (Lev 26:26; Ez 4:16). John hears one of the four creatures saying, 'A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; but do not harm oil and wine' (6:6). Corn, wine, and the oil were the three main crops of Palestine (Duet 7:13; 11:14; 28:51; Ho 2:8,22). The words indicate that there was an acute scarcity of corn while the other two were not affected. Such a situation was not unheard of in Palestine (En 43:11). Denarius, a day's wage of a man, could buy eight to sixteen measures of corn and three to four times as much barley, because the latter was cheaper. So, John is describing a time when there would be an acute scarcity of food grains. This may be reflecting a real historical situation. During the reign of Dalmatian, we are told, there was a serious shortage of grain but a superabundance of wine such that Dalmatian had to promulgate an edict prohibiting planting of fresh vineyards and ordering the cutting down of half the vineyards in the provinces. Paleness signifies malnutrition, sickness, fear or death. In the context (6:6), the 'pale horse' (6:8) signifies sickness and death due to famine and starvation. John's description of these disasters is similar to the 'four sore acts of judgement' with which God threatens to punish the disobedient people: sword, famine, evil beasts, and pestilence (Ex 14:21). The book of Leviticus also has a description of the disasters that would befall the people if they did not obey God (Levi 26:21-26). John uses 'Hades', the nether world in Greek mythology, instead of the Hebrew 'shell' (Ps 49:15-16; Hos 13:14). The 'souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and the witness they had borne' were 'under the altar' (6:9). The Jews regarded blood as life and life as belonging to God, and God alone (Lev 17:11-14). Therefore, during a sacrifice, the blood of the bull was poured at the bottom of the altar of burnt offering (Lev 4:7). The souls under the altar, therefore, symbolise the death of the martyrs as a sacrifice to God. 'How long...?' (6:10) is a cry of

anguish. It has been the eternal cry of the innocent, helpless sufferer. The martyrs were each 'given a white robe.' (6:11). White garments refer to glorified bodies of the righteous dead as indicated already in 3:4-5,18. And they were asked to wait until the number of those who are to be martyred is complete. This thought has roots in the Jewish belief that the persecutions would stop only when the appointed time came, and the appointed number of martyrs is completed (4 Ezra4:36; Enoch 47:4). The sixth seal announces the signs of the end-time (6:12-17). The passage is full of images borrowed from prophetic and apocalyptic traditions of the end of the world: earthquake (Amos 8:8; Is 2:19; Joel 2:10; Hag 2:6; Mk 13:8), sun and moon (Amos 8:9; Is 13:10; Ez 32:7; Joel 3:4; Mk 13:24; Acts 2:20), stars (Nah 3:12; Mk 13:25), vanishing of the sky (2 Pet 3:12).

But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken (Mk 13:24-25).

The list of people of seven walks of life: kings, great men, generals, the rich, the strong, slaves, and free men (6:15) signifies the entire society. Everyone, irrespective of their caste and creed, status and position is bound to be subject to the judgment of God. The imagery of hiding in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, and calling on the mountains and rocks to fall on them and hide them (6:15f) is derived from Isaiah and Hosea respectively.

Enter into the rock,
and hide in the dust
from before the terror of the Lord,
and from the glory of his majesty. (Is 2:10)

The high places of Aven, the sin of Israel
shall be destroyed.

Thorns and thistle shall grow up
on their altars;

and they shall say to the mountains, cover us,

and to the hills, Fall upon us. (Hos 10:8)

John has a vision of 'four angels standing at the Four Corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth' (7:1). The picture of the Four Corners of the earth is based on the conception of the earth as flat.

The vision alludes to the Jewish belief that God regulated the natural elements through his angels. Enoch is shown by the angel accompanying him in his tour of heaven the working of the winds, thunders and lightning, frost and hail, rain, etc. (1 Enoch 60:11-23); Moses is told by 'the angel of the presence' that God created

the angels of the presence,

and the angels of sanctification,

and the angels of the spirit of fire,

and the angels of the spirit of the winds,

and the angels of the spirit of the clouds and darkness and snow and hail and frost,

and the angels of resoundings and thunder and lightening,

and the angels of the spirits of cold and heat and winter and springtime and harvest and summer,

and all of the spirits of his creatures which are in heaven and on earth. (Jubilees 2:2)

The 'four winds' represent divine punishment. Jeremiah foretells the destruction of Elam in the imagery of being scattered by 'the four winds from the four quarters of heaven' (Jer 49:36). Then John sees 'another angel ascend from the rising of the sun, with the seal of the living God' (7:2). This scene must be understood in comparison with the previous, four angels ready to unleash the winds of destruction.

The sun is the source of all life on earth; he rises in the east. Therefore, east in itself is an allegory for life-giving force. The episode of the Magi reporting, 'We have seen his star in the East' (Mt 2:2) may also have been at the back of John's mind while composing this picture. The expression, 'living God' needs to be understood from the Jewish viewpoint of the gods others worshipped: they were not gods at all.

they were the work of human hands; they were only things; they were dead (Is 44:9-17; Ps 115). The living God, therefore, is, unlike the idols, powerful; He will punish the wicked and reward the just (Josh 3:10). The angels holding back the four winds are restrained till the faithful are sealed. The kings used to wear a signet ring. The seal of this ring was the authenticating mark of royal authority, power, and possession (Gen 41:42; Esther 3:10; 8:2; Dan 6:7; Mt 27:66). It was also customary for merchants to seal the goods with their seals, and the owners of vineyards, the jars of wine from their vineyards. The significance of the seal has remained much the same even today. Thus, sealing with the seal of the living God is an allegory for belonging to and being under the protection of the living God. Next, he hears 'the number of the sealed, a hundred and forty-four thousand' (7:4), 12,000 each from all tribes. The number 12, as mentioned already, is a complete number; 1000 signifies a great number. Hence, 12,000 may denote quite many and its square would indicate a perfect number. But it is also possible that John wants to show that not all Jews will be saved, but only those who accept Christ as the Lord. The latter meaning becomes clear in the next vision of the multitude from all nations in 7:9. The tribe of Dan is conspicuous by its absence. The reason may be the belief that the tribe of Dan was considered idolatrous (Gen 49:17; Jgs ch 18; 1 Kgs 12:28-30; Jer 8:16-17). The rabbis believed that the Antichrist was to come from the tribe of Dan. The 'great multitude which no man could number' were 'clothed in white robes' and held 'palm branches in their hands' (7:9). We have seen that white robes symbolise victory, and so do the palm fronds (2 Mac 10:7). The imagery of washing the robes in the blood of the Lamb (7:14) is an allusion to the salvific death of Jesus through which, according to the Christian belief, he redeemed mankind (Rom 3:25; 5:9; Eph 1:7; Col 1:20; Heb 9:14; 1 Pet 1:19; 1 Jn 1:7). The imagery of washing one's clothes in the blood may be repulsive for us today. But during the time of John, it was not so. The Mystery Religions had various dramatic and moving ceremonies through which they promised the devotees rebirth and eternal life. Mithraism was one such. It had followers all over the world. It was the favourite cult of the Roman army. The most sacred ceremony of this cult was called 'taurobolium' the bath in the blood of the bull. It is said that a trench was dug over which was erected a platform with perforated planks; a sacrificial bull

was slaughtered on the platform whose blood dripped on the worshipper who knelt below; he even moistened his tongue with the blood as a sacramental act; fully 'wet' with blood he came out of the trench with the full conviction that he was 'renatus in aeternum', reborn for all eternity. John applies this practice to the death of Jesus on the cross and the its salvific effect on the believer. The allusion may also be to Baptism. It is from this imagery that the custom of presenting a white cloth to the newly baptised sprang up in the Church. Then follows a poetic description of the unending joy and blessedness of those who have washed their clothes in the blood of the Lamb (7:15-17), the imagery being drawn from various sources, particularly that of the 'Good Shepherd' (7:16 = Is 49:10; Ps 12:1-6; 7:17 = Ez 34:23; Ps 23:2; Is 25:8). They shall serve God 'day and night within his temple' (7:15). This is an allusion to the worship in the Temple of Jerusalem. It was the duty of the priests and the Levites to serve day and night before the throne of God (1 Chr 9:33). In the Jerusalem Temple, no Gentile could enter beyond the Court of the Gentiles. Anyone who disregarded this prohibition was liable to death penalty. An Israelite could enter only as far as the Court of the Israelites beyond which was the Court of the priests, and no layman had access to it. The innermost section of the Court of Priests was the Holy of Holies which could be approached by the High Priest only once a year. Now we can understand the significance of what John says: in heaven there would be no barriers, no distinction of caste, nationality, or status; all the faithful will see God face to face and serve Him without ceasing.

Immediately after the seventh seal was opened, 'there was silence in heaven for about half an hour' (8:1). This silence suggests a sense of anticipation and creates an eerie feeling, coming as it is after the terrible events of the seal's series. It is also possible that it was a silence when the prayers of the saints were about to go up. The content of the vision of the seven trumpets (8:2-11:19) is the future salvation of the persecuted Christians through the allegory of the liberation of Israelites from the slavery of Egypt. Alluding to the various plagues with which God affected the Egyptians the seer drives home to the Christians the fact that they will be definitely saved by God. The first trumpet producing 'hail and fire,

mixed with blood, which fell on the earth' (8:7) is an allusion to the seventh plague against the Egyptians (Ex 9:22-26); the second trumpet turning a third of the sea into blood (8:9), to the first (Ex 7:14-24); the third trumpet causing a third of the waters to become wormwood (8:10-11), to the prophecy of Jeremiah (9:15-16; 23:15); the fourth trumpet affecting the heavenly bodies (8:12), to the ninth (Ex 10:21-23) and to some prophetic passages (Am 8:9; Joel 3:15; Is 30:26). Wormwood is a common name for the artemisia family of plants, which are bitter. Israelites had a great dislike for them. The wormwood is an allegory for punishment for disobedience to God (Deut 29:17-18; Jer 9:14-15; 23:15).

The fifth trumpet causes a star to fall from heaven (9:1). The Jews identified the stars with angels. Hence, 'star fallen from heaven to earth' alludes to the story of the fallen angels (Gen 6:1-4; Is 14:12-15; 2 Enoch ch 18). The Apocalypse depicts the 'bottomless pit' as the intermediate place of punishment of the fallen angels, the demons, the beast, the false prophet, and Satan (Ap 9:1,2,11; 11:7; 20:1,3) and their final place of punishment is the lake of fire and sulphur (Ap 20:10,14,15). The plague of locusts unleashed by the fifth trumpet is an allusion to the eighth plague against the Egyptians (Ex 10: 3-15); the locusts appeared like 'horses arrayed for battle' (9:7). This imagery is inspired by Joel 2:4-9. The plague of the locusts serves as an allegory for terrible destruction. When they leave an area not a blade of grass would be seen, the trees would be stripped off their bark; the ground where they had settled looks as if it had been scorched with a ravaging fire. It is said that the locusts plague in Algiers in 1866 resulted in a severe famine in which about 2,00,000 people perished. The suffering caused by the locusts is such that people will long for death but will not die. The head of the locusts is called in Hebrew, 'Abaddon' which means 'destruction'; and in Greek, 'Apollyon' which means 'destroyer'. The 'demons' (9:20) are the pagan idols (Deut 32:17; 1 Cor 10:19-20). John hears the voice ordering the sixth angel to release the 'four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates' (9:14). The reference to Euphrates points out to the Parthian empire. The description of idols, 'of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot either see or hear or walk' (9:20) very closely resembles that in Daniel: ... and you have praised the gods of silver

and gold, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone, which do not see or hear or know... (Dan 5:23).

The little open scroll in the hand of the angel (10:2) suggests clarity and directness in contradistinction to the sealed scroll of 5:1. The scroll is little symbolising nearness of the end, clearly indicated in 10:7. The command to eat the scroll producing bitterness in the stomach and sweetness in the mouth (10:9-10) is similar to Ez 2:8-3:3. It is an allegory to the great feeling one gets when chosen as a messenger by God and the difficulty of delivering the unpleasant message of terrible suffering.

John is given a measuring rod. He is commanded to measure the temple and the altar but prohibited from measuring the courtyard (11:1-2). The allusion here is to the holiness of things measured and the courtyard being unclean due to its occupation by the Romans. They had entered the courtyard of the temple during the Jewish war (70 A D) to put down the rebellion.⁸ John writing his book after the destruction of Jerusalem, may be also hinting that though the earthly city and the temple is no more, its heavenly counterpart is intact where the faithful worship God endlessly. The time limit of 'forty-two months' and 'one thousand two hundred and sixty days' (11:3) recalls 'a time, two times, and half a time' of Daniel (Dan 12:7), all meaning three and a half years. The expression originated in the most terrible time in the Jewish history. Antiochus IV Epiphanes, in his attempt to Hellenise his empire, forced the Greek language, culture, and religion on the Jews. Naturally, the Jews opposed his attempts. About 168 BC, he invaded Jerusalem. It is said that about 80,000 Jews were either killed or sold into slavery. He decreed that the possession of the Torah by any Jew was punishable by death. His army conducted house to house search to find if anyone possessed a copy of it. Circumcising a child was declared to be a capital crime. The Jerusalem Temple was desecrated: a great altar to Zeus was erected in the Temple; swine's flesh was offered as sacrifice on the altar of the Burnt Offerings; the Temple chambers became the official quarters of the sacred prostitutes. The Jews rose against Antiochus as one man. They chose to die to safeguard their religion, and they did. Under the command of Judas Maccabaeus they resorted to guerilla warfare against

Antiochus. Finally, they succeeded in driving out Antiochus' forces, and the Temple was cleansed and restored. The period of the desecration lasted from June 168 BC to December 165 BC, exactly three years and a half. To this day the Jews commemorate the liberation of the Temple by the celebration of the 'Hanuka' in December. By using this expression John is trying to warn the Christians that the persecution against them was bound to be as severe and diabolic, and only a resolute resistance could withstand it. The identity of the two witnesses is difficult to establish. Their being likened to the 'two olive trees and the two lampstands' (11:4) makes us conclude that John has drawn his imagery from Zechariah (4:12-14). The witnesses have power to bring down fire, shut the skies, and cause plagues (11:5-6). Elijah brought down fire to destroy the captain and his fifty soldiers who had come to take him to king Ahab (2 Kgs 1:9-12) and shut the skies to cause drought as a punishment for Ahab's sin of idolatry (1 Kgs chs 17-18); and Moses brought plagues in Egypt (Ex chs 7-10). Elijah and Moses are representatives of the Prophets and the Law (Mk 9:4). Hence, the two witnesses can be identified as Elijah and Moses. The earthly temple consisted of three parts: the ulam (vestibule), the hekal (sanctuary) and the debir (holy of holies), the last containing the ark of the covenant, where nobody but the High Priest could enter, that too, only once a year to offer sacrifice. Therefore, the vision of the temple in heaven being opened and the exposure of the ark of the covenant (11:19) alludes to the future direct relationship between God and his people. The ark of the covenant was a proof and reminder to the Israelites of God's covenant with them. John uses this imagery to stress the fact that God has made a new covenant with His people in Jesus and that, in spite of the terrors and frightening events all around, He would keep that covenant and be true to His promises. The accompanying signs of 'flashes of lightning, voices, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail' (11:19) are characteristic features of Biblical theophanies (Ex 15:8, 10; 19:16-19; Jgs 5:4-5; Pss 18:6-19; 29; 77:16-20).

The second cycle of visions (12:1-22:5) is based on the symbol of the open scroll of 10:2. The vision of the woman and the dragon (12:1-17) has two units: the conflict between a woman in pangs of birth and

the dragon (12:1-6, 13-17) and the depiction of a battle in heaven between archangel Michael and his angels versus the dragon (12:7-9). John sees the woman 'clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars' (12:1). According to Collins, the high goddesses, such as Isis, are depicted with these attributes.⁹ The traditional Roman Catholic interpretation identified the woman with Mary, the mother of Jesus. Other suggestions are that she represents the heavenly Jerusalem, the personified wisdom, or the Church. John uses the allegory to symbolise the heavenly Israel (Hos 1:2; 2:2-3; 2:14-15; Is 50:1; 54:5-8) as he does not distinguish between the Jew and the Christian. The birth pangs allegorically point to the imminent salvation preceded by tribulations. The second portent concerning the 'dragon with seven heads and ten horns' (12:3) has mythic connotation. The Babylonian mythology has a dragon with seven heads. The Canaanite texts too mention a similar monster. Such a beast appears as an adversary of God in Jewish tradition. Isaiah prophesies about the punishment of 'Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will slay the dragon that is in the sea' (Is 27:1); he also speaks of God having 'cut Rahab in pieces' and pierced 'the dragon' (Is 51:9). The psalmist also sings of God who broke 'the heads of the dragons on the waters' and crushed 'the head of Leviathan' (79:13-14). Job, too, acknowledges God's superiority over Rahab (Job 9:13; 26:12). John himself identifies this dragon as the ancient serpent (referring probably to Genesis chapter 3) and Satan (12:9). Daniel's vision of a 'terrible and dreadful and exceedingly strong' beast with ten horns (Dan 7:7) may have inspired John's depiction of the seven horned dragon. This dragon had 'seven diadems upon his head.' Seven diadems signify his tremendous power and authority. He had a long tail with which he 'swept down a third of the stars of heaven, and cast them to the earth' (12:4). In Daniel we read that one of the horns of the ram cast down 'some of the host of the stars' (Dan 7:10). As already pointed out, Jews considered stars as angels. Hence, the casting down of the stars serves as an allegory for the revolt of Satan and his being the cause of the fall of many angels. The dragon 'stood before the woman... that he might devour her child...' (12:4). The description of the child as 'one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron' (12:5) identifies him with the Messiah (Ps 2:9). The picture here is one of enmity between Christ and the devil. As Collins

points out the imagery of the narrative is derived from the story of Apollo's birth. According to the Greco-Roman version of this story, Leto, a goddess, became pregnant by Zeus. Python, a dragon, foresaw that he would be displaced as ruler of the oracle at Delphi by Leto's son. So, he pursued her to kill her son as soon as he was born. Under Zeus' orders, the North Wind and Poseidon, god of the Sea protected Leto. She gave birth to Apollo and Artemis. Apollo killed Python. John makes use of this myth in order to counter the claim of Roman emperors, notably Nero, to be the incarnation of Apollo by adapting the narrative to indicate the birth of the Messiah who will establish the golden age.¹⁰ John could also have been influenced by the Egyptian myth of the birth of the sun-god, Horus. 'Here the goddess mother is represented with a sun upon her head. Typhon slays Horus. Hathor, his mother, is persecuted by Typhon and escapes to a floating island with the bones of Horus, who revives and slays the dragon.'¹¹ Back home, the narrative has similarities with the birth of Krishna. The woman 'fled into the wilderness... in which to be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days' (12:6). The time of nourishment mentioned here and in verse 14 is symbolic. It recalls Daniel 12:7. It is an allegory for a standard period of distress. Then a war arose in heaven, and the dragon and his angels were defeated by the heavenly forces led by the archangel Michael, and thrown down to the earth (12:7-9). Satan is the 'accuser' of Christians before the throne of God. The defeat of this 'accuser' alludes to the reversal of the condemnation of the Christians in Roman courts, thereby implying that the accusation and condemnation by the Romans is wrong. The dragon is called 'that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world' and the accuser of the brethren. This sentence is a summary of the development of the concept of Satan. We have already seen why he is called the ancient serpent'. Originally, 'Satan' meant only an adversary' (Num 22:22; 1 Sam 29:4; 1 Kgs 5:4; 11:14,23). Later on it took the meaning of an 'accuser' (Job 1:9-11; 2:4-6; Zech 3:1). In the NT 'Satan' becomes 'Devil', from the Greek 'diabolos' meaning 'slanderer'. He is the personified power of evil: a tempter, a seducer, leading people astray. He tempts Jesus in the desert (Mt 4:1,3,5,8; Mk 1:13; Lk 4:2,3,5,6,9); he leads Judas to betray Jesus (Jn 13:2,27; Lk 22:3); he causes Peter's fall (Lk 22:31); he makes Ananias greedy

(Acts 5:3); he leads us astray (2 Cor 2:11; Eph 6:11); he is the Prince of the World (Jn 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). The defeated dragon pursued the woman but 'the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle that she might fly from the serpent into the wilderness (12:14). The 'eagles wings' is an allegory for God's protection and care (Ex 19:4; Deut 32:11-12; Is 40:31). The dragon did not give up. it 'poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with the flood' (12:15). The imagery of the flood is often used in the OT as an allegory for trials and tribulations (Ps 18:4; 32:6; 42:7; 124:4; Is 43:2). The swallowing up of the river by the earth (12:16) symbolises Nature joining Providence. The dragon going off 'to make war on the rest of her offspring' (12:17) is symbolic of the spread of persecution in Asia Minor and in other parts of the Roman empire.

John describes two visions in chapter 13: one, of a beast from the sea (13:1-10) and the other, of a beast from the earth (13:11-18). The sea, in Canaanite mythology is a deity in conflict with Baal, the god of storm and fertility. In Jewish tradition it is equivalent to abyss (11:7) and has mythic connotations (Ps 77:17). It is an opponent of God (Ps 74:13). This beast is closely linked with the four beasts in Daniel ch 7: the ten horns associates it with the fourth beast of Daniel (Dan 7:7-8); its leopardlikeness to the third (Dan 7:6); the mouth like a lion to the first (Dan 7:5). Daniel refers to the four successive kingdoms, the Babylonian, the Median, the Persian, and the Greek whereas the Apocalypse concentrates on one kingdom, the Roman. John combines the characteristics of the four beasts into one to portray the Roman empire as having imbibed all the wickedness of the preceding empires. The Roman empire and its emperors seem utterly satanic to him because of demanding universal compulsory Caesar worship. Caesar worship was more a political thing than religious; it represented loyalty to the Roman empire. But no Christian could ever say, 'Caesar is Lord' because for him 'Jesus Christ is Lord.' This was construed to be disloyalty to the empire. These 'dangerous revolutionaries' who refused to take the oath of loyalty were traitors who had to be nipped in the bud. Thus hung over the head of a Christian the proverbial Damocles' sword. The 'seven heads' of the beast point to the seven emperors: Tiberius (AD 14-37), Caligula (AD 37-41),

Claudius (AD 41-54), Nero (AD 55-68), Vespasian (AD 69-79), Titus (AD 79-81), and Domitian (AD 81-96). Nero's death was followed by a brief period of almost complete chaos. In the course of eighteen months three different men occupied the throne: Galba, Otho, and Vitellius. Since their reign is insignificant, John has not included them in his list of seven heads. But he has described the beast as having ten horns to refer to the ten emperors who ruled the Roman empire from the death of Augustus to the time of writing the Apocalypse. The beast had a 'blasphemous name upon its heads.' The word 'blasphemous' means showing contempt or irreverence for God. The Roman emperors had assumed the title 'divus' or 'sebastos', which means 'divine' or 'dominus' which means 'lord', which for Christians belonged only to God and to Jesus Christ, and their attribution to any human being, therefore, was blasphemous. The healing of the mortal wound of one of its heads (13:3) is an allusion to the legend that Nero would return to regain power over Rome.¹² The Sibylline Oracles, too, points out to such a legend (4:119-124, 137-148; 5:93-110, 361-384). The 'blasphemy' (13:6) alludes to the claim to divine worship. The beast from the earth had 'two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon' (13:11). With this imagery, John wants to present the beast as a counter image of Jesus, the Lamb. The same beast is portrayed as a false prophet in 16:13; 19:20; 20:10. The description in 13:11 is analogous to the false prophets 'in sheep's clothing' in Matthew 7:15. The beast has a delegated power (13:12). It receives power from the beast from the sea (Roman empire). This allusion to the imperial cult (13:12-17) leads us to identify the beast with Asiarchs whose main responsibility was to protect and promote the imperial cult. The beast 'works signs' (13:13) in order to lead people astray. In the other books of the New Testament, too, we find such themes. False Christs and false prophets will show signs to mislead the faithful (Mt 24:24; Mk 13:22; 2 Thes 2:9). Those who refused to worship the image of the beast were to be slain (13:15). During the reign of Trajan (AD 98-117) those who were accused of being Christians were asked to invoke the gods, curse Christ and worship the image of Trajan in order to ascertain whether they were true Christians or not, and those who were, were put to death as traitors. The number of the beast is 666 (13:18). However some manuscripts read it as 616. Many hypotheses are put forward to solve this puzzle. All agree that the solution is to be

found in 'gematria', since it refers to the number of a man, viz., sum of letters that make up the man's name. The Hebrew and Greek letters have a numerical value. According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica the number 616 was, probably, associated with Caius Caligula who wanted to install his statue in the Jerusalem Temple. It was later applied to Nero who was thought to be the antichrist. During the siege of Jerusalem in 70, Titus must have seemed the antichrist. Probably, he was associated with the ancient 'titans' (the demonic personalities) and made to fit this number, for 'teitan' totals 666. Beatus explains that the sign and number of the beast itself signifies antichrist: the monogram of Christ is $\chi\rho$; 'anti' means opposite; \ast , therefore, represents antichrist; X=600, I=10 and ζ =6, the last being an early form of Epistemon.¹³ However, at present, the common opinion of the Biblical scholars is that the beast stands for Nero Caesar whose name in Hebrew may be written as NRWN QSR: 50+200+6+50+100+60+200 = 666.¹⁴ As already pointed out in this study, the digit '6' stands for imperfection and a triple repetition of it shows the ultimate imperfection and evil. The Latin form of the name, if written without the final 'N' of NRWN, would add up to 616. Here again a question comes to our mind: Why was it that Nero was considered the devil incarnate? We have to find the answer in the life and character of Nero himself. His father, Cnaeus Domitius Ahenobarbus, was notorious for his wickedness. He had murdered a man just for refusing to drink more wine; deliberately run over a child in his chariot on the Appian Way; in a brawl in the Forum, gouged out the eye of a Roman knight; and finally died of dropsy caused by his debauchery. His mother, Agrippina, is said to be the most terrible woman in history. When Ahenobarbus had come to know that she was pregnant, he had cynically remarked that nothing but a monster could come out of their union. When Nero was three she was banished by Caligula; Nero was entrusted to the care of two slaves, one a barber and other a dancer. Claudius revoked her banishment. She came back with a single agenda, making Nero the emperor. She worked to achieve her ambition with all the passion and intrigue which only she was capable of. Claudius had two children, Octavia and Britannicus, but she persuaded him to adopt Nero. Nero was eleven then. She pestered Claudius to marry her, though he was her uncle, and succeeded.

Then she appointed Seneca, the renowned philosopher, and Afranius Burrus, the great soldier, as Nero's tutors. By and By, Britannicus, the heir -apparent, was sidelined and Nero was given the limelight. Now Claudius had no use for Agrippina and she planned to get rid of him. She arranged to poison him by a dish of mushroom, and when the poison was slow to act and Claudius lay in coma she inserted poison down his throat with a feather. As soon as Claudius died, Nero was lead forth as the emperor, the army having been bribed to support him. Nero was not worried about governance. He was busy with fine arts. Rome was ruled for five years by the wise Seneca and the able Afranius. Then things changed. Nero stopped being a cultured dilettante and indulged in vicious crimes. At night he would roam the streets with other gilded young men and attack whom he fancied. He killed his step brother, Britannicus, as a possible rival. He had insatiable lust; it is said that no young man or young woman was safe from his advances. He publicly married a youth named Sporus in a state wedding; he took Popaea Sabina, the wife of Otho his close friend, as his mistress and kicked her to death when she was with child. He had a great passion for building. It is alleged that Nero set Rome on fire in order to have the glory of rebuilding it. The fire burnt for a week. He not only did nothing to extinguish it but also hindered any attempt to control it. When the people suspected him to be the culprit, he made the Christians the scapegoat and began the persecution. His sadistic nature invented horrible forms of torture: he had the Christians sown up in animal skins and set his savage hunting dogs upon them; he had them put in sacks with stones and thrown into the Tiber; he had them coated with pitch and set them alight and used them as torches to light up his gardens. His insanity grew unchecked. Seneca was forced to end his life; Afranius was poisoned; anyone who incurred his displeasure was sure to be terminated. Even Agrippina could not tolerate this insanity. She attempted to reign him in. Nero was furious. He repeatedly tried to murder her by poisoning, by causing the roof of her house to collapse, by sending her on a voyage in a boat designed to wreck. When all these attempts did not succeed, he sent his attendant, Anicetus, to kill her with a dagger. When Agrippina saw him, she is reported to have said, 'Strike my womb because it bore a Nero.' Even God must have been fed up with this man. People could no longer put up with his madness. Julius

Vindex rebelled in Gaul, followed by Galba in Spain. Finally, the Senate plucked up courage and declared Nero a public enemy. In the end he committed suicide. No doubt there could be no person more satanic than Nero to serve as a paradigm for evil incarnate, the antichrist.

The 144,000 have the name of the Lamb and his Father on their forehead (14:1). This image alludes to those who had the mark of the beast on them in 13:6, who are not saved. They have 'not defiled themselves with women' 14:4). Here the allusion seems to be to the Watchers who are said to have had sexual relations with women (1 Enoch 7:1; 9:8; 15:1-7). Collins opines that it points to the practice of sexual continence considered superior to the married state.¹⁵ Their being 'the first fruits' evokes the imagery of sacrifice. The Israelites were to offer the first fruits of their grounds (Ex 23:19) and the firstlings of their herd and their flock (Deut 12:6) to the Lord. The expression may also suggest the first resurrection as in Paul (1 Cor 15:20-23). The announcement of the fall of Rome (14:8) echoes the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah (Is 21:9; Jer 51:8). It is said to have caused 'all nations drink the wine of her impure passion.' This imagery is drawn from Jeremiah,

Babylon was a golden cup in the Lord's hand,

making all the earth drunken;

the nations drank of her wine,

therefore the nations went mad. (Jer 51:7)

The picture here is one of a prostitute soliciting a man and leading him into immoral activities. Rome is forcing the Christians to render the worship, which rightfully belongs to God to Caesar. The apostate, i.e., one who worships the beast, will incur the wrath of God; he will be severely punished. He will 'drink the wine of God's wrath, poured unmixed into the cup of his anger, and he shall be tormented with fire and sulphur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up for ever and ever; and they have no rest, day or night' (14:9-11). Their torment with fire and Sulphur alludes to the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:28). The description of the torment is

of the torment is analogous to a passage in Isaiah depicting God's vengeance on the wicked (Is 34:8-10). The severity of the punishment of those who give up their faith and render Caesar-worship serves as a warning to desist from apostasy and an incentive to keep their faith. It alludes to the blessedness of the faithful by contrast. John's vision of 'a cloud, and seated on the cloud one like a son of man' (14:14) is analogous to the vision in Daniel (Dan 7:13-14). It alludes to the power of Christ to judge the nations and his final victory. The imagery of the harvest and vintage (14:14-20) is derived from Joel 3:13 where the images of harvest and winepress are used to describe a holy war between the divine warrior and the oppressors of Judah (Joel 3:19). But John universalises this imagery to indicate God's judgement on the entire earth (14:15-16,18-19). In Joel the battle is associated with Zion and Jerusalem (Joel 3:16-17) while for John it is "Babylon", i.e., Rome. The allusion becomes clear if we compare 14:20 with 14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2,10,21. Further, Rome is thus described in the Jewish apocalyptic literature, too (2 Bar 11:1; Sib Or 5:143). The angel having 'power over fire' (14:18) recalls Jubilees 2:2 and 1 Enoch 60:11-21). Treading of the winepress (14:20) owes its imagery to Isaiah (63:1-3). In Isaiah the divine warrior slays Edom and Bozrah (63:1) whose 'lifeblood is sprinkled upon my garments' (63:3). John uses the imagery as an allegory for God's judgement in terms of a battle. 'The winepress was trodden outside the city.' This alludes to the Jewish belief that Jerusalem was the holy city of the chosen people of God and the final judgment of the nations would take place there (Joel 3:2,12; Zech 14:1-4). The blood flowing from the winepress 'for one thousand six hundred stadia' is symbolic of the entire Jewish nation coming under the judgment for the length of Palestine from north to south was approximately sixteen hundred stadia (furlongs).

Now, John is given a new series of visions: the seven bowls. Like in the other series, this one also is interwoven with the themes of persecution, judgement and salvation. This series recapitulates the vision of the seven seals and the vision of the seven trumpets in that it deals with the same subject matter: eschatological events. But the perspective in which it describes these events is different. It has the

themes of justice and vindication in common with the seven seals and the involvement of natural elements and the interplay of Exodus themes as in the seven trumpets. The bowls differ from the trumpets in so far as they specify the adversaries of God and the reason for divine judgement. The seer beholds a 'sea of glass mingled with fire' (15:2). This expression is already commented upon earlier (4:6). The conquerors 'sing the song of Moses' (15:3). The allusion here is to the victory song of Moses after the deliverance of the Israelites from the slavery of the Egyptians (Ex ch 15). The 'song of the Lamb' is, once again, an allusion to the victory of Christ. Then John saw 'the temple of the tent of witness in heaven opened, and out of the temple came seven angels with the seven plagues, robed in pure bright linen, and their breasts girded with golden girdles' (15:5-6). 'Tent of witness' also called 'tent of testimony' was the tabernacle during the sojourn of the Israelites in the wilderness (Num 9:15; 17:7; 18:2). It contained the tablets of the Ten Commandments. The angels coming out from this place with plagues indicates that the plagues are the consequence of disobedience to God's law. The temple was filled with 'smoke' (15:8). The imagery of smoke or cloud is employed in the OT as a symbol of God's glory (Is 6:4; Ex 40:34-35; 1 Kgs 8:10-11). There is an interesting detail here: no one could enter the temple till the people were affected with the seven plagues, which if read with the prayers of the saints followed by an interlude in the catastrophic events described in 7:15-8:1 makes it clear that there was no scope of halting the wrath of God by intercessory prayers.

The chapter 16 concerns the pouring out of the seven bowls of the wrath of God on the earth. They contain the last terrible plagues which have a lot of similarities with the ten plagues in Egypt described in the book of Exodus, and the terrible events that followed the sounding of the seven trumpets in the Apocalypse chs 8-11. The following chart will help us to compare them.

Egyptian Plagues

Trumpet Terrors

Bowl Terrors

Water turned into blood
(Ex 7:20-25)

Hail, fire and blood destroying a third of vegetation (8:7)

Ulcerous sores (16.2)

Frogs (Ex 8:5-14)

Flaming mountain cast into sea turns a third of sea into blood (8.8)

Sea becoming like a dead man's blood (16.3)

Lice (Ex 8:16-18)

The star Wormwood falls into water making them bitter and poisonous (8:10-11)

Rivers, fountains become become blood (16.4)

Flies (Ex 8:20-24)

One third of the sun, moon and stars darkened (8:12)

Scorching and burning hot sun (16.8)

Cattle Plague (Ex.9:3-6)

Falling star unlocks the abyss releasing smoke and demonic locusts (9:1-12)

Darkness over the animal kingdom (16:10)

Boils and sores
(Ex 9:8-11)

loosing four angels of destruction, coming of demonic cavalry from the east (9:13-21)

Euphrates dried to enable invasion by hordes of from east (16:12)

Thunder and Hail
(Ex 9:22-26)

Announcement of the final victory of God and raging of nations of nations (11:5)

Pollution of air, terrors in nature, thunder, earthquake, lightning, hail (16:17-19)

Locusts (Ex 10:12-19)

Darkness (Ex 10:21-23)

Slaying of the first-born
(Ex 12:29-30)

The first four bowls (16:2-4,8) allude to the entire universe. According to Collins, the earth, the sea, the fresh waters, and the sun (heavenly body) represent the traditional Jewish cosmology.¹⁶ The first plague, associated with the first bowl, is an adaptation of the sixth plague against the Egyptians (Ex 9:8-12); the second (16:3) recalls the first against the Egyptians (Ex 7:14-24) and is similar to 8:8-9 while the third (16:4) is an allusion to it. The first plague against the Egyptians turned the water of the Nile and all the fresh waters in Egypt into blood. The fifth bowl was poured on 'the throne of the beast' (16:10). Throne is a symbol of power. Hence 'throne of the beast' alludes to the city of Rome. As a consequence, 'its kingdom was in darkness.' This is an allusion to the ninth Egyptian plague (Ex 10:21-29). Consequent to the pouring of the sixth bowl on the river Euphrates, the river 'dried up, to prepare the way for the kings from the east' (16:12). The imagery is drawn from the Israelites crossing the Red (Reed) Sea (Ex 14:21-25). The allegory of the dried up river points to the salvation of the persecuted Christians, as was the case with the Israelites. According to Peters, 'the kings of the east' in the context refers to the Parthians.¹⁶ The vision of the Parthian cavalry coming sweeping across the Euphrates would have struck terror into even the bravest hearts. Further, we have seen already that it was from Parthia that the Nero redivivus (resurrected Nero) was expected to come to attack Rome. John could also have drawn this imagery from an unusual historical event. According to Herodotus, the ancient historian, Cyrus could not overcome the defences of Babylon. So, he hit upon a brilliant plan: entering the city by crossing the river where the city had no defences. He kept the attack on Babylon going, and at the same time, with a section of his army, 'attacked' the river. By a magnificent engineering feat the course of the river was deflected into a lake. As the water level in the river began to go down making a temporary passage, his army crossed over and captured the city. This incident makes the drying up of the river an allegory for defeat of the persecutors of the Christians. Also, the OT imagery of drying up of waters used as a symbol of God's redeeming act in His peoples' favour (Ex 14:21; Jos 3:17; Jer 51:36; Is 11:16; Zech 10:11) would have suited John very well. From the mouths of the dragon, the beast and the false prophet issue forth-demonic spirits like frogs (16:13). The likening of these spirits to 'frogs' may be an allusion to the second Egyptian plague (Ex 7:25-8:15). In

Zoroastrianism, frogs are agents of Ahriman, the power of darkness; they are said to cause plagues. The OT includes them in the list of unclean animals (Lev 11:10). Their croaking is generally considered to be monotonous meaningless exercise. John seems to have put all these things about the frogs together to depict the evil genius of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet by presenting their utterances as fully wicked: unclean, futile, aiding the powers of darkness, and causing plagues. The 'false prophet' is described in 19:20 as one 'who had worked the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshipped his image.' In 13:13-14 we read that the beast which rose out of the earth 'works great signs...it deceives those who dwell on earth.' This helps us to identify the false prophet as the entire administrative mechanism which enforced Caesar worship. The function of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet was to entice the kings to assemble for battle on the great day of God (16:13-14). The description alludes to the prophecy of Micaiah (1 Kgs 22:21-23). Through this allegory, John wants to show that God's judgement will surely fall on those aligned against God just as it fell on Ahab. The prophetic saying, 'Lo, I am coming like a thief' refers to the parousia (second coming) of Christ (Mt 24:43-44; Lk 12:39-40; 1 Thes 5:2,4; 2 Pet 3:10). Its insertion here would mean that 'the great day of God the Almighty' is the second coming of Christ when he will judge all, the living and the dead. The dragon, the beast, and the false prophet assembled the kings of the whole world for a battle against God at the place called 'Armageddon' (16:16). The word means 'mount of Megiddo'. The main route between Egypt and Syria ran through the plain of Esdraelon (Jezreel). In the southern side of the plain is situated the Carmel mountain range. It had four passes. The army or the caravan from Egypt had to pass through one of these to reach the plain. There were four fortresses, Jokneam, Megiddo, Taanach, and Ibleam, guarding these passes. Of these Megiddo was the strategically most important. This was the scene of many a great battle in history. It was here that the greatest of the Egyptian Pharaohs, Thutmosis III won the final victory over the remnants of the Hyksos who ruled Egypt c 1667-1559 BC, forging the Egyptian empire. This was the plain where Barak and Deborah defeated Sisera and his chariots (Jgs 5:19-21). It was here that Jehu killed Ahaziah (2 Kgs 9:27). Solomon and the later kings had fortified this city (1 Kgs

9:15). Josiah, the most pious of Judah's kings died here trying to block the march of the Egyptian army against Nineveh (2 Kgs 22:19). John has chosen this place for the scene of the greatest battle of all, the cosmic battle in which God's adversaries will be finally vanquished. The catastrophic upheavals following the pouring of the seventh bowl of the wrath of God (16:17-21) are such that the world has never known. They symbolise the severity of the punishment of the unrighteous and the role Nature plays in it.

Chapter 17 and 18 delineate the fall of Babylon, i.e., Rome. The angel shows John 'the great harlot' (17:1). The prophets use the allegory of harlot to denounce a city. Sometimes Jerusalem is called a harlot (Is 1:21; Ez 16:15-45) while at others, it is other nations: Nineveh (Nah 3:4) and Tyre (Is 23:16-17). The harlot is 'seated upon many waters' (17:1). This description points to Babylon (Jer 51:13). Further, the author himself identifies her as Babylon in 17:5. Thus Babylon is allegorically used by John to describe the wrongdoings of Rome: claim to divinity (17:2), luxurious and extravagant life (17:4; 18:3), and persecution of Christians (17:6). It is also possible that John is denouncing the worship of the goddess Roma by calling the deity, 'harlot' (17:7). The name written on her forehead is an allusion to the practice in Rome of writing the names of the prostitutes in public brothels on their foreheads. The description of the harlot, 'arrayed in purple and scarlet, and bedecked with gold and jewels and pearls,' comes from the temple prostitutes of Asia Minor. There is also another possibility. It is said that the Roman empress, Messalina (wife of the weak Claudius) used to go out at night to public brothels and offer herself as a common prostitute. For John she may have perfectly fitted as the type for depicting the immorality of Rome. The beast that John sees, 'was, and is not, and is to ascend from the bottomless pit and go to perdition' (17:8). Here John uses 'beast' to refer to the Roman emperor. The description points to Nero and the legends about him. Nero was, i.e., ruled Rome. He is not, i.e., dead. He will ascend from the bottomless pit, i.e., rise from Hades. He will go to perdition, i.e., will be condemned during the Last Judgement and thrown into hell as indicated in 19:20. The seven heads of the beast are 'seven mountains' (17:9), an allusion to Rome, a city built on seven hills. The seven heads are 'also seven kings, five of whom

have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he comes he must remain only a little while ' (17:10). The five fallen emperors are: Augustus (27 BC- 14 AD), Tiberius (14-37), Gaius Caligula (37-41), Claudius (41-54), and Nero (54-68), ignoring the three weak persons (Galba, Otho and Vitellius); one is: this refers to the sixth emperor Vespasian (69-79); the other has not yet come, and when he comes he must remain only a little while: this refers to Titus, who due to ill health, had a very short reign (79-81). John goes on to say that 'the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to perdition' (17:11). 'The beast that was and is not' refers to Nero who as resurrected is the eighth but belongs to the seventh. This should mean that Nero redivivus is identified with Titus. But Titus' reign was not as terrible as that of Domitian. Further, the Apocalypse, in general, points to the persecution during the reign of Domitian (81-96). Hence, John, though actually writing during the reign of Domitian and identifying the resurrected Nero with Domitian, may be deliberately antedating here, in tune with the apocalyptic writings. To John Domitian was Nero reincarnated; the incarnate evil, epitome of the evil of the Roman empire. The ten horns of the beast represent 'ten kings who have not yet received royal power, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast' (17:12). When Nero realised that he could no longer remain in power, he considered fleeing to Parthia. After his death a legend arose that he was not dead and that he would return with his Parthian allies to regain power over Rome and defeat his enemies.¹⁸ The legend is reflected in 17:12-14, 16-17. John has adapted this legend to suit his purpose. The battle between Nero and his Parthian allies against Rome would take place first, and Nero would assume power. This is the divine judgement against "Babylon" referred to in 14:8 and 16:19. We find an allusion to this battle early on in the book (6:2, the first seal and 9:13-21, the sixth trumpet). The sixth bowl (16:12-16) is a subtle introduction to both this battle whose outcome is depicted in 17:16-18 and the immediately following final battle between the Lamb and the beast (the demonic Nero). The allusion to this final battle can be found in 6:12-17 (sixth seal), 11:15-19 (seventh trumpet) and 14:14-20 (vision of the harvest and the vintage). Its description begins in 17:14 but resumes only in 19:11.

Chapter 18 depicts judgement over "Babylon" in the form of a dirge. It is an allegory depicting the utter destruction and desolation of Rome.

It has become a dwelling place of demons,
a haunt of every foul spirit,
a haunt of every foul and hateful bird (18:2).

The description is analogous to that in Isaiah (Is 13:19-22; 34:11-15), Jeremiah (Jer 50:39-40) and Baruch (Bar 4:35). The 'impure passion' is the claim and the desire to divinity and 'fornication' stands for idolatry. The reference to the merchants growing 'rich with the wealth of her wantonness' (18:3) alludes to Isaiah (Is 23:18) by contrast where the 'merchandise' and the 'hire' of Tyre 'will be dedicated to the Lord; it will not be stored or hoarded...' The call to the people to move out of Babylon in order to escape the plagues (18:4-5) allude to the prophecies of Jeremiah (Jer 51:45; 51:9). It is an allegory for the essential dichotomy between the Christian way of life and the world (Jn 17:9,14,16; Rom 12:2). Babylon is to be rendered 'double for her deeds' and 'a double drought' is to be mixed 'for her in the cup she mixed' (18:6). 'Double' is a symbol of abundance. Thus vengeance against Babylon for her misdeeds is to be without limit. The reason for her punishment is her haughtiness (18:7). The rest of the chapter contains a threefold lamentation: of the kings (18:9-10), of the merchants (18:11:16), and of the shipmasters and sailors (18:17-19), the kings because they have lost their promoter and protector in their ungodly ways, the merchants because they have lost a valuable customer, the shipmasters and sailors because they will be out of job. The final picture is grim indeed, Rome is desolated, devastated, and obliterated (18:21:24). The symbolic action of throwing a stone into the sea and comparing the disappearance of Babylon to the disappearance of the stone (18:21) is analogous to the prophetic action in Jeremiah (Jer 51:59-64).

John presents God's victory over "Babylon" (19:1-5) as divine judge and warrior. The victory song bursts forth with the word 'Hallelujah'. It is one of the two Hebrew words that have been retained in common

religious use in Christian worship - the other being, 'Hosanna'. But, interestingly, the Apocalypse is the only book of the Scriptures where it is used. It occurs four times in this chapter. It means 'Praise the Lord'. God is praised for several² reasons. His judgements are true and just; He has judged the harlot and punished her; He has avenged on her the blood of His martyrs; the smoke from her goes up for ever and ever, all recapitulating earlier images, the last symbolising the destruction being final and complete so that Rome will never again rise from her ruins. His kingship and the marriage of the Lamb form the subject matter of 19:6-8. God is called Almighty. Interestingly, out of the ten times in the NT, this title for God occurs nine times in the Apocalypse (1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 17:7,17; 19:6,15; 21:22). There was never a time in history when such force was drawn up against the Church and, therefore, John uses it repeatedly to impress upon his persecuted brethren the fact that God is mightier than the might of their persecutors. The sequence of victory in battle, accession as king, and the sacred marriage is a Canaanite mythic pattern.¹⁹ The 'marriage of the Lamb' (19:7) is an allegory of the close relationship of Christ with his faithful. The depiction of the marriage of the Lamb here alludes to the fulfilment of the Jewish Messianic expectation (Is 25:6) and the words of Jesus himself (Mt 8:11; 26:29). The 'Bride' is those who persevere till the end. The angel forbidding John to worship him and commanding him, 'Worship God' (19:9-10) is a reminder that worship is to be rendered to God and God alone and to none other. After this, John describes the Second Coming of Christ (19:11-16). He sees 'the Faithful and True'. The title is given to Christ in 1:5 and 3:7,14. He is seated on a 'white horse' symbolising victory march. There are 'many diadems' on his head. His eyes are like flames of fire. We have met this description in 1:14 and 2:18. There were many diadems on his head. Many diadems, i.e., unnumbered, signify unlimited, immeasurable and supreme power in contradistinction to that of Satan in 12:3 and of the beast in 13:1. His robe 'dipped in blood' (19:13) together with treading 'the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God' (14:17-20) recalls the vision of the harvest and vintage (14:14-20), which is an allusion to Isaiah (Is 63:1-6. The imagery of the Messiah as a warrior whose clothes are soaked with the blood of his slaughtered enemies is common in the Jewish apocalyptic literature. He is called the Word of God. This

expression referring to Jesus is found in the first chapter of the Gospel according to John. For the Jews 'word' was not a mere sound or symbol; it was powerful and as good as an action performed which cannot be revoked (Gen 1:3, 6, 9, 14, 26; 27:1-37; Wis Sol 18:15-16; Heb 4:12). Therefore, the expression symbolises the power and might of the victorious Christ. The following description (19:14-16) reinforces the image. Then follows a horrifying description of the doom of the enemies of Christ (19:17-21). The call to the banquet (19:17-18) is the dramatic prelude to the battle described in the verses immediately following. The description is analogous to Ezekiel (Ez 39:17-20) and Isaiah (Is 34:1-7) where the corpses of enemy warriors and horses are described as a sacrificial slaughter. The bloody picture is a common feature of the Jewish apocalyptic literature. The capture of the beast and the false prophet (19:20) symbolises the final defeat of Satan's agents; their being thrown into the lake of fire is the punishment meted out to them for their sins.

Now it is the turn of the Satan; he is bound 'for a thousand years' (20:2). The number 1000 symbolises a considerable quantity, a long period: God is kind to 1000 generations (Ex 20:6; Jer 32:18); 1000 years are like a day for God (Ps 90:4); a day in his service is worth more than 1000 others (Ps 84:11). Binding of Satan is analogous to the binding of evil angels during the deluge to be confined and punished until the last judgement in Enoch literature (1 Enoch 10:4-8; 18:11-19:3; 21:1-10). Those who died for their faith 'shall be priests of God and of Christ, and they shall reign with him a thousand years' (20:10). This belief does not occur in any other book of the NT. Nevertheless, in the early Church it gave rise to the doctrine of Milleniarism or Chiliasm: that for a thousand years before the final end Christ will rule this earth with his saints; after that will come the final struggle, the general resurrection, the last judgment, and the final consummation. The belief originated in the Jewish milieu. In the earlier times the Jews thought that the Messianic kingdom of righteousness would last for ever (Dan 2:44; 7:14,27). But slowly their thinking changed. Towards the last century BC, they began to think that the Messiah will rule the earth for a limited time, and then the final consummation would come (1 Enoch 93:3-10; 2 Bar 40:3). Then came the

speculation on the limited reign of the Messiah. It was differently defined. One view was that it would last for 400 years (4 Ezra 7:28-29). This view was based on Genesis (Gen 15:13) and Psalm 90:15. Some thought that it would last for 6000 years, the time taken for creation. This figure was arrived at by taking a day as 1000 years (Ps 90:4; 2 Pet 3:8). Christians referred to as priests is also found elsewhere (1 Pet 1:9). The reference to Gog and Magog (20:8) is an allusion to Ezekiel chs 38-39. This imagery helps the seer to give the battle a cosmic dimension. Now comes the final judgment (20:11-15). John says that 'books were opened. Also another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, by what they had done' (20:12). We have seen earlier that the judgment based on ones' deeds recorded in the 'books' existed in Judaism (Dan 7:10; 1 Enoch 90:20; 2 Bar 24:1, 4 Ezra 6:20). We have also seen the symbolism of 'the book of life' (Ex 32:32; Ps 69:28; Is 4:3; Phil 4:3; Ap 3:5; 13:8).

The seventh vision in the last series concerns new creation: new heaven, new earth and new Jerusalem (21:1-8). Its main focus is on salvation. The creation of a new heaven and a new earth is seen as the fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah (65:17ff). The disappearance of sea is analogous to the confinement of the dragon in 19:20 and the beast in 20:10 as well as the elimination of Death and Hades in 20:14, and symbolises the definitive victory of God over Satan and his agents. The vision is accompanied by the declaration that 'the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them' (21:3). This announcement alludes to God's promises to his people in the past (Lev 26:11-12; Ez 37:27). God also promises to 'wipe away every tear from every eye...' (21:4) symbolising an end to all pain and suffering and the establishment of real everlasting peace and happiness. The promise recalls 7:17 and Isaiah 25:8. Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls showed John the holy city of Jerusalem coming down from heaven 'like a most rare jewel, like jasper, clear as crystal' (21:11-13). The description is analogous to Isaiah 54:11-12. The description of the twelve city gates is similar to Ezekiel 48:30-35. The twelve gates with the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of

Israel symbolise the unification and gathering of Israel, a Jewish apocalyptic expectation of the Messianic times. The twelve foundations of the wall had the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb (21:14). By integrating the twelve tribes and the twelve apostles into the New Jerusalem, John shows the universal character of Christianity as well as the essential unity of the Jews and the Christians. Then John saw the angel measuring the city (21:15-17). The city was foursquare. In the ancient world, it was common for cities to be built in square shape; Nineveh and Babylon were in the form of a square. But what is interesting is that the holy city was not only square but also a perfect cube (21:16). The cube stands for perfection: the altar of the burnt-offering, the altar of the incense, and the High Priest's breastplate were all in cubic shape (Ex 27:1; 30:2; 28:16); the Holy of Holies in Solomon's temple was a perfect cube (1 Kgs 6:20); this shape comes repeatedly in Ezekiel's vision of the new Jerusalem and the new temple (Ez 41:21; 43:16; 45:2; 48:20). Hence the holy city in the shape of a cube is an allegory for the dwelling place of God. Its measurement was 12000 stadia, i.e., a perfect area. Its wall measured a hundred and forty four cubits. Once again we have a perfect number here. The foundations of the wall was adorned with twelve precious stones and the twelve gates had twelve pearls (21:19-21). The twelve stones were worn by the High Priest on his breastplate (Ex 28:17), and nine of them tally with John's list. It looks John has used the High Priest's breastplate as his model. In this case the symbolism is clear: the wall and the gates are like the High Priest, i.e., inside the wall is the dwelling place of God and all who enter its gates will be in His presence. According to Charles, these pearls, in John's time, represented the twelve constellations of the Zodiac, but, here, are listed in reverse order.²⁰ The purpose may be to show that the constellations are no more the governors of the universe in the new creation. The absence of the temple in the new city (21:22) is a clear indication that there will be full fellowship between God and man in the new Jerusalem. The New Jerusalem shall be a beacon to the nations (21:24-26). This imagery alludes to chapter 60 in Isaiah. The city will not have anything unclean (21:27). Formerly nothing unclean could enter the temple but now the whole city is clean and holy as foreseen by Zechariah (Zech 14:20-21).

The vision of the 'river of life' issuing forth from the throne of God and the Lamb (22:1) alludes to the water flowing from the threshold of the temple in Ezekiel 47:1-10. Water is the symbol of life. Hence the river of life may be standing for fulness of life. It is also possible that John has the Spirit in mind, the giver of life as described in the Gospel according to John (Jn 7:37-39). The tree of life on either side of the river (22:2) is an allusion to the original bliss of the Eden (Gen 2:9); its leaves meant for healing of the nations alludes to the restoration in Ezekiel 47:12. John's description of the tree of life is parallel to the Rabbinical picture of the tree of life in paradise. They conceived it spread over the entire paradise, with five hundred thousand fragrant perfumes, and with abundant fruits, each one with different pleasant taste. The description, therefore, may be taken as an allegory for abundant spiritual gifts: eternal life, joy and happiness. That is the promise on which the vision ends (22:3-5). The rest of the chapter is the summing up of the major themes of the books by way of recapitulation by various characters.