

The Allegory of the Book of Revelation

17th Degree Essay

College of the Consistory

By

David E. Amstutz, KCCH

Valley of Richmond

Orient of Virginia

October 1, 2007

“The Almighty is the great mechanic of the creation; the first philosopher and original teacher of all science. Let us, then, learn to reverence our master, and let us not forget the labors of our ancestors.” (Paine, 1794)

Prelude

The theme of the 17th Degree is that divine revelation is expressed in several religious beliefs having their origins in the “Orient and Occident” and, that the Essenes believed it man’s duty to gather and mold these fragments of divine revelation into a harmonious whole (Clausen, 1974). The bringing together of ideas from the various beliefs, which was necessary for the Essenes to accomplish what they did, resulted from the conquering of Alexander and the subsequent multi-national use of the Greek language.

Pike (1857) makes liberal use of the symbolism and words of the Book of Revelation in the 17th Degree ritual and lecture. The Book of Revelation is composed in a style which suits Pike’s purposes for the 17th Degree perfectly. Pike’s 17th Degree ritual conveys the events described in the Book of Revelation, imbuing them with Masonic meaning (Hutchens, 1995).

The College of the Consistory synopsis of the 17th Degree states that beliefs originating in the middle-east held that a Redeemer was to come. According to Hutchens (1995) the Book of Revelation expresses the idea that the Second Coming of Christ will be preceded by worldwide catastrophe and followed by an extinguishment of evil. Apocalypse, from the Greek means to uncover, or according to Hutchens (1995) a revelation. Because of the worldwide catastrophe described in the Book of Revelation, the word “apocalyptic” has taken on the meaning of “portending future disaster” (Webster, 1984).

1.0 Background

The author and time of writing of the Book of Revelation are both unknown; although several credit the work to John the Evangelist and time it to the latter half of the first century. Grammatical errors and stylistic abnormalities in the Book of Revelation make John the Evangelist doubtful as its author (Wikipedia, 2007). Because the Book of Revelation deals with “what was, what is and what will be” there is no way to establish the time of writing with certainty from the Book’s content, other than that it followed the life on earth of Jesus Christ.

The author of the Book of Revelation is taken (labeled) here to be John of Patmos. John was a widely used name at the time, and this John was by his written admission, living on the island of Patmos. The island of Patmos is in the Aegean Sea off the coast of what is

today Turkey, NNW of the Isle of Rhodes. John of Patmos is neither of the Saints John who both knew Jesus Christ on earth.

If we accept that the analyses of grammatical structure and style are correct then John of Patmos is a new Biblical personality. He may not be a scholar; but, he must have been deeply knowledgeable of three things: the Jewish writings, astronomy and the concept of faith taught by Jesus Christ. All three were available by the mid to late first century. The Jewish writings had been available for as much as a thousand years, and incorporated much of the mythology having ancient origins in many countries. And, the Greeks authored on astronomy centuries before the birth of Christ, making ample use of observations, analyses and hypotheses dating more than three thousand years before. Also, John of Patmos was undoubtedly an excellent observer, especially of the atmosphere and celestial bodies.

The subject of revelation needs to be addressed. We all differ in our views especially those relating to religion, which are faith based. We each owe that care be exercised to not disturb unnecessarily the views of others. For this essay the opinion of Thomas Paine is followed: "Revelation, when applied to religion, means something communicated *immediately* from God to man. No one will deny or dispute the power of the Almighty to make such a communication, (but) it is a revelation to that person only. It is *hearsay* to every other person, and consequently they are not obliged to believe it." (Paine, 1794)

An attempt is made in this essay to interpret four allegories selected from the Book of Revelation. Hundreds of millions have undertaken the same tasks during their reading and study of the Holy Bible. My ideas and interpretations are thus not likely at all to be unique.

2.0 Allegories from the Book of Revelation

Allegories are symbolic representations serving as veils to cover a message (Pike, 1871). Whether these veils covered the message as received by John of Patmos, or were added by him, is unknown. The author says that he reports what he saw, as he was told to do (Rev 1:19).

2.1 The Seven Churches

The veiling afforded by the allegories seems to vary from light to heavy. For example, the mystery of the seven golden candlesticks (Rev 1:12) and the seven stars (Rev 1:16) are revealed in the same chapter to be the angles of the seven churches (Rev 1:20) and the seven churches, respectively. The seven churches are named (Rev 1:11). All were located in western Turkey, three along the coast and four inland along a line extending from north to south. They are named in a clockwise order, beginning with the southernmost on the coast.

There are two related subjects to consider; the audience for whom the Book of Revelation was written and the meanings assigned to the number seven. John of Patmos was told in Rev (1:11), "What thou seest, write in a book and send it to the seven churches: í ö The churches were presumably communities of Christians living in the named towns. (Technically, we shouldn't use the name Christian when writing about the Book of Revelation unless we consider the Book of Revelation to have been written after the early 4th century, when the term, Christian, was first used.)

Lifting the second veil, my view is that the seven churches refer to the collection of early Christian communities where ever they were located, and all of those groups of non-believers. The latter would include members of the Jewish sects as well as those who were faithful in gods other than the God of Abraham. Certainly we should expect that in converting to Christianity some would be lukewarm, weak or even failing in their beliefs and practices. Rev 1:20 refers to: "the mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks." "The seven stars are the angles of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks are seven churches." The seven stars represent the *individuals* who are associated with the seven churches. These individuals are seen to be as numerous as are the stars in the night sky. The seven golden candlesticks, representing the seven churches, refer to the collection or total of churches, which would exceed the number seven.

Candlesticks can be translated *lamp holders* (Holy Bible, 1901), which reminds us of the Menorah. The Menorah was described by Flavius Josephus in the third book of his "Antiquities of the Jews" "the seven lamps upon the candlesticks, they referred to the course of the seven planets, of which that is their number í ö (Wikipedia, 2007).

Specifically then, the Book of Revelation was written for individuals. This is demonstrated almost absolutely by the reference of the angles of the seven churches to the stars, and the directions given to John of Patmos, "To the angle of the church in Ephesus write:" (Rev 2:1). This direction to John of Patmos is repeated in the name of each of the seven churches.

The *word* seven has been seen then in the Book of Revelation to refer to a collection of many; and in the case of the existent Hebrews to refer, in the example of the Menorah, to the numeral seven. The word seven in the Book of Revelation has yet another meaning. Rev (3:1 and 4:5) refer to the "seven Spirits of God" represented by "seven lamps of fire" The "Spirit of God (Jehovah)" are said in Isaiah (11:2) to be: "the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of Jehovah"; but these total three (some count them as six) not seven. Thus we see the word seven used in the Book of Revelation to mean the *collection* of, even when that collection contains fewer than seven elements.

The number seven also referred then and now to perfection (Wikipedia, 2007), as we Masons are well aware. A wonderful example of the mysticism for seven that we seem to hold within ourselves was provided by Isaac Newton in his book, *Opticke* (Newton,

1704). Newton partitioned the wavelengths (colors) of light using a prism. Being an alchemist of sorts he wanted there to be seven colors, and added indigo to accomplish this. Wikipedia (2007) reports that: "Newton chose the 7 colors out of belief derived from the sophists that there was a connection between the musical notes, the known objects in the solar system and the days of the week. [From the same source we learn that Newton wrote that the world would not end before 2060.] Pike (1857) is a victim of the same idealization (pursuit of perfection) when he decorates the 17th Degree chamber with colors alleged to be the colors of the rainbow: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet. Many even today believe erroneously that there are seven colors in white light and the rainbow. Least we leave Isaac Newton in a light far more dim than he deserves, we recall that he restored the spectrum of colors to pure white light using a lens and second prism; showing that pure white light contained (was constructed of) a band of wavelengths or frequencies.

2.2 An Emerald to Look Upon

Rev (4:3) describes a "rainbow around the throne (of God) like to the emerald to look upon." This is at first seemingly impossible to understand. The rainbow likely refers to the covenant of the rainbow (Genesis 9:11-19). But what of the emerald? An idea comes to mind to those of us who have worked at sea. Away from land we have a sharp horizon and clear atmosphere, and with a temperature inversion, an attentive observer (Bowditch, 1802) will see the sun turn green as it sets or the green flash. This beautiful sight lasts only about one second. Readers are referred to Bowditch (1802) for a wonderfully precise description of the phenomena and its cause. A view of the setting sun over a clear horizon was sure to have existed for those on the isle of Patmos.

The rainbow and green flash are perhaps the two most beautiful sights to behold in earth's atmosphere. They are more magical than sunsets or sunrises, making wonderful natural phenomena to be "seen at the throne of God"

We should note here that the rainbow and green flash are observed on opposite sides of the horizon. The green flash is seen, conditions permitting, when looking toward the sun, while the rainbow is always seen while one's back is to the sun.

2.3 The Four Creatures

"And round about the throne, four living creatures full of eyes before and behind. And the first creature was like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face of a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle. And the four living creatures, having each one of them six wings, and full of eyes round about and within; and they have no rest day and night, " (Rev 4:6-8). [It is regrettable that editions of the Bible printed in the last fifty years use the word "beast" in place of "creature" Biblical quotations in this essay are taken from the Holy Bible (1901). The creatures referred to are God's "creations" not some monsters.]

The four creatures are four of the twelve constellations of the Zodiac. The eyes refer to stars. The stars never resting day or night refers to the fact that they are never in the earth's shadow or they know no day or night; and, the constellations advance in helical rising four minutes every twenty four hours. The six wings refer to the six months each constellation of the Zodiac requires to cross the night sky from horizon to horizon. Biblical citations confirming this interpretation, though less specific, are found in Ezekiel (1: 5-28 and 10:12).

The early Persians and Chinese are said to have identified four bright stars in the Zodiac that, watch over and protect the rest of the stars (Hutchens, 1993 and Harding, 1935). These four stars were in the cardinal points: vernal and autumnal equinoxes and winter and summer solstices. The four stars and their creature constellations were: Aldebaran in Taurus (bull) or vernal equinox; Antares in Scorpio (the Hebrews called this constellation the Eagle) or autumnal equinox; Regulus in Leo (lion) or winter solstice; and Fomalhaut in Aquarius (water carrier) or summer solstice.

Today Fomalhaut is named a portion of the constellation Piscis Austrinus (Astronomy, 2007). When viewing this portion of the night sky it is obvious that water poured out of Aquarius falls on Piscis Austrinus. Owing to precession of the equinox these four stars and their constellations no longer mark the cardinal points. The current sidereal hour angle (SHA) of Aldebaran is 291° (Nautical Almanac, 1990). Given the cycle of precession of the equinox to be approximately 25,800 years, Aldebaran stood at the vernal equinox (defined today as the First Point of Aries) 4,900 years ago. The mythical symbolism of Taurus impregnating the earth in spring then dates to 2,900 B.C.

The nearly perfect orthogonality of these four stars can be appreciated by differencing their SHAs: Regulus (208°), Antares (112°) and Fomalhaut (15°), or by plotting their relative orientations.

These stars highlight the four living creatures: the Bull, the Lion, the Eagle and Man. There was no better way for John of Patmos to cloak his story with man's knowledge of the material heavens. These living creatures full of eyes had moved some 41° between when they were first named in writing until the approximate time the Book of Revelation was written; and have moved 28° since then. The motion of the living creatures was slow; but would have been apparent because the constellations no longer marked their seasons. Only by retaining memory through mythology could mankind have appreciated this motion which proceeds so slowly.

John of Patmos refers to the creature like a calf rather than the bull; this naming is a perfect reference to the earlier time when the younger Taurus marked the vernal equinox.

The constellations of the Zodiac observe the earth while slowly, very, very slowly advancing as a wheel. They also serve as the background to measure planetary motion. To John of Patmos they must have also been important as being creations of God, made on the fourth day (Genesis (1:19)). "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to

divide the day from the night: and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years.ö (Genesis (1:14)).

As a final note concerning the four constellations of the Zodiac, they (the creatures) said to John of Patmos: ö*Come and see*ö (Rev 6:1, 3, 5, and 7); and then each of the four horsemen was beheld (Rev 4:2, 4, 5, and 8). Clearly, the horses are references to four planets passing by four constellations (horsemen). The colors of the horses, the planets representing the horses and the constellations representing the horsemen must have been: white, Jupiter, Sagittarius (bow); red, Mars, Perseus (sword); black, Mercury, Libra (balances); pale, Saturn, Scorpio (scorpion). Perseus is the only one of these constellations to be outside the Zodiac. (None of the constellations of the Zodiac include a character brandishing a sword.) The planet Venus also qualifies as being white, however Venus was not generally associated in mythology with violence; and, I believe, John of Patmos uses Venus to represent the, ö*woman sitting upon a scarlet-colored beast*ö (Rev 17:3). The scarlet-colored beast is represented by the star Antares. [While this essay was being written, Jupiter stood nearly over Antares.]

2.4 Time

Masonry has gleaned from and perpetuates beliefs having separate origins in the ancient beliefs. Pike (1871) appears to use the beliefs associated with Christianity, the Essenes and Gnostics as a lens or clearing house for the ancient ideas. There is probably no better way to accomplish this than to cite directly from the Book of Revelation, using terminology derived from ancient cosmological speculation.

Our western mythologies began in Sumeria and migrated with Abraham and his followers to the eastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea. This proposition appears correct based on determinable dates and the written record. An example of the use of seven is found in the flood myth of the Sumerians, which states that rains fell: ö*For six days and nights, í , when the seventh day dawned the hurricane abated, í , the flood ceased.*ö (Woolley, 1995) We conclude, regarding the seven day week, that the days were numbered in Sumeria to match the seven luminaries. The seven day week was preserved in the Book of Genesis, illustrating the importance of the numeral seven to the Hebrews. It is interesting, perhaps amazing in fact, that the days of the week have retained their number and naming after the seven luminaries to this day; a span of some 6,000 years.

Time is a critical element of human life. Man's successful measurement of time and time interval marks one of his greatest achievements. This activity was no doubt one of his earliest intellectual undertakings. The heavenly bodies have provided the absolute standard for measuring time and time interval until the introduction of atomic clocks in the last portion of the current century. This measurement and projection of time is a significant element of the Book of Revelation.

The importance, correctness and applications of time units chosen by the ancients and preserved through use over the millennia are demonstrated wonderfully in a article by Frank (2007). The subject of the article has nothing to do with religion, philosophy or history. The article deals the nucleosynthesis that is hypothesized to have taken place shortly after the Big Bang. What is important are the succession of events taking place over spans of time from one second to one hour and then to about eight weeks. These are the units of time defined by early man and preserved unto today: the second (from the rate of the heart's beat), the minute (from the number of heart beats in 60 second ó 60 being the ancient Sumerian number base), four minutes (from the daily change in time of the helical rising of the stars), the hour from the twelfth part of the day and of the night, the day (from the complete passage of the sun in twenty four hours), and the week of seven days (from the seven bodies of the solar system). Longer intervals for time exist and are relevant, but not to the article on nucleosynthesis; the month (from a twelfth part of the year), the year (for passage of one cycle of the constellations of the Zodiac and one cycle of the sun through the constellations of the Zodiac) and 25,800 years (for one complete cycle of precession of the equinox). Not all civilizations developed these measures of time and time interval; but, all use them today. This serves to reveal that human kind will find what's best, and most if not all, will use what is best. This adaptation to the best ideas, when applied to philosophical and religious beliefs, seems to be the message of Pike (1871) in the 17th Degree.

Rev (9:15) contains a phrase, "for an hour and a day, and a month and a year, í ö. We observe that the series of units of time are all based upon observations of the heavenly bodies. The unit of the week is missing from the series; but the week of course is not based on similar observations. What does John of Patmos intend by this phrase? The hour and the day relate to the rotation of the earth. The month and the year relate to the revolution of the earth about the sun. These solar system characteristics *must* have been known. The notion that mankind was ignorant of the earth's rotation and revolution about the sun until long after the Birth of Christ is doubtful to me. Chaldean astronomers are credited with observing the westward motion of the equinoxes three centuries before the Birth of Christ (Wikipedia, 2007). And the daily four minute rate of change in helical rising was known to the Sumerians. John of Patmos wrote of what he *saw* (Rev 1:2), or what intellectually he would have observed from above the solar system, when he ascended through the door of the heavens (Rev 4:1). He could not have failed to observe the motional characteristics of the solar system. The Book of Revelation was his opportunity to reveal what he knew.

3.0 Conclusions

The allegories of the Book of Revelation are numerous and complex and our interpretations of them have many uncertainties. Several years could be invested in attempting to understand the allegories and the messages intended by John of Patmos. The references to the night sky are particularly intriguing. We can only speculate about the knowledge the writer held regarding the motions of the heavenly bodies. Some interesting studies of star locations could be undertaken. For example, determine the

dates when the four planets (horses) are found with their constellations (horsemen) and Venus over Antares; determine which polar constellations are set into the sea from the latitude of Patmos and further examine the ancient literature to learn more thoroughly what the ancients knew about the actual motions of the earth.

Pike(1871) focused the 17th Degree on the gathering of ideas, philosophical and religious, from the east and west, and their distillation which lead to a new relationship between man and his God. The Book of Revelation also brings the ideas of old as told in large part through celestial mythology, and mysticism brought about through lack of knowledge of the earthly environment, to reveal his vision of the new faith in Jesus Christ.

Epilogue

The Book of Revelation is nicely described by using a phrase found in the 17th Degree (Pike, 1871): "A vast crowd of indistinct abstraction, hovering in the imagination, a train of words embodying no tangible meaning, an inextricable labyrinth of subtleties, í ö

The Source (Mitchner, 1965) is a very well written historical novel that concerns in part the evolution of religious thought in the middle east. From Mitchner's book the following is selected:

"We seek God, not to find Him but to discover ourselves."

Reference

Astronomy (2007). *Astronomy*, Vol. 35, No. 9, September, 2007, Kalmbach Publishing Company, 100 pp.

Bowditch, Nathaniel (1802). *American Practical Navigator, an Epitome of navigation*, H.O. Pub. 9, U.S. Naval Oceanographic Office, Washington, D.C., Edition of 1966, 1524 pp.

Clausen, Henry C. (1974). *Clausen's Commentaries on Morals and Dogma*, Neyeneseh printers, San Diego, California, 258 pp.

Ezekiel [see Holy Bible, 1901)]

Frank, Adam (2007). *How the Big Bang Forged the First Elements*, *Astronomy*, Vol. 35, No. 10, October, 2007, pp 32-37.

Genesis [see Holy Bible, 1901]

Harding, Arthur M. (1935). *Astronomy, the Splendor of the Heavens Brought Down to Earth*, Garden City Publishing Company, Inc. Garden City, New York, 418 pp.

Holy Bible (1901). *Standard Edition, Newly Edited by the American Revision Committee*, Thomas Nelson and Sons, New York, 1064 pp.

Hutchens, Rex R. (1993). *A Glossary to Morals and Dogma*, Electric City Printing Company, Inc. Anderson, South Carolina, 538 pp.

Hutchens, Rex R. (1995). *A Bridge to Light*, Electric City Publishing Company, Inc. Williamston, South Carolina, 340 pp.

Isaiah [see Holy Bible (1901)]

Mitchner, James (1965). *The Source*, Random House, Inc. New York, 909 pp.

Nautical Almanac (1990). *The Nautical Almanac for the year 1990*, Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 353 pp.

Newton, Isaac (1704). *Opticks; A Treatise on the Reflections, Refractions, Inflections and Colours of Light*. Reported in Wikipedia, 2007

Paine, Thomas (1794). *The Age of Reason, Being an Investigation of the True and Fabulous Theology*, Prometheus Books, Amherst, New York, 1984, 190 pp.

Pike, Albert (1857). *Magnum Opus or The Great Work*, Kessinger Publishing Company.

Pike, Albert (1871). *Morals and Dogma*, new and revised Edition of 1950, L.H. Jenkins, Inc. Richmond, Virginia, 861 pp.

Rev (x:y). [see Holy Bible (1901)]

Webster (1984). *New Riverside University Dictionary*, Riverside publishing Co., 1536 pp.

Wikipedia (2007). Citations from the Wikipedia web site taken August ó September, 2007.

Woolley, C. Leonard (1995). *The Sumerians*, Barnes and Nobel, Inc. by arrangement with Oxford University Press, 198 pp.

