

Adult Catechism Class February 22, 2016

Acts of the Apostles and other New Testament letters

Part 1: Scripture Readings:

Acts 4:32-35: Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

Hebrews 9:24-28: For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made by human hands, a mere copy of the true one, but he entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. Nor was it to offer himself again and again, as the high priest enters the Holy Place year after year with blood that is not his own; for then he would have had to suffer again and again since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself. And just as it is appointed for mortals to die once, and after that the judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

1 Peter 3:8-9: Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called—that you might inherit a blessing.

1 John 2: 15-17: Do not love the world or the things in the world. The love of the Father is not in those who love the world; for all that is in the world—the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches—comes not from the Father but from the world. And the world and its desire are passing away, but those who do the will of God live forever.

James 2: 14-17: What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

Revelation 22: 12-16: "See, I am coming soon; my reward is with me, to repay according to everyone's work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they will have the right to the tree of life and may enter the city by the gates. Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. "It is I, Jesus, who sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star."

Part 2: The Acts of the Apostles: Author: Luke the Beloved Physician_Date Written: 60's or 80's AD_Date of Narrative: 30-50 AD_ Acts is the second volume of the two-volume work, Luke-Acts. Written by Luke the beloved physician (Col 4:14), Luke-Acts seamlessly connects the life of Jesus to the lives of the early Apostles after the resurrection. The gospel of Luke is about what Jesus "began to do and teach." (Acts 1:1). But Acts is about what Jesus continued to do and teach through the lives of his followers. Acts highlights the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy and illustrates that Christianity is not an offense to Roman law or custom._Acts begins with a recapitulation of Jesus' ascension mentioned

at the end of Luke. Jesus tells the apostles that they will bring his message to Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (1:8). Luke uses this prophetic statement as an outline for Acts. Once the apostles are "baptized with the Holy Spirit" (1:5) at Pentecost (2), they evangelize the people in Jerusalem (1-7). Soon they are suppressed in the city and begin to evangelize in the surrounding territory of Judea and Samaria (8-12). Eventually, the Church accepts Gentile believers and promotes the gospel throughout the whole known world (13-28).

The apostles, the first bishops of the Church, appoint deacons to assist them (6). Stephen, one of these deacons, is executed for his faith and so becomes the proto-martyr of the Church. The persecutor Saul encounters Jesus in a dramatic vision and becomes a Christian (9). His name is changed to Paul and Acts follows his life. He is also the author of many of the letters in the New Testament.

Church authority becomes a key issue when debate is raging over the inclusion of the Gentiles in the Church. Peter's vision of unclean animals (10) and his speech before the apostles (15) constitute the deciding factors in favor of the Gentiles. Peter and Paul figure as the central apostles in Acts. They each give seven speeches and each plays a particular role: Peter as the central authority of the Church; Paul as the chief evangelist. In fact, to this day their skulls are in adjacent reliquaries in St. John Lateran and statues of the two flank St. Peter's Basilica in Rome.

The Holy Spirit's action is central to the movement of the plot. He descends on the apostles with power, inspires their preaching, tells them where to go and aids them in making doctrinal decisions. The Holy Spirit fills Stephen when he testifies before the Sanhedrin and the Spirit comes upon the Gentiles to indicate God's desire for their salvation. Twice the issue of Paul's Roman citizenship is brought up. Luke carefully shows that his practices were not contrary to Roman law and that each time he was imprisoned or beaten there was no legal justification. In the last few chapters, Paul gets entangled in an inefficient legal system. The Jews in the Temple are about to kill him for supposedly bringing Gentiles into the part of the Temple where they were not allowed. He is arrested by Roman authorities because they think he started a riot. The tribune who arrested him hands him over to the governor in Caesarea, Felix, who never decides his case as a favor to the Jewish authorities (24:27). Felix's successor, Festus, takes a similar approach and suggests that Paul be tried before the Jews in Jerusalem which would have meant sure death (25:9). Paul then appeals to Caesar, which was his right to do as a citizen. He is thus taken to Rome and Acts ends with him under house arrest in Rome. From piecing together the evidence we have, historians posit that Paul's case was eventually dismissed. He proceeded to travel and evangelize, but finally is brought back to Rome and martyred there about six years after the end of Acts' narrative.

Part 3: The Letter to the Hebrews: There is no agreement among scholars, ancient or modern, as to the identity of the inspired writer of the Letter to the Hebrews. In the earliest years of the Church the letter was considered to be included among the works of St. Paul, apostle to the Gentiles but beginning in the 2nd century AD Biblical scholars began to address problems with assigning the letter to Paul: 1. Unlike Paul's other letters there is no greeting at the beginning of the letter identifying the inspired writer. 2. The style and vocabulary of the Letter to the Hebrews is more elegant than Paul's other letters. 3. The subject matter and major themes are different from Paul's other letters.

The Letter to the Hebrews is indeed unique in its subject matter and themes. It is the only New Testament document which identifies Jesus in His divinely appointed role as the High Priest of the New Covenantal order. The letter is distinctive in its literary composition, having no greeting or formal outline like other letters written during the first century. Compare the opening of the Letter to the Hebrews with Paul's letter to the Romans, for example. It is also written in very good Greek, unlike all other New Testament documents with the exception of the letters of Sts. James and Jude which are also written in good Greek. The vocabulary of the document is unlike the other New Testament letters, using a vocabulary which focuses on the liturgical and sacrificial significance of the Old Covenant as compared

to the New Covenant, and other topics not addressed in the other documents of the New Testament. Finally, the Letter to the Hebrews is unusual in its specific use and application of Old Testament Scripture which is used in the letter to illustrate the completion of the Old Covenant which is fulfilled by the perfect sacrifice of Jesus the Messiah, the divine Son who stands before the throne of God as both perfect sacrificial victim and divine High Priest of the New Covenantal order. These themes are expressed nowhere else in sacred Scripture with such depth and clarity.

Most scholars agree the letter had to be written by a Jew who was formally trained in the doctrine and theology of Old Covenant liturgical worship; therefore, some scholars, like the 2nd century Roman lawyer turned Christian apologist Tertullian, have suggested the Levitical priest Joseph Barnabas as the inspired writer of The Letter to the Hebrews.

The Letter to the Hebrews was accepted as part of the canon, as Holy Spirit inspired Scripture by the Eastern Church from the earliest years of the Church.

A few Bible scholars believe that this letter was intended for Jewish and Gentile Christians but the majority of scholars are convinced by the content of the letter itself that it was intended for Jews who had converted to the New Covenant faith. Indeed, the Letter to the Hebrews doesn't have any of the characteristics of a 1st century letter. Instead it reads like a homily or treatise to which a postscript was added so that it could be distributed among the Jewish-Christian communities. The Letter to the Hebrews and 1 John are the only epistles that have no introductory greeting. Since Hebrews does have a postscript it has been suggested that the greeting was lost from the original document but in all the copies of ancient hand written manuscripts that survive from ancient times there is no example in which only the greeting was lost or damaged.

Part 4: The Letter of James: The author of the epistle simply identifies himself as "James, a servant/slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ" (1:1). Christian tradition and biblical scholars generally agree that the author is James, the "brother" of the Lord - listed first among the four "brothers" of Jesus mentioned in the Synoptic Gospels (Mark 6:3; Matt 13:55; cf. Mark 3:31-34; Matt 12:46-50); he later becomes the leader of the early Christian community in Jerusalem (Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; 1Cor 15:7; Gal 1:19; 2:9); Paul calls him an "apostle" (Gal 1:19), although there are some tensions between Paul and some "people from James" who insist that non-Jewish Christians must be circumcised (Gal 2:12). According to Josephus (Ant. 20.9.1), James was stoned to death in the early 60's at the time of the high priest Ananus II. Some scholars, however, suggest the letter is pseudepigraphic (written by someone else, after the death of James).

James stresses the importance of living faith, endurance in trials, and faith-filled undoubting prayer to God: James 1:2-7, James 5:14-16. James stresses the necessity of putting one's faith into action, esp. through care of the poor and needy: James 1:22-27, James 2:14-26. There are many similarities between passages of James and teachings of Jesus as recorded in Matthew's Gospel, especially in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5—7). James talks about the Dangers of Riches (James 5:1-6), Dangers of the Tongue (James 4:11-16), and Forgiveness of Sins and Anointing of the Sick (James 5:13-20).

Part 5: The Letters of St. Peter: Many scholars think 1 Peter is pseudepigraphic, since "Babylon" (5:13) is not used until after 70 AD, and since the Greek is much too good for a simple Galilean fisherman. Yet the good quality of this epistle's Greek could be due to Silvanus, Peter's assistant and scribe who actually wrote it; so it could very well be authentic, with only few later changes. Most scholars agree that 2 Peter is pseudepigraphic, written long after Peter's death, but still drawing upon his authority. Much of 2 Peter quotes from the Letter of Jude, thus it must be written later than Jude. The main themes of 1st Peter are: Christianity does not Threaten the Social Order of the Roman Empire; Accept Innocent Suffering as Christians; Eschatology: Maintain Hope for your Future Reward. Christianity was perceived by some outsiders as a dangerous, subversive, anti-Roman religion: as a

"new" religion, it was suspect and/or despised by many; as monotheists, Christians refused to worship the emperor or other Greco-Roman gods; Christian preaching of "freedom" for everyone might be misinterpreted. 1 Peter stresses that Christians are to be God's obedient children (1:14), a "chosen race, royal priesthood, holy nation, God's own people" (2:9-10); live holy lives, just as God is holy (1:15; 4:1-6); love one another (i.e., other believers) genuinely (1:22; 3:8; 4:8-11); accept the authority of the emperor, governors, every human institution; "honor" the emperor (2:13-17); you are free; but do not misuse your freedom as a pretext for evil (2:16; cf. Gal 5:13).

1st Peter also tells us: Rejoice, even if you have to endure trials and testing (1:6-7; 4:12-13); Follow the example of Christ in suffering unjustly (1:11; 2:21-25; 3:18; 4:1; 5:9); Don't do anything to deserve punishment (2:20; 3:16-17; 4:15); Don't repay evil with evil, but respond by blessing and doing good to those who persecute you (2:23; 3:9; 4:19); You are blessed if you are reviled or suffer "for the name of Christ" or "as a Christian" (4:14, 16). Also, Jesus' resurrection gives us hope for an imperishable inheritance (1:3-4, 11), the salvation of our souls (1:5, 9). Judgment day, the "end of all things" is near, so be prepared (2:12; 4:5-7; 5:8). In 1 Peter, the focus is on Theo-logy more than Christo-logy: Jesus is the model of obedient suffering, but God is the eschatological judge. The Christian community is the "Household of God," rather than the "Body of Christ" (as in Paul).

The important themes of 2nd Peter are: Preserve and Pass On the Apostolic Teachings, and Avoid False Teachers; Ethics: Live a Virtuous and Godly Life; Avoid Evil and Immorality; Eschatology: Don't Be Deceived or Discouraged about the Delay of the Parousia. The whole letter is written in the form of a "Testament," as the dying words of the apostle Peter (1:12-15; 3:1-2) Peter was an eyewitness of Jesus, not someone who made up or passed on myths (1:16-18) In contrast, false prophets and false teachers will try to deceive the believers (2:1-3, 10-22; 3:3-4, 16). Peter tells us to: build up your lives step-by-step: faith / goodness / knowledge / self-control / endurance / godliness / mutual affection / love (1:5-7); the Lord will punish the unrighteous, but rescue the righteous (2:4-10); avoid sinners and any kind of sin: slander, revelry, adultery, greed, etc. (2:11-22); live ethical holy lives as you wait for the coming of the "Day of the Lord" (1:3-4; 3:11-12).

Finally: some people ("scoffers") doubt that the Lord will come; they believe that the world simply goes on (3:3-4); time is irrelevant for God: "with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day" (3:8); God is not slow, but is patient, giving time for more people to repent (3:9); the "day of the Lord" will come suddenly, unexpectedly, "like a thief" (3:10a; cf. Matt 24:43-44; 1 Thess 5:2); the final destruction/purification of everything will occur with "fire" (3:7, 10, 12); finally, there will be "new heavens and a new earth" (3:13; cf. Rev 21:1).

Part 6: The Letters of St. John: The Early Christian tradition identified 1st John as a letter of John the apostle. Because of its resemblance to the fourth gospel in style, vocabulary, and ideas, it is generally agreed that both works are the product of the same school of Johannine Christianity. The terminology and the presence or absence of certain theological ideas in 1 John suggest that it was written after the gospel; it may have been composed as a short treatise on ideas that were developed more fully in the fourth gospel. To others, the evidence suggests that 1 John was written after the fourth gospel as part of a debate on the proper interpretation of that gospel. Whatever its relation to the gospel, 1 John may be dated toward the end of the first century. Unlike 2 and 3 John, it lacks in form the salutation and epistolary conclusion of a letter. These features, its prologue, and its emphasis on doctrinal teaching make it more akin to a theological treatise than to most other New Testament letters. 1st John is not a letter, but a theological treatise, for the whole community. 2nd John is an open letter of exhortation, to a particular church community. 3rd John is a personal letter of commendation, to a named community leader.

The purpose of the first Johannine letter is to combat certain false ideas, especially about Jesus, and to deepen the spiritual and social awareness of the Christian community (1 Jn 3:17). Some former

members (1 Jn 2:19) of the community refused to acknowledge Jesus as the Christ (1 Jn 2:22) and denied that he was a true man (1 Jn 4:2). The specific heresy described in this letter cannot be identified exactly, but it is a form of docetism or gnosticism; the former doctrine denied the humanity of Christ to insure that his divinity was untainted, and the latter viewed the appearance of Christ as a mere stepping-stone to higher knowledge of God. These theological errors are rejected by an appeal to the reality and continuity of the apostolic witness to Jesus. The author affirms that authentic Christian love, ethics, and faith take place only within the historical revelation and sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The fullness of Christian life as fellowship with the Father must be based on true belief and result in charitable living; knowledge of God and love for one another are inseparable, and error in one area inevitably affects the other. Although the author recognizes that Christian doctrine presents intangible mysteries of faith about Christ, he insists that the concrete Christian life brings to light the deeper realities of the gospel. The structure and language of the letter are straightforward yet repetitious. The author sets forth the striking contrasts between light and darkness, Christians and the world, and truth and error to illustrate the threats and responsibilities of Christian life. The result is not one of theological argument but one of intense religious conviction expressed in simple truths. The letter is of particular value for its declaration of the humanity and divinity of Christ as an apostolic teaching and for its development of the intrinsic connection between Christian moral conduct and Christian doctrine.

These are some of the important aspects of the Johannine letters: Community ideals: Walking in love, remaining/abiding in truth, loving one another, living in joy, showing hospitality to the "friends"; testifying to the truth. Problems are not with external "opponents," but "schismatics" who left the community: 2 John 4: "I was overjoyed to find some of your children walking in the truth." 2 John 7a: "Many deceivers have gone out into the world..."

Divisions in 2 John are caused by doctrinal disagreements such as 2 John 7b: "those who do not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh; any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist!" 3 John gives us the name of a specific opponent: Diotrephes! One side: the Elder & Gaius & Demetrius; other side: Diotrephes (and unknown followers).

Divisions in 3 John, in contrast, sound more like a leadership struggle such as 3 John 9-10: "I have written something to the church; but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing in spreading false charges against us. And not content with those charges, he refuses to welcome the friends, and even prevents those who want to do so and expels them from the church." Why are Diotrephes and the Elder opposed to each other? No doctrinal differences are mentioned, just inhospitality and excommunications (but these may also be due to doctrines). Recommendations for dealing with opponents: 2 John 10-11: "Do not receive into the house or welcome anyone who comes to you and does not bring this teaching; / for to welcome is to participate in the evil deeds of such a person." Irony: Diotrephes (in 3 John 10) seems to be doing just what the elder (in 2 John 10) had recommended: not receiving those who disagree with your teaching!

Part 7: The Letter of St. Jude: The Letter of St. Jude is listed among the seven Catholic, meaning universal, letters of the Church. The writer of the inspired Letter of St. Jude identifies himself simply as "Jude", which is Ioudas in the Greek text of the New Testament and is normally translated as Judas in the English translations of the New Testament and Judah in the Old Testament. In English translations of the New Testament this inspired writer of sacred Scripture's name is usually translated as "Jude" to distinguish him from the traitor Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus. The name "Jude" is a shortened form of the name Judas/Judah or Ye'hudah in Hebrew. The identity of Jude or Judah, the brother of St. James Bishop of Jerusalem and the writer of the inspired New Testament letter that bears his name is generally narrowed to Judas (son of) James or Judas the brother/kinsman of Jesus. Early Church histories do cast some light on his identity. An account is recorded in Bishop Eusebius' 4th century Church History by the

2nd century Jewish-Christian historian Hegesippus that the grandchildren of St. Jude were still being accused of being related to Jesus as well as being descendants of King David in the days of the Roman Emperor Domitian. Jude is never identified as "one of the Twelve", a title used by the Early Church Fathers to identify the Twelve Apostles in early Church documents and letters. Jude is listed as an apostle [with a small "a"] in the same way St. Paul, St. Barnabas, and St. Mark are identified as apostles. The scholars of the Navarre commentary and the Venerable Bede [died 735AD] who believe the Apostle James [son] of Alphaeus is the author of the Letter of St. James, also believe the Apostle Jude [son] of James is the brother of the Bishop of Jerusalem and both are kinsmen of Jesus. Biblical scholars Father Patrick Hartin, Father Daniel Harrington, Bo Redicke, and the scholars of the Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture believe James and Jude are kinsmen of Jesus who were not numbered among the Apostles.

Many scholars date the Letter of St. Jude to sometime prior to the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70AD (a catastrophic event which signaled the end of the world for the Jews and which is not mentioned in the letter), but certainly not later than the end of the first century. St. Jude's letter is not addressed to any specific faith community nor does it seem to be addressed to the Church as a whole, even though it is numbered among the 7 Catholic Letters. Since St. James Bishop of Jerusalem is specifically mentioned, it has been suggested by some scholars that this letter was intended for the same faith communities that had received St. James' letter. St. Jude's letter is addressed to "those who are called" who are "dear to God" [verse 1] and who are Jude's "dear/ beloved friends" [verse 20], which suggests that Jude has visited the faithful to whom his letter is addressed. Since the letter is richly textured with both Jewish and Christian traditions it seems most likely that the community or communities Jude has in mind are Jewish-Christian faith communities in the Diaspora - the same communities to whom James' letter was addressed. The focus of Jude's letter is to warn the New Covenant faith communities to beware of false teachers, to avoid them, and to prevent them from having the opportunity to share their erroneous teachings in the assembly of the Eucharistic celebration, where false Christians become "stains on our love-feasts."

The tone of Jude's letter is friendly but not as personal as St. James' letter where the dear bishop spoke of those reading his letter in the intimate language of kinship 14 times in 5 chapters ["my brothers/sisters"; "my beloved brothers/sisters"], and spoke of himself as a "teacher". Like the letter of St. James, there is an underlying eschatological [end times/ last things] theme throughout message, but Jude's letter is more Christological, Trinitarian and apocalyptic [a genre of literature focusing on God's unveiled "revelation"] than the Letter of St. James. Biblical scholars, both ancient and modern have noted the close connection between the 2nd Letter of St. Peter and the Letter of St. Jude. The similarity between the two letters might suggest that one inspired writer may have influenced the other, or perhaps that both letters came from a common body of teaching within the early Church. There are also marked differences between the two letters. The Greek is better in Jude and his letter is less passionate and less personal than 2 Peter. The Letter of St. Jude is written in a humble and affectionate manner but without any personal information about the author, unlike 2 Peter in which the inspired author includes his personal apostolic witness, including his recollection of the miracle of the Transfiguration of the Lord into His glory [see 2 Peter 2 12-18; Matthew 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36]. Jude states his reason for writing his letter in verses 3-4 which is to identify and combat false teachers within the Church who spread heresy by misrepresent the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He assures his readers that there is no other foundation other than that teaching which was passed by Jesus to the Apostles and from the Apostles to the Church. Jude also accuses these false witnesses to the teaching of the Messiah of indulging in immoral behavior that denies Christian moral values by interpreting the Law of Freedom of the Gospel as a Law of license to engage in sinful behavior, actions that reject Jesus Christ and which marks them down for condemnation on the Day of Judgment.

Part 8: The Book of Revelation: The Apocalypse, or Revelation to John, the last book of the Bible, is one of the most difficult to understand because it abounds in unfamiliar and extravagant symbolism, which at best appears unusual to the modern reader. Symbolic language, however, is one of the chief characteristics of apocalyptic literature, of which this book is an outstanding example. Such literature enjoyed wide popularity in both Jewish and Christian circles from ca. 200 B.C. to A.D. 200. This book contains an account of visions in symbolic and allegorical language borrowed extensively from the Old Testament, especially Ezekiel, Zechariah, and Daniel. Whether or not these visions were real experiences of the author or simply literary conventions employed by him is an open question. This much, however, is certain: symbolic descriptions are not to be taken as literal descriptions, nor is the symbolism meant to be pictured realistically. One would find it difficult and repulsive to visualize a lamb with seven horns and seven eyes; yet Jesus Christ is described in precisely such words (Rev 5:6). The author used these images to suggest Christ's universal (seven) power (horns) and knowledge (eyes). A significant feature of apocalyptic writing is the use of symbolic colors, metals, garments (Rev 1:13–16; 3:18; 4:4; 6:1–8; 17:4; 19:8), and numbers (four signifies the world, six imperfection, seven totality or perfection, twelve Israel's tribes or the apostles, one thousand immensity). Finally the vindictive language in the book (Rev 6:9–10; 18:1–19:4) is also to be understood symbolically and not literally. The cries for vengeance on the lips of Christian martyrs that sound so harsh are in fact literary devices the author employed to evoke in the reader and hearer a feeling of horror for apostasy and rebellion that will be severely punished by God.

The lurid descriptions of the punishment of Jezebel (Rev 2:22) and of the destruction of the great harlot, Babylon (Rev 16:9–19:2), are likewise literary devices. The metaphor of Babylon as harlot would be wrongly construed if interpreted literally. On the other hand, the stylized figure of the woman clothed with the sun (Rev 12:1–6), depicting the New Israel, may seem to be a negative stereotype. It is necessary to look beyond the literal meaning to see that these images mean to convey a sense of God's wrath at sin in the former case and trust in God's providential care over the church in the latter. The Book of Revelation cannot be adequately understood except against the historical background that occasioned its writing. Like Daniel and other apocalypses, it was composed as resistance literature to meet a crisis. The book itself suggests that the crisis was ruthless persecution of the early church by the Roman authorities; the harlot Babylon symbolizes pagan Rome, the city on seven hills (17:9). The book is, then, an exhortation and admonition to Christians of the first century to stand firm in the faith and to avoid compromise with paganism, despite the threat of adversity and martyrdom; they are to await patiently the fulfillment of God's mighty promises. The triumph of God in the world of men and women remains a mystery, to be accepted in faith and longed for in hope. It is a triumph that unfolded in the history of Jesus of Nazareth and continues to unfold in the history of the individual Christian who follows the way of the cross, even, if necessary, to a martyr's death.

Though the perspective is eschatological—ultimate salvation and victory are said to take place at the end of the present age when Christ will come in glory at the parousia—the book presents the decisive struggle of Christ and his followers against Satan and his cohorts as already over. Christ's overwhelming defeat of the kingdom of Satan ushered in the everlasting reign of God (Rev 11:15; 12:10). Even the forces of evil unwittingly carry out the divine plan (Rev 17:17), for God is the sovereign Lord of history. The Book of Revelation had its origin in a time of crisis, but it remains valid and meaningful for Christians of all time. In the face of apparently insuperable evil, either from within or from without, all Christians are called to trust in Jesus' promise, "Behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age" (Mt 28:20). Those who remain steadfast in their faith and confidence in the risen Lord need have no fear. Suffering, persecution, even death by martyrdom, though remaining impenetrable mysteries of evil, do not comprise an absurd dead end. No matter what adversity or sacrifice Christians may endure, they will in the end triumph over Satan and his forces because of their fidelity to Christ the victor. This is the

enduring message of the book; it is a message of hope and consolation and challenge for all who dare to believe.

The author of the book calls himself John (Rev 1:1, 4, 9; 22:8), who because of his Christian faith has been exiled to the rocky island of Patmos, a Roman penal colony. Although he never claims to be John the apostle, whose name is attached to the fourth gospel, he was so identified by several of the early church Fathers, including Justin, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Cyprian, and Hippolytus. This identification, however, was denied by other Fathers, including Denis of Alexandria, Eusebius of Caesarea, Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory Nazianzen, and John Chrysostom. Indeed, vocabulary, grammar, and style make it doubtful that the book could have been put into its present form by the same person(s) responsible for the fourth gospel. Nevertheless, there are definite linguistic and theological affinities between the two books. The tone of the letters to the seven churches (Rev 1:4–3:22) is indicative of the great authority the author enjoyed over the Christian communities in Asia. It is possible, therefore, that he was a disciple of John the apostle, who is traditionally associated with that part of the world. The date of the book in its present form is probably near the end of the reign of Domitian (A.D. 81–96), a fierce persecutor of the Christians. The book of Revelation is undoubtedly difficult and full of mysteries. But it is a profoundly Catholic work that reveals Christ for who he is — Lord of the Cosmos — and is full of rich liturgical and heavenly images. As the Dominican Celestin Charlier remarked, "It is a pity that the Apocalypse has so often been regarded as a secret code containing details of the whole of Church history . . . It is much more than a cipher — it is a prolongation throughout time of that rhythm of God's plan which was conceived in eternity".