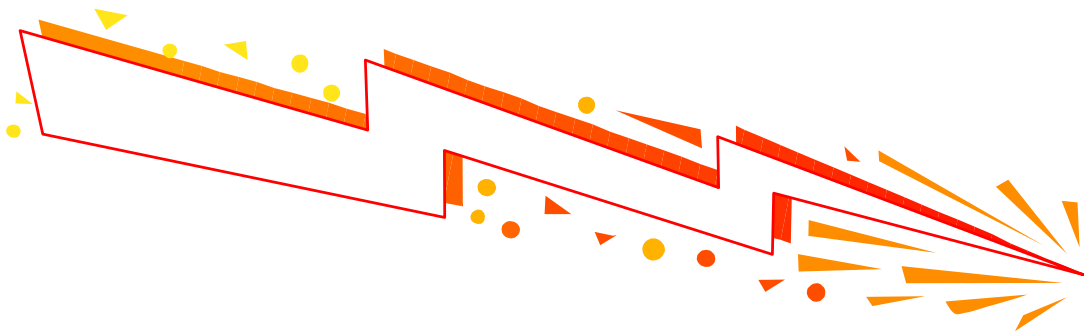


*Apocalypse:
Then and Now*



REVELATION
GOOD NEWS IN BAD TIMES

ROY KEY

"This is the revelation God gave Jesus Christ to show to His servants what must happen very soon... Happy is the one who reads this prophecy and those who hear and pay attention. For the hour of fulfillment is near."

(Revelation 1:1,3)

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APOCALYPSE: THEN AND NOW

FOREWORD

Here are the messages from *Revelation* that a number of you requested. The first was delivered on Easter Sunday, and the others followed in sequence, with one interruption.

A few down-to-earth suggestions are offered as clues to help you make sense of the book as a whole. Many of its visions are not dealt with here, and none of them in detail. Thorough study requires a class setting.

1. *Listen.* Listen with the ears of your soul. John was a Christian pastor concerned for his suffering people, but a pastor who was a seer-dramatist-poet. He was not a professor of political science, and certainly not a fortune teller. Nor was he a draftsman drawing a set of construction blueprints.

2. *Put aside as much preconception as possible.* Let the book speak its own message, its original message to its target group. Remember that a document comes out of a particular historical context. It was addressed to some ones, in some place about something in their situation. In any study we need to discover as much as we can about the circumstances surrounding the document involved. Who wrote it? To whom? What were the religious, social, and political conditions of the time? Does the document say why it was written? If not, how do circumstance and message converge to throw light on the purpose?

3. *Read the book in as many versions as you can...* without listening for particular messages. Let it say whatever it will. Later when major themes stand up and demand attention, give it.

4. *Go to a good historical atlas* and look at the maps. *Consult a Bible dictionary* for the meaning of unfamiliar words or names. If you go to the commentaries first, you will firm up your conclusions too quickly and be less free to listen to the text itself when you most need to do so.

5. *Determine the kind of literature you are studying.* Is it a lyric, ballad, epic narrative, history, proverb, law, parable, apocalypse, etc.? Literal or figurative language? Revelation tells you at the beginning the kind of literature you will read. Its name is "Apocalypse." If you don't know already the literary characteristics of an apocalypse, find out by checking in a Bible dictionary or encyclopedia.

6. Once you learn that *Revelation* is apocalyptic literature, and you are aware that there is such literature in Ezekiel, Daniel, and parts of Isaiah, you can *watch for these Old Testament symbols* to appear in the New Testament. Remember, though, that John is a Christian viewing history in the light of Calvary and Easter. He is not a parrot, mimicking only what others have said before him. He is saturated with their imagery and uses it continually, but in ways determined by the Risen Lord and the light He throws on the historical movement.

7. *You discover that John is a political prisoner* on the Island of Patmos. His message is to people scattered through Asia Minor (and, indeed, to the larger Church) who are subject to the wrath of Rome for refusal to join in Caesar worship. The State religion requires the burning of incense at the emperor's statue, the Imperial Cult being another Roman attempt to unify the Empire. Christians, consequently, confront the critical choice of Caesar (*Kaisar*) or Christ!

8. You see that the book of *Revelation is an extremely political document*. Its author, if understood by the government officials, will be subject to the charge of treason, as was his Lord. *Revelation* is an account of various visions given to John in exile. It lends itself readily to a style which will be familiar to Christian readers, but for all practical purposes will be a code language to the authorities.

9. Remember that *John is the preacher-poet-artist-dramatist-seer*, reassuring his suffering people that though they are potential martyrs, God has not forgotten them. He is at work bringing His Kingdom to total triumph. The Empire is doomed! Rome's fall will be soon, swift, sure.

10. Recognize that *the book was written to be understood!* It was not written to confound the Church. It was not written to 20th century Americans in an age of nuclear armaments, circling space armadas, Communist-Capitalist-Fascist rivalries, and ethnic hatred... Yet, it speaks to us in our situation, as it did to early Christians in their own. It speaks to the tyrannies of our time. It deals with claims to ultimate loyalty laid on us by government, job, family, whatever. It announces to us the death of all idols, all usurpers. It lifts our eyes to God on the Throne of the universe and shows us "the Lion," who is, in fact, "the slaughtered Lamb."

Then it asks, "What will you make of it all?" ...What this says about the meaning and purpose of our lives? about personal and national power? about the conflict between "Christ and Caesar" in this hour and the call to witness in the midst of contemporary culture?

We take Scripture seriously when we listen, when we quit talking and let the text address us. It both announces and questions. When such announcements and questions are surprising, judging, and healing, we can be sure that "the word" has become "the word of God" to us.

Yours for listening and hearing
that amazing word of grace,
Roy Key

“THE LORD GOD THE ALMIGHTY REIGNS!”

(Revelation 19:6)

Easter is a time for singing...for bells and banners, hopes and hallelujahs. It's a time to call, "Good News! Christ has Risen!" It's not a time to debate, for the Gospel is not an argument, but an announcement. "Christ has Risen!" and there is hope in our World. And yet...Beneath our songs and smiles are smothered sighs and hidden doubts. Down deep many of us suspect that the World will be as evil tomorrow as it was yesterday. That Easter will not have been global triumph, but an interlude in the drama of a doomed planet.

Many of us suspect that Britain and Argentina will move on to confrontation, that Israelis and Arabs will still make impossible demands of each other, that the U. S. and Russia will continue the arms race, that we will yet be tempted to step into the quicksand of El Salvador, that inflation and unemployment will be as high next week as it was last. Then, why bother with this celebration? If it will make no difference in the World, what are we doing here?

In his *Confessions* Tolstoy relates an old oriental fable of the traveler lost in the desert surprised by a wild beast. To save himself he jumps into an empty well. At the bottom waits a dragon with open mouth. With the beast above and dragon below, he clings to the branch of a wild bush growing out of a crack in the well. His hands weaken, but still he clings. He then sees two mice, one white, the other black, evenly moving around the bush, gnawing off its roots. Knowing that he will soon perish, the traveler sees on the leaves of the plant a few drops of honey. These he reaches with his tongue and licks them off with rapture.

Many through the centuries have seen this drama as the picture of life. A desperate clinging to existence, brief, transitory, just beyond the jaws of death. While night and day gnaw away its fragile support humanity seizes a few diversionary moments. In one way or another we lick off our drops of honey. Is that what we're doing while death lurks from the sky and time runs out? The Church's equivalent of escape in drugs, sex, food, sleep, running...whatever?

Lately I've been studying the book of *Revelation*. Frankly, it has not been my favorite Scripture. Partly because of the bizarre way in which it is often handled. I read it through at a sitting to sense the drama whole. Then I returned to study the various acts and scenes. It has begun to speak more directly to me. That's one reason I want to lift up some of its major themes in post-Easter sermons. Today, however, let me listen with you to an Easter theme.

These are bad times for good people. Rome is mistress of the World. In the year 95 she doesn't have nor need nuclear weapons, for her legions are everywhere. Domitian is a second Nero, and his statue is set up in far flung places where citizens regularly burn incense and receive the mark that shows they've shared in Caesar worship. It is unpatriotic to refuse to confess (*Kaisar Kurios*) "Caesar is Lord!" An investigation

by the FBI, KGB, or the UnRoman Activities Committee can lead to judgment and execution.

Antipas has already been killed. He wouldn't say the creed and give the salute. Others have been seized. Christians resist, and the Empire strikes back. John is a political prisoner, exiled to the Isle of Patmos. Like Moses in the desert, he broods over the plight of his people. Like Moses, he is not forgotten. The Egyptian exile saw a bush ablaze, and heard the urgent call,

Go down Moses, way down in Egypt land;
Tell old Pharaoh to let my people go!

Next morning Pharaoh was still the hard-hearted, hard-headed king. The sun was as hot, the taskmasters' whips as bloody. Egypt was the same after Moses saw the flame and heard the voice. Only Moses was different, but he was, indeed, different. In him was a dream that would not die and a hope no darkness could put out. What difference did it make??? Exodus!!!

In the opening verse of the book John writes, "This is the revelation God gave Jesus Christ to show to His servants what must happen very soon." He goes on, "Happy is the one who reads this prophecy and those who hear and pay attention. For the hour of fulfillment is near."

Then comes John's encounter with the living Lord. "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day," he says, "and I heard a voice like a trumpet calling me. I turned to see...

and there was one whose head and hair were white as snow-white wool. His eyes blazed like fire. His feet were like polished bronze, and His voice like a waterfall. His face was ablaze like the sun. In His right hand were 7 stars. From His mouth came a two-edged sword.

When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like one dead. Then, He touched me and said, 'Don't be afraid. I am the first and the last and the living one. I was dead, and am alive forevermore, and hold in my hand the keys of death and the grave. Therefore, write down what you have seen, what is now and what is yet to be.'

That was Sunday. Monday morning Rome was as terrible as ever. Christians were in no less danger. What difference, then, did Jesus' appearance make? It made a difference to one man, and he was determined to make a difference to others.

John seized his pen and began to write an extremely political document. He couldn't go, but he could write...and he did. He wrote the Church, knowing very well that his letter would first be read by the authorities. What would he say? "Rome is the World's great Whore, who has sold herself body and soul to Satan, that old Dragon? Caesar is a Beast, the bloodthirsty head of the bloodthirsty Empire? The State Religion is the False Prophet who calls us to worship the Beast?" Would he say straight out, "The choice, Christian friends, is between God and the State? It's Christ or Caesar?" Would he?

That's what he did say, but he said it in code, apocalyptic language that the Empire would not understand. But he said more. "You ask, 'Where is God? Where is God when we need Him most? Where is God when Evil is on the throne and the Church is at the stake? Where is God when the State, who is to be our protector, becomes our executioner? That's what I want to tell you. That's why I was given the vision. Look again at the throne, there where you think you see Caesar sit. Look closely at the face of the King. 'Hallelujah! For the Lord God the Omnipotent reigns!'

"Listen...I saw it all, the terror and the triumph. I saw the destruction of the Beast, the False Prophet, and the old Dragon himself. I saw the victory procession of the martyrs and their place in the coming Kingdom. I saw it all. I tell you the Empire will soon fall. In an hour her strength will fail and her glory fade. In an hour she will crumple mortally wounded. In an hour her doom will be sealed.'

"Two truths you must hold: 1) God's Kingdom will triumph; against it the gates of hell will not prevail; 2) if you would share the victory, you must keep the faith. Then it will keep you ... in prison, on the scaffold, at the stake. Be faithful to death, and you will receive the crown of life.

"God remembers you and is preparing the victory celebration for you. That is why He showed me the future and told me to tell you. Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus. Amen." That is the primary message of the book of Revelation Scripture, including this book, was not written to give commands or truths. It contains both, but they are not its basic purpose. Scripture was directed to particular people at a particular place and time, that these people could in their situation encounter the Risen Lord, that He could be present and in power speak to them. That is "good news."

Scripture as "Gospel" is always surprise. The present Lord is alive in His presented word. Easter can come on the calendar without coming to me with the living Lord present in forgiveness and power. Easter reminders are all around us, the Service full of them, intended not as substitutes, but pointers. They can be either. Likely they are both. If we permit them to be pointers, we may glimpse a blaze. A bush that burns and will not burn out. A banner that sings and will not hush. A Cross that draws and will not let go. An empty tomb whose holy mystery does not fade. And then...at length a Presence that envelopes, embraces, assures, empowers.

There is a secret. John says, "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day. Then I heard. Then I saw."

The Gospel is for earthquake times, for people who neither deny Evil nor surrender to its reign. For those who see rising above the World a Throne, and when all others cry, "Lord Caesar!" they call, "The Lord God Omnipotent reigns!"

Last week amid brave words from both sides, British and Argentine boys sailed off to battle. I remembered how before in a London church troops were entertained before sailing. At evening's close a colonel asked an articulate officer to say a few words. He rose and with wit and charm thanked the hosts. Then seeking words with which to close, he said, "We're leaving now for France, the trenches, and maybe to die." He hadn't meant to say that. Looking all around, he asked, "Can anybody tell us how to die?"

There was an awkward pause, a strained silence. At length someone rose, walked to the piano, and began to play the aria from "Elijah," "O rest in the Lord." A calm enfolded the group as souls all around made their way back to some half-remembered faith where a Father waits at an open door.

"Can anyone tell us how to die?" Yes... and how to live. He who called one Lord's Day to an old political prisoner shut away on Patmos, "I am the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last and the living one. I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore and hold in my hand the keys of hell and the grave!"

Once we see Him, we know that every form of death is doomed. There is a Throne that rises above the World. Glimpsing the face of Him who sits upon it, we stand to sing "The Hallelujah Chorus"...

"King of kings and Lord of lords,
and He shall reign forever. Amen.

WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?

(Rev. 4 – 5)

There are times when life caves in and bewildered we stand among its shambles, searching for some sense to it all.

"Why do the innocent suffer and the guilty go free?" "Why does Evil seem stronger than Good?" "Is God helpless, or does He not care?" We feel forsaken. Knowing that God promises not to leave us nor forsake us, our experience doesn't make sense.

That's the way a political exile named "John" felt on lonely Patmos. That's the way the Church felt rocked by Rome, coerced by the imperial cult of Caesar worship. So, God responded to His people's cry for light, and the book of *Revelation* begins, "The apocalypse God gave Jesus Christ, so that He might show His servants what must happen soon."

"Apocalypse!" Doesn't that mean "catastrophe?" or "doomsday?" The word actually means "unveiling." Consequently, it is translated "revelation" and became the name given the last book in the Bible. Some think of it as a "concealing," a "riddle," or at best a "mystery." That was not its intention. It was sent as "good news" to the suffering Church. The revelation of God...*through* Jesus Christ... *to* John... *for* the Church.

In his encounter with the Risen Lord John experienced a new Easter. He needed it, and on that island a lonely man found himself laid hold on by One who brought strength and light. "I will show you what is and what soon must be," said the Lord. "So, write it down." And John does.

First, he writes to 7 churches in Asia. Right off we need to know the number 7 is important. It is the complete number, 3 is the number for heaven or divinity, 4 is for the world or humanity. Together they make 7, a whole. Scripture is full of 7's, from the hallowing of the 7th day, to the hallowing of the 7th year, plus the 7 times 7th year, to the

7 stars, 7 lamp stands, 7 spirits of God, 7 seals, 7 trumpets, 7 bowls of wrath, and so on. The *Gospel of John* is composed of 7 signs.

John does not mail 7 letters in 7 different envelopes with 7 stamps on them. He puts them into single letter to the entire Church all over the Empire, wherever his letter can go.

Since the 7 chosen congregations exhibit traits characteristic of all congregations, it is understandable that interpreters have tried to make them symbolize the Church in 7 historical ages making up all history. However, the fact is that all these congregations existed in Asia Minor in the days of John, though their members look quite familiar to us. They have those who have left their first love, those who tolerate in our membership everybody, winking at their unfaithfulness. We have those who claim to be alive and are dead, and those who possess love, loyalty, service and endurance. We, also, have those who are neither hot nor cold, the lukewarm, who still make God sick at the stomach.

At the door (of our souls and our churches) the Lord still waits, calling, "Look, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him and he with me."

To John the Risen Lord declares, "I am the alpha and the omega, the one who is and was and is to come" (1:18). In verses 17,18 He says, "I am the first and the last and the living one; I was dead and am alive forevermore and hold in my hand the keys of death and hell." "Alpha" and "omega" are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, indicating that the Lord is before all creation and beyond it. He who in the beginning created the heavens and the earth will at the end achieve His purpose with that creation. Or, to change the figure, God's Kingdom will come and His "will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

In chapter 4 the scene shifts from earth to heaven. One feature of this drama is the way scenes shift from one stage to the other. First, John saw the triumphant Lord, victorious over death. Then he saw the persecuted Church, frustrated and but partly faithful. Now the scene shifts back to heaven, before the Throne of God.

The symbols and visions of Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, are so deep in John that they appear prominently in his vision, Still, they are not carbon copies. There is a Throne and One unnamed sitting on it. The sight is awesome. Thunder and lightning issue from it. After all, God is not a bellhop...but King! Nor is His Reign a matter of "if you please." It is a Kingdom, and to rebel against it is to pay the price of treason.

The sight is as truly one of indescribable beauty and wonder. The One on the Throne is wrapped in a rainbow, symbol of covenant promise and mercy. Around the Throne are 24 thrones for 24 Elders clad in white and wearing crowns of gold. They are the redeemed descendants of the 12 Patriarchs and 12 Apostles, the whole People of God sharing his glory [12 is the Church number]. 4 "living creatures" symbolize all earth's living beings.

Like the seraphim in *Isaiah* 6, they cry "Holy, holy, holy!" While in *Isaiah* they cry, "The whole earth is full of His glory," in 4:8 the creatures cry, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come." The 24 Elders join them,

casting their crowns before the Throne and singing, "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power [3 attributes], for you created all things; by your will they were created and so exist."

This is the scene of the drama beyond history on God's other stage. Worship of God the Creator by His total creation [chapter 4].

In chapter 5 John sees in the hand of the One on the Throne a scroll, written on both sides. It is full, but rolled up and sealed. This is the scroll of destiny or history, the sealed script of the drama that will unfold. None of God's creatures, not even the redeemed martyrs, can tell what is to be.

John burst into tears. Then came one of the Elders, saying, "Don't weep. See! The Lion of Judah's tribe, the root of David, has won the victory, and He can open the scroll." Then he looked and saw a Lamb, a Lamb with its throat slashed as offered in sacrifice. He looked for the lion and saw a slaughtered Lamb Not lying...but standing!

If your would enter this vision, you must see as John saw. Not images sketched with a pencil, which become grotesque. These are images for the soul. You must wait for feelings, impressions, messages that steal in when your eyes are shut, for songs that sing softly in the dark.

This may be the most important figure in the book. It may be the most radical, the most dynamic symbol ever born: the conquering Lion who is the slaughtered Lamb. The Lamb who takes the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sits on the Throne. At this sight all the heavenly beings fall down before the Lamb and sing a new song:

Worthy are you to take the scroll and to break its seals, for you were killed and by your blood did ransom for God people from every tribe and tongue and race and nation, and have made them a Kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on earth.

John then looked and saw millions of people saying, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing" [7 attributes]. Then he heard every creature in heaven, on earth and under the earth saying, "To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might [4 attributes] forever and ever!" Living creatures and Elders fell down and worshipped.

In chapter 4 we saw the worship of God as Creator. In chapter 5 we saw the worship of God as Redeemer. Chapter 4 declares that in all nature there is not found God's purpose. Nature does not reveal destiny, nor offer to the suffering the help for which they cry.

In subsequent chapters the slain Lamb takes the seals and one by one breaks them, so the scroll can be read. However, from the script comes a drama acted out on the stage both of heaven *and* earth. God's people are shown the things that are to be, that they may take heart and prove faithful in the trial that now is. It is not suffering that we can't

stand. It is meaningless suffering...blind, empty meaninglessness. Once we know that our suffering and that of the slain Lamb are of one redemptive piece, our fiercest pain has meaning. We do not see all it will accomplish, not in the meantime. We are given a glimpse of what it will accomplish in the end time. Then we learn to labor and to... wait.

On the front page of yesterday's "Weekender" were reminders of the Holocaust and the Nazi slaughter of 6,000,000 Jews. On the page was, also, a moving statement from Victor Frankl's *Man's Search For Meaning*. Frankl is the psychiatrist who challenged the claims that our chief drive is "the will to power," "the will to knowledge," or even "self preservation."

In the death camp this man saw the struggles, but he saw more. Equally strong and healthy people existed together for a time till most of them gave up and died. Those who lived through the insanity and barbarity were those who found meaning and clung to purpose through it all.

John and the Christian Church learned that fact 20 centuries ago. Others have since. That's why deaconesses stayed in a hospital already bombed 3 times and, with death overhead and all around, tended the wounded and dying. They kept looking at a statement written on the wall, "We do not know what is coming, but we know Who is coming -- Christ."

Sharing in "the fellowship of His sufferings" is filled with meaning, for God uses undeserved suffering to break the hearts of those who inflict it, and to reshape us all. The Lion who conquers is the Lamb who was sacrificed.

When earth-bound people seek symbols of power, they seize on the kings of nature. Russia chooses a bear, Britain a lion, France a tiger, China a dragon, the U.S. an eagle... all beasts [one mythical] and birds of prey. Only the Kingdom of Heaven would dare pick a lamb, a sacrificed Lamb! It will never make sense to those who know that victory is always theirs who have the biggest bomb. It will never make sense to think that suffering is God's way of changing the calloused into the caring. It will never make sense till one glimpses in the midst of the Throne a Lamb... a sacrificed Lamb, not lying...but standing!

Would you know history's meaning? The meaning of your own undeserved suffering? the writing on destiny's scroll? You will, when you see it in the hands of the sacrificed Lamb. You will, when you sense the power and destiny of the Cross.

The Cross is history's hinge and its most luminous clue--.

"Apocalypse!"

THE BEAST, THE MARK, THE SICKLE

(Rev. 13:1-4, 11-18; 14:1-3,13-16)

I've been asked, "Why are you preaching these sermons on *Revelation*?" I'll tell you. Listen to 3 typical messages, one from as late as Friday, another from last week, whose writers think they are interpreting *Revelation*.

This first claims that "the Beast" is the Papacy, that the Roman Church changed the Sabbath to Sunday, and worship on Sunday is "the mark of the Beast." This second one says that "the Beast" (or Antichrist) will establish Judaism as the world religion. Then the Beast will destroy Jew and Gentile alike. This third contains a prophetic chart, whose political system includes "the King of the West" and "10 nations" of Europe. It depicts the roles of Russia, China, Israel, Syria, Libya, and holds that the American Presidency is the Political Beast and the Roman Papacy the Religious Beast. All this, mind you, is supposed to be comfort to Christians dying under Domitian and the Imperial Cult of Caesar worship around 70 A.D.

Still others predict a coming world government. Hal Lindsey calls the Beast "the Future Fuhrer." The False Prophet is the Apostate Church or "Scarlet O'Harlot." The ecumenical movement, National and World Council of Churches are, he and his disciples claim, moving us into the One World Church for the One World State.

Such false prophecy becomes sheer religious "McCarthyism." What do we do with the pictures in *Ephesians* and *Colossians*, of "the Cosmic Christ" who draws all orders of creation into a whole? The essential message of *Ephesians* is "Unite or Perish!" Yet, these modern day "prophets" cry, "Unite and Perish!" We've got a big controversy.

Last, I have a fourth message, written on one of our registration cards. "Could we have a sermon, a series of sermons, telling about the end times and tribulation and how now is the time to accept Christ? I think this is something our congregation hasn't heard much about." The fact is that repeatedly from this pulpit you have heard about "the End," when all people are one and all things new. True, you haven't heard the speculation evident in these popular messages about "The Tribulation" and "The Rapture," the kind of things that if you asked John about them, he would stare at you dumbfounded. You have heard and will continue to hear now is the time to accept Christ as Savior and Lord. I don't understand how, but I do sincerely regret, that anyone could miss that note.

You have a clue now to why these messages. Beside, the book contains a vision of incredible comfort, but it is not the message of the popular "prophets" of the day. Nor is it the message of ultraliberal mainline churches whose image of God is an indulgent Grandfather. Enroute to the gallows or guillotine it's difficult to trust in the God of the wax nose. When it's your child that's abducted, your wife or daughter raped, your mother

mugged, your life savings swindled, you tend to call in question the God who winks at everything. Only the near-sighted look at Hiroshima, Auschwitz, Starvation and the Arms Race, only to turn away, chirping, "I can't see any element of judgment written there."

The book of *Revelation* presents a different picture. Beginning with chapter 6, the Lamb opens the seals of the scroll of the future, and judgment is no longer restrained. Once, twice, three times, four times the drama is played out. The story is told and retold in cycles of 7. Judgment falls, but the cry of the martyrs is heard, and redemption is near.

John's description of the World's fate is not new. Apocalyptic literature has already painted that picture. There will be terrible times preceding the End, what is called "the Tribulation." Prediction of destruction by "the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse," {"War," "Faction," "Famine" and "Death"} were not unknown. What is new is the fate of the Church.

We learn that the death of the martyrs is bound up with the consummation of the Kingdom, and the End will come only when their number is complete. But, in the midst of the drama of doom on an impenitent World come interludes. Each interlude is a scene of hope. In chapter 7 there is such a scene, the sealing of the martyrs. There are 144,000 .. 12,000 from each of the 12 tribes. Israel symbolizes the People of God, and 12 is the Church number. 10 is the round number, and the 144,000 is in reality the complete number.

The "seal" is a mark of ownership. For instance, the mark of Cain was not "Murderer!" Rather, it was, "He is mine!! Hands off! I will deal with him." Now the martyrs are sealed, and the judgment unleashed on earth cannot hurt them until they have given their witness.

When we reach chapter 13, we encounter the opposing "mark." Here is Antichrist with a counter seal upon his faithful. Those who do not worship his image nor receive his mark can neither buy nor sell, and they must pay for the refusal with their lives. Who is this Beast, this Antichrist? Who does John say that he is?

As Christ was God incarnate, so the last emperor will be Satan incarnate. He is not only a civil ruler, but religious lord, worshiped as "God." John sees him as a Beast rising from the sea. In apocalyptic literature the sea ordinarily stands for human government. This Beast, with its 7 heads, 10 horns and blasphemous titles is given the power of the Dragon, and John now tells who it is. The number is the number of a man, 666.

At this point a story about Nero is utilized. There was a tale that Nero had not committed suicide, but had gone into hiding and was coming back to avenge himself on his adversaries. As time passed and Nero did not return, the tale held that another in the spirit of Nero would rise to be an even more terrible dictator. Domitian has become the new and revived Nero.

Letters have numerical equivalents, and in Hebrew "Nero Caesar" adds up to precisely 666. This Beast combined characteristics of the beasts in Daniel's visions. He has his Imperial Cult of "Caesar worship," and that cult is seen as the Second Beast (later

the "False Prophet"), who looks like a Lamb and speaks like the Dragon. Caesar is the symbol of the Empire's political power. The False Prophet is the symbol of its religious power. He erects the Beast's statue, makes it speak, and has worshipers burn incense to it.

Incidentally, the statue could be made to speak by means of ventriloquism, the pulling of wires, fire produced by hidden devices and other stock tricks of pagan magic.

Remember, *Revelation* was written to the Church of John's day. It was not intended to satisfy curiosity about what would occur in 2,000 A.D. You don't prepare prisoners for execution by showing them charts about what is to happen in Syria, Libya, Russia and the U.S.A. in some distant future. Besides, the text says repeatedly that these visions are "what must happen soon." John talked to them about *their* situation *then*.

Popular interpretations of the book would have been useless for the Church of 95 A.D. By the same token, the historical interpretation is as useless for us...unless. Unless there is about Scripture, including this Scripture, the ability to capture the life-and-death drama of each age. There is a sense in which these prophecies are fulfilled again and again.

Each time the State demands ultimate loyalty, it becomes "the Beast," demanding what belongs to God alone. That's idolatry. Those who worship the Beast and receive its mark can't understand that, but Christians should. The believer declares, "My conscience belongs to God, and God alone. I must respectfully decline." The super-patriots reply, "You can't make those decisions. The State has decided. If people could follow their own consciences, we would have chaos. We couldn't have a war; too many would decide not to go."

Christians in each age insist that national security does not lie in having the biggest arsenal. Caesar's followers in each age consider us cowards or crazy. "Of course, victory is on the side of the biggest battalions!" They don't read history very well. Their logic keeps insisting that Gideon and his 300 were clobbered by the Philistines and that right is no match for might "in the real world."

The interpreters were right who said that Napoleon was the Beast. Those were right who said that Hitler was the Beast. Those were right who said that Stalin was the Beast. Those are right who claim that the Beast has been to Washington. Those are right who say the Beast is yet to come. But, they are all wrong who don't recognize that the Beast John saw was "Caesar Nero." He was the instrument of Satan then, as are his successors in every age.

In *Revelation* we don't find a timetable of history. The drama was not penned to satisfy curiosity and promote fortune telling. It was written to encourage those facing persecution and death. "God's Kingdom will triumph! Hold fast. Don't let the State nor its Patriotic Cult turn you from absolute loyalty to God." Like Peter before the Supreme Court of his day, we are sometimes called to declare, "We must obey God, rather than men."

To the Church in Asia Minor John said, "The Empire has become the incarnation of Evil. Caesar is the Beast wielding his evil power. State Religion is the Second Beast

who orders us to worship the first. Both are doomed, and so are all who become entangled with them. Keep the faith, and the Lord of the faith will keep you."

The last part of chapter 14 is a description of the Harvest of Evil, the sickle and the winepress of God's wrath. The blood is as deep as the horses' bridles, enough to cover the known world. It is all terrible and sure.

Revelation has been criticized for its judgment scenes. No God of love could permit it, critics charge. The problem, however, rises from seeing judgment as arbitrary and vindictive. If John were writing us today, he would choose language of our time. There he used what was most appropriate then, familiar apocalyptic language. That is, it was familiar to the Church. To Roman authorities it was a code. The pertinent question is, "Can judgment fall in God's World?"

Friday's *Des Moines Register* carried a story of the horrors beyond description of a nuclear war, where unfortunate survivors walk around with all emotion gone, the stalking of the living dead. Such pictures are painted each week. Do we soothingly say, "A good God would never permit it?" I reply, "A good God will do everything possible to prevent it...everything but take away our freedom to say 'Yes' and 'No.' That is God's creative gift from which there is no repentance."

Like the ancient Seer, you and I are taken to a high place and shown two pictures of the World and told,

"Both are real. One will ultimately disappear. The other will remain. The choice is yours. O, my Child, let me help you to choose... but, the choice is yours!"

ARMAGEDDON AND THE MILLENNIUM

(*Rev.* 16:12-21; 20:1-15)

The Church Calendar tells me that I should complete this series on *Revelation*, so today I am combining two subjects into one. Our Scripture readings highlight two symbols that have become bigger than life,

"Armageddon" and "The Millennium." "Armageddon" has come to be the symbol of the ultimate battle between Good and Evil, and "The Millennium" (the 1,000 years) has come to mean the longed-for age of righteousness and peace. Theodore Roosevelt called his last great political conflict an "Armageddon," but his usage devalues the coin. General Douglas MacArthur was more serious. On the deck of the battleship Missouri at the end of World War II he said,

We have had our last chance. If we will not devise some greater and more equitable system, ARMAGEDDON will be at the door. The problem basically is theological and involves a spiritual recrudescence and

improvement of human character that will synchronize with our almost matchless advances in science, art, literature, and all material and cultural developments of the past 2,000 years. It must be of the spirit, if we are to save the flesh.

General MacArthur saw the impending thermonuclear holocaust, unless we make a spiritual breakthrough in human nature that issues in a peaceful handling of our international problems.

Most modern-day "prophets" see as the Battle of Armageddon a nuclear war. They have no hope for the spiritual breakthrough, because they believe God has spoken through His prophet John, and nothing can alter the inexorable end. They may be right. Our track record is not good. Yet, there are a few who still hope.

We do not believe that John predicts the present Arab-Israeli impasse as the spark that ignites the final fire. That Egypt will attack Israel and Russia then take opportunity to strike Southward. That China and her confederates will then sweep West against Russia. That thermonuclear war will result and Russia be destroyed. That the forces of Western Civilization and the combined forces of the Orient will clash and, lest all life be destroyed, Jesus Christ will return. We do not believe this is the inevitable scenario, but it is the one heralded by many Fundamentalists.

This makes for exciting speculation, but I remind you that John wrote to the persecuted people of Asia Minor around 95 A.D. Their tyrant oppressor was not Russia, China, Israel, Egypt or the U.S.A. John identified him as the incarnation of "Nero Caesar," who, according to rumor, had fled to Parthia and would at the right time return, leading "kings of the East" against Rome in a terrible and final battle.

I do not know whether John expected a literal invasion or not. I am certain that he did not regard his symbols as literal. God's final judgments are called "seven bowls of wrath," reminiscent of the plagues of Egypt. They are poured out on those who, like Pharaoh of old, refuse to repent. The Battle is joined when the unholy trinity (Dragon, Beast and False Prophet) send from their mouths foul spirits like three frogs who stir up the kings of the earth to battle. It becomes clear that this is not purely a military struggle, for the Lord slays His enemies not with atom bombs, but with a two-edged sword. In contrast to the frog-like spirits coming from the mouths of the dark trinity, from Jesus' mouth, to conquer His enemies, comes the sword of the Spirit or Word of Truth. That is hardly a weapon from any nation's arsenal.

I want to comment briefly on the image of Satan. His power is great. The fear of him is awesome, but what comes out at the end looks like a frog. In Milton's works Satan begins as a heroic, defiant figure, crying, "Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven!" He ends up as a disgusting toad. Evil carries in itself the seeds of disintegration and death.

The language about Armageddon is apocalyptic and highly symbolic. Hail stones fall weighing 100 pounds each! All the world's cities are destroyed! Yet, later on cities are again referred to. It sounds like Joel's language when he says the sun will be turned

to darkness and the moon to blood. Peter, we know, took that to mean the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, saying flatly, "This is what Joel spoke of." Peter as a literalist would have missed the message.

This I do know: we are all locked in cosmic combat. The struggle is a life-and-death fight. In every age there are tyrants who rise to incarnate the powers of Death. Paul said, "We are not fighting against human beings, but against the wicked spiritual forces in the heavenly world, the rulers, authorities and cosmic powers of this dark age" (*Eph. 6:12*). These are the powers that killed Jesus, though they operated through human agencies.

We are in a battle to the death, either our death or the death of Evil. The Good News is that we are not in the cosmic conflict alone. God is with us and insures the ultimate victory. We lose the fight only if we chose to lose by consorting with the Enemy, listening to him so as to allow his cunning to deceive and seduce us.

We are all in the battle, but we are of different minds. We are either fatalistic or hopeful. God is calling the fatalistic to repentance. "Repentance" means "change of mind," and the battle is first of all for the mind. People whose minds are filled with symbols of triumph do not surrender. Those whose minds are filled with symbols of defeat do. Those whose minds are filled with symbols of death die.

The word "Armageddon" occurs but once in Scripture, in this 16th chapter of *Revelation*. It is a combination of two words, "Har" and "Megiddo." "Har" means "Mountain" and "Megiddo" was the stronghold at the entrance to the Plain of Esdraelon. It was there, according to *Judges 5*, that "the stars fought...against Sisera" and the Canaanites to give victory to the troops led by Barak and Deborah. Over this ground, through this plain, marched the armies of Syria, Assyria, Babylonia, Egypt and Greece. It became known as "the Battlefield of Palestine" and symbol of conflict.

John, by putting the word in Hebrew, tells us that the name is symbolic, and by usage it has come to mean the ultimate conflict. History has been written largely in terms of wars, and it may be that history's end will come in a thermonuclear catastrophe. Even so, we are still "Soldiers of the Cross," and soldiers are in uniform for more than the parade. They are to fight, and part of that fight is against war itself.

There are Christians among us that do not believe thermonuclear destruction is inevitable. They know that the battle is fierce. They know that when Evil seems to have been vanquished and the era of peace has dawned, Satan can be unchained (as in chap.. 20) and Death stalk the earth again. They do believe, though, that the breakthrough in human nature will come. They are not naive romantics or unchastened liberals who insist that through increased knowledge we will engineer our way out of all earth's midnight swamps. They are believers who look for the breakthrough in human nature to come because Jesus Christ has come. His Spirit is alive in this World and will not be forever choked down. Already it has made a discernible impact.

It has made an impact on the practice of child exposure, on slavery, on the attitude toward women, toward the aged, toward the weak and helpless, toward the poor,

toward human rights and human responsibility to the environment, toward the practice of terrorism and war. They believe that this impact is not at an end.

Alexander Campbell called his major publication "The Millennial Harbinger," because he believed that through the Gospel the religious, educational, social and political institutions of the World will be transformed. They will fall captive to the spell of Jesus, and the 1,000 year Reign of Peace will be ushered in. "The kingdoms of this world will become the Kingdom of our Lord and His Christ" {11:15), and God's "will (shall) be done on earth as it is in heaven."

I do not presume with a few sermons to settle the questions between literalists and non-literalists, or those among Premillennialists, Postmillennialists and Amillennialists. [Premils. hold that Christ will return before the 1,000 years; Postmils. after; Amils. do not take the 1,000 years literally.] What I would do is plead that we take this part of Scripture, as every other part, in its historical context, letting it first speak its original message. Then let us listen to it in our own historical context. By careful listening we hear it speak to our situation and condition.

Here is a bit of what it says to me:

Hang in there and don't give up. You are not alone, and will triumph. Soon or late you will know victory. Look for the living Lord among the rubble of falling empires. See the Christ stand! Never grow cynical or fatalistic. God will surprise you yet. This is His World, and God loves it still. Christ died for it and is now making it new. You neither have nor need a blueprint of world history. You have One who is 'the Way.' Don't substitute some time-table or 'plan' for the Road Companion. He is your security. Love people, but hate the systems that destroy them. God hates them, too, and in the end will destroy them all. Don't tie your destiny to them, and help others get untangled from them. They are doomed. Resist the usurper. There is but one God. The Government is not God! Keep the faith, but not to yourself. Sing the Song of Moses and the Lamb! Rejoice! 'Look! I am now making all things new!' Those who give their lives for Jesus will know Him intimately and shall be shapers of the future with Him

This speaks to me of Stephen, Paul and Antipas, but of Martin Luther King, Jr., as well. The martyrs' place in World redemption is secure. Much more is said to me, but I cannot listen for you, nor you for me. You listen, and tell me what you hear. I pray that we will not allow differences of opinion to make differences in love. We are sisters and brothers together in one Family. One thing is certain, the Risen Lord often interrupts the visions to say, "It will be soon. Watch and be ready, for I will come as a thief in the night."

This is surely a major part of the message: "Take heart! Keep faith. Be ready. Death and Hell are doomed. God will live with you, and you will be His People."

NEW HEAVEN AND NEW EARTH

(Rev.. 21:1-5,22-27; 22:1-5)

This is the end of John's vision. The storm is over. Terror and judgment are past. Eternal Morning has broken, and everything is luminous with the glory of God.

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth," he said. "The first heaven and the first earth had vanished, and the sea was no more." "A new heaven?" We are not surprised to hear him say "a new earth," but why should there be "a new heaven?" First, let's note that there are two words for "new." One means a coming into existence. The other means transformation. It is this second word that is used here. Everything in heaven and earth is transformed. There is one new "Order," in which God's "will (is) done on earth as it is in heaven."

Why "a new heaven?" Once heaven was the home of spirits untested in the fires of temptation. When they were tempted, many of them fell. Rebellion was born. Through created spirit estrangement and death entered the order of life. That order became oppressive and destructive. Paul speaks of "all created life groan(ing) in a sort of universal travail," yearning for freedom (*Rom.* 8:22,23). In heaven was a sea across which only the martyrs had passed. There was the heavenly temple where stood the Throne, and God's presence was most-fully seen. In the new heaven the Old Testament symbols are transformed. There is no dividing sea nor isolating temple.

Why "a new earth?" The old earth was full of thorns, where workers earned bread by the sweat of their faces. The ground was gouged by many a grave and drenched by many a tear. In its embrace was the mysterious, angry sea, from which the old Dragon rose, the sea that swallowed up the sailors, that separated lands and people, that symbolized human governments in their oppression and division. In the new earth all that is gone.

The old earth is the land we abuse and desolate, the land we ravage, the forests we squander, the water and air we poison, the earth that we as poor stewards barter away. Yet, it is God's earth and a vital part of creation. His stewards rejoice to hear him say, "Look! I am making all things new!" and they hasten to help with the new creation.

Now John attempts to describe the Creative Goal of God. Images tumble over one another. It's a City. It's a Bride. It's Eden transformed. It's a World of bustling commerce with no one lazy or afraid. No one cheats or steals. No one is immoral or unfaithful to God or to one another. No one ever grows sick or dies.

Here is a bit of what John saw:

And I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven, prepared and ready, like a bride dressed to meet her husband. I heard a loud voice speaking from the throne: 'Look! God's Home is among the people, and He will live with them. They will be His People, and God

Himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death, and there will be no more grief or crying or pain. The first order of things has passed away' (21:2-4).

At once we know that we are dealing with a reality too big for language, too big even for the symbols John saw and tried to describe. I am reminded of my father's last days, when he tried to tell us what he saw and heard. "Do you hear that music?" he asked, and we had to say, "No, Daddy, we don't hear it." "It's beautiful," he said softly, and had to leave the rest unsaid. He did tell us, "I walked along and saw the sights. They were wonderful, but I can't describe them." At length he added, "I saw the horror, too," but he couldn't describe it, either. John did, and mixed his images to overflowing.

First, he saw the Holy City, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven. It is ultimately God's gift, but still made of earth. This life is not irrelevant to that. Neither is it insignificant that life begins in a Garden and ends in a City. Eden is an environmental Paradise, an authentic "Fantasy Island," but its inhabitants are spiritual babes. Their purity is a naive, untried innocence. Not knowing the harvest of either good or evil, they are open to everything. Everything, including suspicion about themselves, their situation, their freedom and their Creator.

Inhabitants of Eden haven't learned to live "under orders." They don't yet know what it is to see life real, to embrace it and rejoice in it. They discover their creatureliness and resent it. They are mesmerized by the lie that they live under no limitations. They seize the suggestion, "You can be as God. Anyone who tells you otherwise simply doesn't want you to grow up." Confronted with the question, "Do you want to be a child forever?" they answer, "No!"

That's all past now. Those who will not accept reality, who refuse to the very end, are destroyed by illusion. Their end is death, what John calls "the second death." He does not gloat over their fate, but he does point to the fact. He points to that other sea, the sulphur sea, the lake of fire where evil is destroyed. On the one hand is destruction. On the other is the renewed Creation, the perfect Cube, the New Holy of Holies, the City of Light.

We have never seen a city with walls 1,500 miles long, 1,500 miles wide, 1,500 miles high! And, with walls 216 feet thick... two-thirds the length of a football field! We have never seen gold so pure that it is crystal clear. Las Vegas at night may dazzle, wrapped in its neon gown, but the City of God is not even bathed in the light of the sun. The Light radiates from within, coming from every direction and everything. It is the Light of an incredible Holiness, of immeasurable Power, of amazing Grace, the Light of the Creator-Redeemer God. All creation is now transparent to the Glory.

How different things are there. Here gold is grasped for security. There it is purified and used for street paving. People walk on it! Easter morn that massive stone used to seal Jesus in the tomb was rolled back, and the messengers of God *sat* on it. What contempt for earth's vaunted power. There gold is utilized in service, and so with all God's physical creation.

The human creation...ah! How much John sees that he can't convey. But, it is a City. We must understand. The first figure is not of the redeemed as *dwellers in the City*. *They* are the City. There are no solitary individuals walking alone with God. Why not? Why not everybody singing, "I come to the garden alone, while the dew is still on the roses?" Because God's finished creation is not "the rugged individual," good or reasonable or pious. God's completed human creation is the Community of Christ's Care. Consequently, the symbol is the City.

Abraham's children glimpsed that vision centuries ago. On the American frontier we forgot. *Ezekiel* spoke of the City whose name would be "The Lord is there" (48:35). More than once Isaiah pointed to the time when all tears would be dried. Old Testament writers and New spoke of the Jerusalem from above in which will dwell peace and health, security and joy, labor and love.

John describes not the shell of that City, but its soul. He does not depict it as bribe or lure, but as challenge. Those who compose it have learned to live as Community, and not as isolated individuals. They have learned respect for God's natural creation, so that the World may become friend, instead of foe. They thrill to join the Creative Adventure of Him who cries, "Look! I am making all things new!"

The water of the Holy City (the Beloved Community) is the River of Life flowing down the middle of the street of gold. The Tree of Life is there, on both sides of the river, bearing its fruit every month, with its leaves for the healing of the nations. The temple is gone, for God lives with the people. All life reflects God's glory, and every activity is worship. This is the language not of the laboratory or the courtroom. It is the language of the soul, and "Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear."

Another image John uses for the People of the Dawn is that of a Bride. We might see this as individualistic did we not already know that it is a corporate symbol of the Community. As such the image points to the intimacy of the relationship. The Beloved People is a Bride. Not one of a host in a harem, she is God's only Love. In the midst of rising temptation to be seduced by Caesar, she must remain faithful.

One would like to pursue further these figures, but within our limits we can only point. Imagination, however, can continue to soar. What will it be to be called as companions to share the Creative Adventure? What will it be to participate in the creation, maybe even the redemption, of other worlds? Who are "the nations" who live beyond the City radiating Light to all corners of the earth? Who are "the kings" who bring their commerce into the luminous Cube with three gates open on every side? Apparently, the gates are permanently open to all who want in... and for any who would want to leave. We have already been told that nothing unclean shall enter.

Has John's vision simply run away with itself, so that the seer-poet-artist cannot keep from mixing metaphors and superimposing symbols on top of each other...like an instructor placing multiple transparencies at once on an overhead projector? I don't know, but I wonder.

I see no images of winged creatures darting from cloud to cloud, harps tucked under wings. I don't knock that, for I can conceive that in a given circumstance it might be great fun. Certainly, I can think of some spirits who will want to play hide-and-seek among the stars for half an eon and then fall in, salute, and call, "Reporting for duty, Sir." One of the most meaningful lines in *Revelation* is 22:3, "And His servants shall serve Him."

How? With what? What in all Creation is God up to? John called it "a new heaven and a new earth." Is that what we, too, shall be about? I suspect that will be enough.

Then the angel said to me: 'These words are true and can be trusted. And the Lord God, who gives His Spirit to the prophet, sent His angel to show His servants what must happen very soon... The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' And let him who is thirsty come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely. (22:6,7,17).

POSTSCRIPT

It may be that many of you have ventured into unknown waters, away from the clear shallows near the shore. I hope that you now see the voyage is dangerous only when you are without chart and compass.

You don't know, nor have to know, every shoal in the book of *Revelation*. You don't know, nor have to know, the full and certain meaning of every symbol that held significance for the potential martyrs of John's day. You know the central message of the book. You just find and stay on this sure course in the midst of a turbulent sea.

There are temptations to substitute curiosity for commitment and fantasy for Faithfulness. In addition, there are temptations to turn away with a too-easy agnosticism. Such is the temptation to turn from eating meat to a choking on bones.

An old story can bring us a word of wisdom. Two men sat at the same table in a Pullman dining car eating a dinner of delicious Hudson River shad. One was an agnostic, the other a minister. Measuring his companion coldly, the agnostic commented,

"I judge you are a clergyman, sir!"

"Yes, sir," came the reply, "I am in my Master's service."

"Yes, you look it. Preach out of the Bible, don't you?"

"O, yes, of course."

"Find a good many things in the old Book that you don't understand, eh?"

"O, yes, some things."

"Well, what do you do then?"

"Why, my dear friend, I simply do as we do while eating this shad. If I come to a bone, I lay it aside and go on eating the fish, and let some fool insist on choking himself with the bones."

The agnostic wound his watch and went into the smoker.

Beware of the pompous preacher who knows every secret and can unwrap every mystery. Beware of the mock humility that turns away, pretending to know nothing. For the hungry there is meat on these bones. For the thirsty there is water in this desert. For the venturesome there is a City such as we have glimpsed gleaming from afar. For the victims of oppression a Loving and Just Power works in this world beyond all the Caesars of the centuries, whose will shall "be done on earth as it is in heaven."

When speculation grows rife, there are echoes of other words that should sound afresh in our ears. Jesus declared, "But of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Keep alert and watch, for you do not know when the time will come" (*Mark* 13:32,33).

Just before His ascension Jesus told the Eleven Apostles, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by His own authority" (*Acts* 1:7). Paul's words, too, are as applicable to the Eternal Home as to our life in Christ now, "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love Him" (*1 Cor.* 2:9). "Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when He appears we shall be like him, for we shall see Him as He is. And every one who thus hopes in Him purifies himself as He is pure" (*1 John* 3:2,3).

As a child I knew that I had a little brother who died at the age of four. His picture hung on our bedroom wall. Often I studied it and wondered, "Will I ever see and know Alton?" Revivalists came to our little town and preached on the subject, "Will We Know Each Other In Heaven?" Quoting different passages, they made contrary pronouncements. Years later it was a relief to read the response of one crusty old fellow who shot back another question, "Do ye think we'll be bigger fools there than we are here?" Something inside cried, "Amen!"

The answer, though, is not in a passage plucked here and there, often out of context. The answer is in the glimpse of the face of Jesus, who is calling together in a single Family the Father's lost and lonely children. The answer is in the vision of a City that is the Community of Love. Communities begin with strangers, but they do not end there, or else they really do end. He who gave His life that we should know each other here will not so radically change His mind there. We shall "know Him in the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His suffering" (*Phil.* 3:10). Together...we shall know Him, and those to whom He so eagerly presents us.

It will be Homecoming. It will be Family Reunion. It will be one grown-up Family in a brand-new World with everybody Home for Thanksgiving.

Agape and Eirene