

THE FATHER IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

1. Introduction

If you ask who is God there will be many answers such as: God is Love, God is Truth, God is Wisdom and so on. But John the Seer, the author of the book of Revelation, would say that God is Father. Basically the book of Revelation deals with the life of the early Christians in the socio-political milieu of the Roman empire of the first century A.D. It is an apocalyptic prophecy "intended to be read aloud in the context of Christian worship,"¹ reminding the hearers that God alone is to be worshipped as the Almighty and not the Roman empire/emperor. An alternative power in God, the source of every power against the pervasive power of Rome, is presented by the author throughout Revelation. John within his socio-political world of visions, offers a rhetorical alternative world of religio-theological visions in which the persecuted Church is able to draw strength to endeavour in her committed Christian life. Revelation being highly theo-centric, emphasizes the supremacy of God over against the supremacy of Satan and his allies. However, while speaking of God in different attributes and titles the Seer does not mean to illustrate the God-head who is seen in three different persons, but God as the *Father of Jesus Christ* so much so that among the four occurrences of the term "father"-*"pater"* (1:6; 2:28; 3:5; 3:21) three times Jesus says "my father" - *"tou patros mou"* (2:28; 3:5; 3:21). We shall study here the nature and purpose of the fatherhood of God in the book of Revelation.

2. The Trinitarian Outlook

John the Seer brings out the Trinitarian formula of God at the outset of the book itself:

*"Grace to you and peace from him
who is and who was and who is to come,
and from the seven Spirits who are before his throne,
and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness,
the first born of the dead,
and the ruler of the kings of the earth" (1:4-5).*

1. R. Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge 1993) xi.

It is a formula of blessing as was the custom of the early Christian practice. We come across the standard formula of this type in the Pauline letters: "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:3; Eph 1:2). It is true that the formula of blessing in the letters of Paul speaks of two persons of the Divine: God the Father and Jesus Christ. The intention seems to place Jesus Christ with God on the divine side because he was the source of the salvation that comes from God to the world. That was the purpose of Paul. But John using the ancient formula of blessing and coming to know of the Trinitarian concept of God that existed in the early Church (e.g. 1 Pet 1:2) makes his own variations and wishes his readers the blessings of the Holy Trinity. Here we see his concern to include Jesus and the Holy Spirit along with the Father.

In the above blessing formula of John the Name of Jesus is mentioned explicitly, while the Father is named by the phrase: *who is and who was and who is to come*, and the Holy Spirit by the phrase: *the seven Spirits who are before his throne*. There are many different ways to explain the phrase: seven Spirits (cf. also Rev 3:1; 4:5).² The references to the Spirit in Revelation can be divided into three categories: 'in the Spirit,'³ 'to the Spirit,'⁴ and 'seven spirits.'⁵ The identity of these seven spirits is widely debated.⁶ Seeing the background of the throne around which the seven Spirits are standing some would identify them as seven angels who stand in the presence of God (cf. Tob 12:15; 1

2. Cf. D. Aune, *Revelation* (Word Biblical Commentary, Dallas: 1997) 32-39; F.F. Bruce, "Holy Spirit in the Qumran Texts" *ALUOS* 6 (1966-68) 49-55;, "The Spirit in the Apocalypse" in *Christ and Spirit in the New Testament*, FS C.F.D. Moule, ed. B. Linders and Smalley (Cambridge: 1973) 333-344). G.H. Dix, "The Seven Archangels and the Seven Spirits" *JTS* 28 (1927) 233-250; J.M. Ford, "He that Cometh and the Divine Name" *JTJ* 1 (1970) 144-147; J.C. De Smidt, "Spirit and Community in the Johannine Apocalypse-Nomenclature" *NeoT* 28 (1994) 229-244.

3. 1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10.

4. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 14:13; 19:10; 22:17.

5. 1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6. J.C. De Smidt, "The Holy Spirit in the Book of Revelation-Nomenclature," 233, finds another three categories: The Spirit of visions, the Spirit of Prophecy and the Seven Spirits.

6. Cf. G. Dix, "The Seven Archangels and the Seven Spirits," 233-50; F.F. Bruce, "The Spirit in the Apocalypse," 233-344; R. Bauckham, "The Role of the Spirit in the Apocalypse," *EvQ* 522 (1980) 66-83.

Enoch 90:21). David Aune would say that this phrase indicates the seven principal angels of God.⁷ However, it is generally agreed that the expression, probably derived from Isa 42:1 and 61:1-6, is a reference to the fullness of the one Spirit of God. As the Father sits upon the throne in judgement (4:2), the Son appears in the imagery of the Lamb accompanied with the presence of the Spirit (4:5; 5:6). The seven Spirits in 5:6, identifying with the seven horns and the seven eyes of the Lamb, represent the presence and power of God on earth, bringing about God's kingdom by implementing the Lamb's victory throughout the world. Thus the Spirit is related both to God and to Christ. The Holy Spirit continues the earthly work of the glorified Christ (1:4; 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6,13, 22; 4:6; 5:6). The Spirit is also seen as an active agent in divine revelation (1:10; 14:13; 19:10; 21:10) as well as the one who gives the final divine invitation to come and possess the eschatological kingdom (22:17).

Thus the above understanding of the Trinitarian concept of the divine, like most of the early Christian writers, restricts the word 'God' to God the Father of Jesus Christ.⁸

3. The Father of Jesus Christ

God in Revelation is always mentioned with a specific qualification: *Father of Jesus Christ* (1:6; 2:28; 3:5; 3:21). This specificity is not unique to John the Seer alone. It is also seen in other writings of the New Testament: the Gospels and the Pauline writings. The synoptics mention some occasions when Jesus calls God as "my Father" (Mt 7:21; 10:32-33; 18:19; 25:34; 26:53; Lk 9:59; 10:22; 24:49). This expression is very common in the writings of John (5:17; 6:40; 8:19; 8:40; 10:37; 14:7; 14:20-22; 20:21). In all these places the above expression exhibits the intimate union that exists between God the Father and Jesus His Son. It is the Father who sends him to the world and abides in him so much so that if any one knows the Son he knows the Father also (Jn 8:19; 14:7).

Paul has mainly three different expressions while speaking of God:

- i. God, the Father of Jesus Christ (Rom 15:6; Eph 1:3, 17; 2 Cor 1:3; 11:31).

7. Cf. D. Aune, *Revelation*, 34.

8. Cf. R. Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 25.

- ii. God our Father (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:3; Eph 1:2; Col 1:2, 3, 12; Phil 1:2; 4:20).
- iii. God the Father [of all] (Rom 4:16, 17, 18; 6:4; 8:15; 1Cor 8:6; 15:24; 2Cor 1:3; Gal 1:1, 14; 4:2, 6; Eph 2:18; 3:14; 4:6; 5:20; 6:23; Col 3:17; Phil 2:11). In all the above occurrences God is always qualified as the Father, which means, God is not thought to be a being in Himself, but always in connection with Jesus Christ or humankind as the Father.

As noted above God is qualified in Revelation as the Father of Jesus Christ who brings victory over the Evil. However Revelation puts forward the image of the warrior Lamb (5:6; 11:1; 19:10) against the background of the mighty power of God who is seated on the throne as in the case of the Roman Emperor wielding his power of Rule (throne). Christ the Lamb fighting against the Evil as the "Rider of the White Horse" (ch 19) is named as the "Word of God" (19:13). As the great Dragon exercises his power on earth through his agents, the Sea Beast and the Earth Beast (ch 13), so too God the Father exercises his authority through His Messiah, Jesus Christ.⁹ Moreover the author of Revelation presents God the Father with many titles exhibiting His power and might.

4. The Titles applied to God

The power of God is expressed by John through several titles. These titles not only symbolize the diverse nature of God, but also bring to the fore His omnipotence in establishing His kingdom over against the rule of the Dragon.

4.1 The Pantokrator: The Almighty

Besides an OT citation in 2 Cor 6:18, this title of God is not found in the NT outside Revelation, in which it is a favourite title (Cf. 1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:5, 7; 19:6, 15; 21:22) used only for God. *Pantokrator* is the Greek rendering of the Hebrew *Sabaoth* (Isa 6:13). The title 'Yahweh the almighty' is translated by the LXX as *kyrios pantokrator* (2 Sam 5:10 1 Chr 11:9; 17:7, 24; In Zach 56 times). The first three

9. I had developed elsewhere the "Blasphemous Triad" as against the Holy Trinity in exhibiting the devastating power of the Evil Dragon. Cf. A. Peter Abir, "The Blasphemous Triad in the Book of Revelation," *Vaiharai* (Vol. 2, No. 1 Jan 1997) 31-48.

occurrences (Rev 1:8; 4:8; 11:17) indicate that the end of the world is in the hand of God whose almighty power creates the eschatological kingdom. This is further verbalized in the other passages. In Rev 15:3 as in the song of Moses (cf. Ex 15:1-8) the majesty, omnipotence, and righteousness, as well as the fulfilment of the eternal kingdom are praised.

In Rev 6:5-6 the martyrs¹⁰ speak of God as *pantokrator*, the one who already appeared as judge. Further, God the almighty is given thanks for establishing His absolute reign which is the visible sign of God's omnipotence (Cf. 19:6, 15; 21:22). As *pantokrator* expresses God's immovable majesty, immense power and the governing of the earth's chaotic history, this title indicates also the kingly aspect of God. This quality is better expressed by the following title.

4.2 The Despotes: Sovereign Lord

Despotes is the Greek expression of the Hebrew *adon* or *adonai* in the OT. In most of the references in the LXX this word is applied only to God,¹¹ while only in four places in the NT *despotes* refers to God.¹² This word denotes absolute ownership and unlimited power of the master. In Rev 6:10 the martyrs call God "Sovereign Lord." They thereby acknowledge His absolute rule over them and their position as His slaves. This call is an appeal in the context of a relationship in which the master has the authority to protect and avenge the blood of his servants.

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10. The altar is the symbol of the martyrs: cf. H. Langkammer, "Pantokrator," *EWNT*, III (Stuttgart 1983), 26; Even the altar mentioned in ch 6, 9 refers to the martyrs: cf. J.N. Musvosvi, *Vengeance in the Apocalypse* (Michigan 1993) 182-196; esp. 196.
 11. Cf. Gen 15:2, 8; Josh 5:14; Job 5:8; Isa 1:24; 3:1; 10:33 Jer 1:6; 4:10; Jonah 4:3.
 12. Lk 2:29; Act 4:24, 29; Rev 6:10. Three occurrences (2 Pet 2:1; Jud 4; 2 Tim 2:1) refer to Christ, while the other three (1Tim 6:1; Tit 2:9; 1 Pet 2:18) refer to human masters. Although Beckwith (*Apocalypse*, 526) and Ford (*Revelation*, 99) and J.P. Heil ("The Fifth Seal as a Key to the Book of Revelation," *Bib* 74 [1993] 227) suggest that *despotes*, "master" could refer to the Risen Christ, Charles, *Revelation*, I, 175, opts for a reference to God the Father. Our reasons for maintaining that *despotes* in 6:10 as referring to God are: i. The context of ch 6 is the revelation of the scrolls to the saints; ii. The Lamb is only the 'agent' who opens the scrolls; iii. The scrolls are about the judgement by God; iv. The saints cried in hope to God who puts them into tribulation.

This title is in close link with *kyrios*. The Sanskrit word *sura*, which means "power" or "force" is the basis of *kyrios*.¹³ Foerster endeavours to show that in all religions the concept of God contains the element of legitimate power, which is connected to the idea of 'despotes'.¹⁴ As the name for God the LXX constantly translates *adon* or *adonai* as "Lord". However, it is used as an expository equivalent for the divine name Yahweh. In the name of God the nature of God is contained (1 Sam 25:25). The name is both the quintessence of His person and the vehicle of His power (Judg 13:18). Thus the name of God in the OT is a numinous force; it is "fraught with might" and "feared" as is God himself (Deut 28:58)

In the NT *kyrios* is used both of God and of Jesus.¹⁵ However, this title is applied to God in the NT mainly in the OT quotations or allusions, which generally follow the LXX.¹⁶ Derived from the LXX,¹⁷ Revelation uses this title mostly of God, in the sense of the OT concept of Yahweh.¹⁸ In all these cases the Seer points out God's immense power over everything. This power is able to create, build up or destroy anybody and anything, as described by Jeremiah (Jer 1:9-10; 10:6-13). Although this title has a political connotation, for John there is only one Lord in the religious sense, and He is the eternal and omnipotent God who is the master of the emperor himself. Therefore both *despotes* and *kyrios* go together to express the absolute sovereignty of God over all creatures and thus He is the unopposed Emperor of the whole universe.

13. Cf. Foerster, "kyrios," *TDNT*, III (GRand Rapids 1993) 1041.

14. Cf. Forester, "kyrios." 1046-1058.

15. Out of 719 occurrences in the NT, Luke makes the greatest use of the term: Gospel 104 times and Acts 107 times. However, 23 times are found in Revelation. In these, 15 occurrences refer to Yahweh.

16. Cf, Mk 1:3; 12:11, 36; Mt 27:10, LK 1:46; 4:18, 19; Act 2:34; 2 Cor 2:16; 8:21; Heb 1:10.

17. Cf. J.A. Fitzmyer. "kyrios." *EWNT* II, 816.

18. 15 out of the total 23 times: 1:8; 4:8, 11; 11:4, 15, 17; 15:3,4; 16:5,7; 18:8; 19:6; 21:22; 22:5,6.

4.3 The Alpha and Omega

The Jews used to indicate the notion of fullness and completeness by using the first and last letters of the Hebrew alphabet, *aleph* and *tau*. It represents the entirety of things.¹⁹ It was common for the Jews to talk about keeping the law in its entirety. For example, Adam transgressed the whole law from *aleph to tau*, and when God blessed Israel, He does it from *aleph to tau*; Abraham observed the whole law from *aleph to tau*. In the same line of thought *alpha and omega* as the Greek rendering of the Hebrew expression, are the natural symbols for the first and last of all things. In the NT this phrase appears only in Revelation (Cf 1:8; 21:6; refer to God, while 22:13 refers to Christ).

God Himself announces in Rev 1:8 that He is *the alpha and the omega*. In the prologue itself, as he is going to narrate the persecutions of the Asian churches, the Seer attributes this title to God. Taking Isa 44:6 as the background, and going beyond the meaning of Isaiah, John expresses that God is the sovereign Lord of all times and all ages. In particular, in the war waged against the Church by the Dragon, it is, as Beasley-Murray states, an encouragement to believe that the Lord God maintains His sovereign control over the world at all times, even when the powers of this world would resist the Christ and his Church and give place to the raging of Antichrist. In 21:6, this self revelation is extended with "the beginning and the end," which clearly explains the meaning of the phrase. John puts this here in the context of the new creation. The Lord God Almighty is the initiator of creation and its end and this affirms that God would make everything new. John wants to affirm God's power over all reality,²⁰ which ensures the defeat of the Dragon and the coming of the kingdom of God.

This notion goes along with God's eternity which is depicted in Revelation by the phrase: "who is, and who was and who is to come"

19. Cf. D. Aune, "The Apocalypse of John and Greco-Roman Revelatory Magic," *ONTS* 33 (1987) 481-501, for the history of the use of *alpha and omega* in the Jewish tradition, esp. p. 490-91; C.F. Burney, "Christ as the *APXH* of the Christians," *JTS* 27 (1926) 160-177. In p. 177 he says, "there is every reason to suppose that 'arkey' is here used with all the fullness of meaning which St. Paul extracts from *reshith*-beginning-sum total, first fruit. This fits with *alpha and omega* of 21, 6. Also J. M. Ford, "He that comes' and the Divine name (Apo 1:4-8; 4:8)," *JSJ* 1, 2 (1970) 144-147.

20. Cf. T. Holtz, "Alpha," *EWNT* I, 155.

(Cf. 1:4,8; 4:8; 11:17; 16:5). This phrase in Revelation is applied only to God mostly in the context of acclamations and praise. The grammatical difficulties in this expression seem to be intentional. John uses the nominative after *apo* because he considers the paraphrase of the divine name as an undeclinable noun. By this unusual Greek form John wants to remind his readers that God is eternally existent, without beginning or end. This calls for God's sovereign control over the course of history. Moreover, John is in line with the thought behind the revelation of the name at the Exodus.²¹ And so he deliberately perverts Greek grammar rather than modifies the divine name.

However, John goes one step further to apply the phrase "the one who is to come" to God. Jesus is normally thought to come in the future. When the same title is attributed to God, it is believed that He not only transcends the ages, and awaits us in the future, but also He, 'comes' from the future and works His gracious and powerful will. This shows that he will 'come' and consummate His gracious action in Christ by establishing His own kingdom. God thus is not merely the Lord of history but also the Master of human destiny.

4.4 The Holy and True

"Holy and True" is another title applied to God in Revelation. In Jewish culture the Holy One was a familiar title for God (Cf. Isa 40:25; Hab 3:3; Mk 1:24; Jn 6:69). The OT use of *qatosh* shows that this word is closely linked with cult.²² For God's name is an expression for his personal essence as present in the sanctuary and the people (Cf. Ex 3:5; Josh 5:15). God as *qatosh*, in all His divine personality, is contrasted with the human being who is imperfect. The concept of the holiness of God is the central theme of the theology of Isaiah. This picture of God is seen by Isaiah in his initial vision where the *trisagion* appears (Isa 6:3). This saying reveals that God is exceedingly holy,²³ which highlights His mighty power because He is the Lord of hosts and the whole earth also is full of His glory.

21. Ex 3:14 gives God's revelation of His name as "I am who I am." The LXX translates it as "I am who is," while the Jerusalem Targum expands this to "I am he who is and who will be," and Deut 32:29 expands it as, I am who is, and who was, and who will be."

22. Cf. Ex. 16:23; 26:34; Josh 5:15; Isa 48:2; 52:1; Neh 11:1, 18; Ps 5:7; 79:1; etc.

23. Cf. N. Walker, "The Origin of the Thrice-Holy," *NTS* 5 (1968 -9) 132-33.

The NT also attributes *hagios* (holy) as a designation for God.²⁴ In the NT, as in the OT, the decisive center of concern is the activity of the holy God and the new relationship of believers to God as against the destructive action of the Dragon. The first petition of the Lord's prayer (Mt 6:9; Lk 11:2) which bears a verbal resemblance to the first petition of the Jewish Kaddish prayer, reveals God's power and redemptive activity. Jesus applies the title holy to God in his high-priestly prayer of Jn 17:11. This is in accordance with the Jewish prayer: "O holy Lord of all holiness" (2 Macc 14:36) and "O Holy One among the holy" (3 Macc 2:2). The *Didache* attributes this title to God in the context of deliverance of the Church from the evil one. This prayer occurs in John in the context of discipleship. The fact that the disciples belong to God is the reason for their keeping themselves separate (holy) from the world because God Himself is holy.

However only Revelation reproduces in 4:8 the 'trisagion' of Isa 6:3. In ch 4 which is the celebration of creation, John shows that God is worthy of honour and glory because He reveals His mighty power in creation. Nevertheless John does not stick to the source but inserts *deos* after *kyrios* and changes *sabbaoth* into *pantokrator* by which he follows the Hebrew tradition and shows the close connection between the two qualities of God: holiness and omnipotence. The praise of holiness leads to affirmation of God's power and omnipotence. This is further made clear from the hymn in 15:3-4 where God's holiness is the cause of His power.

God's holiness in Revelation is seen along with truth (6:10; 15:4). In the context of vindication God is appealed to in 6:10 as 'holy and true'. As holy, totally separate from all evil, God will vindicate with integrity those who have given their lives for the cause of righteousness.²⁵ Musvosvi observes that by virtue of His holiness He is wholly the other, separate from sin and He cannot let sin and evil go unpunished.²⁶ By His very nature He must ultimately

24. Cf. Lk 1:49 quoting Ps 110:9; Jn 17:11; 1 Pet 1:15, 16; 1 Joh 2:20.

25. While Charles (*Revelation*, 175) and Swete (*Apocalypse*, 90) see here the concept of vengeance, Ford, (*Revelation*, 100) observes that retribution in the sense of punishing the wicked does enter into the picture but the idea of vengeance in the sense of personal satisfaction does not. Ladd (*Revelation*, 105-106) makes it still clear that the cry in ch 6 is out of vindication and not for personal vengeance. Cf. Mounce, *Révélation*, 159; Sweet, *Revelation*, 142.

26. Cf. Musvosvi, *Vengeance in the Apocalypse*, 220.

come into confrontation with the anti-God forces. Therefore, a major concern of Revelation where God's holiness and truth are seen together, is judgement and vindication.

All these above titles applied to God exhibit the fact that God is exceedingly powerful. This victory is the means through which he shows his power to establish His kingdom. In actuality, this power of God is shown in the authority of His Christ when Jesus is able to overthrow the Dragon. It is in Jesus Christ that God's kingdom comes to reality (Cf. Mt 16:28; 21:9; Lk 1:33; 22:30; 2 Tim 4:1; 2 Pet 1:11). That is why Revelation rightly recognizes Christ the Lamb as the Lion of Judah, who has the authority of God. That is why Revelation says that in God's kingdom "the authority of His Christ" is seen (12:10).

Besides, God is seen in Revelation as the Father who rules the whole cosmos as if he is sitting on the throne. The Throne scene in chapter 4 explains the fatherhood of God in so far as he is the ruler and protector of the created world.

5. God Sitting on the Throne

Throne is one of the important symbols, which occurs very frequently in Revelation.²⁷ It is prominent throughout John's prophecy and is mentioned in every chapter except chapters 2, 9, 10, 15, 17 and 18. There are at least two instances in which the term "throne" itself appears to function as a circumlocution for the name of God (4:10; 8:3). The phrase "throne of God," in which the divine name is specifically mentioned, is not common in the book of Revelation (7:15; 22:1, 3; cf. 12:5). Usually heaven is considered as the throne of God (Cf. Mt 5:34; 23:22; Act 7:49). The throne as the royal symbol signifies the majestic power and sovereignty of God (Cf. Heb 8:1). In Revelation too it is the manifestation of God's absolute authority.²⁸

John would have taken the imagery from the Jewish apocalyptic tradition,²⁹ and the throne scene in ch 4 is modeled after the throne

27. The occurrences of *tronos* (throne) in the NT;

| Mt | Mk | Lk/Act | Jn | Pl | Heb | Jas | Joh | Pt | Jud | Rev | Total |
|----|----|--------|----|----|-----|-----|-----|----|-----|-----|-------|
| 5 | 0 | 3/2 | 0 | 1 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 47 | 62 |

28. Cf. 1:4; 4:2-6; 5:1; 6:7,11, 13; 6:16; 7:9-17; 8:3; 14:3,5; 16:17; 19:4-5; 20:11-12; 21:5; 22:1,3; also Kiddle, *Revelation*, 81.

29. Cf. 1 Enoch 45:3; 48:5; 51:3; 55:4; 62:9,9.

rooms of earthly kings. The major focus of ch 4 of the throne scene is its symbolism of God's sovereignty exercised in judgement. From this flows the idea of the nature of the fatherhood of God which does not spare the evil that befalls upon His people. Hence he shows his wrath (Cf. 6:10, 16-17; 14:7; 15:1; 16:5, 19; 18:20; 19:2,11). God cannot withstand evil; he will surely destroy the Evil kingdom in order to save His people. The phrase "one sitting upon the throne" (4:2) indicates undoubtedly God the Father, because he is distinguished from the Lamb in 5:5,7; 6:16; 7:10 and from the Spirit in 4:5.³⁰

6. The Significance of the Fatherhood

Revelation is a text of crisis and conflict where the Seer is asserting the dominion of God and Jesus the Lamb over against the blasphemous pretensions of the Dragon, representing the Roman empire, setting himself up as the "Almighty." In this context of *power-war* John focuses on the ethical responses of the Church at a time of crisis which leads her to be the sign of God's kingdom on earth. We shall describe here the two camps of this *power-war* which concludes with the victory of the Church. In the context of persecution and trials of the early Church the author wants to give a prophetic motivation by presenting God as Father who cares for his people and who protects them in times of danger.

The protection and care of the people from the part of God the Father is seen in the concept of God as judge and Saviour. In Israel all justice is ascribed to God: Yahweh is Lord and Judge (Deut 1:17). As judge he helps his people (Jdg 11:27; 2 Sam 18:31). The OT clearly says that Heaven and Earth or the peoples of the earth are often called upon to act as a tribunal (Isa 1:2; Jer 2:12; Mic 6:1; Ps 50:1-6), especially on the "day of Yahweh" (Isa 2:12-18; 13:9; Jer 46:10; Ezek 30:3 ff). We are also told that God the Father always comes to the aid of anyone suffering violence and injustice (Gen 4:9ff). Writings of the post-exilic period emphasize that God's enemies, whether humans or supernatural powers, will be dashed to pieces (Enoch 10:6; God and Magog, Sib.3). The Congregation of the wickedness will be annihilated, while the sons of light will attain salvation.³¹ This apocalyptic feature where God cannot

30. Cf. R.L.Thomas, *Revelation 1-7* (Chicago 1992) 340.

31. Cf. W. Schneider, "Judgement," *The New International Dictionary of the New Testament Theology*, Vol 2 (Michigan 1980) 364.

admit wickedness is prominent when Revelation calls God as Father. While God judges the Evil *he saves his people*. Thus in his judgement *his saving character* also is observed (Deut 32:11; Ex 19:4; Ps 103:5).

God sitting on the throne (ch 4) expresses not only God's almighty power but also his kingdom against the anti-kingdom set by the evil forces in the world. So the author of Revelation is careful in presenting God the father whose kingdom is more powerful than that of the Dragon.

The world power, be it political, social or religious, which persecutes God's people is considered to be the 'kingdom' opposed to God and his realm.³² The title *Basileia* (kingdom) in Revelation is essentially a relative term, provoking a polemic context between the positive and negative forces. The term *the kings of the earth* has always a negative connotation. Besides, the title "king of kings" occurs only in the context of Christ's victorious war against the evil forces (17:14; 19:16). The Seer thus constructs very vividly an *empire* of the evil forces which constitute the *anti-kingdom*. The whole devastating activities of the "crowned" Dragon with his unusual features (12:3: He has seven heads, ten horns and seven diadems on his heads) and with his allies wielding authority, power and worship (13:1-8), manifest his kingly attributes and diabolic empire. The Dragon thus appears as the principal *anti-king* under whom there are many evil forces at work against the Church. The Great Whore Babylon of Rev 17 shares several qualities with the Dragon and functions with the Beasts of the sea and the land and with the other evil forces such as the "kings of the earth" (e.g. 9:7; 17:12; 19:19) and *the inhabitants of the earth* (6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8, 14a, b; 17:8). The Dragon, being served by all the other evil forces, wields his "imperial" power against God and Christ the Lamb and thus becomes the main protagonist in *the anti-kingdom*.

7. Conclusion

The term God is not an abstract noun in the book of Revelation, but it is a term applied to the *Father* of the universe, a being who created/creates and sustains all. God is not termed by the Seer without any

32. Out of 21 occurrences of *Basileus* (kingdom), it is applied 3 times to *Jesus* (1:5; 17:14; 19:16), once to *God* (15:3), and the rest as negative connotation refer to *the kings of the world*: Kings of the earth (1:5; 6:15; 17:2, 18; 18:3, 9, 21, 24; 19:18, 19; 21:24), the Roman emperors (17:9, 12, 12), the leaders of the people (10:11; 16:12) and the king of demons (9:11).

qualification and God as the *Father of Jesus Christ* is prominent in Revelation. When the Church is faced with many different conflicts and crisis in the commitment to her faith, people are desperately looking for a Saviour. The "prayer of the saints" (6:9) and the reference to the "false prophet" causing death on those who reject the emperor cult (13:15) clearly point to the crisis which the Christians experienced. The situation of crisis and the persecution of the Christians under the reign of Domitian, though not systematic, were not merely an illusion of the author, but a real experience of both the individuals (1:9; 2:13) and the community (6:9; 7:14).

Besides, the symbolic universe of Revelation evokes the reality of the persecuting imperial power that takes the place of God. The actuality of conflict, according to the author of Revelation is not restricted to one emperor, but to all the evil imperial powers. The author makes this evident by describing the activity of the Sea Beast. The Dragon gives his authority to this Beast to make war with *every tribe and people and language and nation* (13:7). R.H. Charles rightly thinks that this verse refers to a world-wide persecution.³³

This rhetoric nature of John's vision is not to be taken as "predicting" the future, rather, he points out the threat of the evil empire to the faithful life of the Christians of yesterday, today and tomorrow.

Thus within the location of the worldwide tyranny of Rome John constructs the cosmic conflict of God and the Dragon and the eschatological purpose of God for the whole creation.

In this situation of crisis the author presents, first and foremost *God as the Father*. The Fatherhood of God would give the suffering Church a message of consolation and hope that their God will never let them down. The political portrayal of God as the supreme ruler with absolute authority is best described by the Seer through the symbol of the throne and in particular, by the throne-room scene of ch 4. The throne of God is surrounded by odd images of the four living creatures, the lesser thrones of the 24 elders each *with garments and golden crown*, and the hosts of angels. Thus describing the heavenly throne-room purely in a political setting, John wants to indicate the majestic power and sovereignty of *God the Father* in contrast to the imperial power of the Dragon/Rome.

33. Cf. Charles, *Revelation*, I, 353.

We should not forget that the concern of the author in establishing the supremacy of God the father's power, as shown above, is not to build up a *dualism* of God's omnipotence and the "absolute" power of the Dragon/world; his only purpose is to point out the theological persuasive message of God's sovereignty in contrast with the satanic power which is destructive in its effects and idolatrous in its claims to ultimate loyalty. John's theological concern in his profuse use of the title "the Almighty" for God is not so much to establish God's power among several powers in the world, as to emphasize that God is the one who keeps everything and everyone under his control. The author's literary style itself brings out the theological significance of this title which occurs all through the book. Closely linked to it are the titles *kyrios, despotes, "the alpha and omega"* which present God the Father as one who has absolute rule.

Thus it is a message of hope and consolation which these titles give for the suffering people of God. The song of praise of Our Lady fits in well in this regard: "His mercy is for those who fear him . . . He has shown strength with his arm; He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy" (Lk 1:50-54). When Christians are tortured, when they are looked down, when the Christian message of peace and love is forgotten and thrown overboard even in the so-called Christian countries we need not lose hope. *God the father* is there to guard us and uphold us. In India, when nuns are attacked, priests are ill-treated and persecuted and Bibles are burnt, we need not think that Christianity will be conquered or wiped off.

God as the Father for his faithful will give us strength and courage to undergo such situations with hope and consolation. The God of the Book of Revelation is almighty and merciful to protect his people like an eagle that carries its young ones under its wings (Deut 32:11). Suffering is inevitable for the people of God (Act 14:22); but we have a *God who is the Father* to guard and protect us from every danger.

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