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Spring 1997

Apocalypse

La Salle University Art Museum

Brother Daniel Burke FSC

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Recommended Citation

La Salle University Art Museum and Burke, Brother Daniel FSC, "Apocalypse" (1997). *Art Museum Exhibition Catalogues*. 31.
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APOCALYPSE

La Salle Art Museum

Spring, 1997

Apocalypse

The last book of the Bible, Revelation or the Apocalypse, is its most complex and mysterious. Like other prophetic passages scattered through the Bible, even in the gospels, the book's major concern is with the eventual triumph of good over evil and with the final fate of the world as we know it. As the Millenium approaches, these concerns have returned.

But the book, traditionally attributed to St. John, also addresses specific concerns and alarms of the early Christian church at the end of the first century, particularly the persecution of Christians in the Roman empire. In the overall form of a letter, it begins with individual letters to seven (a number of mystical significance throughout) Christian congregations in the Middle East, warning them about false teachers and of the dangers of conforming to the pagan culture that surrounds them.

The writer John is then caught up into heaven to witness the rituals of God's final triumph over evil:

the Lamb of God opening a scroll with seven seals (Chapter 6, 8), seven trumpets blaring (8, 9), seven bowls of trials poured over the earth (16) as a panorama of cosmic battles and catastrophes unrolls until the Lamb conquers the seven-headed beast, the Antichrist (19). The saints of the church then reign for the thousand years of the millennium, until Satan is conquered in his final assault and a new heaven and earth replace the old (21). What dominates this complex and digressive panorama are images of power and destruction as with the surreal and monstrous Four Horsemen, the Dragon, the Seven-Headed Beast before, finally, the images of heavenly peace and praise.

It is not surprising, then, that several mediaeval manuscript versions of the Book of the Apocalypse have some of the most vivid and compelling illuminations of the period as in the commentaries on the Apocalypse by the Spanish monk Beatus in the collections of the Morgan Library and the Cloisters in New York. There were also treatments in masterpieces of stained glass (Bourges, Paris, York), tapestry (Madrid, Angers), and painting (the Ghent *Adoration of the Lamb* by Van Eyck). But the most widely

dispersed treatments came with the fifteenth century invention of printing, and especially with the Cologne Bible of 1480 and its large woodcuts. The blocks for these simple but dramatically effective prints were soon borrowed by other publishers, were copied and imitated by still others.

But the early climax to this feverish interest came in 1498 with the publication of a separate edition of the Apocalypse in Latin and German with fifteen large and complex woodcuts by the twenty-seven year old Albrecht Dürer. The set made him instantly famous and became the standard for centuries thereafter. His immediate influence can be traced here in simplified versions two decades later in followers like Lucas Cranach the Elder. He illustrated Luther's New Testament (Wittenberg, 1522), adding anti-Roman touches like papal tiaras on the "Seven-Headed Beast." On the other hand, Hans Sebald Beham eliminated Cranach's anti-papal touches for the Catholic version of Dittenberger in 1534. Albrecht Altdorfer, illustrating the first edition of Luther's Low-German Bible, 1533-34, returns to Dürer's more even-handed approach to sinning Popes,

recent echoes of Dürer's astounding work. In Odilon Redon's *The Apocalypse of St. John* (1899), the major emphasis, as usual with this symbolist artist, is on the solitary visionary. But several of his lithographs borrow directly from Dürer, as in "St. John and the Twenty-four Elders." And, finally, we include the accordion-folded *Book of the Revelation* (1995), with twelve linoleum cuts by Barbara Benish, who has exhibited in the Dürer House in Nuremberg. The printer Robin Price has used German and Czech types and the combination of book design and illustration forcefully recaptures "the horror and beauty of St. John's apocalyptic vision" that Dürer first committed to paper.

Special Exhibition Room

Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528), German

The Apocalypse prints were Dürer's first major woodcut series. A German and Latin text edition, consisting of 15 prints was published in Nuremberg in 1498 and in 1511 another Latin edition was printed with the addition of one more print. These images were popular and appropriate for much thinking of impending doom in Dürer's time, the end of the world having been prophesied by many for 1500. And, of course, the profound influence of these old master illustrations continues up to present times, as made evident in this exhibition.

The synopsis of the Apocalypse text for each woodcut here is taken from James Hall, *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art* (New York, Harper & Row, 1974)

1. *The Vision of the Seven Candlesticks*

From the 1511 Latin edition.

(1:10-16) A voice told John to narrate his vision to seven Christian communities in Asia Minor. He saw seven lamps (sometimes represented as altar candlesticks) in the midst of which was 'one like a son of man,' his hair like snow-white wool, his eyes aflame, holding seven stars in his right hand, with a sword coming out of his mouth. (John kneels in prayer before this vision of Christ, who is generally enthroned.

2. *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* 1498

Lent by the Philadelphia Museum of Art:
Purchased with funds from the SmithKline
Beckman (now Beecham Corporation) for the
Arts Medica Collection).

(6:1-8) On the breaking of the first four seals there appeared the 'four horsemen of the apocalypse': 1) The 'Conqueror,' crowned by an angel, holding a bow, riding a white horse; 2) 'War,' with a sword, on a red horse; 3) 'Famine,' with a pair of scales, on a black

horse; 4) 'Death,' on a sickly pale horse, closely followed by Hades. (The horsemen have been variously interpreted. To the Middle Ages the first stood for Christ and the Church; but more commonly all four are seen as the agents of divine wrath. They trample men under their hooves. Hades, a gaping-jawed Leviathan, swallows a bishop.)



3. *The Four Angels Holding the Four Winds*

(Modern facsimile of the woodcut dated 1498)
Lent by the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

(7: 1-8) Four angels held back the four winds (symbols of the great empires of antiquity) until another angel had placed the protective 'seal of the living God' on the foreheads of the multitudes of Christians.

4. *The Woman Clothed with the Sun and the Seven-headed Beast* 1498

Lent by the Philadelphia Museum of Art: Charles M. Lea Collection.

(12: 1-6) The seventh trumpet brought a vision of God's heavenly temple, followed by earthquake and storm, and the appearance of the famous 'portent': 'a woman robed with the sun, beneath her feet the moon, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.' A dragon with seven heads stood waiting to devour the child she was about to bear, but it was borne by

angels safely up to God. (There is doubt about the writer's original meaning for this vision. The woman was probably meant originally to symbolize the Church. Her identification with the Virgin Mary was a medieval interpretation of Bonaventure and others).

5. *The Babylonian Whore* 1498

Lent by the Philadelphia Museum of Art: Gift of Lessing J. Rosenwald.

(17: 3-6) The vision of the whore of Babylon was of a woman clothed in purple and scarlet, mounted on a scarlet beast that had seven heads and ten horns. She held a gold cup full of obscenities. An angel foretold her destruction to John. (The whore of Babylon symbolized Rome to the writer who states that the beast's seven heads represent seven hills. To Protestant reformers she stood for the Rome of the popes.)

Odilon Redon (1840-1916), French

It seems that Redon's imagination in his visual expression of the invisible world knew no bounds and certainly the Apocalyptic vision was most appropriate for this talent. The very expressive range and tonal richness of Redon's black and white lithographs is probably unequaled among twentieth century artists. His soft-focus, recondite and mystical approach to the Apocalypse text provides a sharp contrast to Dürer's, whose images are more complex and comprehensive and so provide a more detailed account of the biblical text. But, Redon readily admits his general indebtedness to Dürer for this series.

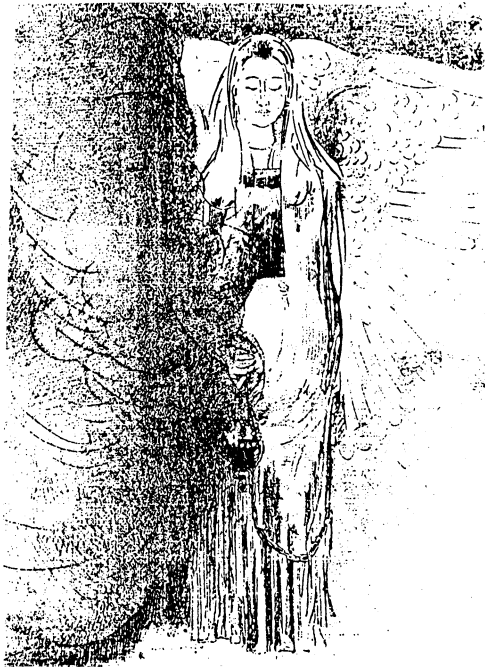
Apocalypse de Saint Jean 1899

(Album of 12 plates and covers published by Ambrose Vollard; edition of 100 sets)

The following four lithographs have been graciously lent by The Philadelphia Museum of Art: Purchased with the John D. McIlhenny Fund.

6. *“And he had in his right hand seven stars; and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword”.* (Ch.1)

7. *“And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals.”*
(Ch. 5)



8. *“And the angel took the censer.”*(Ch.8)

9. *“And I John saw the holy city.”*(Ch.21)

Barbara Benish

10. *The Book of Revelation of Jesus Christ*
(Los Angeles: Robin Price, Designer and
Publisher, 1995)

With color linoleum cuts by Barbara Benish
(Contemporary), Czechoslovakian.

Benish states that her inspiration for these
Apocalypse images came especially from those
of Albrecht Durer, but also Lucas Cranach the
Elder, William Blake, José Posada, and Josef
Vachal.

Renaissance Followers of Dürer

11. Anonymous (16th century)

Left to right

"The Women Clothed with the Sun"

(Ch. 12)

"The Adoration of the Lamb" (Ch. 14)

"The Whore of Babylon" (Ch. 17)

)
)
These woodcuts were probably from a Luther Bible and show a close connection to Lucas Cranach the Elder's Apocalypse illustrations for the first printed edition of Luther's German translation of *The New Testament*, Wittenberg, 1522. Note that the Whore of Babylon wears a papal tiara.

12. Attributed to Hans Sebald Beham (1500-1550), German, and Anton Woensam (c.1499-1541), German

Left to right:

"The Women Clothed with the Sun"

(Ch. 12)

"The Adoration of the Lamb" (Ch. 14)

"The Whore of Babylon" (Ch. 17)

Woodcut illustrations for a Catholic German Bible, *Das Nau Testament...* (Dresden: Wolfgang Stockel, 1527). The papal tiara has been removed in the Whore of Babylon print.

Hall Book Cases

Susan Dunleavy Collection of Biblical Literature

The Reformation sparked a great demand by Protestants and Catholics for the printed illustrated Bible in the vernacular, especially in Germany. And it was here that artists created an Apocalypse image that was more influential and enduring than those printed in France or Italy.

The majority of illustrations in 16th century Bibles remain anonymous. However, for the images of the Apocalypse, the most frequently illustrated section of the New Testament, it is evident that many artists were influenced by the woodcuts of Lucas Cranach the Elder and his workshop. These first appeared in the Luther Bible published in Wittenberg, Germany in 1522. (See illustrated article on stand to right of Case I.) Cranach in turn had been greatly inspired by the compositional motifs of Dürer though he added some original images. Thus, most of the illustrations in the first two cases may be considered to be further variations

on Dürer.

Case I

1. Attributed to Hans Sebald Beham (1500-1550), German, and Anton Woensam (c. 1499-1541), German

Left to right:

The Fifth Trumpet (Ch 9: 1-11)

The Opening of the Seventh Seal (Ch. 8)

The Angel with the Book (Ch. 11: 1-2)

These woodcut illustrations after those of Lucas Cranach the Elder and workshop are from *Das Nau Testament...* (Dresden: Wolfgang Stockel, 1527) with polemical notes by Jerome Esmer for use by German Roman Catholics. These illustrations were also used in another anti-Lutheran German Bible (Mainz: Peter Jordan, 1534) in the La Salle Dunleavy Collection.

2. *De Biblie vth der vthleggine Doctoris Martini Luther...*

(Lubeck, Ludawich Dietz, 1533, 34)

The first low German edition of Luther's Bible, issued just before his first complete edition of 1534. The woodcut illustrations by Erhard Altdorfer (1512-1561), German, are strongly influenced by those of Lucas Cranach the Elder and workshop.

3. *Testamenti Novi Editio Vulgata*
(Dillinger: Sebald Mayer, 1565)

Edited by Parisian theologian, Jean Benoist with notes by Joannis Benedicti (eventually placed on the *Index Expurgatorius*).

Anonymous woodcuts are variations of those by Lucas Cranach the Elder.

4. *Figure del Vecchio and Nuovo Testamento* (Venice: N. Bevilacqua, 1574)

With accompanying verse by Simeoni and anonymous woodcut illustrations.

5. *Biblia Sacra*
(Lugdini: Gulielmus Rouilius, 1588)

The Louvain edition of the Vulgate edited by Johannes Hentenius and with anonymous woodcut illustrations.

Case II

6. Attributed to Hans Sebald Beham (1500-1550), German, and Anton Woensom (c. 1499-1541), German

Left to right:

John Measures the Temple, The Two Witnesses (Ch. 11: 1-12)

The Angel with the Key Casts the Dragon into the Bottomless Pit (Ch. 20: 1-3)

The New Jerusalem (Ch. 21)

Woodcut illustrations from *Das Nau Testament* (Dresden: Wolfgang Stockel, 1527)

7. *Biblia das ist: Die Gantze Heilige Schrift Deutsch. D. Mart. Luth.* (Nuremberg, Hans Luft, 1572)

Woodcut illustrations attributed to Hans Brosamer

(c.1506-1554), German

8. *La Sainte Bible...*

(Paris: Gerard Jollain, 1703)

Engraved illustrations by various anonymous artists.

9. *Histoire du Vieus et du Nouveau*

Testament M. Basnage (Amsterdam: Chez Pierre Mortier Libraire, 1706)

Engraved illustrations by Romeyn de Hooghe (1645-1708), Dutch

Case III

10. Facsimile edition of *L'Apocalypse Figuree*

(Lyon: Jean de Tournes, 1561)

Engraved illustrations by Jean Duvet (1485-after 1571), French

11. *The Revelation of John the Divine*

(Pownal, Vermont, Mason Hill Press, 1983)

Woodcut illustrations by James Dignon
(Contemporary), American

The direct, simplified style of these images was probably inspired by some of the earliest woodcut illustrations of the Apocalypse in the Cologne German Bible published by Heinrich Quentel between 1478 and 1480.

12. *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*
(Montgomeryshire, Wales: Gregynog Press,
1932)

Wood-engraved illustrations by Blair Hughes-Stanton (Contemporary), British

13. Robert McGovern (Contemporary),
American
The Book of the Living was Opened
1986 (Ch. 5)

Case IV

14. Robert McGovern (Contemporary),
American
Tree of Life 1986 (Ch. 21)

Woodcut

15. *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*
(Ithaca, New York: Elfriede Abbe, 1958)

This book was designed, illustrated with woodcuts, handset and hand-printed by Elfriede Abbe.

16. *The Revelation of Saint John the Divine*
(London: Collins Fourteen St. James Place, N.D.)

Lithograph illustrations by Hans Feibusch
(Contemporary), Swiss

17. Prospectus for *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*
(Montgomeryshire, Wales: Gregynog Press, 1932)
"One of the Four Horsemen of the
Apocalypse" (Ch. 6: 1-8)

Br. Daniel Burke
Director
Caroline Wistar
Curator

Illustrations

Frontispiece: Blair Hughes-Stanton,
"The Four Horsemen"

Page 7 Albrecht Durer,
"The Four Horsemen of the
Apocalypse"

Page 11 Odilon Redon,
"And the Angel Took the
Censer..."

Page 21 Barbara Benish,
"The Tree of Life"

