
The Apocalypse As Liturgy

by Charles Teel

This service will be part of the Second National Conference of the Association of Adventist Forums, conducted Sabbath morning, March 17, 1984, in the Loma Linda University Church. To obtain folders containing printed texts of the entire service in a form appropriate for distribution to members participating in the worship service, write to Charles Teel, Division of Religion, Loma Linda University, Loma Linda, Calif. 92350.

Students in a class taught by Alan R. Collins, professor of art at Loma Linda University, created candlesticks representing the seven churches of Revelation to be used on the platform during the Sabbath morning worship service celebrating the Apocalypse as liturgy. The students were: Jim Nazario, Teresa Robinson, Brad Rowe, Debra Sherman, Reza Tabesh.—Editors

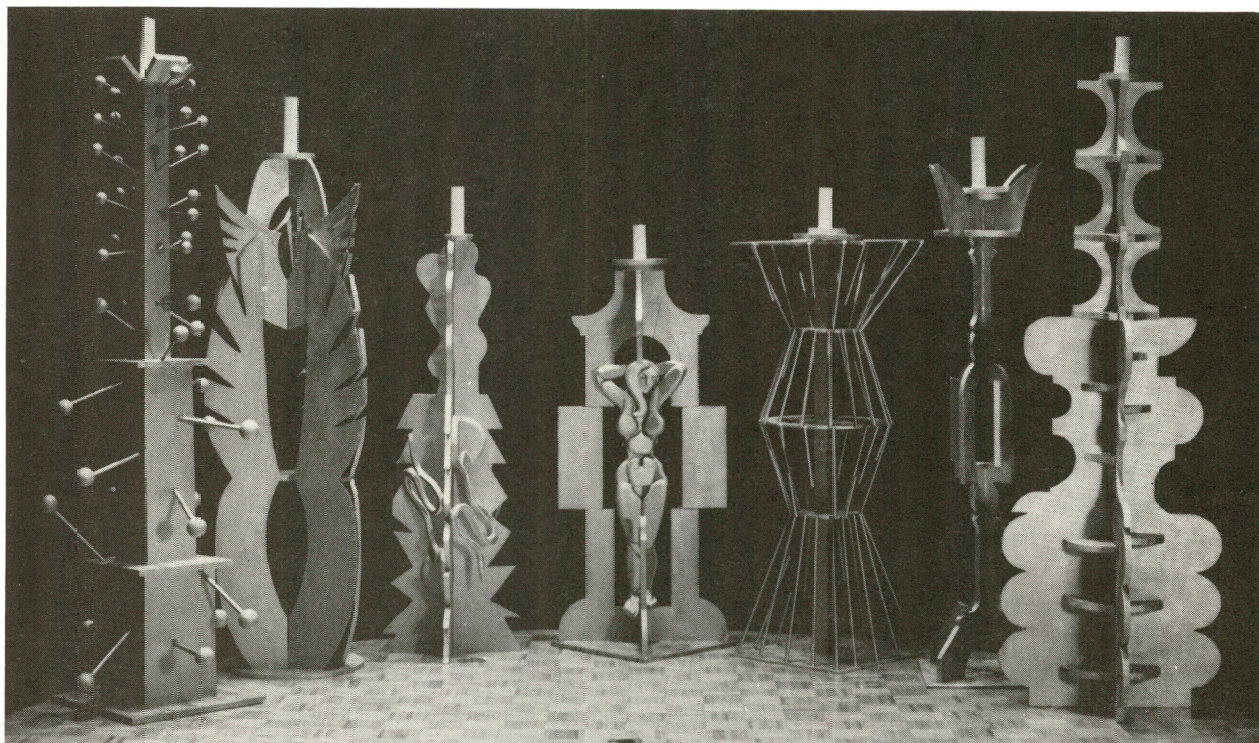
A worship service approaches the Apocalypse of John as a celestial liturgy. Believers in every age have viewed the Apocalypse not only as a work to be “analyzed” or “deciphered” but also as a psalm of praise to be “enacted” and “celebrated.” The liturgical format of the book builds on hymns and prayers that are punctuated by doxologies, alleluias, and amens. Worship aids include flaming candlesticks, golden bowls, and

burning censers. Participants in the service, in addition to John, are the Risen Lord and assorted heavenly creatures, with fully one hundred and forty-four thousand elect leading a vast multitude in antiphonal refrains.

John’s liturgy was written for the seven churches of Asia Minor that endured the alien atmosphere of pagan Rome. These fledgling Christian congregations are implored to honor the Lord of history who conquered the ostentatious wealth and persecuting power of secular culture. As brutal persecution by the Babylonian beast threatens the body, and subtle cultural and economic seduction by the imperial harlot threatens the soul, these remnant communities are exhorted to stand against false religious and political systems and indeed to “Come out of her.”

The apocalyptic language of the liturgy hurls hearers through space and time as they journey into heavenly and earthly and subterranean spheres while piecing together fragments of humankind’s cosmic story. Divine and demonic symbols of this great controversy flash larger than life on the screen of universal history. Beasts rampage and nations give obedience. Harlots seduce and populations succumb. Winds blow and the earth shakes. Bowls are poured out and history screams. Voes are flung against space and the universe is hushed. And through it all the vast multitude shouts, “Alleluia!”

Charles Teel Jr. is a professor of Christian Ethics at Loma Linda University. His doctoral dissertation at Boston University dealt with the American civil rights movement.



"Write down what you see on a scroll and send it to the seven churches."

The Babylonian beasts, imperial harlots, and demonic dragons are real. Very real. The forms of these false systems change, of course, but they stalk the faithful of every age. Yet the shout of "Alleluia!" is also real. It proclaims that ultimate reality lies rather with the New Jerusalem than with Babylon. The unlocked city, the temple-less religion, and the tree of life whose leaves heal the nations all call up a radically new reality—a reality in which persons and cities and churches and nations spring from values inspired by One who says, "Behold, I am making all things new."

In anticipation of this new reality—and in the face of false Babylonian powers which coerce, manipulate, and persecute—the slain Lamb calls believers to form remnant communities which heal, nurture, and build. This call has enabled the faithful remnant throughout history to cope and to hope. And it is this same call that our own worshipping community celebrates and enacts.

"Hear, you who have ears to hear, what the Spirit says to the churches!"

The Setting:

The congregation enters the sanctuary in silence. Each worshiper is provided with a worship folder containing apocalypse art as well as the text of the liturgy. The chancel centrum boasts seven golden candlesticks which range from five to seven feet in height. Each candlestick is sculpted to bear witness to the characteristics of a given church which John the Revelator addresses at the opening of his work. (With the reading of each of the seven messages to the seven churches, the respective candle is lit.)

The hour previous to worship has included stories of contemporary remnants who have faced beastly Babylonian powers: Dietrich Boenhoeffer, German pastor-theologian who inspired the "confessing church" to resist Hitler's Third Reich; Anne Frank, young Jewish girl whose diary on the Holocaust survives as an eloquent testament of hope; Maximillian Kolbe, Catholic priest imprisoned at Auschwitz who volunteered to die in the place of a fellow prisoner; and Vladimir Shelkov, a True and Free Adventist in Russia who was repeatedly imprisoned for his faith.

The congregation is thus prepared to celebrate the Apocalypse as a psalm of hope which speaks to every age; an affirmation that the baby, the woman, and the remnant triumph over the beast, the harlot, and Babylon.

The Churches

First Reader:

I, John, your brother,
who share with you in the suffering
and the endurance which is ours in Jesus—
I was on the island called Patmos
because I had preached God's word
and borne my testimony to Jesus.
It was on the Lord's day, and I was caught up
by the Spirit;
And behind me I heard a loud voice,
like the sound of a trumpet, which said to
me,

Audience:

'Write down what you see on a scroll and
send it to the seven churches:
To Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira,
Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.'

Second Reader:

And when I turned I saw seven standing
lamps of gold,
and among the lamps one like a son of Man.
He laid his right hand upon me and said,

Audience:

'Do not be afraid.
I am the first and the last, and I am the living
one;
For I was dead and now I am alive for
evermore.
Here is the secret of the seven lamps of gold:
The seven lamps are the seven churches.

First Reader:

'To the angel of the church at Ephesus write:
"I know all your ways, your toil and your
fortitude.
Fortitude you have;
You have borne up in my cause and never
flagged.
But I have this against you that you have lost
your early love.

Think from what a height you have fallen;
Repent, and do as you once did.

Children's Choir:

To those that are victorious I will give the
right to eat
From the tree of life that stands in the
Garden of God.

Audience:

Hear, you who have ears to hear, what the
Scripture says to the churches!"

Second Reader:

'To the angel of the church at Smyrna write:
"I know how hard pressed you are, and
poor—and yet you are rich!
Do not be afraid of the suffering to come.
The Devil will throw some of you into
prison, to put you to the test:
And for ten days you will suffer cruelly.

Children's Choir:

Only be faithful till death, and I will give
you the crown of life.
Those who are victorious cannot be harmed
by the second death.

Audience:

Hear, you who have ears to hear, what the
Spirit says to the churches!"

First Reader:

'To the angel of the church at Pergamum
write:
"I know where you live; it is the place
where Satan has his throne.
And yet you are holding fast to my cause.
You did not deny your faith in me
even at the time when Antipas, my faithful
witness,
was killed in your city, the home of Satan.
But I have a few matters to bring against
you:
You have in Pergamum some that eat food
sacrificed to idols and commit fornication.
So repent!

Children's Choir:

To those who are victorious I will give to eat
of the hidden manna.

Audience:

Hear, you who have ears to hear, what the Spirit says to the churches!"

Second Reader:

'To the angel of the church at Thyatira write:

"I know all your ways, your love and faithfulness,
your good service and your fortitude;
And of late you have done better than at first.

Yet I have this against you:

You tolerate that Jezebel, who claims to be a prophetess,
who by her teaching lures my servants into fornication

and into eating food sacrificed to idols.

And now I speak to you others in Thyatira, who do not accept this teaching.

On you I will impose no further burden. Only hold fast to what you have, until I come.

Children's Choir:

To those who are victorious and who persevere in doing my will to the end,
I will give authority over the nations.

Audience:

Hear, you who have ears to hear, what the Spirit says to the churches!"

First Reader:

'To the angel of the church at Sardis write:

"I know all your ways;

That though you have a name for being alive, you are dead.

Wake up, and put strength into what is left, which must otherwise die!

For I have not found any work of yours completed in the eyes of my God.

So remember the teaching you received; observe it, and repent.

Children's Choir:

Those who are victorious shall thus be robed all in white;

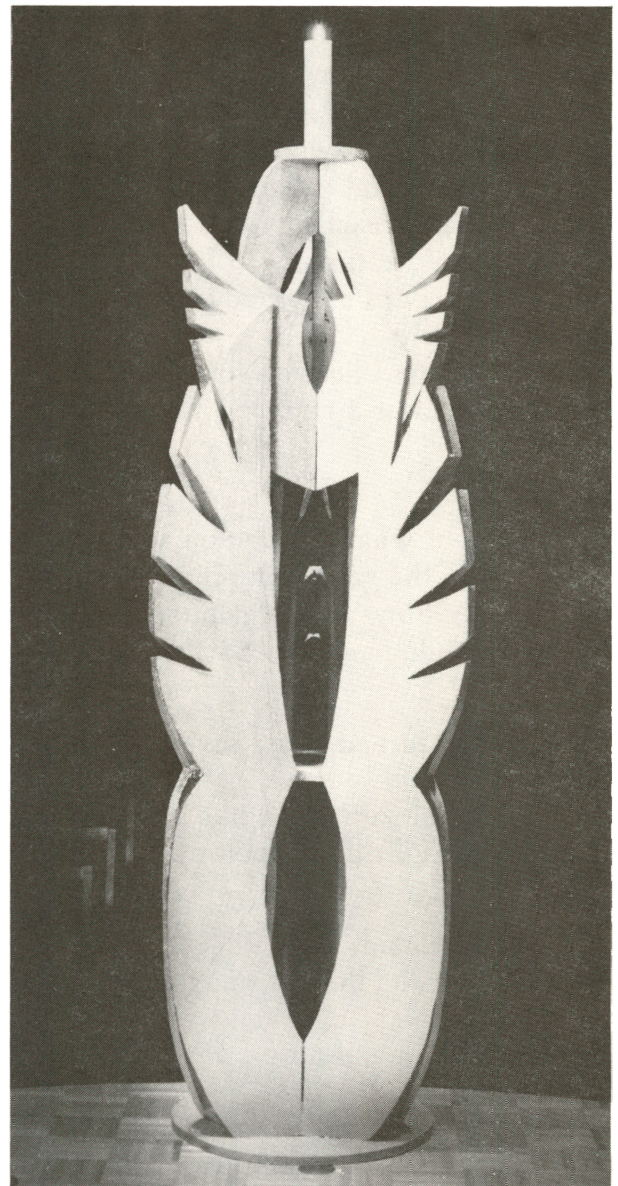
Their names I will never strike off the roll of the living.

Audience:

Hear, you who have ears to hear, what the Spirit says to the churches!"

Second Reader:

'To the angel of the church at Philadelphia write:



Smyrna: "Those who are victorious cannot be harmed by the second death."

"I know all your ways;

I have set before you an open door which no one can shut.

Your strength, I know, is small,

Yet you have observed my commands and have not disowned my name.

Because you have kept my command and
stood fast,
I will also keep you from the ordeal that is
to fall on the whole world.
I am coming soon;
Hold fast what you have, and let no one rob
you of your crown.

Children's Choir:

Those who are victorious I will write the
name of my God upon them,
and the name of the city of my God,
that new Jerusalem which is coming down
out of heaven from my God,
and my own new name.

Audience:

Hear, you who have ears to hear, what the
Spirit says to the churches!"

First Reader:

'To the angel of the church at Laodicea
write:
"I know all your ways; you are neither hot
nor cold!
How I wish you were either hot or cold!
But because you are lukewarm, neither hot
nor cold,
I will spit you out of my mouth.
You say, 'How rich I am! And how well I
have done!
I have everything I want in the world!'
In fact, though you do not know it,
you are the most pitiful wretch, poor, blind
and naked.

Children's Choir:

To those who are victorious I will grant a
place on my throne,
as I myself was victorious and sat down with
my father on his throne.

Audience:

Hear, you who have ears to hear, what the
Spirit says to the churches!"

Hymn: The Church Has One Foundation

*Note: During the singing of the hymn-anthem on
church, young people carry paper banners em-
blazoned with the names of patriots, prophets, and
friends within the congregation. These banners are
hung at various points in the sanctuary as slides*

*bathe the walls with full-face photos of the cong-
regation's diverse membership.*

The Portents

First Reader:

At once I was caught up by the Spirit.
There in heaven stood a throne,
and on the throne sat one whose appearance
was like
the gleam of jasper and cornelian.
In a circle about this throne were twenty-
four other thrones,
and on them sat twenty-four elders wearing
crowns of gold.
From the throne went out flashes of
lightning and peals of thunder.
Burning before the throne were seven
flaming torches,
and in front of it stretched what seemed a sea
of glass,
like a sheet of ice.
The twenty-four elders fall down
before the One who sits on the throne
and worship him who lives for ever and
ever;
And as they lay their crowns before the
throne they cry:

Audience:

'Thou art worthy, O Lord our God,
to receive glory and honour and power,
because thou didst create all things;
By thy will they were created, and have
their being!'

Second Reader:

After this I looked and saw a vast throng,
which no one could count,
from every nation, of all tribes, peoples, and
languages,
standing in front of the throne and before
the Lamb.
They were robed in white and had palms in
their hands,
and they shouted together:

Audience:

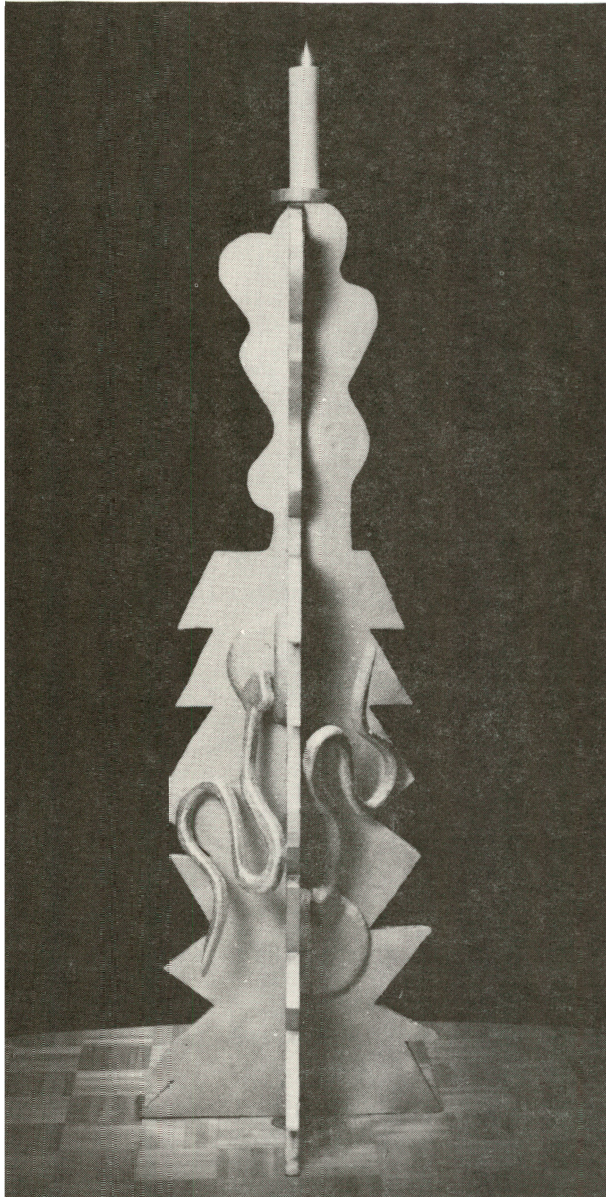
'Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom,
thanksgiving and honour, power and might,
be to our God for ever and ever! Amen!'

First Reader:

Then one of the elders turned to me and said,

Audience:

These that are robed in white
are those who have passed through the great
ordeal;



Pergamum: "You have . . . some that . . . commit fornication."

They have washed their robes and made
them white
in the blood of the Lamb.
That is why they stand before the throne
and minister to him day and night in his
temple;

And he who sits on the throne will dwell
with them.
They shall never again feel hunger or thirst,
the sun shall not beat on them nor any
scorching heat,
because the Lamb will be their shepherd
and will guide them to the springs of the
water of life;
And God will wipe all tears from their eyes.'

Second Reader:

Next appeared a great portent in heaven,
a woman robed with the sun, beneath her
feet the moon,
and on her head a crown of twelve stars.
She was pregnant, and in the anguish of her
labour
she cried out to be delivered.
Then a second portent appeared in heaven:
A great red dragon with seven heads and ten
horns;
And with his tail he swept down a third of
the stars in the sky and flung them to the
earth.
The dragon stood in front of the woman
who was about to give birth,
so that when her child was born he might
devour it.
She gave birth to a male child,
who is destined to rule all nations, with an
iron rod.
But her child was snatched up to God and his
throne;
And the woman herself fled into the wilds.

Audience:

At this the dragon grew furious with the
woman,
and went off to wage war on the rest of her
offspring,
that is, on those who keep God's
commandments
and maintain their testimony to Jesus.

First Reader:

Then out of the sea I saw a beast rising.
It had ten horns and seven heads.
Men worshiped the dragon because he had
conferred his authority
upon the beast and they worshiped the
beast also.

It was also allowed to wage war on God's people and to defeat them, and was granted authority over every tribe and people, language and nation. All on earth will worship it, except those whose names the Lamb that was slain keeps in the roll of the living, written there since the world was made. Then I saw another beast, which came up out of the earth; It had two horns like a lamb's but spoke like a dragon. It was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that it could cause all who would not worship the image to be put to death.

Audience:

Moreover, it caused everyone, great and small, rich and poor, slave and free, to be branded with a mark on his right hand or forehead, and no one was allowed to buy or sell unless he bore this beast's mark, either name or number.

Second Reader:

Then I saw an angel flying in mid-heaven, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those on earth, to every nation and tribe, language and people. He cried in a loud voice,

Audience:

'Fear God and pay homage; For the hour of his judgment has come! Worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the water-springs!'

First Reader:

Then another angel, a second, followed, and he cried,

Audience:

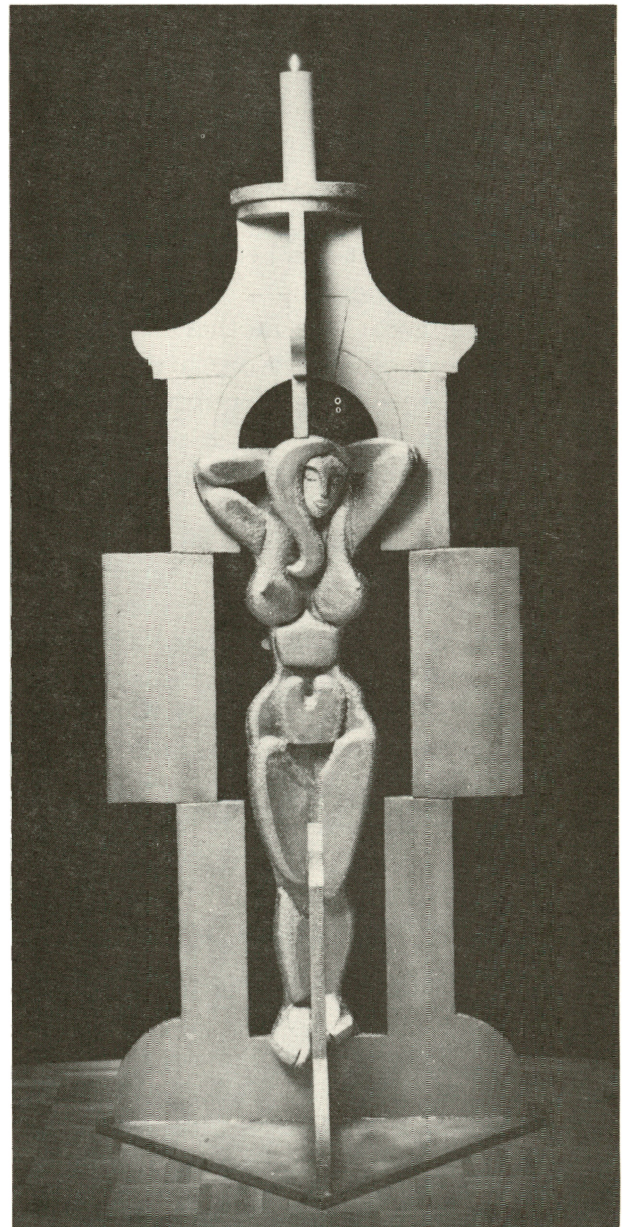
'Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who has made all nations drink the fierce wine of her fornication.'

Second Reader:

Yet a third angel followed, crying out loud,

Audience:

'Whoever worships the beast and its image and receives its mark on his forehead or hand, he shall drink the wine of God's wrath, poured undiluted into the cup of his vengeance.'



Thyatira: "You tolerate that Jezebel."

And there will be no respite day or night for those who worship the beast and its image or receive the mark of its name.'

First Reader:

Here the fortitude of God's people has its place—

in keeping God's commands and remaining
loyal to Jesus.

Second Reader:

And then I saw a woman mounted on a
scarlet beast
which was covered with blasphemous names
and had seven heads and ten horns.
The woman was clothed in purple and
scarlet
and bedizened with gold and jewels and
pearls.

In her hand she held a gold cup,
full of obscenities and the foulness of her
fornication;

And written on her forehead was a name
with a secret meaning:

'Babylon the great, the mother of whores
and of every obscenity on earth.'

The woman, I saw, was drunk with the
blood of God's people
and with the blood of those who had borne
their testimony to Jesus.

The angel said to me,

Audience:

'The ten horns you saw are ten kings
who will confer their power and authority
upon the beast.

They will wage war upon the Lamb, but the
Lamb will defeat them,
for he is Lord of lords and King of kings,
and his victory will be shared by his
followers,
called chosen and faithful.'

*Note: Prior to the singing of the hymn-anthem,
slides are projected on the walls to depict modern
expressions of Babylonian powers and remnant
communities. Drawings of the manipulative beasts
and dragons created by the congregation's children,
are interspersed with drawings and magazine
pictures selected by the children which communicate
both hope and despair:*

swings	bombs
rollerskates	guns
dolls	swastica
baseball	KKK
home	Hiroshima
trees	death
flowers	hunger

church

family

friends

community

life

clouds

sun

rainbow

book burning

bombed churches

John F. Kennedy

Robert F. Kennedy

Martin Luther King, Jr.

their widows

their families

Ghandi

A bell is tolled

Hymn: For all the Saints

The Judgment

First Reader:

After this I saw another angel coming down
out of heaven;

He came with great authority and the earth
was lit up with his splendour.

Then in a mighty voice he proclaimed,

Audience:

'Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!

She has become a dwelling for demons, a
haunt for every unclean spirit,
for every foul and loathsome bird.

For all nations have drunk deep
of the fierce wine of her fornication.'

Second Reader:

The merchants of the earth also will weep
and mourn for her,

because no one any longer buys their
cargoes,

cargoes of gold and silver, jewels and pearls,
cloths of purple and scarlet, silks and fine
linens,

wine, oil, flour, wheat, chariots, slaves, and
the lives of men.

First Reader:

Then I saw the beast taken prisoner,
and so was the false prophet who had
worked miracles in its presence

and deluded those that had received the
mark of the beast

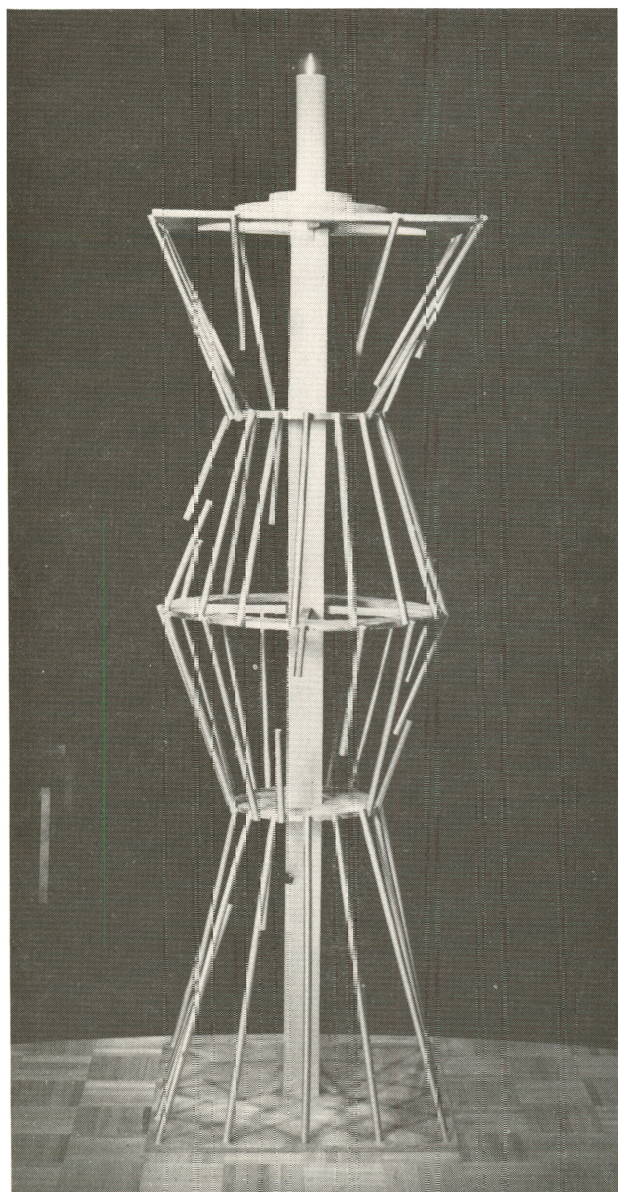
and worshiped its image.

The two of them were thrown alive into the
lake of fire

with its sulphurous flames.

Then I saw an angel coming down from
heaven with the key of the abyss
and a great chain in his hands.

He seized the dragon, that serpent of old,
the Devil or Satan,
and chained him up for a thousand years;
He threw him into the abyss, shutting and
sealing it over him,
so that he might seduce the nations no more.



Sardis: "I have not found any work of yours completed."

Second Reader:

Then I saw a great white throne, and the
One who sat upon it;
From his presence earth and heaven
vanished away,
and no place was left for them.

I could see the dead, great and small,
standing before the throne;
And the books were opened.
Then another book was opened, the roll of
the living.
From what was written in these books the
dead were judged
upon the record of their deeds.
The sea gave up its dead,
and Death and Hades gave up the dead in
their keeping;
They were judged, each man on the record
of his deeds.
Then Death and Hades were flung into the
lake of fire.
And into it were flung any whose names
were not to be found
in the roll of the living.

First Reader:

After this I heard what sounded like the roar
of a vast throng in heaven;
and they were shouting:

Audience:

'Alleluia! Victory and glory and power
belong to our God.
for true and just are his judgments!
He has condemned the earth with her
fornication,
and has avenged upon her the blood of his
servants.'

Second Reader:

Again I heard what sounded like a vast
crowd,
like the noise of rushing water and deep
roars of thunder, and they cried:

Audience:

'Alleluia! The Lord our God, sovereign over
all,
has entered on his reign!
Exalt and shout for joy and do him homage,
for the wedding of the Lamb has come!
His bride has made herself ready,
and for her dress she has been given fine
linen, clean and shining.'

Offertory

*Note: A brass ensemble plays an offertory of
sonorous cadence by way of expanding the theme of*

judgment. Visuals include various symbols of justice/judgment: sword, scales, muse, restrained serpent.

The Hope

First Reader:

Then one of the seven angels spoke unto me
and said,

Audience:

'Come, and I will show you the bride, the
wife of the Lamb.'

Second Reader:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth,
for the first heaven and the first earth had
vanished,

and there was no longer any sea.

I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming
out of heaven from God,
made ready like a bride adorned for her
husband.

I heard a loud voice proclaiming from the
throne:

Audience:

'Now at last God has his dwelling among
men!

He will dwell among them and they shall be
his people,

and God himself will be with them.

He will wipe every tear from their eyes;

There shall be an end to death, and to
mourning and crying and pain;

For the old order has passed away!'

First Reader:

Then he who sat on the throne said,

Audience:

"Behold! I am making all things new!"

Second Reader:

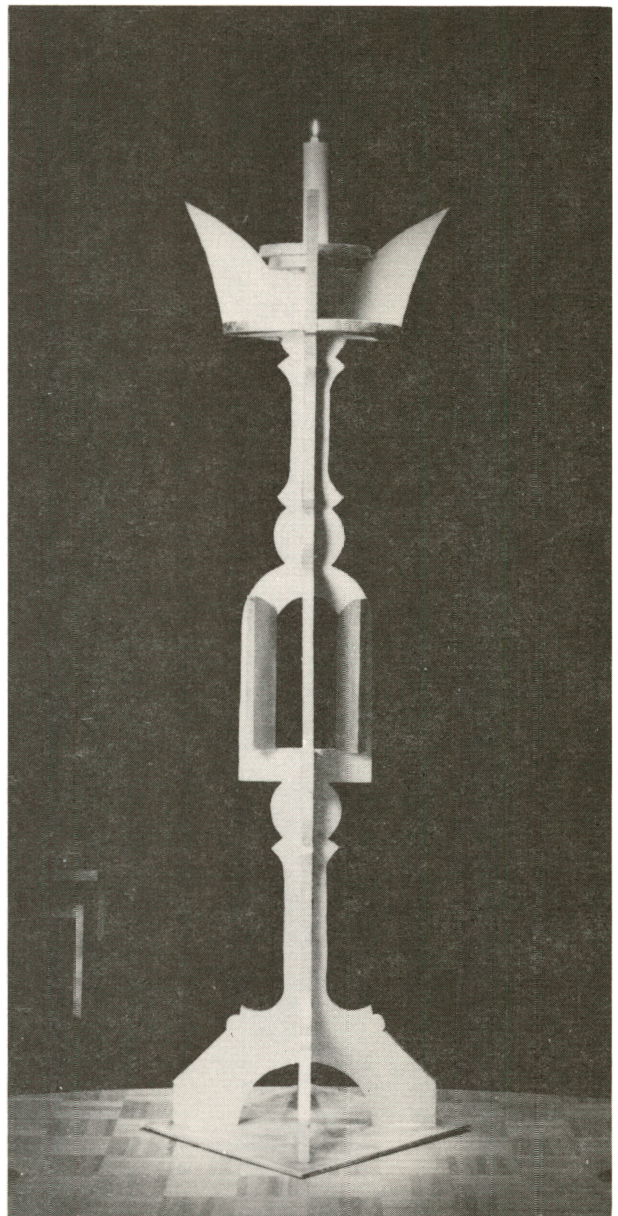
I saw no temple in the city,
for its temple was the sovereign Lord God
and the Lamb.

The gates of the city shall never be shut by
day—

and there will be no night.

Then he showed me the river of the water
of life.

On either side of the river stood a tree of
life,
which yields twelve crops of fruit,
one for each month of the year.
The leaves of the trees serve for the healing
of the nations,
and every accursed thing shall disappear.



Philacelphia: "I have set before you an open door."

Audience:

There shall be no more night,
nor will they need the light of lamp or sun,
for the Lord God will give them light;
and they shall reign for evermore.

First Reader:

Then I looked, and on Mount Zion stood the Lamb,
 and with him were a hundred and forty-four thousand
 who had his name and the name of his Father
 written on their foreheads.
 I heard a sound from heaven like the noise of
 rushing water;
 It was the sound of harpers playing on their
 harps.
 There before the throne they were singing a
 new song.
 That song no one could learn
 except the hundred and forty-four
 thousand,
 who alone from the whole world had been
 ransomed.
 They were singing the song of Moses and the
 song of the Lamb.

Hymn: Worthy, Worthy Is the Lamb!

Note: As the congregation stands to join the choir for the singing of the final hymn, the children's pictures of hope appear on the chancel walls once again, including dolls, family, congregation, community, sky, sun, rainbow.

Second Reader:

I, Jesus, have sent my angel to you
 with this testimony for the churches.
 Happy are those who wash their robes clean!

They will have the right to the tree of life
 and will enter by the gates of the city.

Readers:

'Come!' say the Spirit and the bride.

Audience:

'Come!' let each hearer reply.

Readers:

Come forward, you who are thirsty;

Audience:

Accept the water of life, a free gift to all
 who desire it.

Readers:

He who gives this testimony speaks, "Yes, I
 am coming soon."

Audience:

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

Readers:

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you all.

Audience:

Amen.

Note: Worshipers are invited to remain in the sanctuary following the organ postlude, and to view the seven candlesticks with sculptors Alan Collins and students.

*Benediction**Organ Postlude*