

# R is for Revelation



*Revelation* is a topic sure to bring raised blood-pressure and raised voices! This is true no matter which ‘revelation’ you mean.

- ‘Revelation’ can simply mean the way that we know anything about the divine reality or the way that God reveals something.
- ‘Revelation’ to most conservative-evangelical-charismatic believers will refer to the last book in the New Testament that talks about the end of the world.

Both are very serious topics in their respective arenas.

Let's deal with the concept first and then with the Biblical book.

Revelation: Refers both to the process by which God discloses the divine nature and the mystery of the divine will and purpose to human beings, and to the corpus of truth disclosed. Some theologians maintain that revelation consists of both God's activity in \*salvation history through word and deed, culminating in Jesus (who mediates and fulfills God's self-revelation) and the ongoing activity of God to move people to yield to, accept and personally appropriate that reality.

-Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms (Kindle Locations 1139-1143).

Revelation is often further parsed out into two categories:

- **General revelation** concerned with what can be known (and ascertained) through nature and history.
- **Special revelation** is used to designate that which can be known through particular (special) people and events. This is often related particularly to 'salvation'. *[more on that next week]*

Those who are suspicious of General revelation say that it can be misleading to try to decipher things about a perfect God from a fallen world.

Those who are suspicious of Special revelation say that it *wreaks of fideism* (see 'F' earlier in the series) – only those who already believe, have read the Bible and been empowered by Holy Spirit can truly understand.

There are many insightful schools of thought that address the concept of 'revelation'. Those in the evangelical camp, they look to thinkers like Karl Barth as the final word on the subject. For Barth, revelation happens in Christ alone. Apart from Christ, mankind has no hope of in any way coming to a knowledge of divine reality.

More liberal or mainline churches may bristle at that line of reasoning because it seems elitist, exclusionary, and too narrow – surely the God of the Universe can be seen (at least partially) in other religions and cultures around the world. Pluralism is the word for our era.

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Growing up, when someone said ‘revelation’ they meant the Book of Revelation – as in the apocalyptic letter that closes out the New Testament.

I love the book of Revelation. I study it all the time. I am inspired by it and challenged by it and am constantly referring to imagery within it. The only thing I dislike is what most people *do with* the book of Revelation.

- 1 It is not a book about the end of the world.
- 2 It is not a book about the 21st century.
- 3 It is not a book that should terrify or intimidate us.

The early audience for that book would have taken great consolation and comfort from it. The sad thing is that we should be writing things like the book Revelation *for* our time – but don’t because we think that John’s letter is *about* our time!

The book of Revelation is written in a literary form called apocalyptic. It is *part of a genre* (see ‘G’ earlier in the series) called *literature of the oppressed*. When you lived in an occupied territory under an oppressive regime, you write in code. You use imagery. You use allegory and analogy.

The book of Revelation is political critique and prophetic hope about those first couple of centuries of the church! It was meant to give hope and raise expectation for those early believers.

We should study the forms and harness the same prophetic imagination that the author of Revelation had and use it for *our* time. Unfortunately,

we have had a failure of imagination because we have been taught to think that Revelation *is* about our time ...

I could literally give you 1,000 examples of how the imagery in the book of Revelation is genius and time appropriate to the first two centuries.<sup>1</sup>

My one prayer is that God reveals to those *who are most sincere* that the inspiration and imagery that we see in the book of Revelation would be replicated (and surpassed) in our generation *for* our generation. God knows we need it.

Artwork for the series by Jesse Turri

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<sup>1</sup> If you want to dig deeper I suggest [commentary on Revelation by Ronald Farmer](#) in the Chalice series