

Why do we like movies like Starwars, Ghostbusters, Jurassic Park, Harry Potter, DUNE, Downton Abbey? The distraction of A DIFFERENT REALITY allows us a fantasy escape from War in Ukraine, Hate Crime Shootings, new Variations of the Pandemic, Political dysfunction in Washington DC, Inflation/Recession. At times REALITY is just too much with us! Not that we can dismiss facts, or ignore what is going on, but there are times when envisioning a different reality, an “other” possibility, gives us something.

Revelation is one of the most difficult, even WEIRD, books in the Bible. Theologians throughout Church History have questioned if we need to include this Revelation of John? Whether the Bible would be complete without this alternative vision of Heaven? We do not preach from it often, it only comes up occasionally in the Lectionary, and we would never read this to Children as a Bedtime story. Wars, Dragons, Horsemen, Beasts of the Sea, Beasts of the Earth, Lakes of burning sulfur, and a New Jerusalem? And yet, the Revelation has had a major impact on our Society’s Art, Music, Architecture and Literature.

The Revelation seems poetic, that as Scripture began with life in the Garden, the Revelation should end with a Mystic Tree of Life, in a New Jerusalem, come down from Heaven. The difficulty with our reading today is that The Revelation is far more fluid than the rest of the Bible. Nearly all of Scripture is written as Historical Narrative, describing what took place IN THE BEGINNING, or WHEN GOD CALLED ABRAM, or WHEN GOD GAVE MOSES THE 10 COMMANDMENTS, or WHEN KING DAVID’S SON ABSALOM DIED... Instead this is a future dream, a revelation outside of time, written to 7 Churches each pursuing DIFFERENT REALITIES that must choose DEATH or LIFE during the Roman Empire in what is TODAY TURKEY.

In this Revelation No longer is there need for Days and Nights, because all light emanates from the Lamb of God! But is there no need for the MOON, other than to give light? Is there no need for Nocturnal creatures? Is there no need for REST? Is there no need for SABBATH?

The Tree of Life is planted on both sides of the River, bearing twelve different variety of fruit for the twelve different months in the ROMAN CALENDAR and whose leaves are for the curing of disease; but if there are no days and nights how can there be months? The Roman Caesars added months for July, August, October, so why 12 FRUITS when the Jewish Calendar had 9 MONTHS?

No longer are there seas or oceans... But without the Sun and Moon, without Oceans and Seas, without distinction of Land and Water, the Revelation envisions a world without chaos, without darkness, without balance essential for life. This is not a vision of REALITY as we KNOW it, but A VERY DIFFERENT REALITY. No longer is there Need for a Temple, or even for GOD, because everyone knows God...

Don’t get me wrong, there are elements of this Vision that I adore.

We BELIEVE All Creation was changed with the INCARNATION of God in Humanity, AND differently by RESURRECTION of the Messiah, yet every year Days and Weeks after we go on as if Christmas and Easter were simply Civic Holidays. In this REVELATION, this DIFFERENT REALITY, everything exists in relationship to THE LAMB OF GOD. There are times when I wish, we were able to reorient all the world, instead of being focused on TERRORISM and WAR and INFECTIOUS DISEASE, CONSUMERISM’S NEED FOR PROFIT; for everything to exist in relation to GOD and to Jesus Christ. No more FEAR, no ENVY or HATE. But wishing away REALITY does not give us possibilities.

BALANCE and ORDER.

According to Genesis, God did not eliminate Darkness or Waters of Chaos, but in Creation balanced these.

The Bible in its present form begins with Genesis, which is not our CULTURE's scientific explanation of the creation of the world; but I have always been intrigued that 8,000 years before Charles Darwin was born, the Ancient Hebrews understood the interdependence, the conditional balance of life and the Order of Creation!

Thousands of years ago, they understood that in order for human life to exist, there first had to have been smaller mammals,... SO in truth human beings were created to serve as companions for dogs and cats! BEFORE which, there needed to have been birds and fish and insects; BEFORE which, in order for life to exist there first were needed to be plants; BEFORE which, there needed to be seasons, cycles of the planets and tides of oceans, day and night; BEFORE which there needed to be a separation of dry land from waters; BEFORE which the world needed to have an atmosphere, a Firmament in the Heavens; BEFORE which there first needed to be a separation of light from dark.

Not only a CONDITIONAL REALITY, but where modern scientific thought reasoned that prior to all these things they theorized there must have been a BIG BANG, a cataclysmic combination of gases, which accidentally occurred precisely in the right way for life to be possible; INSTEAD the ancient Hebrews concluded that before anything else, rather than an accident occurring with precision, BEFORE anything else THERE HAD TO HAVE BEEN GOD.

Everything which follows, all of the TORAH, the Histories, the Psalms, Proverbs and Prophets, the Gospel accounts of the life and death and resurrection of Jesus, all the Letters, the whole history of the world is based on that Origin, that Before there was anything else there was God! All HUMAN REALITY and all the rest of the BIBLE evolves from that. GOD LOVED US FOR US TO CHOOSE TO LOVE GOD & ONE ANOTHER.

Throughout ALL of SCRIPTURE prior to the REVELATION OF JOHN, there is a VITALITY, an IMPORTANCE to HUMAN FREEDOM OF WILL. The Bible, our REALITY would have been far simpler without FREE WILL, if GOD Created us absolutely GOOD, aware that we are dependent on GOD. But if that were the case, there would be no need for LOVE, for TRUST, for FAITH. GOD would create everything as needed, and we would only go through the motions of life, AS IF living, rather than truly being alive and aware.

It seems as though most of the FUTURIST FANTASY books and Films describe a Dystopia, where BEFORE THESE THINGS the planet CHANGED to not have enough FOOD, or WATER, where WAR has irreparably changed HUMANITY. Long before HG Wells, Dante, John Bunyan, William Blake, Ray Bradbury, Isaac Asimov or Frank Herbert, John offers us this glimpse, this REVELATION of a DIFFERENT REALITY. In this Revelation there is only absolute Good, separate from a burning lake of absolute Evil, so CHOOSE; there is a choice for LIFE or DEATH. According to the Revelation, there is no balance between these, one must win and the other will lose, you cannot be a little bit sinful. We do live in a scary world. No wonder people are drawn to visions of an apocalypse. The same outcomes in John's REVELATION are our fears today: The Four Horsemen of Domination, War, Famine, Disease.

Someone described to me, that their family member had decided on a DIFFERENT REALITY. The Doctor claimed that they were in excellent health. At 102 they still had all their faculties. But they no longer had their spouse, the love of their life. They no longer had their peers or siblings, engagements or responsibilities. Even their cat had passed. Most of their Hearing was gone, Food no longer tasted good, nor were there smells, and the world had closed in. They decided to give up eating and moving. They did not especially want to die, they just did not care about trying any more. A DIFFERENT REALITY. I hope that if we chose different realities, they are realities of HOPE, of FAITH and TRUST, of challenge and possibility.

The Revelation of John is powerful precisely because in the midst of our anxiety, hopelessness and fear, our visions of a future with God break into our present. Just like in the Movies, Revelation assures us that GOOD overcomes EVIL, LOVE overcomes HATE, HOPE overcomes DESPAIR, LIFE overcomes DEATH and everyone lives happily ever after. So maybe Revelation is not so much a DIFFERENT REALITY, as is the struggle to BELIEVE!