

❖ Other Voices ❖

The revelation [apocalypse] of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place; he made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.

Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it; for the time is near.

REVELATION 1:1-3

As a literary genre, “apocalyptic” is a way of investing space-time events with their theological significance; it is actually a way of affirming, not denying, the vital importance of the present continuing space-time order, by denying that evil has the last word in it.

N. T. WRIGHT, *The New Testament and the People of God* (1992)

In our confusion, we’re accustomed to according the titles of good news and “a positive message” to the most soul-sucking, sentimental fare imaginable. Any song or story that deals with conflict by way of a strained euphemistic spin, a cliché, or a triumphal cupcake ending strikes us as the best in family entertainment. This is the opposite of apocalyptic. Apocalyptic maximizes the reality of human suffering and folly before daring a word of hope (lest too light winning make the prize light). The hope has nowhere else to happen but the valley of the shadow of death. Is it any surprise that we often won’t know it when we see it?

DAVID DARK, *Everyday Apocalypse* (2002)

Apocalyptic is as much involved in the attempt to understand things as they are now as to predict future events. The mysteries of heaven and earth and the real significance of contemporary persons and events in history are also the dominant interests of the apocalypticists. There is thus a concern with the world above and its mysteries as a means of explaining human existence in the present.

CHRISTOPHER ROWLAND, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (1982)

The apocalyptic literature...rejects the widespread perception that salvation is individual and spiritual, focused on the fate of individual souls after death. Countering this narrow and spiritualizing view, it insists that God’s

saving goals encompass global human society, worldwide ecology, and even space/time reality....

The apocalyptic vision of salvation claims to be relevant for the here and now, as well as for the end times. It gives readers a “sense of an ending” to existence and history, assuring them that the life of faith has a satisfying conclusion despite appearances to the contrary.

STEPHEN L. COOK, *The Apocalyptic Literature* (2003)

Apocalyptic shows us what we’re not seeing. It can’t be composed or spoken by the powers that be, because they are the sustainers of “the way things are” whose operation justifies itself by crowning itself as “the ways things ought to be” and whose greatest virtue is in being “realistic.” Thinking through what we mean when we say “realistic” is where apocalyptic begins. If these powers are the boot that, to borrow Orwell’s phrase, presses down upon the human face forever, apocalyptic is the speech of that human face. Apocalyptic denies, in spite of all the appearances to the contrary, the “forever” part.

For both the very human wielder of the boot and the very human face beneath it, apocalyptic has a way of curing deafness and educating the mind.

DAVID DARK, *Everyday Apocalypse* (2002)

Perhaps Christians in our age are being made ready for a new awareness of the continuing relevance of the message of the Apocalypse. There is a widespread recognition that Western society is moving toward the collapse of the mentality that has been identified with Christendom. Christians must recognize that they are a minority globally and locally in the midst of the followers of non-Christian and post-Christian faiths. Perhaps this will prepare us to see how inappropriate and preposterous was the prevailing assumption, from the time of Constantine until yesterday, that the fundamental responsibility of the church for society is to manage it.

And might it be, if we could be freed from the compulsiveness of the vision of ourselves as the guardians of history, that we could receive again the gift of being able to see ourselves as participants in the loving nature of God as revealed in Christ.

JOHN HOWARD YODER, *The Politics of Jesus* (1972)

If we do not permit ourselves to form images of personal and collective existence after death, then we have no way of testing who we are or of sounding our deepest ideals. It’s not that we need to know the details of the world to come—life is short and we will get our data soon enough—but that we need to imagine.

CAROL ZALESKI, *The Life of the World to Come: Near-Death Experience and Christian Hope* (1996)