

Ronald J. Allen. *I Will Tell You the Mystery: A Commentary for Preaching from the Book of Revelation*. Eugene: Cascade Books, 2019. 229 pages. \$32.

Revelation is one most of the challenging letters in the Second Testament for preachers and congregations alike (xvii). *I Will Tell You the Mystery: A Commentary for Preaching from the Book of Revelation* provides preachers with a concise verse-by-verse commentary that flows through the vein of process theology. Allen “seeks to help preachers recognize what the book of Revelation (with its apocalyptic theology) invited people in antiquity to believe and do; to bring that viewpoint into conversation with contemporary revisionary theology; and to help preachers help their congregations identify what it can genuinely believe and confidently do” (x). Interpretations of Revelation that contain apocalyptic imagery, condemnation to eternal torment, and the eschatology of final judgment can be hard to reconcile for progressive and liberal mainline Protestant congregations. This commentary opens the door for preachers to dance with Revelation all over again, and to see with fresh eyes.

The potency of this commentary is found in the “Introduction for Preachers.” In this section, Allen gives preachers a fresh hermeneutical lens for understanding the context that informs Revelation. First, he argues that Revelation is a letter situated in the context of Empire, and that the letter’s intent is to show believers how to live in the midst of Empire. Allen’s work is timely, and frames Empire for preachers living in the context of twenty-first century, post-2016 America. Second, Allen names his own social location as an interpreter, and acknowledges that this commentary is filtered through the experience of a middle-class, middle-aged, white, male, mainline Protestant Christian who identifies with process theology. His perspective may not be consistent with traditional commentaries on Revelation.

Allen invites readers to view Revelation as a book of images that repeat the same scene over and over again (xviii). The first chapter, “Revealing the Ruler of Rulers,” seeks to communicate that the authority of Revelation “comes from God” (1). Here, Allen provides an invitation to fresh understandings of the nature of God and the work of Jesus. Chapters 2 and 3, under the theme “Revealing the Rulers and Ambiguities,” assert that the seven congregations represent the multiplicity of *conditions* impacting congregations in Asia Minor, as opposed to actual congregations (20). Chapters 4 and 5 of are captured under the theme, “Revealing the Power of God.” What takes place in the throne room and the response to the Lamb are meant to demonstrate what life was like in the Mediterranean Empire, and how one is invited to trust in God. The subsequent chapters take the reader on a step-by-step, chapter-by-chapter journey towards a New Heaven and a New Earth: a world that has a brand new beginning, whose systems, structures, ideas, and institutions are rooted in God’s extravagant love, and which is informed by a community of mutuality—that is, free of hierarchy, competition, transactional relationships, and retribution.

This is a refreshing resource that guides twenty-first century preachers living in contexts ravaged by COVID-19, and in a world that is slowly awakening to the pre-existing pandemics of injustice, to think about what it means to be faithful, and how they can imagine the possibilities of a new beginning. This commentary also opens possibilities for homileticians and biblical scholars to consider what it would look like to produce a commentary informed by their social location and situated in our twenty-first century context. What would it look like to have a single verse-by-verse commentary interpreted from the social location of Black women, persons who are differently-abled, immigrants, and other people groups?

Eric C. Jackson, Christian Theological Seminary, Indianapolis, IN