

Recovering Revelation's theological imagination: A study of neglected texts within the Book of Revelation

by Peter Hilton

Abstract

This dissertation's initial task interrogates the church's interaction with Revelation. Findings taken from lectionary engagement, hymnary references, clergy survey and lay Bible study surveys reveal that any interaction the church has with Revelation is concentrated at its beginning (1-5) and concluding (21, 22) chapters. The second task of the dissertation proposes and tests an exegetical method by which the church can re-engage with the neglected texts of the middle section (chapters 6-20) of Revelation. This is important because in neglecting the middle section the church's reading of Revelation is exegetically deficient. Furthermore, prooftexts from the middle chapters are often used to promote extremist views and caricatured portrayals concerning the 'end times'. A better understanding of the middle section would strengthen the church's response to such readings. The exegetical method proposed grapples with the apocalyptic, prophetic and epistolary genres active within Revelation. The method places importance upon apocalyptic visions, and their narrative function in the overall framework of Revelation. Ultimately, it seeks to uncover the theological imagination which these neglected texts possess, primarily through extensive employment of word pictures.

Three texts are examined using this exegetical method. A study of the heavenly worship scene of Revelation 8:1-5 demonstrates the relevance and usefulness of this passage's vivid imagery as the Church of Ireland faces statistical decline in worship attendance. Study of Revelation 10:1-11 highlights the mysterious revelation of God which the middle section of Revelation offers the reader. Revelation 10 also provides evidence of narrative development through the motif of the scroll. Exegesis of Revelation 14:6-20 examines the relationship which judgment and justice share through the multiple juxtapositions found within this passage. Collectively, these exegetical studies combine to present evidence that the middle section of Revelation possesses a depth of theological imagination which is of great value to the church.