

“She wrote 12 novels and won each of science fiction’s highest honors. In 1995, she became the first science fiction writer to be awarded a MacArthur ‘genius’ grant. Her themes, ideas and characters continue to resonate with new readers at a time when so many are looking for, if not hoping for, a way forward.”

These words come from journalist and author Lynell George, who created an extraordinary interactive article for The New York Times, immersing readers in the key places and moments that shaped the career of the writer Octavia E. Butler. As a pioneering Afrofuturist science fiction writer, Butler recognized the lack of Black representation in the genre and actively wrote herself into her stories, exploring themes of identity, inequality, and power through Black protagonists

The MacArthur Foundation described Butler’s work as “transcendent fables, which have as much to do with the future as with the present and the past.” Her visionary writing on climate change, political unrest, and the devastating effects of power and hierarchy, written in the early 1970s, now read as both sobering and prophetic.

For Butler, fiction was never just storytelling—it was a tool for transformation, a way of seeing differently, and a means of inspiring change. She said “I write about people who survive, and sometimes prevail.”

The Book of Revelation is not much different than the work of a science fiction writer. Listen to some of the language we find there. Here’s a description from Rev chapter 9: “Locusts with the power of scorpions... their faces were like human faces, their hair like women’s hair, and their teeth like lions’ teeth.” Sounds like something out of an alien invasion or genetic experiment story. And then there’s the beast seen “rising out of the sea with ten horns and seven heads.” (Rev. 13:1)

But Revelation is not a book that was written to scare us. It was written to instruct us how to act in very particular times and environments. It was written as a tool for transformation, a way of seeing differently, and as a means of inspiring change.

The Book of Revelation is often assumed to be a literal prediction of how the world will end, filled with dramatic imagery of destruction, judgment, and finality. However, as a work of apocalyptic literature, its purpose is not to forecast the future in precise detail, but to offer a symbolic and theological response to the crises of its time. Written to persecuted early Christians, Revelation uses vivid and often unsettling imagery to unveil deeper truths about the struggle between good and evil, the corrupting force of empire, and the enduring hope of God’s justice. Rather than a roadmap to the apocalypse, it serves as a spiritual guide—encouraging faithfulness, resistance to oppression, and trust in the ultimate renewal of creation.

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth...and I saw the holy city...and I heard a loud voice...saying “See, the home of God is among humankind. God will dwell with them as their God. God will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more...” This is the promise given to us in Revelation. It is a vision of life with God in the now, and in the not yet; a vision that forms the foundation of all Christian hope. But it’s not a cheap hope. It’s not a hope that’s handed to us on a silver platter. It’s a hope that we have to work for because it only exists if we enact it.

Christian hope is a spiritual practice of **choosing to live** as if this vision of God is at hand. This is the work of the Christian life; to live into such a hopeful existence, to express the radical idea that new life is possible, forgiveness available, and sacred, Spirit-led, honest community a reality.

When José Andrés arrived in Puerto Rico just days after Hurricane Maria tore through the island in September 2017, he didn’t find the paradise he remembered. He found an island in ruins. He drove through streets where stoplights didn’t work and downed power lines dangled dangerously close to the ground. Trees were snapped like twigs, their roots exposed and torn from the soil. Homes were reduced to shells—roofs gone, windows shattered.

But it was the silence that struck him most. No humming of refrigerators, no buzz of air conditioners, no music from neighborhood bars or chatter from corner cafés. Just a heavy stillness.

Supermarket shelves were bare and gasoline lines stretched for hours. Hospitals were running on limited power, and cell service was patchy at best. People wandered the streets looking for food, water, and information.

Andrés quickly realized that this wasn’t just a disaster zone. It was a humanitarian emergency. People weren’t just hungry—they were desperate. Aid was promised but slow. Federal agencies were stuck in red tape. Boxes of supplies sat in warehouses, untouched, while real lives hung in the balance.

Having founded a nonprofit organization in 2010 called World Central Kitchen (WCK) to provide meals in the wake of natural disasters and humanitarian crises, Andres knew what needed to be done. But in this case he didn’t wait for permission. He acted, and did what he knew best—he cooked. He bore witness to a level of suffering that demanded more than charity. It demanded presence, persistence, and love. He enacted hope for thousands of people.

The Rev. David Buttrick once wrote this: Making new; that’s what’s going on in the world; that’s what’s happening. The Holy City is not future perfect, it’s present tense. (Check out the Greek verbs in the text!) Now the Holy City is descending. Now God is

making things new. Right now God is wiping tears and easing pain and overcoming the power of death in the world. Now! There's nothing otherworldly about the vision; it's happening now in the midst of our worn, torn, broken world. And with the eyes of faith, you can see it happening.

I close with profound thoughts written by a New Testament scholar Dr. Anna Bowden. She says "This fifth Sunday of Easter, John reminds us that we are not heaven bound. Heaven is bound for us. God has come to dwell among God's people, even in our moments of pain and suffering. So, yes, it might be tempting to destroy it all and rebuild from the ground up, but that is not the work God calls us to do. God calls us to join God in the good work of redemption, the work of radical care. We don't have to burn it all down. We don't have to escape to some new world. God meets us right here on earth."

This is the call of Revelation: There will be a new heaven and a new earth but it depends on whether we are ready and willing to be new people. May it be so. Amen.