THE BOOK OF REVELATION
(SC-618)

Rev. Shanell T. Smith, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of New Testament and Christian Origins
Best Form of Communication: ssmith@hartsem.edu

Class Meets: Tuesdays 4:30-7:30pm (Room 205)
Office Hours: Tuesdays and Wednesdays 9:30am-12noon

I. Course Description

The Book of Revelation is a complex text – full of imagery, visions of destruction, and God’s triumph over evil (to name a few). We will attempt to read Revelation in the way it may have been read or heard by the first-century Christian inhabitants of Asia Minor. In other words, we will examine the ways in which modern New Testament scholars have attempted to analyze (that is, “make sense of”) this text in its first-century historical, social, political, and religious setting. But we won’t stop there! This course will also aim to situate the Book of Revelation in our contemporary world by examining how it has been interpreted in other critical discourses such as feminist/womanist studies, masculinity studies and queer theory; liberation hermeneutics and postcolonial studies; and ecotheology and ecocriticism.

II. Objectives

To help students:

- Gain a thorough familiarity with the text of the Book of Revelation
- Explore various hermeneutical, theoretical, and methodological perspectives on Revelation
- Become familiar with the historical and social background of Revelation and some of the other main features of historical-critical scholarship on it
- Become familiar with political approaches to Revelation, such as feminist, womanist, postcolonial, and empire-critical approaches
- Discover that “context matters,” and in the process, learn how to read Revelation with theological and ethical sensitivity in your own context

III. Required Texts

Harold W. Attridge, ed. The Harper Collins Study Bible. New Revised Standard Version (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006). Other acceptable NRS translations that provide study notes developed for the academic study of the Bible are the Oxford Annotated Study Bible or the New Interpreter’s Study Bible.

This course is not based on any one textbook, as the reading assignments illustrate. All of the readings, however, are on reserve. Students may choose to purchase some of the recommended books, however, as they may prove helpful to you as you negotiate the course. Students may also wish to purchase them for their personal libraries.
IV. Recommended Texts

The following books feed into different parts of the course.

*Commentaries:*


*Other studies:*


V. Course Requirements and Assessments

A. Presence, Participation, and Preparation (15% of Final Grade)
Regular attendance at all class sessions and active participation in discussion groups are expected. If you are unable to attend a class session, please notify the professor in advance or at the earliest opportunity. Please plan to arrive promptly to class, and stay for its duration. It is also important that students return promptly after class breaks. Your presence is necessary and important for maximal learning for everyone. Missing two sessions will result in an automatic lowering of your final grade by 10%. Missing three sessions will result in an automatic lowering of your final grade by 20%. Missing four or more sessions will result in automatic failure of the course.

Be ready to ask questions and participate in discussions in a positive and constructive way. Rich, critical dialogue occurs when we discuss, debate, and consider the texts and various issues as a collective. Care should be taken when speaking; however, to make sure that everyone (including the less talkative ones) gets an opportunity to engage.

Brief Presentation of Findings: Each student will be expected to present her/his observations for the required readings (primary and secondary materials) during the class session. Students will consult one or more commentaries (as listed on the syllabus) to gain a deeper understanding of the primary text. Students are strongly encouraged to write no more than half a page (double-spaced) in preparation for discussion. (The professor reserves the right to collect these.) Assessment will be based on 3C’s: coherence, critical analysis, and clarity of presentation. This assignment will also give the professor a chance to provide feedback on the student’s writing prior to the submission of the first major essay.

B. Two (2) Essays: (70% [total] of Final Grade)

Students are required to write two essays, each accounting for 35% of the final grade. Quality essays will show evidence of having been thoroughly researched, and include materials discussed in class. Include properly formatted footnotes (or some other standard form of documentation, such as author-date-page references inserted parenthetically in the main text) to acknowledge your debts to the scholarly literature that you use. Avoid plagiarism. At the end of the essay, include a bibliography of works cited, also correctly formatted. Direct quotations are to be kept to a minimum, however. It is your voice that I want to hear in these essays. Although essays will need to be informed by scholarly opinion, students are encouraged to determine and state their position in relation to it. In other words, do you agree or disagree, and why?

Due Dates:
- First Essay – Tuesday, April 1, 2014 (All papers should be emailed to the professor before the start of class.)
- Second Essay – Monday, May 19, 2014

Essay specifications:
- Length: between 1,500 and 2,000 words for Masters/Certificate students; between 2,000 and 2,500 words for PhD/DMin students. (Word limits exclude bibliography.) Please note: Once word limit is reached, I will stop reading.
- Double-spaced, 12 pt. font, Times New Roman, NO justification, 1 inch margins
Requirements for Essays:

- **A thesis statement.** This is the statement of your hypothesis, that is, your point to be proven. It should be included in the first or second paragraph.
- **Consideration of the text’s context.** This includes the literary, social, political, and rhetorical contexts and its impact on the original hearers.
- **Biblical citations.** Include references to the text (chapter and verse) in your essays. Show how the text supports what you are arguing.
- **Contemporary application.** Consider how John’s message to the original readers may or may not address the situation for today.
- **Bibliographical soundness.** Include analysis from no less than three critical commentaries and if available, two or more academic journals. (A list of commentaries is included on this syllabus. See Rev. Dr. Stephen Blackburn, our librarian, for assistance with accessing these online journals.)
- **Proper presentation.** Proofread. Proofread. Proofread! (Check spelling, punctuation and grammar.)

First Essay Options:

- Exegetical essay on one or more passages in Revelation related to gender and/or sexuality. Passage(s) should be exegeted in detail.
- The Structure of Revelation and its Relevance for Interpretation
- Hebrew Bible Intertextuality in the Book of Revelation (e.g. Daniel, Ezekiel, Isaiah)
- The Socio-Cultural Background to the Book of Revelation

Second Essay Options:

- Exegetical essay on one or more passages in Revelation related to empire and/or ecology. Passage(s) should be exegeted in detail.
- Eschatological Symbols in Revelation (e.g. Earthquake)
- The Christology of Revelation
- The New Jerusalem in Revelation

C. Presentation: (15% of Final Grade)

**Masters/Certificate Students** will give a 10-15 minute presentation that analyses the ways in which some element of the Book of Revelation is represented, alluded to, or otherwise “recycled” in a contemporary cultural artifact (e.g. a sermon, a song, a TV show, a [political] speech, or a visual work of art). Your presentation must not overlap significantly with any of your two papers. **Take heed to the time limit;** rehearse beforehand. Be creative with your presentation, and have fun! Presentation ideas must be approved by the professor in advance. Sign-up sheet to be distributed.

**PhD/DMin Students** will write a 750-1000 word book review on a scholarly examination of (a text of) Revelation. They will then give a 7-10 minute presentation that will include: an examination of the text’s title (Is it accurate? Does it match the content?); an overview of the text’s main argument(s) and how the author arrived there; and her or his own overall assessment of the work. Two questions to facilitate dialogue should also be included. Books must be approved by the professor in advance. Book review is due one week prior to presentation. Sign-up sheet to be distributed.

*Masters/Certificate students led to take on the PhD/DMin assignment are welcome so to do!*
VI. Learning Resources and Expectations

Academic Integrity

Plagiarism will not be tolerated in student written work. You are expected to put your ideas in your own words. When the thoughts, ideas, or words of other persons are used, whether written or verbal, credit should be given by using quotations and proper citation. Proper documentation should also be included for sources used but not quoted verbatim. For the policy and guidelines for avoiding plagiarism, see the Student Handbook.

Lateness Policy

All due dates are real. Please meet them. If you expect to miss a deadline, please contact the professor before the due date, in order to negotiate a new due date. This new date becomes firm. Any assignments turned in after this new agreed-upon date will be docked 5 points per 24 hour period.

Language Issues

Good communication is crucial for ministry, scholarship, and collegiality. Students are encouraged to have their writing assignments reviewed by a writing consultant as needed. Students are also expected to use inclusive language in this course.

CLASS SCHEDULE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

**Please note that all readings are subject to change. Students will be notified in advance.**

Week 1: January 21 - Introduction to the Course
Primary Reading:
- *The Book of Revelation* (preferably in one sitting)

Secondary Reading:

Students will come prepared to share their initial reactions/responses to the Book of Revelation and to the questions posed at the end of Pippin’s essay (p. 5).

PART I: REVELATION AND EMPIRE
HISTORICAL-CRITICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This part of the course will explore some of the salient features of mainstream historical-critical scholarship on Revelation. It will form a platform for the remaining portions of the course, which will consider Revelation from more recent hermeneutical, theoretical, and methodological perspectives.
Week 2: January 28 – Interpretative Systems and Dating of the Apocalypse

Primary Reading:
- *The Book of Revelation* (if you haven’t done so already), with special attention to chapter 1. (Read closely, using one or more commentaries.)

Secondary Reading:

As you read deSilva, consider (and be ready to discuss) the strengths and weaknesses of each interpretive system from your own perspective. To which (if any) do you subscribe?


As you read Collins and van Kooten, read (in context) the passages in Revelation to which they refer as the basis for their arguments. Which set of arguments do you find most persuasive? Come to class ready to debate them.

What difference do questions of dating make to one’s interpretation and application of Revelation?

Week 3: February 4 – Revelation: Structure, Plot, and Theology

Primary Reading:
- *The Book of Revelation*

Secondary Reading:
Students will come prepared to discuss Revelation’s theology. Do you agree with what has been argued in the above works? If yes, with whom and why? If not, what’s your take on things?

Week 4: February 11 – The Occasion of the Book of Revelation and Letters to the Seven Churches

Primary Reading:
- Revelation 2:1 – 3:22, 13 (read closely, using one or more commentaries [as listed on the syllabus])

Secondary Reading:
- Wes Howard-Brook and Anthony Gwyther, Unveiling Empire: Reading Revelation Then and Now (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), pp. 87-119 (with special attention to pp. 102-5). This work explores the practice and institution of emperor worship in the Roman world in general and in the Roman province of Asia in particular.

A major polemical target in Revelation appears to be the practice and institution of emperor worship. This was a phenomenon in the Roman world, and especially in the Roman province of Asia. (See chapter 13) As you will read in chapters 2-3, the author intently focuses his attention on certain fellow Christians in the cities of Roman Asia, particularly in the letters to Pergamum/Pergamon and Thyatira (Rev. 2:12-29). Why?

Week 5: February 18 – The Heavenly Throne Scene and the Lamb

Primary Reading:
- Revelation 4:1 – 5:14 (throne room scene) (Read text closely, using one or more commentaries)

Secondary Reading:

What heavenly symbols are used? Who are the participants? Map out the throne room scene. What are the interpretive implications?

Week 6: February 25 – The Seven Seals, Seven Trumpets, the 144,000, and the beasts

Primary Reading:
- Revelation 6:1 – 8:1 (seven seals)
- *Revelation* 8:2 – 11:19 (seven trumpets)
  (Read texts closely, using one or more commentaries)
- *Revelation* 13 (the beasts)

**Secondary Reading:**

What is the purpose of the six seals in the context of the heavenly throne scene? Why are they literally separated from the seventh seal? What might the sixth seal represent? Why?

What do you notice when you compare trumpets five and six with the second woe (chapter 11)? How significant is the seventh trumpet scene for the message of *Revelation*?

Is there any correlation between the 144,000 and the “great multitude?”

Students should also be prepared to answer the following discussion question from Carter’s reading (pg. 95): “Revelation 13 identifies two agents of the devil in the political structures of the empire, first the emperor and then the emperor’s allies. How are these ‘beasts’ presented? What do you think of John’s approach of aligning these political powers (his enemy), with the devil?” (p. 95)

**PART II: REVELATION ENGENDERED FEMININITY AND MASCULINITY**

This section of the course engages feminist scholarship on Revelation, most likely the subject of most hot-topic debates in Revelation scholarship of the past two decades. We also explore recent work on masculinity and sexuality in Revelation that emerges from or intersects with this feminist work.

**Week 7: March 4 – Feminist Perspectives on Revelation**

**Primary Reading:**

- *Revelation* ch.12; chs. 17-18 (esp. 17:1-6, 16-17); 19:6-8; 21:2, 9-14
  (Read closely, using one or more commentaries)

**Secondary Reading:**

feminist critic of Revelation. She presents an overview of her various positions on Revelation in this work.


- Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, The Power of the Word: Scripture and the Rhetoric of Empire (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 130-47. This work of Schüssler Fiorenza presents an alternate interpretation of Revelation, one that critiques the gender-critical approaches used by both Pippin and Vander Stichele.

As you read each work, consider whose arguments you find most convincing, and come to class ready to debate them.

**Week 8: March 11 – Feminist and Queer Perspectives of Revelation**

**Primary Reading:**

- *Revelation* ch.12; chs. 17-18 (esp. 17:1-6, 16-17); 19:6-8; 21:2, 9-14 (Read closely, using one or more commentaries)

**Secondary Reading:**

- Jennifer A. Glancy and Stephen D. Moore, “How Typical a Roman Prostitute Is Revelation’s ‘Great Whore’?,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 130.3 (2011): 543-62. This article presents a study of the figure of Babylon in Revelation. (Students unfamiliar with Greek should not be put off by the Greek terms in this article. All you really need to know is that πόρνη, which means “prostitute,” is vocalized as pornē, and ἔταιρα, which means “courtesan,” is vocalized as hetaira.)

- Stephen D. Moore, “Metonymies of Empire: Sexual Humiliation and Gender Masquerade in the Book of Revelation,” in Tat-siong Benny Liew, ed., Postcolonial Interventions: Essays in Honor of R. S. Sugirtharajah (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009), pp. 71-97. This essay not only focuses on the figure of Babylon in Revelation, but also deals with the figure of the Lamb in Revelation. It draws on queer theory, which is a subfield of literary and cultural studies devoted to the study of sex and sexuality.


**Week 9: March 18 - Masculinity, Race/Ethnicity, and Revelation**

**Primary Reading:**

- Rev. ch. 5; 14:1-5, 9-11; 17:14; 19:11-21 (Read closely, using one or more commentaries)
Secondary Reading:


- Stephen D. Moore, “Revolting Revelations” in his *God’s Beauty Parlor: And Other Queer Spaces in and around the Bible* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp. 173-99. This chapter also deals with the construction of masculinity and femininity in Revelation, with frequent attention to the figure of the Lamb.


**PART III: REVELATION AND EMPIRE LIBERATIONIST AND POSTCOLONIAL CONSIDERATION**

In recent years, *empire* has emerged as a major theme in New Testament scholarship. We have already touched on this topic in the previous sections in relation to Revelation, but now we engage it more single-mindedly.

**Week 10: March 25 - Liberation Hermeneutics to Postcolonial Hermeneutics?**

_In biblical studies, postcolonial biblical criticism is primarily understood as the critical analysis of empire. This approach, however, has developed mainly from liberation theology and liberationist exegesis._

Secondary Reading:


_In your opinion, do Richard or Blount fall prey to Sugirtharajah’s critique of liberation hermeneutics? Take notes and let’s be ready to discuss._
Week 11: April 1 – Revelation in Postcolonial Perspective

**First essays are due today!**
(All papers should be emailed to the professor before the start of class.)

Secondary Reading:


Ruiz and Moore present two different, but related, postcolonial interpretations of Revelation.

**PART IV: REVELATION AND THE EARTH ECOTHEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

For many Christians today concerned with ecological issues, Revelation is something of an embarrassment. Is the theme of ecological devastation justified, or does the theme of paradisal restoration overcome it?

Week 12: April 8 – Bible and Ecology

Primary Reading:

  (Read closely, using one or more commentaries)

Secondary Reading:

- The Earth Bible Team’s “Guiding Ecojustice Principles,” in Norman C. Habel, ed., *Readings from the Perspective of Earth* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), pp. 38-53. *Readings from the Perspective of Earth* is the first volume of the five volume series, The Earth Bible [2000-2002], which remains the most substantial resource for biblical ecotheology and ecocriticism.) *As you ponder the “ecojustice principles,” reflect on how or whether they apply to Revelation. Are there any you would add? What’s missing when considering the Apocalypse?*
Week 13: April 22 – Revelation and Ecology

This week, we will read and discuss three studies devoted to the problem of ecocide (systemic devastation of the natural world, similar to that described in Rev. 8 and 16), and other ecological issues in Revelation.

Primary Reading:

- *Revelation* chs. 8-9; ch. 16; chs. 21-22.
  (Read closely, using one or more commentaries)

Secondary Reading:

- Barbara Rossing, “For the Healing of the World: Reading Revelation Ecologically,” in David Rhoads, ed., *From Every People and Nation: The Book of Revelation in Intercultural Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), pp. 165-82. Rossing has written most on Revelation and ecology; this essay presents a useful summary of her major positions.
- David G. Horrell, *The Bible and the Environment: Towards a Critical Ecological Biblical Theology* (London, UK: Equinox, 2010), pp. 88-103. Revelation’s climactic vision of the New Jerusalem (21:2-22:5) is important for both Rossing and Maier; however, Horrell attempts to set that vision in broader biblical perspective.

PART V: THE END OF REVELATION?

Week 14: April 29 – Furthering the Discussion: The Apocalypse as “Theo-Ethical Rhetoric,” Decisions in Reading, and Revelation’s Relevance for Today?

In this our final class, we will discuss some concluding thoughts on Revelation – that of secondary works and our own. *Students will prepare a 2-3 sentence movie trailer (blurb) that encapsulates their view of Revelation to be shared with the class.*

Secondary Reading:

As you ponder what we’ve discussed during the course, do you agree with the arguments expressed by the above authors? Do Bauckham’s 11 points say it all?

Is the message of Revelation applicable in culturally meaningful ways in the 21st century?

Second Essay is due Monday, May 19, 2014.

Have a great summer!