REVEALING REVELATION  
(SC-618)

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

Class Meets: Tuesdays 4:00-6:45pm  
Office Hours: TBD

I. Course Description

Yes, Revelation is a complex text, but it is also action-packed! It is full of imagery, visions of destruction, gender-bending, and God’s triumph over evil (to name a few). How do you think the first-century Christian inhabitants of Asia Minor may have heard or read this text? Modern New Testament scholars have tackled this question by analyzing this text in its first-century historical, social, political, and religious settings. We will explore this conversation. Do you think they got it right? We 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. Let’s reveal Revelation together!

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

Master of Arts in Religious Studies Learning Outcome and Key Characteristics: 
To demonstrate knowledge and skills for dialogical and constructive engagement with diversity by:
  a. Knowing sacred literatures of one’s own and other religious traditions  
  b. Appropriating critical theories to engage diversity in a given context (e.g. race, class, gender, sexual orientation, religion)  
  c. Being critically reflexive about one’s own social location and how it shapes engagement with others  
  d. Displaying knowledge and skills that are required for respectfully engaging with others
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 CANVAS.

Important Note About Canvas:
It is imperative that students have access to Canvas as this course will be taught in a hybrid fashion. This means that some of the work will be done in an online dialogical fashion.

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

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 via email. Please plan to arrive promptly to class, and stay for its duration. It is also important that students return promptly after class breaks. Missing two sessions without a legitimate excuse will result in an automatic lowering of your final grade by 10%. Missing three or more sessions without explanation or permission 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.

B. Brief Presentation of Findings (20% of Final Grade)

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.

C. One (1) Essay: (40% [total] of Final Grade)

Students are required to write an essay based on one or more passages in Revelation related to gender and/or sexuality. Passage(s) should be exegeted in detail. 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?

_Students may be required to re-write their papers considering professor’s feedback._

**Due Date:** Tuesday, April 2, 2019 (All papers should be _emailed_ to the professor _before_ the start of class. Students will also bring a _printed_ copy to class.)

**Essay specifications:**
- **Length:** between 1,250 and 1,500 words for Masters/Certificate students; between 1,500 and 1,750 words for PhD/DMin students. (Word limits exclude bibliography.)

Please Note:
_Once word limit is reached, I will stop reading, and you will be penalized for what’s “missing.”_

- Double-spaced, 12 pt. font, Times New Roman, NO justification, 1 inch margins

**Additional Requirements for Papers:**
- **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. (“In this paper, I will argue…”)
- **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 papers. 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.)

**D. Presentation: (25% of Final Grade)**

*Masters/Certificate Students* will give a _10-15 minute presentation_ that analyzes 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 your paper.* **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!*

**E. Final Reflection Paper and Presentation (15% of Final Grade)**

*The book of Revelation has powerful and potentially dangerous visions that are expressed through John the Revelator’s theology, gendered rhetoric, symbolism, and strong dualistic language and tendencies. Considering our multi-faith classroom and institution, what might be the implications of this? That is, can we call someone whose religious beliefs differ from ours a “beast,” a “whore,” or a “synagogue of Satan,” and expect to have reasonable dialogue? What, if anything, might be useful from Revelation for interfaith work? Maybe the vision of a repaired world? What are your thoughts in 1000-1250 words?*

Make references to the book of Revelation in your reflection.

*Students are to email their papers to me before the start of class, and bring 2 hardcopies to class.*

*Students will read their reflections as part of the course conclusion.*

*The presentation itself is worth 5% of total 20%.*

**Due Date: Tuesday, April 30, 2019 (Last day of class!)*

**VI. Learning Resources and Expectations**

*Hartford Seminary Grading Scale*

**Master’s Students:**

- **A (95-100)** Demonstrates excellent mastery of the subject matter, a superior ability to articulate this, and provides helpful connections to daily life or contemporary issues. Exceeds expectations of the course.

- **A- (90-94)** Demonstrates mastery of the subject matter, ability to articulate this well, and makes connections to daily life or contemporary issues. Exceeds expectations of the course.

- **B+(87-89)** Demonstrates a very good understanding of the subject matter, able to articulate lessons learned in the assignment well. Meets expectations of the course.

- **B (83-86)** Demonstrates an understanding of the subject matter and the ability to articulate lessons learned. Meets expectations of the course.

- **B-(80-82)** Demonstrates an understanding of the material at hand, has some difficulty articulating this, and basic connection of the material to daily life or contemporary issues/life. Meets basic expectations for the course.

- **C+(77-79)** Demonstrates a basic comprehension of the subject matter, weak articulation and connections. Does not meet expectations for the course.
C (70-76) Demonstrates a minimal comprehension of the subject matter and has difficulty making connections. Does not meet expectations of the course.

F (below 70) Unable to meet the basic requirements of the course.

- Grades range from A to C and F; A+'s and C-'s are not part of the grading system.
- On a 4.0 GPA scale – A (4.00), A-(3.66), B+(3.33), B(3.00), B-(2.66), C+(2.33), C(2.00) and F(0.00). A grade point average of no less than B- (2.66) is required to maintain good standing. The minimum G.P.A. required for graduation is 2.75.

**DMin students:** High Pass (95-100), Pass (83-94), Low Pass (70-82), and Fail (below 70)

**Plagiarism and Academic Integrity**
Academic honesty and integrity are expected of all students. **Plagiarism exists when:**
a) the work submitted was done, in whole or in part, by anyone other than the one submitting the work, b) parts of the work, whether direct quotations, ideas, or data, are taken from another source without acknowledgement, c) the whole work is copied from another source [especially a web based source], or d) significant portions of one’s own previous work used in another course. See “Plagiarism” at [http://www.hartsem.edu/current-students/policies/](http://www.hartsem.edu/current-students/policies/).

**Appropriate Classroom Etiquette and Use of Technology:**
In order to respect the community within the classroom: 1) **Mute all cell phones** during class; 2) Utilize laptops for the sole purpose of taking class notes. Please do not surf the web, email, or other programs during class time. Such use of the computer during class is disrespectful of the class and professor, and may result in lowering your participation grade.

**Inclusive Language:**
Hartford Seminary is committed to a policy of inclusion in its academic life and mission. All members of the community are expected to communicate in language that reflects the equality of genders, openness to diverse cultural and theological perspectives, and sensitivity to one another’s images of God.

**Extensions:**
Extensions for papers will be given for illnesses or family emergencies only in consultation with the instructor.

**Official Handbooks:**
For all other questions you might have regarding policies or procedures, please check the student handbook [http://www.hartsem.edu/current-students/student-handbook/](http://www.hartsem.edu/current-students/student-handbook/) and seminary policies at Academic policies are listed at [http://www.hartsem.edu/current-students/policies/](http://www.hartsem.edu/current-students/policies/)
CLASS SCHEDULE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

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

**Week 1: January 22 - 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).*

**Week 2: January 29 – Interpretative Systems and their Implications**

**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?*

**Week 3: February 5 – 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 12 – The Occasion of the Book of Revelation, the Letters to the Seven Churches, and the Beasts

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), pages 87-96 (before “Imperial Economics”) and 101-105 (before “Local Cults in Roman Asia”), and pay special attention on the latter pages (“The Imperial Cult”).

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?

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)

Week 5: February 19 – 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 26 – The Seven Seals, Seven Trumpets, and the 144,000

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

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?” Why?**

Week 7: March 5 – Feminist and Womanist 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:

**Students will come prepared to discuss and debate the different views presented.**

Week 8: March 12 – 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
Secondary Reading:


Week 9: March 19 - 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: (Read in this order.)


Week 10: March 26 - Liberation Hermeneutics to Postcolonial Hermeneutics?

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 2 – Revelation in Postcolonial Perspective

Essays are due today!
(All papers should be emailed to the professor before the start of class. Students will also bring a PRINTED copy to class.)

Secondary Reading:


Week 12: April 9 – Bible and Ecology – ONLINE CLASS

Primary Reading:

  (Read closely, using one or more commentaries)

Secondary Reading:


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?

Reading Days: April 15-19 (NO CLASSES!)

Week 13: April 23 – Revelation and Ecology

Primary Reading:

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

Secondary Reading:


Week 14: April 30 – Furthering the Discussion: The Apocalypse as “Theo-Ethical Rhetoric,” Decisions in Reading, and Revelation’s Relevance for Today?

Final Reflection Papers Due and Presentation

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?

Have a great summer!