

B 464: THE BOOK OF REVELATION AND ITS LEGACIES
Spring 2016
Preliminary Syllabus

McCormick Theological Seminary
Instructor: The Rev. Andrew R. Guffey, Ph.D.

Wednesday, 6-8:50 PM
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Anglican theologian and biblical scholar Austin Farrer described the book of Revelation as “the one great poem which the first Christian age produced.” It is a book that has perplexed and fascinated Christians since at least the second century of our era. In this class we will explore the rich imagery and fantastic prophecies of the book. We will try to interpret the book on its own terms and in its historical, cultural context—striving to understand the book as it might have been heard by the original audiences to which it was addressed. But this course will also look at several ways the book of Revelation has been interpreted over the centuries, and also the book’s potential for speaking to our contemporary world through a variety of intercultural voices.

The course has four principle aims:

- To introduce students to the critical, academic study of the book of Revelation in its historical, cultural environment;
- To introduce students to the various ways the book of Revelation has been received in the Church and in western society (which has decisively shaped the academic and religious discourse around the book of Revelation);
- To foster habits of thought, analysis, and criticism sensitive to social, economic, and cultural contexts; and
- To empower students to draw on the Scriptures for their theology and practice of ministry.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

The course will lead students through a close analysis of the book of Revelation. It will also introduce students to a variety of interpretive skills and strategies for understanding the book in its literary, cultural, and religious context. Special emphasis will be given to the reception history of the book—that is, how the book has been received throughout the history of its interpretation and influence. Upon completing this course successfully students should be able to:

- Articulate coherent and responsible interpretations of the book of Revelation and other biblical texts, accountable to the texts’ historical and literary contexts;
- Reflect critically on the role of social and cultural contexts in the composition, reception, and interpretation of biblical texts;
- Employ a variety of different interpretative strategies in reading the book of Revelation that cultivate contextual and cross-cultural awareness for interpreting biblical texts in a pluralistic world;

- Make and evaluate theological claims based on responsible interpretation of the Bible, drawing on a range of resources from biblical scholarship;

STRATEGIES FOR LEARNING (EXPECTATIONS OF STUDENTS)

1. Preparation and Participation

Careful preparation of the reading *before* class meetings, attendance at all class meetings *with your readings in hand*, and informed, thoughtful, and constructive class participation are required.

2. Oral Presentation:

Each student will make one 10-minute presentation on a chosen supplemental reading or topic of interest during the semester.

3. Written Exercises

- An outline of the book of Revelation (one-page, single-spaced)
- Four exegetical reports (3-4 pages each)
- One interpretive essay, based on one of your exegetical reports (7-10 pages)
- Please note: As graduate students, you are expected to submit work characterized by grammatically correct English prose, including correct spelling and punctuation. All sources, whether primary (the book of Revelation, other biblical texts or ancient writings) or secondary (commentaries, articles, books), must be cited properly. I do not require any particular style of citation and/or bibliography (MLA, Chicago, Turabian), but I do ask that you be consistent with the style you use. I recommend using the style in *The SBL Handbook of Style*, 2d ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2014).

4. Midterm Exam:

The midterm exam will examine students on the basic content of Revelation and other ancient texts we will have read in their ancient contexts.

5. Final Project:

Students will complete a final project, with a written component. The final project may entail primarily the construction of a work of art, the composition of a liturgical service, the outline of a Christian formation course, or some other project that draws on the content of the course and addresses the learning outcomes in a synthetic manner. If such a project is chosen, the student must also include an essay outlining the interpretative decisions made in crafting the project or how the course has contributed significantly to the inception and execution of the project (7-10 pages). Students may also choose to write a more traditional exegetical paper (approx. 12-15 pages). The topic and direction of the final project must be submitted for approval by the instructor not later than March 23.

Collaborative learning is encouraged. Students will work in groups to discuss questions and work on interpretive problems throughout the course. While collegial advice and discussion of exegetical papers will prove useful, students should not co-write papers, and exams should reflect the work of each student.

Students are expected to consult with the instructor if there are any questions about the class. I welcome consultations with students—simply contact me to make an appointment. I will generally be available before and directly after our class meetings, but I am happy to make other arrangements to meet.

ASSESSMENT

The formal requirements of the course include:

Assignment	% of final grade
Class attendance and participation	10
Oral presentation	10
Written exercises	30
Midterm exam	20
Final project	30

REQUIRED TEXTS

1. A quality, academic study Bible (with Apocrypha), based on the New Revised Standard translation. I recommend *The HarperCollins Study Bible* (revised edition), and I would recommend purchasing the slightly more expensive hardcover edition, as the paperback edition tends to wear out quickly. The *New Oxford Annotated Bible* (now in its fourth edition), the *New Interpreter's Study Bible*, or the *Catholic Study Bible* (revised edition) are three other good options.
2. David L. Barr, *Tales of the End: A Narrative Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, 2d ed. (Salem, OR: Polebridge, 2012).
3. Bruce Chilton, *Visions of the Apocalypse: Receptions of John's Revelation in Western Imagination* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2013).
4. David Rhoads, ed., *From Every People and Nation: The Book of Revelation in Intercultural Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005).
5. Other assigned readings will be posted electronically, as noted by an asterisk in the course schedule (*).

RECOMMENDED: Students are also strongly encouraged (though not required) to acquire one of the following as a reference commentary:

David E. Aune, *Revelation*, 3 vols., Word Biblical Commentary (Waco/Nashville: Word/Nelson, 1997-1998). Exhaustive historical-critical commentary based on the Greek text, with a strong emphasis on the book in its historical religious context.

G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998). Exhaustive commentary based on the Greek text from a responsible evangelical interpreter. Strong emphasis on Revelation's use of and affinities with Old Testament traditions.

Brian K. Blount, *Revelation*, New Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2009). A mid-size commentary conversant with the Greek text, but fully accessible to those without Greek. Emphasizes the political-economic concerns of

Revelation and its original audience(s), with an eye toward the present, especially through the lens of African American experience.

Ian Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, Black's Commentary (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2006 [and reprinted by Baker Academic, 2009]). A solid, mid-size commentary based on an English translation, largely concerned with interpreting Revelation in the context of Jewish apocalyptic traditions.

Craig R. Koester, *Revelation*, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014). Probably the best overall commentary to purchase—most recent, exhaustive, based on the Greek text, but fully accessible to those without English. Includes significant discussions of the history of Revelation's reception.