APocalypse Now
The Revelation of Jesus Christ

Community Worship
Spring 2016

Beeson Divinity School | Samford University
The revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who testifies to everything he saw that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.
APOCALYPSE NOW

THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

A Guide for Worship and Personal Devotion

BEESON DIVINITY SCHOOL | SPRING 2016
January 26
Opening Convocation
The Most Rev. and Rt. Hon. Dr. George L. Carey
103rd Archbishop of Canterbury

February 2
Biblical Studies Lectures
Liam Goligher

February 9
“Alpha and Omega”
Revelation 1
Allen P. Ross

February 16
“Faithful Unto Death”
Revelation 2:8-11
Timothy George

February 23
William E. Conger, Jr. Lectures on Biblical Preaching
Laura A. Smit

March 1
“The Lion and the Lamb”
Revelation 4 and 5
Sydney Park

March 8
“The Woman and the Dragon”
Revelation 12
Douglas D. Webster
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All services will take place at 11 a.m. in Andrew Gerow Hodges Chapel. Biographical information about each speaker can be found at beesondivinity.com/communityworship.
This semester in our community worship at Beeson Divinity School we are studying the Apocalypse, the final book of the Christian canon. The book of Revelation is not only the last book in the Bible, but it also sums up and completes the doctrine of God developed in the first sixty-five. God speaks directly only twice in Revelation, and he says the same thing both times. First, near the beginning, in 1:8, we read: “I am the Alpha and the Omega,’ says the Lord God [kurios ho theos, the Greek translation of Yahweh Elohim] ‘who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.” Once more, near the end, this divine predicate is repeated: “He said to me: ‘It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End’” (21:6). Just as these two letters stand at the origin and conclusion of the Greek alphabet, so too does the Lord God reveal himself as the source of all that is and the terminus of all that can be.

John’s vision is not only about revelation but also restoration. In older dogmatics textbooks, eschatology was referred to as de novissimus, “concerning the newest things.” Here, in the finale of salvation history, we read about the new temple (21:1-22:5), the new covenant (21:3-4), the new Israel (21:14), and the new Jerusalem (21:2). Faithful believers are also promised a new name (2:17; 3:12). Indeed, God’s work of restoration and renewal is all-encompassing: “I am making everything new!” (21:5). Revelation reminds us that there can be no authentic doctrine of God without eschatology, and apocalyptic eschatology at that. It is a shame that the book of Revelation is regarded by many as a bizarre science fiction fantasy. To think this way is to miss the great crescendo of biblical revelation: the triumph of God over sin, suffering, and the devil. Revelation is the answer to the question of Habakkuk: “How long, O LORD?” (Hab 1:2).

Christianity without apocalyptic is reduced to a code of behavior or a set of maxims about the way the world is in its present disarray and chaos—a kind of therapeutic Confucianism. But Revelation makes clear that the God of the Bible is not only the maker of all that is but also the designer of what will be. He is the one who not only is, and was, but who is also “the one who is coming”: “I am that I am” is also “I will be who I will be.”

The first Christians greeted one another with an Aramaic expression, “Maranatha!”, “O Lord, come!” May this same word still be on our lips and in our hearts.

Timothy George | Dean
The King shall come when morning dawns
And light and beauty brings:
Hail, Christ the Lord!
Your people pray,
Come quickly, King of kings!

—Ancient Greek Hymn
One of my favorite books is *The Horse and His Boy*, the fifth volume in *The Chronicles of Narnia* series, by C. S. Lewis.

Near the end of this book there is a moving scene where the boy, Shasta, is riding his horse at night feeling completely exasperated. At his weakest moment Shasta senses the presence of Someone walking next to him, but he cannot see who it is. After comprehending that this visitor is not a ghost, Shasta shares his sorrows:

“Shasta was a little reassured by the breath: so he told how he had never known his real father or mother and had been brought up sternly by the fisherman. And then he told the story of his escape and how they were chased by lions and forced to swim for their lives; and of all their dangers in Tashbaan and about his night among the tombs and how the beasts howled at him out of the desert. And he told about the heat and thirst of their desert journey and how they were almost at their goal when another lion chased them and wounded Aravis. And also, how very long it was since he had had anything to eat.
“I do not call you unfortunate,” said the Large Voice.
“Don’t you think it was bad luck to meet so many lions?” said Shasta. ...
“There was only one: but he was swift of foot.”
“How do you know?”
“I was the lion.”

And Shasta gaped with open mouth and said nothing, the Voice continued. “I was the lion who forced you to join with Aravis. I was the cat who comforted you among the house of the dead. I was the lion who drove the jackals from you while you slept. I was the lion who gave the Horses the new strength of fear for the last mile so that you should reach King Lune in time. And I was the lion you do not remember who pushed the boat in which you lay, a child near death, so that it came to shore where a man sat, wakeful at midnight, to receive you.”

The Book of Revelation does for us what the fictional character Aslan does for Shasta in this scene. In the last book of our Scriptures, we are given God’s view of our present sufferings. Like Shasta, we see life at a surface level; John’s vision tells us what is really going on underneath. As Richard Bauckham puts it, John’s vision gives us a “heavenly perspective.”

“Apocalypse Now” is the title of this semester’s chapel theme. While Revelation was written to seven churches initially, and speaks of things yet to come, John’s Revelation is also for us today.

This booklet helps us reflect on Revelation in light of our present sufferings by juxtaposing pictures of true, present suffering in our world with the message of Revelation, thereby helping us view our present suffering through the lens of heaven. Naturally it is difficult to be confronted with evil and deep suffering; some of these photos will be challenging. Yet even though we see evil, Jesus Christ is on the throne. Even though it seems as if evil is winning, it will not have the final word. The Book of Revelation assures us that the One “who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood” has not abandoned or forgotten us. Therefore, we have hope.
The Islamic State (also known as ISIS) executes 21 Coptic Christians on the beach in Libya for being “people of the cross” shown in a video posted on February 15, 2015.
Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.

—Rev. 1:17b-18

FEBRUARY 7

Revelation 1

“The world condemned persecutes; the world reconciled suffers persecution.”

—ST. AUGUSTINE

“The Christian Church, even in her tribulation, is the place where the King reigns and holds His court, the King who is the First and the Last, and who has the keys of life and death. Let us never forget this supreme fact: Jesus Christ has come on earth to do a tremendous deed which will reverse history. He is here to break the power of evil and to set the prisoners free. He is here to strip principalities and powers, to nail them to His Cross, and to triumph over them openly. … The supreme act of judgment in the Cross remains as the abiding force to determine all history, and every crisis in human affairs falls under its action and reflects its meaning. Let us make no mistake about it. The Cross of Jesus Christ is still in the field. Jesus Christ still holds the sovereign initiative in history. No doubt the fire rages in the world, but in the heart of the fire there is one like unto the Son of God, and out of the heart of it there comes the shout of a King: ‘Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.’”

—T. F. TORRANCE, THE APOCALYPSE TODAY
On June 17, 2015, a gunman killed nine Christians at Mother Emanuel AME Church, Charleston, South Carolina, during a Wednesday night Bible study. On Sunday, June 21, Gillettie Bennett, right, comforts Clarissa Jackson, left, as they wait in line for Emanuel AME Church’s first worship service following the shooting.

Do not fear those
And do not fear those who kill the body
but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear
him who can destroy both soul and body
in hell. —Matt. 10:28

FEBRUARY 16
Revelation 2:8-11

“The Suffering Church of Smyrna reminds believers of the persecuted church throughout the world.”

—DOUG WEBSTER, FOLLOW THE LAMB

The Church’s one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord;
she is his new creation, by water and the word;
from heaven he came and sought her to be his holy bride;
with his own blood he bought her, and for her life he died.

Though with a scornful wonder we see her sore oppressed,
by schisms rent asunder, by heresies distressed;
yet saints their watch are keeping, their cry goes up, “How long?”
and soon the night of weeping shall be the morn of song.

‘Mid toil and tribulation, and tumult of her war,
she waits the consummation of peace forevermore,
till with the vision glorious her longing eyes are blest,
and the great Church victorious shall be the Church at rest.

Yet she on earth hath union with God, the Three in One,
and mystic sweet communion with those whose rest is won:
O happy ones and holy! Lord, give us grace that we,
like them, the meek and lowly, on high may dwell with thee.

— “THE CHURCH’S ONE FOUNDATION,” verses 1, 3-5
A woman kisses her son outside the Mar Tshmony Church in Erbil, Iraq, on August 11, 2014. Five hundred Christian families were sheltered at Mar Tshmony Church after an unprecedented ISIS advance into Kurdish-controlled territory, mainly Qaraqosh, for the second time.
Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open to scroll and its seven seals. And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain.

—Rev. 5:5-6

MARCH 1

Revelation 4 and 5

“This is the end. For me the beginning of life.”

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s last words

Through the straight pass of suffering
The martyrs even trod,
Their feet upon temptation,
Their faces upon God.

A stately, shriven company;
Convulsion playing round,
Harmless as streaks of meteor
Upon a planet’s bound.

Their faith the everlasting troth;
Their expectation fair;
The needle to the north degree
Wades so, through polar air.

—Emily Dickinson
Chinese Christians celebrate Christmas Eve at a Christian church in Chengdu, located in southwest China’s Sichuan province, on December 24, 2014. Open Doors ranks Communist China as the 29th country in the world where Christians face the most persecution.
And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. —John 1:14

MARCH 8
Revelation 12

“Jesus’ birth excites more than wonder—it excites evil. John impresses upon us the real meaning of Christmas. God defeats the enormous red dragon with a baby, who is Christ the Lord. John’s nativity scene gives us the meaning of the manger!”

—DOUGLAS D. WEBSTER, FOLLOW THE LAMB

“From the perspective of the Trinity, Jesus is the archetypal missionary. The first Western missionaries to arrive in Papua New Guinea may have believed that no one had ever traversed such a vast cultural divide as they. However, their experience pales in comparison to the great gulf that the Son of God crossed in the Incarnation.”

—TIMOTHY TENNENT, INVITATION TO WORLD MISSIONS: A TRINITARIAN MISSIOLOGY FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY
A gunman opened fire on students at Umpqua Community College on October 1, 2015, killing nine. Eyewitnesses say the shooter singled out Christians asking them to stand and then shooting them in the head. On October 4, Valerie Vititow holds up a “Yes I am Christian” sign near a makeshift memorial to the victims.

Not ashamed
“Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure” —for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. —Rev. 19:7-8

MARCH 15

Revelation 19

In the consulship of Praesens (for the second time) and Condianus, on the sixteenth day before the Kalends of August, at Carthage, in the secretarium:

Speratus, Nartzalus, Cittinus, Donata, Secunda and Vestia were brought in. Saturninus the proconsul said: You can earn the pardon of our lord the emperor if you return to your senses.

Vestia said: I am a Christian.

Secunda said: What I am, that I wish to remain.

Speratus said again: I am a Christian; and they all shouted their agreement with him.

Saturninus the proconsul read out his decision from a tablet: Speratus, Nartzalus, Cittinus, Donata, Vestia, Secunda and the rest, have confessed that they live according to the Christian religion, since they obstinately persisted when given the opportunity of returning to Roman ways, are to be executed by the sword.

Speratus said: We give thanks to God.

Nartzalus said: Today as martyrs we shall be in heaven: thanks be to God.

All said: Thanks be to God.

—TIMOTHY DAVID BARNES, TERTULLIAN: A HISTORICAL AND LITERARY STUDY
The Reverend Canon Dr. Andrew White was Anglican Chaplain in Iraq and Vicar of St. George’s Church until he was forced to leave last year. He lost more than 1,200 parishioners to religious genocide by ISIS. According to White, there are now only 260,000 Christians in Iraq. There used to be 1.5 million.
MARCH 29

**Revelation 20**

“We see the cross, and we believe in the resurrection; we see death, and we believe in eternal life; we experience sorrow and separation, but we believe in an eternal joy and community.”

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Finkenwalde Circular Letter

Despised and scorned, they sojourned here; But now, how glorious they appear!
Those martyrs stand a priestly band, God’s throne forever near.
So oft, in troubled days gone by, In anguish they would weep and sigh.
At home above the God of Love, For aye their tears shall dry.
They now enjoy their Sabbath rest, The paschal banquet of the blest;
The Lamb, their Lord, at festal board Himself is Host and Guest.

—“Behold a Host, Arrayed in White,” verse two
Christians worship during a Christmas service at Gelora Bung Karno Stadium in Jakarta, Indonesia, on December 13, 2014, even under the threat of radical Islamic violence.
He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away. —Rev. 21:4

APRIL 19

Revelation 21

“Heaven is the sphere of ultimate reality: what is true in heaven must become true on earth.”

—RICHARD BAUCKHAM, THE THEOLOGY OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

“The time must come, in which death utterly and entirely ceases, so that it can never afflict us again.”

—MARTIN LUTHER, “SERMON FROM 1545”

As grains of sand as drops of dew
Numbered and treasured by the Almighty hand,
The saints triumphant throng that Holy Land
Where all things and Jerusalem are new.
We know not half they sing
Or half they do,
But this we know
They rest and understand.

—CHRISTINA ROSSETTI
Christian residents of the Kasai camp in Bangui, Central African Republic, celebrate as Seleka Muslim militias evacuate on January 28, 2014. The departure of the fighters was greeted with screams of joy from the crowd of hundreds that gathered to watch them leave for another camp in northern Bangui. “We are free! This is our new year!” they shouted.
They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever. —Rev. 22:4-5

APRIL 26

Revelation 22

The term is over: the holidays have begun. The dream is ended: this is the morning.

All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.

—C. S. LEWIS, The Last Battle

One day, John knew, Heaven would come down and mend God’s broken world and make it our true, perfect home once again. And he knew, in some mysterious way that would be hard to explain, that everything was going to be more wonderful for once having been so sad. And he knew then that the ending of The Story was going to be so great, it would make all the sadness and tears and everything seem like just a shadow that is chased away by the morning sun. “I’m on my way,” said Jesus. “I’ll be there soon!” John came to the end of his book. But he didn’t write “The End.” Because, of course, that’s how stories finish. (And this one’s not over yet.) So instead, he wrote: “Come quickly, Jesus!” Which, perhaps, is really just another way of saying . . .
To be continued . . .

—SALLY LLOYD JONES, The Jesus Storybook Bible
This painting was the culmination of a study commissioned in 1999 by Pope John Paul II to research recent Christian martyrs. Pope John Paul II dedicated this painting in 2000 and placed it in The Basilica of Saint Bartholomew in Rome. A print of this painting, which hangs in Dean Timothy George’s office, includes 20th-century martyrs Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Archbishop Janani Luwum and Martin Luther King Jr. Read more about the painting at www.beesondivinity.com/apocalypse-now.
Further reading and resources on Revelation


G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*

Craig S. Keener, *Revelation. The NIV Application Commentary*


T. F. Torrance, *The Apocalypse Today*

Douglas D. Webster, *Follow the Lamb*

www.beesondivinity.com/apocalypse-now

Contributors

Timothy George | Dean

Kristen Padilla | Editor

Vickie Gaston | Chapel Curator

Christy Harper | Assistant Chapel Curator

Scott Camp | Senior Designer

Julie Beckwith | Assistant Director of Creative Services

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