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Reading Revelation at Easter Time

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Book review by Angela McCarthy

Moloney, Francis J. *Reading Revelation at Easter Time*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2020. 196 p. ISBN 978 0 8146 8505 1

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Francis Moloney is a distinguished Johannine scholar and, in this instance, has brought his scholarship to bear on *The Revelation to John*. This final book in the Christian canon of scripture is most often interpreted in the light of eschatological disaster leading to paradise for those who have survived and in extremely literal interpretations has been used as a code to predict various apocalyptic events. Moloney declares that 'some fanatical groups have done great damage to themselves and to an understanding of Christianity through a fundamentalist and fanatical "end-time" reading of the book of Revelation' (p. xv). Not so for this book, which is an offshoot of his major academic work, *The Apocalypse of John. A Commentary*. Moloney attempts to unlock the secrets of Revelation by using as its key 'Jesus Christ's death and resurrection as its theological and literary heart' (p. xvii). Rarely have I heard a good homily on the book of Revelation, most homilists seem to avoid it, and so Moloney's dedicates the book to all Christian pastors in the hope that it will shine Easter light on their ministry of the Word. He uses words from the *Roman Ritual for the Ordination of a Deacon* in the dedication: 'Believe what you read, teach what you believe, and practice what you preach' as a brotherly [and sisterly] reminder to all those who preach.

Moloney insists that Revelation is not to be interpreted as a Jewish-Christian apocalypse, even though there are many literary features of Jewish apocalyptic material, because the author, John, sees the slain Lamb as having been raised. Humankind does not have to wait until the end of time for God to complete earthly life and save those who are good. 'John believes that Christians *already enjoy* access to life because of the death and resurrection of Jesus' (p. 2). 'The book is a celebration of the perennial significance of the death and resurrection of Jesus... from the beginning of creation down to the time of the Christian Church' (p. 11).

Following the introductory chapter, the structure of the book is based on its use in the Liturgy of the Hours from the second to the fifth week of Easter. Chapter Two through to Chapter Ten take each section of Revelation from its beginning to its conclusion with each Chapter subtitled 'Making Sense of Revelation'. To follow the author's literary design Moloney describes the structure of passages so the that the author's literary design is evident (p. 17). Monday of the Second Week of Easter uses the prologue and the initial heavenly encounter and closes with the Easter message where Christ names himself as the Alpha and the Omega. Tuesday to Thursday the letters to the seven churches are announced: Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea. Seven is the number of completeness which echoes Genesis 1 as God created the world in six days and then rested bringing it to completion.

Chapter Three makes sense of Rev 4:1-5:14 which occurs in the Office of Readings on Friday and Saturday. This section is 'dedicated to the opening of the seals of a scroll held in the right hand of God by the slain yet risen Lamb' (p. 39). The continual presence of the understanding of resurrection confirms Moloney's interpretation. In Friday's reading from 4:1-11 John sees the divinity seated on a throne. All the great

noises of creation, which are regularly heard in theophanies, are present as they indicate the origin and authority of God. Moloney uses a different font to allow for an exegetical reading and his interpretive nuances for the passages that appear regularly on important liturgical celebrations (p. 190). Saturday's reading, 5:1-14, describes the Lamb and universal salvation. Moloney declares that there 'is a logical, theological, and Christological link between the Lord and creator God of Israel, the Scripture of Israel, the slain and risen Lamb as the giver of life and the Christian community. But the sequence between them is not *historical*. The heavenly visions *transcend* history but make sense of history' (p. 45).

Chapter Four deals with Rev 6:1-8:1 used in the Office of Readings for Sunday and Monday of the Third Week of Easter. The opening of the seven seals are described with the final three seals making known the 'saving effects of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ' (p. 52), again the focus being shown on this theological and literary heart of Revelation.

The following Chapters follow the same format, and the brevity of this book review does not allow a full summary. What is impressive in Moloney's book is that his depth of academic rigour is evident in this writing, but it is completely accessible. It will support those men and women who use the Office of Readings and those who are newly exploring this material for the purpose of their role as preacher. Chapter Ten presents Rev 22:6-21 which returns to the themes of the prologue and hence is inescapably the epilogue. The perplexing capacity of John to speak of the past, present and future at the same time instructs us that the 'saving effects of the crucified and risen Christ have been present in history from its foundation and will be present until the end' (p. 181-182). As Moloney has made clear – *The Revelation to John* is an Easter book.