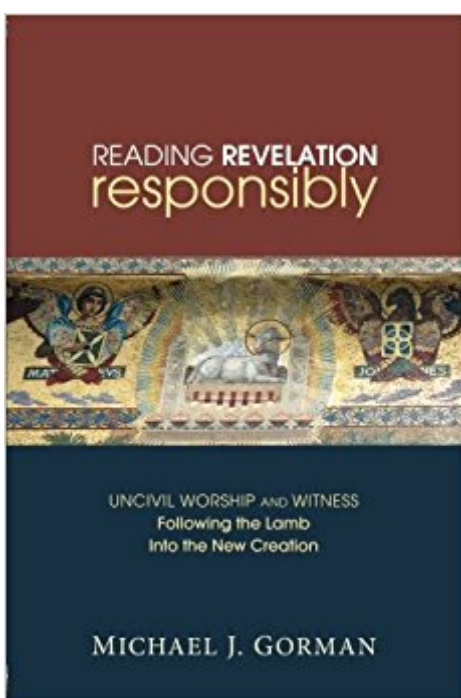


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Reading Revelation Responsibly: Uncivil Worship And Witness: Following The Lamb Into The New Creation



Synopsis

Reading Revelation Responsibly is for those who are confused by, afraid of, and/or preoccupied with the book of Revelation. In rescuing the Apocalypse from those who either completely misinterpret it or completely ignore it, Michael Gorman has given us both a guide to reading Revelation in a responsible way and a theological engagement with the text itself. He takes interpreting the book as a serious and sacred responsibility, believing how one reads, teaches, and preaches Revelation can have a powerful impact on one's own--and other people's--well-being. Gorman pays careful attention to the book's original historical and literary contexts, its connections to the rest of Scripture, its relationship to Christian doctrine and practice, and its potential to help or harm people in their life of faith. Rather than a script for the end times, Gorman demonstrates how Revelation is a script for Christian worship, witness, and mission that runs counter to culturally embedded civil religion.

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Customer Reviews

Michael J. Gorman is Professor of Sacred Scripture and Dean of the Ecumenical Institute of Theology at St. Mary's Seminary & University in Baltimore, Maryland. His recent books include Reading Paul (Cascade 2008) and Inhabiting the Cruciform God (2009).

In the last semester of my undergrad degree in Theology I stumbled across a journal article on Revelation which cited Gorman as someone who promoted a "missional" reading of Revelation,

which perplexed me because for several years after I became a Christian I was repeatedly told that it was a future map of sorts for what would soon be coming upon the world after myself and my fellow believers were spirited away (i.e. raptured) and the rest of the world was left to suffer Divine Wrath a la 'Left Behind.' I talked to my New Testament Professor about the book only to learn that he had recently reworked his Revelation and Johannene Literature class with this book as the textbook for the Revelation portion. Needless to say, I picked up the book and read it in tandem with the Book of Revelation. Others have talked about the person Michael J. Gorman, and I won't discuss him other than to add that he has one of the de facto books on biblical exegesis which speaks to his ability and tact when it comes to Scripture. The book is organized very well, starting with introductions (both on the book and on aspects and themes Gorman deems important to understanding the actual text of Revelation), moves into exegesis on four sections of the book (1-3; 4-5; 6-20; 21-22 respectively), followed by a summary and application, and then a postlude to complete the book. The author maintains complimentary tones of conversation, teaching, and pastoral throughout most of the book, though at certain places (primarily where he is talking about dispensationalism or the Left Behind phenomena) the authoritative tone of someone who has worked diligently and consulted numerous other voices shines through far more powerfully than the other tones. He also concludes each chapter with questions for discussion and reflection, which allows the book to be used not only for personal/pastoral study, but also for small group discussion and classroom settings. I found the book to be extremely compelling, and in a few places very convicting. Gorman cites several problems within the church at large that are very commonplace and are often encouraged and relies on the authority of Revelation itself to call Christians to change their behaviors regarding these problems. I had one minor disappointment with the book, although it wasn't severe enough to even consider removing a star, and that was that the most complicated portion of Revelation, chapters 6-20 (which have the vivid apocalyptic imagery) was largely ignored. The chapter that focused on this section spent most of its space on the last two or so chapters of the section, neglecting the rest. This is permissible in my opinion for two reasons: First, Gorman acknowledges quite rightly that there simply isn't space for him to cover all of the imagery. Each chapter in this book is packed (although not long) and making it through a single chapter can at certain points feel like a feat of accomplishment. The second, and better reason, is that the three chapters that serve as an introduction cover much of the hermeneutical (interpretive) tools that the reader will need to read through Revelation. Anyone who paid attention to the book up until that point shouldn't have a very hard time reading those chapters reasonably well. Aside from this minor complaint I found the book virtually flawless for what it attempts to accomplish. The only conceivable

reason I could see a person not liking this book is either they do not possess an awareness of what constitutes orthodox Christian theology and therefore don't understand why certain things are important to Gorman, or that his writing convicts them of sin/misconduct/irresponsibility in the eyes of Revelation and are unwilling to accept the conviction and consider changing their views and behaviors. A very easy to award, 5/5.

Michael J. Gorman's *Reading Revelation Responsibly: Uncivil Worship and Witness: Following the Lamb Into the New Creation* proposes exactly that: read Revelation well (stop taking symbols literally), worship and be a witness of the Lord (not governments, and be especially mindful of those that co-opt Christianity and claim to be the mighty savior), and follow the Lamb (imitate him by being nonviolent and sacrificial—lay down your life, don't take others into the New Creation (there will be a new creation!). Yes—on all fronts! Gorman briefly describes several ways people read and interpret the last book in our canon, noting some of the problems that arise and unhealthy conclusions thereby taken from the text. He helpfully explains not only what we know of apocalyptic writing, but that the book of Revelation is actually a collection of genres: apocalypse, prophecy, and letter, as well as being both liturgical and political.

There's a lot going on here, and it cannot be simplified into one narrow way of interpreting the entire text—certainly not a literal approach (e.g., 1,000 years does not mean a literal 1,000 years). We are reminded that the sacrificial Lamb is the central image of the drama, and that when the Lord comes with sword in mouth (not in hand!) his robes are already bloodied—his own blood from already conquering evil through sacrificing himself! Revelation is about worshiping the true Lord and living that out (discipleship). It's not all about either what was (the Roman empire) or will be (a blueprint for the end times), but encouragement for us in the end times (between Jesus' ascension and future return) while we live as witnesses of the Lord. Empires will rise and fall, but freedom, salvation, and truth are in Lamb! I highly recommend this one. It may be particularly helpful for those who currently find themselves in the hermeneutical camp of dispensationalism. Aside: I read the book in Kindle format, which has no page numbers and is sometimes a bit clunky in the formatting.

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