Revelation is one of the most difficult and misinterpreted texts in the Christian Scriptures, yet it is widely used in the liturgical life of the Roman Catholic Church.

In Reading Revelation at Easter Time, Francis Moloney explores it as a celebration of the perennial and ongoing effects of Jesus’ death and resurrection. After an introduction to Revelation, the book provides an interpretation for each biblical reading in the Liturgy of the Hours across the Easter period. A presentation of every passage from Revelation used elsewhere in the Roman liturgy is also provided by means of a different typeface across the commentary. Readers are invited to rejoice in the ongoing victory of “the Lamb who was slain before the foundation of the world” (Rev 13:8).

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“Fr. Moloney insists that salvation was mediated through the death of the Lamb from the beginning of creation . . . an imaginative reconfiguration of almost everything Christians have thought about Revelation.”
Pheme Perkins, Boston College

“Aiming his interpretation at a broad array of readers, Moloney’s book is a helpful guide for those who want to understand more fully how to interpret Revelation in a liturgical context.”
Micah Kiel, St. Ambrose University
Believe what you read, teach what you believe, and practice what you preach.

(Roman Ritual for the Ordination of a Deacon)
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Preface

The book of Revelation is the most challenging book in the New Testament. Most mainstream Christians do not read it, and some sectarian Christian groups have used the fierce and often threatening imagery as biblical judgment against individual people and institutions across the ages. This practice was passionately and widely used across all sides of the tragic and often violent divisions that shook the Christian church and society in general in the sixteenth century. Some continue to use it as an inspired guide to what will happen at the end of all time, generating many different "millenarian" interpretations (see Rev 20:1-6). Unfortunately, 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. Revelation is not a book for religious fanatics, but over the centuries such readings by Christians have kept it "in the news."

Despite its challenging nature, the Christian churches, especially in the Western world, use the book of Revelation in their

1 The art of Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472–1553) and Albrecht Dürer (1474–1528) are eloquent testimonies of that era. However, they were not alone in graphically casting opposing Christian communities as the Antichrist, an expression that never appears in the book of Revelation. See Carlos M.N. Eire, Reformations. The Early Modern World, 1450–1650 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), 178–84; Eamon Duffy, "Brush for Hire: Lucas Cranach the Elder," in Royal Books and Holy Bones. Essays in Medieval Christianity (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2018), 301–18.
liturgies. This is not the case in the Eastern churches, where a suspicion of its usefulness as a “word of God” has long existed. In the West the “Office of Readings,” part of the official daily Liturgy of the Hours in the Roman tradition, uses passages from Revelation from the Second to the Fifth Weeks of the Easter season. The book is read sequentially, almost in its entirety. A similar focus upon the Easter relevance of Revelation appears in the selection of four passages as canticles at Evening Prayer for the days of the week, on Sundays, and other major feast days. Its use as a reading for the celebration of Mass over the final weekdays in the Year 2 Cycle of the Ordinary of the Year tends to accentuate a more conventional understanding of Revelation as pointing toward “the end.” But even at that “eschatological” time of the liturgical year, the readings reflect God’s victory in and through Jesus Christ. As is well known, Revelation 12’s presentation of the woman clothed with the sun, the moon under her feet (Rev 12:1) has long been used for the Catholic celebration of Marian feasts, as has Revelation 7:2-4, 9-14 on the feast of All Saints. That passage tells evocatively of the gathering of the “saints” from the tribes of Israel, saved by the blood of the Lamb.

The presentation of the book of Revelation that follows will argue that the allocation of the book of Revelation as part of the church’s Easter celebrations was an inspired decision. What follows will suggest that the theme of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ dominates Revelation. This is not a majority interpretation of this challenging New Testament book. In different ways, most interpret John’s work as an encouragement of Christians, living through suffering and persecution, to hold tight to their Christian beliefs and practice.

They are promised that, in the end, God will reward their faithfulness and punish the wicked. Although some suggest that this resolution of Christian pain, suffering, and death, will take place in a final establishment of God’s kingdom on earth, most suggest that God’s final intervention will take place outside time and space.

Under the shadow of that widespread (and somewhat frightening) understanding of the book of Revelation, rendered complex by outrageous symbols and difficult narrative sequences, most Christians regard it as incomprehensible. But an author, who reveals his name as “John” (see 1:1, 4, 9, 22:8), opens his book with a song of praise to Jesus Christ: “To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever” (1:5b-6). Taking our cue from John himself, reading the book of Revelation as an Easter book attempts to “make sense” of the book itself. Revelation has long been part of the Christian canon, the books the Christian churches regard as Sacred Scripture. It celebrates something that, in a Christian view of history, has already happened. Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection is an event that determines the whole of time, from the foundation of the world to the present (see 13:8). The ancient Christian maxim lex orandi lex credendi strongly suggests that the consistent “praying” of Revelation on Sundays and during the Easter season is an articulation of the church’s Easter “faith.”

Reading Revelation at Easter Time attempts to unlock some of the book’s secrets by suggesting that the key to its interpretation is locating Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection at its theological and literary heart. Most Christians who come across Revelation in their prayers and liturgies are overwhelmed by its challenges. Many turn away from these strange readings,

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3 Citations from the biblical text come from the NRSV (New Revised Standard Version) translation. Occasionally I will use my own translation, indicated by the abbreviation AT (author’s translation).
replacing them with works of more immediate personal or community relevance. I hope to ease those tendencies by providing ten brief chapters that divide John’s text into identifiable literary units, reflecting upon them in the sequence that appears in the Liturgy of the Hours, following the narrative flow of Revelation 1:1–22:21. I attempt to “make sense” of the narrative of the book of Revelation for those who follow its day-by-day appearance from the Second till the Fifth Week of Easter.

**Dual Typefaces**

I trust that many will read this book from the first to the last page, but it has been designed and written to accompany the readings that appear in the Liturgy of the Hours across the Easter period. The foreign nature of the book of Revelation demands patient commitment, without trying to bite off too much at any one time. Out of respect for the allocation of the readings from Revelation across the Easter period, some “bites” run for a few pages, while others are longer. Given the use of texts from Revelation at places in the church’s liturgy that fall outside Easter time, I provided an appendix to this book, listing all the occurrences of the book of Revelation in the Roman liturgy, as a guide to where a commentary on them can be found. Within the book a different typeface is used for commentaries on these passages, with an appropriate note indicating where the passages are used. Thus, the liturgical use of Revelation outside the Office of Readings will be identified but embedded in their context in the book’s unfolding narrative. However, the church’s steady use of Revelation from the Second to the Fifth Weeks of the Easter season in the Liturgy of the Hours determines the structure of the book.

What follows is a simplification of my large scholarly commentary upon the book of Revelation, *The Apocalypse of John. A Commentary*, published in Grand Rapids, Michigan, by Baker Academic in 2020. Heavily dependent upon the research behind that study, I am deeply grateful to all at Baker Academic who have graciously allowed me to produce this book for a more general audience. The commentary on the book of Revelation remains the same, but I have eliminated almost all scholarly discussion, and focused on a reading that, in my opinion, “makes Easter sense.”

I am responding to requests from several Roman Catholic pastors who asked me to provide a guide through the confusing pages of Revelation. Engagement with the scholarly academy that has led me to the following reading of the book of Revelation is found in my *The Apocalypse of John. A Commentary*. None of that is called for in this present study. As I celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of my own priestly ordination (July 11, 1970), I offer this brief book, focused upon the Liturgy of the Hours, to all Christian pastors, in the hope that it might shed “Easter light” upon their ministry of the Word. The words on the dedication page, taken from the Roman Rite for the Ordination of a Deacon, is a brotherly reminder to all of us.

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