

UNVEILING EMPIRE :READING REVELATION THEN AND NOW

Wes Howard Brook and Anthony Cwyther, *Unveiling Empire* (Maryknoll: Maryknoll Publishing Co., 1999),

Chapter 3: Reading Revelation in Context

Chapter 3 leads us to an overview of the political, economic, cultural, and mythic dimensions of *Roman provincial society*. This was the context in which the community (*ekkleisai*) was called by John to practice radical discipleship. I got some clear notion of Roman empire and John's calling of our community today as well.

Ekkleisai: Communities located in the cities of Asia;
Revelation was addressed to that *ekkleisai*. to resist to the empire.

Imperial Economics: Urbanization of Asia Minor... same as today. the rich and poor. Corruption of temples – center of redistribution of sacrificed goods and loans. Allowed client state to gain Roman citizenship to increase taxes.

Imperial Culture: Imperial myth: Pro-Roman Empire mentality among Asia Minors. Imperial policy was so seductive that Asia Minor cities competed to please the emperor by building temples for him and praise him as god.

John urged his communities in Asia Minor to resist Roman empire.

Do we hear the same voice calling today's church to look at our own empire closely and do something about it, not sleeping in it.

The lower classes were the vast majority of the Empire' population. Frequent food shortage bore witness, the export of grain frequently cut into that required for the mere *subsistence* or rural workers. As a result, the peasant class was mostly very poor... Wealthy accumulated at the top of the social pyramid. The social pyramid was a mirror of Rome's heavenly order. The divine roman hierarchy can be seen as legitimating the system that transferred wealth from the many poor to the elite few.

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The same honorific titles were giving to kings, emperors, and gods. Throughout antiquity the court of the earthly ruler and the court of the god were described in much the same way. This invested the ancient ruler with divine qualities, and the gods with earthly ones. In applying divine language to the emperors, the harsh realities of Roman power were clothed with divine authority.

Wes Howard Brook and Anthony Cwyther, *Unveiling Empire* (Maryknoll: Maryknoll Publishing Co., 1999), 103.

Chapter 8: The War of Myth between Revelation and Rome

The theme of the chapter is war between two myths in 5 areas.

5 myths: Empire, Peace, Victory, Faith, and Eternity

These myths of the Roman Empire served to legitimate the imperial structure.

Revelation tried to uncover the reality that is hidden in these myths.

“**War of Myth**” by Amos Wilder to describe how the early Christian texts were written to challenge the myths that both legitimated Judaism and Roman Hellenism.

Metanoeo was a crucial issue for the five of 7 ekkleisai who were not faithfully resisting empire. 5 ekkleisai were called to the “transformed understanding” signified by the Greek metanoeo (meta + noeo = change + understand, perceive, imagine). **Rome’s grand narrative and God’s narrative were at war. John motivate us to see our empire and God’s empire that is working in midst of our history.**

MYTH: EMPIRE

The **myth** of **emperium** was central to the Roman understanding of its role for the world. **Basileia**, the Greek equivalent of the Latin imperium, has traditionally been translated “kingdom” or “reign.” In Greek speaking world in the first century the word had a primary meaning: **the Roman Empire**. This was the term that Rome used to describe itself. It was always translated as “empire.” There was only one empire in the Mediterranean basin in the first century, the Roman Empire.

Pro-emperors in Asia Minor who built temple for emperor Augustus who called him god, welcomed and celebrated imperial rule and god Augustus. Some in other areas resisted it with their lives. (p.224).

COUNTER MYTH: EMPIRE OF OUR GOD

Earliest Christians took over this vocabulary (that of Roman politics) and made it their own. Who was qualified to rule over empire? Was it god Caesar or the God of Jesus? This had been an aspect of battle ground. John claimed that the empire of the world became the empire of the Lord.

Comparison between the two empires and counter –empower part have been very helpful for me in building God’s empire in my mind.

MYTH: ROMAN PAX (the Peace of Rome)

Myth was that Augustus brought war to an end, had ordained peace for the world. The Pax Romana was an expression of order and security that was experienced by those at the center of the empire and member of elite groups. But the empire used deadly force against dissidents within the empire.

COUNTER MYTH: BABYLON, THE SHEDDER OF BLOOD

Revelation opposed the Pax Romana with counter myth claiming empire is murderous. While supporters of Rome made the claim the Pax Romana was supported by gods, Revelation contends that the one true God has revealed this claim to be false and contends that Beast and Babylon are involved in murder.

MYTH: VICTORIA

Victory (Latin Victoria) of emperor enabled peace. The empire's victory is won by military success and the quelling of dissent. Victoria was a myth that legitimated the emperor.

COUNTER-MYTH: THE VICTORY OF THE LAMB AND HIS FOLLOWERS (p. 229-230)

Revelation addresses the question of what makes for "victory." Revelation claims that victory comes only by rejecting empire and by maintaining loyalty to God and the Lamb that victory is won. Revelation exhorted audience to practice nonviolent witness to the reality of God's victory over empire.

The true victory is founded on the "blood of the Lamb (12:11); It was Jesus' willingness to be executed rather than to kill that constitutes "victory." God will reward faithful followers. Revelation's victory is won by preparedness to lay down one's life in resistance to empire, and the willingness to live the way of God for the long haul.

MYTH: FAITH

Fides (Greek pistis) was another Roman myth. The word has traditionally been translated "faith," but in the ancient world meant the "value of enduring social relations"; meant loyalty; submission of the weaker party to the stronger.

In Roman society, those who cooperated with the empire were considered as possessing faith.

COUNTER-MYTH: KEEPING THE FAITH OF JESUS

In Revelation, faith meant loyalty to God. Jesus is loyal to God and to his followers in he ekkeleisai. Faith was also a new way of life in which they must be faithful unto death. Revelation asserted that those who cooperated with empire was "faithless." Those who rejected empire was faithful one.

MYTH: ETERNITY

Throughout the first century, the emperors presented themselves as guarantors

of eternity for Roman state and Roman people. p. 233)

COUNTER-MYTH: THEY WILL REIGN FOREVER

Revelation claims that God lives forever and the followers; God, Jesus and their followers possess imperial rule forever.