Empire and Ekklēsia: Mapping the Function of Ekklēsia Rhetoric in the Book of Revelation

Empire and Ekklēsia:
Mapping the Function of Ekklēsia Rhetoric in The Book of Revelation

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the function of *ekklēsia* rhetoric in the Book of Revelation, and demonstrates its role in addressing various issues within the seven *ekklēsiai* and their inscribed rhetorical situation, including: the participation of *eidōlothyta*, the blasphemy of the so-called synagogue of Satan, and the pursuit of wealth. Contemporary reconstructions of the rhetorical situation of Revelation cast the assemblies as consolidated Christian churches and view the aforementioned issues as indicative of tensions between heretics and orthodox Christians, between church and synagogue, and/or between church and Greco-Roman society. Yet, such interpretations often reinscribe normative frameworks, the so-called parting of the ways, and obfuscate the role of imperial power. In contrast, I reconstruct the inscribed assemblies Revelation as Jewish groups from the Diaspora in Asia Minor that used *ekklēsia* rhetoric as well as its topoi of civic reciprocity, civic participation, and the common good to negotiate the socio-economic and political situation of Asia Minor under Rome. In order to map the ways in which the assemblies could have interacted with imperial power, I use epigraphic materials from ancient voluntary associations. Drawing from postcolonial theory, I also read the rhetorical situation of Revelation as a colonial situation and the aforementioned issues as negotiations of power, ethnic identity, and wealth.

CONTENTS

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Soli Deo Gloria

ABREVIATIONS OF PRIMARY SOURCES

1 Cor	1 Corinthians	
1 Pet	1 Peter	
Arist.	Aristotle	
	Ath. Pol.	*Athenian Politics*
	Pol.	*Politics*
	Rhet.	*Rhetoric*
Dem.	Demosthenes	
	Ex.	*Exordia*
		On the Crown
		On the False Embassy
		Olynthiac 2
Dio	Dio Chrysostom	
	Or.	*Oration*
Ex	Exodus	
Rev	Revelation	
Josephus	Flavius Josephus	
	Ant.	Antiquities
	War	War Jewish War
Philo	Philo of Alexandria	
Plut.	Plutarch	
Hdt.	Herodotus	

Chapter One:

Introduction

1.1 *Ekklēsia* and the Book of Revelation

John of Patmos addresses the Book of Revelation to seven communities that he refers to as *ekklēsiai* (1:4), which he locates in seven major cities of Asia Minor: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamon, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodikea (1:11). The term *ekklēsia* also appears in Revelation more times than any other New Testament text,[1] and also does so at strategic junctures of the text. This pervasive use of the term indicates the author's preoccupation with particular issues he sees reflected in the assemblies, such as (1) the dwindling love and imperfect works of some members (2:4; 3:1-2); (2) the presence of "false apostles" and prophets who promote *eidōlothyta* and *porneia* (2:14; 2:20); (3) the blasphemy of a group he frames as "Synagogue of Satan" (2:9; 3:9); and (4) the contrasting poverty and wealth of some within the *ekklēsia* (2:9; 3:17-18). John also subjugates the contents of the so-called visions sections (Rev. 4:1-22:1-21) to the issues he outlines in the messages section (2:1-3:1-22). Depending on how they relate to the aforementioned issues, the *ekklēsiai* receive either praise or blame.

Scholars have translated the term *ekklēsia* as church and have used the issues John identifies as signposts to reconstruct the rhetorical situation of Revelation—that is, the situation that elicited and shaped John's rhetorical address—in interesting yet

[1] See Rev. 1:4, 11, 20; 2:1, 8, 11, 12, 18, 23, 29; 3:1, 6, 7, 13, 14, 22; 22:16.

problematic ways. Following patristic tradition,[2] most scholars have suggested that John wrote to encourage Christians suffering an imperial persecution under Domitian.[3] Critical of such a view,[4] others proposed that the crisis of Revelation derived from John's inability to reconcile his expectation of the coming Kingdom of God with what he perceived to be an oppressive reality.[5] Other scholars instead proposed an internal crisis between John and rival prophets[6] over how to practice Christianity in Greco-Roman culture as the reason for the plight.[7] Distancing themselves from any crisis theories,

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[2] Here he might be alluding to the so-called "church fathers" such as Irenaeus of Lyon (125-202), Tertullian (160–225 C.E.), and Eusebius (260-340 C.E.) who galvanized the idea of an imperial persecution. In his work, *Adversus Haereses* (5.26.1), for instance, Irenaeus insisted that John wrote Revelation to comfort Christians experiencing a persecution under Roman Emperor Domitian (125-202 C.E.). Whereas Tertullian underscores the brevity of the persecution (*Apol.* 5), Eusebius further reinforces the view and identifies Domitian as its mastermind (*Hist. Eccl*. 3.17).

[3] Colin J. Hemer, "The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting" (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986), 11; However, Hemer is quick to note that such persecution probably "took the form of the more systematic and deliberate exploitation of pressures inherent in the situation. Nerva did not remove the danger: it might be reactivated whenever circumstances and personalities concurred" (11); see also Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches* (edited by Mark Wilson. Peabody Mass: Hendrickson, 1994, 7; and William Barclay, *Letters to the Seven Churches* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 34.

[4] Adela Yarbro-Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1984), 6.

[5] In Collins' view, such perception resulted from John's inability to reconcile his expectations of God's kingdom and what he perceived to be oppressive socio-political reality. In her view, various cumulative experiences contributed to this sense of oppression, including: the hostility of Jews and gentiles against Christians communities; poverty and social instability in Asia Minor; and the trauma created by Nero's persecution and destruction of Jerusalem. By situating the perceived threat from Rome on a cosmic stage, John not only clarified the source of the community's anxiety but also provided a sense of catharsis and relief from the their experiences of trauma.

[6] Robert M. Royalty, *The Streets of Heaven: The Ideology of Wealth in the Apocalypse of John* (Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1998), 27.

[7] Royalty notes that in order to maintain or increase his authority, John appealed to the socio-economic sensibilities of his audience by presenting God and Christ as wealthy patrons of the Christian churches. In order to discredit the wealth of Rome as "sordida en vulgares," John

others have suggested that John wrote to awaken complacent Christians who "lived alongside their non-Christian neighbors sharing peacefully in Asian life."[8]

1.1.2 Identifying the Issues

While the aforementioned reconstructions of the rhetorical situation of Revelation have their merits, and I draw on some of their insights in this dissertation, they operate with various methodological presuppositions that I suggest obfuscate our understanding of the text and the power relations embedded within it. Such presuppositions include (1) the binary of heresy vs. orthodoxy; (2) the parting of the ways between Christianity and Judaism; and (3) benign notions of Roman imperialism. As a result, some of the aforementioned reconstructions treat the messages as sources of historical data and visions as rhetorical tropes.[9] Furthermore, scholars often embrace the author's polemical portrait of the competing voices within the *ekklēsia* and cast them as the first heretics. Viewing the *ekklēsia* as consolidated Christian churches, they anachronistically import second- and third-century polemics between church and synagogue. Finally, such approaches often obfuscate the role that Roman imperialism played in various issues within the inscribed *ekklēsia*.[10]

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associates it with trade and commerce, and renders it as low status in comparison to the wealth of the New Jerusalem. In sum, Royalty suggests that it was the "ethical and theological diversity" that constituted a crisis for John (27).

[8] Leonard Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 192. According to Thompson, such topoi are not only "generic" in apocalyptic literature, but as such "they do not necessarily indicate anything about the circumstances in which the Book of Revelation arose." Therefore, he argues that such topics cannot serve as clues to map the social location of Revelation in its imperial context (91).

[9] Thompson, *Revelation*,192.

[10] Royalty, *The Streets of Heaven*, 36.

1.1.3 Proposal: *Ekklēsia* Rhetoric as a Strategy for Negotiating Imperial Power

How would our understanding of the seven *ekklēsiai* of Revelation and their constitutive issues change if we view them not as consolidated Christian churches, but as assemblies that embraced a form of *ekklēsia* rhetoric to address multiple socio-economic and political issues in Asia Minor? As Wayne McCready notes, the term *ekklēsia* does not mean church, but assembly and refers to a Greek democratic assembly of free citizens who gathered to deliberate on issues pertaining to the polis. Drawing on the civic dimensions of the term ekklēsia and its pervasiveness in the imperial period, New Testament scholars have explore how it illumines various socio-political tensions in texts such as 1 Corinthians,[11] or the ways it served as a counter imperial ideology in the Book of Revelation.[12] While I draw significantly on such approaches, my goal here is to explore the ways in which Jewish communities from the Diaspora in Asia Minor could have use ekklēsia rhetoric, not as a strategy of resistance or resolution of internal tensions, but as a strategy to negotiate the colonial situation of Asia Minor under Rome.

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[11] Anna C. Miller, *Ekklēsia: 1 Corinthians in the Context of Ancient Democratic Rhetoric* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Harvard University, 2008), 31. Miller rightly observes that "Despite Roman imperial rule in the first century CE, classical Greek democratic thought and practice in the eastern Roman Empire had not entirely disappeared. A central aspect of this Greek cultural continuity related to the citizen *ekklēsia*, which was historically one of the key institutions for democratic city-states like Athens of the classical period. Such assemblies were once open to all citizens and made key decisions relating to the cities' welfare" (31); See also by Miller, "Not with Eloquent Wisdom: Democratic Ekklēsia Discourse in 1 Corinthians 1–4. *JSNT* 35 (2013): 323–54; and her recent work, *Corinthian Democracy: Democratic Discourse in First Corinthians* (PTMS 220; Eugene, OR.: Pickwick Publications, 2015).

[12] Ralph J. Korner has explored the ways in which early Christ followers used polis rhetoric as a form of counter-imperial rhetoric, See Korner, "The Ekklēsia of Early Christ-Followers in Asia Minor as the Eschatological New Jerusalem: Counter-Imperial Rhetoric," in *Urban Dreams and Realities in Antiquity: Remains and Representations of the Ancient City* (ed. Adam M. Kemezis Leiden: Brill, 2015), 6-7.

In order to explore the ways in which the inscribed assemblies of Revelation deployed *ekklēsia* rhetoric, I will make five methodological moves. In my first methodological move, I draw from the civic dimensions of the term *ekklēsia*, and its concomitant topoi of civic reciprocity, civic participation, and the common good. In doing so, I also presuppose the designation of the inscribed audience as ekklēsia refers to their self understanding as such.[13] order to explore the function of such rhetoric within the broader rhetorical situation of Revelation, my second methodological move involves a brief rhetorical analysis of Revelation. The third methodological move involves an exploration of ancient voluntary associations, and their use of polis rhetoric. In contrast to recent works on Revelation, I will read Revelation as a Jewish text, and its inscribed audience as Jewish Diaspora communities from Asia Minor. Finally, I use Frantz Fanon analysis of the ways in which colonized subjects strategically adopt and deploy the colonizer's language to negotiate colonial situations of domination.

From these methodological foundations, I will suggest that *ekklēsia* rhetoric provided a way for John and other leaders to debate how to relate to the colonial situation of Asia Minor, and its socio, political, and economic structures. At stake in such a debate is the common good of the *ekklēsiai*, and both John and his interlocutors seem to share such a concern. On the one hand, certain leaders whom John accuses of having the teaching of Balaam, and a prophetess he derides as "Jezebel" likely used *ekklēsia* rhetoric to persuade members to negotiate the Roman colonial situation vis-à-vis the imperial cult and participation in the Roman imperial apparatus it entailed. On the other hand, John

[13] For the self-understanding of groups as ekklēsia see Paul Trebilco, *Self-designations and Group Identity in the New Testament.* Cambridge University Press, 2011), 165,

challenges the audience to uphold its self-understanding as a free assembly of citizens, to resist the colonial situation, and to cast their lot with the Kingdom of God. Within such context, the various issues that frame the rhetorical situation of Revelation—food sacrificed to idols (Rev. 2:2; 2:14-15; 2:20); the so-called "Synagogue of Satan" (Rev. 2:9; 3:9), and the pursuit of wealth (Rev. 3:18-17)—emerge as negotiations of power, identity, and status.

1.2. Description of the Problem

As I have suggested, the scholarly reconstructions of the rhetorical situation of Revelation casts the *ekklēsiai* of Revelation as consolidated Christian churches. Such an understanding not only bypasses the civic and democratic background of the term, but also reveals multiple methodological problems that obfuscate our understanding of John and his audience's use of *ekklēsia* rhetoric. These include: the (1) usage of heresiological discourses to read the issue of food offered to idols; (2) the so-called "parting of the ways" between Christianity and Judaism; and (3) a benign portrait of Roman imperialism. While scholars have mostly departed from the notion that John wrote Revelation as a response to an imperial persecution under Domitian, the aforementioned presuppositions that accompanied such reconstruction of the rhetorical situation remain, and continue to inform various scholarly approaches to the Book of Revelation.

1.2.1 Heresiological Discourse

First, the imposition of the binary heresy vs. orthodoxy often leads scholars to explore the tension within the *ekklēsiai* as an issue over authority and right or wrong doctrine. Such imposition often leads scholars to embrace the author's rhetoric and to cast the inscribed competing voices as heretics, and John as a hero of orthodox teaching.

Scholarly discussions of the teaching of the Nicolaitans, which play a significant role in the messages to the assemblies, illustrate the issues.[14] While most scholars agree that the competing voices represented a different "brand" of Christianity, they cast such competing voices as: (1) a group of Christian liberals;[15] (2) Pauline Christians; (3) or "Gnostic" heretics.[16] In spite of the multiple proposals, or perhaps because of them, other scholars suggest the Nicolaitans represented all these groups in one way or another, and do so again on grounds of a "similar attitude towards urban life."[17] While other scholars abstain from such associations, they still conclude that "Revelation 2-3 should be seen as one of the first Christian heresiologies."[18]

Most of the aforementioned views, however, have not developed a hermeneutic of suspicion that would lead to an interrogation of the author's rhetorical strategies. Because much, if not all, of the information we have on the competing voices derives from the

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[14] According to Robert Mounce, the Nicolaitans, Balaam, and Jezebel refer to "an antinomian group that had accommodated itself to the religious and social requirements of the pagan society in which they lived." *The Book of Revelation. The New International Commentary on The New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 81-82; Paul Brooks Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?: Prophetic Rivalry and the Rhetoric of Crisis in the Churches of the Apocalypse* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 51; M.E. Boring, *Revelation: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 92.

[15] Schüssler-Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006), 116-117; Jörg Frey*, Roman Imperial Cult and the Book of Revelation: The New Testament and Early Christian Literature in Greco-Roman Context. Studies in Honor of David E. Aune* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2006), 246-247.

[16] Jürgen Roloff, *A Continental Commentary: The Revelation of John* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 54; W.M. Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches*, Mark W. Wilson, ed. (Peabody Mass: Hendrickson, 1994), 48.

[17] According to Leonard L. Thompson, "The 'strong' at Corinth--to some extent Paul himself, Jezebel, the Nicolaitans, and Christian Gnostics--thus shared a similar attitude towards urban life, although they did not share the same philosophical and theological beliefs." *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 123.

[18] Royalty, *The Streets of Heaven*, 27.

portraits painted by biblical authors and second- and third-century polemicists, it would be ill-advised to assume that the rhetorical portrait of opponents is a fair representation of their arguments or teachings. Yet, scholars continue to reinscribe the patristic association of the teaching of the Nicolaitans with Nicolaus, a deacon mentioned in 6:5. The so-called Patristic fathers cast Nicolaus as a corrupt and immoral figure (Tertullian *Adv. Marc.* I.29; Clement, *Strom.* II.20; III.24; Irenaeus *Adv. haer.* I.26.3; III.11.1).[19] In fact, it was the so-called church fathers who first conflated the Nicolaitans and the followers of Balaam (2:14) and Jezebel, and proposed they were "Gnostics" of sorts (Hippolytus *Ref.* VII.36; Eusebius (*HE* III.29). However, as scholars have observed, because polemicists may have misunderstood and misrepresented the teachings/positions of the "others," "we cannot assume that they accurately represented the issues that were of concern to their rivals, since their refutations necessarily reflect the issues that concern them."[20]

1.2.2 Anti-Jewish Polemic

The second methodological problem that I see reflected in contemporary reconstructions of the messages to the seven assemblies is the projection of the so-called "parting of the ways" between Judaism and Christianity into the Book of Revelation. This presupposition casts both Judaism and Christianity as two separate entities, and leads scholars to view the *ekklēsia* as consolidated Christian churches. Hence, scholars proceed to cast John's tension with the so-called "synagogue of Satan" (2:9; 3:9) as an issue between church and synagogue, and thereby re-inscribe supercessionist views and the

[19] See K.A. Fox, "The Nicolaitans, Nicolaus and the early Church," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religiousness*, 23(4) (1994): 485-96.

[20] Karen L. King, *What Is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 26.

portrait of the anti-Christian Jew.[21] In his discussion of the Smyrnan Jews, for instance, Sir William Ramsay seems to have set a precedent for contemporary scholarship in suggesting that "It was the Jewish Christians, and not the pagan converts, whom the national Jews hated so violently."[22] In order to corroborate such a view, he invokes the Martyrdom of Polycarp (155-160 C.E.), in which "the eagerness of the Jews to expedite the execution of the Christian leader actually overpowered their objection to profane the Sabbath day."[23] In a manner that evokes supercessionist views of second-century apologists, Ramsay notes that Christians were the "true Jews" and "true citizens" of Jerusalem, and he went so far as to suggest that the city's past, as well the "whole ancient heritage of the Jews, the promises and the favor of God,"[24] belonged solely to Christians.

The notion of the anti-Christian Jew remains deeply embedded in more contemporary reconstructions of the "Seven Churches." In *The Letters to the Seven Churches in their Historical Setting*, Colin J. Hemer links the reference to the so-called "Synagogue of Satan" with the local Jewish community in Smyrna, which preserved its

[21] The rhetorical portrait of a group as "Synagogue of Satan" in the messages to Smyrna and Philadelphia has historically fed the portrait of the Anti-Christian Jew, which still prevails in one way or another in both past and present reconstructions of the Seven Messages.

[22] Ibid., *The Letters to the Seven Churches*, 272-73.

[23] Ibid., 273; For a closer analysis of the role of martyrological materials in activating the portrait of the anti-Christian Jew, see Judith M. Lieu, "Accusations of Jewish Persecution in Early Christian Sources, with Particular Reference to Justin Martyr and the Martyrdom of Polycarp," *Tolerance and Intolerance in Early Judaism and Christianity* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press,1998), 279-95.

[24] "Again and again it was the Jews who informed against the Christians, or who gained the ear of the local governor and incited him to unleash an attack of persecution upon the Christians. The Jews stopped at nothing in their attempts to obliterate the Christian Church" (57).

identity as people of God.[25] However, Hemer qualifies or explains away the Jewish monotheistic resilience and adherence to their notion of divine election, suggesting that for John the true people of God are "a spiritual nation" not an ethnic group: "The Christians were the true Jews; those who maintained a racial separation had rejected the Christ, according to John, and were of Satan."[26]

In his exploration of the question of poverty in the message to Smyrna, Robert Royalty also seems to re-inscribe the *contra Iudaeos* tradition and the parting of the ways.[27] For Royalty, the Jewish hostility towards Christians is a main literary feature of the message.[28] In reference to the "affliction" of the church and the "slander" of the "Synagogue of Satan" (2:9), Royalty notes that "the sequence of this message suggests that Christ bestows wealth upon the Smyrnans for their fight with the Jews, which they are apparently losing."[29] From such observation, Royalty goes on to make a direct allusion to the parting of the ways and this informs his interpretation of the passage: "The split between Christians and Jews which resulted in Jewish Christians being expelled from the Synagogue probably preceded Revelation by ten or fifteen years."[30] Aware of

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[25] Similarly, Hemer invokes the Martyrdom of Polycarp to underscore the Jewish willingness to profane the Sabbath in order to secure the death of Polycarp (Mart. Polyc., 13, 21).

[26] Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches*, 67.

[27] On the role of the contra Iudeos tradition the discussion of the parting of the ways, see Paula Fredriksen, "What Parting of the Ways"? Jews, Gentiles, and the Ancient Mediterranean City" in *The Ways That Never Parted : Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*. (ed. Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 35-65,

[28] Royalty, *The Streets of Heaven*, 159.

[29] Ibid., 160.

[30] Royalty adds that, "The two references to the Jews in Revelation both include the phrase "the synagogue of Satan" (2:9, 3:9), strongly suggesting that the expulsion of the Christians from the synagogue was still a live issue sin the churches of Asia" (161).

the noxiousness associated with the idea of the anti-Christian Jew, Paul B. Duff interprets the reference to the "Synagogue of Satan" as a rhetorical strategy. By promoting "fear of hostility" from local Jews, he notes that John attempted to "discourage his closest allies in the internal church struggles...from defecting to the synagogues."[31] Hence, John is not engaged in an actual struggle with the local Jews, but simply exaggerating his rhetoric to convince Christians not to defect to the synagogues.

As I have pointed out, such reconstructions presuppose the "parting of the ways."[32] Although scholars have long recognized that John was a Jew[33] who drew significantly from the scriptural traditions of ancient Israel,[34] and whose work reflects cultic concerns over purity, eating practices, and temple worship,[35] they still see

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[31] Paul B. Duff, " 'The Synagogue of Satan:' Crisis Mongering and the Apocalypse of John" in *The Reality of Apocalypse: Rhetoric and Politics in the Book of Revelation*, David Barr, ed., (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2006).

[32] Goodman, M. "Diaspora Reactions to the Destruction of the Temple." *The Parting of the Ways AD* 70 (1992): 27-38; Lieu, J. '"The Parting of the Ways': Theological Construct or Historical Reality?" *JSNT* 17 (1995): 101-119; D G. Dunn, *Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways, A.D. 70 to 135:The Second Durham-Tübingen Research Symposium on Earliest Christianity and Judaism (Durham, September 1989*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1999); Boyarin, D. *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Judaism and Christianity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); Dunn, James D G. *The Partings of the Ways : Between Christianity and Judaism and Their Significance for the Character of Christianity* (London: SCM, 2006); Lieu, J. *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World.* Oxford University Press, USA, 2006; James Hershel Shank and Geza Vermez*, Parting: How Judaism and Christianity Became Two*. Washington D.C.: Biblical Archaeology Society, 2013); Shaye J.D. Cohen The ways that parted: Jews, Christians, and Jewish-Christians ca. 100-150 CE. Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations. Cambridge. Harvard University, preprint, 2013.

[33] According to Adela Yarbro-Collins, "it is likely that John was a Jew" and that such a hypothesis would help "explain his massive assumption of continuity; that is, his failure to distinguish an old and new Israel." Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1984), 5.

[34] See Wilfrid J. Harrington, *Revelation,* Sacra Pagina 16, Daniel J. Harrington, ed.,(Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 6.

[35] John Ben-Daniel and Gloria Ben-Daniel, *The Apocalypse in the Light of the Temple: A New Approach to the Book of Revelation* (Jerusalem: Beit Yochanan, 2003), 44.

Revelation as representative of Jewish Christianity. As a result, scholars view John as a Christian or a Jewish Christian and the seven assemblies as consolidated Christian churches[36] or "Christian communities."[37] Unsurprisingly, Revelation is often categorized as an example of "Jewish-Christianity," and situated along other Jewish-Christian texts.

Yet, as John Marshall has pointed out, such a move turns John's polemic with the so-called "synagogue of Satan" into an example of tensions between Church and Synagogue. Rather than natural sounding the parting of the ways, Daniel Boyarin invites us to consider that those borders emerged through discursive acts of violence and were imposed on what was once "a territory without borderlines."[38] In his view, such borders could be understood as crossing points were "religious ideas, practices, and innovations, permeated that border crossing in both directions."[39] Similarly, Adam. H. Becker, and Annette Yoshiko Reed observe suggests that archeaolgical and literary materials attests "messier reality" than the metaphor of parting of ways allows. In their view, such sources suggests "that developments in both traditions continued to be shaped by contacts between Jews and Christians, as well as by their shared cultural contexts.[40]

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[36] Ramsay, Hemer, Duff, Thompson, and Harland.

[37] Royalty, *The Streets of Heaven*, 27.

[38] Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia, Pa.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 2.

[39] Boyarin, *Border Lines,* 2; For Boyarin, Judaism and Christianity were phenomenologically indistinguishable as entities in early stages of their development. In his view, this is the case, "not merely in the conventionally accepted sense, that Christianity was a Judaism, but in the sense that differences that were in the fullness of time to constitute the very basis for the distinction between the two 'two religions' ran through and not between the nascent groups of Jesus following Jews, and Jews who did not follow Jesus" (90); See also Judith Lieu," 'The Parting of the Ways': Theological Construct or Historical Reality?" *JSNT* 17 (1995): 101-119.

[40] Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed, "Introduction: Traditional Models and Interpretation", in *The Ways That Never Parted : Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the*

1.2.3 Roman Imperialism

The third and last methodological issue I summon for critique is the proclivity of certain scholars to separate John's treatment of wealth and poverty from his broader critique of Roman imperialism. While it is clear that Revelation contains an overtly anti-Roman critique, scholarly interpretations display an ambivalent and at times apologetic tone when addressing questions regarding Roman imperialism in the text. The proclivity to view Rome in a somewhat positive is evident in earlier Revelation scholarship. While still upholding the view of a Roman persecution under Domitian, Barclay sees Rome as the epitome of justice and vilifies non-Roman leaders as "capricious" "despots" and "tyrants."[41] Citing Godspeed's description of the *Pax Romana*, Barclay observes that "The provincial under Roman sway found himself in a position to conduct his business, provide for his family, and send his letters, and his journeys in security thanks to the strong hand of Rome."[42]

While some sectors of Revelation scholarship been attentive to Revelation's anti-imperial stance, others still echo benign notions of Roman imperialism. nineteen century notion. Leonard Thompson, for instance, not only dispenses with crisis theories, but suggests that "Christians, for the most part, lived alongside their non-Christian neighbors, sharing peacefully in urban Asian life." [43] He also suggests that the poor actually

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Early Middle Ages (ed. Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 2.

[41] Barclay, *Letters to the Seven Churches*, 34.

[42] Ibid., 34.

[43] Thompson*, The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 191.

welcomed Roman domination of the provinces.[44] Casting John's "crisis" rhetoric as a literary dimension of the apocalyptic genre, Thompson suggests that John wrote to awaken Christians from their complacent life style within Roman imperial structures.[45]

Such benign notions of Roman imperialism, however, not only reintroduce Theodor Mommsen's concept of "Defensive Imperialism,"[46] but also lead scholars to view John's discussion of wealth in spiritual terms and divorce it from his overall critique of Roman imperialism. That depoliticized reconstructions of the rhetorical situation of Revelation are intrinsically linked to spiritualized discussions of wealth and poverty in Revelation is clear in Robert Royalty's groundbreaking work on the rhetoric of wealth in the Book of Revelation.[47]

Reading Revelation as descriptive not of a struggle between Christians and Romans, but of a struggle between Christians and Christians, or as crisis of authority, Royalty tends to cast the valuation of wealth and poverty in spiritual terms. In his discussion of Jesus' claim that the Smyrnans are rich, while the Laodikeans are poor, for instance, Royalty suggests that the suffering of the Smyrnans elicited such a remark: "It is because of their suffering, not their poverty that the Smyrnans rank high in Christ's

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[44] Ibid., 191.

[45] Ibid., 191. Elsewhere Thompson points to the munificence of the emperors with the provinces, and to the peace (no legions were ever stationed in there) and prosperity under Rome. In fact, he suggests that the imperial administration was popular among the lower classes. See Thompson, "Ordinary Lives: John and His First Readers" in *Reading the Book of Revelation: A Resource for Students*, David L. Barr, ed., (Boston: Brill, 2004), 39.

[46] By defensive imperialism I refer to Mommsen's idea that the colonized enjoyed peace, prosperity, and protection under Roman rule. See Theodor Mommsen, *The Provinces of the Roman Empire: From Caesar to Diocletian* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1887), 5, 115, 388.

[47] Royalty, *The Streets of Heaven*, 28.

characterization of the seven churches and are therefore called rich."[48] With the option of imperial persecution off the table, Royalty goes on to note that, "To be truly rich, according to the apocalypse, is to participate in struggles against the Jewish synagogue."[49] On the other hand, he notes that that the *ekklēsia* of Laodikea is overly concerned with material wealth, even to the point of ignoring "moral and theological controversies that split other congregations."[50] Similarly, Mark D. Mathews' treatment of poverty and wealth in Revelation sidelines its critique of Roman imperialism. Alluding to Second Temple traditions that associated poverty with righteousness[51] and wealth with wickedness, Mathews suggests that John rejected wealth and embraced poverty "based not on socio-historical circumstances, but on the already established paradigm that in the present age, the faithful will be poor and the wicked will be rich."[52] In such an assessment, he seems to follow Thompson and others who suggest that Revelation's anti-imperial rhetoric is but a trope characteristic of the Apocalyptic genre.

1.3 Methodological Considerations

In order to map the function of *ekklēsia* rhetoric in the Book of Revelation, and to do so in a way that constructively addresses the aforementioned quandaries, I will deploy a fivefold methodological approach. In my first methodological move, I read John's address of the audience as *ekklēsia* as a reference to their self-understanding and usage of

[48] Ibid., 162.

[49] Ibid., 163.

[50] Ibid., 167.

[51] Mark D. Mathews, *Riches, Poverty, and the Faithful: Perspectives on Wealth in the Second Temple Period and the Apocalypse of John,* 164.

[52] Ibid., 218.

polis rhetoric, and its concomitant topoi civic reciprocity, civic participation, and the common good. In order to map the function of *ekklēsia* rhetoric in Revelation, and its intersection with imperial power, my second methodological move entails a critical rhetorical analysis of Revelation. The third methodological move involves an exploration of epigraphic data on ancient voluntary associations and their use of polis rhetoric to reconstruct the ways in which the competing voices of Revelation might have negotiated the socio-economic, and political structures of Asia Minor.[53] The fourth methodological move I make is to read Revelation as a Jewish texts, and as one addressed to Jewish communities in Asia Minor. Finally, I will postcolonial theory, and in particular Frantz Fanon's notion of colonial situation, and its concomitant strategies of negotiation.[54] One major strategy, as Fanon observed, is the adoption of the colonizer's language, its morphology, syntax, and cultural weight, as a way to negotiate situation of domination, and to both obtain and maintain multiple privileges. As I will suggest, the deployment of *ekklēsia* rhetoric by the inscribed audience may signal such attempts.

1.3.1 *Ekklēsia* Rhetoric

My first methodological strategy is to read John's designation of his audience as *ekklēsia* as a reference to their self-understanding, and as signaling their deployment of *ekklēsia* rhetoric and concomitant topoi of civic reciprocity, freedom, equality, communal discernment, and the common good. In making such methodological turn, I do not

[53] In this manner, I hope to undermine the imposition of the so-called parting of the ways in a first-century context and to such a complex text as Revelation.

[54] By mapping the ways in which subjects negotiated Roman imperialism, my reading (a) obviates the need for an imperial persecution as well other positions described in the *status quaestionis*; (b) repoliticizes the genre of apocalypse; (c) and obviates the need for presupposing the so-called parting of the ways. These points will be elaborated in the conclusion of the introduction.

translate the term ekklēsia as church, but with Wayne McCready and others view it as a "voting assembly of free citizens in Athens who engaged in legislative processes, from appointments of officials to the discussion of treaties and contracts."[55] In the constitutional government of the Greek city-state, the *ekklēsia* seems to have wielded significant power and influence, and this regardless of whether a monarchy, oligarchy, or democracy was in place.[56] Since ekklēsia derives from the verb *ekkaleo*, some scholars have interpreted it as reference to a people being called out of the world. [57] However, such a translation still evidences a Christian understanding of the term in so far as it attempts to identify Christians as an exclusive group of people being "called out" of the world.[58]

Given the civic implications of the term ekklēsia, I also purpose to read the issues embedded in the seven messages as a form of ekklēsia rhetoric. This type of civic rhetoric was rooted in the Greek democratic tradition of the polis and underscored topoi such as civic reciprocity, communal discernment, equality, and freedom. Furthermore, it was often employed in the resolution of various socio-economic and political tensions within the polis.[59] As Anna C. Miller has observed, this focus on *ekklēsia* rhetoric in first-

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[55] Wayne Mcready, "Ekklēsia and Voluntary Associations," in *Voluntary Associations in the Graeco-Roman World*, John Kloppenborg, ed., (London: Routledge, 1996), 60.

[56] Roy Bowen Ward, "Ekklēsia: A Word Study." *Restoration Quarterly* 2, no. 4 (1958): 164-17.

[57] For more on the evaluation of such etymological usages see F. J. A. Hort, *The Christian Ecclesia* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1898); J. Y. Campbell, "The Origin and Meaning of the Christian Use of theWord *EKKLĒSIA*," *JTS*, 49 (1948).

[58] Radamacher, *The Nature of the Church* (Hayesville, NC: Schettle Publishing Co., 1996), 119.

[59] Anna Criscinda Miller, " *Ekklēsia*: 1 Corinthians in the Context of Ancient Democratic Rhetoric" (Ph.D diss, Harvard University, 2008), iv; in her dissertation, Anna C. Miller argues regarding 1 Corinthians that "While Paul's rhetoric engages an *ekklēsia* rhetoric designed to promote hierarchy and his own position as an apostolic leader, the Corinthians mobilize a

century literature, "suggests new possibilities for the way we interpret community dynamics and debates over leadership, freedom, and equality in the early Roman Empire."[60] Considering that in Revelation the deployment of the term ekklēsia rhetoric intersects with Roman imperial power, this study affords the opportunity to explore its function within the Roman colonial situation of Asia Minor. In order map such function, however, I will first conduct a critical rhetorical analysis of the text.

1.3.2 Rhetorical Analysis

In order to map the ways in which *ekklēsia* rhetoric intersects with imperial power, I will conduct a rhetorical-analysis of Revelation. Feminist scholars have urged us to reconsider our understanding of rhetoric, its deployment in biblical texts, and the impetuses for the particular rhetorical models we employ. Rather than viewing rhetoric simply as the "art" of speaking or compositional technique, these scholars encourage us to view it as a tool for exploring the power relationships embedded in the author, audience, and context relationship.

Rhetoric, as these scholars reminds us, seeks to instigate a change of attitudes and motivations, "it strives to persuade to teach and to engage the hearer/reader by eliciting reactions, emotions, convictions, and identifications."[61] Given the rhetorical nature of biblical texts and other materials we employ in their reconstruction, a critical rhetorical analysis calls for the implementation of a hermeneutic of suspicion that would help us interrogate John's strategies of persuasion and to reconstruct the silenced voices of

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competing rhetoric towards an egalitarian vision of community that emphasizes the open participation of free "citizens" (iv).

[60] Ibid., IV.

[61] Schüssler-Fiorenza, "Rhetorical Situation and Historical Reconstruction in 1 Corinthians," *NTS* 33 (1987): 386-403.

"Jezebel," the followers of Balaam, and the so-called Synagogue of Satan. Since the portrait of the competing voices of Revelation reaches us through John's invectives, however, our understanding of the ways they might have interacted with imperial authority is rather incomplete. Considering that the inscribed ekklēsia appear to use polis rhetoric, I supplement my reconstruction of the rhetorical situation looking at epigraphic evidence from ancient voluntary association who imitated the civic structures of the polis, as a way to negotiate their socio-economic and political situation within it.

1.3.3 Voluntary Associations

In order to reconstruct the inscribed communities of Revelation and to map the ways they appropriated *ekklēsia* rhetoric to negotiate imperial power in Asia Minor, I draw from sociological and archaeological works on ancient voluntary associations. The term "voluntary associations" refers to small "unofficial" groups of people that spread across urban and rural areas during the Hellenistic and Roman imperial period.[62] As John Kloppenborg observes, voluntary associations imitated the ethos and civic structure of the polis. They not only borrowed polis terminology for their leadership positions,[63] but often

[62] Such groups include those that used titles such as collegium (association), koinon (association), eranos (club), orgeones (sacrificing associates), synodos (synod), synergasia (guild), thiasos (society), synagogue (synagogue), eranistai, (club members), synedrion (mystai (initiates), and tiasotai (society members), and, most importantly, *ekklēsia* (Assembly). See Richard S. Ascough, et al., *and Associations in the Greco-Roman World: A Sourcebook* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2012), 5.

[63] John S. Kloppenborg, "Edwin Hatch, Churches, and Collegia," in *Origins and Method: Towards a New Understanding of Judaism and Christianity*, B. H. Maclean, ed., (Sheffield: JSOT Press), 212-38; these Some of the political titles that both voluntary associations and *ekklēsiai* of Jesus followers used include terms such as "elders" (*presbyteroi*; e.g., 1 Tim 5:1, 2, 17, 19; Titus 1:5; 2 John 1:2; 3 John 1:2); "bishop" or overseer (*episkopos*; e.g., Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:7), "servant" or "deacon" (*diakonos*; e.g., Rom 16:1; Phil 1:1; 1 Thess 3:2); and "patroness" (*prostatis*; Rom 16:2).

appropriated the self-designation of *ekklēsiai*.[64] Two examples of such appropriation and its political function include an undated inscription from gymnastic association in Samos, and another inscription from an association of Tyrian merchants (shippers and warehousemen) in Delos.

In the first example, the association of *aleiphomēnoi* from Samos passes a resolution to honor a benefactor during an assembly (*ekklēsia*) of their membership (ISamos 119). Ralph J. Korner suggests that the fact that Samos formally became a cleruchy of Athens in 365 BCE may play a role in their adoption of what he terms "*ekklēsia* terminology."[65] In his view, "Naming their semi-public assembly as a *ekklēsia* may have served implicitly to affirm the commitment of the *aleiphomēnoi* to Athenian democratic values thereby conferring greater legitimacy to their decrees and to their social praxis."[66]

The second example involves an honorary inscription by an association of Tyrian merchants (shippers and warehousemen) from Delos dated to the imperial period (153/152 BCE).[67] They praise Patron son of Dorotheos for providing funds to build a

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[64] Korner, *The Ekklēsia of Early Christ-Followers in Asia Minor*, 460; Korner adds that, "If one assumes that in Roman Asia there is socio-religious continuity between the prophet John's seven *ekklēsiai* (90s CE; e.g., Ephesus), the *ekklēsia* of the presbyteros John (90s CE; Ephesus[?], 3 John 9 , 25 and the apostle Paul's earlier *ekklēsiai* (50s CE; e.g., Ephesus, Acts 20:17-38), then one can postulate the existence of some continuity in the social structuration of all three *ekklēsia* sub-groups, including their use of civic leadership titles" (460).

[65] Ibid., 462.

[66] Ibid., 462.

[67] The dating of the inscription varies. Ralph J. Korner suggests a period between 153/2 BCE and 149/148 BCE, but suggest that IDelos 1519 was probably inscribed around 150 BCE, some time after Rome returns Delos to the status of an Athenian Cleruchy (167/6 BCE). See Korner, *The Ekklēsia, 465.* ; See also Monika Trümper, "Where the Non-Delians met in Delos. The Meeting-Places of Foreign Associations and Ethnic Communities in Late Hellenistic Delos," in Political

temple for Herakles.[68]Chosen as an ambassador to the council of the people of Athens, Patron also received a golden crown during the sacrifices and a painted image of him in the sanctuary of Herakles (IDelos 1519). Since the association's decision to send an embassy to the Athenian *boulē* took place within the *ekklēsia*, scholars note that the association adhered to Athenian democratic values, and perhaps did so as an attempt to legitimate their embassy, and obtain favor for their request to build a temple to Herakles in Delos.[69]

Although associations organized around common socio-economic, political, and religious goals, the taxonomy remains a point of contention among scholars. For the purposes of this dissertation, I will use Phillip Harland's fivefold typology that includes: (1) household, (2) ethnographic, (3) neighborhood, (4) occupation, and (5) cultic groups.[70] While I explore materials that often coincide with the cities of Revelation, I do not intend to glean historical references from Revelation or view them as allusions to

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Culture in the Greek City After the Classical Age (ed. Onno van Nijf and Richard Alston with the assistance of C. G. Williamson; Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 55.

[68] John Day, *Greek History: An Economic History of Athens Under Roman Domination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942), 67.

[69] Korner posits that, "If it is possible to suggest that a socio-religious voluntary association named its 'members-only' assembly *ekklēsia* as a way of currying political and economic favor with its political overlords and social benefactors, then it is not unreasonable to apply that self-same logic to a group which actually self-identifies as an ekklēsia." See Korner, *The Ekklēsia*, 464.

[70] Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations*, 30; whereas household associations were composed primarily of family members, ethnographic associations were composed of foreigners who shared a common ethnic background. Thus one finds associations of Samaritans at Delos, and associations of Judeans at Ephesus, Laodikea, Pergamum, Philadelphia, Sardis, Smyrna, Thyatira, and Aphrodisias. Neighborhood associations organized around a specific location or street, and often honored influential figures of the city (IPergamon, 393). Cultic associations included mystery cults who worshipped and sacrificed to a patron god or goddess and/or to the Roman emperors. All this being said, Philip Harland points out than an association's name or descriptive title was not determinative of how it functioned.

specific places in the cities, as earlier scholarship had done. Instead my goal is to map read the inscribed assemblies of Revelation, and their use of polis rhetoric, in light of voluntary association, and the ways in which they also used polis rhetoric to negotiate their own socio-economic and political situation in first century Asia Minor.

The use of voluntary associations as *comparanda* for the study of Early Christianity has a well-established history.[71] Yet, some scholars regard the methodological move as inadequate for exploring the origins, nature, and function of Christian *ekklēsiai*, which again they see as Christian congregations. For instance, Wayne Meeks observes that, "Christian groups were much more inclusive in terms of social stratification and other social categories than were the voluntary associations."[72] While allowing that "There was some crossing of social boundaries in the associations, especially under Roman influence in the period we are interested in, so that lists of members and of officers not infrequently included both men and women, or freeborn, freepersons, and slaves," he quickly notes that "Rarely…is there evidence of equality of role among these categories, and for the most part, the clubs tended to draw together people who were socially homogenous."[73] For Meeks, what characterized the Pauline Christian communities was precisely that heterogeneity of status. However, as Harland rightly observes, Meek's position merits critique on the following grounds: (1) it

[71] For a brief discussion of the trajectory of using associations as comparanda for Christian churches and synagogues see Philipp A. Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations: Claiming a Place in Ancient Mediterranean Society* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 178-180.

[72] Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 79.

[73] Ibid., 79.

oversimplifies issues regarding the social composition of ancient voluntary associations; (2) it ignores that congregations and synagogues and associations shared several organizational characteristics; (3) it underestimates the possibilities for extra-local linkages among voluntary associations.[74] This debate over the use of voluntary associations to study Early Christianity bids us to consider what is at stake in our adoption of one particular model over another. For the purposes of this study, I am primarily interested in the function of civic terminology as a strategy for negotiating the socio-economic and political situation of Asia Minor. Furthermore, I do not presuppose the so-called parting of the ways, but situate Revelation and its inscribed communities within the Jewish diaspora of Asia Minor.

1.3.4 Revelation as a Jewish Text

In my fourth methodological move, I read Revelation as a text that evidences a primarily Jewish ethos, symbolic universe, and one that addresses a primarily Jewish audience. Such move involved underscoring the civic dimensions of συναγωγή, which I translate as congregation, and do not presuppose the so-called parting of the ways between Jews and Christians.[75] While scholars often situate Revelation among other "Jewish Christian texts," the term "Jewish Christianity" often designates a transitional

[74] Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 182; while the debate over the use of associations could receive more attention than is granted here, my methodological aims obviate such discussion since I read Revelation as a Jewish text, translate *ekklēsia* as assembly, and eschew the "parting of the ways." Most importantly, I am not suggesting that the *ekklēsiai* of Revelation were voluntary associations, but rather focus on the ways in which these negotiated the Roman colonial situation of Asia Minor, and how such negotiations might help illumine the power dynamics embedded in the text, and to read the rhetorical-historical situation of Revelation as a Colonial Situation of domination.

[75] This strategy, then, involves reading Revelation not only in light of epigraphic data on the Jewish diaspora of Asia Minor, but also in light of other Jewish texts from the Second Temple Period, including Qumran texts such as the Community Rule and the Damascus Document.

stage between "Judaism and Christianity." As John W. Marshall observes, such move often leads readers to dismember Revelation into its "Christian elements and its Jewish elements," with scholars usually characterizing the latter as "background."[76] In Marshall's view, the term presupposes a teleology that identifies the Apocalypse as relevant only to the extent that it represents an example of the transition to Christianity. With Marshall, I will operate with the presupposition that Revelation's foreground is just as Jewish as its background, for as Marshall points out it is "the secondary reception history of the Apocalypse of John that it is Christian."[77]

While I read Revelation as a Jewish text, it would be ill-advised to separate texts representing the diversity of Judaisms from their wider Greco-Roman setting, as well as to reinforce isolationist notions of the Jewish communities in Asia Minor. [78] As Paul Trebilco and others have observed, archaeological data suggests that the Jewish diaspora in Asia Minor was actively engaged in the socio-economic and political affairs of the polis.[79] Like the Herakleists of Delos and others, they also seem to have appropriated polis terminology for their own purposes. The work of Anna C. Miller has illumined the

[76] Marshall, *Parables of War*, 8.

[77] Marshall clearly observers that "If the primary object of... analysis is the Apocalypse of John, then naming it in terms of what it contributed to in the future distorts its own present" (8).

[78] Gruen, Erich S. *Diaspora Jews Amidst Greeks and Romans.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 84; Tessa Rajak, "The Jewish Community and Its Boundaries." *The Jews among Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire* (ed. J. Lieu, J. North & T. Rajak. London, 1992): 9-28;Gideon Bohak, "Ethnic Continuity in the Jewish Diaspora in Antiquity." In *Jews in the Hellenistic and Roman Cities* (ed. J. R. Bartlett. London: Routledge, 2002), 175-192.

[79] Trebilco, Paul. *Self-designations and Group Identity in the New Testament.* Cambridge University Press, 2011), 165; John M G. Barclay, *Negotiating Diaspora : Jewish Strategies in the Roman Empire.* London ; New York: T & T Clark International, 2004); Kraabel, A T. "Unity and Diversity Among Diaspora Synagogues." *The synagogue in late antiquity* (1987): 49-60; Shaye J.D. Cohen, and E S. Frerichs, *Diasporas in Antiquity.* Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993).

ways in which Josephus integrates polis terminology and its ethos in his interpretation of the biblical text. In fact, she observes that Josephus draws on the word *ekklēsia* far more frequently than "synagogue.[80] In his *Antiquities*, Josephus reinterprets two biblical narrative using *ekklēsia* rhetoric; namely, the Korah rebellion against Moses (Numbers 16:1-50; *Ant*. 4.11-156) and Zambrias' apparently insolent speech (Numbers 25:1-9; *Ant*. 4:145-149). While Korah seems to have a point in highlighting the nepotism behind Moses' decision to choose his own brother as high priest, Josephus ascribes the revolt to Korah's jealousy and as pretending to care for the common good.[81] In the episode of Israel's sin with Midianite women, Josephus condemns Zambrias and exalts Phinehas as a superior man to the rest of the youth (Ant. 4.152). In both, Josephus presents the *ekklēsia* as an arena to debate issues pertaining to the common good of the Israelites, such as rights to vie for leadership, wealth inequalities, and freedom.[82]

1.3.5 Postcolonial Theory

My fifth and last methodological move involves the integration of postcolonial theory in order to map the ways in which the inscribed ekklēsiai could have interacted with Roman imperial power. Postcolonialism theorizes the effects of colonialism upon previously subjugated peoples, cultures, and societies by mostly European powers, such as France and Great Britain. While some trajectories focus on the reinterpretation of literary works and the discursive dynamics of colonization, others trajectories explore its socio-historical dimensions. Key thinkers in this trajectory include, among others,

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[80] Miller, *Ekklēsia*, 88.

[81] Louis H. Feldman, *Studies in Josephus' Rewritten Bible* (Leiden; New York: Brill, 1998), 101.

[82] Feldman, *Studies in Josephus' Rewritten Bible*, 101.

Gayatry C. Spivak, Homi Bhabha, Edward Said, and Frantz Fanon. These authors have introduced well-known concepts of postcolonial discourse, such as hybridity, mimicry, sly civility, alterity, orientalism, and colonial situation. Given Revelation's critique of Roman imperial power, New Testament scholars have turned to the works of these authors in order to map the power relations inscribed in the text. Indeed, a basic premise of postcolonial biblical criticism is taking seriously the category of empire as an analytical tool.[83]

Several scholars who have addressed the role of imperial power in the book of Revelation include Steven J. Friesen, Stephen Moore, and John Marshall, among others. Whereas Friesen draws upon Edward's Said's "Contrapuntal Reading" for his analysis of imperial cults in Revelation,[84] Stephen Moore uses Homi Bhabha's notion of hybridity, mimicry, and ambivalence in his interpretation of Revelation. Similarly John Marshall draws from Bhabha's notion of hybridity [85] to address the role of women within situations of domination.[86] For the purposes of this dissertation, I will use Frantz Fanon's analysis of the mastery of the dominant language as a strategy to negotiate the colonial situation, which he describes as a situation of domination which presses subjects to engage in

[83] Stephen D. Moore and Fernando F. Segovia. *Postcolonial Biblical Criticism : Interdisciplinary Intersections* (London ; New York: T & T Clark International, 2007), 56.

[84] Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John*, 20.

[85] Marshall, "Gender and Empire: Sexualized Violence in John's Anti-Imperial Apocalypse," in *A Feminist Companion to the Apocalypse of John*, 17-32.

[86] Unlike Marshall, my project applies Fanon's notion of the Colonial Situation not only to the Seven Messages but also to the entire text of Revelation, and explores more systematically the way in which Roman imperial power forced subjects to engage in negotiations of power status and ethnic identity.

various negotiations, often at the expense of other colonized subjects, in order to stay afloat within colonial hierarchies.

Frantz Fanon's analysis of the intersection between language and colonial power informs my exploration of *ekklēsia* rhetoric as a strategy for negotiating the colonial situation of Asia Minor. In some of his works, Fanon theorized the ways in which colonized subjects use the language of the colonizers as a strategy for negotiating their socio-economic and political status. In *Black Skins/White masks*, for instance, he observes that "…to speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support he weight of a civilization."[87] On the one hand, the very act of speaking the colonizer's mother tongue imbues the colonized with a certain degree of power in so far as they too now become part of the colonial apparatus. On the other hand, Fanon underscores that their ability to speak the colonizer's language enunciates the degree of their subjugation or acculturation to the colonizer's civilizing enterprise. While Fanon is critical of such move, and of those who collude with empire, such strategic adoption of French by Martinican colonial subjects enables them to negotiate power, ethnic identity, and status.

In terms of power, Fanon intimates that the mastery of French gives the colonized subjects the ability to invoke the colonial structures of domination, which at the same time legitimates the power of the dominant tongue, and their use of it. Thus he observes that, "A man who possesses a language possesses an indirect consequence of the world expressed and implied by this language."[88] With Paul Valery, Fanon refers to language,

[87] Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks.* New York: Grove Press, 2008), 1-2.

[88] Ibid., 2.

and more specifically to the language of the colonizers, as "The god gone astray in the flesh."[89] But the command of the colonizer's tongue also has the power to reconfigure the ethnic identity of colonized subjects. The ability to master the dominant language also allows the colonized to negotiate their ethnic identity. In Fanon's view, the more the black Antillean assimilates the French language, the whiter he becomes, and the more he rejects his blackness.[90] To speak proper French, is not only "to speak like a white man,"[91] but also to become one as well.

Furthermore, Fanon observes that mastery of French gave the Antilles Negro a higher status within the socio-economic, and political hierarchies of the colonial apparatus. Fanon explains that: "This is because the Antilles Negro is more 'civilized' than the African, that is, he is closer to the white man and this difference prevails not only on the back streets and on boulevards but also in public service and the army."[92] However, since the colonial division of privileges often creates tensions amongst colonized subjects, Fanon decries those who collude with the colonial apparatus.[93]

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[89] Ibid., 2; However, as we have observed, such mastery comes at the expense of fully embracing the master's culture and civilizations, and for Fanon this implied a distancing from native culture, values, and creole. In fact, Fanon notes that the middle class of the colonies only speak creole when speaking with servants, and Martinican students are instructed to treat the dialect with contempt, and to avoid creolisms (4). Hence, he notes that "The more the colonized has assimilated the cultural values of the metropolis, the more he will have escaped the bush" (2).

[90] Ibid., 2.

[91] Ibid., 5.

[92] Ibid., 76.

[93] In his work, *The Wretched of the Earth*, he observed that certain native elites collude with imperial forces in order to profit from the colonial set-up, thereby merging their socio-economic fortunes with those of empire. Critical of such a move, Fanon notes that this group, "Without pity…[uses] today's national distress as a means of getting on through scheming and legal robbery, by import-export combines, limited liability companies, gambling on the stock exchange, or unfair promotion" (48). In Fanon's view, these "common opportunist" and "franchised slaves" locked themselves in a symbiotic relationship with the colonial apparatus, and

Finally, in this dissertation I will also use the terms colonial situation and colonialism rather than imperialism to explore the power dynamics inscribed in both literary and epigraphic materials. Admittedly, "The dynamics of culture, knowledge, economy, religion and power in the Roman world are too distant to be approached in exactly the same way."[94] Hence, it would be misleading to think of ancient Roman *coloniae* as European colonies of the early modern period,[95] for the former were towns or "civic communities Roman citizens settled outside Italy and [were] composed mainly of military veterans."[96] However, as Stephen Moore observes, postcolonial rhetoric distinguishes between settler colonies and colonies of occupation. While in settler or invader colonies the colonizers often decimate or uproot the population, eventually becoming a minority in relation to the majority settler population, "colonies of occupation are one in which the indigenous population remains in the majority numerically, but is administered by a foreign power."[97] Clearly, as Moore also notes, Roman Asia may be the best model of colonies of occupation, since the number of

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contributed to the perpetuation of the Colonial Situation (61). For a description of the colonial elite and their complex relationship with the imperial apparatus, see Fanon's, *The Wretched of the Earth.* New York: Grove Press, 2004), 48, 61.

[94] Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John,* 17.

[95] Moore, "The Revelation of John," in *A Postcolonial Commentary*, 437.

[96] Ibid., 437; he adds that "The colonia was one of the three principal types of Roman provincial community, all of them urban; the others were the municipal (confined mainly to the Latin west, and of the lesser status than the colonia), and the city or town that was neither an official colonial nor a municipal, and as such less "Romanized" than either. The classic unit of the Roman colonization, then (in the contemporary sense of the term), was urban, and it was though an infrastructure of self-governing cities that Roman provinces were administered" (438).

[97] Ibid., 438

Roman elite officials allotted to any one province was minor in comparison to the amount of land to be administered.[98]

Furthermore, scholars such as John Marshall have suggested that the Roman empire may be understood as a colonial empire and its political project as colonialists on the basis of three factors, namely "the political, economic, cultural and discursive elements of colonialism:"[99] First, as he notes, colonization involves domination, either through military strength or mere deterrence (the threat of violence), and established asymmetrical relationship of power between the colonizer and the colonized, which ultimately alters the political landscape through the direct or indirect influence of the colonial power.[100] Second, exploitation and colonization always go hand in hand, and "The establishment of domination may entail the extraction of booty and the expropriation of land and resources. Tax and tribute may be paid in kind or in currencies. Structures of law favor the colonizers. Expropriation, tariffs, duties, levies, and other forms of exploration compound the extraction of wealth from the colony."[101] Ultimately, the rationale for my use of the terms colonial situation and colonialism lays in their

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[98] Ibid.; Moore notes that Roman culture was concentrated in the (mainly coastal) cities of the province in contrast to the rural Anatolian interior, which managed to preserve its indigenous character, conspicuous especially in its native languages and religious cultures, more or less intact until the third century C.E.

[99] John W. Marshall, Gender and Empire: Sexualized Violence in John's Anti-Imperial Apocalypse. *A Feminist Companion to the Apocalypse of John. (ed. Amy-Jill Levine.* London; New York: T & T Clark, 2009), 17-32.

[100] He notes that, "The colonized are displaced in various modes--internally, diasporically-again to the advantage of the colonizers but also to the benefit of local elites among the colonized. Politics too in colonized lands are deeply transformed either through enforced reformation or through the influence, direct or indirect, of a superordinate power" (20).

[101] Nevertheless Marshall observes that "exploitation spans a wider field than can be described with a balance sheet: it involves the restructuring and reorientation of subordinate economies and cultures"(20).

heuristic value and promise for adumbrating the function of ekklēsia rhetoric as a strategy for negotiation structures of domination.

1.4. Chapter Overview:

1.4.1 A Rhetorical Analysis of Revelation

In this chapter I explore the function of *ekklēsia* rhetoric within the overall rhetorical situation of Revelation. Whereas some scholars reconstruct the rhetorical situation as an imperial persecution under Domitian, others reconstruct it as a perceived crisis;[102] as internal power struggles within the *ekklēsiai*,[103] or as accommodation to imperial structures.[104] While instructive, these interpretations tend to reinscribe some of aforementioned methodological issues and render impervious the role of imperial power within the text. Instead, I reconstruct the rhetorical situation of Revelation as a colonial situation that both triggered and inflected the deployment of *ekklēsia* rhetoric as a strategy for negotiating power, ethnic, identity, and wealth.

1.4.2 *Ekklēsia* and *Eidōlothyta*: *Food, Power, and Civic Reciprocity*

My second chapter focuses on the polemic over *eidōlothyta* in the messages to Pergamon and Thyatira (Rev. 2:12-17). While some scholars have explored the question of participation in *eidōlothyta* as a debate over heresy, others view it as a tension between

[102] Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984), 105-106.

[103] Paul B. Duff, *Who Rides the Beast? Prophetic Rivalry and the Rhetoric of Crisis in the Churches of the Apocalypse* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 15.

[104] Leonard L. Thompson, *Revelation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 66.

the church and pagan society. Looking at notions of civic reciprocity embedded in ekklēsia rhetoric, as well as in the practice of ritual sacrifice, I will explore the ways in which the competing voices could have used *eidōlothyta* to reaffirm a relationship of reciprocity with both the polis and the empire.

1.4.3 *"The Synagogue of Satan:" Negotiating Ethnic and Civic Identities*

The third chapter explores John's polemic against the so-called "Synagogue of Satan" in the messages to Smyrna (2:8-11) and Philadelphia (3:7-13). Whereas some scholars have interpreted it as a tension between Christians and a group of hostile Jews from the local synagogue, others view it as a tension between Christians and gentile Judaizers within the *ekklēsia*. Reading the inscribed audience as Jewish communities, I explore the polemic as a negotiation of ethnic and civic identities vis-à-vis *ekklēsia rhetoric*, as well as the ways in which it was inflected by the colonial situation of Asia Minor under Rome.

1.4.4. *"I Have Grown Rich:" Wealth, Poverty, and Decolonization*

The final chapter explores questions of wealth/poverty in the messages to Smyrna (Rev. 2:8-11) and Laodikea (Rev. 3:18-17). While some scholars have explored the issue in terms of spiritual and material wealth,[105] others see wealth and poverty as markers of wickedness and righteousness respectively.[106] Looking at notions of the common good

[105] See Wilfrid J. Harrington, *Revelation,* Daniel J. Harrington, ed. Sacra Pagina 16. (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 58; Royalty, *The Streets of Heaven,* 18-19.

[106] Mark D. Mathews, *Riches, Poverty, and the Faithful: Perspectives on Wealth in the Second Temple Period and the Apocalypse of John* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 142.

embedded within *ekklēsia rhetoric*, however, I explore the issue as a negotiation of wealth that is inflected by the demise of Babylon and the rise of the New Jerusalem.

1.5 Conclusion

Scholars usually interpret the ekklēsia of Revelation as consolidated Christian churches. Similarly, they often view the various exigencies of the rhetorical situation of Revelation[107] as representative of an imperial persecution, or internal power struggles, or Christian assimilation to pagan Greco-Roman society. Conversely, I reconstruct the seven *ekklēsia*i as assemblies that used *ekklēsia* rhetoric, and its topoi of civic reciprocity, civic participation, and the common good to negotiate the socio-economic and political tensions triggered by the colonial situation of Asia Minor. Using postcolonial analysis, as well as epigraphic materials on ancient voluntary associations, I have suggested that the inscribed Jewish audience used ekklēsia rhetoric in order to negotiate the social, political, and economic structures of empire in Asia Minor.

[107] These include the polemic over *eidōlothyta* and *porneia* (2:6,14-15,20), the so-called slander of a group he frames as "Synagogue of Satan" (2:9; 3:9); and the pursuit of wealth by some *ekklēsia* members (2:17-18).

Chapter Two:

A Rhetorical Analysis of Revelation

2.1. Introduction

In order to map the function of *ekklēsia* rhetoric and its intersection with imperial power, I will conduct a critical rhetorical analysis in this chapter. Although of Patmos structured the contents of the Book of Revelation around the concerns expressed in the messages to the seven *ekklēsia* (2:1-3:22),[1] contemporary interpretations of Revelation, continue to operate with a structural dichotomy that separates the messages to the seven assemblies (2:1-3:22), from the so-called visions section (4:1-22:6-21). The author achieves such unity through the deployment of various rhetorical themes that include: the theme of power symbolized in the image of thrones;[2] the theme of faithful witnessing; and the theme of conquering.[3] In the messages section, John not only identifies various

[1] Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, "Eschatology and Composition of the Apocalypse." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (1968): 537-569; According to Schüssler-Fiorenza, John "intends not so much to give a survey of history as to present a prophetic interpretation of the situation of the Christian community from the viewpoint of the eschatological future" (561).

[2] The deployment of thrones as symbols of power should illustrate such rhetorical weaving. While in the salutation the author alludes to the throne of God (1:4), in the messages he mentions the throne of Satan (2:13), which he challenges through the promise of thrones to conquering believers (3:21). In the visions section, he not only juxtaposes the throne of God (4:1, 2, 3) with the throne of the beast (Rev. 13:2; 16:10), but also describes the fulfillment of the promise of thrones for the conquering ones (20:4). The climax of such imagery comes when the throne of God descends to earth along with the New Jerusalem (21:3).

[3] Each of these themes weaves the prologue, the messages, the visions proper, and the epilogue into a single and unique vision of apocalyptic rhetoric. The messages section (Chs. 2-3) is usually seen as historical reference in which John not only identifies various issues to do with the historical inscription of the *ekklēsiai*, such as *eidōlothyta*, poverty, and wealth, but also clearly marks the letters as the first vision cycle, since the letters are addressed to the angels of the communities.

issues that have to do with the common good of the *ekklēsia*—such as *eidōlothyta* (2:14), suffering (2:10), and wealth (3:17)— but also addresses them through the content of the so-called visions section (4:1-22:6-21). For instance, to *ekklēsia*i dealing with the question of food offered to idols or *eidōlothyta* (2:14; 20), John promises access to the hidden manna (2:17) and the fruits of the tree of life (2:7), which he then locates at the center of the New Jerusalem (22:2). This subjugation of the visions to the concerns of the *ekklēsiai* elucidates the centrality of assemblies in the entire text of Revelation.[4]

However, some scholars operate with a structural dichotomy that separates the messages to the seven *ekklēsia* (2:1-3:22) from the visions (4:1-22:6-21). Such an approach treats the former as pools of historical references, and the latter as rhetorical tropes.[5] Such approaches have led some scholars to associate the removal of the Ephesian's lampstand (2:5) with the threat posed by Kayster silts to the Ephesian port,[6] and the so-called "lukewarm stance" of the Laodikeans (3:16), with the hot springs at Laodikea.[7] While one might disagree with both the methods and resulting interpretations, such approaches raise an important question; how do the messages fit within the overall

[4] In short, this first vision cycle clearly marks the rhetorical situation which the whole Book addresses and which scholars tend then uncritically to identify as the historical rhetorical situation.

[5] Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza. *Revelation: Vision of a Just World* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), 17.

[6] Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters to The Seven Churches*, 53; Hemer adds that, "The signs could be read by the far-sighted. It was a solemn warning of prospective realities. Unless a deeper renewal and repentance in the Church led to a transformation of the community and broke the drift of event, it has to fear a reversion to the temple dominance of the Lydian and Persian times as the population progressively drifted back towards the Artemisia" (53).

[7] Roland H. Worth. *The Seven Cities of the Apocalypse and Greco-Asian Culture* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 216.

rhetorical composition of Revelation? In view of the author's strategic usage of *ekklēsia* rhetoric, then, "one must not only highight the theological themes and intention of the author, but also show how he embodied his theoology in a unique fusion of content and form."[8]

If both the inscribed author and audience deployed a form of *ekklēsia* rhetoric that prioritizes the common good of the assemblies, one should analyze its overall function within the text. By carefully analyzing the rhetorical situation inscribed in the Book, one is able to critically reconstruct the historical situation of Revelation. Asking how the messages to the *ekklēsiai* fit within the overall rhetorical composition of Revelation, may serve as a solid first step in that direction. In analyzing the rhetorical composition of the text, I will attempt to illumine the ways in which John links the messages with the overall visionary argument of Revelation. Such an analysis will also demonstrate how the visionary messages and the apocalyptic visions share in the same symbolic rhetorical universe and are part of the same apocalyptic vision. Most important, it also shows the ways in which the inscribed rhetorical situation of Revelation places the *ekklēsiai* and their concerns at the center of the text's visionary argument.

2.2 The Structural Dichotomy

[8] Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza. *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment* (2nd ed. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 159; Schüssler-Fiorenza notes that ,"Against the old dichotomy of content and form, the New Criticism maintains that the form is not a container for the content but the patterning and arrangement of it. If one changes the order of a text one changes its meaning" (159); in an earlier essay on the eschatology and composition of Revelation, Schüssler-Fiorenza explored how the author structured the arguments of the Book around the concerns expressed in the messages to the seven *ekklēsiai* (2-3), ultimately making these the focal point of his apocalyptic rhetoric. The discussion of the cited Book is an updated version of it. See "Eschatology and Composition of the Apocalypse," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (1968): 537-569.

The first methodological presupposition I summon for critique is the structural dichotomy between the messages to the seven *ekklēsia* (chs. 2-3) and the visions (ch. 22). As Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza has observed, scholars usually focus on the "seven letters" as historical sources to illumine the socio-cultural, and religious context of the text.[9] In her view, "such a historical-referential analysis tends to separate the letters as a reflection of historical reality from the apocalyptic visionary part of the Book, which is said to project visions of the future in the language of traditional Apocalypticism."[10] The deployment of such "historical-referential" analysis is particularly evident in early Revelation scholarship.

In their respective works on the "Seven Churches," Sir William Ramsay, William Barclay, and Colin J. Hemer treat the messages as pools of historical references, and so interpret several passages in relation to historical peoples, events, and/or places.[11] Ramsay, for example, links the allusion to the "Throne of Satan" in the message to the *ekklēsia* of Pergamon (2:13) with the temple of Augustus and Roma established in 27 B.C.E. and states that,

> In this Pergamene Temple, then, Satan was enthroned. The authority over the minds of its Asian subjects, possessed by the State, and arrayed against the Church, was mainly concentrated in the Temple. The history of the Church in Pergamum had been determined by its close proximity to the

[9] Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), 17.

[10] Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Revelation*, 17.

[11] Ramsay and Hemer seem to presuppose that when John sat down to write Revelation he had in mind the socio-political situation of each city, and hence that a later reader and interpreter could use the textual allusions to local settings, events, and history to unpack the significance of certain textual passages. See Steven J. Friesen, "Revelation, Realia, and Religion: Archaeology in the Interpretation of the Apocalypse," *HTR* 88, vol 3 (1995): 303; whereas Ramsay allocates two chapters to each message, one to map the historical situation and another to connect the references in the letters, Hemer selects specific items he will then use to explain the textual "references."

> seat of State opposition, 'where Satan's throne is.' Such, beyond all doubt, was the chief determining fact in prompting this remarkable expression. [12]

While Barclay does not spend much time situating each of the cities mentioned in the messages (chs. 2-3), he does re-inscribe the structural dichotomy and follows the same historical-referential analysis. For example, in his analysis of the message to Laodikea, Barclay reads the "neither hot nor cold nature" of the Laodikeans in relation to the thermal springs in adjacent Hierapolis:

> It may well be that the picture is taken from these mineral springs, and that the Risen Christ is saying: Sometimes when a man goes to drink of the medicinal spring, the tepid and all the ill-tasting water makes his gorge rise and makes him want to vomit, that is the way in which I feel about a Church that is neither hot nor cold.[13]

Although Hemer does not allocate two chapters to discussing each of the messages, as Ramsay did, he deploys the same approach.[14] In his discussion of Ephesus as a city of change, Hemer reads Jesus's threat to the Ephesian *ekklēsia* that he will remove their lampstand "from its place" (Rev. 2:5) as a reference to the city's battle against Kayster silts. In his views, "The danger was that the great harbor-city and its vigorous church would be moved back under the deadening power of the temple. If the battle against the Kayster silt were finally lost and the city were severed from its maritime commerce, the old Anatolian theocracy would rapidly reassert itself."[15] While

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[12] Ramsay, *The Letters to The Seven Churches*, ch. 21.

[13] William Barclay, The *Letters to the Seven Churches* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 289.

[14] Such a move is already enunciated in the discussion of his methodology, where he attempts to map the "character and circumstances of the cities" in order to assess "How much Jewish influence was there? What were the local relations of the Jews and 'Christians' and of both to the pagan community? What kind of allusion might the readers be expected to understand." See Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches*, 20.

[15] Furthermore, Hemer notes that, "The signs could be read by the far-sighted. It was a solemn warning of prospective realities. Unless a deeper renewal and repentance in the Church led to a

Hemer recognizes the parallels between the messages and the visions, he dismisses these as incidental, for he is interested in establishing not only "verbal" but "historical references."[16]

The aforementioned interpretations merit critique on several grounds. Steven J. Friesen has already observed the atomizing tendency of Hemer's work. In his view, Hemer's work hardly united his arbitrary use of "textual allusions" into a coherent whole, ultimately making the use of archaeological materials rather fragmented.[17] However, the main issue is that the imposition of the structural dichotomy reveals a particular understanding of Revelation's structure, and the role of the seven messages within it. While it is clear that John presents the messages as part of his visions, and that their content is addressed to angels, scholars seem vested in deriving historical content from chapters 2-3.

2.3 The Rhetorical Composition of Revelation

If the author summons the overall content and structure of Revelation to fit the concerns expressed in the visions, we should expect to see not only parallels between the messages and the letters, but an overall unified compositional structure. The author neatly interweaves the vision messages to the seven *ekklēsiai* and the issues raised within them to structure the form and content of Revelation through compositional techniques that include (1) numbers and numerical patterns; (2) overarching symbol associations reinforcing each other; (3) preannouncements and cross-references; (4) contrasting

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transformation of the community and broke the drift of event, it has to fear a reversion to the temple dominance of the Lydian and Persian times as the population progressively drifted back towards the Artemisia" (53).

[16] Hemer, *The Letters to The Seven Churches*, 16.

[17] Ibid., 306.

symbols and imagery; and (5) the technique of intercalation. Due to space constraints, here I elaborate only on points 1, 2, and 5, and turn to the others over the course of the dissertation. In terms of numerical patterns, one of the primary ways the author achieves structural unity is through the use of four septets[18] that prioritize the common good of the *ekklēsia* and address the issues the author claim it faces.

The first septet consists of the command to John to write to the *ekklēsiai* located in seven cities of Asia Minor: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamon, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodikea (2:1-3:22). I will analyze some of the messages in more detail in the following chapters of the dissertation. The messages constitute a compositional unit that can be understood only from its position in the Book as a whole. As Roloff and other scholars have observed, the content of the messages is intricately connected with the rest of Revelation. Since most of the Seven Messages follow more or less the same structural pattern, the outline below should help illumine the structural composition of the messages in general:

I. **Introduction**: The Divine Imperative
   a. The Command to Write
   b. The Prophetic-messenger formula
   c. The characterization of Jesus Christ
II. **Body/Content:** Analysis of the Situation
   a. Acknowledgement of the Situation
      1. Praise
      2. Blame
   b. Blame Incentives to Repent
      1. Promise of Christ Return
      2. Threat
III. **Conclusion:** The Call to Action
   a. The Call to Hear (2:7a)
   b. The Promises to the Victors (2:7b)

[18] Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, 39.

This outline illustrates how the author uses some of the aforementioned techniques of compositions that frame the overall text. The self-characterization of Christ is an example of the technique of cross-referencing. In the vision at Patmos (1:10-20), John describes Jesus as one who has eyes like a flame of fire οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτοῦ ὡς φλὸξ πυρὸς (1:14), which he then repeats in the message to Thyatira: "And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: These are the words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze" (2:18). Subsequently, in the vision of the rider of the white horse, John notes that his "eyes are like a flame of fire" (19:12).[19] The technique of contrasting imagery is evident in the juxtaposition between the New Jerusalem (2:9-22:1-21) and Babylon (18:1-22). While the latter is a symbol of the oppression of God's people, the former is a symbol of liberation and redemption, but is also first introduced in message to Philadelphia as a promise to those who conquer (3:12).

Here I mention the overarching concerns and issues that the various messages articulate: (1) the dwindling love and imperfect works of some of the *ekklēsiai* (2:4; 3:1-2); (2) the presence of "false apostles" and prophets who promote food offered to idols (*eidōlothyta*) and fornication (porneia) in the *ekklēsiai* (2:6,14-15,20); (3) the blasphemy/slander of a group he frames as a "Synagogue of Satan" (2:9; 3:9); and (4) the

[19] The consistency in the application of the technique is clear in that he has a sword coming out of his mouth (19:15), which he already introduced in the message to Pergamon (2:12:16), and which he first mentioned in the vision at Patmos (1:16). The technique of preannouncement neatly links the eschatological promises to the victors at the end of the messages with the final section of the Book of Revelation, which constitutes the technique of preannouncements. The reference to the tree of life in the message to Ephesus (2:7), for instance, reappears again in the vision of the New Jerusalem (chapter 21), and does so as an eschatological fulfillment of the promise for those who conquer: "Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations" (22:1-2).

pursuit of wealth by some *ekklēsia* members (2:17-18).[20] The second septet consists of Seven Seals (6:1-8:1) that are introduced in chapters 4-5 and that only the Lamb of God (5:5) can open. Their content again addresses key concerns introduced in the messages to the *ekklēsiai* , particularly in relation to the faithful witnesses who suffer on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus and call for revenge: "they cried out with a loud voice, 'Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long will it be before you judge and avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth?' "(6:9-10). Most important, the theme of dying on account of the word of God intricately links the second septet with the first septet, and does so by addressing the reality of death among certain *ekklēsia*. In the message to Pergamon, for instance, the author mentioned the murder of Antipas, and praises him as ὁ μάρτυς μου ὁ πιστός μου (2:13). In doing so, he also links the Second and First Septet with the self-descriptions as a faithful witness (1:5). In other words, all faithful witnesses ultimately trace their lineage to Christ, since he is the "first born of the dead" (1:5).

The third septet consists of the Seven Trumpet visions (8:2-11:19) that have to do with various natural disasters and portents against the inhabitants of the earth. Through these the wrath of God is unleashed against the worshippers of the beast and those bearing its mark (9:4). The first four trumpets include hail, fire, and blood, and darkness upon the earth. The fifth trumpet releases demonic locusts that torture the followers of the beast (9:1-12), while the sixth trumpet releases plagues symbolized by hybrid horses that kill a third of humanity. The author links first, second, and third septets by juxtaposing

[20] These messages also include promises to conquering believers that link the first septet with multiple sections of Revelation, including the visions of the New Jerusalem, where several of the promises receive their fulfillment.

the faithful followers of the lamb (who are killed because of the word of God) with the unrepentant idolaters, who survive the plagues and still refuse to repent (9:20-21). The author also links the third and first septet through the theme of repentance and idolatry by associating the unrepentant idolaters in the third septet with Jezebel in the first septet, in so far as she also refuses to repent: "I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her fornication" (2:21). Indeed through the third septet, he further shows what will happen to the unrepentant members of the *ekklēsia* and in particular to the followers of the competing voices within it.

The fourth septet unleashes the last Seven Plagues (15:1-16:21), which complete the wrath of God. The first bowl releases painful sores against those who bear the mark of the beast and those who worship its image (16:1), while the second bowl is thrown into the sea and kills all living things within it. The third bowl turns rivers and spring into blood (16:4). The third angel explains that turning the sea and the rivers and springs into blood is a rather bloody vengeance against the followers of the beast, "because they shed the blood of saints and prophets, you have given them blood to drink. It is what they deserve! (16:6). Such septet connects the third, the second, and the first through the theme of death of the faithful witnesses, and directly relates to issues raised in the *ekklēsia* of Pergamon and Smyrna. That the altar responds in affirmation of the judgments of God (16:7) after the pouring of the third bowl suggests that the cry requesting vengeance in the second septet has been answered. The fourth and fifth bowls unleash scorching heat from the sun as well as darkness along with painful sores. In both instances, the followers of the beast do not repent but blaspheme God (16:9; 10, 11). As I will show in chapter three, the author also uses the word βλασφημία (2:9; 3:9), which I

do not translate as "slander" (this presupposes the tensions between Jews and Christians) but as "blasphemy," to link the so-called Synagogue of Satan with the beast described in chapter 13. Not only does the beast bear blasphemous names, it also blasphemes God:

> The beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months. It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven.[21]

The connection between those who are engaged in blaspheming with the beast becomes all the more clear in John's depictions of the idolaters who, despite the plagues, refuse to repent and instead blaspheme God multiple times. According to John, "The fierce heat scorched them, but they blasphemed (ἐβλασφήμησαν) the name of God, who had authority over these plagues, and they did not repent and give him glory" (16:9).[22] The NRSV translation of the term as "slander" separates the blaspheming of the "Synagogue of Satan," from the blaspheming of Satan and its followers, and seems to presuppose the parting of the ways, and promotes an isolationist view of Judaism in the diaspora of Asia Minor.

The bowl of the sixth angel releases demonic spirits in the shape of frogs who gather the kings of the nation to fight against the Lamb (16:13,14). The seventh and final bowl causes an earthquake that splits the imperial matrix in three parts (16:19), and releases a plague of hail "each weighing a hundred pounds," that also causes the followers of the Beast to blaspheme God (16:21). In this manner, the author links the last three septets to the concerns he raises around the common good of the ekklēsiai in the

[21] Καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ στόμα λαλοῦν μεγάλα καὶ βλασφημίας καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ ἐξουσία ποιῆσαι μῆνας τεσσεράκοντα [καὶ] δύο. καὶ ἤνοιξεν τὸ στόμα αὐτοῦ εἰς βλασφημίας πρὸς τὸν θεὸν βλασφημῆσαι τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ καὶ τὴν σκηνὴν αὐτοῦ, τοὺς ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ σκηνοῦντας[21]

[22] καὶ ἐκαυματίσθησαν οἱ ἄνθρωποι καῦμα μέγα καὶ ἐβλασφήμησαν τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἔχοντος τὴν ἐξουσίαν ἐπὶ τὰς πληγὰς ταύτας καὶ οὐ μετενόησαν δοῦναι αὐτῷ δόξαν

first vision series. Yet, the numerical pattern is just one form through which the author makes rhetorical connections in Revelation. He also does so through major associations of symbols of power such as thrones with the Lamb and the Beast.

In terms of associations through symbols of power, the deployment of throne imagery serves as another unifying theme. Indeed, Revelation's rhetoric alludes more to "thrones as symbols of power" than any other New Testament text (e.g. Rev 1:4; 3:21 (2); 4:2 (2), 3, 4 (3), 5 (2), 6 (3), 9, 10 (2); 5:1, 6, 7, 11, 13; 6:16; 7:9, 10, 11 (2), 15 (2), 17; 8:3; 11:16; 12:5; 13:2; 14:3; 16:10, 17; 19:4, 5; 20:4, 11, 12; 21:3, 5; 22:1, 3). Such rhetoric of power permeates the text and challenges Roman imperial power. This rhetoric of power symbolized by "imperial thrones" is set up through an indirect reference (vis-à-vis the Seven Spirits) to the throne of the God (1:4),[23] which seems to be contrasted with the throne of Satan (2:13) and the Beast (13:2; 16:10).[24] The author then contrasts such references through the promise of thrones to conquering believers: "To the one who conquers I will give a place with me on my throne, just as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne" (3:21).[25]

However, what legitimate such promises are the author's vision of the "Throne of God" (4:1,2,3) and its heavenly court of elders who also have their own thrones (4:4). In the vision of the great white throne, John also sees faithful witnesses clothed in white

[23] Ἰωάννης ταῖς ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαις ταῖς ἐν τῇ Ἀσίᾳ· χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν ἑπτὰ πνευμάτων ἃ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου αὐτοῦ; Mounce notes that, «Although only a conjecture, it woul seem that «the seven spirits before [God's throe» are bes t understood a part of the heavenly entourage that has a special ministy in connection with the Lamb; See Mounc, *The Book of Revelation*, 48.

[24] J.D. Charles "Imperial Pretensions and the Throne-Vision of the Lamb: Observations on the Function of Revelation 5." *CTR* 7 (1993): 85-97; Norman R, Gulley, "Revelation's Throne Scenes." *JATS* (1997): 28-39

[25] Ὁ νικῶν δώσω αὐτῷ καθίσαι μετ' ἐμοῦ ἐν τῷ θρόνῳ μου, ὡς κἀγὼ ἐνίκησα καὶ ἐκάθισα μετὰ τοῦ πατρός μου ἐν τῷ θρόνῳ αὐτοῦ.

(7:9), and this would include Antipas of Pergamon to whom the author refers as "ὁ μάρτυς μου ὁ πιστός μου," and who was killed in Pergamon (2:13). In the next chapter, I will explore the ways in which the rhetoric of thrones is deployed in the broader context of the assemblies' political situation, and the ways they relate to Roman imperial power. Underscoring the concerns of the community, the author identified an altar before the throne of God, where an angel offers the prayers of the faithful (8:3). Subsequently, the author reintroduces the throne of Satan/Dragon/Devil/Ancient Serpent, who, as a parody of God's sharing of his throne and authority with the Lamb, gives his power, throne, and authority to the beast (13:2):

> And the beast that I saw was like a leopard, its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And the dragon gave it his power and his throne and great authority (13:2).

Just like Jesus and faithful witnesses (3:21) share the throne of God and will exercise authority to rule the nations, the Beast received power, authority, and the throne of the Dragon.[26] However, the beast's empire and throne do not have the power to withstand the judgment of God, and plunge into darkness when an angel releases a bowl (16:10); at the end of the plagues only the throne of God remains (16:10). Hence, God receives worship from the 24 elders (19:4), and the eschatological promises to the conquering ones are at last fulfilled as they receive thrones and reign with the Lamb:

> Then I saw thrones, and those seated on them were given authority to judge. I also saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years (20:4).[27]

[26] Steven J. Friesen "Satan's Throne, Imperial Cults and the Social Settings of Revelation."(2005)

[27] Καὶ εἶδον θρόνους καὶ ἐκάθισαν ἐπ᾽ αὐτοὺς καὶ κρίμα ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς, καὶ τὰς ψυχὰς τῶν πεπελεκισμένων διὰ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ καὶ διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ οἵτινες οὐ

Yet, the climax of what I term the "throne rhetoric" comes when the throne of God descends to earth, thereby replacing the throne of Satan in a rather complete way (21:3). The throne will not be located in heaven but on earth, the New Jerusalem. In contrast to the "throne of Satan" that oppresses the nations, the throne of God is associated with "the river of life" that nurtures the tree of life, whose leaves are intended for the healing of the nations (21:2). This rhetoric of thrones stresses that the New Earth/Jerusalem is the place where the throne of God, the Lamb, and their followers (22:3) experience the abundance and wellbeing of God's empire.[28] The patterning and numerical structure of seven, along with symbolic associations, contribute to the unity of the text, and intimate that the text does not follow a direct forward movement.

2.4. The Symbolic Universe of Revelation

The rhetoric of Revelation works with symbols and images rather than with simple arguments. Through the deployment of a symbolic universe that draws from both Jewish and Greco-Roman traditions, John not only underscores the overall rhetorical unity of the text, but also seeks to persuade the ekklēsiai to adopt his non-compromising position. His intricate reworking of Hebrew traditions and symbols, suggests not only that the audience could understand them, but also the stakes for both him and the audience are high.

2.4.1 Jewish Traditions

προσεκύνησαν τὸ θηρίον οὐδὲ τὴν εἰκόνα αὐτοῦ καὶ οὐκ ἔλαβον τὸ χάραγμα ἐπὶ τὸ μέτωπον καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν χεῖρα αὐτῶν. καὶ ἔζησαν καὶ ἐβασίλευσαν μετὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ χίλια ἔτη.[27]

[28] Russell S. Morton, *One Upon the Throne and the Lamb : A Tradition Historical.* New York: Peter Lang, 2007).

The notion of a liberating messiah is a major concept John draws from Jewish tradition (a trait he shared with other Jewish apocalypses and Qumran documents). While some understand Jewish Messianism as way to describe ideas about the appearance of a future agent of divine deliverance,[29] others see it as the expectation of a Davidic King, of an ideal priest, or an eschatological prophet.[30] The reference to a Davidic messiah, the temple, and angels indicates that his rhetoric is shaped by a deep knowledge of Jewish tradition and the symbolism of the Hebrew Bible. Yet, as Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza points out, John "never quotes or exegetes the Hebrew Bible or any of his other sources; rather he uses them as "language" and "imagery."[31]

The rhetoric of Revelation pictures Jesus as the one who "freed us from our sins by his blood" (1:5); has the key of David (3:7), and is the Lion of the Tribe of Judah who has conquered (5:5), and "through his blood has ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation" (5:9). The warring nature of the Davidic messiah and his double-edged sword neatly links the introductory vision (1:16), with the threat of war against the Balaamites (2:12), and its fulfillment in the eschatological battle (19:11-15). Such a warrior motif derives directly from the Hebrew Bible (Isaiah, 11; Ps. 2).[32] In the epilogue, John has Jesus embrace such a Davidic messianic understanding: "It is I, Jesus, who sent my angel to you with this testimony for the church. I am the root

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[29] George W E. Nickelsburg, *Ancient Judaism and Christian Origins: Diversity, Continuity, and Transformation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 130.

[30] For the complexities and ambiguities in the usage of the term Messiah, see John J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature.* New York: Doubleday, 1995), 16-20.

[31] Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, 29.

[32] For a solid discussion of the Davidic messiah in Revelation see Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge, UK and New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 66-73.

and the descendant of David, the bright morning star" (22:16). Such notions of the Davidic messiah are also present in Qumran, particularly Pesher of Isaiah, where the Branch of David or Prince of the Congregation appears also to play a role in the eschatological war against the kittim.[33]

Another major symbol unifying the structure of Revelation in general and the message and the visions series in particular is the rhetoric of the New Jerusalem, with or without a temple. In 21:9-27, John evokes a majestic vision of the city: "And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (21:2). This city not only *has* "the glory of God," (21:11), but God and the Lamb *will be* the temple itself. Most important, the city is the ultimate place for the faithful witnesses of the *ekklēsiai* who reject food offered to idols, and who keep the word of God and the testimony of Jesus:

> If you conquer, I will make you a pillar in the temple of my God; you will never go out of it. I will write on you the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem that comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name (3:12).[34]

Thus the rhetoric of the "New Jerusalem" is not only a promise to those who conquer the beast but also a threat that it will not be accessible to fornicators, adulterers, cowards, and idolaters (21:8).[35] The overall centrality of the city in the rhetoric, as David Frankfurter

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[33] John J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: Messianism in light of The Dead Sea Scrolls* (62-64).

[34] Ὁ νικῶν ποιήσω αὐτὸν στῦλον ἐν τῷ ναῷ τοῦ θεοῦ μου καὶ ἔξω οὐ μὴ ἐξέλθῃ ἔτι καὶ γράψω ἐπ᾽ αὐτὸν τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ θεοῦ μου καὶ τὸ ὄνομα τῆς πόλεως τοῦ θεοῦ μου, τῆς καινῆς Ἰερουσαλὴμ ἡ καταβαίνουσα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ μου, καὶ τὸ ὄνομά μου τὸ καινόν. Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις[34]

[35] "But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, the murderers, the fornicators, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all liars, their place will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death" (21:8).

notes, illuminates the "abiding value of these themes for Jews outside Judea and Galilee."[36]

A third component of the symbolic universe through which John's text achieves structural unity is the rhetoric of angeology, which is derived directly from the Hebrew Bible and is also pervasive in Jewish apocalyptic tradition. As in other apocalyptic texts, an *angelus interpres* mediates the Revelation to John (1:1). This rhetoric also speaks of angels who unleash the plagues (16:5), as well as of angels who serve as messengers, and as "mediators of the dramatic unfolding"[37] of the events in Revelation.

This rhetoric also pictures John as at times so overwhelmed or overawed by the *angelus interpres* that he wants to pay homage to the angel. However, the angel stops him: "but he said to me, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your comrades the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this Book. Worship God!" (22:9). The rhetoric of angels thus functions as rhetoric of constraint. The pervasiveness of angels in the messages remind the careful reader that the messages are part of the overall rhetorical configuration of the text and of the overall apocalyptic vision. As Christopher Frilingos points out, Revelation "shared with contemporaneous texts and

[36] David Frankfurter, "The Revelation to John" in *The Jewish Annotated New Testament* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 465; like 4 Ezra, Revelation appears to address the destruction of the holy city regarding how to proceed without the temple; while scholars such as R.H. Charles noted that the Law is not mentioned in Revelation, he neglects to point out that a central feature of John's notion of peoplehood is a reference to those who keep the commandments of God (Rev. 12: 17; 14:12). John's halakic concern also emerges in his warning that "nothing unclean shall enter the city" (21:27). Throughout Revelation, the author is also invested in ritual purity: "Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they will have the right to the tree of life and may enter the city by the gates" (22:14).

[37] Wilfrid J. Harrington, *Revelation*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington. Sacra Pagina 16 (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 29.

institutions specific techniques for defining world and self."[38] In short, since the rhetoric of Revelation locates its audience and John not in Palestine but in the diaspora of Asia Minor, we should expect his rhetoric to interact with his social, cultural, political, religious, and economic milieu, and to see such interactions inscribed in his text.

2.4.2 Greco-Roman Traditions

Scholars of Revelation have long established John's interaction with multiple cultural, social, and political traditions of the Greco-Roman world, but have not been as attentive to Greek democratic traditions. Understood as historically and culturally grounded, the rhetoric of Revelation uses such traditions to express and illumine its arguments. The allusion to Greco-Roman mythology is well attested and has become commonplace in the interpretation of Revelation. The image of the one like a human son who holds the "keys of Death and Hades" (1:18b) evokes the image of the goddess Hecate, a major mythological figure in the Hellenistic world, who was thought to hold the keys to the gates of Hades circulated widely during the Roman imperial period.[39]

Furthermore, the myth of the queen of heaven, which was so prevalent in Babylonia, Egypt, Greece, and Asia Minor includes rhetorical elements, such as the goddess with the divine child, the great red dragon and his enmity to mother and child, and their protection, that are clearly incorporated in Revelation 12. The oldest temple of Roma is found in Smyrna and her child was celebrated as the "world's savior" and as the sun god Apollo. Using texts such as Phlegon's Book *of Marvels*, whose rhetoric enabled a Greco-Roman audience to "see" exotic animals and distant places, Frilingos observes

[38] Christopher A. Frilingos, *Spectacles of Empire: Monsters, Martyrs, and the Book of Revelation* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 5.

[39] Ibid., 29.

that "just as crowds in Rome and Phlegon's audience gathered around the embalmed hippocentaur," so too John transports his audience along into the wilderness to see the woman riding the beast (17:6).[40] Such rhetoric invites us to see that Roman spectacles, with their beast hunts, gladiatorial combats, and public executions, not only pervaded urban life in Asia Minor, but also communicated Roman domination of the *oikoumenē*.[41]

As we have seen, the rhetoric of Revelation uses the throne as a symbol of power. Revelation's rhetoric also alludes to symbols of imperial power and its language also uses Greco-Roman mythology as a resource. Emperors were often associated with or portrayed in the garb of Greco-Roman deities as a way to communicate imperial ideologies. The various displays of Augustus in the likeness of Greco-Roman deities, for instance, became a form of "visual language" deployed in the broader social context that certainly altered the perspective of the viewer.[42] Certain representations of Augustus or Octavian, for instance, cast him as the god Neptune, riding the waves. He appears being pulled by four hippos, while the head of Sextus Pompey sinks under their hooves.[43] A clear allusion to his victory at Actium and invocation of Greco-Roman mythology is also evident in the coin described below, where Octavian appears again in Neptune-like fashion. As Zanker notes, "the imagery of the imperial mythology could, through symbolic adaptation, be employed to convey a range of civic virtues and values."[44] Since the compact, pyramidal structure of Roman society was entirely oriented towards its

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[40] Frilingos, *Spectacles of Empire*, 59.

[41] Ibid., 16

[42] Paul Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990), 3.

[43] Ibid., 3.

[44] Ibid., 365.

apex, the image of the emperor easily became the model for every individual."[45] Such displays of Roman power also informed the cult of the Sebastoi which proliferated throughout the Roman Empire and flourished in Asia Minor. There, emperors were represented as Greco-Roman deities and received sacrifices and offerings.

The pervasiveness of the imperial cult, scholars argue, would also have shaped the rhetoric of the author, the audience, and the text of Revelation. In chapter 13, for instance, the author alludes to the worship of the beast, its blasphemous titles and power, and the violence it deploys against those who refuse to worship it. Furthermore, John locates his audience in cities under Roman domination, three of which had aggressively vied with each other for imperial favors and the right to become temple wardens.[46] While the first provincial cult to Augustus and Roma was established in Pergamon in 27 C.E., Ephesus and Smyrna soon followed with their own requests, and made various types of arguments to secure a *neokorate* status. As Steven J. Friesen observed, "The cult reflected a desire to maintain continuity with religious practices of the Republican period while promoting allegiance to Augustus and his adoptive father Julius Caesar."[47] While the cult of Pergamon served as precedent for the granting of a *neokorate* status to Smyrna, the imperial cult at Smyrna had Tiberius as its central figure.[48] However, scholars have not been as attentive to the ways in which the rhetoric of Revelation interacts with democratic traditions circulating in the cities mentioned in the text.

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[45] Zanker, *The Power of Images*, 365.

[46] Steven J. Friesen, *Twice Neokoros: Ephesus, Asia, and the Cult of the Flavian Imperial Family* (Leiden and New York: Brill, 1993), 14.

[47] Friesen, *Twice Neokoros*, 14.

[48] Ibid., 16.

Another major source of John's symbolic universe is the use of *ekklēsia* rhetoric, which Anna C. Miller has defined as a rhetoric rooted in Greek democratic ideals of equality, communal discernment, and citizen participation, and leadership.[49] Although some scholars have held that the democratic *ekklēsia*, and its civic character had mostly disappeared from the scene in the Roman imperial period, Miller's exploration of literary references in the works of Dio, or Plutarch, for instance, indicate that such democratic rhetoric was still common in the Roman imperial period.[50] One of the ways in which *ekklēsiai* rhetoric managed to survive and finds its way to the Greek east was through Greek *paideia* and constitutive handbooks, such as Theon's *Progymnasmata*, which discusses the works of Thucydides,[51] Lysias,[52] and Isocrates, as well as of Demosthenes.[53]

Demosthenes' *On the Crown, False Legation and the Second Olynthiac* underscore crucial elements of *ekklēsia* rhetoric that might have been part of, or have contributed to Revelation's rhetoric and symbolic universe. Such elements would include a concern about the common good, civic participation, equality, and the protection of the rights of the poor. For instance, Demosthenes describes ideal speakers as those who always prioritize the interests and common good of the *ekklēsia* above all else, and as those who must be willing to suffer for their loyalty to the polis, as he himself had suffered (*On the Crown*, 8.278; 321, 322). He also underscores his own championing of

[49] Anna Criscinda Miller, "*Ekklēsia*: 1 Corinthians in the Context of Ancient Democratic Discourse" (Ph.D. diss, Harvard University, 2008), iv.

[50] Ibid., iv.

[51] Thuc. 2.37.

[52] Lys. 2; Theon, Progymnasmata, 68.

[53] Dem. 21.124-127.

equality within the *ekklēsia* by upholding the rights of the poor during the war with Philip of Macedon. He passed a motion that obligated the wealthy to carry their share of the financial burden and to support the navy, thereby resolving the concerns raised by the poor, whose resources had already been allocated to such enterprises (18.102). Most importantly, in the *Second Olynthiac*, Demosthenes argues that the *ekklēsia* has the obligation to honor the right of every citizen to address the *ekklēsia* (2.30). Elements of such ideals are also evident in the works of Philo and Josephus, who might have shared various elements of John's symbolic universe.

Furthermore, as Miller has observed, "These speeches all incorporate significant consideration of the relationship between speaker and audience, and in addition, provide insight into the process and debates of the assembly." Such understanding of *ekklēsia* rhetoric, in turn, enables us to read the inscribed competing voices in the seven *ekklēsia* of Revelation. This promotes the understanding of the inscribed arguments of Revelation not just as theological debates over orthodoxy and heresy, but also as civic debates about *ekklēsia* participation, and equality.

2.5 The Rhetorical Situation of Revelation

The inscribed author of the Book of Revelation describes himself as John. Unlike the authors of other Jewish apocalypses, John is not interested in pseudonimity to legitimate his authority. John simply describes himself as a slave of God (1:1), who testifies about the word of God and the testimony of Jesus (1:2). By introducing himself in the third person through the phrase "his slave John," the author follows the rhetorical practice of Jeremiah, Amos, and 1 Enoch, but also indicates that the term δοῦλος is

synonymous with prophet. He not only refers to his work as τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας (1:3), but also conflates the terms when he alludes to prophets as servants of God: τοὺς ἑαυτοῦ δούλους τοὺς προφήτας (10:17; 11:8). Such self-understanding is also evident in the denunciation of those who shed the blood of the prophets (16:16; 18:20; 18:24), and in the assertion that John is a fellow servant with angels (22:9).

While John uses the term δουλος to connect with other recipients of divine Revelation, he uses the terms μαρτυρία and μαρτυρέω to connect with the rest of the faithful in the *ekklēsiai*. He testifies about the word of God and testimony of Jesus (1:1). Such rhetoric of self representation seeks to align John with paradigmatic *ekklēsia* members such as Antipas, to whom Jesus refers as ὁ μάρτυς μου ὁ πιστός μου (2:13) with the souls under the altar who were killed because of λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ διὰ τὴν μαρτυρίαν ἣν εἶχον (6:9), who conquer the Dragon through the blood of the Lamb and the faithful witness (12:11), and ultimately reign with Christ (20:4). That John intends to make such connection is evident in the introductory verse to his vision of Christ:

> I, John, your brother who shares with you in Jesus the persecution and the kingdom and the patient endurance, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus (1:9).[54]

Finally, the author claims to be the recipient of a divine revelation and of a prophetic commissioning of sorts in so far as he is commanded to write what he sees and send it to the seven *ekklēsia* of Asia Minor (1:11).

In both the prologue and the vision at Patmos, John addresses Revelation to a group of seven *ekklēsiai* in Asia (1:4), and then more directly to the angels of the seven

[54] Ἐγὼ Ἰωάννης, ὁ ἀδελφὸς ὑμῶν καὶ συγκοινωνὸς ἐν τῇ θλίψει καὶ βασιλείᾳ καὶ ὑπομονῇ ἐν Ἰησοῦ, ἐγενόμην ἐν τῇ νήσῳ τῇ καλουμένῃ Πάτμῳ διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ.

ekklēsiai: Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodikea (1:11). Although the prologue of Revelation is stylized in the Pauline letter form, it does not follow that the messages to the seven assemblies are independent letters, nor a subsequent collection of originally independent letters to individual "churches" as some have argued.[55]

Together the messages characterize the rhetorical situation of Revelation, and provide an overall picture of the *ekklēsiai* (not church) in Asia Minor. The author provides scant information about the communities themselves and centers his messages on a critical prophetic evaluation of their works. Both the assembly of Smyrna and Philadelphia receive nothing but praise and are encouraged in view of their dire circumstance. Both seem to be struggling economically; John describes Smyrna as poor and Philadelphia as having little power.

However, not everybody seems to be suffering or facing potential death and imprisonment. John mentions a group that claims to be Jews, but who he says are not; he refers to them as "a Synagogue of Satan." Such a group seems also have been a part of the *ekklēsia*, but was following a different practice that John felt compromised or divested them from their Jewishness. The assembly of Ephesus and Sardis seems to be languishing in their works, and receive minor reprimands. While the former has abandoned its love (2:3), the latter seems to have "a name of being alive," but is actually "dead" (3:1), so both are called to repentance (2:5; 3:3). In contrast to these groups that receive praise and mild corrections, the assemblies of Pergamon, Thyatira, and Laodikea

[55] Jürgen Roloff, *A Continental Commentary: The Revelation of John* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 41; Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting.* (JSNTS:11. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986).

receive very harsh correction. While they receive some commendation for not denying the name of Jesus (2:13), for their faithful service, and their consistent resistance (2:19), they are sharply reprimanded for allowing a group of teachers, Balaamites and Jezebel, to promote the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Such teaching involves a partaking in *eidōlothyta* and porneia.

How does John seek to address such a situation? Using his vision at Patmos to establish his prophetic authority, he proceeds to address the situation in two ways. On the one hand, he vilifies the competing voices within the *ekklēsia*, those who are promoting the teaching of the Nicolaitans, and links them with Babylon, the Beast, and Satan. On the other hand, he also issues a series of promises to *ekklēsia* members who do not embrace such teaching. In the message to the *ekklēsia* of Ephesus, John praises the Ephesians for testing those who claimed to be apostles, but who he claims are not (2:2). It seems, too, that such apostles are false because they embraced the teaching of the Nicolaitans, and John celebrates that they have rejected both (2:6). However, one does not know exactly why John casts the false apostles as such. In the messages to Smyrna and Philadelphia, the author lambasts a group, who claim to be Jews, but whom he insists are not, and refers to them as "a synagogue of Satan" (2:9; 3:9). As with the false apostles of Ephesus, John does not really provide clues about what makes them false, but simply alludes to their blasphemy (βλασφημία). Hence, the only two clues John gives for vituperating his opponents as false Jews and apostles are the teaching of the Nicolaitans and the blasphemy of those claiming to be Jews. It is in the message to Pergamon and Thyatira that John discloses what the teaching of the Nicolaitans entails, and how the false Jews behave. He lambasts a group as followers of Balaam, because, in his view,

they are putting a "stumbling block" before the people of Israel by promoting *eidōlothyta* and porneia. Subsequently, the author ties such practice to the teaching of Nicolaitans. He also polemicizes against a woman prophetess in Thyatira and her followers by referring to her as Jezebel, and insists she also promotes *eidōlothyta* and porneia. Like "the synagogue of Satan," these competing leaders are also denied Jewish ethnicity and cast as ignominious figures in the history of Israel.

Through the accusation of *porneia* leveled against the "Balaamites" of Pergamon and the Jezebel of Thyatira, the author directly links these characters with Babylon, "with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and with the wine of whose fornication the inhabitants of the earth have become drunk" (17:32).[56] The political and economic dimension of such fornication are clear in the author's allusion to the kings and merchants who fornicate with Babylon (18:3) and grow rich as a result. But *eidōlothyta* and *porneia* also in no uncertain terms links participants with Satan or the Dragon/Satan/Ancient Serpent. While the Balaamites are associated with the throne of Satan, and Jezebel is accused of teaching the deep things of Satan, those who claim to be "false Jews" are referred to as "the Synagogue of Satan."[57] In this manner, the congregation of Satan, the Balaamites living in the place where Satan has its throne, and Jezebel and her children who teach the deep thing of Satan are no longer part of the people of God.

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[56] Duff, Paul. *Wolves in Sheep's Clothing: Literary Opposition and Social Tension in the Revelation of John in Reading the Book of Revelation: A Resource for Students* (ed. David Barr. Leuven: Brill, 2004), 76.

[57] David Frankfurter, "Jews or Not? Reconstructing the "Other" in Rev 2:9 and 3:9." *HTR* 94 (2001): 403-425.

Finally, the author also addresses the situation by issuing a series of promises to the assemblies, which directly link these with the overall text. These promises directly or indirectly address the problems John sees reflected in each of the *ekklēsia* but considers them as a group. The promises to the conquering ones include: (1) permission to eat from the tree of life (2:7); (2) immunity against the Second Death (2:11); (3) hidden manna and a new name; authority over the nations and "the morning star" (2:26-27);[58] (4) white robes, a place in the Book of life, and confession of one's name before God and his angels (3:5); and (5) becoming a pillar in the temple of God, as well as getting the name God written on them, the New Jerusalem, and Jesus' new name (2:12); (6) and sharing Jesus throne (3:21).

The author uses the verb to be victorious (νικάω), which occurs at least eight times in the messages (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21) to link the conquering activity of the faithful witnesses within the assembly with the overall conquering activity of the Lamb (5:5; 17:14) and faithful witnesses in the rest of Revelation (12:11).[59] Furthermore, he also juxtaposes such conquering activity with the conquering activity of the Beast (11:7; 13:7) and its followers. This includes those who promote the teaching of the Nicolaitans (2:6; 2:15), as well as those bear the mark of the beast. While John suggests that the conquering witnesses of the *ekklēsia* will have access to the New Jerusalem, he suggests that conquered followers of the beast will not only be excluded but will also share its fate in the lake of fire: "But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, the murderers, the

[58] Mounce, Robert H. *The Book of Revelation. NICONT.* Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1998),82.

[59] Matthijs den Dulk, "The Promises of the Conquerors in the Book of Revelation." *Biblica* 87 (2006): 516-522; Oliver Nwachukwu. *Beyond Vengeance and Protest: A Reflection on the Macarisms in Revelation.* New York: Peter Lang, 2005.

fornicators, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all liars, their place will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death" (21:8). But what about the voice of the audience? To whom did they address the problems John identified? Did they even see these as a problem? The following chapters will seek to address such questions.

2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored the rhetorical composition and unity of Revelation as a whole. At the core of structural dichotomies that lead scholars to view the messages as pools of historical references and the visions as rhetorical tropes, or to relegate the discussion of imperial cults to the visions section, are the questions of Revelation's structural composition and the role of the seven messages within it. However, as my exploration has shown, the author organizes his material around the concerns of the community of faithful witnesses. Hence, one may be justified in presupposing a clear connection between the purpose and composition of Revelation. In the chapters that follow, I not only reconstruct the silenced competing voices, but also show how they and the author use *ekklēsia* rhetoric to address the situation of domination under Rome and the ways it triggered and inflected various issues within the *ekklēsia*.

Chapter Three

Ekklēsia and *Eidōlothyta*: Food, Power, and Civic Reciprocity

3.1. Introduction

The audience of Revelation seems to have an understanding of the *ekklēsia* as a democratic assembly of citizens, an idea rooted in the tradition of the Greek polis. Such an understanding not only underscores civic participation, equality, and freedom, but also serves as a site for the resolution of various socio-economic and political tensions. One such major source of tension for the *ekklēsiai* , as I argued, is how best to respond to the colonial situation of the seven cities of Asia Minor under Babylon/Rome. At stake in such a question is the common good of the *ekklēsiai* and John himself appears to share at least this concern with some of the competing voices. Because such leaders seem already to have persuaded some of the *ekklēsiai* to negotiate rather to than resist the Roman colonial situation, John appeals to the assemblies' self-understanding as *ekklēsiai* to gain a hearing (they are obliged to grant him one), and to convince them that such a decision has deleterious consequences on issues of wealth, ethnic identity, and authority.

While in the next two chapters I explore how both John and other *ekklēsia* leaders attempted to resolve tensions over ethnic identity and wealth, and the ways the colonial situation impinged upon their respective approaches, in this chapter I will focus my exploration on the question of authority/power in the messages to Pergamon, Thyatira, and Ephesus. In these messages, John praises or blames these assemblies for accepting or rejecting the teaching of the Nicolaitans, which he understands to involve participation of

food offered to idols (*eidōlothyta*) and fornication (porneia).[1] The issue is so crucial that John's proxy Jesus threatens to kill unrepentant members of the *ekklēsia* of Pergamon (2:12,16),[2] and to kill the followers of Jezebel: καὶ τὰ τέκνα αὐτῆς ἀποκτενῶ ἐν θανάτῳ (2:23).

However, scholars usually cast the teaching of the Nicolaitans (*eidōlothyta* and porneia) in normative terms[3] as representative of tensions between Orthodox Christianity and heretic Christians. Hence, they view the question of *eidōlothyta* as either a compromise church leaders made with pagan society,[4] as a case of internal polemics,[5] or as an example of assimilation into Greco-Roman culture.[6] Although such reconstructions of the rhetorical situation of Revelation are not without their merits, they continue to tie the teaching of Nicolaitans to the patristic portrait of Nicolaus. Such readings not only paint John as a Christian anti-imperial hero, but also cast the polemic about *eidōlothyta* and *porneia* as a debate to do with heresy and orthodoxy. In this manner, they reinscribe

[1] While John praises the *ekklēsia* of Ephesus for rejecting the teaching of the Nicolaitans, he blames both the *ekklēsia* of Pergamon and Thyatira for accepting leaders who not only endorse it but also promote it (2:14-15).

[2] In the overall context of Revelation, participation in *eidōlothyta* can turn such members into worshippers of the Beast (13:8), who fornicate with Babylon (17:2,15), fight alonside the Beast (19:19), and are killed by the sword from Jesus' mouth (19:19). On the other hand, resistance to it turns them into conquering followers of the Lamb (14:1-5) who hold the testimony of Jesus (12:17), and inherit the New Jerusalem (21:7), but who are also persecuted and killed by the Beast (13:15).

[3] Jürgen Roloff, *The Revelation of John: A Continental Commentary* (Fortress Press, 1993), 44.

[4] According to Robert H. Mounce, such a "compromise violated the requirements of the apostolic decree in which Gentiles entering the fellowship should abstain from "food sacrificed to idols…and from sexual immorality" (See Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 71).

[5] Paul B. Duff, "The Synagogue of Satan: Crisis Mongering and the Apocalypse of John," in *The Reality of Apocalypse: Rhetoric and Politics in the Book of Revelation*, ed. David Barr (Boston: Brill, 2006), 164.

[6] Leonard L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 123.

the silencing of the alternative voices within the *ekklēsia* and obfuscate the broader critique of imperial power.[7]

So how would our understanding of the tension over the teaching of the Nicolaitans (*eidōlothyta* and *porneia*) between John and his interlocutors (Balaamites and Jezabel) change if we read it as a locus for the negotiation of imperial power? In order to illumine the function of *ekklēsia* rhetoric and the ways it was inflected by the colonial situation of Revelation, I will (1) situate the exegencies of these *ekklēsiai* within the broader colonial situation of Revelation; (2) reconstruct how the competing voices within the *ekklēsia* could have associated with the civic structures using epigraphic materials on ancient voluntary associations. Finally, (3) I will explore the rhetorical strategies John devises in order to persuade the *ekklēsiai* to adopt his anti-imperial position.

Subsequently, I will suggest that, in the colonial situation of Revelation, the *ekklēsiai* debate over *eidōlothyta* becomes a site for the contestation of imperial power between members of the ekklēsia. Whereas certain members of the ekklēsiai in question used *eidōlothyta* to negotiate the colonial situation by establishing a relationship of reciprocity with benefactors, the polis, and the empire, John polemicizes against such a practice in order to persuade the ekklēsia to cast their lot with Jesus and become citizens of another polis, the New Jerusalem. Since it seems the assembly has already chosen a course of action, John resorts to discrediting the authority of certain *ekklēsia* leaders (Balaamites and Jezebel) by showing that behind their participation in *eidōlothyta* stands the worship of the beast, and ultimately Satan.

[7] Schüssler-Fiorenza, "The Words of Prophecy: Reading the Apocalypse Theologically," in *Studies in The Book of Revelation*, ed. Steve Moyise (New York, NY: T & T Clark, 2001), 17.

3.2 The Rhetorical Exegencies

As my previous chapter noted, the main problem (stasis) assailing the assemblies is how to relate to the colonial situation Babylon imposed on the cities of Asia Minor, and the question of food offered to idols among the *ekklēsiai*. While some members of the *ekklēsiai* of Ephesus, Pergamon, and Thyatira, whom John frames as false apostles and prophets, have opted to embrace such teaching, John seeks to reorient their civic participation in relation to the New Jerusalem.[8] In this way, such teaching becomes the site for the negotiation or contestation of authority/power between John and the alternative voices, and of the Roman imperial power that enables it. Unsurprisingly, the praise and blame that the assemblies receive is contingent on their endorsement or rejection of the teaching of the Nicolaitans and those who promote it.

In the message to the *ekklēsia* of Ephesus, for instance, John acknowledges its consistent resistance and intolerance of false apostles: "I know your works, your trouble and your consistent resistance. I know that you cannot tolerate evildoers; you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not and have found them to be false" (2:22).[9] Then again, having accused the assembly of abandoning their first love (2:4), the author links the false apostles or evildoers with the promotion of the teaching of the Nicolaitans, and

[8] However, *ekklēsia* rhetoric that is not contextualized within the broader colonial situation of domination, often reduces the debates over authority to a sectarian polemic or internal crisis, or to a theological debate between Pauline and non-Pauline Christians, which scholars often divorced from the broader political situation of Asia Minor under Rome. However, *ekklēsia* rhetoric that is not contextualized within the broader colonial situation of domination, often reduces the debates over authority to a sectarian polemic or internal crisis, or to a theological debate between Pauline and non-Pauline Christians, which scholars often divorced from the broader political situation of Asia Minor under Rome.

[9] οἶδα τὰ ἔργα σου καὶ τὸν κόπον καὶ τὴν ὑπομονήν σου καὶ ὅτι οὐ δύνῃ βαστάσαι κακούς, καὶ ἐπείρασας τοὺς λέγοντας ἑαυτοὺς ἀποστόλους καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν καὶ εὗρες αὐτοὺς ψευδεῖς.

praises them for rejecting it or actually hating it: ἀλλὰ τοῦτο ἔχεις, ὅτι μισεῖς τὰ ἔργα τῶν Νικολαϊτῶν ἃ κἀγὼ μισῶ (2:6).[10]

Similarly, in the message to Pergamon and Thyatira, John challenges the authority of those he frames as Balaamites and Jezebel, respectively, and does so on the grounds that they promote *eidōlothyta* and *porneia* (2:14; 2:20).[11] As in the case of false apostles in Ephesus, John rather explicitly links the Balaamites with the teaching of the Nicolaitans, οὕτως ἔχεις καὶ σὺ κρατοῦντας τὴν διδαχὴν [τῶν] Νικολαϊτῶν ὁμοίως (2:15), and implicitly links them with the teaching of Jezebel, which also involves *eidōlothyta* and porneia(2:20). As I have suggested in the previous chapter, the inscribed rhetorical situation of Revelation is not fictive but grounded in a socio-historical context from which its symbolic universe derives its force.

3.3 Voluntary Associations

In order to reconstruct the ways in which the competing voices of the assembly used *ekklēsia* rhetoric to negotiate the colonial situation of Asia Minor, I will explore epigraphic materials on ancient voluntary associations, and focus on the ways they interacted with imperial power, and its multiple socio-economic, and political manifestations. Scholars such as Phillip Harlad, John Kloppenborg, and Wayne Meeks, among others, have recognized the similarities betwen Jewish and Christians groups, and voluntary associations.[12] Early Christian groups also gathered in small groups, shared

[10] Although the verb μισέω could also mean to disfavor, the acerbic tirade against the teaching of the Nicolaitans calls for the stronger the reading.

[11] ἀλλ᾽ ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὀλίγα ὅτι ἔχεις ἐκεῖ κρατοῦντας τὴν διδαχὴν Βαλαάμ, ὃς ἐδίδασκεν τῷ Βαλὰκ βαλεῖν σκάνδαλον ἐνώπιον τῶν υἱῶν Ἰσραὴλ φαγεῖν εἰδωλόθυτα καὶ πορνεῦσαι (2:14);

[12] Philip A. Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations: Claiming a Place in Ancient Mediterranean Society* (illustrated ed. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003); 177-213; John S. Kloppenborg and S G Wilson, *Voluntary Associations in the Graeco-Roman World* (Psychology

meals in ritual settings, and also used polis rhetoric to articulate their self-understanding and activities. Given the similarities, Harland observed that to an outsider, Jewish or Christian groups could initially appear to be just another *association, thiasos, synodos, or collegium* within the polis.[13] In this chapter, however, I focus primarily on the ways in which associations engaged in relations of civic reciprocity through ritual participation in honors to the emperors.

3.3.1 The Hymnōdoi of Pergamon

In order to explore the ways in which the inscribed assemblies articulated their relationship of civic reciprocity with the polis and the empire, I turn to explore an important voluntary association from Pergamon known, and the way it integrated cultic honors to the emperor. With the establishment of the first imperial temple dedicated to Augustus and the goddess Roma at Pergamon in 29 B.C.E, a new association called the hymnōdoi was created to sing hymns to Augustus in the temple precinct.[14] While the group held its own meetings and ritual sacrifices in a special location in honor of Augustus and Rome,[15] it was directly associated with the provincial imperial cult, and held a rather prominent place amongst cultic associations. Although the membership fees were seven times higher than in any other association, it evidently managed to keep a

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Press, 1996); John S. Kloppenborg, "Collegia and Thiasoi: Issues in Function, Taxonomy and Membership." *Voluntary associations in the Graeco-Roman world* (1996): 16-30; Wayne A. Meeks *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 77-78.

[13] Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations,* 177.

[14] Associations of hymnōdoi are also attested in other cities of Asia Minor, such as Ephesus, Smyrna Akmoneia (IGR IV 657) and Didyma (IDidyma 50), and Nicopolis (IGR I 565). For a description of these associations see P.A. Harland, "Imperial Cults Within Local Cultural Life: Associations in Roman Asia," *Ancient History Bulletin/Zeitschrift fur Alte Geschichte*, 17 (2003): 105-106.

[15] Josef Keil, "Zur Geschichte der Hymnoden in der Provinz Asia," JÖAI 11 (1908) 101–110.

larger membership; at one point it had between thirty and thirty-six members.[16] The association received a recognition from the koinon of Asia,[17] and in some ways influenced the emergence of other hymnōdoi in rival cities such as Ephesus, and Smyrna (ISmyrna 697), which joined the Pergamene hymnōdoi in celebrations of the provincial cult to Augustus.[18]

Although the ritual and mystical dimensions of their gatherings are well attested,[19] three aspects I will underscore in my exploration of this and other associations include: (1) the integration of the imperial cult into their ritual services; (2) their relations with other associations and the polis; and (3) the overall relations with the Roman Empire. The altar inscription that supplies most of my information on the hymnōdoi (Ipergamon 374) dates to between 129 and 138 C.E in the reign of Hadrian. Found buried at least three meters deep in the bazaar of the modern city in 1885, the inscription is made of white blue marble and measures 104.5 x 60.5 x 58.2 centimeters. While all its four sides are inscribed, sides A and D have sustained considerable damage. Considering the length of the inscription, I include here only Side C, and make allusion to the rest in my interpretation.[20]

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[16]Stevenson, *Power and Place*, 56.

[17] S.R.F Price, and E Kearns. *The Oxford Dictionary of Classical Myth and Religion.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); "Since one should each year make clear display of one's piety and of all holy, fitting intentions towards the imperial house, the choirs of all Asia, gathering at Pergamum on the most holy birthday of Sebastos Tiberius Caesar, performs a task that contributes greatly to the glory of Sebastos in hymning the imperial house and performing sacrifices to the Sebastan gods and conducting festivals and feasts..." IGR IV 1608c=I.Ephesus VII 2, 3801, restored.

[18] Gregory Stevenson, *Power and Place: Temple and Identity in The Book of Revelation*, 56.

[19] W.H. Pleket, "An Aspect of the Emperor Cult: Imperial Mysteries," *HTR* 58, no. 4 (1965): 331-347.

[20] Side C contains only 13 lines and shows some deterioration in the top right corner that barely touches the end tip of the second line. This along with Face B is the best-preserved part of the

ἀγαθῆι τύχηι.
ὅσα τῶι ἐνιαυτῶι παρέχει τῆς ἀρ[χῆς] ὁ ἱερεύς·
μηνὸς Περειτίου καλάν(δαις) Ἰανουαρίαις·
οἶνον, στρῶσιν, μνᾶν, ἄρτους γ′.
μηνὸς Πανήμου β′· ῥοδισμῷ οἶνον,
στρῶσιν, μνᾶν, ἄρτους γ′.
μηνὸς Λῴου β′· οἶνον, μνᾶν, ἄρτους γ′.
μηνὸς Ὑπερβερεταίου προ(τέρα)· μνᾶν, ἄρτους γ′.
τοῦ αὐτοῦ μηνὸς λ′· παραβωμίου οἶνον,
στρῶσιν (δηναρίου) α′.
δώσουσιν δὲ οἱ καθιστάμενοι ἐξωτικοὶ ὑμνῳ
δοὶ εἰς εἰκόνας τῶν Σεβαστῶν ∗ ν′.

For good fortune! During his year in office, the priest supplies the following items. In the month of Peritios on the Kalends of January: wine, a table-setting, one mina, and three loaves of bread. On the second day of the month of Panemos, for the Rose festival, he supplies: wine, a table-setting, one mina, and three loaves of breads. On the second day of the month of Loös, he provides for the mysteries: wine, one mina, and three breads. On the twenty-ninth day of the month of Hyperberetaios, he provides wine, a table-setting, one mina, and three loaves of bread. On the thirtieth day of the same month he provides: wine for the altar, a table setting, one denarius. Also, outsiders newly appointed as hymn singers shall give fifty denarii towards the images of the Augusti.

The centrality of the cult to the Sebastoi is evident at multiple junctures throughout the inscription, but particularly at the outset, where the hymnōdoi describe them as ὑμνῳδοὶ θεοῦ Σεβαστοῦ καὶ θεᾶς Ῥώμης (Side A, line 4). The order in which Augustus and Roma are presented reveals a particular development in the cult of the Sebastoi. As Friesen notes, the official title of the provincial temple at Pergamon began with Rome, and then included Augustus, which by the second century had been reversed, with the goddess appearing in second place.[21] The provision for the Eukosmos to provide wreaths for

inscription. C includes instructions for the priest regarding provisions for key dates in the association's calendar

[21] Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 111; the emphasis on the cult of the Sebastoi, and the self-designation of the association as hymnōdoi should not lead us to believe all the members did was to go around singing hymns to Augustus. As Friesen suggests, "the men were involved in other activities as well. For example, reference to care for the deceased choir members appears twice,

children during the mysteries, as well as cakes, incense, and lamps for Augustus (Side B, line 15-20) provides some insight into the proceedings of the ritual within this, and potentially other, associations. The priest mentioned in side C, line 1 must refer to the priest that presided at imperial cult rituals; and he himself is expected to contribute a tablecloth, one mina, and three loaves of bread on various months and days. The provision that newly appointed members pay fifteen denarii towards the εἰκόνας τῶν Σεβαστῶν (Side C, line 12), illumines the role of emperor images for imperial cult rituals. Finally, the association made prescriptions for the sacrifices of Augustus and Roma on the month of Loos, imposing a fee of upon a designated hymn singer (Side D, lines 13, 14).

As Stanley K. Stowers points out, sacrifice situated participants within a cosmic hierarchy in which the gods were at the top and male citizens of the polis at the center—and women, children, and resident aliens in the periphery—is relevant here, except the gods are no longer alone.[22] The association has Augustus, Rome, Hadrian, and the imperial household at the top. Their ritual calendar, for instance, revolves around the birthday of Augustus (September 23), and is marked by key celebrations for members of the imperial household, including Augusta (Livia), the emperor's wife (Side D, Line 2). By reinforcing this hierarchy, the associations clearly positioned themselves as imperial subjects, but simultaneously established a relationship of reciprocity with the divinized emperors. The idea of divine reciprocity, as Stowers points out, was a key concept in

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in the festival of rosalia and in the guidelines for paying funerary incense at the end of side B. (111).

[22] Stanley K. Stowers, "Greeks Who Sacrifice and Those Who Do Not: Toward an Anthropology of Greek Religion" in *The Social World of the First Christians: Essays in Honor of Wayne A. Meeks*, ed. Michael White and O. Larry Yarbrough (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 328.

Greek sacrifice. He suggests that the productivity of the land was interpreted through sacrifice as reciprocity with the gods. Such productivity included agricultural products but also animal offspring, which humans saw as the greatest gifts they could return as offering to the gods. In his view, "The great range of offerings, cleansings, and strategic circumstances for offerings produced a highly complex and life-encompassing order of reciprocity with the divine."[23] The hymnōdoi of Pergamon, like other associations, also tried to establish links through direct correspondence with emperors. One inscription monumentalizes a letter in which Claudius (41-54 C.E.) acknowledges a decree they had sent him (IEph 3801).

Such a brief overview of the imperial cult within the ritual practices of the hymnōdoi of Augustus and Roma touches on three major questions in relation to the imperial cult and imperial mysteries, all of which must be briefly addressed here. These issues/questions include: (1) the modern partisanship between Protestants and Catholics; (2) the question of whether participants made sacrifices to the emperors or on behalf of the emperors; and (3) the related issue of whether the imperial cult was merely a civic act, or whether it actually involved signs of personal devotion. In his work, *A Drudgery Divine*, Jonathan Z. Smith has noted that the rhetoric on "mystery religions" in the last three centuries often includes veiled animosities by Protestant scholars against Catholic scholars, [24] by using the term "mystery religions" as an allegory for Roman Catholic

[23] Stanley K. Stowers, "Does Pauline Christianity Resemble a Hellenistic Philosophy?" In *Redescribing Paul and the Corinthians,* ed. Ron Cameron and Merrill P. Mille (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 225.

[24] Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 56.

Christianity.[25] In terms of the second point, the traditional paradigm cast participation in imperial cults and/or imperial mysteries as a political way of "cloaking disloyalty under secrecy,"[26] as "pseudo-mysteries,"[27] or as a way to express loyalty to Roman rule and feed the ambition of the elite.[28] However, Friesen suggests that questions about whether "sentiments" behind participation in imperial mysteries were truly spiritual or just political evidence parochial and modern definitions that are unconvincing.[29] Citing H.W. Pleket's call for a wider definition of the religion, and "one that recognizes the importance of ritual in the construction of the world," Friesen notes that, "Nothing in the existing evidence for imperial mysteries justifies separating them from other religious phenomena of their time."[30]

From the outset the association alludes to its long-standing reputation of Pergamon as the first provincial cult of Asia Minor through its self-identification as the ὑμνῳδοὶ θεοῦ Σεβαστοῦ καὶ θεᾶς Ῥώμης. The designation of Hadrian as "Savior and Founder" (σωτῆρι καὶ κτίστηι) alludes to his established reputation as benefactor of Asian cities. Furthermore, three individuals are worth considering in some detail: L. Aninius Flaccus, A. Castricius Paulus, and T. Claudius Asklepiades. A. Castricius Paulus seems to refer to the same Castricius mentioned in lines 11 and 12, while T. Claudius

[25] Ibid., 57; In his discussion of Casaubon, Smith adds that his definition of Mysterium as arcanum doctrinam (478) gave rise to the notion that the mysteries were concerned with secret teachings, with dogmata. This definition in turn led to the Protestant polemic preoccupation with the alleged Roman Catholic practice of the *disciplina arcani*, a term first proposed by John Daille in 1666, and often used in the early Protestant literature, with explicit reference to Casaubon" (57).

[26] Arthur Darby Nock, "The Historical Importance of Cult-Associations," CLR 38 (1924) 105-9.

[27] M.P. Nilsson, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion* (2d. ed. Munich: Beck, 1961), 370.

[28] Ibid., 385.

[29] Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 114.

[30] Ibid., 114.

Asklepiades also appears in an undated inscription from Akmoneia, in which a group of Roman settlers (οἱ κατοικοῦντες Ῥωμαῖοι), honor him as descendant of benefactors of the city, and ambassador to Augustus (IPhrygR, 533). L. Aninius Flaccus was also a member of the cowherds of Dionysius and also appears in another honorary inscription set up by this association for Julius Quadratus and dated around 109 C.E (IPergamon S4). Such an important connection merits some attention, in part because as we will see in the next chapter, Julius Quadratus was a descendant of both Attalid and Galatian royalty, and was a relative of Julia Severa, who donated a meeting place for the local synagogue. [31]

An influential Pergamene, Quadratus was a council member in 94 C.E., and in 105 C.E. As a provincial official, he was a legate in Asia, Bithynia-Pontus, Lycia, and Syria. Finally, he became proconsul of Asia in 109-110 C.E. Given his exceptional career and various benefactions, he received honors from various associations, including some from Syria, Pamphylia, and Pergamon (I Pergamon 436; IEph 614). The associations' participation in sacrifices and rituals for the Sebastoi also reinforced their connection to the Polis. Their monumental honors to Hadrian, to whom they refer as "Savior" and "Founder," [32] might allude to the reputation Hadrian built for himself as sponsor, savior, and benefactor of various cities and restorer of temples. [33] However, such a designation might also reflect the ways in which the hymnōdoi participated in their city's competition

[31] Quadratus was a Pergamene provincial, a descendant of Attalid royalty, who began his political career under the Flavians. Vespasian made him senator by adlection *inter praetorios*—that is, he reached senatorial status at praetorian rank. For a summary of Quadratus' successful career under the Flavians, see Glen Warren Bowersock, *Studies on the Eastern Roman Empire: Social, Economic and Administrative History, Religion, Historiography* (Goldbach: Keip Verlag, 1994), 358; see also A. Conze and C. Schuchhardt, "Die Arbeiten zu Pergamon," MDAI(A) 24 (1899) 164–240.

[32] Mary T. Boatwright, *Hadrian and the Cities of the Roman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 5.

[33] Ibid., 5.

with major rivals Ephesus and Smyrna, which also had their own hymnōdoi. Ephesus had a group of hymnōdoi connected with Hadrian's temple,[34] while Smyrna had at least two groups of hymnōdoi also linked to Hadrian (ISmyrna 595).[35] At one point the hymnōdoi monumentalize the honors they receive from the koinon of Asia, thanking them for their participation in the annual celebration of Augustus' birthday. The display of such honors and relations with influential benefactors seem to have justified the high entrance fees into this association.[36]

If sacrifice established strong links between associations and the polis, it could also reinforce the association's status as subjects of Rome. The centrality of Augustus and the goddess Roma for their ritual calendar illumines the self-understanding of the association as subjects of Rome, a fact they seem to celebrate. Earlier versions of the hymnōdoi appear to have sent decrees directly to the emperor. In an inscription dated to the time of Claudius, the hymnōdoi display an instance in which the emperor himself acknowledges their decree (IEph 3801), and they chose to monumentalize it as a way to display such interaction. The Augustan calendar, which was central to the hymnōdoi's ritual practices, was instituted by the Asian koinon, at the suggestions of the Roman governor who won for himself high honors for suggesting it.[37] The inner city competition for imperial recognitions, such as the *neokorate* status, evidences provincial efforts to locate themselves in relation to the empire. In his *Moralia,* Plutarch mocks provincials

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[34] Phillip Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations: Claiming a Place in Ancient Mediterranean Society* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 128.

[35] Another inscription from Smyrna celebrates an emperor's decree granting them a second *neokorate* status, hymn singers included (ISmyrna 697).

[36] Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations*, 126.

[37] Stephen R. Llewelyn and Paul Barnett. *A Review of the Greek Inscriptions and Papyri Published 1986-87: In Honour of Paul Barnett* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002, 4.

who are too eager to buy into Roman imperial society. Scholars have also noted that the hymnōdoi included a strong contingent of Roman citizens.[38] Several inscriptions attest to the presence of Romans in the associations, which are usually described as Romans engaged in business in Asia. They participated in honors to the city, and to local officials, but also to the empire. They swore allegiance to Rome and seem to have promoted the imperial cult. How may the hymnōdoi's efforts to situate themselves in a relationship of reciprocity with city, the emperor, and the empire illuminate the issues reflected in *ekklēsia* of Pergamon and Revelation at large?

3.4 Reconstructing the Silenced Voices: Eidōlothyta, Ekkl*ē*sia Rhetoric, and Civic Reciprocity

The exploration of the aforementioned associations should illumine our understanding of the ways in which the inscribed *ekklēsiai* of Ephesus, Pergamon, and Thyatira negotiated the Roman colonial situation of Asia Minor. As I will suggest, they did so vis-à-vis *eidōlothyta* and in so far as it brokered their relationship with other associations, the polis, and the Roman Empire. Such move interrogates John's rhetorical portrait of the competing voices as faithless ekklēsia members, and contributes towards cementing my reconstruction the audience as Jewish groups. Most important, it helps us imagine the ways in which they could have used *ekklēsia* rhetoric and its topoi of civic participation and equality to negotiate the colonial situation of Asia Minor.

Faced with the loss of the nominal protection that Jewish groups from the Diaspora had received from Rome,[39] and with a rather hostile civic environment,[40] the

[38] Price, *Rituals and Power*, 31.

[39] See Margaret Williams, "Jews and Jewish Communities in the Roman empire," in *Experiencing Rome : Culture, Identity and Power in the Roman Empire.* 2000), 305-334; John

ekklēsiai had to decide how to relate to the colonial situation and its varied socio-economic, political, and religious manifestations. As scholars have suggested, various aspects of an association's life were linked in one way or another to Roman imperial power, or to benefactors and city officials who were deeply inmersed in the cult to the Sebastoi.[41] In view of such a situation, *ekklēsia* leaders—the so-called false apostles of Ephesus, the Balaamites of Pergamon, and Jezebel and her children at Thyatira—excercised a form of communal discerment to weight their options and determine how to relate to the structures of the cities they inhabited, and its colonial situation under Rome. Judging from John's rhetoric of vilification and silencing, it appears that the assemblies decided to negotiate their political situation by pariticating in *eidōlothyta*, and embracing the notions of civic reciprocity it entailed.

3.4.1 *Ekklēsia* and Eidōlothyta

The decision to participate of food offered to idols (*eidōlothyta)* seems to have precedents in Paul's somewhat flexible position in 1 Corinthains 8:1-11:1. Considering that John polemicizes against it in Revelation 2, and that the assemblies are located in some of the cities that were within Paul's missionary circuit (Acts 20:29), scholars speculate about the relationship between the two positions. Marcel Simon, for instance, suggests that the polemic against *eidōlothyta* in Revelation 2 reflects a deliberate attack

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M.G. Barclay, *Negotiating Diaspora: Jewish Strategies in the Roman Empire* (London ; New York: T & T Clark International, 2004);

[40] Erich S. Gruen, *Diaspora Jews Amidst Greeks and Romans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 84-105.

[41] Nelson J. Kraybill *Imperial Cult and Commerce in John's Apocalypse* (illustrated ed. Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996); Phillip A. Harland, "Honouring the Emperor or Assailing the Beast: Participation in Civic Life Among Associations (Jewish, Christian and Other) in Asia Minor and the Apocalypse of John." *JSNT,* 77 (2000): 99-12.

against Paul and his position on the matter.[42] He cites at least three examples to support his view: (1) John's denunciation of false apostles (Rev. 2:2) echoes controversies about Paul's apostleship (Rm. 11:13; 1 Cor. 9:1-2; and Gal. 1.1 16-19); the strong emphasis on "works" (Rev. 2.2,19); and the juxtaposition between "the deep things of Satan" in Rev. 2.4, with "the deep things of God" in 1 Cor. 2:10.

However, other scholars such as Alex T. Cheung have critiqued such view on grounds it presupposes the traditional understanding of Paul's stance on food offered to idols, and that Rev. 2.2 may actually reflect the fruit of Paul's ministry, since Paul had warned the Ephesian church against false apostles.[43] In any case, Paul seems to suggest that the question facing the *ekklēsia* does not constitute a dilemma, largely because the so-called idols, lords and gods cannot be compared with the Jewish God.[44] While commentators have cast the competing voices of the *ekklēsia* as antinomians at best and heretics at worst, it appears that these leaders of the *ekklēsia* reasoned they had found a way to uphold the common good of the *ekklēsia*, and its concomitant rhetoric of civic participation while at the same time upholding their identity as people of God.[45]

3.4.2 *Eidōlothyta* and Civic Reciprocity

[42] Simon, "Apostolic Decree,"452.

[43] Cheung, A T. *Idol Food in Corinth: Jewish Background and Pauline Legacy.* (Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 201.

[44] J C. Brunt, "Rejected, Ignored, or Misunderstood? The Fate of Paul's Approach to the Problem of Food Offered to Idols in Early Christianity" *NTS* 31 (1985): 113-124;

[45] Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World.* Fortress Press, 1991), 56; She also observes that the Pauline position on *eidōlothyta* "provided an alternative theological perspective to the "either/or" rhetoric of John because it proposed a theological compromise. The alternative prophetic rhetoric allowed Christian believers to participate actively in the commercial, political, and social life of their cities and the empire" (56).

Rather than reinscribing the normative rhetoric on *eidōlothyta* as a heresy, or the patristic reading that links it with the figure of Nicolaus, I suggest that the competing voices of the *ekklēsia* participated in *eidōlothyta* as a way of upholding their civic commitment to the polis, and the relationships of reciprocity it entailed. In doing so, *eidōlothyta* becomes the site for the brokering of power relations between. As postcolonial thinkers have observed, within situations of domination otherwise quotidian practices, such as apparel, clothes, language and etc., become loci for the negotiation of imperial power between colonizing and colonized subjects. This is the case because in such situations of domination such practices often come to embody the culture, values, and/or well being of the colonized people.

Our exploration of the rites of the *hymnōdoi* undercores how careful provisions were made for the offerings as well for the sacrifices to the Sebastoi (Side B, lines 14-16). Such provisions hint at the role that sacrifical food played in mediating how the associations related to the Sebastoi and imperial apparatus they represented, thereby making food a locus for the negotiation of Roman imperial power, and its multiple socoi-economic, and political manifestations. [46]

Similarly, those promoting the teaching of the Nicolaitans (Balaamites, Jezebel, and her children), or *eidōlothyta* and porneia, seem to have decided that relating to the colonial apparatus vis-à-vis participation in cultic food and the participation in the imperial apparatus it entailed was the best course of action. Such willingness to negotiate the imperial apparatus is evident in the author's notion of porneia. While most scholars

[46] Stowers, "Greeks Who Sacrifice and Those Who Do Not," 313; he also notes "The elites in the Greek East who surged forward to establish these cults were making claims to a relationship with the new power," (313).

influenced by the patristic understanding of the teaching of the Nicolaitans translate *porneia* as a form of sexual immorality,[47] John of Patmos redefines the conventional use of *porneia* as a "political intercourse" that negotiates wealth, power, and violent death. The trope of "whoring" is not used in the interests of imperial power but against it."[48] John groups the *eidōlothyta* and *porneia* together because he understands that to partake of one leads to the other. [49]

The competing voices within the *ekklēsia* also could have mediated their relationship with the polis, vis-à-vis *eidōlothyta* and porneia. Given that, as an *ekklēsia*, the competing voices would have underscored civic participation, and that sacrifice was understood to bind participants in a relationship of reciprocity with the polis, participating in *eidōlothyta* reinscribe their loyalty to the polis. While John situates each

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[47] According to Robert H. Mounce, "Since the eating of 'food sacriced to idols' is undoubtedly intended in a literal sense, it is best to take 'sexual immorality' in the same way" (See Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 86; Bruce J. Malina, "Does Porneia Mean Fornication?" *Novum Testamentum* 14, no. 1 (1972): 10-17; Boring suggests that John may not have been alluding to fornication merely in a figurative sense. See M.E. Boring, *Revelation: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 92; however, certain feminist scholars prefer to maintain the ambivalence between sexual misconduct and participation in the imperial apparatus. See Pamela Thimmes, "Teaching and Beguiling My Servants" in *A Feminist Companion to the Apocalypse of John*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine (New York, NY: Continuum, 2010), 84.

[48] Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, *The Power of the Word: Scripture and the Rhetoric of Empire* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 136; she adds that "Revelation does not use the metaphor of "whoring" as the prophets of the Hebrew Bible did, in such a way as to indict the Christian community as unfaithful to G*d. Rather, the text foregrounds the economic-political realities of kryriarchal exploitations by the Empire. "The wine of its fornication," from which the dwellers of the earth have become drunk," stems from the "intercourse" of Babylon with the "kings of the earth" by which "the wealth of its wantonness" has enriched the merchants of the earth. Not sex but power, wealth, and murder are the ingredients of Babylon/Rome's "fornication" (136); Thompson agrees that fornications refers not to sexual immorality but to idolatry and the participation in imperial society. See Leonard Thompson, "Ordinary Lives: John and His First Readers" in *Reading the Book of Revelation: A Resource for Students*, ed. David L. Barr (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 44.

[49] The term *eidōlothyta* or εἰδωλόθυτον refers to meat derived from sacrifices offered to Greco-Roman deities. While the Greeks used ἱερόθυτον,49 or in rare cases θεόθυτον, the Jews used εἰδωλόθυτον in order to describe the idolatrous and thereby impure nature of the practice.

of the *ekklēsia* in some important cities, some more than others, of Asia Minor, he hardly provides details about the cities themselves.[50] However, the major exception is Pergamon, which he vilifies as a place of satanic influence:

> Yet you are holding fast to my name, and you did not deny your faith in me even in the days of Antipas my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan lives (2:13).[51]

Reading against the grain, however, one may see John's vilification of Pergamon as a residence of Satan as a denunciation of the socio-economic, and political influence the city wielded over the ekklēsiai, which heightened the temptation to participate in *eidōlothyta*) and fornication (porneia). The epigraphic record adumbrates such relationships by showing associations vested in their cities' cultural life, public works, and political maneuvering. Thus, the hymnōdoi of Pergamon proudly display the honors bestowed upon them by the koinon of Asia for their participation in the provincial imperial cult. In other instances, one also sees the cities bestowing honors upon associations or providing opportunities to connect with city officials through systems of benefaction.

In an inscription dated between 54-59 CE, we find the city of Ephesus granting an association of fishermen a place to build a fishery toll (AGRW 162). In return, they set up an inscription honoring Artemis, Nero, his wife, his mother, the demos of the Romans,

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[50] While nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Revelation scholarship attempted to bank upon the allusion to the cities, their historical-referential approaches drew critique. According to Friesen, for instance, Ramsay and others presuppose that John had in mind the socio-political situation of the cities when he sat down to write Revelation. Steven J. Friesen, "Revelation, Realia, and Religion: Archaeology in the Interpretation of the Apocalypse," *The Harvard Theological Review* 88, 3 (1995): 291-314.

[51] οἶδα ποῦ κατοικεῖς, ὅπου ὁ θρόνος τοῦ σατανᾶ, καὶ κρατεῖς τὸ ὄνομά μου καὶ οὐκ ἠρνήσω τὴν πίστιν μου καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις Ἀντιπᾶς ὁ μάρτυς μου ὁ πιστός μου, ὃς ἀπεκτάνθη παρ' ὑμῖν, ὅπου ὁ σατανᾶς κατοικεῖ.

and the demos of the Ephesians. In other instances, one finds cities such as Philippi honoring an association of purple dyers, and in particular a member known as Antiochus, son of Lycus, who is referred to as both an outstanding citizen and a native of Thyatira, for his benefactions (AGRW 44).[52] Furthermore, the cities in general, and Pergamon in particular, afforded associations the opportunity to make connections with influential civic officials, such as Julius Quadratus. While he himself served as an imperial priest, his mother, Julia Tyche, carried the title of "queen" of the precincts of the temple of the goddess Roma and was also a priestess of Demeter, while another relative, Julia Severa, served as imperial priestesses.[53]

3.4.3 Ekklēsia**,** Eidōlothyta, and Imperial Power

Finally, it also appears that participation in *eidōlothyta* mediated the *ekklēsiai* and other associations' relationship with the emperor and its empire. Apart from referring to cities such as Pergamon as the place where Satan dwells, John also considers Pergamon to be the location of the Throne of Satan in Revelation 2:13a: οἶδα ποῦ κατοικεῖς, ὅπου ὁ θρόνος τοῦ σατανᾶ. How is one to interpret such a remark within the overall epigraphic evidence on imperial cults, not only in Pergamon but also throughout Asia Minor? The reference to the throne of Satan has led scholars in a frantic search for a specific location within the city. Scholars usually posit multiple possibilities, including:

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[52] Richard S. Ascough, Philip A. Harland, and John S. Kloppenborg, *Associations in the Greco-Roman World: A SourceBook* (illustrated, annotated ed.) (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2012), 42. Ascough, Harland, and Kloppenborg caution that, "The similarities to a well-known biblical character, Lydia the Thyatiran purple dealer at Philippi (Acts 16:14), and the circumstances in which it was seen by only one individual and subsequently lost have caused some to question its authenticity."

[53] See Harland, *Associations, Synagogues and Congregations*, 142.

the temple of Rome and Augustus, the temple of Zeus,[54] the temple of Zeus and Athena combined[55] the Asklepion.[56] For others, the "throne of Satan reference simply means that Pergamum is a place where opposition to the church had become lethal in at least one instance."[57] While the temple of Rome and Augustus has not yet been located, numismatic evidence from Pergamon shows it existed.

Figure 1.1 The obverse of this first-century (41-41 C.E.) cistophorus shows the bare head of Claudius. The reverse shows a female figure holding a cornucopia and crowning Claudius © The British Museum.

[54] Leonard L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 173.

[55] Adela Yarbro Collins, "Pergamon in Early Christian Literature," in *Pergamon, Citadel of the Gods: Archaeological Record, Literary Description, and Religious Development* (illustrated ed.) ed. Helmut Koester (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1998), 167-176.

[56] Caird, *Revelation*, 37; See also Adolf Holtmann, "The Roman Remodeling of the Asklepieion," in Koester (ed.), *Pergamon*, 41-61,

[57] Steven J. Friesen, "Satan's Throne, Imperial Cults and the Social Settings of Revelation," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 27, no. 3 (2005); 296-314; Friesen is keen to underscore that his position should not be confused with the old persecution theories that posited a perseuction of Christians under Domitian. Conversely, he notes that "I am arguing rather that the reference is to local hostility toward the Pergamene assembly. This might have involved local legal proceedings or perhaps even mob violence. Unfortunately, we do not know the exact reasons for the hostility, for neither the literary nor the archaeological data divulge those details. The problem, however, was not presented as one involving imperial cults (365-366).

As I have noted earlier, this is the only instance in which John implicitly polemicizes against a city itself, apart from Rome of course. Keeping in mind John's cultic concerns, and the connection between *eidōlothyta* and the worship of the beast, who receives the authority and throne of Satan, it appears that his critique revolves around Pergamon's status as a major site of emperor worship (the Beast). The link between *eidōlothyta* and the worship of the beast as inseparable forms of idolatry further drive the point.

Drawing from such interpretation, it would appear that the *ekklēsia* are fully invested in partaking of ritual honors to the emperors. As our exploration of voluntary associations has shown, an entire association's (*hymnōdoi*) cultic calendar revolved around the figure of Agustus, a practice also followed by various Asian cities. Associations were actively trying to establish connections with the emeperor's themselves. In an inscription mentioned earlier, the *hymnōdoi* were quick to monumentalize an instance where they honor emperor Claudius, and he writes back acknowledging their decree **(**IEph 3801). Provisions are made not only for sacrifices, but also for the images of the emperor.

As scholars observed, honoring the emperors or their families through statues, inscriptions, and buildings dedicated to them was a common convention,[58] and various types of associations took part in these honors. We find honorific dedications to most if not all the emperors, including: Augustus (27 B.C.E.-14 C.E.), Tiberius (14-37 C.E.), Claudius (41:54 C.E.), Nero (54-68 C.E.), Vespasian (69-79 C.E), Domitian (81-96 C.E.), Trajan (98-117 C.E.), Hadrian (117-138), Antoninus Pius (138-161 C.E.), Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus (161-169 C.E.), Commodus (176-192 C.E.), and Caracalla

[58] Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations*, 155.

(198-217).[59] Furthermore one also finds cultic honors to their families, as in the case of the hymndoi (I Pergamon574), and the firshermen also who honor Nero's wife and mother.

In other instances, it appears the emperors were, often unbeknownst to them, conscripted into membership of associations. The Dyonisian association of Ephesus, for instance, referred to Trajan as a *thiasotes*, or member of the cult society. However, as Harland observes, there were other instances in which associations could mantain diplomatic relations with the emperor,[60] as is the case with the initiates of Dionysos Breseus at Smyrna, which monumentalized its correspondence with Marcus Aurelius and Antoninus Pius (Ismyrna 600).[61] Furthermore, as Philo points out, other associations send embassies to the emperor, and he himself claims to have been part of one in which he carried a petition by Alexandrian Jews to secure their rights amidst growing tensions with the Greek.[62]

3.5 John's Rhetorical Strategies: *Reorienting Ekklēsia Rhetoric* to the Heavenly Polis

In this disseration, I have suggested that the identification of the inscribed audience as *ekklēsia,* alludes to their self-understanding*,* as well as to their deployment of ekklēsia rhetoric*,* which was rooted in the Greek democratic tradition. Considering that *ekklēsia* rhetoric accentuates the role of civic participation, and the right of every member

[59] Ibid., 154; this incudes the more broad category of Sebastoi or Augusti.

[60] The case of an embassy to Gaius by Jews from politeuma at Alexandria is another important one, since Gaius complains that they do not offer sacrifices to him.

[61] As Harland observes, the former letter refers to a response by the future emperor Marcus Aurelius, who was then consul for the second time (158 C.E.). In it Marcus Aurelius replies to the association's decree celebrating the birth of his son, noting that this son had since died.

[62] Philo*, Legatio Ad Gaium*, 180-98.

to appear, speak, and offer counsel to the assembly,[63] the *ekklēsia* are obliged to grant John a hearing. While John addresses the audience by invoking the authority of the risen Christ, he also establishes his ethos by identifying himself as a brother and fellow comrade, who partakes in the suffering and consistent resistance of the people of God (Rev.1:9). Indeed, he describes his presence at Patmos as a consequence of his faithful witness and his keeping of the word of God. Most important, he introduces himself as a recepient of divine Revelation. While he does not directly claim prophetic authority, the prophetic formula *tadei legei* always legitmates his messages by linking them to his vision at Patmos. Such presentation enables John to dispel any doubts about his authority, and to establish commonalities with the other faithful witnesses within the *ekklēsia*.

As we have seen, one of the major sources of tension John identifies within the assemblies is *eidōlothyta* and porneia, as well as the religious, socio-economic, and political relations it establishes. In an effort to curtail assembly participation in their civic practices and the power relations it reinscribed, John proceeds to make a double-pronged attack. First, he denounces the food consumed by the audience as idol food, and links the competing voices with the idolaters of the conquered, idolatrous, and deceived nations. Second, he provides his own alternative food and intimates it will help the assemblies establish the right relationship of reciprocity but with a different imperial power. In the end, however, the power relations triggered by the colonial situation remained mediated through sacred foods, and become the site for the contestation/negotiation of imperial power, both Roman and Jewish.

3.5.1 *Eidōlothyta* and Civic Reciprocity with Babylon

[63] Arist. *Pol*. 42. 1; 47.1; Dem. 24.151. Xen. *Mem*. 1.2.35.

Within the Greco-Roman system of sacrifice, ritual foods were understood to established relations of reciprocity between the participants, the polis, and local patron deities. John makes *eidōlothyta* the battleground between the empire of God and the empire of Caesar. He reminds the audience, in no uncertain terms, that participation in such cultic foods constitutes a form of idolatry (2:1; 2:20). While the Greeks usually referred to food offered to their deities such as Artemis as sacred food (ἱερόθυτον) or as godfood (θεόθυτον), though this usage is rare John declares it to be εἰδωλόθυτον (2:14; 2:20). [64] Such a critique places his remarks well within the bounds of the Jewish understandings of idolatry, and the danger to which the foods of the nations might expose one.[65] Jewish preoccupation with the matter of *eidōlothyta* and the idolatry it represented is clear in other New Testament texts (Rom. 14:2–21, and 1 Cor. 8:1–11:1).

3.5.2 *Manna* and Civic Reciprocity with The New Jerusalem

Subsequently, John juxtaposes the food offered to idols with the food of the conquering believers. He does so by alluding to two foods, which do not entail fornication or participation in the imperial apparatus but rather a faithful witnessing, in so far as they are offered to those who conquer the imperial apparatus:

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[64] Gerhard Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament.* Vol. 2, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-), 378; In 1 C. 10:28, the "unbelievers" use the term ἱερόθυτον whereas Paul refers to it as εἰδωλόθυτον. The term is first found in 4 Macc. 5:2: κρέων ὑείων καὶ εἰδωλοθύτων ἀναγκάζειν ἀπογεύεσθαι (378).

[65] While the author of Tobit appear keen to underscore he abstained from the food of the gentiles (1.10-11), Joseph refuses to kiss Asenath on the grounds that it is not fitting for a man to kiss a woman who eats of *eidōlothyta* (Jos. Asen.8.5.7). Philo is mocked by Giaus' court when asked, "Why do you refuse to eat pork?" (Leg. Gai. 361). Although Josephus stays away from an explicit condemnation of food offered to idols, he overtly criticizes idolatry (Apion 2.239-49). Presupposing that the nations should know the boundaries of Jews in regards to food, Josephus observes that "there is no one city, Greek or barbarian…to which…many of our prohibitions in the matter of food are not observed (Apion, 2.283)

> Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις. Τῷ νικῶντι δώσω αὐτῷ φαγεῖν ἐκ τοῦ ξύλου τῆς ζωῆς, ὅ ἐστιν ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ τοῦ θεοῦ (2:7).
>
> Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις. Τῷ νικῶντι δώσω αὐτῷ τοῦ μάννα τοῦ κεκρυμμένου καὶ δώσω αὐτῷ ψῆφον λευκήν, καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν ψῆφον ὄνομα καινὸν γεγραμμένον ὃ οὐδεὶς οἶδεν εἰ μὴ ὁ λαμβάνων (2:17).

As noted above, both foods are only accessible to those who conquer, that is those who abstain from the food offered to idols and fornication, or participation in the colonial apparatus. Hence, John directly juxtaposes both types of foods, and sees them as describing two types of peoples, the conquerors and the conquered. Since the "three of life" is located in the New Jerusalem, only the conquering ones will have access to it (21:7), while the idolaters will not (21:27). Consistent with Apocalyptic thought, the "tree of life" also constitutes a reward for the righteous.[66]

Similarly, the author promises the conquering ones of the *ekklēsia* of Pergamon who are suffering the influence of the competing voices access to the "hidden manna." John extends the parallel between the *ekklēsia* and the people of Israel in this promise to the conquering ones, in so far as manna was the food that supernaturally fed the Israelites in the desert during their pilgrimage to the promised land (16:4). While allusions to the Eucharist here are unwarranted,[67] some scholars rightly observe the link with the eschatological feeding of the woman in the desert. The author sees God irrupting into the

[66] 1 Enoch 24:4-25:6; T.Levi 18:11; Cf. also 2 Esdr. 8:52; 2 Enoch 8:3.

[67] According to Duff, the reference to the "tree of life" and to the "water of life" (7:17; 21:1; 22:17) seem to entail Eucharistic elements, and he concludes that "it thus seems reasonable to interpret the Apocalypse within the contents of the public worship of the church, culminating with the Eucharist." Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 102; D.K.K. Wong observes that "the 'manna' in Revelation 2:17 may be understood as a symbol of Christ, whom believers can assimilate spiritually in blessed fellowship" (see Wong, "The Hidden Manna and the White Stone in Revelation 2:17," In *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155 (1998): 346-54; See also Armando J. Levoratti, "El Maná Escondido (Apoc 2:17)," in *Revista Bíblica* 46.3 (1984): 57-273.

imperial situation of the assemblies to sustain those who keep his commandments (Rev. 12:17; 14:12), as they await the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21). In the Apocalypse of Baruch (circa 70-135 C.E), for instance, manna is represented as the food preserved for the elect in the last days (29:8). Consistent with the delivery of manna in Exodus 16:4, 32-35, and John's eschatological hopes, the heavenly food will come during times of great turmoil and the glorious advent of the Messiah (2 Baruch 30:1).[68] Most important, the heavenly food is only for those who conquer by refusing to partake of food offered to idols.[69]

John also juxtaposes the Pergamene polis with the heavenly polis in order to further give the assemblies some type of alternative. While he describes Pergamon as the place where Satan lives and has his throne, he describes the New Jerusalem the place where God dwells and will eventually establish his throne among humans: "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them" (21:3).[70] Another major contrast is the death-dealing nature of Pergamon and the life-giving nature of the New Jerusalem. Whereas in the former, Antipas, Jesus' faithful witness, was killed in the place where Satan dwells (Rev. 2:13), believers are to experience life in the place where God dwells: "he will wipe every tear from their eyes.

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[68] "And it shall come to pass after these things, when the time of the advent of the Messiah is fulfilled, that He shall return in glory" (2 Baruch 30:1).

[69] See also *Sib. Or.* 7:148–49

[70] The verb used to designate the New Jerusalem as the Place where God dwells, and the Pergamon as the place where Satan dwells also helps to set up the contrast. While John uses σκηνόω which means to live, and to settle, to refer to the dwelling place of God and believers (17:15; 12:12; 13:6; 21:3), the author uses κατοικέω (to live, to settle) to designate the place where Satan and his followers, the inhabitants of the earth, live (2:13 (2); 3:10; 6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8, 12, 14 (2); 17:2, 8) [70]

Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away" (Rev. 21:4).

While Pergamon is permeated by the idolatry and fornication of Balaam and the Nicolaitans, the New Jerusalem belongs to the conquering ones: "Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children. (21:7). Furthermore, John also contrasts the types of food consumed in each city and the types of socio-political relations they create or reinforce. While the Pergamene consumed *eidōlothyta* and are therefore bound to Satan and his Beast, his cult and empire, the conquering citizens of the heavenly polis will consume the hidden manna, which binds them to God and his Lamb. The allusion to manna evokes the feeding of God's people in the desert (16:4), but is also eschatological in nature. John sets another juxtaposition between the two cities in terms of the citizens that will dwell in them. While according to John Pergamon has citizens like the Nicolaitans and Balaam who promote fornication, the New Jerusalem is the city of the conquering one who refuses *eidōlothyta* (21:8). Ultimately, participation and abstinence from *eidōlothyta* determines whether they are followers of the Lamb, or the Beast, and this also determines their fate. While the former will go to the New Jerusalem, the Dragon, the Beast, the false prophet, and its followers are destined for the lake of fire (21:8).

3.4.4 Civic Reciprocity with Babylon

John also attempts to disarticulate the assemblies' relationship with the city of Pergamaon by linking the teaching of Balaam and the Nicolaitans with Babylon (Rome), whom he identifies as a whore (Rev 17:1), and the mother of all whores (17:5), who

corrupts the earth with her fornications (19:2).[71] Such association evokes the image of Pergamon and other cities as prostitutes. However, John uses the term fornication to mean participation in socio-economic and political systems of exploitation, which situate Pergamon as a client city of the empire.

As scholars observe, the Attalids were Rome's client kings, and benefited substantially from Roman Imperialism.[72] At the treaty of Appameia (188 BC), the Romans granted its client king, Eumenes, the control of "80,000 km (square), a realm as large as Ireland, including the densely populated lowland valleys of the Hermosa, Klystrons, and Meander rivers, the rolling pastures of central and southern Phrygia, and the rich coastal plains along the Propionates."[73] Eumenes himself cited the Romans as ultimate guarantors of his authority in his political relationships with new cities under his domain.[74] Such an example illustrates how the kings of the earth could have compromised with Rome, a compromise that John views as a form of committing fornication (ἐπόρνευσαν) with her (17:2). Similarly, John notes, "the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxury" (18:3).[75] Since for John it is

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[71] See Paul Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?*, 40; Mark D. Mathews, *Riches, Poverty, and the Faithful: Perspectives on Wealth in the Second Temple Period and the Apocalypse of John*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 155.

[72] Evans, Richard J. *A History of Pergamum: Beyond Hellenistic Kingship* (illustrated ed. London; New York: Bloomsbury, 2012).

[73] Peter James Thonemann, *Attalid Asia Minor: Money, International Relations, and the State* (illustrated ed.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[74] Thoneman, *Attalid Asia Minor*, 5; according to Strabo, Eumenes "received from the Romans all the country within the Taurus which had belonged to Antiochus. Before this time there were not under the power of Pergamum many places that reached to the sea at the Elaïtic and the Adramyttene Gulfs. Eumenes embellished the city, he ornamented the Nicephorium with a grove, enriched it with votive offerings and a library, and by his care raised the city of Pergamum to its present magnificence.[74]

[75] John seems to believe that it is impossible to participate in imperial life without succumbing to fornicating with the imperial apparatus. Hence, he calls the assemblies to exit Rome lest they

impossible to be active in the civic and religious practices of the polis without compromising, he calls the assemblies to exit the civic structures operating under empire, lest they partake of its abominations and its punishments.

3.5.3 "You are What You Eat"

Ultimately, John seems to suggest that the audience is defined by what they eat, and thereby may even be excluded from the people of God. While they are eager to participate in the colonial apparatus and its socio-economic, and political networks of benefaction, John links the competing voices instead with ignominious figures in the history of Israel and the idolater nations of the *oikoumenē*. The reference to the teaching of Balaam and his σκάνδαλον in teaching Israel to commit fornication clearly invokes his advising Midianite women on how to deceive the Israelites into sexual immorality, and food sacrificed to idols (Num. 25:1-9; 31:16).[76] Similarly, the interpellation of a woman prophetess as Jezebel invokes the wife of King Ahab, who sponsored the worship of Baal and its 450 prophets, as well the worship of Asherah and her 400 prophets respectively (1 Kings 19:1). Furthermore, John situates these teachers and their followers with the idolaters of the nations (9:20), and excludes them from the people of God (21:8). The link is also evident not only in what the author deems idolatrous practices, but also in their refusal to repent (μετανοέω).[77] While Jezebel refuses to repent (οὐ θέλει μετανοῆσαι)

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partake of its abominations, its punishments, and be excluded from the New Jerusalem, where fornicators (πόρνοι) and idolaters (εἰδωλολάτραι), along with the cowardly (δειλοί) and faithless (ἄπιστοι) (i.e. those who failt to remain faithful until death) will not enter (Rev. 21:8).

[76] Consequently, Jewish tradition paints Balaam as a prototype of all corrupt or false teachers (see Josephus, Ant. 4.6.6; see also 2 Peter 2:15; Jude 11).

[77] The term μετανοέω occurs over eleven times in the Book of Revelation (2:5 (2), 16, 21 (2), 22; 3:3, 19; 9:20, 21; 16:9), and can be linked to the issues John identified in the *ekklēsia* particularly in relation to idolatry and fornication; commentators suggest that it is John who has given her time to repent, but this approach ignores that the message constitutes a vision, and the seer is

from her fornication (2:21),[78] so too the idolaters refuse to repent (οὐ μετενόησαν) of their idolatry, and they even blaspheme God (16:9).[79] As scholars observed, John underscores the obstinacy of Jezebel by using the present tense of the verb θέλω, which they see as "repeated attempts to help her get right with God."[80] In cases, Jezebel, her followers, and the idolaters of the nations, appeared to be participating in the imperial apparatus. [81]

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the question of food offered to idols and fornication as a negotiation of the imperial power in the messages to Ephesus, Pergamon, and Thyatira in light of voluntary associations and their interaction with the Roman imperial cult. Drawing an analogy from the epigraphic date on voluntary associations, as well as their integration of the imperial cult, I have alluded to the relations of reciprocity that the participation of *eidōlothyta* established in relation to the city, the empire, and the emperor himself.

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apparently speaking on behalf of Christ. See Robert Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 87; Similarly, Grant Osborne observes that, "It is likely that John or some other leader had already warned Jezebel (she alone is mentioned here, but the whole movement is addressed through her), either by prophetic utterance or in accordance with 3 John 10.

[78] καὶ ἔδωκα αὐτῇ χρόνον ἵνα μετανοήσῃ, καὶ οὐ θέλει μετανοῆσαι ἐκ τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς

[79] καὶ ἐκαυματίσθησαν οἱ ἄνθρωποι καῦμα μέγα καὶ ἐβλασφήμησαν τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἔχοντος τὴν ἐξουσίαν ἐπὶ τὰς πληγὰς ταύτας καὶ οὐ μετενόησαν δοῦναι αὐτῷ δόξαν.

[80] Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2002), 158; Osborne departs from his earlier notion that fornication always refers to sexual immorality by noting that, "Unlike 2:14; , 20, here *porneia* (adultery), is metaphorical, following the OT tendency (cf. Isa. 57:3, 8; Hos. 9:1) to use it for "playing the harlot" with other gods" (158). A close reading of the motif of fornication as participation in the socio-economic political and religious apparatus of Babylon, however, is consistent and does not warrant such distinction.

[81] Jürgen Roloff, *A Continental Commentary: The Revelation of John* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 189.

Tapping the theme of civic participation embedded within ekklēsia rhetoric, John tries challenges the assemblies become responsible citizens of the New Jerusalem, and to pursue establish relationships of civic reciprocity with it, rather than with Babylon. In this manner, John seeks to persuade members of the *ekklēsia* to abstain from the worship of the beast (Rev. 13:4), from the networks of associations honoring the emperor, and from the civic compromise that such practices entailed. Understanding that ritual food mediated such civic relationships of power, he introduces two sacred foods through which conquering believers can establish civic reciprocity with the Jew Jerusalem; namely, manna and the tree of life.

Chapter Four

"The Synagogue of Satan:" Negotiating Ethnic and Civic Identities in the Polis

4.1 Introduction

One of the main themes in the message to Smyrna and Philadelphia is his acrid portrayal of a group of people that "claim to be Jews," but who, he insists, are not: "I know the slander on the part of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan" (2:9; 39).[82] Subsequently, the author reiterates such remarks in the message to Philadelphia, arguably in reference to the same group, and essentially promises to break down the group: "I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but are lying—I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you" (3:9).[83] Because, in contrast, to the rest of the *ekklēsiai*, Smyrna and Philadelphia receive nothing but praise, it is difficult to ascertain why the author lambasts those who claim to be Jews. While in the message to Smyrna the author makes reference to their slander/blasphemy (τὴν βλασφημίαν), in the message to Philadelphia the author underscores an open door (θύραν ἠνεῳγμένην), which Jesus has set before the *ekklēsia*, and which no one is able to close:

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[82] Paul B. Duff, "*The Synagogue of Satan: Crisis Mongering and the Apocalypse of John" in the Reality of Apocalypse: Rhetoric and Politics in the Book of Revelation* (ed. David Barr. Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2006), 151-153; Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, *"The Words of Prophecy: Reading the Apocalypse Theologically" in Studies in the Book of Revelation (*ed. Steve Moyise. Edinburgh: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2001), 14; Frankfurter, David. "Jews or Not? Reconstructing the "Other" in Rev 2:9 and 3:9." *HTR 94* (2001): 403-425

[83] "ἰδοὺ διδῶ ἐκ τῆς συναγωγῆς τοῦ σατανᾶ τῶν λεγόντων ἑαυτοὺς Ἰουδαίους εἶναι, καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν ἀλλὰ ψεύδονται. ἰδοὺ ποιήσω αὐτοὺς ἵνα ἥξουσιν καὶ προσκυνήσουσιν ἐνώπιον τῶν ποδῶν σου καὶ γνῶσιν ὅτι ἐγὼ ἠγάπησά σε.

"Look, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut" (3:8b).[84]

Presupposing the so-called "parting of the ways" between Judaism and Christianity, however, most interpretations view such rhetorical portraits as representative of tensions between Jews and Christians. Hence, the so-called Synagogue of Satan often emerges as: (a) a group of hostile Jews from the local synagogue;[85] (b) Christians and gentile Judaizers; [86] (c) a mix of Christians and Jews, as well as neo-Pauline Christians;[87] and even (d) non-hostile local Jews. [88] However, such portraits not only re-inscribe tensions from second- and third-century martyrological materials, but also the supersessionist proclivities of earlier revelation scholarship. Following W.M Ramsay, for instance, Colin J. Hemer, suggests that, "The Christians were the true Jews; those who maintained a racial separation had rejected the Christ, according to John, and were of Satan."[6] In order to disqualify Jewish adherence to their notion of divine election, Hemer suggests that by "the people of God" is meant a "spiritual people" not an "ethnic group."[89] Even when read against the background of Second Temple texts and Qumran materials, scholars are quick to invoke the "parting of the ways" to disable the comparison. Noting the differences between the Qumran community and "the early

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[84] ἰδοὺ δέδωκα ἐνώπιόν σου θύραν ἠνεῳγμένην, ἣν οὐδεὶς δύναται κλεῖσαι αὐτήν

[85] Henry B. Sweete, *The Apocalypse of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 50; Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986), 8.

[86] See Stephen G. Wilson, "Gentile Judaizers," *NTS* 38 (1992): 613-15; John G. Gager, *The Origins of Anti-Semitism: Attitudes toward Judaism in Pagan and Christian Antiquity* (Oxford University Press, 1983), 132.

[87] See David Frankfurter, "Jews or Not? Reconstructing the "Other" in Rev 2:9 and 3:9," *HTR* 94 (2001): 403-425.

[88] See Duff's, *Who Rides the Beast?* 50-51; and "The Synagogue of Satan," 164.

[89] J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986), 67.

church," they argue that "The church was less separatist and it did, at least at first, show some hope for the salvation of the Jewish people (Rom. 1.16)."[90] Thus, under the weight of centuries of the *contra Iudaeos* tradition, some scholars suggest that the Apocalypse does not contain a particular notion of Jewishness, or a particular construction of ethnicity.[91]

But how would our understanding of the tension between John and the so-called Synagogue of Satan change if we disable the "parting of the ways," and read it not simply as a polemic between two Jewish groups but as a negotiation of ethnic identity within *ekklēsia* who are trying to negotiate the colonial situation of Asia Minor? In order to address this question, I will make the following methodological shifts: (1) link the rhetorical exigencies in the messages to Smyrna and Philadelphia within the overall rhetorical situation of Revelation; (2) reconstruct the silenced voices of the *ekklēsia* through ancient voluntary associations; and (3) read the issue as a negotiation/contestation of ethnic identity in the colonial situation; (4) and explore the rhetorical strategies John devises in order to persuade the *ekklēsiai*.

Finally, I will suggest that the colonial situation of Asia Minor, manifested in the proliferation of the Roman imperial cult, forced John and the *ekklēsiai* to negotiate questions of ethnic identity. On the one hand, the so-called "Synagogue of Satan," like the false apostles and prophets of Pergamon, Thyatira, and Laodikea, did not perceive a contradiction in participation in civic structures, and seems to have encouraged such

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[90] Philip L. Mayo, *"Those Who Call Themselves Jews": The Church and Judaism in the Apocalypse of John* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2006), 72.

[91] David L. Barr, "Idol Meat and Satanic Synagogues: From Imagery to History in John's Apocalypse," in *Imagery in the Book of Revelation*, eds. Michael Labahn and Lehtipuu Outi (Leuven; Walpole, Mass.: Peeters, 2011), 8.

practice within the *ekklēsiai*. On the other hand, John uses the question of the imperial cult, introduced in the previous chapter, as the criterion to demarcate the boundaries of Jewish ethnicity, that is, of who is a true Jew and who is not.[92] In order to illumine such negotiations of Jewish ethnicity and the ways the colonial situation impinged upon it, I will first link the rhetorical exigencies embedded in the messages to Smyrna and Philadelphia.

4.2. The Rhetorical Exigencies in Smyrna and Philadelphia

In order to map the ways in which the *ekklēsiai of* Smyrna and Philadelphia used ekklēsia rhetoric to negotiate their ethnic and civic identity, I will briefly explore the rhetorical exigencies of the messages to Smyrna (Rev. 2:8-11) and Philadelphia (3:7-13). Subsequently, I will link these exigencies with the overall rhetorical situation of Revelation. Such modus operandi should illumine the ways in which John attempts to map the civic and religious implications of the problems he introduced in the messages to Ephesus, Pergamon, and Thyatira, and which he seems to unpack in the remaining messages as well.

4.2.1 Revelation 2:8-11: Suffering, Death, and Poverty

In the message to Smyrna, for instance, the author constructs the exigencies in the assembly around a set of antitheses that are meant to encourage the faithful and critique those who are actively participating in the Roman imperial apparatus. The first antithesis

[92] I suggest that he closes the boundaries of Jewish ethnicity for the opposition by associating them with Satan and situating them among the conquered and deceived nations; that he opens the boundaries of Jewish ethnicity for the faithful from among the nations on account of their "faithful witness" and resistance to the imperial cult; and that this "border patrolling" "functions rhetorically as a way to delegitimize the Jewish opposition within the *ekklēsia*, to encourage gentile believers also within the *ekklēsia*, and to legitimate his own position as a "faithful witness" vis-à-vis the Smyrnans and Philadelphians."

John introduces is between death and life, which is present in the self-description of Christ embedded in the prophetic formula: "And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These are the words (Τάδε λέγει) of the first and the last, who was dead (ὃς ἐγένετο νεκρὸς) and came to life (ἔζησεν) (2:8)."[93] Such antithesis not only grounds the authority of the speaker by linking it with the vision of the risen Christ at Patmos, but also governs the entire message, in so far as the *ekklēsia* are called to "Be faithful until death," in order to receive "the crown of life" (2:10), the crown of life being juxtaposed with the Second Death (2:10c) from which the conquering ones will be delivered.

The second set of antitheses is between riches and poverty embedded in the acknowledgement of their situation: οἶδά σου τὴν θλῖψιν καὶ τὴν πτωχείαν, ἀλλὰ πλούσιος εἶ (2:9a). Through this antithesis the author links the Smyrnans with all the faithful ones who, having refused to worship the beast or bear its mark (Rev. 13), are actually killed (13; 15), or cannot buy or sell (13:17), and are therefore experiencing economic hardship, though the decolonizing moment John anticipates makes them rich (πλούσιος). The third and last set of antitheses is between "false Jews" and the implied true Jews (2:9a) inhering in the remarks against the so-called "Synagogue of Satan": "I know the slander on the part of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan" (2:9b).

4.2.2 Revelation 3:7-13

Unlike the message to Smyrna, the message to Philadelphia does not provide many references to death or potential imprisonments. Rather, it centers its content around three themes: an opening and closing of doors, keeping Jesus' word, and the breaking

[93] Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Σμύρνῃ ἐκκλησίας γράψον·
Τάδε λέγει ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος, ὃς ἐγένετο νεκρὸς καὶ ἔζησεν·

down of the Synagogue of Satan. Describing himself as the one who has the "Key of David" and underscoring his ability to open and close doors (3:7), Jesus proceeds to address the *ekklēsia*: "I know your works. Look, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut." The theme of not confessing Jesus' name and keeping his word emerges as the reason Jesus will keep the door open: "because, although you have but little power, you have kept my word and have not denied my name" (3:8).[94] In turn, the Philadelphians' keeping of Jesus' word becomes the reason for their own deliverance: "Because you have kept my word of patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth" (3:10).[95]

Sandwiched between the Philadelphian's keeping of Jesus' work and deliverance from the hour of testing, the author includes his condemnation of the so-called Synagogue of Satan. Just as with the message to Smyrna, the author makes reference to their claims to Jewish ethnicity, but now includes their humiliation: "I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but are lying—I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you" (3:9).[96] After noting his imminent return, Jesus encourages the Philadelphians to "hold fast" to what they have, so that no one may seize their crown (3:11). The promises to the conquerors seem to unify the theme of keeping Jesus' word, in so far as he promises that the conquerors will be marked with the name of God, Jesus, and the New Jerusalem.

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[94] ὅτι μικρὰν ἔχεις δύναμιν καὶ ἐτήρησάς μου τὸν λόγον καὶ οὐκ ἠρνήσω τὸ ὄνομά μου.

[95] ὅτι ἐτήρησας τὸν λόγον τῆς ὑπομονῆς μου, κἀγώ σε τηρήσω ἐκ τῆς ὥρας τοῦ πειρασμοῦ τῆς μελλούσης ἔρχεσθαι ἐπὶ τῆς οἰκουμένης ὅλης πειράσαι τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς.

[96] ἰδοὺ διδῶ ἐκ τῆς συναγωγῆς τοῦ σατανᾶ τῶν λεγόντων ἑαυτοὺς Ἰουδαίους εἶναι, καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν ἀλλὰ ψεύδονται. ἰδοὺ ποιήσω αὐτοὺς ἵνα ἥξουσιν καὶ προσκυνήσουσιν ἐνώπιον τῶν ποδῶν σου καὶ γνῶσιν ὅτι ἐγὼ ἠγάπησά σε.

4.3. Voluntary Associations

In order to reconstruct the way in which the *ekklēsia* of Smyrna and Philadelphia negotiated the colonial situation and questions of ethnic identity, I turn once again to ancient voluntary associations.[97] Traditionally, scholars have cast Jews as isolated monotheistic sectarian groups pitched against a rather hostile Greco-Roman society.[98] At times, such perspectives hardly take into account the historicity of literary or epigraphic sources, as well as the author's goals. Should Josephus claim, for instance, that Jews in the Diaspora observed various food regulations stated in Leviticus (*Contra Appointed*, 2. 123) be taken as normative for all Diaspora Jews? While it is certainly plausible that Diaspora followed various regulations, such as keeping the Sabbath or dietary laws, it would be ill advised to assume high degrees of segregation from civic life.[99] Along with Rajak, other scholars have discussed evidence suggesting a more fluid picture of Jewish participation and integration in the life of the polis.[100]

4.3.1 Jewish Participation in Civic Structures

[97] While I have presupposed from the outset and in previous chapters that the Jews from the diaspora constitute primarily the group of Jesus followers that John addresses, it is fitting here to address the question of Jewish participation in imperial society, since scholars would not dispute here that John is addressing a Jewish community.

[98] V. Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews*, trans. S. Applebaum (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1966 [19591), 296; see also P.R. Trebilco, *Jewish Communities in Asia Minor* (SNTSMS, 69, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 186, 263.

[99] For an informative discussion on the boundaries of Jewish religious practice, including dietary laws, see Tessa Raja, "The Jewish Community and Its Boundaries," in Judith Lieu et. al, The Jews among Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire (London, 1992), 9–28.

[100] A. T. Kraabel, "Judaism in Western Asia Minor under the Roman Empire, with a Preliminary Study of the Jewish Community at Sardis, Lydia" (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1968); Trebilco, *Jewish Communities*, 167-85, F. Blanchetière, "Juifs et non juifs: Essai sur la diaspora en Asie-Mineure" *RHPR* 54 (1974), 367-72.

In contrast to restrictive portraits of Jewish participation in the socio-economic, and political life of Asia Minor, scholars are beginning to paint a more fluid picture. Paul Trebilco, for instance, suggest that such integration may be due to two key factors.[101] First, the colonized Greek polis "accommodates" a wide array of populations without requiring "uniformity." Second, Jewish civic participation did not amount to abandonment of Jewish traditions, customs, or notions of Jewish distinctiveness.[102] Furthermore, Philip Harland has also marshaled evidence that suggests full Jewish participation in the socio-economic, and political life of the polis.[103] Citing an example from the theater at Miletus, which included seating for Jews and God-fearers, Harland suggests Jews were present at the socio-cultural life of the polis. Second, Jews could also have joined other voluntary associations. Looking at evidence from Hierapolis, Harland cites the case of Publius Aelius Glykon, who made provisions for members of the guilds of purple-dyers and carpet-weavers to take care of his grave on particular Jewish holidays (IHierap 342).[104] Moreover, Philo knew of Jewish merchants, artisans, and shippers who also participated in various other guilds (Contra Flacum 57).[105] Harland refers to an

[101] Despite various anachronisms such as references to a "Jewish lobby" in Sardis or usage of the term "Jewess" for a woman, Paul Trebilco's studies on the Jewish diaspora of Asia Minor signaled a shift in our understanding of Jewish civic participation.

[102] Trebilco, *Jewish Communities*, 187; Cohen, S J D. *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (University of California Press, 2001), 67.

[103] Philip A. Harland, "Honoring the Emperor or Assailing the Beast: Participation in Civic Life Among Associations (Jewish, Christian and Other) in Asia Minor and the Apocalypse of John," 77, no. 2000 (2000): 99-121.

[104] Harland, "Honoring the Emperor," 110.

[105] Ibid., 110. See also T .Torrey Seland, "Philo and the Clubs and Associations of Alexandria," in *Voluntary Associations* (eds. Kloppenborg and Wilson), 110-27.

association of Judean youths at Hypaipa, and to Jews serving as members of the local elders' association at Eumeneia (CU, 755).[106]

With regards to the question of identity, Harland has documented epigraphic data about associations who portrayed themselves along ethnic lines, as is the case with a group of Samaritans who sent money for the temple on Mt. Gerizim, and self-designate their associations as Israelites.[107] We also have epigraphic information on groups of Italian merchants, as well as associations of Thracians. With this diversity of Jewish participation in voluntary associations and in the life of the polis in mind, I turn to two specific case studies that might adumbrate the ways in which the Synagogue of Satan might have attempted to negotiate the colonial situation. The first case is the involvement of Jewish groups, in this case a synagogue, in the system of benefactions, particularly their bestowing of honors on a priestess named Julia Severa in the imperial cult.[108] The second case is the civic participation of the group formerly of Judea, or formerly Jews.

4.3.2 Synagogue Honors for Julia Severa

In order to illustrate Jewish participation into the life of the polis, I turn to explore how the local synagogue honored Julia Severa. Julia was a member of a prominent Julian family who was descended from both Galatian and Attalid royalty. As Harland observes, the family had entered into imperial service as equestrians and then senators by the late first century. The family's prominent role in the civic life and politics of Asia Minor has

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[106] Harland, "Honoring the Emperor," 109.

[107] Philip A. Harland, *Dynamics of Identity in the World of the Early Christians: Associations, Judeans, and Cultural Minorities* (New York: T & T Clark, 2009), 94; Philip A. Harland *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations: Claiming a Place in Ancient Mediterranean Society* (illustrated ed. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003).

[108] Nelson J. Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce in John's Apocalypse* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 174.

been carefully studied by proposopographers. By the mid-first century, Julia Severa had become a prominent benefactor and was heavily involved in the life of Akmoneia, where she acted as director of contests and high priestess in the local temple of the "Sebastoi gods" (MAMA VI 263, 265; IGR IV 656). A relative of Julius Quadratus, an influential Pergamene, Severa also acted as benefactor of the local elders' associations or at Akmoneia.

As result, the local synagogue had no qualms about honoring the imperial priestess with a golden shield (MAMA VI 264), and such honors included other members who later renovated the building, including P. Tyrronius Cladus.

τὸν κατασκευασθέ[ν]τα ο[ἶ]κον ὑπὸ
Ἰουλίας Σευήρας Π. Τυρρώνιος Κλά-
δος ὁ διὰ βίου ἀρχισυνάγωγος καὶ
Λούκιος Λουκίου ἀρχισυνάγωγος
καὶ Ποπίλιος Ζωτικὸς ἄρχων ἐπεσ-
κεύασαν ἔκ τε τῶν ἰδίων καὶ τῶν συν-
καταθεμένων καὶ ἔγραψαν τοὺς τοί-
χους καὶ τὴν ὀροφὴν καὶ ἐποίησαν
τὴν τῶν θυρίδων ἀσφάλειαν καὶ τὸν
[λυ]πὸν πάντα κόσμον, οὕστινας κα[ὶ]
ἡ συναγωγὴ ἐτείμησεν ὅπλῳ ἐπιχρύ-
σῳ διά τε τὴν ἐνάρετον αὐτῶν δ[ι]ά̣θ[ε]-
σ̣ιν καὶ τὴν π̣ρὸς τὴν συναγωγὴν εὔνο̣ι̣ά̣ν
τε καὶ σ̣[που]δήν.

> The building was built by Julia Severa, was renovated by P. Tyrronius Klados, head of the synagogue for life, Lucius son of Lucius, also head of the synagogue, and Popikius Zotikos, leader, from their own resources and from the common deposit. They decorated the walls and ceiling, made the windows secure, and took care of all the rest of the decoration. The Synagogue honored them with a gilded shield because of their virtuous disposition, goodwill, and diligence in relation to the Synagogue.[109]

[109] Slab of white marble with a panel and traces of handles (ansae) on the right and the left, found reused as a support for a veranda of a home (49 x 58 x 15 cm; letter height: 1.75-2.25 cm); Translated and edited by Philip A. Harland, *Greco-Roman Associations: Text, Translation, and Commentary. II: North Coast of the Black Sea* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2014), 150-151.

From the inscription above one may note at least three things in relation to Jewish participation into the civic life of the polis: (1) like other associations, the Jewish synagogue was engaged in patron-client relationship with influential officials; (2) the synagogue leadership did not frown upon the participation of these benefactors in the imperial cult; (3) and the leadership certainly had no problem honoring an imperial cult priestesses with a gilded shield at their synagogue. In fact, as Harland notes, Julia and others honored by the synagogue were relatives of other influential politicians in Asia Minor, who served in the provincial imperial cult. By setting in stone their connection with wealthy and influential figures from Asia Minor, the Jews were, in the words of Harland, attempting to "preserve symbolically a particular set of relations within city and the cosmos for passersby to observe."[110]

4.3.3 The Ones Formerly from Judea, or Former Jews?

The second inscription dated to 124 C.E. concerns a group of Jews who donated money for civic works in the city of Smyrna (ISmyrna 697). Sandwiched among references to voluntary associations (hymnōdoi), an imperial high priestesses (Nimphidia), and other influential women of Smyrna who promised large sums of money (e.g. Claudia Artemulla, Claudia Polla, Flavia Asklepiake, and Antonia Magna, among others), we find a reference to the Jews who are set to contribute 10,000 drachmae: κῶνα νβ′ · οἳ ποτε Ἰουδαῖοι μυ(ριάδα) α′. As Paul Trebilco observes, the phrase οἳ ποτε Ἰουδαῖοι has been at the center of a scholarly debate. On the one hand, scholars such as Louis Feldman and Mary Smallwood suggest that the phrase may be translated as

[110] Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations: Claiming a Place in Ancient Mediterranean Society* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 159.

"former Jews" in a "religious" sense, meaning those "Jews who had acquired Greek citizenship at the price of repudiating their Jewish allegiance."[111] That they contributed to civic works was a way to "advertise their rise in the social scale."[112] On the other hand, Thomas A. Kraabel challenged such translation and suggests we translate it instead as "people formerly of Judea."[113] While he does not cite inscriptional evidence to support his translation as "at one time," or "at some time" in reference to a group of immigrants, Kraabel rightly notes that an inscription to honor benefactors would be an unlikely place to publicly renounce the faith.

Despite the evidence or perhaps because of it, other scholars such as Margaret Williams suggest that apostasy did in fact occur and that immigrants were seldom described as "formerly being from such and such a region."[114] However, Philip Harland observes that, "she is in fact mistaken regarding the absence of this practice of describing foreigners as formerly of some regions (unless she is still focused solely on the term pote specifically)."[115] Citing epigraphic evidence in which immigrants denoted their geographical origins, Harland suggests that the inscription listings Judeans at Smyrna as donors provides another instance of settlers from the East gathering together as a group.[116] The allusion to the ethnic dimensions of the inscriptions is perhaps more

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[111] Louis H. Feldman, Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World: Attitudes and Interactions from Alexander to Justinian. Princeton: NJ.; Princeton University Press, 1993), 83.

[112] Trebilco, *Jewish Involvement in City Life*, 175.

[113] Kraabel, 1982, 455; see also Trebilco, 1991, 175.

[114] Williams, 1997, 251-252.

[115] Philip A. Harland, *Dynamics of Identity in the World of the Early Christians: Associations, Judeans, and Cultural Minorities* (New York: T & T Clark, 2009), 151.

[116] Ibid., 152. Harland adds that announcing one's religious status as a group would also be peculiar considering that "what we call religion" was embedded with social and cultural life in antiquity.

instructive than the discussion itself, this in light of the political situation in which the inscription emerged.

Rather than seeing the inscription as representing apostasy or as simply an allusion to place of origins, it may be more productive to read this as a negotiation of ethnic identity under the colonial situation of Asia Minor. Margaret Williams adumbrates the unstable political situation in which Diaspora Jewish found themselves in the wake of the Jewish war with Rome. While the Roman practice of upholding appeals made by Jews from the Diaspora (e.g. Josephus, Ant. 16.162-5), gave the impression that Jewish rights were "inalienable," Williams suggests such perspective was mistaken.

> Official protection of the Jewish way of life had simply been a *beneficium* (a kindness) that Rome, as a satisfied patron, had seen fit to bestow on clients who had fulfilled their duties *(officia*). When the latter gave cause for dissatisfaction, as the Jews of the Diaspora, increasingly unsettled by the deteriorating situation in the province of Judea and the rising militancy of its Jewish inhabitants, were soon to do, emperor such as Tiberius, Claudius, Vespasian, Trajan, and Hadrian were to show very quickly what Jewish 'rights' amounted to—concession by the sovereign power, no more, no less.[117]

Since the Jews in Egypt, Cyrenaica, and Cyrus had revolted against their Gentile neighbors, and the Jews from Judea had engaged in a full-scale war against Rome in 66 C.E., their socio-economic and political situation was at risk. In view of this portrait, Paul Trebilco notes that the Jews of Smyrna were showing the locals a "completely different attitude," in so far as they were "demonstrating that they were loyal and benevolent members of their city."[118] Considering that Jews from the Diaspora no longer had the support or protection from Rome,[119] upholding notions of civic reciprocity, which

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[117] Margaret Williams, "Jews and Jewish Communities in the Roman empire," in *Experiencing Rome : Culture, Identity and Power in the Roman Empire.* 2000), 328-330.

[118] Trebilco, *Jewish Communities in Asia Minor*, 175.

[119] Williams, "Jews and Jewish Communities in the Roman empire," 228.

are embedded in ekklēsia rhetoric, served to underscored the responsibilities between the polis and its Jewish citizens.

On the other hand, one may imagine that the ambiguity deployed in the inscription itself might have played in the favor of the Jews. Presenting themselves as loyal citizens would not only have pacified potential suspicions among their neighbors, but would also have helped them to secure or maintain their connections with influential benefactors like Julia Severea. In doing so, they were not only playing with the ambiguity of their ethnic and religious background, but also portraying themselves as fully integrated into the life of the polis, and had no qualms of having their names set in stone alongside the hymnōdoi or the imperial priests or priestesses of the Sebastoi. While not all Jews in the diaspora might have approved of such "cozying up" to the imperial apparatus, the assemblies seem to have opted to negotiate to uphold their civic identity Whereas the latter was expected to fully participate in the life of the polis, and fulfill its civic duties, the latter was bound to uphold the rights, privileges, and freedoms of the latter, to the degree that that was possible in the colonial situation of Asia Minor.

4.4. The Synagogue of the Polis: Reconstructing the *Ekklēsiai* of Smyrna and Philadelphia

From the exploration of the two aforementioned inscriptions, I now turn to reconstruct the competing voices of the *ekklēsia.* Considering the unstable political situation, the loss of Roman support, and suspicion from gentile neighbors, *ekklēsia* leaders had to decide how to best address the situation, and to so in a way that prioritized the common good of the assemblies. Against the background of an ignominious defeat by

Rome in 70 C.E., suspicion of further Jewish revolts (which did eventually take place in 132-135 C.E.), and proliferation of Roman symbols of power and civic religion, assembly leaders used ekklēsia rhetoric and its topoi of civic participation. Within such context, how would the so-called synagogue of Satan opted to proceed? Drawing on both the rhetorical portrait painted by John, the epigraphic evidence discussed above, as well as the overall political situation under Rome, one can make the following observations.

First, the group embraced the self-designation as ekklēsia, and activated the notion of civic participation embedded in ekklēsia rhetoric. Against John's calls for withdrawal from the colonial situation, as shown in his so-called exile to Patmos and call to exit Babylon (1:9; 18:4), the so-called synagogue of Satan used ekklēsia rhetoric and to communicate its willingness to fully participate in the life of the polis to both civic authorities, and to their neighbors alike.[120] Like those "formerly from Judea," they might have been involved in contributing money for civic projects, to show how they also upheld civic participation. At the same time, their deployment of ekklēsia rhetoric impinged on the polis, perhaps making its official obliged to upheld and protect the rights of its Jewish citizens.

Second, they might have decided to actively pursue benefactions from wealthy Roman and local patrons, and to reap the socio-economic benefits it entailed. Since those who have opted to adopt John's stance are experiencing θλῖψις and πτωχεία (2:9), one may infer that the opposite is the case for the so-called Synagogue of Satan. Like other voluntary associations, they might have been benefiting economically from their participation in economic networks of the polis. Third, they were probably keen to honor

[120] Bradley Ritter, *Judeans in the Greek Cities of the Roman Empire: Rights, Citizenship and Civil Discord (Leiden: Brill,* 2015), 198.

these individuals who, like Julia Severa, were not only influential figures in the city but imperial priestesses and might have opted to monumentalize such socio-economic and political relationships to stake their claim at the polis. Perhaps the "Synagogue of Satan" had set up a gilded shield or two in their synagogue to honor such individuals or, like other associations, invited them to be guests of honor.

Since the *ekklēsia* of Philadelphia had also opted not to participate in various civic networks of benefaction, it make sense that Jesus praises them for keeping his name, even though, as he underscores, they have little power (μικρὰν ἔχεις δύναμιν), which I understand here in socio-economic and political terms (3:8). While a bit speculative, the allusion to the open door refers not to expulsion from the Synagogue. Given the activities of the synagogue leaders and the militancy of messianic Jews, it is plausible that the would have expelled themselves in protest or simply heeding John's call to exit the colonial apparatus. In my view, the allusion to shutting or opening of doors refers to the socio-economic, and political opportunities that ekklēsia rhetoric afforded some members through civic participation, and the lack of such opportunities for those who rejected it.

Fourth, it is plausible that those John derides as "false Jews" were perhaps ekklēsia members, who were upholding their civic duties, and the compromises it entailed, such as participating in the cultic honors to the emperors or honoring local benefactors. In view of their strategic use of ekklēsia rhetoric, and its concomitant topoi of civic participation, freedom, reciprocity, and the common good, John cast their participation in civic structures as a blasphemy, and refers to such group as a Synagogue of Satan. The rhetorical connections that John establishes between the idolaters and the beast vis-à-vis the term βλασφημία supports such view. While scholars have often

translated the slander (τὴν βλασφημίαν) of the so-called Synagogue Satan (2:9) as a reference to the Jewish denunciation of Christians,[121] my exploration suggests it refers to their civic participation in the broader imperial apparatus, and in particular to honors they gave to the Sebastoi, or to their imperial priests and priestess, such as Julia Severa. In making such a claim, I translate βλασφημία as blasphemy rather than slander.[122] Through this term, John links the Synagogue of Satan to Beast who (1) bears blasphemous names on its seven heads (13:1), (2) has a mouth that utters great blasphemies (13:5),[123] and ultimate blasphemes the name of God (13:6).

Since the so-called blasphemous names probably refers to the divine claims of the Sebastoi, it would be fitting that the "blasphemy" of the Jews refer to their participation in honors to Roman emperors, which is further underscored by their direct association with Satan.[124] Furthermore, the association of the verb βλασφημέω with unrepentant human beings who follow the beast further strengthens my point. Beset by various plagues, including intense heat (16:9), a darkness that causes pain and sores (16:10-11), and huge hailstones (16:21),[125] the followers of the Beast blaspheme against God.

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[121] J. Lambrecht, "Jewish Slander: A Note on Revelation 2, 9-10" *Ephemerides Theological Lovanienses* 75, no. 4 (1999): 421-429; See also D.E. Aune, *Revelation* (WBC, 52/1 (Dallas, TX, 1997), 162; see also H. Lichtenberger, Überlegungen zum Verständnis der Johannes-Apocalypse, in Jesus Christus als die Mitte der Schrift (Studien zur Hermeneutik des Evangelisms. Berlin, 1997), 603-618.

[122] The NRSV's translation of βλασφημία as "slander" reveals the pervasiveness of the notion of an imperial persecution of Christians under Domitian, and of the concomitant notion that the Jews served as *delatores* during such period.

[123] Eberhard Nestlé et al., *The Greek New Testament* (27th ed.; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993), 657.

[124] O. Hofius, βλασφημέω, βλασφημία, βλασφημία, in EDNT 1, 219-221.

[125] This is preceded by lightning and earthquakes that split the colonial matrix (Rome) in three parts (Rev. 16:21).

Finally, (5) it would certainly seem that the so-called Synagogue of Satan had embraced the teaching of the Nicolaitans, which the author describes as *eidōlothyta* and porneia. As scholars rightly note, such teaching included participation in food offered in a cultic setting related to imperial sacrifices, while *porneia* refers to direct participation in the socio-economic and political structures of the empire. Presupposing the so-called parting of the ways, scholars have often reconstructed the Synagogue of Satan as (a) a group of hostile Jews from the local synagogue;[126] (b) Christians and gentile Judaizers;[127] (c) a mix of Christians and Jews, as well as neo-Pauline Christians;[128] and even (d) non-hostile local Jews.[129] However, such portraits not only re-inscribe tensions from second- and third-century martyrological materials, but also the supercessionist proclivities of earlier revelation scholarship. Having reconstructed the competing voices as a synagogue of the polis "rather than as a synagogue of Satan," I turn now to explore the ways in which John turns the question of civic participation into a negotiation of Jewish identity in the colonial situation.

4.5 Idolatry and Identity: Marking The boundaries of Jewish Ethnicity

The author of Revelation constructs the boundaries of Jewish identity around abstinence or participation in idolatry that participation in cultic honors to the Roman emperors and the broader imperial apparatus entailed. As I pointed out in this chapter, Jewish Diaspora groups used ekklēsia rhetoric, and its topoi of civic participation to

[126] Sweete, *The Apocalypse of John,* 50.

[127] Wilson, "Gentile Judaizers," *NTS* 38 (1992): 613-15

[128] Frankfurter, "Jews or Not?" 403-425.

[129] Duff, "The Synagogue of Satan," 164.

negotiate the socio-economic, and political situation of Asia Minor, while at the same time obliging the poleis they inhabited to uphold their civic compromise with their citizens. I have also suggested that civic participation often involved honoring wealthy to benefactors, such as Julia Severa, who were deeply involved in the provincial or local imperial cults.

The Synagogue of Sardis and its direct access to imperial cult halls further upholds a fluid portrait of Jewish participation in the life of the polis.[130] While the synagogue dates to a later period, Harland rightly observes that "this synagogue illustrates well the ways in which a Jewish group could quite literally, find a place for themselves within the polis."[131] Yet, Josephus also alludes to decision by civic authorities in Sardis to grant the Jews a place to meet.[132] Returning to the Sardis Synagogue, Phillip A. Harland notes that its door leading to the imperial cult hall was sealed off to avoid any idolatrous implications.[133] Given the degree of civic participation of the ekklēsia , and their honors to officials deeply involved in the imperial cult, the closed door would not have made much of a difference for John.[134]

4.5.1 Marking the Boundaries of Ethnic Identity

[130] Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations*, 203

[131] Ibid., 203.

[132] Ant. 14.25.259.

[133] Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations*, 203.

[134] While in the previous chapter I noted how John maps the implications of their participation of *eidōlothyta* for their own citizenship in the New Jerusalem, here I pay attention to how he demarcates the boundaries of Jewish ethnic identity around participation or rejection of the idolatry.

John makes participation in the civic structures of empire the determining boundary of Jewish ethnic identity. In this he seems to follow the Hebrew bible's definition of idolatry as unfaithfulness to Yahweh (e.g. Lev. 26:1; Deut. 4:23; cf. 2 Chr. 33:22; Isa. 40:19; 44:17; Jer. 10:14; 51:17; and Dan. 11:8).[135] The term idolatry εἰδωλολατρία and its substantive εἰδωλολάτρης refer to the worship of idols and occur only in the New Testament (1 Cor. 5:10, 11; 6:9; 10:7, 14; Gal. 5:20; Col. 3:5; Eph. 5:5; 1 Pet. 4:3; 21:8; 22:15).[136] Nevertheless, one would not easily establish the important nuancing of idolatry in Revelation through an etymological analysis per se. The terms εἰδωλολατρία (idolatry) and εἰδωλολατρεία (idol worship) are not attested, and εἰδωλολάτρης occurs twice (Rev. 21:8; 22:15) and idol (εἴδωλον) only once (9:20).

However, the term image (εἰκών) or idol in the LXX, occurs more times than in any New Testament text, and always refers to the image of the beast and its worship (Rev. 13:14, 15 (3); 14:9, 11; 15:2; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4).137 In my view, this signals that the author intends a targeted critique of the Roman imperial cult, and not simply a critique of the food offered to Greco-Roman deities, hence my reticence to view the critique of "idol food" through the lens of 1 Corinthians 8. That the idolatry John critiques consistently is the worship of the beast and its image, which is also evident in that he links the conquering of the *ekklēsiai* with abstinence from it and rejection of the

[135] Allen C. Myers, *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 512.

[136] Friedrich *Büchsel,* εἰδωλολάτρης, εἰδωλολατρία , in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 2, ed. Gerhard Kittel et al.; electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 380.

[137] *The Lexham Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament* (Logos Bible Software, 2011).

mark of the beast (15:2).[138] Indeed, the progression of the author's critique of the worship of the beast begins with his critique of *eidōlothyta* and *porneia*, followed by the various punishments upon unrepentant idolaters, and climaxes with their exclusion from the New Jerusalem (21:8) and their sharing in the punishments of the beast.

4.5.2 Blaspheming like The Beast

In order to persuade the *ekklēsia* that the decision of the so-called Synagogue of Satan excludes it from the people of God, which John understands not only in ethnic but also religious terms, the author rhetorically links them with the Roman emperor (13:1). As I have suggested, the "βλασφημία" of the Synagogue of Satan does not refer to a denunciation of Christians before Roman authorities, but rather to their participation in the imperial cult, which would include honoring imperial cult priestesses like Julia Severa, and the colonial apparatus undergirding the cult. In this sense, their slander is related to the *eidōlothyta* and *porneia*" discussed in the previous chapters. The author clearly establishes a connection between the "false Jews," the beast, and its followers through the term βλασφημία, which he ascribes to both the Beast and its followers. In John's view, it is because of this βλασφημία that those who claim to be Jews are not really Jews, but they are lying (2:9; 3:9). While in the messages John does not exactly tell us what the βλασφημία entails (the messages are a vision within a vision), its direct link with the worship of the beast and its followers is rather explicit.

The introduction of the Beast onto the stage of the text in chapter 13 is clearly marked by the blasphemous names on its seven heads: Καὶ εἶδον ἐκ τῆς θαλάσσης θηρίον

[138] Καὶ εἶδον ὡς θάλασσαν ὑαλίνην μεμιγμένην πυρὶ καὶ τοὺς νικῶντας ἐκ τοῦ θηρίου καὶ ἐκ τῆς εἰκόνος αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐκ τοῦ ἀριθμοῦ τοῦ ὀνόματος αὐτοῦ ἑστῶτας ἐπὶ τὴν θάλασσαν τὴν ὑαλίνην ἔχοντας κιθάρας τοῦ θεοῦ.

ἀναβαῖνον, ἔχον κέρατα δέκα καὶ κεφαλὰς ἑπτὰ καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν κεράτων αὐτοῦ δέκα διαδήματα καὶ ἐπὶ τὰς κεφαλὰς αὐτοῦ ὀνόμα [τα] βλασφημίας (13:1). Scholars seem to agree that the blasphemous names and the blasphemous words it utters (13:5) refer to the titles of honor that were conferred on Roman emperors in order to declare their claim to divine veneration in the cult of the Caesar: *divus* (divine), *augustus* (exalted one), *dominus ac deus* (Lord and God).[139] Such claims are also related to the Beast's blasphemies against God himself: "It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven" (13:6).

4.5.3 Acomplices in Oppression

The author also establishes the link between the "false Jews" and Rome through the term βλασφημία. In his vision of the "Whore" in the desert, John sees a woman (Rome) who is riding the beast with blasphemous names (ὀνόματα βλασφημίας): "So he carried me away in the spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns" (17:3).[140] The beast with blasphemous names refers to the previous beast and is understood to be a symbolic representation of the Roman emperor and his blasphemous claims. While scholars have interpreted the allusion to her abominations and fornication in theological and moral terms, they often neglect the economic dimensions of the term in

[139] Jürgen Roloff, *A Continental Commentary: The Revelation of John* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 156; Kraybill, J Nelson. *Apocalypse and Allegiance: Worship, Politics, and Devotion in the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Publishing Group, 2010), 56.

[140] καὶ ἀπήνεγκέν με εἰς ἔρημον ἐν πνεύματι. Καὶ εἶδον γυναῖκα καθημένην ἐπὶ θηρίον κόκκινον, γέμον[τα] ὀνόματα βλασφημίας, ἔχων κεφαλὰς ἑπτὰ καὶ κέρατα δέκα.

Revelation.[141] In chapter 18, the author clearly establishes the economic dimensions of *porneia* by noting that the kings and merchants of the earth have committed fornication with her and the latter have grown rich as a result (18:3). This connection with Babylon the next chapter explores in greater detail along with a discussion on wealth. However, the βλασφημία of the "Synagogue of Satan" and the economic participation in the imperial apparatus and more specifically the system of benefaction suggests they were not experiencing economic hardship. Conversely, those who embrace John's teaching and are thereby not aligning themselves with Rome, are experiencing oppression, potential imprisonment, and death, but also poverty, precisely because they have opted to abstain from participation in the colonial apparatus.

While in the messages to Pergamon and Thyatira the author links the Balaamites and Jezebel to the emperor, Rome, and Satan through the teaching of *eidōlothyta* and fornication, in the messages to Philadelphia and Smyrna he does so through the βλασφημία of the false Jews. This is because, as the broader rhetorical context of Revelation suggests, the βλασφημία of the "those who claim to be Jews" also involves *eidōlothyta*, and viceversa. Consequently, the endorsing of such teaching leads John to deny the claims to Jewish ethnicity to both "those who call themsleves Jews" and to Jezebel and Balaamites. It is also here that John links his opponents through *eidōlothyta* and *porneia*, in so far as it includes direct or indirect participation in the imperial cult and the Roman imperial apparatus. Just as the Beast is linked Rome, so too are those who call themselves Jews. That such a connection is intented is clear from the association of both

[141] Mounce notes, for instance, that the cup refers to the "Moral corruption and all manner of ceremonial uncleanness" (310). While such meaning might be present, it is but a fraction of how the author intends to use the term.

Balaamites, Jezebel, and false Jews with Satan. While the Balaamites are were Satan dwells, and Jezebel teaches the deep things of Satan, the those who call themselves Jews are actually a "Synagogue of Satan."

It is at this juncture, however, that the author lays a greater charge against his opponents. They are not only false Jews because they partake in the imperial cult and the idolatrous colonial apparatus under Rome, but also because, in doing so, they have become accomplices in the oppression of their own people. In both chapters 17 and 18, the author clearly accuses Rome of murder:

> καὶ εἶδον τὴν γυναῖκα μεθύουσαν ἐκ τοῦ αἵματος τῶν ἁγίων καὶ ἐκ τοῦ αἵματος τῶν μαρτύρων Ἰησοῦ. Καὶ ἐθαύμασα ἰδὼν αὐτὴν θαῦμα μέγα (17:6).[142]
>
> καὶ ἐν αὐτῇ αἷμα προφητῶν καὶ ἁγίων εὑρέθη καὶ πάντων τῶν ἐσφαγμένων ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς (18:24).[143]

The allusion to the blood of the witnesses of Jesus evokes the death of Antipas at Pergamon, as well as all the souls under the altar. Furthermore, scholars have often misunderstood such implicit association of those "who call themselves Jews" with Rome because they cast them as *delatores* of Christians. However, my analysis shows the relationship is subtler and explains why the faithful witnesses in Smyrna are experiencing economic hardships, while the "Synagogue of Satan is not."

4.5.4 The Conquered Nations

The author also closes the boundaries of Jewish ethnicity for his interlocutors by situating them among the conquered nations through the term βλασφημία.[144] As I noted

[142] "And I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the witnesses to Jesus. When I saw her, I was greatly amazed" (17:6).

[143] "And in you was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slaughtered on earth" (18:24).

in the previous paragraphs, the term βλασφημία is associated with the image of beast, as well as with those who worship it. Despite the punishment of divine plagues, the followers of the beast do not repent but rather curse God multiple times:

> The fierce heat scorched them, but they blasphemed (ἐβλασφήμησαν), the name of God who had authority over these plagues, and they did not repent and give him glory (16:9).[145]
>
> And they blasphemed (ἐβλασφήμησαν) the God of heaven because of their pains and sores, and they did not repent of their deeds (16:11).[146]
>
> And huge hailstones, each weighing about a hundred pounds, dropped from heaven on people, until they blasphemed (ἐβλασφήμησαν) God for the plague of the hail, so fearful was that plague (16:21).[147]

The repeated blaspheming of God by the unrepentant nations underscores their loyalty to the beast but also the degree of their own deception (20:3).[148] Amazed at the signs of the beast and decieved by it, the nations or inhabitants of earth make an image for the beast (13:14) and worship it.

The rather impressionable "synagogue of Satan" is thus positioned among the conquered, gullible, and deceived nations (20:3). The point is reinforced by the rhetorical

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[144] For a discussion of the representation of the nations in Revelation see Ronald Herms. *An Apocalypse for the Church and for the World: The Narrative Function of Universal Language in the Book of Revelation* (Berlin; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2006). For a discussion of the nations and Roman imperial ideology see Davina Lopez, *The Apostle to the Conquered: Reimagining Paul's Mission.* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010); Neil Elliott. *The Arrogance of Nations* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010).

[145] καὶ ἐκαυματίσθησαν οἱ ἄνθρωποι καῦμα μέγα καὶ ἐβλασφήμησαν τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἔχοντος τὴν ἐξουσίαν ἐπὶ τὰς πληγὰς ταύτας καὶ οὐ μετενόησαν δοῦναι αὐτῷ δόξαν.

[146] καὶ ἐβλασφήμησαν τὸν θεὸν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἐκ τῶν πόνων αὐτῶν καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἑλκῶν αὐτῶν καὶ οὐ μετενόησαν ἐκ τῶν ἔργων αὐτῶν·

[147] καὶ χάλαζα μεγάλη ὡς ταλαντιαία καταβαίνει ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἐπὶ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, καὶ ἐβλασφήμησαν οἱ ἄνθρωποι τὸν θεὸν ἐκ τῆς πληγῆς τῆς χαλάζης, ὅτι μεγάλη ἐστὶν ἡ πληγὴ αὐτῆς σφόδρα.

[148] Herms, *An Apocalypse for the Church,* 148.

construction of the nations that John paints. In Revelation, the nations emerge as antagonistic to the people of God (e.g. they trample the holy city refuse to bury the two witnesses and rejoice at their death (11:2,9-10). John describes them as the waters upon which the "whore" sits, or has authority (17:15), and their future prospects do not seem any better, that is, if they remain under the influence of the beast.

The nations often appear as allied with the kings of the earth (1.5; 6.15; 17.2, 18; 18:3; 9-10; 19.19; 21.2), who are in turn allied with Rome (17.2, 17; 18:3) and are destroyed in the eschatological battle (19:19-21).[149] The strategy of situating another Jewish faction among gentiles is not entirely unusual (e.g., 1 Mace 1:34; 2:44, 48; 1 Enoch 5:4-7; 82:4-5; Pss. Sol. 4:8; 13:6-12). In Jewish literature, gentiles are depicted as wicked and guilty of sin. The Psalms (e.g., Ps 50:16-20; 109:2-7; 119:53,155) allude to those who ignore the law and who therefore fall under condemnation. As J.D.G. Dunn notes, "since gentiles were by definition lawless, the term could be used… as more or less synonymous with Gentiles" (Ps 9:17; Tobit 13:6).[150] Hence, framing another Jewish faction as gentiles entails casting them outside the people of God, and calls into question their ethnic identity (e.g.1 Mac 1:34; 2:44, 48; 1 Enoch 5:4-7; 82:4-5; Pss. Sol. 4:8; 13:6-12).

Most importantly, they participate in the idolatry represented by the imperial cult (13:7; 14:6, 8). Hence, the Synagogue of Satan and arguably, the Balaamites at Pergamon, and Jezebel at Thyatira, are cast outside of the people of God. The totality of their deception and idolatry is encompassed by the usage of the fourfold formula for

[149] Herms, *An Apocalypse for the Church,* 169-181.

[150] Dunn, J. D. G., "Echoes of Intra-Jewish Polemic in Paul's Letter to the Galatians" (1993).

humanity in the Book of Revelation (tribe, tongue, people, and nation).[151] To their credit, the Beast's successful deception of the nations is quite subtle, for it is able to circumvent the traditional Jewish understanding of idols as man-made things that cannot see, hear, or know (Dan. 5:23; Isaiah 44:9), as things that have no breath in them (Hab. 2:18-19), that "have mouths but cannot speak" (Ps.115). In chapter 13, however, the second beast is able to give breath to the image (εἰκών) of the first beast, a man-made image, which is then able to speak and even ensure that those who refuse to worship it are killed (13:15).

Ultimately, John suggests that those who claim to be Jews are not because they are associated with the Dragon (Rev. 12:3, 4, 7, 9, 13, 16, 17; 13:2, 4, 11; 16:13; 20:2). While the term βλασφημία is not used here, it is forcefully implied since the Beast is a creation of the Dragon, has the same number of heads, horns, and diadems, and derives its authority from it (13:2). Hence, both Dragon and Beast resist God, deceive people, and persecute the saints. The author makes the link clearer by referring to those who claim to be Jews as a "Synagogue of Satan." In the context of my reconstruction, such interpellation ultimately marks their exclusion from the people of God, the New Jerusalem, and dooms them to share in Satan's fate. This is evident in that those who worship the beast also receive its mark, and the author is keen to emphasize that the names of such people are not written in the Book of life:

> And all the inhabitants of the earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the Book of life (ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τῆς ζωῆς) of the Lamb that was slaughtered (13:8).

[151] Allan J. McNicol, *The Conversion of the Nations in Revelation* (London; New York: T & T Clark, 2011), 31.

The author makes the link explicitly in its promise to the conquering ones in the message to Sardis, that should they conquer, that is, should they not worship the beast, he will not erase their names names from τῆς βίβλου τῆς ζωῆς.[152] The option is significant because despite the fact that those whose names were not written from the foundation of the world would worship the beast, here the John appears to give people an option. This is consistent with his claim that the Dragon will decive even the chosen ones.

Because idolaters will be excluded from the Book of life, John argues they will also be excluded from the New Jerusalem:

> But nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of life (21:27).

Only those who worship God and bear his name on their foreheads (21:4) will have access to the New Jerusalem. But in case the point is not clear, the author against underscores that the idolaters will be left outside the city. Most important, worshipping the beast and bearing its mark, according to John, ultimately leads them to share Satan's fate. Since they have merged their interests with the beast and its imperial apparatus, they have also merged interests with the Dragon, and will therefore also partake of its demise in the lake of fire: "If anyone's name was not found written in the Book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire." (20:15).[153]

Furthermore, while in the messages to Pergamon and Thyatira the author links the Balaamites and Jezebel to the emperor, Rome, and Satan through the teaching of *eidōlothyta* and fornication, in the messages to Philadelphia and Smyrna he does so

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[152] Eberhard Nestlé et al., *The Greek New Testament* (27th ed.; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993), 637-38.

[153] καὶ εἴ τις οὐχ εὑρέθη ἐν τῇ βίβλῳ τῆς ζωῆς γεγραμμένος, ἐβλήθη εἰς τὴν λίμνην τοῦ πυρός

through the βλασφημία of the false Jews. This is because, as the broader rhetorical context of Revelation suggests, the βλασφημία of the those "who claim to be Jews," also involves *eidōlothyta*, and vice versa. Consequently, the endorsing of such teaching leads John to deny the claims to Jewish ethnicity to both "those who call themsleves Jews" and to Jezebel and Balaamites. It is also here that John links his opponents through *eidōlothyta* and *porneia*, in so far as it includes direct or indirect participation in the imperial cult and the Roman imperial apparatus. Just as the Beast is subjected to Rome, so are those who call themselves Jews. That such a connection is intended is clear from the association of both Balaamites, Jezebel, and false Jews with Satan. While the Balaamites are where Satan dwells, and Jezebel teaches the deep things of Satan, those who call themselves Jews are actually a "synagogue of Satan."

4.5.5 Conquering the Colonial Apparatus

The second dimension of John's counter *ekklēsia* rhetoric is to deliver a set of promises that read as alternatives to the colonial situation. However, these are contingent on the ability of the *ekklēsiai* to conquer, which for John entails abstinence from both *eidōlothyta* and fornication, that is, participation in the Roman imperial cult and the imperial apparatus that maintains it. Having cast the Synagogue of Satan as apostates who will share in the destruction of the beast in the lake of fire, John proceeds to encourage and indirectly entice the opposition to join his party through a series of messages known as promises to the victors (e.g. 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21). The messages not only constitute a direct address to the situation, but also link the rhetorical exigencies of the messages with the overall rhetorical situation of Revelation. As I noted in my analysis of the rhetorical exigencies of Smyrna and Philadelphia, the main theme

(s) that frame the situation of Smyrna is the antithesis life/death, while in the message to Philadelphia is exclusion. Both messages, of course, share the contrast of their faithful witness with the blasphemy of the so-called Synagogue of Satan, which is neither poor nor facing potential death given their worship of the beast.

In the message to Smyrna, the author's intention to encourage the audience and at the same time give a further threat is clear in his promise of immunity from the second death: "Whoever conquers will not be harmed by the second death" (2:11). The notion of "the second death," derives from Judaism and denotes that final death from which there is no resurrection: "Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. Over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him a thousand years" (20:6).[154] The contrast in the types of death awaiting the "true Jews" and those who claim to be Jews is dramatic. While the witnesses of Jesus may face potential death, the apparently comfortable "synagogue of Satan" faces a rather terrible death from which there is no resurrection. The promise to reign with Jesus may also point to their contemporary precarious socio-economic and political situation. Since they are unable to benefit from the sort of relationships with wealthy benefactors, even imperial cult priest and priestesses, the author promises they will be priests not of the beast and Satan, but of the Lamb and Christ. What is more, the faithful witnesses or conquering ones stand to rule with Christ for a thousand years.

Similarly, the promises to the victors in the message to Philadelphia provide a constructive alternative and comfort of sorts for the *ekklēsia*. One of the main themes

[154] μακάριος καὶ ἅγιος ὁ ἔχων μέρος ἐν τῇ ἀναστάσει τῇ πρώτῃ· ἐπὶ τούτων ὁ δεύτερος θάνατος οὐκ ἔχει ἐξουσίαν, ἀλλ᾽ ἔσονται ἱερεῖς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ βασιλεύσουσιν μετ᾽ αὐτοῦ [τὰ] χίλια ἔτη.

framing the rhetorical exigency of this assembly is the exclusion from the imperial apparatus, which leads them to have little power (3:8). Scholars have usually read the themes of the open/closed doors in Philadelphia as an allusion to the exclusion of Christians from the Synagogue,[155] which not only presupposes the parting of the ways but also has supercessionist overtones in so far as the Christians are seen as an eschatological embodiment of God's people. Conversely, I read the image of the doors as an exclusion of the socio-economic and political apparatus that comes with refusing to worship the beast and bear its mark. The promises to the conquerors seems to address such concerns rather explicitly:

> If you conquer, I will make you a pillar in the temple of my God; you will never go out of it. I will write on you the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem that comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name (3:12).[156]

While scholars have interpreted the allusion to becoming pillars as a response to the earthquakes,[157] or as a parody of the statues of imperial priests who upon the end of his tenure was given a statue with his name, it is likely that it refers to the privileged access to God himself that faithful witnesses will have in the New Jerusalem. Schüssler-Fiorenza rightly points out that the *ekklēsia* of Smyrna and Philadelphia were "poor and powerless" and that consequently, "They receive assurance that Christ as the Davidic messiah will keep open for them the 'door' to the eschatological future and guarantee their citizenship in the

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[155] Jürgen Roloff, *A Continental Commentary: The Revelation of John* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 61.

[156] Ὁ νικῶν ποιήσω αὐτὸν στῦλον ἐν τῷ ναῷ τοῦ θεοῦ μου καὶ ἔξω οὐ μὴ ἐξέλθῃ ἔτι καὶ γράψω ἐπ᾽ αὐτὸν τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ θεοῦ μου καὶ τὸ ὄνομα τῆς πόλεως τοῦ θεοῦ μου, τῆς καινῆς Ἰερουσαλὴμ ἡ καταβαίνουσα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ μου, καὶ τὸ ὄνομά μου τὸ καινόν.

[157] Roloff, *The Revelation of John, 61*.

New Jerusalem."[158] Most important, the promise to be inscribed with the name of God, the New Jerusalem, and Christ stands in juxtaposition to the mark that the followers of the beast have (Rev 13:16, 17), and their socio-economic and political connections with Rome. While the exclusion of the eschatological community of the faithful is inevitable since they cannot partake of the imperial apparatus, so is the ultimate exclusion of the followers of the beast since those who bear its mark will be erased from the Book of life.

4.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored the polemic against the so-called synagogue of Satan as a reference to their deployment of ekklēsia rhetoric and its topoi of civic participation. In view of the deteriorating political situation of the Jewish Diaspora in Asia Minor, and other parts of the world, and the disfavor they incurred with Rome, Jewish groups opted to deploy ekklēsia rhetoric as a way to accentuate their participation in the socio-economic, and political structures of the polis, and to underscore its responsibility in protecting the rights of its citizens. Epigraphic sources on ancient voluntary associations further substantiates such view. We find Jewish associations honoring wealthy benefactors, as well as city official who happened to be deeply involved, in the local and provincial cults to the emperors. Alluding to the idolatrous implications of such civic participation and relationship of reciprocity with the city, John makes it the dividing boundary between the true and the false Jews. Unwilling to compromise, he casts civic participation and the honors to the emperors it often entailed,

[158] Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza. *Revelation: Vision of a Just World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 55.

as a blasphemy. Indeed, through such term he links the “false Jews” with Babylon, The Beast, and ultimately Satan.

Chapter Five

"I Have Grown Rich:" Wealth, Poverty, and Decolonization

5.1. Introduction

The inscribed Jewish assemblies also used ekklēsia rhetoric to negotiate their economic status. Whereas in the message to Smyrna the author praises the *ekklēsia* and qualifies its poverty by noting that they are truly rich (Rev. 2:9), in the message to Laodikea he contests their claims to riches in no uncertain terms: "Because you say, 'I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing.' You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked" (3:17). The significance of wealth in Revelation becomes clearer when the author notes that no one will be able "to buy or sell" without the mark of the Beast (13:17), and when he portrays the merchants of the earth locked in a symbiotic relationship with Babylon, which he casts as a form of fornication (18:3). While they feed Rome's luxurious and extravagant lifestyle with items that range from gold to slaves (18:11), they grow rich from the incessant demand for their goods (18:19). But if the imperial matrix that persecutes and kills the saints and prophets of God is wealthy (18:24), the New Jerusalem that is set to replace it is even wealthier (21:9-27), for its streets are made of refined gold and its gates of precious stones (21:21). In fact, the author intimates a reorientation of wealth and status not only through the imminent collapse of Babylon, but also because the nations will bring their honor and glory into it (21: 24; 26).

However, contemporary scholarly explorations of the construction and function of wealth/poverty in the Book of Revelation continue to presuppose the parting of the ways and obfuscate the role of imperial power. While some scholars view the "wealth" of the "materially poor" Smyrnan church as wealthy "in spiritual goods, in faith,"[1] or as a symbol of inner and outer poverty,[2] others cast the "poverty" of the materially rich Laodikeans as an indication of their commerce-tainted wealth.[3] Others still observe that the sequence in the message to Smyrna suggests that "Christ bestows wealth upon the Smyrnans for their fight with the Jews, which they are apparently losing."[4] In order to get Christians to side with him, John associates Babylon's wealth with commerce and casts it as *sordida et vulgares*, in comparison with the high status wealth of the New Jerusalem. Looking at various texts from Second Temple period,[5] other scholars suggest that in Revelation wealth constitutes a sign of wickedness and poverty a sign of fidelity to God.[6]

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[1] See Wilfrid J. Harrington, *Revelation,* ed. by Daniel J. Harrington (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 58.

[2] Jürgen Roloff, *The Revelation of John* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 48.

[3] See Robert M. Royalty, The *Streets of Heaven: The Ideology of Wealth in the Apocalypse of John* (Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1998), 163; Royalty adds that "Christ's counsel to buy goods from him… shows that the wealth of the Laodikeans almost certainly derived from commerce; the Laodikeans are already buying from somebody else with the hope of reselling for profit. The subtext here for the audience, of course, is the low status of the merchants and commerce. Christ, taking the studied pose of a Stoic philosopher, draws an implicit comparison between the commercially derived wealth of the Laodikean church and the true wealth of heaven, to which the Christians gain access by endurance and suffering (Rev. 2:9)" (171).

[4] Some of them will be cast into prison. The split between Christmas and Jews which resulted in Jewish Christians being expelled from the Synagogue probably preceded Revelation by ten or fifteen years. The two references to the Jews in Revelation both include the phrase "the synagogue of Satan" (2:9, 3:9), strongly suggesting that the expulsion of the Christians from the synagogue was still a live issue in the churches of Asia" (161).

[5] See 1 Enoch, *Pesher of Habakkuk*, and *Damascus Document* among several others.

[6] Mathews, *Riches, Poverty, and The Faithful*, 165; in his view, "John is encouraging the rich in the church to reject riches in the present age and to receive the reproof and disciplined of God

In their respective ways, scholars use both Jewish and Greco-Roman traditions to explain away the role of empire in the text.[7]

But how would our understanding of the tension over wealth/poverty in Revelation change if we were to view it as an economic tension triggered by Roman imperialism, which the assembly and John had to resolve, and did so through *ekklēsia* rhetoric? As I have been suggesting, the ancient democratic *ekklēsia* served as a site for deliberation and resolution of various social, and political, and economic tensions. Rather than simply overlay it with a topoi of *ekklēsia* rhetoric, however, my work seeks to show how it was inflected by the Roman imperial situation of Asia Minor.[8] In order to address the question at hand, I will deploy my threefold methodology: (1) map the rhetorical situation of Laodikea, and to some extent of Smyrna, (2) reconstruct the silenced voices and issues of the *ekklēsia* using epigraphic materials on ancient voluntary associations; (3) and explore the rhetorical strategies John uses in order to persuade the *ekklēsiai* to adopt his decolonizing stance.

(3:19), which reflects an 'alternative, otherworldly,' economic system. "This demonstrates the writer's presumption that faithfulness in the present age is evidenced by poverty and a life of suffering while affluence denotes unfaithfulness" (165).

[7] Mathews adds that Rome is not the enemy of the church per se, nor is the idea prevalent in early Christian tradition (cf. Matt 22:21; Luke 20:25; Rom 13; 1 Peter 2:13-17). John does not critique the Roman Empire with the hope of a new political power that rejects the imperial cults and idolatry. In John's view, the present age is completely irredeemable and not because of the Roman Empire, but because the eschatological age has been inaugurated and Satan and his angels have been cast out from the earth. There is not hope for the righteous in the present age apart from divine intervention in which Christ will vindicate the faithful poor and destroy the wicked rich" (2:17).

[8] Frantz Fanon's notion of "colonial situation" and decolonization provides a framework/language that may help illuminate the multiple ways in which subjects negotiated imperial power, and the ways in which such negotiation is contingent on the fortunes of the empire, whether this be Caesar's or the Lamb's empire.

Subsequently, I will argue that both John and the *ekklēsia* attempted to resolve the economic tensions triggered by the colonial situation under Rome. Using the rhetoric of the common good,[9] the *ekklēsia* seems to have opted to participate fully in the economic structures of empire and the cultic dimensions it entailed. In order to persuade them, John intimates that he is also concerned with their common good and deploys a two-fold strategy. On the one hand, he links them with merchants and Rome through the theme of fornication or *porneia*, but also enunciates a decolonizing moment that would devalue their wealth and essentially leave them broke.[10] On the other hand, John does not seem to want to alienate the rest of the *ekklēsia* members and invites the Laodikean merchants to conduct trade with another merchant (Jesus) and with another imperial matrix (the New Jerusalem).[11]

5.2 The Rhetorical Exegencies

The question of wealth and poverty in Revelation is intricately linked to the deployment of *ekklēsia* rhetoric and its notions of civic participation. In the broader context of Revelation, John suggests that only those who bear the mark of the beast will be able to buy and sell, while the rest will not and might even face death. As I have suggested in the previous chapters, the use of ekklēsia rhetoric as a strategy to negotiate the socio-economic structures of empire, would have facilitated the economic prosperity

[9] Ibid., 78; Royalty notes that, "The more one reads Jewish literature with an eye for passages about wealth and trade, the more striking it is that nowhere in the Apocalypse is there any strong concern for social justice, the poor, the widowed, or the orphaned" (78).

[10] In the decolonization of the *oikoumenē* that John anticipates, the alliance with either Rome or the New Jerusalem explains the shift in economic fortunes of its subjects. Hence, the Rome-bound Laodikeans, who claim to be rich, are poor, and the New Jerusalem-bound Smyrnans, who are poor, are actually rich.

[11] Royalty. *The Streets of Heaven, 207;* For a critique of this view see Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?*13.

of the assemblies, or at least of those who upheld notions of civic participation, civic reciprocity, and the common good. Unsurprisingly, the author paints the competing voices not only as transgressing boundaries that put at risk their citizenship in the New Jerusalem and ethnic identity as Jews, but also as benefiting economically from the colonial apparatus, and doing so at the expense of other oppressed Jews. Hence, scholars have suggested that in Revelation, as with other texts from the Second Temple Period, the wicked are prospering economically, while the righteous endure suffering and poverty.[12]

5.2.1 Revelation 2:9: The Poverty of Smyrna

A brief analysis should illumine the centrality of the issue of wealth and poverty in both messages. As I suggested in my previous analysis of the message to Smyrna, the juxtaposition of the theme of life and death frames the rhetorical exigency or situation of the text. Couched between two verses in which life and death are juxtaposed (2:8; 2:10), John alludes to the poverty of the Smyrnan using the οἶδά formula that signal the acknowledgement of the circumstances of the *ekklēsia*: οἶδά σου τὴν θλῖψιν καὶ τὴν πτωχείαν, ἀλλὰ πλούσιος εἶ (2:0a). The theme of poverty, however, is not a dangling element in the text, but integrally connected to the theme of suffering and death that permeates the message. It appears that for John, poverty is what accompanies faithful witnessing, along with suffering, potential imprisonment, and death (2:10).[13] Furthermore, the author contrasts the poverty of the Smyrnans in two ways: first, by

[12] Mathews, *Riches, Poverty, and the Faithful, 216; Mathews adds that "*The author envisions the world in the present age as irretrievably evil and ruled temporally by Satan. This follows the same pattern developed in the Second Temple period in which organized, external forces deceive human kind and lure them into a life of affluence and away from worshipping God. For this reason, John categorically rejects participation in the economic system" (216).

[13] This also applies to the "little power" that the Philadelphians are said to have.

contradicting or qualitiying the acknowledgement of their poverty and stating that they are rich; and second, by juxtaposing their poverty with the blasphemy of a group who, according to the author, claim to be Jews, but who he says are not: "I know the blasphemy on the part of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan" (2:9b).[14]

5.2.2 Rev. 3:14-23: The Wealth of Laodikea

In contrast to the faithful of Smyrna, John presents the members of the *ekklēsia* of Laodikea as overly prosperous provincials. While some Robert Royalty suggest that the scripting of Jesus as a philosopher is the key to understanding the passage,[15] it appears that the contrast with faithful witnesses and their poverty is as much, if not more, productive. From the outset, John introduces Jesus as "the amen, the faithful witness and true witness," and links him with the epistolary prescript (1:6-7; see also 5:14, 7:12). The contrast between Jesus' self-designation and the nature of the Laodikeans is evident in so far as in Revelation faithful witnessing is tied to death, suffering, and poverty. Conversely, that the Laodikeans are actually experiencing the opposite economic situation indicates to John that they are not faithful witnesses. What is intimated becomes evident in the οἶδά section when Jesus notes in 3:15: οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα ὅτι οὔτε ψυχρὸς εἶ οὔτε ζεστός. ὄφελον ψυχρὸς ἦς ἢ ζεστός. The indecision appears to be related to

[14] While not much information is provided about this group, I have suggested their blasphemy would situate them as those who bear the mark of the beast, and thereby can buy and sell (13:17). Therefore, they are not experiencing the same suffering, potential imprisonment, and death as those John praises.

[15] Royalty, *The Streets of Heaven*, 170.

participation in the economic apparatus of the Beast,[16] and as Royalty rightly observes, John seems to demand nothing but full committment to his vision of the situation.[17] However, this does not really explain the threat of exclusion noted in 3:16: οὕτως ὅτι χλιαρὸς εἶ καὶ οὔτε ζεστὸς οὔτε ψυχρός, μέλλω σε ἐμέσαι ἐκ τοῦ στόματός μου.

The rationale for the threat and contrast with faithful witnessing is rather due to their self-confident claim to riches, and the economic participation in the imperial apparatus it entails: "For you say, 'I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing" (3:17a). While some scholars suggest that John has in mind here boasting of spiritual riches, Royalty I think rightly notes that the allusions to wealth and poverty refer to material wealth, given the amplication of 3:18 through terms of commercial imagery.[18] In disagreement with Royalty, however, I view the Laodikean claims as an indication of participation in the socio-economic apparatus that *eidōlothyta* and *porneia* enabled.[19] Hence, the invitation from Jesus to swtich imperial apparatuses and actually trade with him:

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[16] For Royalty, "The lukewarm attitude of the Laodiceans challenges John's polarized worldview. This is a church of uncommitted fence sitters, and wealthy ones at that. They have not rejected John's forceful message for another teacher's but neither have they rejected John's opponents."

[17] According to Royalty, "The implied author wants strong commitment from the churches. Therefore, Christ desires the Laodiceans to be 'hot.' Fire appears as destructive imagery in the visions, but in the immediate contexts of the messages is a positive image (1:14-15; 2:18), particularly the 'fiery gold' Christ offers to sell to this church (3:18).

[18] Ibid., 167.

[19] Royalty dismisses the allusion to both *eidōlothyta* and *porneia* and their promoters (Nicolaitans, Jezebel, and Balaamites), on the grounds that these overlay the situation of strong and weak Christians here as one sees in 1 Corinthians 8, while the message to Laodikea does not evidence any concern with moral issues. However, he does so, because, as he himself has critiqued, he has fallen prey to normative approaches that read *eidōlothyta* and *porneia* merely in moral terms, and see it as a problem of heresy vs. Orthodoxy. In his view, "the Nicolaitans and Jezebel and her followers are in fact condemned in Revelation for "libertine" behavior similar to the "strong in Corinth, such as eating idol meat, and alternative sexual practices, but there is no indication that these moral issues are at stake in the controversy with the Laodikeans" (167).

> Therefore I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire so that you may be rich; and white robes to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen; and salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see (3:18).

Scholars such as Robert H. Mounce have explored the cliams to riches of Laodikea in relation to the city's wealth.[20] They underscore the city's self-sufficiency in rebuilding itself after the earthquake in 60 A.D.[21] However, if the contrast with Smyrna is mantained in material terms, it appears that faithful witnessesing, and abstinence from *eidōlothyta* and porneia, is a way of trading with Jesus. In John's view, this secures faithful witnesses an inheritance in the New Jerusalem (22:7). Conversely, participating in *eidōlothyta* and *porneia* leads to prosperity in the socio-economic apparatus of the beast.

5.3. Voluntary Associations

In order to illumine the ways in which ekklēsia rhetoric function as a strategy to negotiate the economic structures of the colonized poleis in Asia Minor, I revisit epigraphic materials on voluntary associations. As Harland has noted, certain voluntary associations embraced polis rhetoric as a way of carving for themselves a place within it.[22] Given the analagous practices accross, rituals, self-designations, and governing structures of associations in Asia Minor, and exploration of their economic interactions with imperial economic structures should illumine the ways in which the ekklēsia of Revelation participated in the economic life of the colonized polis.

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[20] Robert H. Mounce. *The Book of Revelation*, 110; Mounce alludes to the city's financial wealth, extensive textile industry, and popular eye salve. Furthermore, he observes that, "The huge sums taken from Asian cities by Roman officials during the Mithridatic period and following indicate enormous wealth. The Zenoid family (private citizens of Laodikea) is a remarkable example of the power of individual wealth" (110).

[21] Jürgen Roloff, *The Revelation of John* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 60; Wilfrid J. Harrington, *Revelation*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 75.

[22] Phillip A. Harland, Associations, Synagogues and Congregations, 212.

5.3.1 Merchants from the Slave Market

As I have shown in the previous chapters, various associations sought to establish not only political but also economically beneficial connections, and were engaged in multiple types of trade. In an inscription dated to around 42-43 C.E, for instance, a group of merchants from the slave market honor their patron C. Sallustius Crispus Passienus (IEph3025). Among his many titles, Sallustius is described as proconsul, consul, praetor…quaestor of Tiberius Caesar Augustus, and member of the board of Augustus (Augustales). The last line contains a self-reference by the merchants and their relationship with C. Sallustius: "Those who are engaged in business in the slave-market (*qui in statario negotiantur*) set this up for their patron." As Harland has observed, C. Sallustius Crispus Passienus was proconsul between 42-43 C.E., and consul for the second time in 44 (IEph 716; 3026). The merchants in the slave market also appear in a different inscription dated to 100 C.E. honoring T. Claudius Secundus.[23] He is described as a Roman reserve soldier who was also messenger of the tribune, and to whom they refer as "favisori civitatis Ephesiorum," patron of the Ephesian citizens (IEph646). The pervasiveness of the slave trade is well attested in Asia Minor (AGRW 124).

5.3.2 A Roman Conventus

The second association I explore is a group of Roman businessmen. In this case, they join efforts with the other Greeks, and the *dēmos* of Laodikea, to honor Quintus Pomponius Flaccus, son of Quintus of the Galeria tribe (ILaodikLyk 82).

> οἱ ἐπὶ τῆς Ἀσίας Ῥωμαῖοι καὶ Ἕλληνες καὶ ὁ δῆ-
> μος ὁ Λαοδικέων ἐτείμησαν Κοίντον Πομπώ-
> νιον Κοίντου υἱὸν Γαλερία Φλάκκον ἥρωα, στρατη-
> γήσαντα τῆς πόλεως δημ<ω>φελῶς καὶ γενόμενον ἐπὶ

[23] The name T. Claudius Secondus is also attested in various others inscriptions (e.g. IEph 857, 1544, 1545).

τῶν δημοσίων προσόδων, ἀγορανομήσαντά τε πολυτε-
λῶς καὶ ἑκατέρους τοὺς θερμοὺς περιπάτους καύσαντ[α]
πρῶτον καὶ μόνον, ἀλείψαντά τε ἐν ταῖς ἐπισήμοις ἡμέ-
ραις παρ᾽ ἑαυτοῦ κατὰ μῆνα καὶ νομοφυλακήσαντά τε μετὰ
τοῦ καὶ τὰς ὑπὲρ τῶν οἰκονομημάτων δαπάνας πεποι-
ῆσθαι παρ᾽ ἑαυτοῦ καὶ στρατηγήσαντα διὰ νυκτὸς ν[ο]-
μίμως καὶ πρεσβεύσαντα εἰς Ῥώμην ὑπὲρ τῆς πατρίδ[ος]
παρ᾽ ἑαυτοῦ καὶ ἐπιδίδοντα ἐν εὐανγελίοις εὐψύχω[ς]
στρώσαντά τε παρ᾽ ἑαυτοῦ ἔνπροσθεν τοῦ Διὸς [λευ]-
κολίθῳ καὶ ἀλείψαντα τὴν πόλιν πάλιν παρ᾽ ἑαυτο[ῦ]
τοῖς κατ᾽ ἄνδρα δράκτοις ἐγ λουτήρων. τελ[ειωσάν]-
των τὸ μνημῆον Κοΐντου Πομπωνίου [— — —]
τῶν ἀδε[λφ]ῶν αὐτοῦ, ποιησαμέν[ων — — —]
[— — —]ης καὶ συνδαṗ[ανησαντ— — —]
[— — — α]ὐτοῦ ΚΟ[— — —]
— — —

The inscription adumbrates not only the honors to the a wealthy benefactor, but also the relationship between Greek and Romans in Asia Minor. In Harland's translation of the inscription, one can gain a glimpse of the wealth that certain Roman officials possessed, as well the ways in which they are said to have used to benefit the city:

> The Romans and Greeks in Asia and the People of Laodikea honor Quintus Pomponius Flaccus son of Quintus of the Galeria tribe, deceased, who has served as commander of the city for the good of the People, as well as being in charge of the revenues of the People. He served as market–overseer in an extravagant manner, having been the first and only to heat both heated concourses. He supplied oil during the specified days during the month and has served as guardian of the laws, as well as covering the administrative costs at his own expense. He has served as night–commander in a lawful manner and as ambassador to Rome on behalf of the homeland at his own expense. He has generously provided for the festivals of good news, as well as paving the area in front of Zeus' (statue, or: temple) with white marble. He has supplied the city with oil, again at his own expense, with a measure for each man in a cup. His brothers, Quintus Pomponius and … prepared this memorial, having it made … and having covered the costs together..

Whether or not the claims made about Quintus munificence are correct, it appears he amassed a considerable amount of wealth while in Asia Minor. Among his many duties, he is recognized for the following: (1) serving as commander; (2) overseeing the revenues of the people; market overseer, and (3) as ambassador to Rome on behalf of the

homeland.[24] The wealth of Quintus is evident in that, "He has supplied the city with oil, again at his own expense, with a measure for each man in a cup." As Harland observed, the term "Greeks in Asia" is ambiguous. On the one hand, it may refer to the provincial league that represents Greek cities and which is often referred to as τὸ κοινὸν τῶν ἐπὶ τῆς Ἀσίας Ἑλλήνων. Furthermore, it is also interesting that, along with the dēmos of Laodikea, the Greek of Asia join a *conventus* of Romans, who are often described as *conventus civium Romanorum qui in Asia negotiantur* (IEph 409 and IEph 3019).[25] The inscription may also indirectly attests to the economic opportunities that participation in networks of civic benefactions afforded certain groups.

5.4. *Ekklēsia* and Wealth

Traditional interpretation of the message to Laodikea casts the competing voices within *ekklēsia* as sell-outs to empire. In their view, this portrait accounts for the seer's description of the competing voices as "lukewarm" (3:16). Such label has also served to reinforce interpretations that cast the Laodikeans as: (1) spiritually cold Christians;[26] (2) greedy provincials colluding with empire; (3) and half-hearted Christians who were unable to commit to the Christian cause.[27] In most cases, these portraits reinscribe the author's rhetoric of vilification in so far as the blame is placed on the Laodikeans for not embracing John's apocalyptic vision of the world. Robert Royalty, for instance, portrays

[24] Louis Robert, "Les Inscriptions," in *Laodicée du Lycos: Le Nymphée campagnes 1961-1963* (Quebec: Les Presses de L'Université Laval, 1969), 265.

[25] The presence of "Roman businessmen" in Asia is attested by numerous inscriptions, some dated to the third century BCE., where Romans and the inhabitants of Paphlagonia swear an oath of allegiance to Augustus by his altar.

[26] David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John's Way: The Rhetoric of the Book of Revelation* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 70.

[27] Roland H. Worth, *The Seven Cities of the Apocalypse and Greco-Asian Culture* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 216.

the Laodikeans as wealthy "fence-sitters." In his view, "The lukewarm attitude of the Laodikeans challenges John's polarized worldview. This is a church of uncommitted fence sitters, and wealthy ones at that. They have not rejected John's forceful message for another teacher's but neither have they rejected John's opponents."[28]

The analogy with ancient voluntary associations, however, presses us to consider that members might have had little choice. As Harland observed, "if one was a dyer or merchant, one naturally associated with one's fellow-workers in the guild of dyers or merchants. It is quite possible that the opponents were continuing in their occupational affiliations and sustaining memberships in other local guilds."[29] Still, the labeling of opponents reinscribe the author's perspective of the competing voices. Postcolonial interpretations that encourage resistance to an imperial apparatus may also reproduce the rhetoric of opponents or partisans of colonialism.

5.4.1 *Ekklēsia* Rhetoric and the Common Good

But what if we imagined the voices of the *ekklēsia* as deploying not only the rhetoric of civic participation, but of the overall common good? As we have noted in the introduction, the *ekklēsia* also served as a site for the negotiation of economic tensions between the rich and the poor, the masses and the elite. Both Plutarch and Dio adumbrate the relationship of poor and wealthy in the context of the assembly. In their works, the assembly emerges as a site for the negotiation/contestation of tensions between the masses and the elite. Furthermore, in many respects, as Miller intimates, the assembly

[28] Royalty, *The Streets of Heaven*, 166.

[29] P.A. Harland, "Honouring the Emperor or Assailing the Beast: Participation in Civic Life Among Associations (Jewish, Christian and Other) in Asia Minor and the Apocalypse of John." 77, 2000 (2000): 99-121.

becomes an instrument that is able to influence the wealthy to contribute from their own wealth and resources to the polis.[30]

However, the colonial situation has significantly altered the economic tensions that the inscribed assemblies face. The issue at stake is whether or not members should partake in the economic apparatus of empire. According to John, in the colonial apparatus no one, rich or poor, free or slave, can buy nor sell without the mark of the Beast (13:16-17). In other words, it is impossible to prosper economically without participating in the worship of the Beast. Hence, he calls people to withdraw from the colonial apparatus (18:4). In fact, John introduces his work by stating that he himself was at Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus (1:9), and claims to partake of the suffering and consistent resistance of faithful members.

Following patristic sources (Jerome's *De Vir. Ill*. 9; Tertullian's *De Praescr*. 36; and Eusebius' *Hist. Eccl*. 3.23), scholars speculate whether John's presence at Patmos was a case of *relegatio in insulam*, or a case of *deportatio ad insulam*. While the former entailed life-long exile for all those who posed a threat to the common good, the latter entailed forceful removal to an island, and could only be enforced by the emperor.[31] Given John's rhetorical goals, however, it appears that he actually expected people to literally withdraw from the colonial apparatus, and to do so in no uncertain terms.[32]

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[30] Anna Miller, *Ekklēsia: 1 Corinthians in the Context of Ancient Democratic Discourse* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 93.

[31] Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis,* 102-104.

[32] The communities at Qumran model how groups distanced themselves to form alternative communities from what they perceived to be a "wicked," polluted, or corrupt establishments. The reactions among Jews to the Roman colonial situation and to the destruction of Jerusalem varies.

As Kenneth R. Jones suggests, the "Roman question" remains a concern for writers reflecting on the destruction of Jerusalem.[33] While Josephus seems to have counseled accommodation, 4 Ezra conflated gentiles and Jews as sinful humanity, only to dispense later of gentiles on the grounds of the election of Israel. However, 4 Baruch advocated strict separation from the colonial apparatus and "all things Roman," implied in the call to the people of God to separate themselves from the works of Babylon (8.7). As Jones observes, the rejection of the returnees from Babylon by both Jerusalem and Babylon suggests that compromise is untenable: "The author warns the accommodation party that it will find itself cut off from both Rome and Jerusalem. It cannot find a place among the Jews because of its attachment to foreign ways and ideas. It will be equally shunned by the Romans for desiring to keep its Jewish identity integral."[34]

However, the Laodikean assembly, as well as those accused of partaking in food offered to idols and fornication, seem to have placed their economic well being ahead of the assembly's. Therefore, they opted to pursue the common good of the *ekklēsiai* by (1) remaining active in their various types of trade; (2) the civic and socio-economic structures of empire; (3) and attempting to prosper in the imperial economic apparatus.[35] Like the competing voices at Smyrna, Pergamon, and Thyatira they did not perceive a contradiction between following Jesus and participating in the socio-economic, and political structures of empire. The terminology of wealth (πλούσιος, πλουτέω, χρυσός) and of buying (ἀγοράζω) wares such as gold (χρυσός), or white garments (ἱμάτια λευκὰ)

[33] Kenneth R. Jones, *Jewish Reactions to the Destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70: Apocalypses and Related Pseudopigrapha* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 79.

[34] Ibid., 147.

[35] See Hemer, *The Seven Churches*, 192-194.

suggests that the competing voices in Laodikea were actively engaged in commerce and various types of trades.

As Harland has observed there were multiple types of occupational associations trying to carve out a place for themselves, not only in the polis but also within the broader local and provincial economic networks of the empire.[36] These included associations of dyers, fish dealers, clothing cleaners, silversmiths, bakers, firefighters, bankers, shoemakers, shippers, sailors, and etc. Among all these possibilities, some could have been part of associations involved in the slave trade, such as the merchants from Ephesus who honored C. Sallustius Crispus Passienus, or those that honored T. Secundus. Other could have been part of the synagogue honoring Julia Severa, while others could have been part of those formerly from Judea who were now contributing to the city of Smyrna.

Second, they also had no qualms in participating with Roman associations or honoring individuals who were associated with the Roman imperial cult, or might have been involved in the cult itself. Along with the demos of Laodikea, they could have joined the Roman conventus and Hellenes of Asia in honoring influential officials such as Quintus Pomponius Flaccus (ILaodikLyk 82). It appears that most of the time such wealthy individuals were involved in the imperial cult in one way or another. Unlike Pergamon, Ephesus, and Smyrna, Laodikea did not have a provincial imperial cult or Neokorate, but numismatic evidence attests to the presence of a municipal cult for Domitian.[37] In a coin from the late first century C.E., for instance, Domitian appears

[36] Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregation, 161.*

[37] F. Imhoof-Blumer, *Monnaies grecques* (Amsterdam: Johannes Müller, 1883), 404; Imhoof-Blumer bases his conclusions on the military themes (e.g. cuirass, spear, and trophy).

accompanied by his wife in a small temple that was apparently in honor of his military victories.

Fig. 2. The obverse depicts the busts of Domitian and Domitia facing each other. BM Phrygia 307 # 185, pl. 37.6 © The British Museum.[38]

Scholars have observed that the cult of Domitian at Laodikea not only included his wife, Domitia,[39] but also other members of the imperial family, or Roman aristocracy.[40] Given that several patrons encountered earlier, such as Julius Quadratus, and Julia Severa, were also either involved in the imperial cult or were even imperial priests or priestesses, it is

[38] The reverse shows the temples with the emperor and his wife at the center. He is dressed in military attire and carries a trophy in his right hand and a spear in his left; Domitian is standing to his right, and holds a scented scepter.

[39] The temple stands on a three-step krepidoma with an inscription on the temple frieze that reads "EPINEIKIOS." Friesen translates the adjective as "warlike" or "contentious" See Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 62. On the other hand, Price translates it literally as "for victory." Most important, Price observes that the inscription not only reflects the importance of such victories, and posits that the themes of military victory that accompanied the representation of various emperors played a significant role in the ideology of empire. See S.R.P. *Rituals and Power*, 183.

[40] Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 62.

possible that various benefactors of the Laodikean *ekklēsia* were also linked to the imperial cult.

The members of the *ekklēsia* of Laodikea also strived to prosper within the imperial economic apparatus.[41] Scholars have already adumbrated the multiple economic opportunities available for members of associations, but also for particular types of occupations, such as shippers and sailors. As Jason Kraybill observes, it was common for provincials from Asia Minor to travel widely for commerce. In an inscription dating to the second century C.E., a man named Flavius Zeuxis, a merchant from Hierapolis, states that he made seventy-two sea voyages to and from Rome (IGR, IV, 841). Jason Kraybill suggests that, "The name 'Flavius may indicate the merchant or his father once was a slave of the Flavian imperial family."[42] The man's ability to travel that many times could be indicative of the demands of his trade as well of his wealth. In another inscription dating to 70 C.E. from Nicomedia, an association of shippers dedicated their building and a temenos to Vespasian, and did so in consultation with the proconsul Marcus Plancius Varus' advice (TAM IV 22). According to David Magie, these were prosperous shippers at least in part because of the excellent condition of roads leading inland. [43] Jason Kraybill has noted the economic rise of shippers in light of Rome's dependence for food on the provinces.[44] While Tiberius had granted subsidy of two sestertii per modius to the grain merchants, Claudius promised merchants that Rome would cover the cost of any

[41] See Hemer, *The Seven Churches*, 192-194.
[42] Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce*, 111.
[43] Magie, *Roman Rule in Asia Minor*, 777. Cited in Kraybill, *Cult and Commerce*, 116.
[44] Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce*, 111.

ships lost at sea.[45] While fictive, the portrait that Petronius Paints of Trimalchio, a wealthy merchant and former slave, is grounded in a social reality that illustrates the opportunities under the Roman economic structures. But even for *ekklēsia* members engaged in other trades, there were apparently local opportunities as well. The wealth that individuals such as Quintus Pomponius displayed is also impressive, since he not only provided oil at the baths, but also distributed it to every citizen. While acts of benefaction from individuals to their respective cities are rather common, Hemer accentuates the ostentatious display of wealth by individuals such as Quintus Pomponius.[46]

5.5 Negotiating Imperial Wealth

In order to address the decision of the *ekklēsia* to partake in the imperial apparatus and in the socio-economic and political benefits derived from it, John deploys his two-fold rhetorical strategy of vilification and vindication. On the one hand, he proceeds to sharply exhort the Laodikeans by linking them with the imperial economic system, including (1) the merchants who fornicate with Rome; (2) the Beast; and (3) by enunciating a decolonizing moment that would devalue their wealth. On the other hand, John does not seem to want to alienate the rest of the *ekklēsia* members and invites the Laodikean merchants to conduct trade within another imperial apparatus, with another

[45] According to Tacitus, at least two hundred vessels sank during a storm in 62, and this within the port at Ostia.

[46] Hemer draws attention to the apparent refusal of Laodikea to accept Roman wealth for its own reconstruction after a major earthquake. According to Hemer, "The flourishing church was exposed as partaking of the standards of the society in which it lived…. It was spiritually self-sufficient and saw no need of Christ's aid. The following words are more specific: they connect its hidden needs with the assurance of Christ's remedy, and again the language employed derives additional force from its pointed allusion to some of the sources of the city's wealth" (Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting*, 197.

merchant, and with another imperial matrix.[47] In the decolonization of the *oikoumenē* that John anticipated, there is no vacuum of power, for Jesus, the kingdom of God, and the New Jerusalem enter the scene with an apparently more just vision of the world.

5.5.1 Trading with Babylon

The author begins by associating the Laodikean claims to wealth and prosperity in Rev.2:17b with the merchants who benefit from the colonial apparatus. He does so by establishing a connection between the two parties through the verb πλουτέω, meaning to be rich or to become rich. While the Laodikeans have become rich (πεπλούτηκα) by participating in the imperial apparatus (3:17b),[48] the merchants have also grown rich from their trade with Babylon (18:3c).[49] Indeed, the verb occurs only five times in Revelation, and all occurrences seem to link the Laodikeans with the merchants. Since the merchants themselves are fornicating with Babylon, the author undercores the association between the merchants and the Laodikeans through the verb ἀγοράζω, a commerce/trade-related verb. While Jesus advises the Laodikeans to buy refined gold from him (3:18a),[50] the merchants themselves have been feeding gold to Rome (18:11-12).[51] Since Jesus is offering his own wares, the connection with the merchants who depend on the demand of Rome is also established.

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[47] In this manner, the author reinforces the idea that, given his ability to foresee the upcoming "market crash," so to speak, he is actually the one concerned for the economic well being of the assemblies.

[48] ὅτι λέγεις ὅτι πλούσιός εἰμι καὶ πεπλούτηκα καὶ οὐδὲν χρείαν ἔχω (3:17b).

[49] ...καὶ οἱ ἔμποροι τῆς γῆς ἐκ τῆς δυνάμεως τοῦ στρήνους αὐτῆς ἐπλούτησαν (18:3c).

[50] συμβουλεύω σοι ἀγοράσαι παρ' ἐμοῦ χρυσίον πεπυρωμένον ἐκ πυρὸς ἵνα πλουτήσῃς (3:18a).

[51] γόμον χρυσοῦ καὶ ἀργύρου καὶ λίθου τιμίου καὶ μαργαριτῶν καὶ βυσσίνου καὶ πορφύρας καὶ σιρικοῦ καὶ κοκκίνου, καὶ πᾶν ξύλον θύϊνον καὶ πᾶν σκεῦος ἐλεφάντινον καὶ πᾶν σκεῦος ἐκ ξύλου τιμιωτάτου καὶ χαλκοῦ καὶ σιδήρου καὶ μαρμάρου, καὶ κιννάμωμον καὶ ἄμωμον καὶ θυμιάματα καὶ μύρον καὶ λίβανον καὶ οἶνον καὶ ἔλαιον καὶ σεμίδαλιν καὶ σῖτον καὶ κτήνη καὶ πρόβατα, καὶ ἵππων καὶ ῥεδῶν καὶ σωμάτων, καὶ ψυχὰς ἀνθρώπων.[51]

The author also links the Laodikeans with Babylon through the theme of fornication and through the self-confident claims that Rome and the Laodikeans seem to make. The relationship between provincials and the imperial matrix is intimated in the imputed claims of self-sufficiency (καὶ οὐδὲν χρείαν ἔχω) of the Laodikeans (Rev. 3:17a), and self-confidence of Rome: 'I rule as a queen; I am no widow, and I will never see grief (Rev. 18:7).[52] The Laodikeans are not only profiting from but have also merged interests with Rome and now seem to be locked in a symbiotic relationship with it. As Mark D. Matthews obseves, John not only links the Laodikeans with Rome through their claims of self sufficiency, but also through a form of imputed speech that is a common rhetorical tool in the Hebrew Bible (e.g. Hos. 12:9, Zech 11:5), and other texts from the Second Temple period (e.g.1 Enoch 97:8-9). Furthermore, it is interesting to note that this form of speech occurs in Revelation only in 3:17 and 18:7 to connect the Laodikeans with Rome and to critique their claims to wealth. As Matthews observes, both texts denote an attitude of self sufficeincy in so far as (1) "The rich in the church boast of their wealth while Babylon brags of her sovereignty, and inability to be destroyed. She, too, is portrayed as rich and living a luxurious lifestyle."[53]

Furthermore, both forms of imputed speech take place within the context of a prophetic speech form.[54] The self-sufficiency of the Laodikean provincials appears to rest on Rome's prosperity. Roman historians attest to a symbiotic relationship between merchants and Rome, or the emperors themselves. As I have suggested, Suetonius noted

[52] ὅτι ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ αὐτῆς λέγει ὅτι κάθημαι βασίλισσα καὶ χήρα οὐκ εἰμὶ καὶ πένθος οὐ μὴ ἴδω.

[53] Mathews, *Riches, Poverty, and the Faithful*, 161.

[54] According to Mathews, "within the seven messages the Laodikean correspondence reflects a salvation-judgment oracle while the critique of Babylon incudes prophetic announcements of judgment (Rev. 18:2-3; 6, 8, 10, 16, 19), and a judgment oracle (Rev 18:21-4)" (161).

that Claudius promised merchants in service of the *annona* that he would subsidize, insure, and pay for any ships lost at sea (Claud. 18). Similarly, Tacitus suggested that Nero exempt merchants from tax on cargo ships (Tacit, Anna. 13.51). But, even if the audience of Laodikea were not composed of merchants, the Laodikeans still would have been deeply embedded within the economic structures of the empire. Finally, the author seems to underscore that the Laodikeans are embracing the teaching of the Nicolaitans that involves *eidōlothyta* and *porneia*. As I have suggested earlier, fornication in Revelation does not refer merely to sexual immorality; it is also a way in which John describes participation in the Roman imperial apparatus. Like the kings of the earth, the merchants, and the nations of the world, John is accusing the Laodikeans of fornicating with Babylon (18:3). This interpretation, however, challenges those who refuse to see the influence of the teaching of the Nicolaitans in the message to Laodikea.[55]

5.5.2 The Merchants of the Beast

The third rhetorical stragey is to link the basic ability to buy and sell, and by implication to grow rich and to prosper with idolatry.[56] The interpellation of the Laodikeans as blind and the exhortation to anoint their eyes so that they may see suggests they are failing "to see" the deeper implications of their participation in the imperial economic structures. Not only are they contributing to the continuity of Babylon and the

[55] According to Royalty, commentators have gone so far as to connect a "Laodikean heresy with the Nicolaitans and other opponents of John, falling yet again under the spell of John's heresiological rhetoric that tries to connect all of his opponents in one diabolical opposition" (167). While allowing as heresy Royalty's critique of those who view the Laodikean stance, I disagree that one should not view the message through the issues of *eidōlothyta* and *porneia*, precisely because participation in both would have enabled the type of prosperity John critiques.

[56] The Hebrew Bible seems to describe idolatry as the worship of other gods, the worship of images and the worship of the Lord using images, and does not appear to distinguish between these forms. See B.S. Rosner, "The Concept of Idolatry," *Themelios* 24 (1999): 21-30.

colonial situation of the *oikoumenē*, they are also partaking of the worship of the Beast that undergirds it. The verb ἀγοράζω occurs six times in Revelation; at least three of those occurrences link the Laodikeans (Rev. 3:18a) as well as the merchants and Babylon (Rev. 18:11) with the worship of the Beast (13:17): "So that no one can buy or sell (ἵνα μή τις δύνηται ἀγοράσαι ἢ πωλῆσαι) who does not have the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name" (Rev. 13:17).[57] As scholars note, the reference to the mark of the beast is to contrast its bearers with those who bear the mark of the Lamb (14:1), who, unsurprisingly, refuse to worship the Beast (Rev. 14:9-10).[58] Although some have interpreted the reference to the mark of the Beast in rather creative ways[59] and as a literal tattoo,[60] others suggest it simply symbolizes allegiance to Rome and the imperial cult.[61] The main point is that economic activity in the Beast's empire is impossible without participating in its worship and vice versa. In this sense, then, the Laodikeans could be said to bear the mark of the Beast. Yet, there is an even a deeper overlapping

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[57] καὶ ποιεῖ πάντας, τοὺς μικροὺς καὶ τοὺς μεγάλους, καὶ τοὺς πλουσίους καὶ τοὺς πτωχούς, καὶ τοὺς ἐλευθέρους καὶ τοὺς δούλους, ἵνα δῶσιν αὐτοῖς χάραγμα ἐπὶ τῆς χειρὸς αὐτῶν τῆς δεξιᾶς ἢ ἐπὶ τὸ μέτωπον αὐτῶν καὶ ἵνα μή τις δύνηται ἀγοράσαι ἢ πωλῆσαι εἰ μὴ ὁ ἔχων τὸ χάραγμα τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ θηρίου ἢ τὸν ἀριθμὸν τοῦ ὀνόματος αὐτοῦ

[58] Steven J. Friesen for instance regards as "inappropriate" the importation of imperial cults into the messages to the seven *ekklēsiai* , and in particular to the Pergamene assembly (Rev. 2-3). He cites as evidence the lack of condemnation for participation in imperial cults in Rev. 2-3, and the lack of dissension on the matter. See Steven J. Friesen, "Satan's Throne, Imperial Cults and the Social Settings of Revelation," in *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 27, no. 3 (2005): 356, 365, 368.

[59] Pablo Richard suggests that while the mark may be symbolic it may still refer to something physical that encapsulates the economic power and idolatry of the Roman Empire. He suggests that Roman coinage embodied imperial power and ideology and could be the instrument that Satan used to kill. See Richard, *Apocalypse: A People's Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 116.

[60] Wilfrid J. Harrington, *Revelation. Sacra Pagina 16* (Edited by Daniel J. Harrington. Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 142-145.

[61] Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation. The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1998), 220.

reality which the Laodikeans and the merchants of the earth fail to perceive. The empire of the Beast is soon to be overthrown by God's empire, so the claims to riches, prosperity, and confidence are essentially already devalued.

5.5.3 Decolonization

Finally John proceeds to enunciate the economic demise of the Laodikeans and those who collaborate with Rome through the decolonization of the *oikoumenē* that he anticipates. While scholars have been baffled by the apparent contradiction that the materially rich Laodikeans are poor according to John, while the materially poor Smyrnans are rich, they have yet to consider that Jesus' allusion to the poverty of the Laodikeans is a premonition of the fall of Babylon. While some scholars see in this verse an allusion to spiritual poverty, it is likely that material poverty is intended. The fall of Babylon (18:1-22) through a violent and divinely initiated conflagration significantly impacts the economic fortunes of its subjects. Given that all those who fornicate with Babylon are locked in a symbiotic relationship with the empire, its collapse also constitutes their economic failure. Jesus' denunciation in 3:17 means to show the Laodikeans that their fortunes are about to change: "You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked" (3:17).[62] In contrast, the merchants of the earth who have seen the conflagration realize the difficulty of the situation: "And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn for her, since no one buys their cargo anymore" (18:11).[63] The anticipation of economic collapse is underscored in the merchant's lament

[62] ὅτι λέγεις ὅτι πλούσιός εἰμι καὶ πεπλούτηκα καὶ οὐδὲν χρείαν ἔχω, καὶ οὐκ οἶδας ὅτι σὺ εἶ ὁ ταλαίπωρος καὶ ἐλεεινὸς καὶ πτωχὸς καὶ τυφλὸς καὶ γυμνός, [62]

[63] Καὶ οἱ ἔμποροι τῆς γῆς κλαίουσιν καὶ πενθοῦσιν ἐπ' αὐτήν, ὅτι τὸν γόμον αὐτῶν οὐδεὶς ἀγοράζει οὐκέτι**;** Harrington rightly observes that the lament of the merchants is centered not so much on the fall of Babylon itself, but rather on the loss of material wealth; Harrington, *Revelation*, 179.

that no one buys his or her cargo anymore (Rev. 18:16-17). While scholars are baffled that the merchants in Rev. 18 are not punished, the messages enunciate their utter poverty, nakedness, and blindness. In either case, the collapse of the imperial matrix necessarily implies the economic collapse of those partaking in its economic system.

5.5.4 Jesus as Wealthy Merchant

The vindication of the conquerors presupposes the demise and judgment of Babylon and those who fornicate with it. The author of Revelation imagined the saints rejoicing at Babylon' demise, but there is no vacuum of power. Decolonization is not only a violent phenomenon, but also involves replacing one power structure by another, "absolute substitution," and transformation of society's structure from the "bottom up."[64] Jesus, the Kingdom of God, and the New Imperial Matrix stand ready to replace the old power structure.[65] The shift is signaled in the promises to the conquerors, which often stand as a direct challenge to Babylon's imperial apparatus: "To the one who conquers I will give a place with me on my throne, just as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne" (3:21). According to Mark Wilson, "The promise of authority in the messianic kingdom might well be a counterbalance to the temporal power upon which the church was now focused."[66] Within its immediate literary context, however, the promise to the victors at the end of the message to Laodikea appears to serve three main functions.

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[64] Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 35.

[65] Whereas Royalty suggests John attempted to persuade the "churches" by presenting Christ as a heavenly patron, Paul B. Duff suggests that a substantial portion of John's audience was striving for the low status wealth of merchants. See Paul B. Duff, *Who Rides the Beast? Prophetic Rivalry and the Rhetoric of Crisis in the Churches of the Apocalypse* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 15.

[66] Mark W. Wilson, *The Victor Sayings in the Book of Revelation.* Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2007), 163.

The first is to juxtapose the throne of God and the Lamb, which Jesus is promising to the victors, with the throne of Satan mentioned in message to the *ekklēsia* of Pergamon (2:13). The second one is to link the first septet of Revelation (chapter 2-3) with the vision of the heavenly court (4:1-5:14), where the throne of God and the Lamb receives worship.[67] The third function is to validate Jesus' claims to power and wealth in the message to Laodikea itself, particularly his presentation as wealthy merchant who offers his own merchandise:

> Therefore, I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire so that you may be rich; and white robes to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen; and salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see (3:18).[68]

Scholars have often interpreted in spiritual terms the wealth and wares that Jesus offers here. Some suggests that gold refers to spiritual wealth, [69] contrast white garments to the black woolen clothing typical of the city,[70] and see the eye-salve as reference to the so-called "Phrygian powder.[71] However, the language of buying/ selling and becoming

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[67] Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, "THE FOLLOWERS OF THE LAMB: VISIONARY RHETORIC AND SOCIAL- POLITICAL SITUATION," *Semeia* 36 (1986): 122-14.

[68] συμβουλεύω σοι ἀγοράσαι παρ' ἐμοῦ χρυσίον πεπυρωμένον ἐκ πυρὸς ἵνα πλουτήσῃς, καὶ ἱμάτια λευκὰ ἵνα περιβάλῃ καὶ μὴ φανερωθῇ ἡ αἰσχύνη τῆς γυμνότητός σου, καὶ κολλ[ο]ύριον ἐγχρῖσαι τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς σου ἵνα βλέπῃς

[69] Roloff interprets this in theological terms, "The point now is finally to acquire from Jesus what is truly necessary for life. For its poverty the church needs "gold," that is, true wealth, which only he can give; for its nakedness, the white garment of salvation (v. 5*); and for its blindness, salve for the eyes, which grants spiritual sight." See Jürgen Roloff, *A Continental Commentary: The Revelation of John* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 65.

[70] Scholars usually describe the items Jesus offers here in symbolic terms. Mounce states that: "The gold is spiritual wealth that has passed though the refiners' fire and has been found to be trustworthy. The Laodikeans need white cloth as well in order to cover the shame of their nakedness." Mounce*, The Book of Revelation*, 111.

[71] Ibid., 111.

wealthy suggests that a reference to material wealth is intended. Jesus here is competing with some of the most successful or wealthy merchants.

The reorientation of power structures in the Apocalypse suggests Jesus may very well be able to back up his claims. John has already introduced Jesus as wearing a golden sash across his chest (1:13). The association between Jesus' self-presentation as one having eyes life a flame of fire (1:14, 2:18, 19:12) and the refined gold by fire (2:13) is also evident.[72] While scholars presuppose a tone of irony in Jesus' remarks that the Laodikeans trade with him, my reading of the rhetorical situation makes the situation more serious than commentators suggest. One the one hand, Jesus has a premonition of the material fate of those who trade with Rome (18:11-12); on the other hand, the invitation to trade with him suggests he is giving them the opportunity switch allegiances before it is too late.

Indeed, I would advance the argument that the invitation to trade with Jesus constitutes a not so veiled reference to exiting Babylon (18:4). The situation is serious: If they refuse to trade with Jesus, and thereby maintain their ties with Babylon, the Laodikeans, like the idolatrous merchants of the earth, would incur into two serious aspects of their trade: (1) the oppression and suffering of the faithful ones who are persecuted by the Dragon and refuse to worship the beast (13:4); and (2) the murdering of prophets and saints (Rev. 18: 24). If the value of the wealth that Jesus and the competing merchants at Laodikea offer ultimately derives from the structure of domination that

[72] Royalty has observed parallels with 1 Peter 1:7, where the author refers to the tests of gold through fire. According to Royalty, "it provides more of a contrast than a parallel to Rev. 3:18. For here Peter explicitly contrasts the 'imperishable undefiled and unfading' heavenly inheritance with earthly riches such as refined gold (1 Peter 1:3-4), which offers gold refined by fire for sale to the Laodikeans." See Royalty, *Streets of Heaven*, 172.

underwrites it, what happens to the notion that John associates wealth derived from commerce as *sordida et vulgares*,[73] or to portraits of Jesus as a cynic philosopher? The problem, in my view, lies not in the type of wealth but rather in the imperial matrix and economic system that undergirds it.

5.5.5. The Merchants of the New Jerusalem

The invitation to trade with Jesus constitutes not only a call to exit Babylon but to switch allegiances to the New Jerusalem. The promises of thrones and other benefits offered to the conquering ones find their ultimate fulfillment in the New imperial matrix, where the throne of God will be ultimately established (22:3). Indeed, John describes the New Jerusalem as a luxurious city itself, made to rival or even surpass the affluence of Babylon. [74]

> The wall is built of jasper, while the city is pure gold, clear as glass. The foundations of the wall of the city are adorned with every jewel; the first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. And the twelve gates are twelve pearls, each of the gates is a single pearl, and the street of the city is pure gold, transparent as glass (Rev. 21:18-21).[75]

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[73] Royalty situates John language of wealth within Stoic ideas and its relationship with Cynic Philosophy. For instance, he argues that the imagery of Christ clothed in a white robe and golden shawl (1:13) evoked Stoic attitudes towards wealth as adiaphora. Furthermore, he suggests that in order to persuade its audience to withdraw from imperial society, John used the language of wealth to present Jesus as a moral philosopher who juxtaposes the low status of earthly wealth with the high status of heavenly wealth." See Royalty, *The Streets of Heaven, 21.*

[74] See Barbara Rossing, *A Choice between Two Cities: Whore, Bride, and Empire in the Apocalypse (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1999).*

[75] καὶ ἡ ἐνδώμησις τοῦ τείχους αὐτῆς ἴασπις καὶ ἡ πόλις χρυσίον καθαρὸν ὅμοιον ὑάλῳ καθαρῷ. οἱ θεμέλιοι τοῦ τείχους τῆς πόλεως παντὶ λίθῳ τιμίῳ κεκοσμημένοι· ὁ θεμέλιος ὁ πρῶτος ἴασπις, ὁ δεύτερος σάπφιρος, ὁ τρίτος χαλκηδών, ὁ τέταρτος σμάραγδος, ὁ πέμπτος σαρδόνυξ, ὁ ἕκτος σάρδιον, ὁ ἕβδομος χρυσόλιθος, ὁ ὄγδοος βήρυλλος, ὁ ἔνατος τοπάζιον, ὁ δέκατος χρυσόπρασος, ὁ ἑνδέκατος ὑάκινθος, ὁ δωδέκατος ἀμέθυστος, καὶ οἱ δώδεκα πυλῶνες δώδεκα μαργαρῖται, ἀνὰ εἷς ἕκαστος τῶν πυλώνων ἦν ἐξ ἑνὸς μαργαρίτου. καὶ ἡ πλατεῖα τῆς πόλεως χρυσίον καθαρὸν ὡς ὕαλος διαυγής[75]

With a city so rich in gold and precious stones, it is unsurprising that Jesus would encourage the Laodikeans to buy refined gold from him. Most important, the call to trade with Jesus and to have commensality with him (3:20) is actually an opportunity for the Laodikeans to open the door for themselves and enter into the New Jerusalem. The reference to the love of Jesus for those he disciplines, and to the fact that the merchants do not perish in the conflagration, suggests that John did not want to alienate the merchant's within the *ekklēsia*.[76] As my brief discussion on voluntary associations has illustrated, it would have been difficult for the Jesus followers involved in trade to enforce the strict faith practice John envisioned. Since he suggest that the nations will bring their glory and honor into the New Jerusalem, perhaps John also anticipated a reorientation in wealth as well. Scholar have suggested that in Revelation 21:24b and 26, John is utilizing Isaiah 60:3b which suggests that the nations will also bring their wealth into the New Jerusalem. However, John glosses the text to continue to affirm the full allegiance of all nations to the Lamb.[77]

Finally, the valuation and devaluation of wealth of the *ekklēsia* of Smyrna and Laodikea derive from the power structure undergirding it, as and more directly from the reversal of fortunes that decolonization implies.[78] I turn to explore Jesus' remarks that the Smyrnans are rich: "I know your affliction and your poverty, even though you are rich

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[76] Duff, *Who Rides the Beast, 13.*

[77] Alluding to Isaiah 60;3, 5, 9, 11, McNikol suggests that, "the amount of goods and wealth of the nations are indicators of Jerusalem's power and significance. John had seen this kind of wealth in Babylon (Rome) and was not impressed (18:11-13). He prefers to spiritualize Isaiah's terminology. See his McNikol, *The Conversion of The Nations*, (79).

[78] Fanon continues commenting on decolonization noting that, ""If we wish to describe it precisely, we might find it in the well-known words: "The last shall be first and the first last" See, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 37.

(2:9). Whereas some scholars have suggested that the Smyrnans "are rich in deeds, in suffering and endurance,"[79] others cast their wealth as spiritual riches.[80] Since decolonization involves a reversal of fortunes and radical transfer of power, I will suggest that the Smyrnans are rich because they have invested or "traded" with the New Jerusalem, which the author already sees as the New Imperial matrix. Such interpretation is consistent with Second Temple texts that anticipate the demise of the wicked (cf. 1 Enoch 97:3-5; 9-9); and the rise of the faithful and fulfillment of their promised rewards (1 Enoch 11:1; 45-4-6; 48:7; 91:12-13; 108:8-15; 1QM 12:12-14; Sib. Or. 3:780-6). As Mathews has observed, "one could argue that not wealth but the Lamb himself is the inheritance of the faithful. However, the promises to the poor in the seven messages also describe the inheritance of the gold-and-jewel laden New Jerusalem (3:12; 21:7)." [81] How does one get to invest in the New Jerusalem? John of Patmos calls believers to conquer (3:21; 5:5; 11:7; 12:11; 13:7; 15:2)! While scholars posit that such conquering is only achieved through death, [82] such a position is tantamount to saying that John expected all his followers to die, which would be rather unappealing. It appears, rather, that John expects believers to withdraw from the imperial apparatus and suffer poverty, socio-political disfranchisement, and potentially death to enter the New Jerusalem and inherit

[79] Ibid., 78;

[80] According to Roloff, "To be sure, this poverty is only external; with regard to the inner life and spiritual strength of the church, it is rich (2 Cor. 6:10; 8:10), and therein it stands in contrast to the church in Laodikea, which considered itself rich without being so (3:17)." Commentators such as Robert H. Mounce not that while their poverty was external and material, the Smyrnans were Spiritually rich. See Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation. The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1998), 74.

[81] Matthews, *Riches, Poverty, and the Faithful*, 171.

[82] Ibid., 160.

the city's wealth: "Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children" (Rev. 21:7).[83]

5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored the ways in which the competing voices in the message to Laodikea used *ekklēsia* rhetoric to negotiate the economic structures of Asia Minor. Underscoring the notion of the common good, the competing voices within the *ekklēsia* opted to participate in the economic structures of empire. The evidence from various occupational type of associations suggests not only the range of economic opportunities, but also the link between wealthy benefactors and the imperial cult. John appears to contest or reorient such *ekklēsia* rhetoric by positioning himself, or Jesus, as being concerned with the common good of the *ekklēsia*, in so far as Jesus challenges the *ekklēsia* to trade with him and the New Jerusalem. In the violent demise that the fall of Babylon entails, John warns the *ekklēsia* that they are associated not only with the wrong merchants, but also with the wrong imperial apparatus. Given the rising fortunes of the New Jerusalem and the collapse of Babylon, John tell the Smyrnans that they are rich, while the Laodikeans are poor. In John's view, the conquering ones stand to inherit the wealth of the New Jerusalem.

[83] The promises include not only access to the New Jerusalem, but also accompanying benefits such as protection from the second death (ὁ θάνατος ὁ δεύτερος) (21: 8), which was a promised made directly to those who conquer in the assembly of Smyrna (2:11), thereby establishing a direct link with the city.

Chapter 6

Conclusion:

6.1 The Function of *Ekklēsia* Rhetoric

In this dissertation I have explored the function of *ekklēsia* rhetoric within the rhetorical situation of Revelation, which I have reconstructed as a colonial situation. Most reconstructions of the rhetorical situation of Revelation presuppose various methodological issues that include: the so-called parting of the ways, debates between heresy and orthodoxy, and elements of "defensive imperialism." Hence, the seven assemblies emerge as consolidated Christian churches whose orthodox members were facing threats by heretics promoting *eidōlothyta* (2:14, 20); facing harassment by Jews from the local synagogue (2:8-11; 3:1-6); and compromising their faith on account of economic prosperity (3:14-21). As I have noted, these reconstructions often reinscribe the silencing of the competing voices within the text, while at the same time casts John as a Christian hero.

However, I have approached the assemblies not as churches, but as Jewish groups that, like voluntary associations in antiquity, were actively negotiating the Roman imperial apparatus. I have argued that the assemblies used *ekklēsia* rhetoric to negotiate the socio-political, and economic structures of the Roman imperial apparatus in Asia Minor. On the one hand, the competing voices (e.g., Balaamites, Jezebel, and Synagogue of Satan, and the rich Laodikeans) used *ekklēsia* rhetoric and its topoi of civic participation, freedom, and the common good as a strategy to engage the Roman colonial apparatus in Asia Minor. On the other hand, John appears to contest their use of *ekklēsia* rhetoric by suggesting that their civic participation constitutes a form of idolatry and

fornication; that their freedom threatens their own identity as Jews; and that their notions of the common good actually lead them to benefit at the expense of other colonized subjects. Read this way, the various exigencies framing the rhetorical situation emerge as negotiations of power, ethnic identity, and wealth. Such an exploration of the function of *ekklēsia* rhetoric in the Book of Revelation informs key conversations in New Testament/Early Christianity and Jewish Studies.

6.2 Argument Review

In order to explore the function of *ekklēsia* rhetoric in the Book of Revelation, my first chapter explored the rhetorical composition of Revelation. John not only deploys the term *ekklēsia* multiple times, but uses it rhetorically to connect three major sections: the introduction (1:4, 11, 20), the messages proper (2:1, 8, 11, 12, 18, 23, 29; 3:1, 6, 7, 13, 14, 22), and the epilogue (22:16). However, scholars often impose structural dichotomies that sever the messages and the concerns expressed there (chs. 2-3), from the visions section (chs. 4-22). Taking the pervasiveness of the term *ekklēsia* as a cue, I suggested that the "letter" section functions rhetorically as an exordium to the whole Book. Hence, I discussed the ways in which the first septet of visions (2:1-3:22) introduces major issues (e.g. *eidōlothyta* and porneia)[1] that the author addresses in the remaining three septets: the seven seals of the wrath of God (4:1-8:1;) the seven trumpets (8:2-11:19); and the seven last plagues (15:1-16:21). In most of these septets, the idolatrous followers of the beast are subjected to various plagues. Hence, I argued that the messages and the visions are part of the same symbolic universe, which is grounded in both Jewish and Greco-Roman traditions. Drawing from Jewish messianic traditions, for instance, John presents

Jesus as a Davidic messiah who holds the key of David (3:7), and whom he also described as the Lion of the Tribe of Judah (5:5).

Most important, John presents the New Jerusalem as the ideal polis where notions of the common good will be realize and where conquering believers find their ultimate reward (3:12). He elaborates articulates the city's might, purity, and structure (21:1-22:14) in terms of Jewish eschatological hopes. Heeding caveats against narrow and isolated understandings of the Jewish diaspora, I also explored the various Greco-Roman traditions that are part of John's symbolic universe, and particularly his engagement with *ekklēsia* rhetoric, and its topoi of freedom, equality, and the common good. In short, I explored key issues that inform the inscribed rhetorical situation of Revelation: the dwindling love and imperfect works of some members of the i (2:4; 3:1-2); the presence of "false apostles" and prophets who promote *eidōlothyta* and fornication *porneia*(2:6,14-15,20); the blasphemy of "false Jews" (2:9; 3:9); and the pursuit of wealth by some *ekklēsia* members (2:17-18). Combined, these issues frame the overall inscribed rhetorical situation of Revelation, which I read as a colonial situation of domination under Rome.

In my second chapter, I explored the question of *eidōlothyta* as a point of conflict between John and the competing voices at Pergamon and Thyatira (Rev. 2:12-17). Whereas some scholars have interpreted this text for instance, as a debate over heresy, as a case of internal church polemics/authority, I focus on the ways in which the rhetoric of *eidōlothyta* becomes the locus for negotiation/contestation of imperial power, both earthly and heavenly power, by colonized subjects. In order to understand the rhetoric of Revelation in its socio-political context, I explored epigraphic information on cultic

voluntary associations known as the hymnōdoi of Pergamon. As the name suggests, this association was first established to sing hymns to Augustus and Roma at the temple in Pergamon, but also held their own private meetings, during which honors to the Sebastoi took center stage, and encompassed various provisions for sacrifices, including of wine and bread. Looking at the ways in which hymnōdoi established relationships of reciprocity with benefactors, the polis, and the empire, I proceeded to reconstruct the rhetorical situation of the *ekklēsiai* at Pergamon, Thyatira, and to an extent, Ephesus. On the one hand, the assemblies used notions of civic participation embedded in *ekklēsia* rhetoric to establish a relationship of reciprocity with the city, the empire, and/or even the emperor vis-à-vis *eidōlothyta*.

On the other hand, I pointed out how John challenges them to reorient their rhetoric in two ways: first by suggesting that *eidōlothyta* practice leads them to establish reciprocity with Babylon, the Beast, and Satan; second, by bidding them to establish reciprocity with the New Jerusalem, Jesus, and God. Underscoring the centrality of cultic foods, the author suggest that a relationship of reciprocity with God, the Lamb, and the New Jerusalem, must be mediated through a different cultic food; namely, manna and the fruit/produce of the tree of life. Since the New Jerusalem is free of oppression, suffering, pain, and death, and is the polis where the faithful will reign with Christ, it emerges as the ideal city, and which should impinge in the deployment of ekklēsia rhetoric of the competing voices.

Focusing on John's polemic against the so-called "Synagogue of Satan" in the messages to the angels of the *ekklēsiai* of Smyrna (2:8-11) and Philadelphia (3:7-13), my third chapter explored the intersection of *ekklēsia* rhetoric, negotiations of ethnic identity,

and imperial power. Scholars have interpreted this "polemic" as a religious conflict between the church and the synagogue.[84] Such interpretations presuppose clear boundaries between Jews and Christians in the first century C.E., and reinscribe the picture of the anti-Christian Jews. Conversely, I have interpreted such "polemic" as negotiation of ethnic identity between two colonized Jewish groups in the diaspora of Asia Minor. Looking at the ways in which Jewish associations related to the imperial apparatus in Asia Minor, I suggested that both John and the competing voices used *ekklēsia* rhetoric to negotiate ethnic identity under imperial duress. On the one hand, the assemblies underscored democratic notions of freedom and civic participation to justify their participation in the socio-economic and political networks of both Smyrna and Philadelphia, and their networks of social, economic, and political benefaction. On the other hand, John maintains that their participation constitutes a blasphemy that turns them into followers of the beast, Satan, and ultimately excludes them from the New Jerusalem. In this manner, *ekklēsia* rhetoric serves to articulate varied and at times competing understandings of ethnic identity, and the ways in which it was both constituted and undermined by the colonial situation of the assemblies under Rome.

The fourth and final chapter explores the intersection between the rhetoric of *ekklēsia* wealth, and imperial power in the message to Laodikea (Rev. 3:18-17). Whereas scholars have interpreted the construction of wealth and poverty in Revelation as markers of wickedness and righteousness, as signs of spiritual poverty or wealth, or to establish

[84] Robert M. Royalty, *The Streets of Heaven: The Ideology of Wealth in the Apocalypse of John* (Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1998), 151; Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting.* Journal for the Study of New Testament Supplement Series 11 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986).

hierarchies between heavenly and earthly wealth, I suggest that we read the invective over wealth as negotiation of the Roman economic apparatus. Chapter four briefly analyzes the rhetorical situation of Smyrna and Laodikea, in so doing underscoring the question of wealth. In order to reconstruct the ways in which the inscribed *ekklēsia* of Laodikea related to the imperial apparatus, I explored occupational voluntary associations, including that of merchants from the slave market, and the ways they related to the economic apparatus of empire. Since most of the economic dimensions with influential city officials or benefactors revolved around cultic honors to the Sebastoi, I also briefly discussed evidence for the Roman imperial cult of Domitian and Domitia at Laodikea, which is attested primarily by numismatic evidence. Subsequently, I argued that both John and the assembly use *ekklēsia* rhetoric of the common good to resolve the economic tensions triggered by the colonial situation. Whereas the assemblies use *ekklēsia* rhetoric to advocate for an economically stable situation, John links them with the merchant and Babylon through the theme of *porneia*, and articulates a decolonizing moment that will leave them broke, so to speak. Since he does not want to alienate his audience, and in a move that underscores the trade/commerce themes in Revelation, John portrays Jesus as a merchant when he invites the Laodikeans to trade with him and the New Jerusalem.

6.3. Implications

My postcolonial exploration of the function of *ekklēsia* rhetoric in the Book of Revelation can inform key conversations in New Testament/Early Christian studies, Jewish studies, and Postcolonial studies. In terms of New Testament/Early Christianity,

this dissertation speaks to conversations on discourses of normativity; the social setting of the Book of Revelation, and discussion on the genre apocalypse.

6.3.1 Discourses of Normativity

While contemporary interpretations of the competing voices and their position on food offered to idols associate them with patristic portraits of Nicolaus, they often reinscribe the binary heresy-orthodoxy. As a result, they often casts the competing voices as Gnostics of sorts, and thereby as the first heretics. Against invitations to view Revelation as the first heresiologies, my dissertation reconnects John's cultic concerns over food offered to idols (Rev. 2-3) with the worship of the beast (Rev. 4-22), and participation in the imperial apparatus. Indeed, my reconstruction of the colonial situation using various types of voluntary associations (cultic, ethnic, and occupational), indicates that the cult to the Sebastoi often mediated the associations' interaction with the socio-economic, and political structures of empire.

In the case the hymnōdoi of Pergamon, whose ritual calendar revolved around Augustus, we find various individuals linked to powerful city officials such as Julius Quadratus, who were themselves often participants in provincial and municipal imperial cults. By reading the issues of *eidōlothyta* and porneia (2:6,14-15,20) as a negotiation of imperial power through *ekklēsia* rhetoric, I have not only unsettled normative frameworks but shown how it may be read as a locus for the negotiation/contestation of imperial power.

6.3.2 The Social Setting of Revelation

Most important, my exploration of *ekklēsia* rhetoric in the Book of Revelation addressed long standing questions on the social setting of the Book of Revelation. Traditionally, scholars have argued that John wrote Revelation in response to an imperial persecution under Domitian. Unable to historically ground such perspective, and shedding doubt on Tacitus and Suetonius motivations for vilifying Domitian, scholars made a depolitizing shift that led to informative, but at times slightly myopic perspectives. For instance, Robert Royalty argues that "the crisis of the Apocalypse is a crisis of authority within Christian circles. This is the social setting that best accounts for the powerful rhetoric of Revelation and its attempts to change the symbolic universe of the audience."[85] Conversely, others argue that there was no crisis, but that John simply exacerbated his rhetoric to win his audience, or that in fact "Christians" were living complacently in the imperial apparatus and were in need of a wake up call.

By reconstructing the assemblies as Jewish communities, and the rhetorical situation of Revelation as a colonial situation, my reading not only questions the apolitical nature of such interpretations, but also shows who the various issues that framed the rhetorical situation of Revelation (e.g. food offered to idols, polemics with the synagogue of Satan, and critiques of those pursuing wealth in the imperial apparatus), may be productively read as negotiations of power, status, and identity. In this manner, my work also contributes to emerging conversations on the intersection of race/ethnicity and empire in New Testament texts. [86]

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[85] Ibid., 28.

[86] See Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, "Introduction: Exploring the Intersections of Race, Gender, Status, and Ethnicity in Early Christian Studies," in *Prejudice and Christian Beginnings: Investigating Race, Gender, and Ethnicity in Early Christian Studies* (Eds. Laura S. Nasrallah and Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 4.

6.3.3 The Genre Apocalypse

Moreover, my dissertation also contributes to an ongoing discussion of the genre and the social function of apocalyptic literature.[87] My reconstruction of the rhetorical situation of Revelation as a colonial situation problematizes contemporary definitions of the genre "apocalypse,"[88] and what we see it doing in a text like Revelation. While proponents of a literary definition of the genre were opened to the idea that some apocalypses addressed a situation of oppression,[89] overtime some scholars, have used the literary definition to support the so-called consensus that apocalypses do not presuppose a situation of oppression.[90] Hence, scholars such as Leonard L. Thompson, Mark. D. Mathews, and Robert Royalty, used such apolitical notion of the apocalyptic genre to argue that John's imperial critique is but a rhetorical trope of the genre. However, my dissertation indicates that treating each text's engagement with empire as a single case basis is far more productive than using genre as a strait jacket.[91] My exploration of the

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[87] While the literary function of an apocalypse is concerned with the implicit or explicit purpose within the text, the social function takes into account the history and manner of its utilization in its *Sitz im Leben.*

[88] According to Collins, "Apocalypse is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, insofar far as it discloses a transcendent reality which is both temporal, it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial involves another, supernatural world." See Collin's, "Towards the Morphology of A Genre." *Semeia* 14 (1979): 29.

[89] See Collins's, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to the Jewish Matrix of Christianity.* (Grand Rapids: Crossroad, 1984),41.

[90] DeSilva, *Seeing Things John's Way,* 52.

[91] Considering that previous to the Apocalypse of John (95 C.E.), there is not a single text that describes itself as an apocalypse, such critique merits further analysis. See Morton, Smith. *"*On the History of Apocalypto and Apocalipsis" in *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East* (Ed. David Hellholm. *Tübingen*: Mohr Siebeck, 1983), 14.

rhetorical situation as a colonial situation, in fact, indicates that imperial dynamics are actually at the center of the various tensions we see reflected in the apocalypse. My use of Frantz Fanon's notion of the colonial situation also interrogated the binary oppressed/oppressor embedded in contemporary understandings of the genre apocalypse. This includes challenging the now established notion that if there is no imperial persecution, there is no is no systemic oppression. By positing a middle ground between collusion and resistance, *ekklēsia* rhetoric as a strategy for negotiating the colonial situation destabilizes the binary.

6.3.4. The Jewish Diaspora of Asia Minor

In terms of Jewish studies, my work speaks to ongoing conversations on the so-called parting of the ways and the Jewish Diaspora in Asia Minor. My exploration of John's polemic with the so-called synagogue of Satan has interrogated the ways in which the so-called parting of the ways reinscribes old tensions between church and synagogue. As a result, such interpretations reinforce the portrait of the anti-Christian Jew. Distancing from such methodological presuppositions, I have approached the inscribed communities of Revelation as Jewish commmunities from the Diaspora in Asia Minor that shared the author's symbolic universe. The author's reference to Jesus as the Branch of David, and the Lion of the Tribe of Judah indicates that these communities shared such understanding, or at least were familiar with it. Rather than translating the term βλασφημία as slander, which would reinforce the notion of Jewish collusion with authorities against Christians, I have translated the term as blasphemy. While basic, my translation has important implications for our understanding of the Jewish diaspora and the degree of their participation in the socio-economic and politicla structures of the

colonized polis. My reconstruction of the competing voices using ethnic voluntary associations and their links to influential benefactors who were actively involved in the civic structures of empire and honoring benefactors such as Julia Severa, supports a more fluid portrait of Jewish participation in the in socio-economic, and political structures of empire. Most importantly, my work also illumines the ways in which these Jewish communities used available democratic traditions to articulate and justify their participation in the imperial apparatus, and to press the poleis to uphold their rights in an increasingly unstable political situation.

6.4. Conclusion

As I pointed out, this dissertation explored the function of *ekklēsia* rhetoric in the Book of Revelation, and demonstrates its role in addressing various issues of the inscribed rhetorical situation, such as the question of *eidōlothyta*, the blasphemy of the so-called synagogue of Satan, and the pursuit of wealth. Contemporary reconstructions of the rhetorical situation of Revelation continue view the assemblies as consolidated Christian churches. Hence, they often approach the various issues framing the rhetorical situation of Revelation as indicative of debates over heresy, tensions between church and synagogue, and/or tensions between church and Greco-Roman society. As a result, such interpretations reinscribe the so-called parting of the ways and elements of defensive imperialism, among other methodological presuppositions.

Conversely, I reconstruct the seven *ekklēsia*i as assemblies that used *ekklēsia* rhetoric, and its topoi of civic reciprocity, civic participation, and the common good to negotiate the socio-economic and political tensions triggered by the colonial situation of Asia Minor. Using postcolonial analysis, as well as epigraphic data on ancient voluntary

associations, I have reconstructed the ways in which the assemblies could have interacted with the social, political, and economic structures of empire. Using postcolonial analysis and in particular Frantz Fanon's notion of the colonial situation, I theorized the ways in which the various issues reflected in the seven assemblies constituted markers of negotiations of the colonial situation of domination. My overall reading of Revelation indicated that the inscribed competing voices within the assemblies (e.g. Balaamites, Jezebel, the Synagogue of Satan, and wealthy Laodikeans) used *ekklēsia* rhetoric to negotiate their participation in the structures of the Roman imperial apparatus. Reacting to such rhetoric, John links the competing voices with Babylon (Rome), the Beast (emperor), and ultimately Satan, while at the same time challenging them to use their *ekklēsia* rhetoric to relate to another empire, another emperor, and another imperial matrix. This is the case because for John, the New Jerusalem appears to be the ideal polis, where notions of the common good are ultimately fulfilled.

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