AN INTRODUCTION TO EMPIRE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

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Dedicated to the Memory of Ellen Aitken

Contents

A Brief Word of Introduction and Acknowledgment

Over the past twenty years, there has been an explosion of academic research and publication on the topic of the New Testament's engagement with the realities of Rome's empire. While there are certainly numerous precursors to this surge of scholarly activity, its primary point of origin seems to be the formation of the Paul and Politics consultation that began meeting (and still meets) at the Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting in the mid-nineties. Led by Richard Horsley and involving the noteworthy contributions of scholars such as Neil Elliot, Dieter Georgi, and Helmut Koester, this consultation produced a volume of collected essays on Paul's engagement with and challenge to Rome's empire (Horsley 1997). This seminal work led to the multiplication of monographs, journal articles, dissertations, and subsequent volumes of collected essays. The scope of research quickly expanded, as Horsley and others began to consider Jesus's response to empire, and Warren Carter began exploring the ways in which the Gospels might be challenging Rome's power. Today one can find "empire" studies on most books of the New Testament. The purpose of the present volume is both to introduce readers, particularly students and nonspecialists, to this growing subfield of New Testament studies, making them aware of the significant work that has already been produced, and to point them to new ways in which this field is moving forward. This volume includes a diverse group of interpreters who at times have differing presuppositions, methods, and concerns regarding how the texts of the New Testament engage the Roman Empire, but who all hold in common a belief that Rome's empire is a crucial foreground for reading and interpreting at least certain New Testament texts. The volume includes contributors who have been pioneers in "empire criticism" for the past twenty years and who continue to plow new ground, but it also includes the work of new scholars who, while often building on the work

of those who have gone before them, bring new and fresh insights into the ways in which New Testament texts might be engaging the realities of Rome's empire.

While there have been a number of recent (and excellent) edited volumes that address the New Testament's response to and engagement with Rome's empire, this volume is particularly distinct in its scope, as the following essays cover virtually the entire New Testament canon. It is also distinct in its purpose to serve as an introduction to both students and nonspecialists within the field of New Testament studies and educated readers outside the field of New Testament studies. As a result of its introductory purpose, contributors have sought to avoid analysis and language that is overly technical and have minimized (where possible) the use of footnotes and excessive references to secondary literature. Each essays concludes with a section that directs interested readers to secondary literature in which they can find more thorough discussion and additional bibliographic information.

The volume begins with two introductory essays. The first, authored by myself, further discusses the development of "empire criticism" in the field of New Testament studies and considers the various strategies and methods employed in New Testament texts for engaging and responding to Rome's empire. The second, by Bruce W. Longenecker, Baylor University, introduces the reader to the nature and scope of the Roman Empire itself, demonstrating the ways and means by which the empire pervaded virtually every area of life in the ancient Mediterranean world. Following these two introductory essays, Richard A. Horsley offers an essay on the historical Jesus and his engagement with Roman imperial realities. The essays then progress through the canonical order of the New Testament: Warren Carter, Brite Divinity School, examines the Gospel of Matthew; I examine the Gospel of Mark; Eric D. Barreto, Luther Seminary, examines the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles; Beth M. Sheppard, Duke Divinity School, examines the Gospel of John; Neil Elliot, Fortress Press, examines Romans and 1 and 2 Corinthians; James R. Harrison, Sydney College of Divinity, examines Galatians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philippians; Harry O. Maier, Vancouver School of Theology, examines Colossians and Ephesians; Deborah Krause, Eden Theological Seminary, examines the Pastoral Epistles; Jason A. Whitlark, Baylor University, examines Hebrews; Matthew Ryan Hauge, Azusa Pacific University, examines James; Kelly D. Liebengood, Letourneau University, examines 1 Peter; and Davina Lopez, Eckerd College, examines Revelation.

In the nascent stages of this project, Ellen Aitken of McGill University was committed to contribute the essay on Hebrews and empire, an area of study in which Ellen was a brilliant pioneer. Tragically, Ellen was diagnosed with a rare and aggressive form of cancer in early May 2014 and succumbed to the disease in the following month. Her all-too-sudden death at the age of fifty-three is a heartbreaking loss for her family and friends, but also for the guild of New Testament studies, which lost a dear and highly esteemed colleague, teacher, and scholar. This present volume is dedicated to Ellen's memory, and we hope it brings honor to her, her family, her friends, and her colleagues. You will be dearly missed, Ellen.

A project of this nature is always a significant undertaking, the success of which involves the hard work of many. I want to thank Tom Thatcher, the editor for the Society of Biblical Literature's Resources for Biblical Study series, who envisioned this project and asked if I would be willing to serve as its editor. His guidance and patience through what turned out to be a longer-than-intended process is greatly appreciated—without it the ship would have sunk! I would also like to thank my colleagues Tim Brookins (Houston Baptist University) and Alice Yafeh-Deigh (Azusa Pacific University), who both provided informal editorial and professional assistance with certain aspects of this project. Finally, I want to thank the thirteen excellent contributors who have provided superb essays for this volume, essays that contain first-rate scholarship that is deftly crafted to communicate to our intended audience of students and nonspecialists—not an easy task for many of us! Your patience, cooperation, and communication throughout this process has been commendable, and it has truly been a joy to work with you all. I hope the editorial work presented here is worthy of your significant contributions.

Adam Winn
Pasadena, California, 2015

Abbreviations

Primary Sources

Abr.	Philo, *De Abrahamo*
Acts Paul	Acts of Paul
Aen.	Virgil, *Aeneid*
Agr.	Tacitus, *Agricola*
Ann.	Tacitus, *Annales*
Ant.	Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*
Ant.	Sophocles, *Antigone*
Ant. rom.	Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Antiquitates romanae*
Aug.	Suetonius, *Divus Augustus*
Bell. civ.	Appian, *Bella civilia*
Bib. hist.	Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca historica*
Brut.	Cicero, *Brutus* or *De claris oratoribus*
Cat.	Lucian, *Cataplus*
Cher.	Philo, *De cherubim*
Claud.	Suetonius, *Divus Claudius*
Clem.	Seneca, *De clementia*
Dom.	Suetonius, *Domitianus*
Dreams	Philo, *On Dreams*
Eloc.	Demetrius, *De elocutione* (*Peri hermēneias*)
Ep.	*Epistulae*
Epict. diss.	Arrian, *Epicteti dissertationes*
Fug.	Lucian, *Fugitivi*
Haer.	Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses*
Hist.	Sallust, *Historiae*
Hist.	Tacitus, *Historiae*
Hist. eccl.	*Historia ecclesiastica*
Hist. rom.	Cassius Dio, *Historia romana* (*Roman History*)

Hom. Phil.	John Chrysostom, *Homiliae in epistulam ad Philippenses*
Il.	Homer, *Iliad*
Inst.	Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*
Jub.	Jubilees
J.W.	Josephus, *Jewish War*
LAB	Liber antiquitatum biblicarum (Pseudo-Philo)
Leg.	Plato, *Leges*
Mand.	Shepherd of Hermas, Mandate(s)
Mart. Pol.	Martyrdom of Polycarp
Metam.	Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*
Nat.	Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis historia*
Nem.	Pindar, *Nemeonikai*
Num.	Plutarch, *Numa*
Off.	Cicero, *De officiis*
Ol.	Pindar, *Olympionikai*
Orest.	Euripides, *Orestes*
Pan.	Pliny the Younger, *Panegyricus*
PE	Pastoral Epistles
Pol.	Aristotle, *Politica*
Praec. ger. rei publ.	Plutarch, *Praecepta gerendae rei publicae*
Prog.	Libanius, *Progymnasmata*
Quaest. rom.	Plutarch, *Quaestiones romanae et graecae* (*Aetia romana et graeca*)
Rep.	Cicero, *De republica*
Res gest. divi Aug.	Res gestae divi Augusti
[*Rhet.*]	Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Ars rhetorica*
Rom.	Plutarch, *Romulus*
Saec.	Horace, *Carmen saeculare*
Sim.	Shepherd of Hermas, Similitude(s)
Ti. C. Gracch.	Plutarch, *Tiberius et Caius Gracchus*
Tib.	Suetonius, *Tiberius*
Tim.	Plato, *Timaeus*
Vesp.	Suetonius, *Vespasianus*
Vis.	Shepherd of Hermas, Vision(s)

Secondary Sources

AJA	*American Journal of Archaeology*

AJEC	Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity
AJP	*American Journal of Philology*
ANF	*The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325.* Edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. 10 vols. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing, 1987.
ANRW	*Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung*. Part 2, *Principat*. Edited by Hildegard Temporini and Wolfgang Haase. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1972–
AnSt	*Anatolian Studies*
AYB	Anchor Yale Bible
Bib	*Biblica*
BibInt	*Biblical Interpretation*
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation Series
BMC	*Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum*
BMW	Bible in the Modern World
BSGRT	Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana
BurH	*Buried History*
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeischrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBNTS	Coniectanea Biblica New Testament Series
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CIG	*Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum*. Edited by August Boeckh. 4 vols. Berlin, 1828–1877
CIL	*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*. Berlin, 1862–
CP	*Classical Philology*
CW	*Classical World*
Divinations	Divinations: Rereading Late Ancient Religion
ExpTim	*Expository Times*
GRBS	*Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*
HSCP	*Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*
HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*
IBC	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
IG	*Inscriptiones graecae. Editio Minor*. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1924–

IGR	*Inscriptiones Graecae ad Res Romanas Pertinentes*
ILS	*Inscriptiones Latinae selectae*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JETS	*Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
JGRChJ	*Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism*
JHI	*Journal of the History of Ideas*
JHS	*Journal of Hellenic Studies*
JJS	*Journal of Jewish Studies*
JNES	*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
JRASS	Journal of Roman Archaeology: Supplement Series
JRS	*Journal of Roman Studies*
JSJ	*Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods*
JSNT	*Journal for the Study of the New Testament*
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series
JSPSup	Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha: Supplement Series
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
LSJ	Liddell, Henry George, Robert Scott, and Henry Stuart Jones. *A Greek-English Lexicon*. 9th ed. with revised supplement. Oxford: Clarendon, 1996
MAMA	*Monumenta Asiae Minoris Antiqua*. Manchester and London, 1928–1993
MNTSS	McMaster New Testament Studies Series
NIBCNT	New International Biblical Commentary on the New Testament
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NovTSup	Supplements to Novum Testamentum
NTL	New Testament Library
NTMS	New Testament Monographs
NTOA	Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus
NTS	*New Testament Studies*
OGIS	*Orientis graeci inscriptions selectae*. Edited by Wilhelm Dittenberger. 2 vols. Leipzig: Hirzel, 1903–1905

Ph&Rh	*Philosophy and Rhetoric*
RBS	Resources for Biblical Study
RIC	*The Roman Imperial Coinage*
RPC	*Roman Provincial Coinage*
RSR	*Recherches de science religieuse*
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLSP	Soceity of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SEG	Supplementum epigraphicum graecum
SemeiaSt	Semeia Studies
SNT	Studien zum Neuen Testament
SNTSMS	Society For New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SP	Sacra Pagina
SymS	Symposium Series
TAPS	*Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*
Thf	*Theoforum*
TynBul	*Tyndale Bulletin*
UBS	United Bible Society
USQR	*Union Seminary Quarterly Review*
VC	*Vigiiae christianae*
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WGRW	Writings from the Greco-Roman World
WGRWSup	Writings from the Greco-Roman World Supplement Series
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament

Striking Back at the Empire: Empire Theory and Responses to Empire in the New Testament

Adam Winn

As will become evident throughout this volume of essays, the Roman Empire dominated and pervaded virtually every aspect of life in the ancient Mediterranean world. Though Christianity was birthed under the power of this empire and every page of Christian Scripture was written under its shadow, the Roman Empire has played a relatively insignificant role in the history of modern New Testament scholarship. To be sure, realities of the empire were often recognized as a background for the Christian movement. Knowledge of Roman laws, rulers, and customs was certainly used to inform one's interpretation of Paul's mission and letters, the life of Jesus, the four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, and many aspects of the New Testament. To be sure, the history of religions school considered the impact of Roman religious ideas on the development and expression of early Christian theology. But few interpreters considered the way in which the Roman Empire and its ubiquitous power and influence might be a foreground for understanding Christian theological expression, mission, and practice. Few New Testament interpreters considered ways in which New Testament texts might be critiquing the evils of the Roman Empire. The prevailing assumption was that the writings of the New Testament were apolitical, that they were primarily concerned with spiritual realties rather than the worldly practices of ancient empires. The general conclusion of most interpreters was that Christians by and large accepted Roman authority, honored Roman rulers and laws, and only demonstrated resistance or critique when Roman power directly called Christians to violate their allegiance to God or his Christ.

While the reasons for such conclusions are numerous, I will note some prominent ones here. First, modern New Testament scholarship is a product of the modern Western world, a world in which the separation of religion and state is for many a foundational presupposition. This presupposition has two significant implications for the relationship between the Roman Empire and Christian Scriptures. The first implication is that the Roman Empire was understood in strictly political terms, as if it only incorporated political realities such as political officials, institutions, and laws. As such, it was presumed that the New Testament only engaged empire when it explicitly engaged these political realities—engagement that is relatively rare in the New Testament. The second implication is related to the fact that in the modern West, the New Testament was a book of the church and thus a distinctly religious book. Since the New Testament was a religious book and the Western world created a sharp divide between the interests of the state and religion, it was presumed that the New Testament would have little interest in political realities. Thus, by imposing its own dichotomy between religion and state onto the New Testament, the modern Western world was blinded to many ways in which the New Testament might be engaging or responding to Roman imperial realities.

Second, as a product of the modern West, modern New Testament scholarship belonged, and to a great extent still belongs, to the world's wealthy, powerful, and privileged. Because virtually all New Testament interpreters were citizens of powerful nations (empires?) and benefited from that power, they were (and still today often remain) predisposed to see themselves and their own situations in these texts. The authors, audiences, and characters are seen through the lens of privilege and are presumed to stand in the place of privilege. Thus the place of privilege held by many interpreters kept them from recognizing the primary players in the New Testament for what they actually were, namely, the poor, oppressed, powerless, and dominated people of the Roman Empire. Without recognizing the people of the New Testament as a dominated people, there was no real hope of seeing in their writings a critique of the powerful. One might conclude that the power and privilege of the modern Western interpreters themselves stand as a barrier to reading the text as a critique of the powerful and thus to see in the New Testament text critiques of Rome's empire.

Yet over the past three decades, there have been significant developments in the field of New Testament studies that have led to critiques of the

previously held presumptions regarding the New Testament's relationship to the Roman Empire. Postmodern literary criticism led the way in recognizing the biases of readers and the ways in which those biases shape the meaning of literature. Subsequently, it did not take long for the dominant biases of privileged Western readers to be recognized and critiqued. Postcolonial criticism played a significant role in this process, recognizing biases of the privileged and powerful, the ways in which these biases oppress the colonized, and the ways in which the colonized respond to their subjugation. The application of postcolonial criticism to the New Testament led to the recognition that the primary actors of the New Testament (authors, audiences, characters, etc.) were distinctly different from the privileged Western interpreters that dominated the field of New Testament studies. The early Christians that both composed the New Testament and took center stage in it were not the powerful or privileged but the colonized poor who had little power to change their social condition. Such a recognition led interpreters to consider the ways in which early Christians might be responding to and resisting Roman colonization and imperial power. Strategies of response that were witnessed among modern colonized people were used to understand the behaviors and writings of early Christians.

Aided in part by postcolonial criticism and in part by developments in classical studies, New Testament scholars began to recognize the vast scope and pervasive nature of the Roman Empire (as seen in the following essay). These advances led many scholars to abandon the previously held presupposition regarding the separation of church and state. It became quite clear that Roman religion was inseparable from Roman politics, and vice versa. Likewise, the Roman economic system, social organization, architecture, and even literature were demonstrated to be inseparable from the political power of Rome. When Rome's empire is understood in this way, it does not take long to realize that virtually every dimension of Christian life would in some way be affected by Rome's empire and that engagement with and response to this empire would be a daily reality for all Christians.

As a result of these developments, the last two decades have seen numerous studies on the role that empire played in the life of early Christianity and in the composition and use of the New Testament. These studies have demonstrated that early Christian responses to the Roman Empire, responses found in the New Testament, were highly diverse in their estimation of empire, in their strategies for responding to empire, and the aspects of empire to which they respond. Here I consider this diversity and

introduce the reader to various means and strategies employed in New Testament books to respond to Rome's empire.

Predicted and Imagined Judgment

Perhaps not surprisingly, the New Testament's estimation of Rome's empire is often negative. Central to much Christian proclamation was the return of Christ, an event that would bring with it the full establishment of God's righteous reign on earth (e.g., Acts 3:19–21; 1 Cor 15:23–28; Phil 3:20–21; 1 Thess 4:14–17). Implicit in the establishment of God's reign was the destruction of all earthly powers that opposed God, as well as the rulers that represented those powers. Since Rome was the current world power, its defeat and removal was implicit in Christian eschatological hope. Thus one way in which Christians responded to Roman power was to predict its removal and judgment. In 1 Cor 2:6, Paul claims that the "rulers of this age," presumably Roman rulers, "are doomed to perish."[1] Later, in 1 Cor 15:24, Paul says, "Then comes the end, when he [Christ] hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power." Though Paul does not specifically mention Rome here, the destruction of Roman power is clearly implied, and it would have been understood by Paul's earliest readers. Paul again predicts the judgment of Rome in 1 Thess 5:3: "When they say, 'There is peace and security,' then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape!" "Peace and security" represents a common mantra of the Roman Empire (*pax et securitas*), one commonly found on coins and in imperial inscriptions. The mantra promised peace and safety to all those under the empire's power. Thus those saying "peace and security" are best identified as those who represent Roman power, that is, those who place these words on coins and inscribe them on walls and statues. Paul is claiming that these representatives of Roman power will experience sudden destruction at the return of God's messiah, Jesus.

These are examples of direct challenges to Roman power through the prediction of Roman destruction. While these are clearly direct challenges to Roman power, there is an element of "self-protection" to them. Self-protection is a common practice found in the response of the dominated

1. Unless otherwise noted, all scripture citations are from the NRSV.

to the dominant. There is much risk involved in challenging the dominant power, and as such, often measures are taken by the dominated to protect themselves. The first level of protection for these predictions of Rome's destruction is the medium by which they are conveyed, namely, through private letters. These letters would have been read by those who, by and large, shared Paul's opinion of Rome and thus would not have been scandalized by it. Such private correspondence would have been unlikely to create trouble for either Paul or his community. But even yet, it is noteworthy that in these predictions, Rome itself is never mentioned explicitly, though it is clearly implied. Implicit rather than explicit predictions of Rome's destruction likely reflect an element of self-protection in Paul's critique of Roman power.

The most powerful Christian prediction of the destruction of Roman power is likely found in Revelation. However, Revelation often goes beyond simply predicting the destruction of Rome by vividly imagining and describing this destruction. For example, in Rev 18, the author describes a vision in which an angel descends from heaven and cries, "Fallen, Fallen is Babylon the Great" (18:2). It is widely recognized that Babylon is a coded reference to Rome, which like Babylon destroyed the Jewish temple. The chapter describes the great sins of "Babylon," the Roman Empire, including fornication (perhaps a reference to idolatry), greed, arrogance, and the murder of the saints. Rome is described as a "dwelling place for demons" and a "haunt for every foul spirit, a haunt for every foul bird, and a haunt for every foul and hateful beast" (18:2). Its sins are said to be "as high as heaven" (18:5). To be sure, the outward greatness of Rome is not ignored, as the great economic wealth of Rome is thoroughly described, as is the wealth that Rome has brought to those who have "fornicated" with it (18:9–17). This wealth, obtained through unrighteous means, has led to arrogance as it claims, "I rule as a queen; I am no widow, and I will never see grief" (18:7). But Rome's wealth and arrogance only magnify the dramatic nature of its judgment and destruction, both of which are described as sudden and swift: "her plagues will come in a single day" (18:8) and "for in one hour your judgment has come" (18:10). The greatness of Rome is clearly juxtaposed with its shocking and sudden demise. Rome's great luxury will be matched by its great suffering: "Render to her as she herself has rendered, and repay her double for her deeds; mix a double draught for her in the cup she mixed. As she glorified herself and lived luxuriously, so give her a like measure of torment and grief" (18:6–7). God's judgment on Rome leaves it smoking and burning and the inhabitants weeping

and mourning loudly (18:18–19). While the city is left void of music and laughter, the saints, prophets, and apostles rejoice over God's vindication the wrongs committed against them (18:20–23). Through such envisioned judgment, the powerless are able both to express their critique of their oppressors and to engender hope among their ranks by imagining the reversal of their current situation.

In this chapter, and throughout much of Revelation, we again see a strategy of self-protection, this time through the use of coded language. Rome is never explicitly mentioned in the chapter. The chapter speaks of the fall of Babylon, not the fall of Rome. To the outside reader, the harsh critique of Rome might be easily missed. But to the insider, Babylon is a well-known code word for Rome. Thus, through such coded language, the dominated find the courage to voice their critique of those who dominate them.

Critique through Co-opted Language

Another common way in which the New Testament responds to and critiques the Roman Empire is through co-opting the language of the empire and using that language to express loyalty to a competing power, ruler, and eschatological vision. Language that is both prominent and commonplace in the New Testament is equally so in the Roman imperial world. The word *euangelion*, which is often translated as "good news" or "gospel," was a word closely associated with Roman power and the Roman emperor. The word was used to describe the emperor's birth, ascension to power, and even victory in battle (A. Collins 2000, 85–100; Winn 2008, 97–99). To the Greco-Roman reader of the New Testament, the proclamation of the "gospel of Jesus Christ" and the eschatological vision it implied could be heard as a challenge to the "gospel of Caesar" and the present power of Rome. Titles that are frequently applied to Jesus, such as "Son of God," "savior," "lord," and "king," were all commonly attributed to Roman emperors. When in Mark's Gospel a Roman centurion bestows on Jesus the title "Son of God" (Mark 15:39), a title that such a figure would commonly bestow on his emperor, the Greco-Roman reader would at least pause to consider whether a subversive message was intended, namely, if Jesus is Son of God then is Caesar *not*? Additionally, words like "faith," "justice," "peace," and "hope" were regularly identified as prominent virtues of Roman emperors and Rome itself. The faithfulness of the Roman emperor to his people ensured them justice, peace, and hope for the future.

For Paul, the faithfulness of Jesus reveals and establishes God's *dikaiosynē* (Rom 1:16; 3:21–22; 5:1), a word that is often translated "righteousness" in our New Testament, but in the Greco-Roman world was often associated with the Roman imperial virtue "justice." But not only does the faith of Jesus bring about justice; it also brings about "peace" (Rom 5:1) and "hope" (Rom 5:2). This language pervades many of Paul's letters, and it continually plays a prominent role in Paul's presentation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. One could argue that Paul uses this language to subvert the gospel of Rome by showing the superiority of the gospel of Jesus; that is, in Jesus one finds the faithfulness of a superior Lord, who brings a superior justice, peace, and hope.

One would be remiss to ignore the fact that much of the language noted above finds significance and meaning in the world of Second Temple Judaism as well, and there is no attempt here to deny such significance. But when this language was read by Greeks and Romans, it no doubt called to mind, at least for some, the unavoidable imperial realities through which they daily saw this language (e.g., on Roman coins, Roman temples, Roman public inscriptions). Instead of choosing one background over the other, interpreters might be better served to recognize the multivalent nature of this language that makes it useful for contrasting the kingdom of the God of Israel with Rome's empire.

It is noteworthy that the co-opting of Roman imperial language still carries with it a measure of self-protection, as it generally does not convey any explicit critique of Rome or its rulers. In Mark's Gospel, the Roman centurion does not explicitly state that because Jesus is Son of God, Caesar is not, though such a meaning could either be implied by the reader or intended by the author. Yet co-opted language is likely more dangerous than the use of coded language, because it is more likely to raise the suspicions of the dominating power.

Hidden Transcripts

As noted above, postcolonial criticism played a significant role in paving the way for studying responses to empire in the New Testament. Of particular importance is the work of James C. Scott (1985, 1990), a professor of political science at Yale who has done extensive research on the way in which dominated people interact with and respond to a dominating power. Scott (1990, 18) has demonstrated that the dominating power usually has an organized narrative or ideology that explains its power, justifies

its domination, and communicates the benefits of its power for the dominated. Scott refers to this narrative as a "public transcript" (2, 18). The public transcript is frequently communicated by the dominating power, and the dominated are expected both to know and affirm the public transcript (70). While the dominated often publicly affirm the public transcript, Scott argues that such public affirmation should not be understood as a sincere affirmation of the dominating power or the ideology they perpetuate (2–5). Because open resistance to the public transcript would likely result in an unpleasant outcome for the dominated, they often resist in secret by creating and promoting their own counternarrative or ideology. Scott refers to this counternarrative as a "hidden transcript" (5). The hidden transcript is usually only communicated in the private sphere of the dominated, "backstage" and out of the sight of the dominant power (5–8). However, at times the hidden transcript can break through into the public sphere. While such appearances of the hidden transcript are usually subtle, at times they can be overt.

Scott's work has provided a useful way forward in understanding and detecting ways in which New Testament texts might be engaging and responding to the Roman Empire. As Longenecker's essay in this volume demonstrates, Rome had a well-developed public transcript, one that presented Roman rule as divinely ordained and as a source of blessing to those who lived under its authority. Recognition of this public transcript has led scholars to mine the New Testament for evidence of a hidden transcript that functions to resist Roman power and that offers the reader a counternarrative. At times, the hidden transcript is blatant, such as Revelation's imagined judgment of Rome or Paul's prediction of the destruction of all earthly powers and rulers. Yet more often the hidden transcript is subtle and hard to detect if one is not looking for it. Is Paul's use of words like "faithfulness," "justice," "savior," and "peace" politically neutral, or is Paul advancing with these words a hidden transcript that subverts the public transcript of Rome in which these words are prominent? In the essays to follow, certain authors will use this concept of hidden transcript to identify ways in which a New Testament text might be responding to Roman power.

Formation of Alternative Communities and Subversion of Sociocultural Institutions

As Longenecker demonstrates in this volume, the Roman Empire was not simply the product of military and political might. While these

two realities certainly had their place, the stability and power of the empire rested largely on the broad shoulders of Rome's social, cultural, and civic institutions. Roman governance over its many provinces was largely facilitated through intricate patron-client relationships. The social elites in provincial cities were clients of Rome and its emperor, and they worked hard to honor and support these patrons (e.g., through the building of honorific temples, the perpetuation of Roman propaganda, and the maintenance of civic peace and harmony). Such honor and support was rewarded by generous gifts from the patrons, which increased the wealth, power, and honor of the civic elite. But these civic elites were also supported by their own clients that worked to increase the honor of these patrons, for which the clients would receive generous gifts and benefits. Through this system of mutually beneficial relationships, Rome was able to maintain peace and stability throughout the provinces it ruled with relatively little need for the use of military force. Such a system was largely built on status and the proper recognition of one's social superiors. Threats to such notions of status would thus threaten the intricate web of client-patron relationships, which would in turn threaten the very stability of Rome's empire.

Roman stability was also closely tied to the stability of the family unit. Greeks and Romans linked the stability of families to the stability and success of the empire (Aristotle, *Pol.* 1.1.5–9; Cicero, *Off.* 1.54; Arimus Didymus, *Epitome* 148.5–13). The family unit was organized around the paterfamilias or "father of the family."[2] The father had full legal authority over everyone in his household, which would include his spouse, children, grandchildren, and slaves. The paterfamilias had complete imperium or authority over his home, just as the emperor, the father of the Roman people, had complete imperium over Rome and its provinces. A stable family required a stable father who ruled over his home with both wisdom and justice (Aristotle, *Pol.* 1.5.3–12). Any destabilization of the institution of the paterfamilias would be linked to the destabilization of Rome itself.

In addition to the cultural institutions of the family and patronage, the Roman legal system and its administration of justice was also seen as foundational to Roman power and stability. *Iustitia*, "justice," was a foun-

2. Technically, the paterfamilias was a Roman legal institution, and only Roman citizens could be recognized as a paterfamilias. But for non-Romans living in the Roman Empire (Greeks, Jews, etc.), the father essentially held the same authority over his family as that of the Roman paterfamilias.

dational Roman virtue. Cicero claims that justice is "the crowning glory of the virtues" (*Off.* 1.20 [Miller, LCL]). Rome perceived that its divine right to rule was largely predicated on the empire's (and emperor's) commitment to justice and the just rule of law (Rutilius, *De Reditu Suo* 63–66). Justice was largely facilitated by civic courts or councils where local magistrates, figures appointed either directly or indirectly by Roman authorities, would hear and adjudicate legal disputes (R. Collins 1999, 226). As such, subversion of these institutions could be perceived as a subversion of *iustitia* and ultimately the stability of Rome's empire.

When these social, familial, and civic realities are seen in their proper relationship to the success and stability of the Roman Empire, that is, as thoroughly imperial realities, New Testament passages that deal with such realities can be seen in radically new ways. Paul's instructions to "outdo another in showing honor," "bless those who persecute you," "extend hospitality to strangers," "associate with the lowly" (Rom 12:10–16), and the like all undermine the notions of status, honor, and obligation that are embedded in the Roman social institution of patronage. The teaching of the Lukan Jesus to invite to dinner only those who cannot reciprocate the invitation (Luke 14:12–14) or James's instruction not to show favoritism in one's home to the wealthy over against the poor (Jas 2:1–9) both subvert this institution as well and stand to threaten the client-patron social construct, a construct used by Rome to keep peace and stability throughout its empire.

Paul's declaration that the husband's body belongs to the wife (1 Cor 7:4) is radically egalitarian, and it implicitly challenges the rights and powers of (and thus the institution of) the paterfamilias. Similarly, Paul's declaration that in Christ there is neither male or female nor slave or free, presents an egalitarian principle that has significant implications for the institution of the paterfamilias (Gal 3:28). If the family is the model for the city and state, what kind of state would a family that adopted such egalitarian principles model? Certainly not a state that looked like imperial Rome.

Paul also urges the Christians of Corinth not to take their legal disputes to the courts of the gentiles but to act as their own arbitrators of such legal matters (1 Cor 6:1–11). While the specific courts that this Pauline text has in its purview might represent local civic authority in Corinth rather that the court of a Roman provincial governor (only significant cases would be brought to the provincial governor, while local magistrates would oversee less noteworthy cases [R. Collins 1999, 226]), Paul's basic premise that Christians should adjudicate their own legal disputes because

of their superior wisdom to that of their pagan contemporaries would most certainly be applied to courts that more directly expressed Roman's authority, that is, the high court of either the provincial governor or the emperor. For Paul, Christians are able to provide a greater justice among themselves than what is offered by Rome's promise of *iustitia*.

Through such instructions, the authors of the New Testament are directing their readers to form alternative communities that stand in sharp contrast to those offered them by the Roman imperial order. Whether intentionally so or not, the formation of such communities was subversive to an empire that depended on social, familial, and civic institutions for its power and stability. Thus the formation of such alternative communities is a real and tangible way that New Testament texts engage and subvert Rome's empire.

Accommodation of Roman Imperial Power

Not all of the New Testament's engagement with and response to Roman power is subversive. Many New Testament texts seem to be accommodating or even supportive of Rome's empire. Perhaps most noteworthy are passages like Rom 13:1–7, in which Paul encourages submission to Roman power as it has been instituted by God, the payment of Roman taxes, and the giving of honor to political figures. First Peter 2:12–17 instructs the reader to honor all political institutions and figures, for it is the Lord who has instituted them for punishing those who do wrong and rewarding those who do good. Through such a response to imperial power, the authors hope that those who wield such power might honor God when he comes to judge the world.

In addition to such direct demands to submit to Roman authority, there are passages that seem to accommodate the social-familial institutions outlined above, institutions that undergirded Rome's power and success. While the undisputed letters of Paul seem to advance a radical egalitarianism and call for the formation of communities that stand in sharp contrast to those offered by the Roman imperial world, many of the disputed letters of Paul seem to embrace the social-familial realities that characterize the communities of imperial Rome. In Ephesians, the familial institution of the paterfamilias seems to be reinforced, as the author identifies the husband as the "head" of the wife and requires the wife to submit to her husband in everything (Eph 5:22–24). Likewise, the author appears to reinforce the institution of slavery, as slaves are told to obey their masters with "fear

and trembling" (Eph 6:5–6). Similar teachings can also be found in the "household codes" of Colossians (Col 3:18–22). While some interpreters might argue that these passages do not reflect complete accommodation to Roman power (and that they might even reflect elements of resistance), one cannot deny the striking differences between the alternative communities that Paul's undisputed letters seek to form and the accommodation to Roman communal realities found in the disputed letters.

Hybridity: Ambivalent Response to Roman Power

Homi K. Bhabha, professor of English and American literature at Harvard University, is another significant voice in postcolonial criticism that continues to have a significant impact on the field of New Testament studies. Bhabha (1985, 144–65) has demonstrated that the responses of the colonized to their colonizers are rarely characterized by outright resistance or rejection but that such responses are quite often characterized by ambivalence. Even when colonization is resisted by the colonized, the colonized are inevitably affected by the realities of colonization. As a result, the colonized are in many ways hybrids of their own cultural realities and those imposed by their colonizers. Bhabha uses the term "hybridity" to describe this phenomenon and the responses to colonization that it creates (154–56). Hybrid responses to colonization often involve the colonized embracing some aspect of the colonial culture that has been imposed on them but then enacting or embodying that aspect of colonial culture in some new or different way (144–65). By accepting yet transforming a particular aspect of the colonial culture, the colonized are subtly subverting and resisting the colonial power.

One of the ways in which such hybridity is expressed is through what Bhabha (1984, 126–27) describes as "mimicry." The colonizers desire that the colonized resemble themselves in values, education, and other such cultural expressions. While the colonized regularly oblige these desires by embracing many aspects of the colonial culture, they frequently replicate such aspects imperfectly or incompletely (Moore 2006, 110). According to Bhabha (1984, 123), such imperfect mimicry of the colonizers combines both "resemblance and menace," as the imperfect imitation of the colonizers is a subtle form of resistance to colonization. Thus mimicry is an ambivalent form of responding to imperial power, as it maintains some resemblance of imperial/colonial realities, but it resists such realities by stopping short of complete or perfect imitation.

Such understanding of resistance to colonial/imperial power opens up radical new avenues for evaluating imperial responses found in New Testament writings. Texts that were long regarded as accommodating or embracing the realities of Roman imperial power can and should be reassessed in light of Bhabha's work on hybridity and mimicry. In such texts, are New Testament authors truly accommodating Roman imperial power, or is there evidence of imperfect accommodation and/or imitation that might function subversively? Luke and Acts have often been understood to demonstrate the commensurability between the Christian faith and Rome, and in so doing they present Rome, its empire, and its imperial actors in a positive light (Maddox 1982; Williams 1990, 15–16). But as the close reading of Luke and Acts in this volume will propose, the apparent pro-Roman aspects of these books are often tempered and subtle challenges to Rome's sociopolitical ideology. The concept of hybridity might also be helpful in analyzing a passage like Rom 13:1–7, a passage that, as we noted above, has often been interpreted in terms of Pauline accommodation of Roman power, yet stands in tension with other Pauline texts that seem to clearly critique and challenge that power (J. Marshall 2008, 157–78). Through the concept of hybridity, we are remind that there is rarely a "pure" and complete rejection of the colonial reality by the colonized but that most responses to colonization are ambivalent, combining both accommodation and resistance.

Summary

It is the hope of this essay to demonstrate the great diversity that characterizes the New Testament's engagement with empire as well as the resulting diversity in empire criticism. The New Testament's assessment of empire and Roman imperial realities clearly lacks uniformity. While some New Testament books directly critique and challenge Rome's empire, others offer attempts to accommodate it. Some books fall somewhere in between these two poles and offer hybrid or ambivalent responses to imperial realities. Strategies of response also vary widely, including coded language, co-opted language, imagined judgment, hidden transcripts, mimicry, and flattery among others. Also, due to the ubiquitous nature of the Roman Empire, the particular focus of any critique or engagement can be directed toward a wide range of "imperial" realities. While direct responses to Rome's political authority might be the most obvious examples of engagement with Rome's empire, some New Testament texts might completely

ignore such political authority and instead choose to engage one or more of the many arms of Rome's imperial reach, including Roman religious, economic, social, and familial institutions.

The entirety of this diversity is reflected in the following essays, with some essays introducing the reader to methods and strategies for engaging empire that I have not addressed here and with other essays offering a more thorough discussion of issues I could only offer a cursory discussion of here.

For Further Reading

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