

A PRIMER FOR THE STUDY OF PAUL AND ROMAN IMPERIAL IDEOLOGY

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INTRODUCTION

With the emergence of the New Perspective on Paul (NPP) and the so-called Third Quest for the Historical Jesus,¹ New Testament scholars have been actively investigating the Jewish background of Paul and the Gospels. The NPP has gained wide attention among evangelicals because of its harsh critique of the traditional Reformation position on justification by faith. Although most evangelicals are rightfully critical of conclusions drawn by this movement, no one can deny that fresh investigations into the historical background of the New Testament are invigorating to the discipline.

While the NPP and the Third Quest have garnered much press, another area of New Testament background studies has been quietly gaining scholarly attention. Unlike the NPP and the Third Quest which deal primarily with Second Temple Judaism, this burgeoning area deals with the Roman and Greek backgrounds of the New Testament.

Essentially, classicists are arguing that Imperial Rome (that is, Rome from Augustus onward) had a distinct ideology or theology that functioned both as a defense of its legitimacy and as a programmatic guide for how the Empire was to conduct its affairs. That is to say, that Imperial Rome developed an ideology—a worldview—that served as its guiding light.

Describing the function of Rome's ideology, Fears argues,

In these terms, ideology forms the matrix of social behavior and provides the principal means for attaining social solidarity and integration. Through ideology a given state of political affairs can be rationalized, legitimized, and perpetuated. Such a political myth binds a group of people together, taps their sentiments and emotions, and directs their energies toward specific objectives. As a shaper of

¹ For a concise summary of the Third Quest, see N. T. Wright, *The Contemporary Quest for Jesus*, Facets ed., Facets (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002), and Darrell L. Bock, *Studying the Historical Jesus: A Guide to Sources and Methods* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2002).

political action ideology has a variety of complementary functions: legitimacy; identity; solidarity; agitation; communication; and goal specification.²

Perhaps a modern example would be helpful here: To many, the story of the United States goes something like this: The United States of America was formed by men seeking religious and personal freedom. Throughout its history, the country has stood as a beacon of human dignity, democracy, and freedom. Even to this day, America stands as a beacon to the world, leading the world in fighting against communism, totalitarianism, Islamic extremism, etc. Although the United States has not always been consistent with its own ideals (e.g. slavery and treatment of Native Americans), this is still seen as the fundamental history and mission of the United States. Notice how this ideology both defends the intrinsic value of the country, and serves as a kind of on-going mission statement for it.

Certain American rituals serve to reinforce this view. National holidays like Memorial and Independence Day serve to communicate America's perceived mission in the world by honoring those who served their country. This is accomplished through parades and national celebrations. Many smaller rituals help to reinforce this ideology as well—simple acts like playing the national anthem at sporting events is a constant reinforcement of these American values. Fears draws a comparison between Ancient Rome and modern countries like the U.S. and Italy:

To the Roman the modern cult of the flag with its pledge of allegiance, national anthems, and monuments like the Lincoln Memorial and the *Altare della Patria*, would differ in no whit from his practice of cult offerings, hymns, and temples directed to gods of the state, including deified rulers.³

²J. Rufus Fears, "The Cult of Jupiter and Roman Imperial Ideology," *ANRW II. 17.1*: 7-8.

³ *Ibid.*: 8.

The point here is neither to attack nor defend this particular view of America. Rather, it is to illustrate how certain classicists view the function of Rome's Imperial Ideology in validating its history and on-going mission in the Ancient world. Ando, for example, argues that Loyal Romans from all over the empire would have embraced and defended this ideology with the same vigor that most Americans today would defend their view of America's place in the world.⁴

Out of this particular view of Roman Imperial Ideology have come a slew of studies integrating this background with New Testament interpretation. A number of studies have attempted to read the particular New Testament books in light of Roman Imperial Cult and Roman Imperial ideology. Biguzzi⁵ and Freisen⁶ have both published studies dealing with the Roman Imperial Cult and John's Apocalypse. Carter⁷ and Brent⁸ have produced studies reading various gospels as attempts to confront the Roman Imperial Cult as well. A number of similar studies have been conducted on various Pauline epistles.⁹

⁴Clifford Ando, *Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty in the Roman Empire*, Classics and Contemporary Thought 6(Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 424.

⁵Giancarlo Biguzzi, "Ephesus, Its Artemision, Its Temple to the Flavian Emperors, and Idolatry in Revelation," *Novum testamentum* 40, no. 3 (1998).

⁶Steven J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins*(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁷Warren Carter, "Toward an Imperial-Critical Reading of Matthew's Gospel," *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* 37 (1998).

⁸Allen Brent, "Luke-Acts and the Imperial Cult in Asia Minor," *Journal of Theological Studies* 48, no. 2 (1997).

⁹Two among many possible examples include Harry O. Maier, "A Sly Civility: Colossians and Empire," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 27, no. 3 (2005). and J. R. Harrison, "Paul and the Imperial Gospel at Thessaloniki," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 25, no. 1 (2002).

Further, a number of scholars, many of whom would identify themselves as post-colonial interpreters, integrate the Roman Imperial Ideology and Roman Imperial Cult material with Paul in order to develop a view of Paul as being Anti-Roman or Counter-Imperial. They apply these counter-imperial readings by arguing that Paul would be anti-empire, and thus anti-American.¹⁰

How should evangelical students, preachers, and professors react to this background material? Should it influence our interpretations of particular New Testament books? Should it serve to form the framework of a fully developed Pauline theology? One thing is for certain, this material cannot be ignored. It has filtered down through scholarly books and articles down to the level of popular writings¹¹ and blogs.¹² Thus, it is only a matter of time before evangelical students, preachers, and professors are expected to speak intelligently on this topic.

Speaking intelligently and with intellectual honesty on this topic, however, will demand much of the evangelical. What makes this topic so demanding is its highly technical nature. That is, relatively few have, or perhaps would even want, the specialized skills in archaeology, epigraphic studies, statuary, and numismatics, necessary to work with the primary sources. Thus, the average evangelical student, preacher, or professor is left to work with secondary sources—authors whose perspectives they are ill-equipped to critique.

However, the evangelical must start somewhere. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to offer a primer to the study of Paul, Roman Imperial Ideology, and the Roman Imperial Cult. It

¹⁰ See especially, John Dominic Crossan, *God and Empire: Jesus against Rome, Then and Now*, 1st ed. ([San Francisco]: HarperSanFrancisco, 2007); Richard A. Horsley, *Paul and Empire : Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society*(Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1997); Richard A. Horsley, *Paul and the Roman Imperial Order*(Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2004).

¹¹ Two examples of popular level applications of this material are: Brian J. Walsh and Sylvia C. Keesmaat, *Colossians Remixed: Subverting the Empire*(Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2004). and Warren Carter, *The Roman Empire and the New Testament : An Essential Guide*, Abingdon Essential Guides(Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006).

¹² Note for example, <http://www.revelation-resources.com/category/general-introduction/imperial-cult/>

is not designed primarily as an introduction to primary sources. Rather, it is intended to offer an overview of the scholarly material available. As such, this paper should be helpful as an introduction and as a map for further study.

This paper is organized into two major parts. Part I summarizes four key sources on Roman Imperial Ideology and the Roman Imperial Cult. These four sources either are, or deal with, primary source evidence. Part II interacts with two particular articles dealing with methodological challenges in integrating the Roman Imperial material with New Testament interpretation. The works of these two authors are synthesized into a set of methodological principles for studying proposed Pauline parallels to Roman Imperial material.

Part I: Four Key Sources

There are at least four key sources for anyone seeking a basic understanding of Roman Imperial Ideology and the Roman Imperial Cult. The first source below is the only primary source discussed in the present paper. I have limited my discussion of primary sources to Virgil's *Aeneid* because it is the most accessible, and perhaps most familiar, primary source. The balance of works discussed in Part I are modern authors who interact primarily with literary, archaeological, epigraphic, statuary, and numismatic evidences.

Virgil's Aeneid

Virgil, Augustus' court poet, wrote what is considered to be the Roman epic, *The Aeneid*. The *Aeneid* traces the journey of the Roman progenitor, Aeneas, from his devastated home in Troy (after the Trojan War) to his new home in Italy. Duff argues that Virgil's intent is to

“uphold the new monarchy as one foreshadowed in the fatherly leadership of Aeneas, and predestined to follow the long and glorious evolution of the republic.”¹³

Although it would be tempting to take a grand tour of Virgil’s epic, I must limit my discussion to two key texts. Both excerpts come from the famous sixth book. Here, Aeneas takes a trip to the underworld, where (among other things), he sees his dead father, Anchises, who offers him prophetic advice:

Others will fashion molten
Bronze with more skill (at least I believe this), will carve from
Marble live faces, will plead cases better, and sketch out
the paths of the heavenly bodies with pointers, and forecast
the rising of the stars.
You, Roman, remember to govern
the people with power (these arts shall be yours), to establish
the practice of peace, spare the conquered, and beat down the haughty.¹⁴

With these words, Virgil lays out a fundamental distinction between Greeks and Romans: Greeks were about wisdom and beauty; Romans were about power to rule. The last two lines serve as something like a mission statement. Rome’s first priority is to rule with power. This justifies the rule of Augustus. He has a god-ordained mission to rule over the whole world.

The exact nature of this rule is further developed in book six. Anchises, in the underworld, prophecies of Aeneas’ descendant Augustus:

Now turn your eyes to see
this race and your Romans. Here Caesar and all of the clan
of Iulus will come to the great vault of heaven. This man,
this is he whom again and again you have heard in the promise
of prophecy, Caesar Augustus, son of a god.

¹³J. Wight Duff, *A Literary History of Rome, from the Origins to the Close of the Golden Age*, [3d] ed.(New York: Barnes & Noble, 1960), 343.

¹⁴Virgil, *The Aeneid*, trans., L. R. Lind(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963), 127.

He shall found once again an era of gold in the land
of Latium, through the fields that Saturn once ruled.¹⁵

The closing two lines are crucial to Augustus' propaganda. Saturn is Jupiter's father. According to Hesiod, the Greek Poet, Saturn ruled over the Golden Age. Jupiter, ruled over the Silver Age. Virgil here argues that Augustus has fulfilled prophecy and ushered in a golden era of peace, the *Pax Romana*.¹⁶ Augustus' rule, then, is the inauguration of a new age. One can hardly miss the similarity between the imagery of Augustus' rule and the biblical account of the Kingdom of God. In fact, Augustus' rule might even be called eschatological.¹⁷

This short discussion should be sufficient to demonstrate the basic thrust of Augustus' ideology. Through Virgil, Augustus presents himself as the culmination of human history—the ruler who was destined by god to bring in the golden era of peace and prosperity. To stand against Rome, then, would be to war against god's will.

*Zanker: The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*¹⁸

If Virgil's Aeneid offers as an example of the Augustus' literary propaganda, Zanker offers an excellent modern analysis of the emperor's propaganda through the use of images. He states,

My interest is instead in the totality of images that a contemporary would experience. This includes not only "works of art," buildings, and poetic imagery, but also religious ritual, clothing, state ceremony, and the emperor's conduct and

¹⁵ Ibid., 125.

¹⁶ M. C. Howatson and Paul Harvey, *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

¹⁷ On this, see Brent.

¹⁸ Paul Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*, trans., Alan Shapiro, Jerome Lectures 16th Ser. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1988).

forms of social intercourse, insofar as these create a visual impression. I am concerned with the contexts of these images and with the effect of this tapestry of images on the viewer.¹⁹

Essentially, Zanker offers an analysis and interpretation of all of the available imagery used by Augustus as he navigated the perilous times of his rise and success in power. Ultimately, Zanker will argue that Augustus, consciously portrayed differing images of himself during the various phases of his career. Through the use of coins, statuary, architecture, clothing, festivals, sacrifices, etc., Augustus changed his image to suit the needs of the moment.²⁰

Zanker argues that once Augustus returned stability to the empire he sought to establish a permanent imagery. He states,

The successes of the new regime had had an impact on every individual. It was now time to give permanent expression to this mood of optimism, to create a new imagery that would transcend reality and eternalize the happiness of the present moment. That state needed a myth and here again Augustus was able to latch onto something that was already in the air before he came along. For years, people had fantasized about the imminent dawning of a new “Saturnian” age of happiness. Another comet was expected in the year 17 B.C., so what better time simply to proclaim that the long awaited new *Saeculum* had arrived?²¹

The above two excerpts from Virgil’s Aeneid foretold a golden age, a return to the rule of Saturn. Augustus takes the imagery and proclaims that the new age had arrived—and that he had inaugurated it.

Constraints of time and space do not allow a full exposition of this work. This short overview, however, should suffice to demonstrate the main thrust of Zanker’s argument.

Augustus utilized all of the images at his disposal to create an ideology that elevated him to the

¹⁹Ibid., 3.

²⁰Ibid., 3, 33, 79, 101, 167.

²¹Ibid., 167.

status of a god-ordained bringer of peace, a god (in the East), or a son of a god (in the West) who established an eternal kingdom. Zanker's work is indispensable for anyone who would understand how effective and far-reaching the Augustan propaganda program actually was.

*Ando: Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty in the Roman Empire*²²

Most educated men and women have at least heard of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.²³ The purpose of this famous work was to explain the reasons why the Roman Empire waned and eventually failed. Ando takes the opposite perspective in this massive study of Roman Ideology. In other words, rather than studying the causes of its demise, Ando sets out to study the causes for the amazing longevity of the Roman Empire.²⁴

Early in his work, Ando argues that Roman ideology was the primary cause of its ability to generate loyalty in its subjects. Ultimately, this explains Rome's longevity. He states,

I shall argue that the Roman state successfully invoked the obedience of its subjects by appealing to several principles of legitimation concurrently. Particular constituencies responded to those principles whose validity they were predisposed to accept. It was, therefore, Rome that supplied the initial articulation of the values to which residents of the empire oriented themselves as members of its community, and it was the belief that others shared those values that legitimized Rome's representation of the social order.²⁵

²²Ando. One should take care when using this source because it takes into account a great deal of evidence from well beyond the First Century.

²³Edward Gibbon and Hans-Friedrich Mueller, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Modern Library paperback ed.(New York: Modern Library, 2003).

²⁴Ando, 1.

²⁵Ibid., 23.

In other words, the Roman Empire was successful primarily because of its ideology. Although various subjects were pre-disposed to accepting elements of it, Rome's articulation and reinforcement was the source of her longevity.

Rome created this consensus through various means. Especially pertinent to our study is the imperial use of images. Imperial Rome used images as one method of creating consensus around its ideology. Speaking of the effectiveness of images, Ando argues that

Literary sources suggest that contemporaries consciously identified coins and monuments as carriers of ideological meaning and as symbols of Rome and the legitimacy of her rule. The function of imperial images in daily life, from their supervision of markets and lawcourts to their cohabitation of temples and sanction of oaths, and their power in the popular imagination, in turn, both created and relied on a belief in some direct relationship between emperor and observer.²⁶

Ultimately, Ando will argue that Augustus' ideological program was so successful that a century later,

A traveler could recognize at least one temple in every city he visited and would know the prayers for one divinity in every ritual he witnessed; he could identify the dates of imperial holidays in any civic calendar as shared with every municipality in the Empire.²⁷

Ando concludes that the Roman Empire survived because Augustus' religio-political ideology created a consensus that cemented his vast and diverse empire for centuries to follow.

Ando is an excellent source for studying Roman imperial ideology. However, New Testament scholars should note several caveats when using Ando. Because he covers the whole empire, East and West, he is a better source for Roman ideology than for Imperial Cult proper. Further, because Ando is concerned with the longevity of the Roman Empire, much of the

²⁶Ibid., 212.

²⁷Ibid., 407.

evidence he cites goes well beyond the New Testament era. However, Ando is a worthy source when dealing with broad issues of Roman Ideology.

*Price: Rituals and Power*²⁸

Price's 1984 publication offers what is perhaps the most comprehensive treatment of the Roman Imperial Cult available in English. His thesis is that the Roman East adapted and developed the already existing eastern ruler cult in order to organize and explain the new order that Augustus imposed upon them. He states,

Many societies have the problem of making sense of an otherwise incomprehensible intrusion of authority into their world. The Greeks were faced with the rule first of Hellenistic kings and then of the Roman emperors which was not completely alien, but which did not relate to the traditions of the self-governing cities. They attempted to evoke an answer by focusing the problem in ritual. Using their traditional symbolic system they represented the emperor to themselves in the familiar terms of divine power. The Imperial cult, like the cults of the traditional gods, created a relationship of power between subject and ruler. It also enhanced the dominance of local elites over the populace, of cities over other cities, and of Greek over indigenous cultures. That is, the cult was a major part of the web of power that formed the fabric of society.

The Imperial cult stabilized the religious order of the world. The system of ritual was carefully structured; the symbolism evoking a picture of the relationship between the emperor and the gods. The ritual was also structuring; it imposed a definition of the world. The Imperial cult, along with politics and diplomacy, constructed the reality of the Roman Empire.²⁹

Several issues are worth discussing here. First, Price analyzes the Roman Imperial Cult from the perspective of anthropologists like Geertz, who see rituals and symbols as ways of conceptualizing the world.³⁰ The Roman Imperial Cult was truly a religion. To read the

²⁸S. R. F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor*(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

²⁹Ibid., 247-248.

³⁰Ibid., 8.

evidence otherwise is to impose what Price calls “Christianizing assumptions”³¹ and a false distinction between religion and politics.³²

Instead of reading modern western sensibilities back into classical times, Price argues that the Roman Imperial Cult must be understood as offering a kind of ideology or worldview that helped the Roman East explain and organize their new existence under Augustus and his heirs.

Second, Price argues that the Roman Imperial Cult was a novel development by the Roman East, and was not initiated by Rome.³³ Price offers evidence from 29 BC whereby the provincial assembly of Asia offered a prize for the individual who would suggest the greatest honor for “the god (e.g. Augustus).”³⁴ The prize was eventually awarded in 9 BC for suggesting that the New Year should begin on Augustus’ birthday.³⁵ Price includes part of the text recounting the award:

Whereas the Providence which divinely ordered our lives created with zeal and munificence the most perfect good for our lives by producing Augustus and filling him with virtue for the benefaction of mankind, sending us and those after us a savior (σωτήρ) who put an end to war and established all things; and whereas Caesar (i.e. Augustus) when he appeared (ἐπιφανεία) exceeding the hopes of all who had anticipated good tidings (εὐαγγέλιον), not only by surpassing the benefactor is born before him, but not even the leaving those to come any hope of surpassing him; and whereas the birthday of the god marked for the world the beginning of good tidings (εὐαγγέλιον) through his coming...³⁶

³¹Ibid., 11-15.

³²Ibid., 16-18.

³³Ibid., 23.

³⁴Ibid., 54.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid.

This text describes the act initiated by the assembly of Asia as a way of honoring Augustus.

Third, Price argues that the Roman Imperial Cult was a kind of worldview—an ideology that allowed the Roman East to process and live-out the new situation under Augustus. The Roman Imperial Cult, Price argues, put every part of the Greek-minded, Roman East into its proper place. The cities kept a measure of independence, and could rise to prominence over other Asian cities by honoring Augustus. The ruling elites kept their positions of influence and power by funding various temples, shrines, processions, and festivals. The non-elites showed their loyalty to the local elites and to Rome via participation in the various Imperial Cult rituals and symbols.

To sum up Price, then: The Roman Imperial Cult was a novel development of the already existing ruler cult. The various cities of the Roman East adapted this ruler cult independently of Rome in order to organize their place and function in this newly established empire. The rituals and practices associated with the Roman Imperial Cult saturated most every aspect of life in the Roman East.

Price is a must read for anyone interested in studying the Roman Imperial Cult. His work is particularly important because of its focus upon Asia Minor. This benefits the student of the New Testament because all of the cities in the Book of Revelation, and most of the cities in which Paul ministered are located in Asia Minor. Although Price covers a shorter time-span than does Ando, he still covers a period spanning around three centuries. Thus, one must be careful to note the date for any evidence cited from Price.

Summary of Part I

In order to summarize Part I, it will be helpful to return to our illustration of modern America: The American ideal (i.e. ideology) discussed above functions to organize American life. Regular, work-a-day, people live their lives seeking the American dream. They want to live quiet lives. They want to go to work, return to a home that they own. They want relatively little intervention from their government except to provide for the common good via roads, services, military, etc. Government should provide necessary services, safety from foreign threats, and stand for justice. Although there is a sliding scale regarding the degree of the government's involvement in the individual's life, Americans generally do not want an oppressive government.

Note also that, for most Americans, God has (at least) an abstract role in their idea of America. God is the giver of human freedom. Many who would not consider themselves to be practicing Christians would affirm this basic notion—and perhaps, even place a “God bless America” bumper sticker on their car.

This basic American ideology serves to organize the life and mission of politicians at local, state, and federal levels. Americans generally expect integrity from their officials. Officials see themselves as serving the public good by providing services, protection, and justice to citizens. With reference to God, no politician in his or her right mind will pass up the opportunity to end a speech with, “May God bless America.”

Roman subjects and citizens, particularly those in the East, would share a similar outlook on God and Country—albeit with significantly different content. Price, Ando, and Zanker all argue that Roman Imperial Ideology, in general, and the Roman Imperial Cult, in particular, shaped how Roman subjects viewed their place in the world. This ideology would be almost

implicit in their thinking. The various rituals and symbols enacted via temple and shrine worship, processions, and festivals. All served to reinforce the belief that the *Pax Romana* existed thanks to the blessing of the emperor who was either divine, or an actual god.

Part II: Methodological Approaches to Roman Imperial Material

It is one thing to understand Roman Imperial Ideology; it is quite another thing to integrate this material with the New Testament. As noted above, a number of books and articles have been published which attempt to do so. Very few, however, deal with the methodological question of integration. How exactly should Roman Imperial material be integrated into our understanding of various biblical texts? To my knowledge, only two such studies have been published.³⁷ Part II discusses these studies and attempts to develop a methodology for integrating Roman Imperial material appropriately.

Burke: Is Paul's Gospel Counterimperial?

As noted above, a number of studies have integrated the Roman Imperial material with some, or all, of the Pauline epistles to develop a post-colonial critique of the United States as empire. Burke offers a critique of these post-colonial approaches, which he designates as the "Fresh Perspective on Paul."³⁸ It is important to note that Burke never denies the value of the

³⁷Denny Burke, "Is Paul's Gospel Counterimperial? Evaluating the Prospects of the 'Fresh Perspective' for Evangelical Theology," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 51, no. 2 (2008); Peter Oakes, "Re-Mapping the Universe: Paul and the Emperor in 1 Thessalonians and Philippians," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 27, no. 3 (2005).

³⁸Burke: 311.

Roman Imperial material as legitimate historical background for the study of the New Testament.

Rather, he affirms its value if, integrated properly. He states,

Our knowledge of the Roman Empire in the first century and consequently our understanding of the historical backdrop of Paul's letters and mission have been greatly enhanced by this scholarship. This contribution has value for a variety of reasons. Nevertheless, not every historical insight has led to commensurate insight into the interpretation of Paul's epistles.³⁹

In the early part of his article, Burke offers a helpful survey of the key post-colonial interpreters like Richard Horsley, Dominic Crossan, and others.⁴⁰ Although I would disagree with Burke when he includes N.T. Wright in the same category as Horsley and Crossan,⁴¹ his overall treatment is fair and accurate.

The bulk of Burke's article critiques the so-called Fresh-Perspective (FP) by cautioning the reader against practicing certain methodological fallacies. He offers seven cautions: 1) the use of parallels; 2) the distinction of meaning and implication; 3) the hermeneutics of the Fresh Perspective; 4) narrow application to the Roman Empire; 5) the Fresh Perspective's view of the nature of Scriptures; 6) the analogy between America and Rome; and 7) the interpretation of Romans 13:1-7.

Time and space prohibit a close look at each of the seven cautions. I will touch upon two⁴² of his cautions which will help to establish a methodology for integrating Roman Imperial material with the New Testament.

³⁹Ibid.: 314-315.

⁴⁰Ibid.: 309-314.

⁴¹Wright, for example argues against what he sees as anarchist tendencies in N. T. Wright, "Paul's Gospel and Caesar's Empire," in *Paul and Politics* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Snow Lion Publications, 2000), 163-180.

⁴²Several of Burke's cautions deal with what he sees as particular problems with post-colonial interpretations. Several more could be subsumed under the heading of cautions about the use of parallels. Thus, only two are discussed.

Cautions about the Use of Parallels

Burke cautions his readers against the illegitimate use of parallels when integrating Roman Imperial materials with the biblical text.⁴³ Here he refers to the famous work against “Parallelomania” by Sandmel.⁴⁴ Burke states,

While verbal parallels certainly exist between Paul's vocabulary and that of the Imperial cult, the careful exegete will exercise caution in assessing the significance of those parallels. This warning should be heeded especially where Paul's vocabulary overlaps with both the Imperial cult and the LXX. The tendency in FP exegesis is to identify such parallels and to assume almost automatically that they constitute evidence of some formal (perhaps literary) connection, implying that Paul deliberately chooses such terms in order to subvert the ideology of emperor worship. This procedure is problematic because the assessment of the significance of the parallels is subject to being predetermined by an agenda to have a “political” reading of Paul, rather than by paying close attention to what Paul is actually saying.⁴⁵

Here Burke both critiques the post-colonial reading of Paul and agrees with Sandmel as to the key to identifying legitimate parallels. The key to identifying legitimate parallels is to see the similarity between the author's argument and the proposed background material. Note how Sandmel frames it:

Paul's context is of infinitely more significance than the question of the alleged parallels. Indeed, to make Paul's context conform to the content of the alleged parallels is to distort Paul. The knowledge on our part of the parallels may assist us in understanding Paul; but if we make him mean only what the parallels mean, we are using the parallels in a way that can lead us to misunderstand Paul.⁴⁶

Burke and Sandmel both affirm that the key to finding legitimate parallels is not merely in the similarity of language. Rather, it is in the similarity of context and argument. This means that

⁴³Burke: 315-319.

⁴⁴Samuel Sandmel, "Parallelomania," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81, no. 1 (1962).

⁴⁵Burke: 315-316.

⁴⁶Sandmel: 5.

New Testament scholars must make detailed contextual arguments for parallels between the New Testament and Roman Imperial materials.

This does not, however, imply that no parallels exist.⁴⁷ Both Sandmel and Burke are arguing against what Sandmel calls “extravagance”⁴⁸ in the use of parallels. Rather than deny any possibility of parallels, New Testament scholars must be judicious when claiming them.

One further note regarding parallels is appropriate here. Interpreters must not merely take into account the context of the New Testament; rather, they must take into account both the New Testament context and the context of the so-called parallel as well. There should be a sufficient level of overlap between the two contexts before proclaiming the parallel to be exegetically significant.

Caution about the interpretation of Romans 13:1-7

Although this warning from Burke is too particular to form a principle in a methodology for integrating parallel material, it illustrates a concept that might be called a corollary. Thus, I have included this caution in the present discussion.

Here Burke cautions evangelicals that a “*prima facie* reading of Paul’s exhortation to the Roman believers in Rom 13:1-7 might present an obstacle to the FP.”⁴⁹ Burke is correct here. Romans 13, with its reference to government (i.e. Rome) as being God-ordained, presents a major obstacle for the post-colonial approach to Paul. Post-colonial interpreters have no choice

⁴⁷In fact, I have not found a single scholar who denies that the New Testament interacts with Roman Imperial materials.

⁴⁸Sandmel: 1.

⁴⁹Burke: 330.

but to attempt various readings of Romans 13 that explain how Paul is not really saying what he seems to be saying.⁵⁰

Burke's discussion is helpful in that it serves to illustrate an important principle in integrating background material. Any large-scale interpretations of Paul (or of any other biblical author), must be able to account for all biblical evidence. In other words, any large-scale attempt at integrating the Roman Imperial material must be able to account for Romans 13:1-7.

To sum up the contribution of Burke to our methodology: Burke helps to establish one methodological principle and one corollary. By way of principle, students of the New Testament must show great caution when citing biblical parallels. Parallels must not be merely verbal; they must be contextual as well. By way of corollary, any proposed large-scale parallel reading of Paul must take into account all of the relevant biblical data.

Oakes: Re-mapping the Universe

In his 2005 article, Oakes attempts to establish the degree to which one can claim "links between texts in either 1 Thessalonians or Philippians and the Roman Empire, the Roman emperor or the Roman Imperial Cult."⁵¹ Oakes first establishes the possible ways in which Paul could be interacting with Roman Imperial materials. He then examines several key texts in 1 Thessalonians and Philippians in order to establish how these passages interact with the Rome. In discussing the various ways that Paul might interact with the Roman Imperial materials, Oakes posits four possibilities.

⁵⁰ Several examples include, Carter, *The Roman Empire and the New Testament : An Essential Guide*, 133-136; Robert Jewett, *Romans*, ed. Roy David Kotansky and Eldon Jay Epp, *Hermeneia--a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible*(Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 786-803.

⁵¹Oakes: 301.

Rome and Christianity Follow Common Models

Whenever a potential parallel exists between a biblical text and Roman Imperial material, it is possible that Rome and Christianity are merely using similar or identical stock language without any exegetical significance. Here Oakes argues,

Where elements of Christian and Roman discourse stem independently from common models, then nothing is directly implied about Christianity's relationship to Rome. The coincidence in terminology does not arise from such a relationship. The effects of the coincidence might include conflict. However, our interest is in the origin of parallel terminology. If a parallel stems from the use of a common model, then it does not give us direct evidence about the relationship between Christianity and Rome.⁵²

From one perspective, Oakes is correct here. If Paul uses a word that is common stock, and thus, an unintentional parallel, it would be inappropriate to say that Paul is intentionally subverting the Roman Empire. Thus, subversion or conflict should not be attributed as being the author's intent.

From another perspective, however, Oakes seems to be understating the potential exegetical significance of unintentional parallels. For example, an unintentional parallel may have exegetical significance at the level of implication or application.⁵³ Even if Paul isn't intentionally subverting the rule of Claudius Caesar by calling Jesus, "Lord," one cannot deny that this parallel has significance (at least) at the level of implication. Although this parallel may not be intentional, it clearly conflicts with Roman Ideology. In these cases, interpreters should bring out the conflict whether they are intentional or not. The major thrust of Oakes' assertion here is correct, however. Verbal parallels may simply mean that Rome and Christianity utilize similar vocabulary.

⁵²Ibid.: 303.

⁵³Burke: 319-322.

Christianity Follows Rome

Here Oakes argues that some verbal parallels may imply the fact that “Roman power relations might thus be partially replicated in those of a Christian community.”⁵⁴ To put it into more general terms, Oakes suggests that at times, Christianity may follow the patterns established by those with whom they interact. In these situations, no critique is implied because Christians are essentially borrowing from their neighbors. If, for example, Paul is borrowing the term “elder” from the synagogue, this may not imply a direct or veiled critique of the synagogue.

Rome Conflicts with Christianity/Christianity Conflicts with Rome

Oakes treats these two categories separately in his article. In the case of, *Rome Conflicts with Christianity*, Oakes suggests that Paul is responding to particular conflicts arising from Roman Ideology. Oakes cites an example from Gordon Fee’s commentary on Philippians. Fee suggests that the believers in Philippi were being persecuted for refusing to participate in the Roman Imperial Cult.⁵⁵ Since Paul is reacting to persecution, Oakes would classify this as *Rome Conflicts with Christianity*.

In the case of *Christianity Conflicts with Rome*, Paul would be confronting elements of Rome in a more proactive way than above. Oakes cites at least five ways in which Christianity might conflict with Rome: “Rome’s domination and violence, eschatology, Christology, imperial cult, and specific aspects of discourse and behavior.”⁵⁶ It is important to note that Oakes does not call this list comprehensive.

⁵⁴Ibid.: 304.

⁵⁵ Gordon D. Fee, *Philippians*, The Ivp New Testament Commentary Series 11(Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 197.

⁵⁶ Burke: 307.

Since both of the above categories affirm Paul's use of verbal parallel in order to confront Rome, I integrate them together into one category: *Christianity Confronts Rome*.

To sum up the contribution of Oakes, he helps establish a methodology by offering a discreet number of possibilities for how Paul interacts with Rome and Roman Imperial Ideology. By combining two of his four categories together, we are left with the following three: *Rome and Christianity Follow Common Models*, *Christianity Follows Rome*, and *Christianity Confronts Rome*. To this, I would suggest the addition of another category: *Christianity Confronts Rome by Implication*.

Summary of Part II

In Part II, I have summarized the works of Burke and Oakes in order to develop methodological principles for integrating verbal parallels between Paul and Imperial Rome. Burke contributed one such principle: great care must be taken to avoid Sandmel's *Parallelomania*. Verbal or conceptual parallels are insufficient evidence to prove a significant exegetical relationship between Paul and proposed Roman Imperial background material. There must be a significant overlap both in the content of Paul's argument and the content of the proposed background material.

For example, Harrison argues that Paul confronts the eschatology of the Imperial Cult in Thessalonians.⁵⁷ In order to prove this, Harrison must satisfy several burdens. First, he must demonstrate verbal parallels between Paul and Imperial Cult. Second, he must demonstrate that the Imperial Cult is indeed an eschatology. Finally, Harrison must demonstrate that his proposed reading is consistent with Paul's argument in Thessalonians.

⁵⁷ Harrison.

Oakes furthers Burke's contribution by offering a list of possible ways that Pauline parallels might relate to the so-called parallel background material. By combining two of his four categories together, and adding a fourth that I have developed, the following list remains: *Rome and Christianity Follow Common Models*, *Christianity Follows Rome*, *Christianity Confronts Rome by Implication*, and *Christianity Confronts Rome*.

Biblical interpreters, when confronted with possible Pauline parallels to the Roman Imperial Cult, must not jump to conclusions too quickly. Rather, they must offer a close reading of both the proposed background material and the Pauline context. In doing so, they must make detailed arguments to demonstrate in which of the four ways, if any, Paul interacts with Rome, Roman Imperial Ideology, or the Roman Imperial Cult.

CONCLUSION

In this paper I have offered a primer for the study of Paul and Roman Imperial Ideology. Part I offered an overview of four key sources on Roman Imperial Ideology and Roman Imperial Cult. Part II reviewed the works of Burke and Oakes in order to develop methodological principles. If the principles developed in Part II of this paper are accurate, they offer a method by which supposed Pauline parallels with Roman Imperial material can be studied.

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