ABSTRACT

Fighting Liturgy with Liturgy:
A Study of the Effects of Liturgical Catechesis on the Civil Religious formation of Army Ranger Students

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This project studies the effects that historic Christian liturgical worship and liturgical catechesis has on the civil religious beliefs and dispositions of United States Army (USA) soldiers who are students at the USA Ranger School. Critical to this study is the understanding of religion not solely the relationship between a person or group and their deity. Rather, religion throughout is regarded as a cultural phenomenon centered around symbols that give meaning, unity, and order to a society. Religion, properly defined, cannot be separated from politics or economics, these domains are interlocking and interpenetrating categories. The theological foundation explores the rise and embodiment of American Civil Religion (ACR) through history as encapsulated in the American soldier. This thesis investigates the role of the soldier within ACR as its “G.I. Messiah” and how the citizen becomes the soldier through “thick” Army liturgies. The biblical foundation investigates the Revelation of Jesus according to John’s polemic toward Roman Civil Religion (RCR). This project relies upon “liturgical anthropology” as a foundation to understanding both civil religion, RCR and ACR, and the Revelation. The project tests the effects of liturgical worship, liturgical catechesis, and daily office prayers and reading on
Army Ranger students through qualitative and quantitative research. Areas measured are patriotism, nationalism, ACR beliefs, and GI Messianism. This project measures the effect of corporate historic Christian liturgy and personal devotion, on the spiritual formation of soldiers. This project presents “a way” for Army chaplains to form their soldiers more into the likeness of Jesus and less in the likeness of the G.I. Messiah.
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Fighting Liturgy with Liturgy:

A Study of the Effects of Liturgical Catechesis on the Civil Religious formation of Army Ranger Students

A Culminating Project Report Submitted to the Faculty of George W. Truett Theological Seminary Baylor University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Ministry

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

General Terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACR</td>
<td>American Civil Religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD</td>
<td><em>anno Domini</em> (in the year of the Lord)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apoc.</td>
<td>Apocalypse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BC</td>
<td>before Christ</td>
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<tr>
<td>EOG</td>
<td>Empire of God</td>
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<tr>
<td>G.I.</td>
<td>General Issue, nickname for a “soldier” or military service member</td>
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<tr>
<td>LXX</td>
<td>The Septuagint, Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible</td>
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<td>NRSV</td>
<td>New Revised Standard Version, English Bible translation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>New Testament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OT</td>
<td>Old Testament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCR</td>
<td>Roman Civil Religion</td>
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<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>United States Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>United States of America</td>
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<tr>
<td>WWI</td>
<td>World War I</td>
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<td>WWII</td>
<td>World War II</td>
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All quotations from the Bible are NRSV, unless otherwise noted.
I have noticed a glaring lack of Christian participation in United States (US) Army soldiers. In 2021 RAND published research showing nearly 60% of Army soldiers declare Protestant as their religious affiliation.\(^1\) During my time as a battalion chaplain at Fort Campbell, KY never once did more than twenty-five soldiers attend a Christian worship service I led. My battalion always had over 700 soldiers with approximately 30% of them rotating out and being replaced annually. Simple math shows that I was the primary religious and spiritual leader for over 1,500 soldiers across four years. According to RAND I could hope to see approximately 900 Christian soldiers at my services when added up over those years. I never saw even a third of those “Christian” soldiers in worship services or discipleship ventures I offered. The soldiers I serve do not corporately participate in their declared faith.

Greater even than my personal experience was the witness of religious participation across Fort Campbell. Over 27,000 soldiers lived on, around, and serve that post along with over 51,000 family members.\(^2\) Every Sunday during my time at Fort Campbell (2016-2020) there were five Protestant worship services. The largest attended

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1 Melissa Haller, *Forecasting Religious Affiliation in the United States Army* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2021), 20. The regular army has approximately 10% higher Protestant declarations than the greater US population.

2 “Fort Campbell | Base Overview & Info | Military Installations,” accessed May 4, 2022, https://installations.militaryonesource.mil/in-depth-overview/fort-campbell. According to the above RAND research FCKY would account for over 41,700 Protestants (~16,200 soldiers and ~25,500 civilian family members based off nearly 60% for soldiers and nearly 50% for US Population declaring Protestant). The Protestant services offered during my tenure at FCKY were: Liturgical, Traditional, Pentecostal, Gospel, and non-denominational general Protestant. The latter being the largest.
service averaged around four hundred persons, soldiers, families, and civilians. The remaining four each saw an average of sixty to a hundred in attendance.\(^3\) Slightly over 1% of declared Protestants on Fort Campbell participated in weekly, on post, Protestant worship.\(^4\) The US Army (USA) has a crisis in Christian participation.\(^5\) I believe this lack can be attributed to the strength of American Civil Religion (ACR) as the dominate source of spiritual formation in soldier’s lives.

I first came across the notion of ACR on Memorial Day weekend 2017 when I visited Washington D.C. for the first time. Upon arrival I found myself appalled at the level of religious symbolism, architecture, and climate of the city. None of the above religiosity of Washington D.C., however, struck me as “Christian.” This was the most religious city I had ever visited and the most void of the Spirit of the Triune God. My trip to Washington D.C. combined with the glaring lack of Christian participation amongst my soldiers provides the rationale and impetus for this project.

\(^3\) This does not account for Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox services; however, it does include the “Liturgical Protestant” service which saw two or three dozen persons at most. The Roman Catholic Sunday Mass regularly competed with the “contemporary” Protestant service in attendance. As I will discuss below, I believe the liturgical nature of the Roman Mass has a part to play in the size and attendance of that service. As a Protestant I am speaking to a specifically Protestant issue as I experienced it.

\(^4\) The possibility exists that more soldiers would attend larger, better run worship services by full time clergy settled in a local community. The argument I purpose here is based on Fort Campbell Religious Support Office reports and the RAND report. It is my personal rationale for pursuing my Doctor of Ministry in the first place.

\(^5\) I am aware that participation in a worship service is not the end all measure of Christian spiritual formation. It is a non-negotiable measure, yet not the ultimate measure. In the secular age, however, simple church membership or Sunday morning participation can and does function as the best measure of Christian dedication. I am not arguing for the secular stance of a religious space versus an a-religious space where the battle is for affiliation and participation. I am using participation as one, easily identifiable symptom of a deeper malaise, namely, the religious effects of the ACR liturgical system which is a child of the secular age. See Andrew Root, Faith Formation in a Secular Age: Responding to the Church’s Obsession with Youthfulness, Ministry in a Secular Age (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2017), 97–112, 132.
I am embarking on this project because of the problem I see in soldiers of lack of Christian formation. I believe the spiritual formation that comes from the civil religion and the affective practices of patriotism have inoculated soldiers away from a desire for the Triune God. When presented with the option to participate in Christian worship most soldiers refuse because they are already formed by ACR beliefs and practices.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It takes a village to raise a child. The same is true for this dissertation, a whole village partook in bringing this to fruition. God has been so good to me as he has steadfastly brought me through to this point in my education and life. Truly, “every good thing comes from above, coming down from the Father . . .” Above all, I acknowledge God’s goodness and grace through this whole project, before, and beyond.

I also must thank my wife, Amy, for putting up with another crazy adventure of my own wild design. Amy, you have followed me, at this point, for twelve fierce years of moving with the Army, long lonely weeks of training, and even longer and lonelier months of deployments. When I brought this up you smiled, like I was crazy, and said “yes.” Thank you for being part of my dreams and keeping me rooted. I love you, always and forever, my best good friend.

To my dad, mom, and my dear brother, Dylan. Above all thank you for leading me to Jesus. Thank you for instilling a work ethic and determination in me and encouraging me to step out into a new territory, empowered by your unconditional love. The longer I live the more I come to know how smart and correct you are and were about many things. You set me up for a robust and fulfilling life in a way not many of my generational and younger peers had. Thank you, my success finds its roots in you and the family you made.

Any success I have had in the past fourteen years has often been because of Nicholas Stavlund. Nick, in you I truly have found “a friend who sticks closer than a brother.” It would take another dissertation length book to tell what your and Tracy’s friendship
means to me and my family over the years. I look forward to decades more as we con-
tinue to follow Jesus together through this life. I love you, brother.

To my children and godchildren, Amayah, Zekiah, Eva, Gwen, Jude, and Vera, as I wrote every page of this work, I was thinking of you and your future. This may have been an academic exercise for me, but for you this is your hope. Continue to fiercely fol-
low Jesus with your whole being, in action, word, song, and sacrament. May this act as a guide as you live, move, and have your being in God’s Kingdom.

To the Truett faculty, Drs. Kevin Dougherty, Jared Alcantara, Paul Sands, Robert Creech, John McCallum, and Bryan Harper, thank you for your instruction, patience, and correction. To Dr. Preben Vang who first recruited me nearly ten years ago, thank you for never letting me forget about this degree and shepherding me all the way through. To chaplain Geoff Bailey, thank you for the discussion and mentorship as my field supervi-
sor. To Dr. David Wilhite, I could not contain my joy when I heard you agreed to be my academic supervisor. You have been a beacon of hope and guidance leading me to the far shore of this project. Thank you.

To my cohort, Bill, 2nd John, 3rd John, Tyronne, and Treebeard, you are all rock-
star pastors and loyal friends. Thank you for molding this hard-edged soldier and helping form me more into the image of our Messiah. I love and will forever cherish our talks and laughs. I do not know if “chaplain America” will ever become vegan, but I do know that in you, I have made dear friends. Keep honing your handball skills, remember hol-
ness means “set apart”, keep asking “what’s the lie”, and a good eschatology is “already, but not yet.”
This project started at our second duty station in Niceville, FL. That community, both military and civilian, was the rich seedbed that nourished this work daily into the fruit of these pages. Robbie Bailey, thank you for all the workouts, cigars, and meals shared. You patiently listened while I pontificated about what I was learning, reading, and thinking. Many of our talks helped straighten and smooth my thoughts into coherent sentences that make up these pages. Thank you for sharing your family and caring for mine.

Crosspoint Church (Niceville, FL) and the team of pastors there, thank you for welcoming me as one of your own. My family has experienced hurt in the local church before and your faithfulness in following Jesus by his Spirit healed our wounds. Pastor Jeremy, thank you for leading like Jesus and extending me the right hand of fellowship. It is risky business opening the pulpit to someone, I am forever grateful for the humble opportunity to preach to the saints. Thank you for the many hours of late-night talks and fine cigars. These pages drip with your council and friendship. To the “Living the Kingdom Story” life group, Cherron, Terri and Steve, Kelsey, Mike and Jonah, Shannon, Anna, Lou and Allyssa, Carol, Andrew and Christina, Kyle, Angela, Nona, Bill and Tonia, and Jake and Hailey, thank you for your questions and challenges. Keep living, showing, and telling the Story of God. We may not meet again in this life, but we will meet in God’s Kingdom.

Three of my battalion commanders and a brigade chaplain gave me time, permission, and travel funds to make this project a reality. COL James D. Pritchet, LTC (ret) Ric Jones, CSM Tyler Benge, LTC Eric Shockley, and chaplain Jon Knoedler, thank you for the support and guidance through the tough and fun times. Also, to the many Ranger
Instructors, cadre, and Ranger students whom I walked through swamps and jumped out of airplanes with, thank you for your professionalism and setting the example for me to follow. Rangers Lead the Way.

I wrote an exegetical paper early in my time of this degree on 1 Corinthians 2:6-8. One Baylor professor of New Testament commented on how well the paper was written and researched and asked me where I went for my M. Div. I told him Fuller Theological Seminary. “It was not I who wrote, but Fuller who wrote in me.” Thank you to the Fuller SW students and professors, namely Signe Carlson, my cohort, Drs. Mike Moore, Grayson Carter, and director Tom Parker. You endured my obnoxious growth pains during those years and set me up for an academic success and joy I would have never previously imagined.

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To Michael Carlson.

This whole project is your fault.

Thank you.
. . . if you plan to follow Jesus, *get ready for a real fight.*


And war broke out in heaven; Michael and his angels fought against the dragon. The dragon and his angels fought back, but they were defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. The great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. . . . Then the dragon was angry with the woman, and *went off to make war on the rest of her children, those who keep the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus.*

—Revelation 12:7-9, 17, NRSV
CHAPTER ONE

Rationale for Project

Problem and Purpose

This project intends to explore the influence of ACR in soldiers who are students at USA Ranger School and its relation to Christian formation. The purpose of this project is to spiritually counter-form Army Ranger students through historic Christian embodied liturgical worship, catechesis, and personal practices centered on the Revelation of Jesus, according to John.

Definitions

Several key terms need definition from the start. To understand this problem one must understand the meaning of: Civil Religion, Patriotism, the Empire of God, Spiritual Counter-formation, and Public Liturgies. These terms form the backbone of this project.

Civil Religion

The term ‘religion’ must be addressed first. In the modern West, when one says ‘religion’ the intended and received messages tends to be ‘religiosity’. By ‘religiosity’ I refer to an ethereal, relative, autonomous, individualized, psychologized, and privatized internal set of beliefs, ethics, and doctrines. This understanding of religion comes from the nineteenth century German pietists. Since these thinkers, many of the popular and academic approaches to religion, both faithful and scientific, have used this model. I will
not use this approach to religion, for with ‘religiosity’ there is no room for ‘civic religion’
or a wholistic understanding of ancient religions.\textsuperscript{6}

Religion is a cultural system. It is far greater of a phenomenon than simply ‘the belief and/or worship of the divine.’ The anthropologist and ethnographer Clifford Geertz defines culture as:

\begin{quote}
\ldots an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life. \ldots [culture patterns are] organized systems of significant symbols \ldots a set of symbolic devices for controlling behavior, extrasomatic sources of information.\textsuperscript{7}
\end{quote}

Culture is a dynamic collection of symbols that give meaning to human life passed on through generations. Human life is inexorably bound to culture. Where no set of meaningful symbols exist, there exists a subhuman group.\textsuperscript{8}

Religion, therefore, is the collection of sacred symbols that connect a particular way of life to a metaphysical reality. Religion is purely a human phenomenon. Religion is not something that some people in each culture privately do parallel to the rest of the way of life, yet somehow separate from. Instead, a religion is:

\begin{quote}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{7} Clifford Geertz, \textit{The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays}, Third edition, Kindle (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 50–58, 95. See also, “\ldots the sum total of ways of living built up by a group of human beings and transmitted from one generation to another.” Lesslie Newbigin, \textit{Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture} (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub, 1986), 3.
\item \textsuperscript{8} “To supply the additional information necessary to be able to act, we were forced, in turn, to rely more and more heavily on cultural sources—the accumulated fund of significant symbols. Such symbols are thus not mere expressions, instrumentalities, or correlates of our biological, psychological, and social existence; they are prerequisites of it. Without men, no culture, certainly; but equally, and more significantly, without culture, no men. We are, in sum, incomplete or unfinished animals who complete or finish ourselves through culture—and not through culture in general but through highly particular forms of it.\ldots” Geertz, \textit{The Interpretation of Cultures}, 55; Russell E. Richey and Donald G. Jones, eds., \textit{American Civil Religion}, 1st ed., A Harper Forum Book (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 90.
\end{itemize}
\end{quote}
a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.\(^9\)

Religion is a set of cultural symbols that take on sacred properties. Religion could simply be described as “a way of life.”\(^{10}\) By symbol, Geertz refers to “any object, act, event, quality, or relation which serves as a vehicle for a conception—the conception is the symbol’s ‘meaning’. . .” Symbols function as vehicles for meaning. Sacred symbols carry ultimate meaning.\(^{11}\)

With a robust understanding of religion in place, we now turn to “civil religion.” Civil religion is the collection of cultural symbols that take on sacred dimensions providing ultimate meaning and unity by guiding public life.\(^{12}\) Civil religion is simply the aspects of a cultural system that are religious. It is the *cultus publicus* of a nation. Civil Religion is pluralistic in nature, allowing for numerous institutional and private religious beliefs to be practiced alongside, though subordinate to the public faith. Civil Religion is

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\(^{10}\) “But religion here refers primarily not to a set of beliefs or doctrines but rather to a way of life. What’s at stake is not primarily ideas but love, which functions on a different register.” James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*, Kindle edition, Volume 1 of Cultural Liturgies (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 27.


plastic and agile, able to morph and adapt along with the culture. Civil religion remains below the level of consciousness and most citizens are unaware of its guiding and unifying power.\(^{13}\)

Michael Goheen, discussing the thought of Leslie Newbigin, would call civil religion the *credo* at the base of a culture. By *credo* he means:

... a set of religious beliefs that give ultimate meaning to all of life. Newbigin gives us the metaphor of a *credo* that is hidden beneath our culture; it functions like the foundation of a house. These beliefs lie unnoticed beneath a culture but give shape and organization to the visible aspects of human culture above. Even though hidden, this *credo* shapes the public life of culture, including in economics, education, medicine, and media.\(^{14}\)

This captures the fullness of what I am aiming for regarding civil religion. The *credo* is the collection of sacred symbols that build the belief system permeating the cultural way of life. How is one faithful or pious in a civil religion?

*Patriotism*

The way one experiences the sacred forms a strong dimension of their piety. Faith toward the state is the piety of civil religion. This is fitting because it claims ultimate status and special relation with the divine. Patriotism is considered a matter of spiritual and religious importance. It is the faith of civil religion, how one shows devotion to their nation. It is piety on display, a civic faith.\(^{15}\)

\(^{13}\)“One must also include in culture, as fundamental to any culture, a set of beliefs, experiences, and practices that seek to grasp and express the ultimate nature of things, that which gives shape and meaning to life, that which claims final loyalty. I am speaking, obviously, about religion.” Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 3. See also Richey and Jones, *American Civil Religion*, 46–70, 76–77.

\(^{14}\) Goheen, *The Church and Its Vocation*, 144.

\(^{15}\) Piety (*pietas*) originally refers to one’s social and public life, the expression of internal beliefs, not a private and personal experience. This, along with religion addressed above, is another casualty of the
Patriotism is simply the level of love for one’s country. “Patriotism taps the affective component of one's feelings toward one's country. . . It assesses the degree of love for and pride in one's nation-in essence, the degree of attachment to the nation.”\(^\text{16}\) Patriotism produces self-sacrifice on behalf of the nation and can increase solidarity and sense of belonging among those who identify as patriotic. It seems to produce higher morality and even increases international values and cooperation. Surprisingly, patriotism does not necessarily lead to the support of war, but trends toward more peaceful solutions relating toward conflict. It produces pride and “healthy national self-concept.”\(^\text{17}\)

Patriotism is the piety of civil religion.\(^\text{18}\) It provides the experiential feelings that drive action. The shared faith creates cohesion and unity between the believers. In this way, patriotism (civil religious faith), “provides a culture with a sense of meaning, which,

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\(^{18}\) “In the imagination of the simple patriot the nation is not a society but Society. Though its values are relative they appear, from his naive perspective, to be absolute . . . . The nation is always endowed with an aura of the sacred, which is one reason why religions, which claim universality, are so easily captured and tamed by national sentiment, religion and patriotism merging in the process.” Reinhold Niebuhr quoted in Andrew L. Whitehead and Samuel L. Perry, *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2020), vi. See also Richard John Neuhaus, “patriotism is a species of piety” quoted in Richard V. Pierard and Robert Dean Linder, *Civil Religion & the Presidency* (Grand Rapids, MI: Academie Books, 1988), 286–87; Richey and Jones, *American Civil Religion*, 121.
in turn, allows people to look at their political community in a distinctive sense. This distinctive way of looking at a country helps to bring about a sense of collective purpose, which helps it to bring about social assimilation.”

The patriotic piety provides a glue binding the nation together, regardless of their private cult. The sacred and experiential aspects of institutional religions may divide each from the other, but the shared patriotism can unite these otherwise divided faith groups.

_Spiritual Counter-formation_

This project aims to spiritually counter-form US soldiers into the image of Jesus the Messiah. My hypothesis centers on the idea that ACR has provided spiritual formation in the likeness of the nation. Therefore, when offered opportunities to participate in Christian worship and discipleship they, by and large, turn them down because their “religious” and “faith” needs are met by ACR and patriotism. They no longer have room in their heart, they have already undergone deep spiritual formation. What do I mean by spiritual counter-formation?

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20 This was the heart of Rousseau’s argument supporting his creation of the concept ‘civil religion.’ “The third [referring to Christianity] is so clearly bad, that it is a waste of time to stop to prove it such. All that destroys social unity is worthless; all institutions that set man in contradiction to himself are worthless. . . There is therefore a purely civil profession of faith of which the Sovereign should fix the articles, not exactly as religious dogmas, but as social sentiments without which a man cannot be a good citizen or a faithful subject. While it can compel no one to believe them, it can banish the State whoever does not believe them - it can banish him, not for impiety, but as an anti-social being, incapable of truly loving the laws and justice, and of sacrificing, at need, his life to his duty. If anyone, after publicly recognizing these dogmas, behaves as if he does not believe them, let him be punished by death. . . Now that there is an can be no longer an exclusive national religion, tolerance should be given to all religions that tolerate others, so long as their dogmas contain nothing contrary to the duties of citizenship.” Jean-Jacques Rousseau, _The Social Contract and Discourses_, trans. G. D. H. Cole, Everyman’s Library Philosophy and Theology, (New York, NY: Dutton, 1950), 134–40.
All humans, regardless of ethnicity, class, gender, religion, or culture are spiritually formed. The experiences and situations that comprise our lives and our reactions or responses to them form us. There are no neutral events or responses. Humans live from their spirit; we are driven not primarily by the physical but by the spiritual. Dallas Willard defines spiritual simply as the “non-physical’, the hidden or inner world of the human self . . .”21 Spiritual is the most real part of life, equally as important as the realm of life that is perceptible with the five senses. It involves our emotions, mind, character, imagination, intellect, and morality among other aspects of inner human life. Spirit is our capacity to relate and connect with the world around us, enliven and enlarging the biological, chemical, and physical interactions. Neither the material nor spiritual takes precedence over the other. This is the meaning of embodied: the material reality filled with the spiritual. This is a biblical reality portrayed in the filling of the dust man, Adam, with the breath (spirit) and he became a living soul.22

Since the spiritual and material are overlapping realities, they form each other. Neutral spaces or events do not exist, every event forms us into the likeness of something.23 This project seeks to offer electing soldiers a manner of spiritual counter-


22 We humans do not have a body or a soul, we are our bodies, we are a soul. A human is an earth-creature infused with the breath of the Creator and Triune God. I purport a non-reductive monist ontological view of the human. This is a sacramental view wherein the spirit finds expression in the material. Nancey C. Murphy, *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?*, Current Issues in Theology (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Senn, *Embodied Liturgy*, 1–17; Tim Mackie, Jon Collins, and Carissa Quinn, “What the Bible’s Authors Took for Granted,” The Paradigm, accessed February 19, 2022, https://bibleproject.com/podcast/what-bibles-authors-took-granted/, 25:30-41:15.

23 “The shrine of the public square is not empty, nor is it neutral; it has fallen under the power of other gods.” Goheen, *The Church and Its Vocation*, 189. “Behind the veneer of a “value-free” education concerned with providing skills, knowledge, and information is an educational vision that remains
formation: more into the likeness of Jesus the Messiah and living the life of his Empire. I will detail more in chapter two how the USA spiritually forms its soldiers. Becoming a soldier is their initial and most powerful spiritual formation, I will seek to offer a counter-formation of spirit through embodied historic liturgical worship and personal devotion. This liturgy will aim soldiers at the Empire of God.

*Empire of God*

Throughout I will not refer to the “Kingdom” of God. Rather, I will use the term “empire.” Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza and Warren Carter both argue for this use of the term empire over kingdom.24 As I will show in chapter two, both the Roman empire and the Empire of God (EOG) form their citizens, not through strategic thinking but through embodied liturgies. Revelation 1:6 and 5:10 refer to the collection of saints, Jesus-followers who resist the power of Rome, as a “kingdom of priests.” This “kingdom of priests” language comes from many places in the Old Testament (OT), including the Chronicles. Scott W. Hahn rightly comments about the phrase “kingdom of priests” as follows: “Israel, the kingdom of God, is a *liturgical empire*, an empire of prayer. . . . It is not an *ideal* political economy or kingdom, but a *liturgical empire*, a multinational

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kingdom ordered to offer sacrifice and praise to the living God. . . . For the Chronicler, Israel is fundamentally a qāhāl, a kingdom of priests, a liturgical empire.”

A kingdom is the realm or dominion of a king. It is the “space” or range where the king’s will is done. This is true of all humans; we each have our own little kingdoms. “Every last one of us has a ‘kingdom’. . . Our ‘kingdom’ is simply the range of our effective will.” An empire carries the same thrust, yet on a grander scale. An empire is a kingdom of kingdoms. An emperor is a “king of kings” and “lord of lords.” The empire is the range of the emperor’s effective will.

Both the Hebrew and Greek words commonly translated “kingdom” can and often do carry imperial notes. They were the words used by Romans to describe the principality they had conquered. It was also the word used by David describing the height of


26 This works equally well for queen, president, CEO, or military Commander. The point is not the word ‘king’, its something larger, more real, near, and personal.


28 “[Concerning וֹלֵדָה and מָלֵךְ] Nevertheless, as we can now see, the language of court forms the bridge to faith in the Messiah. The whole complex of religious and political ideas linked with the empirical king; what was expected of him; how he was addressed; what wonderful deeds were ascribed to him—all these form the soil for Messianic belief. . . . In relation to the general usage of βασιλεία, usually translated “kingdom,” it is to be noted first that it signifies the “being,” “nature” and “state” of the king. Since the reference is to a king, we do best to speak first of his “dignity” or “power.” . . . Almost spontaneously there then intrudes a richly attested second meaning; the dignity of the king is expressed in the territory ruled by him, i.e., his “kingdom.” This transition is no less obvious in the Eng. “principalcy,” or “empire,” or indeed “dominion.” On the other hand, it did not wholly replace the original meaning of dignity. Both meanings are present in βασιλεία.” Hermann Kleinknecht et al., “Βασιλείας, Βασιλεία, Βασιλίσσα, Βασιλεύω, Συμβασιλεύω, Βασιλικός,” in Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 566–80.
Israel’s territory. A kingdom contains, generally, one nation, tribe, people, and language. An Empire, on the other hand, spans across multiple kingdoms (nations, tribes, peoples, and languages). Rome was not just Romans or Italians. Rome contained many hundreds of ethnicities, languages, cultures, and nations. This definition is true of Assyria, Babylon, Greece, and Persia before Rome and true of the so called “Holy Roman Empire” after Charlemagne, the British and other colonial European empires, the Ottoman empire, the short lived Third Reich, and even rings true of modern America in unique ways. As I will detail in chapter two, the EOG has always desired, does already in part, and will fully one day span all nations, tribes, peoples, and languages.

The biblical narrative tells the story of how God created everything as part of his Empire and his desire to bless everything with his own presence and life. Creation is meant to work best when all smaller kingdoms are under and working with God’s will. The remainder of the Bible since Genesis 3 is the story of God working to rescue his humans and creation from rebellion, sin, and death. One day the story will finish with God and his will being all and in all. Until then, the EOG struggles against lesser kingdoms.

The central and driving force of this story of God’s Empire is the good news of its coming on earth as it is in heaven. This is the Christian Gospel: in the person of Jesus of Nazareth who lived, died, rose, and ascended, the long saving story of Israel has come to

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30 When viewed through this lens the late modern global corporation (think Apple, Nike, or Amazon Prime) function in similar ways to the classic empires mentioned above.

31 Rev. 5:10, 7:9, 21-22.
its completion and God’s Empire has been inaugurated on earth. Because of this event in the middle of history now all who pledge allegiance to the rescuing and sacrificial victory of Jesus’ life, crucifixion, and resurrection are transferred from the empire of the world into the EOG. Jesus is the King and Kingdom bringer, the rightful Lord of all the earth. In other words, in Jesus God becomes Emperor. This is the Gospel.

Once we delineate between the sinful and destructive nature of human and worldly empires powered by the devil and the Empire of everlasting life, justice, and love of God the term “empire” fits well within biblical theology. Key to this discussion is the differentiation of God’s Empire from worldly empires like Rome. This is the heart of Revelation and part of what this project seeks to detail.

The Bible is a unified metanarrative of public truth, the most real story of the cosmos. This story offers the origin and consummation of all the universe. The broad-brush stroke contours of this metanarrative are summed up by understanding the EOG. From beginning to end the Bible tells the epic story of God’s universal Empire and he as the cosmic “King of kings.” This story weaves through every book of the Old and New Testaments. In this story the “good news” is God becoming Emperor through the life, willing death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus thus inaugurating the Empire of his Father by the power of his Spirit.

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33 “We are not talking about one sector of human affairs, one strand out of the whole fabric of world history; we are talking about the reign and sovereignty of God over all that is. . . The Bible is unique among the sacred books of the world’s religions in that it is in structure a history of the cosmos. It claims to show us the shape, the structure, the origin, and goal not merely of human history, but of cosmic history.” Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, Rev. ed (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1995), 30–31. “. . . the whole point of Christianity is that it offers a story which is the story of the whole world. It is public truth.” N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People*
How does one express faithfulness to and become counter-formed into the likeness of the Cosmic Emperor? The discussion of spiritual counter-formation above ties in with the EOG, civil religion, and patriotism in at least one powerful way: through liturgy.

Public Liturgies

Liturgy comes from the Greek *leitourgia*, a compound basically meaning “work concerning the people.” It never refers, in the Greco-Roman world or in either Testament, to a private act. Rather, *leitourgia* is the political performing of a societal task. In the LXX *leitourgia* refers to cultic ministrations of the priests in the tabernacle and temple. Patrons in the ancient world did *leitourgia* for their clients or on behalf of their communities. Therefore, *leitourgia* is deeply connected with *ekklesia* and the *polis*. Liturgy is more than worship though worship fits within liturgy. Sacrifice is the heart of *leitourgia*. Liturgy is a ministerial service to and for the divine and the community. It

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35 This is true of *leitourgia* in the New Testament. Hebrews, which is deeply rooted in Old Testament cult, uses *leitourgia* over half the occurrences all referring to the sacrificial work of Jesus. Surprisingly, *leitourgia* is used in Acts 13:2 concerning the prayer offered for the apostles set apart by God for the gentile mission thus expanding the purely ritualistic role. Public prayer is *leitourgia*. Paul also uses *leitourgia* in Rom. 15:27; 2 Cor. 9:12; Phil. 2:17 and 30 about monetary and material sacrifice and service for the community.
is by *leitourgia* that one serves their nation, benefits communities, and honors another. This is all public and ritual based.\(^{36}\)

Liturgies, then, are simply public formative practices. They are rituals that develop and orient our desires toward something. Liturgies form habits, shape our imaginations, and direct our lives toward a *telos*. Liturgy contains worship, and it can be either sacred or secular. James K.A. Smith asserts that “every liturgy constitutes a pedagogy that teaches us, in all sorts of precognitive ways, to be a certain kind of person. Hence every liturgy is an education, and embedded in every liturgy is an implicit worldview or “understanding” of the world.” Liturgies contain and transport a whole cosmos, a “comprehensive reality.”\(^{37}\) Liturgy is concerned with the heart and gut before the mind, its material and embodied in nature, not ethereal and detached. They are aimed at a vision of the “good life” and they form us into the kind of people who live and embody that vision.\(^{38}\)

This phenomenon of secular or public liturgies stands in sharp contrast to most worldview claims. “A worldview is construed as a set of implicit ideas.”\(^{39}\) In many popular worldview conversations, the goal is thinking and shaping the intellect. Worldview


\(^{38}\) Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 24–26.

\(^{39}\) Ibid., 32.
tends to fall into the trap that correct knowledge coupled with willpower produces counter-formation of the person. This only proves true with simple tasks like algebra or cooking. Spiritual counter-formation and character development take place over years of liturgical practices, not direct effort. The phenomenon of “public liturgies” will expand the thought and work of Clifford Geertz, Lesslie Newbigin, and Dallas Willard discussed above. Looking at patriotism, military training, and military life through the lens of “public liturgy” and credo helps understand the resistance of USA soldiers to Christian participation and formation. I will theologically and biblically work through the synthesis and application of these definitions in chapter two as they illuminate the concepts of ACR and spiritual formation in USA soldiers.

Rationale for the Project

I am embarking on this project because of the problem I see in USA soldiers of lack of Christian formation. As I have quoted above, all humans have been and are being spiritually formed into the likeness of something. I believe the spiritual formation that comes from the institutional civil religion and the affective practices of patriotism are inoculating soldiers from a desire for the Kingdom of God, its King, and his life. When presented with the option to participate in Christian worship a good many soldiers refuse.

40 I am of course talking about disciplines. “A discipline is any activity within our power that we engage in to enable us to do what we cannot do by direct effort.” Willard, The Divine Conspiracy, 353.

41 Patriotism, as defined above, is simply a love for one’s country. I believe James K.A. Smith to be correct when he says, “Our ultimate love/desire is shaped by practices, not ideas that are merely communicated to us.” I will spell out in chapter two how this works within the ‘civil religion’ my soldiers and I embody. Smith, Desiring the Kingdom, 27.
Many Army chaplains tend to approach Christian faith formation, generally, through the intellect and cerebral functions. This “knowledge dump” gives the ability to give correct answers to theoretical questions, yet it completely bypasses the heart, body, and imagination. I believe a ritual based, imaginative, and affective set of spiritual practices will counter-form soldiers more into the likeness of Jesus. In specific regard to the presence of civil religion and patriotism, the curriculum of study and practice will come from the Apocalypse of John.

I will follow the line of thought of Michael Gorman: “Revelation’s liturgical and missional spirituality (that is, a life of worship and witness) is the antithesis of religion that idolizes secular power. . .such religion is usually referred to as civil religion. . .Revelation is ‘uncivil’ in its rejection of civil religion. . .”42 John’s Apocalypse confronts the imperial and civic religion of Rome while giving persecuted disciples of Jesus the spiritually formative liturgies needed to resist the idolatry of the world around them. I hope to appropriate the Revelation of Jesus the Messiah for soldiers as a means of affective Christian spiritual formation.

Excursus: What about Nationalism?

This project will not address, nor does it seek to address the phenomenon of American Christian Nationalism.43 The body of literature specifically aimed at Christian

42 Gorman, Reading Revelation Responsibly, xv and 12.

43 I will test for nationalism in general on the pre and post-test surveys. My reasoning for this is detailed in chapter three of this dissertation project.
Nationalism in the United States is plethoric and ever growing. Nationalism, in general, is not civil religion. Numerous studies have shown a distinguishable difference between nationalism and patriotism. Patriotism is the piety of civil religion thus strongly uniting the two concepts. By differentiating between patriotism and nationalism one can therefore differentiate between civil religion and nationalism.

What is Christian nationalism? “Christian nationalism is a cultural framework that blurs distinctions between Christian identity and American identity, viewing the two as closely related and seeking to enhance and preserve their union. It is undergirded by identification with a conservative political orientation . . . , Bible belief, pre-millennial visions of moral decay, and divine sanction for conquest. Finally, its conception of orality centers exclusively on fidelity to religion and fidelity to the nation.” Christian nationalism is an ethno-centric, authoritarian, hierarchical, apocalyptic, violent, and sexist ideology. Christian nationalism dments and twists civil religion thus making it, like all}


47 Whitehead and Perry, Taking America Back for God, 15–21; Gorski, American Covenant, 35.
ideas, a religion “gone wrong.” Christian nationalism is closely related to civil religion yet represents civil religion’s “dark side.”

Civil religion and Christian nationalism differ in several ways. First, civil religion is more inclusive and unifying, able to incorporate a plurality of beliefs and lifestyles. Christian nationalism is inherently divisive and homogenizing. Second, civil religion moderates explicit religious language and symbols. Civil religion makes vague references to a “supreme being” while Christian nationalism makes explicit references to a pseudo-Christian deity. Third, civil religion makes a religion of the political life of the

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48 Geertz addressed ideology and defined it, as he does religion above, “as an ordered system of cultural symbols.” He argues for a more nuanced approach than the “strain theory” that claims an ideology arises when the social and political order hits disequilibrium and anxiety rises in response to social strain and desperation. Both religion and ideology provide meaning through cultural patterns and blueprints for social processes. Ideologies, in a healthy culture, remain marginal until the culture ventures into “unknown territory.” An ideology emerges when the when the political system becomes free from its received tradition. This leads to an unreflective moralism and a loss of formal governance and religious guidance. Authoritarian concepts begin to render life within the culture meaningful and the symbols of the ideology become dominant. Geertz maintains that ideology is neither good or ill and as a sociologist he claims that a functional observation of its effects will reveal the ideologies quality. Citing the French Revolution as “the greatest incubator of extremist ideologies . . . in human history . . . because the central organizing principle of political life, the divine rights of kings, was destroyed. It is a confluence of sociopsychological strain and an absence of cultural resources by means of which to make sense of the strain, each exacerbating the other, that sets the stage for the rise of systematic (political, moral, or economic) ideologies” (emphasis added). Ideologies provide maps for the collective to find their way when their orientation has been lost. The credibility and accuracy of the map is, Geertz claims, a separate issue.

Ideology is the impassioned other side of dispassionate science. Geertz is saying we need both. He closes with a comparison of Churchill and Hitler. Where both used ideologies to give the masses purpose, direction, and motivation, Churchill kept one eye on the dispassionate reality of the situation: they did not have the required resources to defend their country effectively and efficiently. This view would have caused despair and England would have crumbled. It was Churchill's passionate ideology that overcame the scientific reality. Hitler, on the other hand, had the ideology but blinded himself to the dispassionate reality that he was out maneuvering his resources and doing so unethically. Hitler is ideology gone wrong; Churchill is ideology used well. Ideology is a group of symbols that objectivity the mood of a culture. It’s how ideology is used that is either evil or good. Christian nationalism is, through rigorous research and theoretical reason, wrong and evil. Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures, 211–51.

49 Christian nationalism is not Christianity any more than the Latter-Day Saints or Islam is Christianity. The Jesus of Christian nationalism is not the Jesus of the Gospels. See Whitehead and Perry, Taking America Back for God, 20–21.
nation without a fusion between an exclusive religion and the “way of life” of the state. In Christian nationalism there is a coterminous welding of state and church symbols.\textsuperscript{50}

The January 6, 2021, insurrection attempt is the logical extreme of the Christian nationalist ideology brewing beneath the surface of American public life. Christian nationalism is a threat to democracy and orthodox Christianity. Civil religion, on the other hand, is the religious tradition at the center of the American project and has allowed the state and the church to thrive over the past three hundred years. Some would argue that revitalizing the civic religious core of America will do the dual work of reducing Christian nationalism and bringing health to the American social, economic, and political system.\textsuperscript{51}

\textit{Research Questions}

The purpose of this project is to spiritually counter-form Army Ranger students through historic Christian liturgical worship, catechesis, and personal practices centered on the Revelation of John. The major question guiding this project is: \textit{What affect will historic liturgical worship and corresponding catechesis have on the Civil Religious beliefs of US Army Soldiers?} Secondary questions are:

1. What effect does Christian liturgical worship have on a soldier’s ACR beliefs? 

2. How does a liturgy based Christian education (liturgical catechesis) relate to ACR beliefs in soldiers?


3. How does a Revelation-focused spiritual formation curriculum affect a soldier’s patriotism?

Significance of the Project

This project stands to create what Lesslie Newbigin calls a “missionary encounter” with the USA. The United States has its own set of dogmas, liturgies, and civic religious structures that provide a powerful and comprehensive story that runs perpendicular to the Christian story. The Army of the nation is a microcosm of the greater culture out of which it is born. I will argue in the next chapter that the USA soldier is the incarnation of the civil religion, its messianic figure. No other individual or group believes the story of civil religion more than those who willingly die for the narrative it tells.

If I handle the Christian story as public truth, it will collide with the narrative practiced by the USA and the nation. Christians are called to encounter the culture in which they are found. Where the culture is good and true, in accordance with the Biblical narrative, the church is to champion and join that culture in goodness and truth. Everywhere else, the church is called to challenge the cultural dogmas and credos. This project will do just that.

Chaplains, in many ways, are missionaries sent by their denominations to live in and with the military. All too often Chaplains easily become swept up with the liturgies

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52 “A missionary encounter is a clash between two equally ultimate and comprehensive stories. These two stories are ‘different and incompatible’ such that if the church lives fully in the biblical story, it will inevitably clash with the cultural story, the received dogma that controls the public life of society.” Goheen, *The Church and Its Vocation*, 25.

of the civil religion for we are the religious leaders of our units. The religious nature of
the military, that I will detail in chapter two, easily forces Chaplains to become priests of
the cultus publicus.\footnote{\ldots{} the chaplaincy serves a civic purpose.\ldots{} chaplains participate in military ceremonies out-
side of the chapel.\ldots{} such ceremonies.\ldots{} are forms of civil religion. Nowhere is civil religion both created
and celebrated more than in the Armed Forces; nothing is more hallowed to Americans or to war veterans
than what Lincoln called ‘these honored dead.’ The Chaplain is a guardian not only of his particular faith,
but of the common American faith – in democracy, liberty, and justice." “Why Does the US Military Have
Chaplains? | Pepperdine University School of Public Policy,” accessed September 25, 2021, https://pub-
licpolicy.pepperdine.edu/academics/research/policy-review/2009v2/why-does-us-military-have-chap-
lains.htm.} This project will present a way for Chaplains to offer Christian for-
mation to their soldiers. This formation may come at the cost of de-forming soldiers in
ACR as Christian faith contends that we cannot embody two ultimate and comprehensive
truth claims thus serving two masters.

I believe the spiritually formative power of ACR on USA soldiers is underappre-
ciated. I believe their deep spiritual need is, perceptively, met by the public, cultural, and
civic religious liturgies they participate in daily. When offered the opportunity to wor-
ship and grow in Christian formation they often do not see or feel the need. This project
could bring awareness to soldiers who yearn to follow Jesus more closely. Seeing, expe-
riencing, and exercising a formative Christian education may meet the spiritual needs of
Christian soldiers in the USA in a more historically Christian manner.
CHAPTER TWO

Biblical and Theological Foundation

Introduction

In chapter one I defined civil religion in general. For the theological synthesis I will show the specific contours of American Civil Religion (ACR) drawing the discussion to a point concerning the United States Army (USA) and its soldiers as the incarnation of ACR.¹ In this regard cultural liturgies² will help reveal how the rituals and rites of ACR as expressed in the USA deeply shape soldiers. This formation expresses itself in the piety of patriotism which, once again, will be shown as most exemplified by the USA soldier.

The biblical foundation of the project will come from Revelation. I theorize that the Roman Empire had a large and powerful civil religion. Following Warren Carter’s work,³ I believe the book of Revelation provides a powerful resistance to the civic religion. Revelation creates a world, through imagination, that resists Rome. This world is none other than the Empire of God (EOG) led by the Lamb that was slain and yet lives.


Part One: Theological Foundation

Given “America” in Civil Religion

Any discussion of American Civil Religion (ACR) must start with Robert Bellah and his seminal article “Civil Religion in America.” Bellah noticed the existence of a “generalized religion. . . alongside of and rather clearly differentiated from the churches an elaborate and well-institutionalized civil religion in America.” This “civil religion” was not the institutional religions like Catholicism, Protestantism, or Judaism that were forced into the private sphere by the separation of church and state, a private cult. Instead, Bellah noticed a cultus publicus common to “the great majority of Americans.”

Bellah would later go on to examine this phenomenon in numerous different nations. However, he observed the American expression shared much with general Christianity yet “this religion is clearly not itself Christianity. . . neither sectarian nor in any specific sense Christian.” It has borrowed from Protestant Christianity, particularly its Calvinist and Puritan roots. This makes ACR “selectively derived” and yet “clearly

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4 The impact of this article is impossible to overstate. The article was published in 1967 and as of 2018 had been “cited . . . in more than 2,500 scholarly publications alone. . .” Michael Lienesch, “Contesting Civil Religion: Religious Responses to American Patriotic Nationalism, 1919-1929,” Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation 28, no. 1 (2018): 92.

5 Bellah, “Civil Religion in America,” 1–3.
differentiated” from Christianity. Bellah details many contours and historical developments of ACR, yet he never gives a definition.

What is ACR? *Civil religion is the collection of cultural symbols that take on sacred dimensions providing transcendent meaning which guide and unify public life.* ACR is simply the aspects of the American cultural system that are religious. It is the *cultus publicus* of America. ACR is pluralistic allowing for numerous institutional and private cults to practice the public and private faiths. If the private faith is subordinate to the public cult all remains in order. Remember, civil religion exists to unify and bind a modern secular people together. ACR is plastic and agile, able to morph and adapt alongside the culture. ACR remains below the level of consciousness and most Americans are unaware of its guiding and unifying power.

*Whence Comes ACR.* ACR has a long and detailed history. ACR has five components running into its formulation that express themselves in two different types with

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6 “... most of those who study civil religion would agree that in the United States the absence of a state church and the presence of religious pluralism have meant that it has taken on an identity distinct from any traditional church or denomination.” Lienesch, “Contesting Civil Religion,” 99; Bellah, “Civil Religion in America,” 8.

7 Civil religion, as noted in the first chapter, takes the dominate institutional religion of the nation and melds it with the civic structure. This way the largest body of the population does not see or suspect a difference in faith to the state or faith to their institutional religion. ACR coopts enough Christianity, the dominate private cult, to keep allegiance and unity from and across numerous denominations. An example is Shinto in Japan. See Robert N. Bellah and Phillip E. Hammond, *Varieties of Civil Religion* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1980); Bellah, “Civil Religion in America,” 7–8; Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly*, 69; Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony: A Provocative Christian Assessment of Culture and Ministry for People Who Know That Something Is Wrong*, Expanded 25th anniversary edition (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2014), 80–81.

8 “One must also include in culture, as fundamental to any culture, a set of beliefs, experiences, and practices that seek to grasp and express the ultimate nature of things, that which gives shape and meaning to life, that which claims final loyalty. I am speaking, obviously, about religion.” Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 3.
two aspects of each type. These five components are: America is a chosen nation, civil millennialism, evangelical liberty, enlightenment deism, and historical self-affirmation. Looking at these will give an organized history of ACR. The two types of ACR are: 1) a ‘nation under God’ and 2) a ‘self-transcendent nation’. The two aspects by which these two types find expression are: 1) priestly and 2) prophetic.

Some argue that ACR is dead or at least dying. History shows that ACR has changed and morphed drastically over time. Regardless of what shape ACR takes in the future, the greatest difficulty it regularly faces comes from its own invisibility. As Marty rightly notes, “Public religion [ACR] was not only a set of phrases from Franklin about ‘the essentials of all religions,’ or some self-evident truths stated by Jefferson, or some

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10 Pierard and Linder, Civil Religion & the Presidency, 54–60.

11 To understand this history in a holistic manner I recommend the following crucial texts: Smart, Dimensions of the Sacred; Rajdeep Singh Dosanjh, “American Civil Religion: The Prophetic Republican Orthodoxy Dogma from the Declaration of Independence to Abraham Lincoln,” ProQuest Dissertations and Theses (M.A., United States -- California, California State University, Long Beach, 2020); Wyatt, “The Pride of State in the Bride of Christ”; Marty, “Two Kinds of Two Kinds of Civil Religion”; Martin E. Marty, Pilgrims in Their Own Land: 500 Years of Religion in America (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1985); Richey and Jones, American Civil Religion; Gorski, American Covenant.


12 Andrew Root makes this argument. Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD) seems to be taking center stage as the private cult of the American people. I argue, that if ACR is to survive, it will and is transitioning from a Christian base to a “self-transcendent nation” base to match and keep pace with MTD. For discussion see Andrew Root, The Congregation in a Secular Age: Keeping Sacred Time against the Speed of Modern Life, Paperback, vol. 3, 3 vols., Ministry in a Secular Age (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021); Root, Faith Formation in a Secular Age; Douthat, Bad Religion, 55–145, 211–41; Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).
acts for religious liberty by Madison. It looked for institutional embodiment.” For the average citizen, embodiment of ACR rarely occurs and when it does the concrete experience is fleeting. However, this invisible “word” of ACR becomes visible “flesh” most powerfully in one subset of American culture: the military. I will now turn and refine this discussion to a sharper point looking at the US soldier as ACR incarnate.

*The American Soldier: The Embodiment of ACR*

ACR’s problem of visceral embodiment finds a powerful solution in the bodies of American soldiers. Jonathan Ebel picks up Marty’s observation of ACR “looking for institutional embodiment” and carries it forward. Ebel acknowledges ACR scholarship’s tendency to observe ideas, figures, symbols, and events in American history as religious yet “disembodied.” The military service member gives embodiment to ACR. Nowhere in America can one see every other sincerely held belief (ethnicity, religion, or class) submerged below a group’s allegiance to the state than in the Army.

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14 As an USA CH, I will only refer to soldiers and not speak on behalf of the other branches of the US Military. Ebel makes a common mistake, though a confusing one acknowledging his military service, by referring to all members of the US military as “soldiers.” Members of the Army are soldiers, Marine Corps are ‘Marines’, Navy are seamen or sailors, and Air Force are airmen. Throughout when I say ‘soldier’ I specifically mean a member of the USA. Since all liturgy forms, to some degree, what is said of the Army culture below has parallels across the branches. When I quote Ebel, or other authors who use imprecise language, they may say ‘soldier’ while meaning military service members in general.

15 “One could argue quite convincingly that the soldier is the fullest embodiment of American civil religion due both to his willingness to die for the nation and to the kind of community his death prompts Americans to imagine: historically continuous; composed of common men and women from all races, creeds, and classes; created equal.” Ebel, “Of the Lost and the Fallen,” 226-27.

Ebel documents thoroughly the development of the G.I. Messiah from WWI through the Global War on Terror. It seems that there exists within the ACR framework a trinity comprised of father (the nation), son (the G.I. Messiah), and the spirit (national ideals). It is the soldier who willingly serves, suffers, and sacrifices that not only provides salvation for the people but also receives salvation in return. This service, suffering, and sacrifice makes the soldier the *truest* expression of ACR living as both monk and messiah on behalf of the nation.

As the war on terror has closed and international conflict brews in the east and west, America has the soldier-savior-son-scapegoat at the center of American civil piety. The G.I. currently exists at a transition point between over twenty years of Messiahship to an unknown period receding to the cultural backdrop of monastic life once more.

Ebel’s project is to help the American people see the human flesh of the soldier, not just the incarnated word of ACR. His project and mine diverge at this point however apropos his call is for ACR study, the American people, and her warriors. The next step in my

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17 ACR thus has a circular soteriology. To save the nation the G.I. Messiah must serve, suffer, and sacrifice. Then the nation will bestow upon the soldier salvation. The saved turns and saves the savior. This can only work in the immanent frame where there exists no transcendence. “Within the well-defined walls of the ABMC cemetery, the diverse narratives of American war and American religion are forged into a nationalist theology in which the redeemer nation acts through its incarnate sons, sacrifices some of them for the good of the world and then keeps them alive in memory as citizens draw near to contemplate the glory.” Ebel, *G.I. Messiahs*, 98. See Smiths discussion about immanence in a flattened world still seeking transcendence in transient things like sports. Taylor describes this as the “eclipse of heaven.” Smith, *Awaiting the King*, 23–25, 209–13.

work comes in answering the question: How does a citizen become the “word” of the nation incarnate? What goes into making a civilian a soldier-savior, a G.I. Messiah?

_How the “Word” Becomes Flesh: The Forming of the Soldier-Savior._ I have located the predominately invisible and disembodied expressions of ACR in the bodies of American war fighters. This framework places the nation/god of ACR becoming incarnate in the soldier/son where the national ideals/spirit find embodied flesh. Here enters Smith’s cultural liturgies project.

Smith’s project starts, firstly, as anti-Cartesian in nature. He sets out to offer a _liturgical anthropology_, opposed to the intellectualist, rationalist, or cognitive philosophies of what it means to be human. This is a teleological understanding of humanity which sides with modern psychological and neurological study of humans having affective and emotional activity prior to cognitive reflection. Only after we have habituated our bodies, or more likely have _been_ habituated by cultural forces, through repetitious and significant rituals do we “think” about our words and deeds. Our minds play an undeniable role in our formation and direction in life, and yet cognition rarely ever provides _ad hoc_ being, that comes from the environment through the body. Here enters the imagination as at least equal, if not superior to, the intellect. Our bodies function as an

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19 Smith argues the Cartesian model is the dominate philosophical anthropology of the modern, post-Enlightenment era. Smith, _Desiring the Kingdom_, 49.

20 Willard argues for the role of the body in spiritual formation, regardless of the source or aim of the formation. Willard, _The Divine Conspiracy_, 311–73. Throughout Smith’s trilogy he rightly connects _telos_ and the “good life” with the word _kingdom_. Herein lies how rival empires to the Empire of God capture our heart while our heads, so to speak, remain attuned to the Empire of God. Smith, _Desiring the Kingdom_, 51, 55, 91.

21 Drawing on Bourdieu, Smith calls this “practical sense.” It is a “knowing” that does not happen in the mind, but a knowing that occurs between the body and the environment. Smith, _Imagining the Kingdom_, 86; Smith, _Desiring the Kingdom_, 53–54.
elephant, borrowing Jonathan Haidt’s illustration, and our brains as the rider. The elephant/embodied existence is in control while the rider/cognitive capacity influences after the fact. Haidt and Smith both agree that what most deeply and profoundly engages our bodies will powerfully shape our lives, even without mounting a cognitive argument or eliciting our “strategic reasoning.”

If our hearts are aimed primarily by our embodied existence, then what we repeatedly do shapes our lives toward a certain empire. Smith asserts that once we move away from a rationalist or intellectual paradigm that equates religion with beliefs and worldviews and instead identify the religious with rituals of ultimacy (i.e., liturgies), then cultural institutions and practices that we might have previously thought neutral or benign are recognized as having a kind of religious force about them precisely because they aim to shape our loves.

Every culture has a hidden credo, in the case of America a civil religion, that binds life together. One becomes American by practicing the rituals of the ACR. These rituals form a habitus in practitioners that operates below the level of awareness.

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23 Kingdoms contain a telos and a desired “good life” that pulls our hearts and bodies along through our lived experience in the world. This creates the foundation of Dallas Willard’s project in Willard, The Divine Conspiracy, 19–33.


26 For Habitus see Smith, Imagining the Kingdom, 80–81; Harold L. Senkbeil, The Care of Souls: Cultivating a Pastor’s Heart (Bellingham, Washington: Lexham Press, 2019), 18–21. Not all rituals form equally. By discussing “thick” and “thin” rituals, Smith helps arrive at a definition of liturgy versus mundane rituals. Practices (routine repeated rituals) “automate” us by forming habits that help functions
Herein enters liturgy. Liturgies are “thick” rituals that comport a whole cosmos of meaning through embodied symbolic practices that aim and form the heart of practitioners toward a certain kingdom. Liturgies carry the freight of a “good life” that create desire in practitioners intending them toward a telos. Complicit within all liturgies is an ethic with values and virtues that seep into the body, heart, and gut of those practicing them. Liturgies, in line with this project’s operating definition of “religion” as a system of symbols that create ultimate meaning and allegiance, exist at the heart of both secular and faith systems. Liturgies form deep identities and change persons into the image and likeness of whatever kingdom that liturgy serves. Not all ritual is liturgy, but all liturgy is ritual.

The “Word” Becomes Flesh: Looking at Army Liturgies. The American military is a heavily liturgical expression of ACR. The marking of time through bugle calls is a prime example, however I want to look at other aspects of Army culture through the lens of liturgy drawing out how this impacts the spiritual formation of the soldier.

operate below the level of cognition. This “automation” happens automatically. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 80–83.


28 Smith carefully, helpfully, and rightly walks a tight rope here between rituals, practices, and liturgies. See Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 86–87.

29 “The American military is an exceptionally sophisticated and effective ritual culture. It is religious both because it forges a community and thus trades in one etymological root of the word religion (*religare*: to bind) and because it imparts an orienting ethic of collectivism, order, and sacrifice for a higher good.” Ebel, *G.I. Messiahs*, 39–40.
Every soldier is “born again” through the crucible of basic combat training (hereafter basic). At basic, soldiers are incorporated into a new ethic: that of collective identity. Every head is shaved, all forms of individual identity that can be removed are, and new “vestments” (combat uniforms) fit for adepts are donned. The embodiment of this ethic goes further through “drill and ceremony.” Practicing individual movements and group marching creates a *habitus* aimed at “good order and discipline” that lays the foundation for success in combat. The *telos* of basic, the desired “good life” implicit in the Army, is one of war fighting and winning.

The Army is the nation’s dominate land-power and defends the nation’s prosperity and interests. The Army’s mission is to fight and win our nation’s wars in large scale, land combat. This type of war can only be waged by “putting your young men in the

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30 I vividly remember the first time I heard this reference. I was speaking to a veteran of the USA while I was an undergraduate at Boise State University in 2004. I was stumbling through an attempt at evangelization when this gentleman mentioned he had already been “born again.” He referred to his initiation into the USA through basic training at, then, Fort Benning, GA (now Fort Moore, GA). For him the mythology went like this: I was born first as an American citizen. Through basic training I died, was buried, and born again into the newness of life as an infantryman in the Army. He then received his “baptism” during his combat experience in the invasion of Iraq in 2003 with the 82nd Airborne Division. Since this conversation I have heard these narratives countless times.

31 “Although the procedures taught in drill today are not normally employed on the battlefield, the objectives accomplished by drill—professionalism, teamwork, confidence, pride, alertness, attention to detail, esprit de corps, and discipline—are just as important to the modern Army as they were to the Continental Army.” Department of the Army, *Drill and Ceremonies*, TC 3-21.5 (Washington, DC, 2021). Emphasis mine. “Close-order drill is a ritual with undeniable connections to a broader "cosmos."” Ebel, *G.I. Messiahs*, 41.

32 For a discussion on land power see Department of the Army, *The Army* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2019), 1–1. For the Army’s mission see ibid, 3–1. “Land combat consists of operations against a thinking and lethal enemy in conditions that include violence, chaos, fatigue, fear, and uncertainty. Large-scale ground combat is the most lethal and demanding environment human beings have ever devised to resolve conflict.” ibid, 2–2.
mud.” These men “in the mud” are the soldiers who fill the Army’s ranks. The soldier is made by liturgies, practices of ultimate desire, to become the type of person who can endure the “violence, chaos, fatigue, fear, and uncertainty” of large-scale land combat. This ‘becoming’ happens through drill and ceremony, attention to detail, concern for physical fitness, and many other daily or cyclical tasks of soldiering. These liturgies “argue loudly and clearly against the chaos of combat for control of and over bodies” by “precis[ing] ambiguities” in war. All Army training aims the soldier at the telos of winning in war, the ultimate and final crucible in making the ACR messiah.

In times of so-called peace, the soldier-monk observes a set of liturgies called training. These practices of ultimate desire hone and refine the soldier so when the ultimate liturgy of war arrives the soldier can shed the monk, become the hero, and put on the savior. War serves as the “rite of passage” that validates the prior liturgies and vindicates the soldier as G.I. Messiah of ACR. In this way the soldier-savior stands as a potent symbol of ACR in ways very similar to Jesus in Christian theology.

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33 T. R. Fehrenbach, This Kind of War (Open Road Media, 2014), 469.

34 U.S. Navy Rear Admiral J. C. Wylie says, “The ultimate determinant in war is a man on the scene with a gun. This man is the final power in war. He is in control. He determines who wins . . . if the strategist is forced to strive for final and ultimate control, he must establish, or must present as an inevitable prospect, a man on the scene with a gun. This is the Soldier.” Department of the Army, ADP 1, 1–2.

35 Since ACR seeks to create ultimate meaning and belonging through pluralism then the bonds created by soldiers in war, despite their differences, stands as the hallmark of ACR. This ‘band of brothers’ places war at or near the top of the list of importance in ACR liturgies. Ebel, G.I. Messiahs, 101–11; Richey and Jones, American Civil Religion, 105–8.

36 “Through miniaturization, repetition, and attention to detail, military ritual imparts an ethic and precis ambiguities as to communal structure, authority, and ownership of the soldierly body in preparation for another ritual: war. From the stand point of civil religion, war is the nation's most important ritual.” Ebel, G.I. Messiahs, 40–42.

37 “Having endured the ritual of war, living soldier-symbols testify to its redemptive power . . . war as a rite of passage is not over until the soldier is reintegrated into society or returned to his or her
In sum, the ACR mythology tells the story of the nation, often one soldier at a time, building the cosmos that rivals the EOG for ultimate allegiance. This story is instilled into and through the bodies of soldiers as they practice the liturgies of the Army way of life starting with basic. The cosmos and mythology of ACR is comported into their being aiming them at the \textit{telos} of honoring and being honored by the nation in the ultimate liturgy of warfare. Upon returning ‘well’, either dead or alive, the liturgy of the soldier is complete. The reintegrated warrior can now, fully, incarnate the word of the nation as its soldier-savior, the G.I. Messiah.\footnote{Serving, suffering, and sacrificing has “granted the soldier the status of the 'word' of the United States made flesh . . . the religious power of soldiering. Believing that they had waged a war 'For God and Country,' that their friends and brothers and sisters had given their lives 'For God and Country' . . .” Ebel, \textit{G.I. Messiahs}, 35.} Next to the American flag, the soldier stands as a powerfully affective and visceral symbol of ACR proclaiming, through their embodied existence, the gospel of ACR.\footnote{“The coming together of the soldier, the cross, and the Gospel words accomplishes an impressive amount. At the intersection of symbol and scripture, death in war is sanitized. It is made an act of willing. The soldier does not have life torn, blown, cut, or crushed from him. He is not burned to death or atomized by an enemy shell. Rather, he lays life down. At this same intersection, soldiering for America is sanctified. . . .” ibid, 190–93.} Through embodying this religion and living this gospel aimed at a rival empire, soldiers seem to have their spiritual needs meet. By serving in the Army, they simultaneously serve “god.” Their patriotic beliefs find expression through their embodied service, suffering, and sacrifice for the nation. The
liturgies, thick and thin, of the Army comport the cosmos of ACR belief into their bones thus satisfying their felt need for piety and religious devotion.\textsuperscript{40}

Here the question about self-identified “Christian” soldiers that opened this project is addressed, in part, by my proposal. Why do “Christian” soldiers not participate in worship services? The liturgies of ACR, intensified in the Army way of life, satisfy the religious impulse of many soldiers obviating their lack of participation in “Christian” chapel and worship services. The logical chain laid out in detail above is simplified thus: since humans are fundamentally desiring creatures and since liturgies form desire and since the Army is a complex liturgical culture that comports ACR into the bodies of the soldiers; then it would follow that a soldier’s primary faith and spiritual formation comes from their service, suffering, and sacrifice as war fighters. The Army spiritually forms citizens into soldiers through liturgies, who naturally serve, suffer, and sacrifice for an empire rival to the EOG; most of which declare some form of orthodox Christian faith.\textsuperscript{41}

\textsuperscript{40} Richey and Jones, \textit{American Civil Religion}, 110.

I will test the effect of historic Christian liturgies through the “practice of practices” and measure the results of ACR beliefs. To do so I must first lay a biblical foundation for this research. Now that the cultural exegesis and a theological and liturgical anthropolo- 
gy is laid, I turn to the Bible’s address of civil religion: the Revelation of Jesus to John of Patmos.

**Part Two: Biblical Foundation**

*Roman Civil Religion: Revelation’s Context*

The Book of Revelation originated in the first century Roman Empire which com- prised the context for its writing. No New Testament (NT) text can receive full treatment until the reality of the Roman Empire obtains and maintains attention throughout. “... Rome’s empire does not disappear or go away when it is not explicitly mentioned. *It is always there. It forms the pervasive context of New Testament writings.*”

To the Roman context I now turn.

*The Nature of the Imperial World.* Rome remained ever present throughout the NT. The entirety of the NT addressed the civic and societal structures of Roman life by providing ways for Jesus-followers to negotiate life as citizens of God’s Empire who have material life in Rome’s empire. Rome had no separation of church and state, religious leaders functioned as political leaders and vice versa. A lack of understanding of the Roman imperial world creates confusion for many modern readers.

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Empires, ancient and modern, share certain qualities that force all non-elite citizens to negotiate in their daily lives. Rome’s empire consolidated authority, resources, and power in the top two-to-three percent of the population while the rest lived in grinding poverty and oppression. Rome was an agrarian and legionary empire wherein control was maintained through taxation and coercive domination. The emperor ruled as supreme over the whole empire. His relationships with subordinate elites were built on the *patronus-cliens* relationship with each echelon owing allegiance to the level above in the hierarchy. There were many “lords” in Rome, yet there was only one “Lord,” Caesar, who was the “Lord of lords.” Caesar not only held the title of emperor, but he also served as the *pontifex maximus* of the imperial cult. This imperial cult had divine sanction making Rome an “empire without end.”

Whatever Rome did was seen as the direct will of the divine and the emperor occupied the role as image and son of god. The Romans were destined to rule the world,

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43 For a detailed support of Roman soldiers as police officers see Esau McCaulley, Reading While Black: African American Biblical Interpretation as an Exercise in Hope, Kindle Edition (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 34–38.

44 Rome did not invent this idea for their supreme leaders, the Persians had done so centuries earlier. “The imperial cult also provided people in the province with a bridge of access to their ultimate patron [the emperor].” David Arthur DeSilva, Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 95–119.

45 “The emperor occupied a peculiar position in the state cult in that he served as pontifex maximus (chief priest) while increasingly becoming an object of worship.” Pierard and Linder, Civil Religion & the Presidency, 37. “The "imperial cult" refers to a vast array of temples, images, rituals, personnel, and theological claims that honored the emperor.” Seneca, discussing Nero, says about the emperor, “‘Have I of all mortals found favor with Heaven and been chosen to serve on earth as vicar of the gods? I am the arbiter of life and death for the nations.’” Quoted in Carter, The Roman Empire and the New Testament, 7 and 84.

bring peace, and crush their foes; all ordained by the gods. Jupiter, the highest god of the Roman pantheon and supreme ruler of the cosmos, appointed Rome as the domain of his chosen ruler the emperor to bring *pax* to all creation. Imperial values included domination and power, euergetism, contempt for laborers and slaves, consumerism, and a Roman superiority over non-Romans. Every aspect of this empire presented serious struggles for first century Jesus-followers and the NT provided unique ways for the Christians to navigate their lives “between the empires” of God and Rome.

**Roman Civic Religion.** Roman Civic Religion (RCR) shares much and diverges much from ACR. Firstly, RCR found its center in the *polis* and moved predominately upward from there to the empire. ACR reverses the flow predominately starting in the civic structures and moving downward into the states and cities. Second, the modern view of religion tends to only “see” the religious as what exists on the “inside” of the

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47 Virgil, 6.1115-18. “What remains, therefore, is this, that you have recourse to divine assistance; but this is already on the side of the Romans; for it is impossible that so vast an empire should be settled without God’s providence.” Josephus, *The Works of Josephus*, 632.

48 Speaking of emperor Domitian, during whose reign the Apoc. was written, Statius wrote “See! He is a god, him Jupiter commands to rule the happy earth in his stead.” P. Papinius Statius, *Silvae*, trans. D. R. Shackleton Bailey, Loeb Classical Library 206 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 265.

49 Josephus quoting the Roman general, and future emperor, Titus says: “I mean the constancy and patience of these Jews, even under their ill successes; for it is unbecoming you, who are Romans and my soldiers, who have in peace been taught how to make wars, and who have also been used to conquer in those wars, to be inferior to Jews, either in action of the hand or in courage of the soul, and this especially when you are at the conclusion of your victory, and are assisted by God himself. . .” Flavius Josephus, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*, trans. William Whiston, New updated ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987), 729.

50 As mentioned earlier, there existed no split between church and state for “there was no sphere of one’s civic or familial existence outside religion, nor did religion offer space or forms of authority or systems of knowledge from which to launch an immanent critique.” Scheid, *The Gods, the State, and the Individual*, loc. 127. With president Lincoln ACR began its slow shift from splintered localized civil/folk religion to a centralized national civic religion. This shift was solidified by Eisenhower. Richey and Jones, *American Civil Religion*, 167–68; Pierard and Linder, *Civil Religion & the Presidency*, 87–113 and 184–205.
individual and their abstract belief about the divine. For RCR this simply was not true as the gods were members of the *polis* living in their space and in their midst. For Romans, religion was ritual which connected the individual to the *polis*, the *polis* to the empire, and the empire to the gods. Third, unlike Christianity and the other monotheistic religions of today, RCR was not a religion of books or doctrine. This RCR shares with ACR, there exists no centralized polity governing the civic cult. What matters over book and dogma is precise liturgical execution. Fourth, RCR views the human and

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52 This privatization of piety has resulted in what Charles Taylor calls the “age of authenticity” wherein the individual is required to create and curate a self with little to no influence from outside the self. This has resulted in a moralistic, therapeutic, and deistic mode of faith formation. We have imposed our late modern understanding of faith onto ancient peoples. For a discussion see Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age*, 11. “In this historical reconstruction of the emergence of “true” religiosity, the reader familiar with German philosophers and theologians of the Romantic era will recognize without difficulty the influence of Schleiermacher, Hegel, and others.” Scheid, *The Gods, the State, and the Individual*.

53 It would be better to translate the word “religion” in the Roman or ancient context as *ritual*. In the context of my project, it is even better to use *liturgy* to stay consistent. Thanks to David Wilhite for this clarification. Scheid, *The Gods, the State, and the Individual*, loc. 247-65.

54 Truth is better understood as *meaning* there were a plurality of meanings. This stemmed from the lack of a centralized dogmatic cult. Many thanks to David Wilhite for this clarification. “The notion of truth could not have the same meaning in Roman civilization as in a Christian one, where truth is revealed by God, diffused by a book, and codified in dogmas. Nothing of the sort existed at Rome, where the truth was plural and depended on the point of view of the person who formulated it.” Ibid, 121-23.

55 Ibid, 59, 123.

56 We must remember that there existed “books” at the heart of RCR. Paramount to these was the *Aeneid* by Virgil quoted above. However, this differs from post-Roman religious books like the *Quran* and many popular, however incorrect, approaches to the *Tanak* and the *Holy Bible*. These books are often viewed as books of theology, devotion, ethics, and legal rules that govern the religious practices and the beliefs of the practitioners. I believe this approach, to the *Tanak* and the *Bible* at least, to be woefully incorrect. They, like the *Aeneid* and the *Iliad*, are epic narratives that claim to tell the true story of the world and how to be human within creation and relate to the divine. I believe this misperception of the meta-narrative of the *Bible* to be an offshoot result of the German pietistic school of thought that has dominated the modern era. Part of why the mythology of RCR and ACR is so compelling and enduring comes through its lack of dogma and emphasis on embodying the story it tells. For a helpful discussion of authors on this point see Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 216–18; N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 1st North American ed, vol. 1, Christian Origins and the Question of God (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press,
divine relationship in a distinct way from modern and western perceptions. The role of *patronus-cliens* comes in heavily here uniting all the empire to the gods through the multiple echelons of cultic, legal, and social relationships.\(^{57}\) Spiritual beings were members of the same *polis* as human beings and through liturgy the visible and invisible were united.\(^{58}\) Lastly, the place and function of emotion and belief were located differently in RCR.\(^{59}\) Instead of being a vehicle for emotional expression as many modern civic and private religious services function, RCR and the different *polis* centered cults obviated

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\(^{57}\) The role of *fides* set the tone for both social (justice) and religious relationships and removed the “emotional” display from interchanges between *patronus* and *clien* regardless of whether the *patronus* was a human or divine entity. Responding to your *patronus* (human or divine) with anxiety belonged in the category of *superstitio* and not the proper category of *religio* which “demands that one first perform a check, because relations with immortals were founded upon a feeling of interdependence and not upon servile submission.”\(^{57}\) Uncontrolled emotional expression was for the vilified and criticized realm of *superstitio* while the RCR, the proper *religio* which connected heaven to earth and divine to human, required the emotions be held in check. Scheid, *The Gods, the State, and the Individual*, 49–52.

\(^{58}\) To make this imaginative leap one would have to think of a “New York civil religion” first, then through allegiance of New York to America, the national cult enters second. What I am angling for in this discussion is to see RCR as *more or less* city centric while ARC remains *nation* centric with the cult hailing from Washington, DC. For the Roman the gods were members of their *polis* living within however in a different plane of existence one could call the *unseen realm*. Scheid, *The Gods, the State, and the Individual*, 49–52.

\(^{59}\) Participation was measured differently than moderns measure it in an individualist culture. See Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age*, 30. For meat sacrificed to idols see “To receive, buy, and consume one’s share at a public sacrifice amounted to participation in the rite in question, even if that participation was formal in character. In a ritualist religion, this is also what banquet or the purchase of meat at the butcher signified. The Christians were not wrong in this. Not to recognize the importance of this connection is to fall back into an antiquated way of talking about ritualism and the poverty of its religious content.” Scheid, *The Gods, the State, and the Individual*, 72. See also 1 Cor. 8 and 10 and commentary Preben Vang, *1 Corinthians*, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2014), 114–21; N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 4, Book 2, Christian Origins and the Question of God (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013), 661–70.
the need for emotion through ritual practices. Liturgies channeled the emotion and belief of the individual into the collective removing the need for specific and abstract doctrinal adherence. If one observed the obligatory liturgies of RCR, personal feelings and values were left up to the individual. Rome thus had a robust civil religion.

The Apocalypse According to John

John is writing an apocalyptic prophecy in the line of the great OT prophetic tradition. He writes to disciple the seven churches of Asia as they negotiate living as Jesus-followers in the all-encompassing Roman empire. Apocalyptic literature is not meant to be understood directly. Apocalypse and prophecy share a common heritage with

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60 “Notably, the Romans did not understand themselves as the metropole of Italy or the world, but rather very precisely as a Greek colony: a Trojan colony, practicing asylum and open to all city-states that wanted an alliance with them.” Scheid, The Gods, the State, and the Individual, 59.

61 “. . . the notion of belief among the ancients was not the same as that of modern times. There was no normative requirement that all should believe, let alone believe the same thing. Truths were multiple, and they varied according to point of view.” Ibid, 121.

62 This representation of the people by a subset of the greater population was common across the ancient world. This is how the priestly class in Israel functioned with the high priestly role in Exodus and Leviticus. Ibid, 11–12, 67, and 123–24. “Hellenistic men and women did not regard belief as necessary for the cult. So long as the traditional sacrifices were offered, so long as the show went on, all would be well. . . .” Green, Evangelism in the Early Church, 203.

63 For a discussion of authorship and date see Appendix F of this dissertation.
unique overlap and divergence. John has given us an “apocalyptic-prophetic” book which centers on hope.

Imagination is required for reading the apocalyptic-prophetic genre. Apocalyptic is fantasy literature comparable to the classic “fairy-tale.” Fantasy, in many ways, is more real than “real life.” If one first approaches apocalyptic intellectually the genre will be lost, and the message skewed. Imagination is the primary mode of apocalyptic which traffics in images before ideas. Revelation, like all apocalyptic, is a drama meant to be transformative literature. Pippin comments that “Catharsis is the central mode of reader response in the Apocalypse.”


By fantasy or fairy-tale, I do not mean “make-believe” or fiction. Rather, as Bauckham and Hart define fantasy, it is a “wanton transgression of the rules which, in our familiar world, define the boundaries of the permissible and impermissible . . . fantasy is what could not have happened.” Fantasy literature is “outrageous, nonsensical, impossible” and is meant to lead “us to the very brink of the unimaginable, peering into the brilliant darkness beyond.” Richard Bauckham and Trevor A. Hart, *Hope against Hope: Christian Eschatology at the Turn of the Millennium* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1999), 89–108.

joined, not cognitively pondered through strategic thinking. Thus, a correct reading of the Apocalypse requires a liturgical anthropology purported by Smith above. Imagination brings us into stories which register below the level of awareness into our heart and gut on the visceral plane.\footnote{Eugene H. Peterson, \textit{Reversed Thunder: The Revelation of John and the Praying Imagination} (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1991), xii–17; Smith, \textit{Desiring the Kingdom}; Schüssler Fiorenza, \textit{Revelation}, locs. 400–420; Pippin, \textit{Death and Desire}, 40–43; McKnight and Matchett, \textit{Revelation for the Rest of Us}, 269–70.}

This message of hope was crucial for Asiatic churches in the late 90s because the communities receiving the message of Revelation were unique among the early EOG communities spread across the Roman empire. They, unlike Judea, Syria, or Greece, were not conquered. Asian cities willingly submitted to Roman rule in 133 BC and therefore the average outlook toward the empire was positive and eager to please the capital and emperor.\footnote{King Attalus of Pergamum brought this region under Roman control. A small rebellion occurred from 88–86 BC; however, it was minor and quickly quelled. Ephesus, Pergamum, Sardis, and Smyrna were all in the top fourteen largest cities in the whole empire placing these communities at the heart of Roman urban life. Witherington, \textit{Revelation}, 22; Kulli Toniste, “Pergamum,” in \textit{The Lexham Bible Dictionary}, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016); David Seal, “Ephesus,” in \textit{The Lexham Bible Dictionary}, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016); David Seal, “Smyrna,” in \textit{The Lexham Bible Dictionary}, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016); R. L. Drouhard, “Sardis,” in \textit{The Lexham Bible Dictionary}, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).} The Roman and emperor cults truly functioned as the \textit{religio} of Asia for the cultic rituals bound the people together toward Rome in allegiance through \textit{sacramenta} and \textit{leitourgia}. Resisting Rome would not stand out in Syria or Judea or other contentious parts of the empire. Resisting imperial culture stood out and would easily garner social, economic, and political discrimination in Asia.

Because of this I see, along with many scholars, that Revelation’s Jesus is calling his Empire communities to culturally dislocate from RCR. I will approach Revelation as
presented, not thematically. The totality of the Apocalypse reveals by “its profound reality” not the pieces broken apart. I see a flow in the text weaving the plethora of theological themes together. I will follow one strand of this tapestry, namely, how participation in RCR is dangerous for the Jesus-follower in first century Asia. What follows is not exhaustive. Rather, I am reading Revelation with an eye toward how John’s Apocalypse reveals, or unveils, the civil religion of Rome as dangerous for the Jesus-follower. Jesus is sending a clarion call to his EOG communities to have “eyes to see” and “ears to hear” how uncritical participation in the civic religious liturgies of Rome is unacceptable for Jesus-followers.

Revelation 1: God’s Word to God’s World.

The Apocalypse opens with an audacious claim in the first century Roman empire: the whole world belongs to “the one who is, who was, and who is to come” and “the sevenfold spirit before his throne” and “Messiah Jesus, the faithful martyr, the firstborn

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70 The one exception below is the three times seven disciplines (Rev. 6:8:5; 8:6-11; 15-18) I deal with these all together which breaks up the otherwise linear flow. Many scholars approach the Apoc. through a thematic or motif-based method and these studies produce excellent insight and theological application. Gorman, Reading Revelation Responsibly; McKnight and Matchett, Revelation for the Rest of Us; Pippin, Death and Desire; J. Nelson Kraybill, Apocalypse and Allegiance; Richard Bauckham, The Theology of the Book of Revelation, New Testament Theology (Cambridge [England] ; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Richard Bauckham, The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2005).

71 Ellul, Apocalypse, 17-18n2. Emphasis original.

72 I follow Warren Carter’s structure and movement as a guide throughout this exegesis. Heiser works in a linear fashion through the text with an eye explicitly toward how Revelation utilizes the Old Testament. Peterson also works through the Apoc. linearly with an emphasis on spiritual formation. Ellul sees a basic ABCB’A’ chiasm with chapters 10-11 sitting in the middle and most prominent position. For the purposes of this project, addressing the ACR formation and faith in USA Ranger students, Carter’s outline and movement provides the most logical avenue of approach. Carter, What Does Revelation Reveal?; Michael S. Heiser, The Old Testament in Revelation: Notes from The Naked Bible Podcast (Naked Bible Press, 2021); Peterson, Reversed Thunder; Ellul, Apocalypse, 42–49.
from the dead, and the one ruling the kings of the earth” (authors translation). This phrasing names YHWH from the burning bush event, the complete and full spirit of the Creator God, and Messiah Jesus as the archon of all earthly kings.73 This Jesus is the dominate and coming one, who, upon seeing him all the earth will wail. YHWH, in 1:8, is the beginning and end of all things and the exalted Jesus claims this title also in 1:17.74 The imposing and terrifying Cosmic Christ holds “seven stars” in his right hand, was dead and is now alive, and owns the power of death and Hades. This Cosmic Christ has full authority over all the cosmos: the skies above (seven stars), the earth below (ruling kings of the earth), and the underworld (death and Hades). According to ancient cosmology, the Triune Creator God owns and reigns over all of creation in both time and

73 Exod. 3:14, LXX (cf. Isa. 41:4; 43:10; 44:6 48:12). This is the first occurrence of John’s solecisms, a deliberate grammatical error to draw attention to the OT text to which he alludes. Also, the title of Jesus as “faithful witness” calls back to Ps. 88:38 as a title for the Messiah. Here we have two tight solecisms linking the main characters of the Apoc. with the Hebrew Bible. See Michael S. Heiser, The Old Testament in Revelation: Notes from The Naked Bible Podcast, 10–12; G. K. Beale, John’s Use of the Old Testament in Revelation, Journal for the Study of the New Testament 166 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 63–66, 318–54; Carter, What Does Revelation Reveal?, 20.

I take the “seven-fold spirit” as the Holy Spirit. The placing of the “seven-fold spirit” between the “one who was, is, and is coming” and Messiah Jesus does not leave any other options but the Holy Spirit. There are three (a divine number) sources of “grace” and “peace” in 1:4-5 of which the “seven-fold spirit” is one. Only from the Creator God can grace and peace flow. The designation of “seven” refers to the completeness of the spirit hence my translation “seven-fold spirit.” See Fee, Revelation, 6; McKnight and Matchett, Revelation for the Rest of Us, 39; James L. Rissegue, The Revelation of John: A Narrative Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2009), 28–32, 66. This Trinitarian formula may be reading later doctrine back into Revelation. In favor of the “seven spirits before the throne” as angels see Mounce, The Book of Revelation, 45–47; Koester, Revelation, 216; Oikoumenios, Commentary on the Apocalypse, trans. John Suggit, The Fathers of the Church, a New Translation, v. 112 (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 24; Witherington, Revelation, 75–76.

74 “This expression is explained in some manuscripts as ‘the beginning and the end’ and in others as ‘the first and the last’ and in Rev. 22:13 as both ‘the first and the last’ and ‘the beginning and the end.’ The combination of alpha and omega in secular literature came to designate the entire universe and all kinds of divine and demonic powers, so that in Revelation this title could refer to Christ’s dominion over the universe. In the use of such an expression as ‘the alpha and the omega,’ there is obviously also an important element of status.” J. P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds., Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains, 2nd ed, Logos Bible Software (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 610.
space.\textsuperscript{75} What Jesus reveals to John is simply that only the “One who is, who was, and who is coming” his “seven-fold spirit” and the Cosmic Messiah are the rightful originators, owners, and rulers of the world and everything within.

This picture of the Triune God in Revelation 1 reveals and unveils the truth behind the scenes, namely, that Israel’s God through the Messiah and the Spirit owns and rules the whole world of time, material, and space. For the Greeks, Zeus – often equated with the Roman Jupiter – was the “most high god,” and he carried titles like hypsistos and even the moniker “Zeus was, Zeus is, and Zeus shall be.”\textsuperscript{76} Zeus was the supreme god of the cosmos, unrivaled in power, majesty, and even called the “king of kings.”\textsuperscript{77} The Apocalypse opens with a stunning claim that Israel’s God was the hypsistos, the “Most High”, and not Zeus.\textsuperscript{78}

\textsuperscript{75} Here in Revelation 1 we have a veiled yet present allusion to the “three-tiered” cosmos that exists from creation in Gen. 1. It is an ANE reference to the totality of the created order. Wesley Crouser, “Cosmology,” in The Lexham Bible Dictionary, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016); Michael S. Heiser, “The Old Testament and the Ancient Near Eastern Worldview,” in Faithlife Study Bible (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).


\textsuperscript{78} This abundance of references to el eylon (Highest God) begs the question, if no other gods exist (as we moderns believe in a disenchanted universe) then why call the god of Israel “most high?” Excellent question to which I completely agree. If no other divine beings were thought to exist, then this title is foolish. The other gods of the nations were not make-believe for the ancient Jews and Christians. To the contrary,
Kings and emperors of the ancient world often thought of themselves as “sons of god,” the image of the chief deity, or even the embodiment of the supreme god. Carter notes that Rome “was a proprietary empire” meaning that all of Rome’s actions demonstrated that “everything on the earth and in the sea belonged to the emperor . . .” and that Rome owned the “the earth . . . and all that is in it.” Augustus, son of “Julius Caesar, the divine”, thought himself as the incarnation of Apollo. Augustus was declared divine, not only the son of a god (Caesar) but a god in his own right. Augustus had brought *pax* to the world as its owner, ruler, and savior.

Domitian, the emperor during whose reign John wrote, insisted on acting like the embodiment of Jupiter. Domitian changed the title of two months to his own names, and

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79 This was true of the Egyptian pharaoh within which the claim that YHWH ruled the world came to Moses. The whole of the Exodus narrative comes to a point when YHWH, not pharaoh or Re, is victorious over the gods of Egypt and their divine son pharaoh. See Daniel J. Cameron, “Ramesses II,” in *Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016); J. Assmann, “RE רע,” in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, ed. Karel van der Toorn et al., 2nd Revised Edition (Leiden; Boston: Grand Rapids, Mich: Brill; Eerdmans, 1999).


81 Julius Caesar believed he was destined to rule and own the whole earth for he dreamt this one night after visiting the statue of Alexander the Great. For the dream of world domination see chapter 8 of Suetonius and for title of Julius Caesar see chapter 1 of C. Suetonius Tranquillus, “Julius Caesar,” in *Suetonius: The Lives of the Twelve Caesars; An English Translation*, ed. Alexander Thomson, Perseus Classics Collection (Medford, MA: Gebbie & Co., 1889).

he forced his subjects to refer to him as “lord” and “god” while also using the title of himself.\(^{83}\) Many of the Caesar’s believed, or were proclaimed by their subjects, that they were gods incarnate and destined to own and rule the world. The empire of Caesar was quite clearly, in the minds and eyes of first century people, the proprietor of the world.

This apocalyptic prophecy we have is the Creator God’s word to his world (1:1-3). This word is both from and about Messiah Jesus. Jesus, the Cosmic Emperor contra Caesar, is both the source and the subject. As the ruler and owner of the creation only he can command and lead the churches and their spiritual counterparts, the seven-stars in Jesus’ hand are the seven angels of the churches (1:20). From the beginning the collision is set between the EOG and his Messiah and Rome, Caesar, and RCR.

In civil religion, a special status of divine ordination and exclusivity exists placing the civic religious system as unique and special within the family of nations. It is as if the respective political, economic, social, and militaristic systems own, rule, and run daily operations of everything between “heaven and hades.” John the Revelator proclaims a different story. The world belongs to the Triune Creator God who has the final word to his world.\(^{84}\)

\textit{Revelation 2-3: Cultural Participation is Dangerous}

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\(^{83}\) In the Greek of Dio Cassius’ the title for “lord” is \textit{despotes} not \textit{kyrios} however it still carries the same meaning of “lord or master” and was often used for divinities. In the epic \textit{Thebaid} the Roman poet Statius, funded by his patron Domitian, writes an epic in which the god Jupiter (Domitian) supplants Apollo as the chief deity of the early empire. This epic was meant to elevate Domitian (the embodiment of Jupiter) over Augustus (the embodiment of Apollo). Dio Cassius, \textit{Roman History}, 67.4.3-5, 7 and 67.13.4; C. Suetonius Tranquillus, “Domitian,” in \textit{Suetonius: The Lives of the Twelve Caesars; An English Translation}, ed. Alexander Thomson, Perseus Classics Collection (Medford, MA: Gebbie & Co., 1889), chap. 13; Carter, \textit{What Does Revelation Reveal?}, 55; Patrick Ryan Yaggy, “Augustus and Domitian: Political Allusions in Statius’ Thebaid” (Masters Thesis, Athens, GA, University of Georgia, 2009).

\(^{84}\) Carter, \textit{What Does Revelation Reveal?}, chap. 1.
The second section of the Apocalypse reveals that uncritical participation in the prevailing culture is dangerous for the Jesus-follower. These sermons are all specific and general in nature. There are aspects of each sermon meant for the individual community and other parts meant for all EOG communities. The central issue of all the sermons, and thus the rest of the book, is how Jesus-followers live, work, and participate in their local context within the Roman Empire.

What the Seven Share. Each sermon shares nine aspects of format in common. Each sermon is addressed “to the angel” of the community and “the church” itself. There is a command “to write the words” of Jesus. Then follows one of the “descriptors of Jesus” found in Revelation 1, with no descriptor repeating. Then Jesus tells each EOG community “I know” followed by some unique address to the local community. This structure forms the beginning of the sermon.

The middle portion is some combination of rebuke, call to repentance, commendation, exhortation, or blaming for bad behavior. The sermons to the communities vary most in the body of their content.

Each sermon closes in similar ways. Every community is told to “listen” to the words of Jesus. Then every sermon tells the benefit to those who “conquer” which is the “promise of life” from Jesus, the crucified and living one. Though nuances exist in how these aspects are presented, this format is common across the seven sermons.

85 These addresses are better described as “sermons” or “prophecies” than letters. McKnight and Matchett, Revelation for the Rest of Us, 4.

86 Carter, What Does Revelation Reveal?, 27–29. See especially Carter’s chart on page 29 for a full listing, by verse and community, the different and similar aspects of these seven sermons.
Revelation, the whole Apocalypse, was written to these seven communities and is meant for all EOG communities everywhere. As Fee notes, all EOG communities elsewhere that read or hear these sermons “end up reading everyone else’s mail” as every sermon closes with “what the Spirit says to the churches.” These sermons are for all EOG communities everywhere and throughout all time.

Smyrna and Philadelphia are the only churches that do not receive any rebuke, threat of discipline, or call to repentance from Jesus. Laodicea is the only church that does not receive any exhortation. To these churches we now turn.

_Smyrna (2:8-11)._ To Smyrna Jesus presents himself as “the first and the last, who was dead and came to life” (2:8; 1:17-18). This is the Jesus who embraces all time and has overcome death weaponized by Rome. This Jesus that the believers in Smyrna follow recognizes their material poverty and affliction. The Roman empire was heavily characterized by extreme poverty with 97-98% of the population living impoverished. The affliction of the Smyrna Jesus-followers seems to have come from the Jewish synagogue located in the city. This conflict is important because the Smyrna believers are not giving into the pressure.

The Jews in Smyrna may have been participating in the Roman cults and civic religious practices. Jesus seems to praise the Smyrna community for resisting Roman ways

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of cultural accommodation. This could have brought hardship in two ways from the local synagogue: one for claiming the crucified Jesus was the Jewish Messiah and bad citizenship of Rome through lack of participation in liturgies. Without thinking, one could easily participate in RCR practices. It seems, from Jesus’ language, that the Jews in Smyrna have porous boundaries with culture.\(^{89}\)

John relays positivity about how the Jesus-followers in Smyrna have distanced themselves from the Roman civic, social, and religious structures. By joining with him in suffering endurance, the Jesus-followers of Smyrna will also join him in his vindication as victors over the “second death.”\(^{90}\)

*Philadephia (3:7-13).* This church joins with Smyrna in two ways: commendation without rebuke and a reference to conflict with a synagogue. Jesus does refer to himself as the one holding “the key of David” evoking Isaiah 22:22. With this reference Jesus is the one who is the heir of David’s everlasting empire from 2 Samuel 7 (see Rev. 3:7). Jesus opens a door for the followers in Philadelphia to bear witness and join Jesus on his mission despite their powerlessness.

Once again, the reference to “the synagogue of Satan” seems unfortunate on the surface. Jews had a strict law and accommodating the Roman culture degrades one’s Jewish-ness. This synagogue has colluded with RCR in some ways and the devil runs the

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\(^{89}\) Since Revelation, as we will see later, shows that the Roman empire was in the control of the satan then those who uncritically accommodate Rome are in collusion with the satan. Hence the title “synagogue of Satan.” This cannot be seen as a fact; it is how John wrote what he saw and what he is writing is purposely meant to shock us out of passivity. Smyrna also had a temple to the emperor cult. Carter, *What Does Revelation Reveal?*, 32–33; Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation*, locs. 809–819.

world, as is later revealed. Therefore, collusion with human empire is collusion with the satan. These Jews who have brought hardship upon the Jesus-followers of Philadelphia will be brought low, bowing at the feet of the Jesus-followers learning that the Messiah loves those who “hold fast” to his name and not Rome. Remember, clinging to Jesus and conquering means resisting what is evil in culture even unto physical death, not accommodating culture (see 3:9-11).91

Laodicea (3:14-21). Rather than receiving a mixture of praise and rebuke, Laodicea only receives rebuke. We should consider carefully what those in Laodicea have done to garner this response from the Risen Jesus who presents himself as the “Amen,” the “faithful and true witness” to God’s mighty acts and purposes in history. Their posture toward Jesus and the culture is neither hot or cold, just room temperature or “lukewarm.”92 The risen Jesus is ready to dispel Laodicean church from his presence.

Laodicea’s self-declaration of wealth and prosperity most likely comes from their collusion with the Roman economic system suggesting heavy participation in the RCR. Yet from the Risen Jesus’ view this affluence gained through cultural accommodation has made them “wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.” Assimilation to Rome breaks down the Christian, dehumanizing them through civic, social, and economic subjugation.

91 If the Christians in Philadelphia “hold fast” to King Jesus, they will “conquer”. Notice for the faithful followers of Jesus in Smyrna and Philadelphia no rapture theology exists. Jesus will remain with them through the hardship and difficulties, not allow them to escape this suffering of this world. They will be a mainstay in the presence of the Creator God with a new name, the very name of Jesus as their own, and permanent residence in the renewed and holy City of God (Rev. 3:12-13). Carter, What Does Revelation Reveal?, 44–46.

92 Laodicea was located around limestone cliffs where their water flowed for consumption. This maybe a local reference to the tepid and bitter water coming from those limestone cliffs. Gorman, Reading Revelation Responsibly, 133; Carter, What Does Revelation Reveal?, 47.
The only way to the richness of Jesus, as Smyrna is declared rich, is through repentance and clinging to the Risen Messiah.

This sermon of rebuke and accusation closes with hope. The Alpha and Omega stands at the door knocking to be let in so they can share in life with the Living One. In contrast to eating food offered to idols and accommodating Roman culture and gods, Laodicean Christians are offered to participate with the King of all Creation and be included in God’s purposes. Not only will they share in life and table with the Crucified and Living one, but those who resist cultural accommodation and turn from the evils of Rome will conquer with Messiah Jesus and share his throne.93

Jezebel, Nicolaitans, and Balaamites. It seems that part of the impetus for writing this vision came from a few groups of Christians who had differing views of cultural accommodation. In Jesus’ address to the communities in Ephesus and Pergamum, he mentions the “Nicolaitans” (2:6, 14-15).94 In Pergamum another group enters the scene connected to the Nicolatians, the Balaamites.95 In Thyatira (2:18-28) a prophetess name “Jezebel” is encouraging the same cultural accommodations.96 These groups, in


94 In Ephesus the question concerns discipleship and how involved a Jesus-follower should be in their civic structures. This may rise from the mention of “false apostles” earlier teaching and leading Jesus-followers to a compromised relationships with Rome’s civil institutions and social practices (Rev. 2:2). Mounce, The Book of Revelation, 71; Resseguie, The Revelation of John, 86; Koester, Revelation, 261–64.

95 The “teachings of Balaam” probably refers to the extra-biblical Balaam traditions linking Balaam and the post-blessing scene in Numbers 25 concerning the idolatry and sexual misconduct called “the affair of Peor” in Num. 31:16. 1 Kgs 16:31; 18:4, 13; 19:1-3; 21:23-26 and 2 Kgs 9:22, 30-37. I also do not believe we have a real human named “Balaam” leading the Balaamite group. Jesus is drawing John into the Old Testament narrative uniting the church with Israel in their struggles. This is re-enactment of motifs and themes drawing the fledgling churches into the story of Jesus and God. See Josephus, The Works of Josephus, 111.

96 Seeing as this name “Jezebel” occurs in the Kings narrative as the arch enemy of the great prophet Elijah who led the northern ten tribes astray by seducing the king of Israel, Ahab, into idolatry, I do
Pergamum, Thyatira, and Ephesus, are linked with food offered to idols and “fornication.” Throughout the rest of John’s Apocalypse, to “commit fornication” is a condemnation of the evils of Roman culture and imperial behavior (17:2 and 18:3, 9). Uncritical participation in Roman culture was on analogy to marital infidelity.97

It seems that these groups are those pseudo-Christians who “are participating too much in their urban civic context and compromise their commitment to Christ.”98 A debate has arisen in the early days of the EOG communities of how much civic-social practice is too much and Jesus disagrees with their accommodating stance. John records that the way of these false apostolic groups is active idolatry. These false apostles and prophets threaten the churches witness by collusion with the Roman way of life.99

Why would these pseudo-Christian groups preach cultural accommodation? Most people in the Roman empire were poor and suffering. Resistance to the power of Rome would quickly bring ostracization, discrimination, and even persecution. In these chapters the only martyr other than Jesus is mentioned, Antipas (2:13) so the communities were already feeling real pressure to participate in Rome’s cultural liturgies. Maybe they were working along the same theological lines Paul was in 1 Corinthians 8 believing that

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98 The only perceived economic safety was with the Roman elite. As a militaristic empire, Rome would quickly and violently crush any group that showed signs of rebellion. Carter, The Roman Empire and the New Testament, 4–5, 101–18.

“no idol in the world really exists.” Perhaps these groups believed God was using Rome as part of his purposes as he had done in the past. 100

John presents a very stark perspective of cultural accommodation, and it seems all negative. Smith’s Cultural Liturgies project helps us here. The “public sphere” is not neutral the secular world always remains a spiritually “contested space.” 101 Simply “going through the motions” fundamentally changes a person as Smith points out in his project. Cultural liturgies carry within them a whole cosmos, a worldview, an anthropology, a theology, an ethic, and a “social imaginary” that directs whole people groups toward a certain version of the “good life.” 102 Therefore, cultural accommodation is very dangerous if one engages in the public liturgies uncritically.

Revelation offers a new way to imagine the world and therefore live within the world. These churches located in first century Roman cities were cities ‘within’ cities. They were outposts of the EOG located in the Roman empire. 103 Jesus does not institute

100 Since the issue of accommodation exists in Corinth and is addressed by Paul in that way, there is reason to believe there could be a similar approach elsewhere separate from Paul’s work. The connection between Paul and Ephesus must remain in the margins here. See Mounce, The Book of Revelation, 86; Koester, Revelation, 263. Other examples in the Hebrew scriptures tell of God’s people rising to power in other empires, why not these Jesus-followers now in Rome? Think of Joseph in Egypt (Gen. 37-50), Jeremiah encouraged exiles in Babylon to make Babylon their home through integrating in the city (Jer. 29:5-7), and Daniel along with his friends under Babylonian rule rise to great prestige (Dan. 1-7). See also God using Assyria, Babylon, and Persia in Isa. 10:5-11; Jer. 25:1-11; and Isa. 44:28 and 45:1. Also this was the route Josephus takes in his Wars of the Jews, 2.390 and 5.367-68, 378 in Josephus, The Works of Josephus, 623, 715-16.

101 “The ‘secular’ society is not a neutral area into which we can project the Christian message. It is an area already occupied by other gods. We have a battle on our hands. We are dealing with principalities and powers.” Newbigin, Word in Season, 150 quoted in Goheen, The Church and Its Vocation, 84. See also pages 170-80 for a fuller conversation. Smith, Awaiting the King, 13-15, 33-52, and 135–50.

102 “There’s no “city limit” sign to the earthly city precisely because the earthly city is less a place and more a way of life, a constellation of loves and longing and beliefs bundled up in communal rhythms, routines, and rituals.” Ibid., 19.

103 This is not a call for partisan politics but Empire of God politics. This project holds as a central belief that the state is religious, and the church is political and vice versa; the failure to see this is fatal
a wholesale dismissal of all human culture for human culture is a creational good. Jesus wanted the communities to discern these cultural liturgies with a fresh and “holy imagination” to perceive the world from the perspective of the Crucified and Living One. Once we see the dangers of cultural liturgies and assimilation, then we can properly resist and defy them.

Revelation 4-5: Revealing True Worship

The previous section leaves an obvious question unanswered: why is uncritical cultural participation so dangerous? The remainder of John’s Apocalypse details the answer to this question. Chapters four to five give the primary answer, namely, that uncritical cultural participation draws the worship of Jesus-followers away from where worship truly belongs; toward the “One seated upon the throne” and to “the Lamb.” Cultural participation is involvement in the civil religious secular liturgies, which is worship. John desires to reveal true worship, what he saw in the cosmic throne room, “to disqualify for Christian discipleship. Their theology was deeply political and so to ours must become if we are to understand the dangers of cultural accommodation today. Hauerwas and Willimon, Resident Aliens, passim. Herein enters suffering, for when we properly embrace the King and resist the culture we will be hated as culture hated our Ascended and Reigning King (John 15:18-25). The communities in Rev. 2-3 who received praise did so because “suffering is integral to the vocational witness of the church” just as suffering was central to Jesus as the True and Faithful Witness. Goheen, The Church and Its Vocation, 84; Smith, Awaiting the King, 16.

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104 Gen. 1:26-28 is the cultural mandate from God to humanity to take the raw elements of creation and arrange them in a life-giving way. The very elements of the sacraments are a resounding “yes” to human culture making. See Smith’s brilliant meditation on culture making in Smith, Desiring the Kingdom, 197–203. For a cross cultural examination of the Eucharist see Senn, Embodied Liturgy, 119–48.

105 Matt. 10:16. Notice how Jesus speaks in this verse, he is sending his followers out into the public square as sheep among wolves. Jesus in his earthly ministry knew the “public square” was not neutral but a battleground of spiritual conflict. For New Testament examples of resisting empire see Carter, The Roman Empire and the New Testament, 120–37.
participation in all other worship activity.” These chapters form the center of gravity for the whole book.  

*The One Seated Upon the Throne.* Revelation 1 clearly revealed that the Triune God rules, as sole regent, over the world and everything within and is therefore the only correct recipient of praise. Revelation 4 and 5 forms the theological center of the Apocalypse.  

The crucial point to understanding this scene requires us modern readers to suspend our disbelief and see the world through a thoroughly ancient near-eastern (ANE) lens. Nearly all ANE peoples understood the world to have two overlapping and interlocking realms or dimensions of reality: the visible and invisible over which a “god of gods” ruled. Recall from the discussion above that for the ancient Jew and early Christian, YHWH was the Highest God, there was none like him in all the cosmos. This scene in Revelation 4-6 has heavy connections to OT Divine council scenes (Isa. 6; Ezra 1 and 10; Dan. 7; 1 Kgs 22). John is drawn into God’s heavenly throne room from whence he rules and runs the universe as its divine and rightful cosmic Emperor.  

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106 As stated in the introduction, worship aims our love, desires, and being in the world toward a telos. Carter, *What Does Revelation Reveal?*, 52. “Those who worship on earth echo the true worship in heaven; therefore, readers have incentive to continue worshiping God, despite social pressures to compromise.” Koester, *Revelation*, 367.


This is the object of worship, the Creator seated on the throne as the center of divine liturgy and ruling supreme over his creation. Creatures and humans gather to worship perpetually the Creator above all things. In the Roman empire, when the emperor was present, client kings would show their submission by throwing their crowns before Caesar. It was commonplace for Romans to refer to their emperor as “our lord and god.” Rome was an “empire without end.” Yet the divine council remarks otherwise and this is revealed to John. “Only one is worthy to be so identified and only one is to be worshiped as creator. All other worship is illegitimate and invalid. Believers should not participate in it.”

Worship of the Lamb. After the description of the throne and divine council the One Seated on the Throne holds a scroll in his right hand with writing all over it and

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110 The twenty-four elders appear often in the Apoc.: Rev. 4:4, 10; 5:5-11; 7:13; 11:16; 19:4. The identity of these twenty-four elders does not seem to concern John and should not occupy too much of our time here. I settle on these elders as glorified humans symbolizing all those throughout time and space who are marked by loyal love and ultimate allegiance to YHWH himself. For the glorification of human beings and their presence in YHWH’s council see Heiser, Unseen Realm, 355; Peterson, Reversed Thunder, 61; Gorman, Reading Revelation Responsibly, 145; Fee, Revelation, 69–70. This is a debate among some scholars, though Koester lands on the interpretation of 12+12=24 as God’s people, see Koester, Revelation, 360–61. Oikoumenios believes them to be a combination of OT patriarchs, kings, and prophets combined with the martyrs mentioned in the NT. Oikoumenios, Commentary on the Apocalypse, 55–56. The four living creatures call back to Old Testament visions uniting John’s work with the prophets of old, Isa. 6 and Ezr 1. The word “like”, used throughout Rev. 4, is repeated for each creature signaling to us this is symbolic, not literal, speech. These creatures represent all the created order, except the sea. They are divine throne guardians. Lion and ox represent wild and domestic animals respectively. The human faced one symbolizes all of humanity while the eagle represents the creatures of the air. Peterson, Reversed Thunder, 62; Fee, Revelation, 72–73; Koester, Revelation, 363–64; Mounce, The Book of Revelation, 125.


sealed. Yet when John looks, he does not see a lion in the middle of the lampstands and before the throne in the middle of the creatures and elders. No, he sees a “Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered.” This description of the Lamb carries heavy OT currency (Gen. 49:9-10; 2 Sam. 7; Pss. 72:1-11; 89:1-4). One expects powerful rule in the vein of Caesar and yet sees vulnerable suffering. “The lion is a lamb. The Lamb appears to have been slaughtered but is alive. Power is vulnerability.”

Jesus suffered the violence of Rome through his crucifixion without returning violence. This “slain Lamb” stands over Rome and is the only one worthy to enact God’s story and finish what the scroll tells.

Through his suffering death he has claimed those loyal to him from across the Roman world. Rome thought their empire was vast and included all “tribes, languages, peoples, and nations” yet does not, for that is the EOG. The Kingdom and priest language calls back to the “priestly kingdom and a holy nation” of Exodus 19:6. We have already seen the language used in relation to the communities (Rev. 1:6). This language also gives a future hope of a final establishment of God’s people, redeemed by the Lamb, who reign with God in his everlasting and cosmic Empire (20:4-6). The dual scene of Revelation 4-5 shows that God alone is the one seated on the throne and is worthy of praise.

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The Old Testament has a tradition of lambs used for sacrifice yet that is not the primary use in Revelation. For the Lamb in the liberation of people from Egypt see Exod. 12. For the daily sacrifice of lambs in the temple see Exod. 29:38-42. For the suffering servant who is the victim of human violence on behalf of the people see Isa. 53:4-12. The word “slaughtered” or “slain” does not relate to sacrifice but a violent death. Rev. 6:4; 13:3; 18:24. Carter, What Does Revelation Reveal?, 56–57. Emphasis added.


“God has always been about forming a people to carry out God’s purposes.” Carter, What Does Revelation Reveal?, 58.
The Lamb is worthy, because of his death, to receive worship and honor equal to the One Seated on the throne.¹¹⁶

*Connection with the Imperial Court.* This scene shows true worship and exposes the sham that RCR presents for Jesus-followers. It also reveals the central question and claim of the whole Apocalypse: who rules the world, Caesar, or the Triune God? The answer is uniquely the Triune God. The divine court has, as a twisted and inverted mirror image, the Roman imperial court. Carter notes that “there are some striking similarities between this vision of exclusive worship for God, and the ways in which Roman emperors were honored, whether in Rome or in traveling throughout the empire.”¹¹⁷ This message “opposes imperial ways” even though resembling imperial types. John is trying to persuade the Jesus-following communities to worship the One on the throne and the Lamb only. Uncritical cultural participation is dangerous because it draws our worship from the Creator and the Lamb through civil religious liturgies.¹¹⁸

*Revelation 6-11 and 15-18: The Time for Discipline and Repentance is Now, Rome is Ending*

Revelation reveals that uncritical cultural accommodation is dangerous because it steals worship from the Creator and Living God who alone rules the world. The three times seven disciplines reveal other reasons why uncritical cultural accommodation is

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¹¹⁶ Kraybill rightly marks the Lamb as the sovereign of all history in the Rev. 5 scene. See J. Nelson Kraybill, *Apocalypse and Allegiance*, 97–107.


¹¹⁸ At the center of YHWH’s court is a Lion who is a Lamb that stands even though it was slain by Rome. Kraybill offers brilliant exposition of the cultural parallels with the cosmic and Roman council rooms. J. Nelson Kraybill, *Apocalypse and Allegiance*, 82–96; Witherington, *Revelation*, 113–15.
dangerous. First, regarding the seals, because the One on the throne and the Lamb are currently disciplining\textsuperscript{119} the world (6-8:5). Second, regarding the trumpets, the discipline of the One seated upon the throne is giving the people of the world a chance to repent (8:6-11).\textsuperscript{120} Lastly, regarding the bowls, the final septet of disciplines reveals that the time for Rome’s rule is over (15-18). Uncritical accommodation of cultural liturgies joins Jesus-followers to the society that is actively receiving discipline. The implication here reveals that if YHWH triumphed over Pharaoh so too will the One upon the throne overcome Caesar.\textsuperscript{121} John wants these churches to distance themselves and avoid falling under divine discipline. Key to this discussion of the triple septet of discipline is the connection with the Exodus from Egypt.\textsuperscript{122}

\textit{Revelation 6-8:5: Seven Seals.}

These chapters contain the first of three septets of judgement in Revelation. The seven seals reveal that God is active in the natural consequences of human empire. Make no mistake, the Lamb is actively opening these seals so there is no one else who has the

\textsuperscript{119} McKnight and Matchett helpfully refer to and describe the “judgements” of Revelation as God’s discipline. This phrasing captures the love of God and God’s ownership over the world while still maintaining the severity of the actions. McKnight and Matchett, \textit{Revelation for the Rest of Us}, chap. 13.

\textsuperscript{120} Witherington, \textit{Revelation}, 147–48; Schüssler Fiorenza, \textit{Revelation}, loc. 1124.

\textsuperscript{121} “This imperial world in which they are active participants and to which they are overaccommodated is not as God wants it to be.” Carter, \textit{What Does Revelation Reveal?}, 61.

\textsuperscript{122} Plagues one and seven through nine show significant similarities with five of the trumpets. Rev. 16:9, 11, 21 gives hint that these disciplines are meant for repentance like the plagues of Egypt. The people suffering the discipline curse God instead of repent. Carter, 75–76 and 97–102; Witherington, \textit{Revelation}, 206–9; Schüssler Fiorenza, \textit{Revelation}, locs. 872–1124 and 1436–1613.
authority to issue these disciplines. However, all human empires, like Rome, are responsible for their actions and reap the corresponding consequences.123

The Four Cavaliers (6:1-8). In rapid succession, four horsemen come galloping across the landscape. White is the color of victory and this horse, called forth by the creatures, is the conquering horse. Rome had declared to usher in the pax Romana through its conquest. Yet their civil system only meant pax for the top few percent of the population. Roman conquest culture is being disciplined.124 With Roman conquest comes violence, bloodshed, and war, the red horse. Rome was a militaristic empire that quickly and regularly reverted to warfare instead of peaceful diplomacy to solve issues

123 “This imperial world in which they are active participants and to which they are overaccommodated is not as God wants it to be.” Carter, What Does Revelation Reveal?, 61. Carter seems erroneously to soften the source of judgement in Revelation as if God is not judging, only allowing consequences to take their due course in history. Though I agree God regularly disciplines and judges through “turning over to sinful desires” (Rom. 1:24), that still involves an active and deliberate choice by God. Fiorenza makes a helpful nuance saying the Lamb sets these in motion however they are not willed or decreed by God. Witherington adds, “These judgements happen because of Christ’s action of taking the scroll and unsealing the seals. He is then in some sense sovereign over them and responsible for them. . . . we are talking about divine judgment on sin, which unfortunately also involves judgment on sinners. Justice, not personal vengeance, is at issue as is the vindication of those who have given their life for Christ. Though the Lamb is merciful, he must also be just.” Witherington, Revelation, 132; Schüssler Fiorenza, Revelation, locs. 968–974.

124 This interpretation is not universal or clear. Peterson makes a compelling argument for this white horse being Jesus himself, the first on the field of battle. Peterson, Reversed Thunder, 74–76. To Peterson’s credit, the only other white horse in Revelation is the Lamb in chapter nineteen, yet the weaponry, outcome, and symbology of these white conquerors do not match. Though compelling, the white horse cannot be the same as Rev. 19 for all four of these riders work together. This may function as a subtle yet cutting afront to Roman power. Parthia, to the east, represented the only people to not only resist Roman imperial rule but defeat them on three occasions. The Parthians used white horses and the bow as the symbols of their kingdom. Rome feared the eastern horsemen, an enemy their arrogance created, would shatter the pax set up by Augustus. Witherington, Revelation, 133; Schüssler Fiorenza, Revelation, locs. 959–968; Resseguie, The Revelation of John, 127; Carter, What Does Revelation Reveal?, 63; Mounce, The Book of Revelation, 141–42; Koester, Revelation, 393–95; Bauckham, The Climax of Prophecy, 179; Fee, Revelation, 93; Plutarch, “Crassus,” in Plutarch’s Lives, ed. Bernadotte Perrin, Perseus Classics Collection (Medford, MA: Harvard University Press, 1916), 24.5-25.5.
and secure their own gains. The slain and living Lamb is disciplining and clearing this false \textit{pax} so the true \textit{shalom} of God’s Empire can reign.\textsuperscript{125}

The third horse is famine and food shortage. Rome’s economy was built on siphoning large quantities of food stuffs from the far-flung regions of the empire to the wealthy portions. This led to food shortages causing most Roman subjects to “implode[s] under the inequities of this destructive system.”\textsuperscript{126} This is the active and present discipline of the Lamb upon human empire its economic inequalities and civil liturgies.\textsuperscript{127}

The pale green horse emerges next and brings sickness and pestilence to the empire.\textsuperscript{128} The Lamb is actively disciplining the empire by calling forth the natural

\textsuperscript{125} The \textit{Pax Romana} was a false peace that supported the civic structures and liturgies where the top two or three percent of the population received most of the wealth and resources through domination. The RCR structures enforced this false peace through cultic observance of the Roman way of life tied to the temples and imperial worship. One cannot ‘pursue’ peace. God’s \textit{shalom} comes through the pursuit of justice. Here God is bringing justice and \textit{shalom} ensues. Carter, \textit{What Does Revelation Reveal?}, 64; Carter, \textit{The Roman Empire and the New Testament}, 4–10; Resseguie, \textit{The Revelation of John}, 127–28; J. Nelson Kraybill, \textit{Apocalypse and Allegiance}, 102; Fredrick W. Shipley, “Res Gestae Divi Augusti,” 12; Strabo, \textit{The Geography of Strabo. Literally Translated, with Notes, in Three Volumes.}, ed. H. C. Hamilton, Perseus Digital Library (Medford, MA: George Bell & Sons, 1903), 6.4.1-2; Mounce, \textit{The Book of Revelation}, 143; Koester, \textit{Revelation}, 395–96.

\textsuperscript{126} Carter, \textit{What Does Revelation Reveal?}, 64–65.

\textsuperscript{127} Carter, \textit{The Roman Empire and the New Testament}, chap. 7. Both Mounce and Ressegue argue that the comment about oil and wine in vs. 6 are God’s limits on the famine and shortage and hence his mercy at this point, only a quarter of the population dies. Later in the narrative one-third and then all living things perish. Mounce, \textit{The Book of Revelation}, 144; Resseguie, \textit{The Revelation of John}, 128–29. Peterson points out that the measurements and prices here show that daily rations for poor people are sold at inflated prices (a quart of wheat for a day’s wage) while the fine luxuries of the “rich and famous” (oil and wine) abound. This point does not fully hit the mark as the poor had access to oil and wine. What the point of this price gouging is these are the logical result of conquest, violence, and economic exploitation. Peterson, \textit{Reversed Thunder}, 78; J. Nelson Kraybill, \textit{Apocalypse and Allegiance}, 102–3; Bauckham, \textit{The Climax of Prophecy}, 362–63; Herodotus, \textit{Herodotus, with an English Translation}, trans. A. D. Godley, Perseus Classics Collection (Medford, MA: Harvard University Press, 1920), 7.187.2; Diogenes Laertius, \textit{Lives of Eminent Philosophers}, ed. R. D. Hicks, Perseus Classics Collection (Kansas City, MO: Harvard University Press, 2005), 8.18; Koester, \textit{Revelation}, 396–97.

consequences of conquest, violence, and famine which culminate in pandemic. These
two cavaliers represent the disciplines the Lamb is working upon the human systems.
These horsemen would, no doubt, run across the imagination of John’s churches imploring them to separate from RCR.

_Saints under the Alter (6:9-11)._ The opening of the fifth seal switches from the cavaliers churning across the earth to heaven. This seal shows John the slain saints under the altar in the throne room who had been killed because of their allegiance to God and the Lamb. They are told to wait until the witness of Jesus-followers on earth reaches its fullness. These saints, like Jesus, were slain for not imbibing in the civic liturgies of Rome and declaring another Empire than Caesars.

_Cosmic Destruction (6:12-17)._ As the four horsemen trample a quarter of the earth under foot, the martyred saints under the altar in God’s throne room cry out for justice. Then the penultimate end comes, creation is undone and all the people of the earth, those presumably who ignorantly and willingly accommodate RCR and persecute the

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129 The translation of _plerotōs_ in 6:11 leads to some disagreement among translators. I agree with Koester that this word refers not to a number but the completion or fulfillment of a mission or task, in this case “to witness.” God is not sitting by waiting for a certain number of Jesus-followers to be killed for resisting the civil liturgies, that would be sinister. Rather, God awaits the fulfillment of the global mission of Matt. 28 to make disciples of all nations. Bauckham helpfully notes, “It is not just that there is an arbitrarily decreed quota of martyrs to be completed. It is so that the witness of the martyrs may play a key role in God’s purpose of establishing his universal kingdom.” See Koester, _Revelation_, 400–401; Louw and Nida, _Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament_, 160; Bauckham, _The Climax of Prophecy_, 48–56.

130 It seems that the resistance of Roman civil liturgies, unto death, is part and parcel of how the One seated on the throne brings about the discipline and destruction of evil. This reading stands in stark contrast to a so-called “rapture theology” as the saints are not snatched out of the world to avoid a tribulation. Rather, they endure, and their lives are brought to an end by tribulation before they are made safe in God’s presence. Like the Lamb, their martyrdom works toward the victory over evil. Their resistance of cultural accommodation is triumph, while the Lamb’s death is redemption. Carter, _What Does Revelation Reveal?_, 65–67; Fee, _Revelation_, 96–98; Mounce, _The Book of Revelation_, 146–49; Witherington, _Revelation_, 135; Resseguie, _The Revelation of John_, 129–31; Schüssler Fiorenza, _Revelation_, locs. 975–991; Bauckham, _The Theology of the Book of Revelation_, 79.
saints who resist civil liturgies, tremble in fear realizing the “wrath of the Lamb” whose followers they had slain.\textsuperscript{131}

\textit{An Interlude (7:1-17).} A break comes before the seventh seal of discipline that answers the question asked by “the peoples of the earth” in the sixth seal; “who can stand?”\textsuperscript{132} This interlude shows a multitude, first of 144,000 and then of countless scores who can stand.\textsuperscript{133} God does not just wantonly wipe creation clean and install his Empire. No, he pauses and draws our attention to the “already, not fully”\textsuperscript{134} reality of the intermediate age. During conquest, violence, famine, pestilence, martyrdom, and the unravelling of creation, God seals those who worship him in allegiance through the disaster.\textsuperscript{135}

\textsuperscript{131} This undoing of creation resembles many other apocalyptic images in the Bible and second temple literature. Isa. 13:9–11; 24:11–23; Joel 2:30–31; Nah. 1:5; Jer. 4:24; Zep. 1:14-18; Mark 13:24-26; 2 Bar. 32:1; 1 En. 91:7; T. Mos. 10:4–5. Mounce, \textit{The Book of Revelation}, 150–51. Also the seven groups of people, ranging from powerful to poor, denotes that all humanity will be subject to God’s discipline upon the world. Notice, however, no humans are harmed though they beg to be crushed so to escape the discipline. See Hos. 10:8; Luke 23:30 and Resseguie, \textit{The Revelation of John}, 133; Mounce, \textit{The Book of Revelation}, 152.

\textsuperscript{132} The question that dominates the fifth seal, from the lips of the martyred saints, is “how long o’ Sovereign Lord?” while the question of the sixth seal, from the lips of those who martyred the saints, is “who can stand?” The rupturing of the earth and degradation of the celestial bodies show that the political environment has been irreparably damaged and the evil of the current age is being cleared away making way for God’s Empire of justice and true peace. Carter, \textit{What Does Revelation Reveal?}, 67–68; Fee, \textit{Revelation}, 99–103; Koester, \textit{Revelation}, 401–5.

\textsuperscript{133} The seal, or mark, is not a physical symbol placed on skin or clothing. Rather, in Revelation a seals or marks “are figurative signs made visible in peoples’ norms, values, and beliefs.” Wax seals or marks denote ownership, to whom this sealed or marked one belongs. Peterson, \textit{Reversed Thunder}, 82. An interlude is an embedded narrative meant to break the pace of these terrifying seals of discipline and draw the readers’ attention to the interlude as the most important piece of the whole sequence. Resseguie, \textit{The Revelation of John}, 135. This number is heavily symbolic as twelve indicates completeness or fulfillment and 144,000 is $12 \times 12 \times 1,000$. The point is the completeness of the multinational multitude not the number. Carter, \textit{What Does Revelation Reveal?}, 68; Gorman, \textit{Reading Revelation Responsibly}, 178.

\textsuperscript{134} Thanks to Preben Vang for this helpful and clarifying rephrasing of Christian eschatology.

Silence and Prayers (8:1-5). The final seal returns to the divine throne room. The liturgy of the Lamb’s Empire continues, now with the prayers of the sealed yet harried saints. When the Roman empire crushes those who resist their liturgies and rejoices in the smoke rising from the bodies of burning Jesus-followers, the One on the throne listens to their cries. Seeing this septet would enliven the imagination of John’s churches to alter their social imaginary toward desiring the liturgical EOG. The end is already arriving just not yet fully here.

Revelation 8:6-11: Seven Trumpets.

The seventh seal opens into the seven trumpets. This second septet cycle continues the Revelation of Jesus revealing that the discipline of the One seated upon the throne is giving the people of the world a chance to repent. This cycle intensifies from the seven seals and follows the same general schema. Six trumpets occur in rapid succession followed by an interlude then the seventh trumpet. These trumpets are not meant to scare but “to provide a wake-up call for those who are sleeping, not merely through life, but through empire.”

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Revelation 8: Ecological Disaster. Here the hail and fire that fell upon Egypt again falls upon the earth destroying one-third of the earth and trees, and all the green grass is burned. A third of the sea becomes blood while a third of sea creatures die. A third of fresh water becomes bitter causing the death of many. A third of the sun, moon, and stars are struck limiting their light by one third. Notice the intensification from the seals which destroyed a quarter of things while in the trumpets a third is destroyed. The urgency of the Lamb’s discipline increases, thus magnifying the need to participate in the liturgies of God’s Empire over the cultural liturgies of Rome. These sets of threes and thirds declare that time is running out for people to repent.

Revelation 9: Demonic Disaster. Trumpets one through four affect the earth while the final three affect earth’s inhabitants who are not sealed. Trumpets five and six show what the world is like if God were to give it over to idol worship. Demented hybrid creatures pour from the underworld and torment those upon the earth who do not have the seal of the Lamb. Drawing on both the plague of locusts from Exodus and Joel 2, John is trying to show the world the need for repentance from idolatrous cultural accommodation. This scene gives a glimpse of the power behind human rebellion; demonic

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139 See footnote above for discussion on how the celestial bodies were connected in the worldview of Rome with the well-being of the political powers of the empire. Here is an intensification of discipline upon Rome’s political and ruling class.

140 Resseguie, The Revelation of John, 143–44.

hordes and their emperor “Destruction.” It also gives hope, for God has limited the destruction and duration of this demonic disaster.

A Prophetic Task: Interlude then Trumpet Seven. A pause in the discipline takes effect between trumpet six and seven. This interlude provides reassurance that though Jesus-followers resist the cultural liturgies and receive discrimination and persecution, they will be vindicated and protected from ultimate harm by the Lamb. This interlude shows two persons, a recast of Moses and Elijah, proclaiming and forth telling the bittersweet truth of God’s Empire over the empires of the world. They are killed for their testimony by the beast from the “bottomless pit.” Yet after three-and-a-half days the breath of God resurrects them, and they are taken into heaven as an earthquake which destroys a portion of the city and kills seven thousand inhabitants.

This passage calls the churches, like these witnesses, to stand in their city defiant of the cultural idolatry and liturgies around them even in the face of tribulation. These witnesses and the churches must not measure their success, as Gorman says, “by the quantity of their converts, but by the steadfastness of their testimony.”

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142 Apollo was symbolized, at times, by the locust and known, in part, as a god who brings pestilence. Recall from above, multiple Caesars believed themselves to be descended from or incarnate of Apollo. Witherington, Revelation, 153–54; R. van den Broek, “Apollo,” in Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible, ed. Karel van der Toorn et. al. (Leiden ; Boston : Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999); M. Hutter, “Abaddon,” in Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible, ed. Karel van der Toorn et. al. (Leiden ; Boston : Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999); Aeschylus, Aeschylus, with and English Translation in Two Volumes, trans. Herbert Weir Smyth, vol. 2 (Medford, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926), ll. 1076–1089.

143 Verse twenty gives the crux of my thrust here, these trumpets are meant to encourage people to repent from cultural liturgies, yet people persist against God. Carter, What Does Revelation Reveal?, 77–79; Peterson, Reversed Thunder, 99.


145 Gorman, Reading Revelation Responsibly, 176–77.
their death and resurrection many in the city “glorify God” and worship him focusing on, according to Carter, “God's sovereign reign, or empire, that "overcomes" nations that previously did not honor God.”\textsuperscript{146} The seventh seal is more liturgical worship of God by those who swear allegiance to the Lamb. To resist, Jesus-followers like the witnesses, must stand upon the law of God (Moses) and prophesy the truth (Elijah) to the world about their ultimate allegiance, no matter the cost.\textsuperscript{147}

\textit{Revelation 15-18: Rome’s Empire is Ending}

\textit{Revelation 15-16: Seven Bowls and Plagues.} These bowl plagues affect those who have the mark of allegiance to the beast. Those who have repented of participating in civic liturgies sing praise to God claiming him to be all powerful and “King of the nations” signaling his political superiority over Rome. The plague bowls continue the discipline on Rome’s empire and cultural liturgies that draw worship from God and the Lamb. From sores on those who participate in commerce and worship, to ecological disasters affecting the sea, rivers, and sun, finally to the assembly of a great army ready for battle, these bowls are the most intense, sweeping away Rome’s wickedness.\textsuperscript{148} Continuing the revelation from chapters 12-14, spirits from the dragon deceive kings of the earth into

\textsuperscript{146} Carter, \textit{What Does Revelation Reveal?}, 82.

\textsuperscript{147} In chapter eleven John is given a measuring stick and measures out a worship space showing that the worship space is protected, though the witnessing space is contested. Peterson, \textit{Reversed Thunder}, 111–14.

\textsuperscript{148} The world either belongs to the One upon the throne or the dragon, there is no middle ground. These bowls reveal that the civil systems of dragon owned and empowered empires, like Rome, are coming to an end. The demonic spirits gather the nations for war against God and the Lamb. God uses the work of the powers of darkness for his own purposes, to coalesce the nations together in one place for judgement. See Ezra 39-39; Zec. 14; and 1 En. 56, 90. I discuss “har magedon” further below. Witherington, \textit{Revelation}, 210–11.
doing his bidding. Being ready for Jesus’ return means distancing oneself from “imperial and civic idolatry and images.”

**Revelation 17-18: The Destruction of Rome.** Here in these chapters, we come face to face with the great prostitute “Babylon.” She rides upon a scarlet beast with seven heads and ten horns, and she is clothed in royal dress and is drunk with the blood of Jesus-followers. She has seduced the kings and empires of the earth into colluding with her and the peoples of the earth have sworn allegiance to her. This woman is none other than Rome being recast as the greatest city of wickedness from the OT, Babylon. She rides upon a beast thus linking Rome to the beasts and ultimately the dragon. Notice the peoples of the world have “fornicated” with her through cultural liturgies of eating food offered to idols and honoring images.

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150 Tina Pippin represents an intelligent, however adversarial, Marxist-feminist-liberationist hermeneutic of the Apoc. Her central claim, counter to the hallmark female Revelation scholars Collins and Schussler Fiorenza, is pejorative. “The feminist reading I am doing in this book sees women as marginalized . . . and/or used as sexual objects and abused . . .” Revelation, she claims, is a “blatantly misogynist text” that turns women into “the receptacle of evil” making it “the most vividly misogynist” book in the library of the NT. Her argument rests on the violence Revelation encourages toward women. Her point is partially made through the history of the church and the artwork she discusses at the end of her book. The church has used Revelation over the last two thousand years in some poor ways pertaining to anti-Semitism and encouraging an unhealthy masculinity. However, she pushes her point too far. The Apoc. closes with a splendid bride and the entire biblical narrative exclusively refers to cities in the feminine. Revelation has no choice but to call Babylon by female terms. The symbolic and prophetic tradition that John belongs too also regularly uses sexual metaphors for idolatry (Isa. 23; Jer. 50-51; Ezra 16, and 26-28; Hos.). At no point is violence committed by the Lamb or one of his followers. Revelation, though extreme, cannot be used to encourage violence if read responsibly as I have attempted above. In short, Pippin is reading Revelation through the lens of “linguistic determinism” which presents a closed linguistic system that does not take seriously, if at all, the metanarrative of the OT. I, following Schussler Fiorenza, read the gendered language as a “conventional generic language” meant to relay meaning through symbols and images. Pippin, though helpful, seems to have fallen into the Marxist-linguistic trap. Pippin, *Death and Desire*, 53–56; Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation*, locs. 205–249; Carter, *What Does Revelation Reveal?*, 105 and 128–32; Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 18–21; Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 343–49; Witherington, *Revelation*, 219–24; McKnight and Matchett, *Revelation for the Rest of Us*, 41–44.
Chapter 18 opens with an angel declaring the fall of Babylon/Rome. This angel calls the followers of the Lamb to “Come out of her” so to not partake in her sins and thus “share in her plagues.” Those who uncritically participate in the cultural liturgies of Babylon/Rome will also suffer from the discipline she receives from God. This scene gives vivid warning that Rome and her cultural liturgies are being disciplined and destroyed. Jesus-followers in Asia are warned not to fall with Babylon, but to resist the civic religion.\(^{151}\)

**An Ironic End.** This proclaimed end to Rome’s so-called “eternal empire” surely gave Asian Jesus-followers hope, until they remembered that Rome still ruled with an iron fist. The temptation to forsake this Apocalypse and cling to Rome’s visible power would be significant. Yet, John has seen and proclaims that Rome has no future in God’s purposes.\(^{152}\) This literature is meant to create a new understanding of the “good life” and telos presented by the EOG and the Lamb. This new story is caught through imagination, not information, and is infused with liturgical worship. Only through creating a new social imaginary can the Jesus-followers in Roman controlled Asia desire the EOG and resist the failing RCR.

**Revelation 12-14: Revealing the Evil Powers**

Chapter eleven competes a full cycle, the Apocalypse could end here. The world has been sufficiently disciplined creating and clearing space for God’s Empire. The “Day

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\(^{151}\) This coming out is not a call to leave the geographic locations of Roman cities. The call is a dissociation from the corrupt values of the dragon empowered empire. Carter, *What Does Revelation Reveal?*, 103–6; Witherington, *Revelation*, 225–31; Ressenguie, *The Revelation of John*, 229.

of the Lord” has come and multitudes of people from every “language, tribe, nation, and
tongue” congregate together to participate in the liturgical EOG and the Lamb. John
breaks from the onslaught of divine discipline and reveals the powers behind the Roman
empire. John sees the most terrifying vision yet; “The Roman Empire is in the hands of
the devil.”

Revelation 12: The Dragon. The civil liturgies of Rome that lead people in wor-
ship away from God and into divine discipline are orchestrated by something other than
human wickedness. This section of the Apocalypse tells of the power behind the world’s
power: the Devil or the satan. A red dragon seeks to devour the male child born of a
pregnant woman. The child is born then immediately snatched up by God to his
throne. There ensues a war in heaven in which the dragon is defeated by Michael the
archangel and cast down to earth. He pursues the woman, who is saved, so then the great
dragon viciously harries the other children of the woman, knowing his time is short.

153 Carter, 119, 85–87. This claim is consistent with the narrative world view of Matthew, Luke,
and John (Matt. 4:8–9; Luke 4:5–7; John 8:44, 12:31–33). Remember Josephus’s claim that God had or-
dained Rome to rule the world, this view was not predominated among first century Jews.

154 The identity of the woman is of great interest and debate, though not crucial for the purposes
of this project. I take the position of the woman being a conglomeration of characters melded from across the
biblical narrative bringing powerful aspects of each into one robust and multilayered character. She is sim-
ultaneously, Eve, Israel, Mother Zion, Mary, the church or bride of the Messiah, and culminating as the
New Jerusalem. For woman as Israel (old or renewed), the church, and/or the whole Messianic community
throughout time see Resseguie, The Revelation of John, 170–71; Mounce, The Book of Revelation, 231–32;
Fee, Revelation, 164–65; Michael S. Heiser, The Old Testament in Revelation: Notes from The Naked Bible
Podcast, 208–9. For woman as Mary see Hahn, The Lamb’s Supper, 74–77; Oikoumenios, Commentary on
the Apocalypse, 107. For my view see Carter, What Does Revelation Reveal?, 88–89; J. Nelson Kraybill,
Apocalypse and Allegiance, 73. For the woman as Zion or New Jerusalem see Witherington, Revelation,
45, 167–68.

155 This story is not unique in the ancient world. The statue of Zeus at Pergamum, one of our
seven cities, depicts a struggle between the god and a wild beast. Apollo was born under the specter of Py-
thon, a great serpent. Yet Apollo was spared and returned to kill the dragon. Domitian and August both
claimed a deep affinity with Apollo and Zeus. This story must be targeted at the cultural structures and lit-
urgies built around these Greek and Roman myths. Fee, Revelation, 164; Koester, Revelation, 528;
This story calls forth multiple allusions from previous scripture. First, our imagination draws back to Eve and the serpent. Its then layered with Israel in Babylonian exile, each representing woman and dragon respectively. Most powerfully, the dominant layer calls back to the Jesus narrative, born of a woman, destroyed by evil, yet resurrected (snatched) and ascended to the throne.156

Critical to this passage is the imaginative, however real, recasting of the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus that casts the dragon to the earth to rule. No longer a resident of heaven, the dragon rules the earth for a short time and torments the people who “keep the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus.” Whoever thinks they rule the world is a client of the dragon. Whoever discriminates, persecutes, and martyrs Jesus-followers is a tool in the hands of the dragon. Yet, the slain and living Lamb reigns, even over the dragon.157

Revelation 13: Chaos Agents. As the dragon stands upon the earth, he calls forth two beasts to work with him in the quest to dominate the world through deceiving human empires. Both beasts hail from places symbolic of chaos; sea and wilderness making

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156 Gen. 3:16 and Mic. 4:9-10 respectively. For the direct quote of Ps. 2:9 see Rev. 12:5a. Imaginatively think through the phrase from Gen. 3:13-14 concerning the serpent, “on your belly you shall go . . . dust you shall eat.”

157 Artemis (Diana for the Romans) was the patron goddess of Ephesus (Acts 19). Among other symbols, she was known as a moon goddess. Rev. 12 would speak loudly to the churches in Ephesus that this woman was the queen of heaven, not Artemis. Roma was the mother of Rome and therefore the patron goddess of the empire. Many emperors saw themselves as the son born of the queen of heaven, Roma. The oldest temple of Roma stood in Smyrna. This passage claims otherwise, the woman, not Roma was the bearer of the true Emperor of all creation. The One upon the throne rules the world with the Lamb and no one else. Witherington, Revelation, 169; Schüssler Fiorenza, Revelation, locs. 466–476.
them agents of the dragon’s purposes in undoing the goodness of creation. The beast from the sea is given power and authority from the dragon’s throne. It is arrayed with multivalent symbols of power and is a parody of the slain and risen Lamb with a fatal wound yet living. All the symbols point to this beast representing the Roman emperor and his empire. Seeing as RCR centered around emperor and empire worship, the blasphemies mentioned in verses five through six indicate that this beast is surely imperial.

The second beast promotes, coerces, baits, evangelizes, and encourages the people of the earth to worship the first beast, and thus the dragon. Here I clearly see the entire RCR system. If civil religious liturgies draw our worship from God toward another kingdom and perceived telos through the desires of our hearts and habits, then this beast can be nothing other than RCR. This beast draws the worship of humans away from God and the Lamb to another one upon a throne and his empire. In other words, the second beast is civil religion.

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158 Think back to Gen. 1 and 2 where the chaos subdued by God’s word is first in the form of waters and then wasteland or wilderness. Rabbinic thought held that on day five, God created these wild things (1 En. 60:7-10; 4 Ezra 6:49-52; 2 Bar. 29:4). A helpful though tangential analogy between these beasts of Rev. 13 and the behemoth and leviathan of Job 40-41 (and 26:10; 51:9; Ps. 89:10) is insightful as well. See Michael S. Heiser, *The Old Testament in Revelation: Notes from The Naked Bible Podcast*, 221–27. The most common antecedent, however, comes from Dan. 7.

159 Much of this points to Nero, however we must not get focused in on him as the only representation. As Witherington says, “The author knows that Nero does not exhaust the meaning of the beast, but he certainly exemplifies it.” Witherington, *Revelation*, 38. Nero also died by suicide and a myth arose in Asia that he came back to life, a reincarnation of sorts, years later. Carter, *What Does Revelation Reveal?*, 90; Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, 66.19.3. One could rightly symbolize the first beast as the Roman empire itself, not just the emperor. I do not see issue with this as Caesar was the single representee of the entire empire in one man. As the father represented the family, so the father of the empire “stood in” for the empire. J. Nelson Kraybill, *Apocalypse and Allegiance*, 55–56. Think practically of how Rome or the emperor arrived in Asia or Judah, namely, via the sea on boats. This brings clarity when this beast comes from the sea.

This all brings clarity to one of the most famous passages of all scripture, Revelation 13:18 and the number “666.” Many identify Nero Caesar as the culprit of John’s famous “666” pointing to the Jewish and ancient practice of gematria.\textsuperscript{161} I do not think this is the case or as simple as many scholars argue. First, the transliteration into Hebrew is excruciating and John always tips readers off to the switching of languages.\textsuperscript{162} Second, this number, like every other number in the Apocalypse, must be taken symbolically and generically. Why would John only switch to a nongenetic use of a number here and nowhere else?\textsuperscript{163} Third, an early church father and commentator, Irenaeus, discusses this passage at length without mentioning Nero.\textsuperscript{164}

I propose\textsuperscript{165} that “666” is a generic reference to humanity arrayed against God and the Lamb infused by satanic power to become divine, or the highest god. First, six is always the number in Revelation that marks the penultimate.\textsuperscript{166} “Six” is incomplete and “it

\textsuperscript{161} “Nero” in Hebrew is also the number “666.” Also, in Greek and the Latin accounts for the textual variant of 616 in some manuscripts. Carter, 92–93; Witherington, Revelation, 176–79; Bauckham, The Climax of Prophecy, 389–96, 409, 423–34; Fee, Revelation, 186–87; Koester, Revelation, 596–606; J. Nelson Kraybill, Apocalypse and Allegiance, 62–67; Schüssler Fiorenza, Revelation, loc. 1349.

\textsuperscript{162} For instance, Rev. 9:11 and the king of the underworld “Abaddon” vs. “Apollyon” and 16:16 he signals the Hebrew of “Har magedon.”

\textsuperscript{163} In Rev. 21:17 the phrase “human measurement” parallels our wording here. It does not mean the measurement of a specific person; it has a generic meaning referring to the way humanity measures.


\textsuperscript{165} The following discussion is in conversation with Resseguie, The Revelation of John, 188–91.

\textsuperscript{166} Think of the three sets of disciplines (seals, trumpets, and bowls) where the sixth is almost the end, but not quite. Also, Gen. 1 has humanity created on the sixth, penultimate, day of creation. If, following Walton, when God rested on the seventh day means he took rule over his creation then this amplifies this argument even more. John H. Walton, Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible, Second edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic,
anticipates and approximates the complete but falls short.” Second, the number “three” in the Apocalypse represents the divine, or its parody and counterfeit. The triple “sixes” show humanity in collusion with rebellious spiritual beings striving to dethrone the Creator. 167 Third, this brings us to the number matching the name and function of this beast. If the first beast is Caesar as representee of the empire and the second beast is the civic religion, then this number is the characteristic blending of humanity using satanic power to try and usurp God and his Lamb. This mark then is not a tattoo or coinage, it is the lived example of thoughts, words, actions, and deeds of cultural participation in civil liturgies. 168 This mark is one of allegiance bought, taught, and caught through the

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167 Herein enters Irenaeus’s argument about teitan or “titan” as the culprit. The titans were the Greek mythological heroes of hybrid nature, part earthly part divine. In Hebrew cosmology they are the Nephilim, the blend of the lesser spiritual beings (sons of God) who impregnate human women which give birth to ancient warrior heroes of old. These correspond with the apkallu myth of the Babylonians and Mesopotamians who worshiped these semi-divine demi-gods which were their first kings and founders of their cities. Here, lying behind this, enters the second and third rebellion scenes of Gen. 6 and 11 being repeated and expounded upon by John’s visions. Heiser, Unseen Realm; Amar Annus, “On the Origin of Watchers: A Comparative Study of the Antediluvian Wisdom in Mesopotamian and Jewish Traditions,” Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha 19, no. 4 (June 1, 2010): 277–320.; Irenaeus of Lyons, “Against Heresies,” 5.30.3; Michael S. Heiser, The Old Testament in Revelation: Notes from The Naked Bible Podcast; J. C. Greenfield, “Apkallu,” in Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible, ed. Karel van der Toorn et. al. (Leiden ; Boston : Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999).

168 The mark on the forehead and right hand signal thoughts and actions. Resseguie, The Revelation of John, 188. Bearing this mark is also contrasted with “bearing the name” of YHWH in the Old Testament, cf. Num. 6:22-27 or the third commandment. No Israelite was branded or tattooed for that was against the law. “Bearing the name” was also not cursing, it included that but was vastly more robust. It was the call to be the “holy nation” and the “kingdom (or empire) of priests” the Torah called for (Exod. 19:6; Rev. 1:6; 5:10). This called for keeping the Torah as a “sign” or “mark” on the forehead and hand to remind them they belonged to YHWH and were loyal to him above all else (Exod. 13:9, 16; Deut. 6:8; 11:18). Carmen Joy Imes, Bearing God’s Name: Why Sinai Still Matters (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019); Carmen Joy Imes, “Bearing Yhwh’s Name at Sinai: A Re-Examination of the Name Command of the Decalogue” (Ph.D., United States -- Illinois, Wheaton College), accessed September 1, 2021. Interesting to note, Ezra 9:4 talks of marking the foreheads of those in Jerusalem who filled her with abominations, marking them for death to clearing the city for the righteous. This mark was the Hebrew letter tav which had, in that day derived from Aramaic and was in the shape of a cross or lower case “t.” Thanks to
repetitive uncritical participation in RCR. The wisdom called for is not to look and scheme for which persona in history is the individual antichrist but to live by a different set of cultural liturgies, namely, the liturgies and culture of the EOG.  

Revelation 14: Visions, Angels, and Address. This scene opens in direct contrast to the beasts of chapter 13. We see the 144,000 again who bear the mark and seal of the lamb showing their allegiance through resistance to RCR and true worship of God. Then an angel appears exhorting every “nation, tribe, language, and people” to “fear God . . . and worship” him instead of other powers. We are also introduced to Rome’s code name in the Apocalypse, Babylon, by a second angel. A third angel appears announcing discipline to anyone who uncritically participates in civil liturgies, thus worshiping the beast and dragon. Here, John breaks in directly appealing to his readers to have endurance in keeping God’s commandments and holding fast to Jesus.

Revelation 19-22: The Coming Triumph of God

Rome is coming to an end because they have not repented of their collusion with the dragon who holds power over the empire. The final revelation of the Apocalypse finishes the story of the world with the ultimate and irrevocable triumph of the One upon the throne and the Lamb and the establishment of his Empire on earth as it is in heaven, 


170 Notice the name of the Lamb and his Father written on their foreheads. Also notice the term “virgin” which most likely refers, like sex does throughout Revelation, to not worshiping other gods or idolatrous civil liturgies. Those with the mark of the beast are contrasted with those with the mark of the Lamb.
forever. When God’s good purposes for the world are finished there is no room for Rome or other human/dragon empires and all the horror they bring.

**Seven Scenes of God’s Reign.** Chapter 19 opens with another liturgical worship scene in heaven. This multitude of people from across the nations exalts God and the Lamb as the avenger of saint’s blood, true judge, and destroyer of the empire. “The Lord our God / the Almighty reigns” is the culmination of their rejoicing.\(^{171}\) Previews of the coming triumph and EOG follows in the “already, not fully” reality of Christian eschatology.

These scenes do not make a chronological or coherent system or agenda of end times. The devil is defeated twice (20:3 and 20:7-10), three scenes involve final judgement (19:17-21; 20:4-6; 20:11-15), and though all the kings of the earth are condemned they still find welcome in the renewed Jerusalem (19:17-21 and 21:24). These previews work cyclically and are overlapping pictures of God’s Empire coming in fullness, each revealing different proportions of God’s already present and coming full reign.\(^{172}\)

The first image counters the first cavalier of Revelation 6. Opposed to the violent conquering of the dragon empowered empires, this white rider conquers by the means of his own death.\(^{173}\) The sword from his mouth and his own blood on his robes bring about

\(^{171}\) These scenes are: 19:11-16 and the rider on a white horse; 19:17-21 and the defeat of the beasts and their followers; 20:1-3 and the locking up of the devil; 20:4-6 where Christ and the saints rule; 20:7-10 and the defeat of the devil; 20:11-15 and the last, ultimate discipline; 21:1-22:5 with the renewed heavens, earth, and Jerusalem. The verb “reigns” is in the present tense showing that part of this section “in chapters 19–22 is already under way but not yet established in full. There are both present and future dimensions to these scenes.” Carter, *What Does Revelation Reveal?*, 110–11.


\(^{173}\) Many scholars hold that the blood on Jesus’ robes is his own. A few hold that the blood is that of his enemies. This second position does not hold with the narrative of the rest of the Apoc. nor that of
the defeat of the beasts and followers of the beasts in picture two (19:17-21). These gathering forces of humanity arrayed against the Lamb are defeated without any battle, by the “word of God” on the “mount of assembly.”

This victory confines the devil’s bestial agents. The next picture (20:1-3) is one of the devil himself being thrown into a pit, “locked and sealed” for a “thousand years.” This allows for the following scene (20:4-6) showing the reign of the Lamb and his followers for the same symbolic time, a “thousand years.” This picture encourages Jesus-followers to continue to distance themselves from the cultural liturgies of RCR for exoneration and resurrection comes to those who participate in the liturgical Empire of the Lamb.


174 Rev. 19 calls back to the scene of Rev. 16:16 and “Har Magedon.” Many scholars and popular writers on Rev. refer to this as the “Mountain of Megiddo,” the site of many famous battles in Israel’s history (Jd 5:2; 2 Chr. 35:22-25). This mountain battle is crucial to most forms of premillennial eschatology, a stance I and this project oppose. This plain, no mountain exists at Megiddo, does not seem to fit the narrative. Meredith Kline, in a convincing article, argues that *har magedon* refers to Jerusalem or Zion and draws on the invasion found in Ezek. 38-39 (see also Isa. 14 and Ps. 48). He argues that *har magedon* is a variant of *har mo’ed* meaning the “mount of assembly.” This connects forward to Gog/Magog event found in Rev. 20:7-10. This means that we are dealing with cosmic geography where Zion is the theological “high ground” wherein whichever deity sits upon its summit carries the title of “Most High.” Kline’s interpretation makes sense as the Apoc. is a cosmic battle between the Lamb and the dragon, so it follows that if the dragon’s forces can win on “the mount of assembly” he could rule creation. This is the, in biblical theology, the divine council or throne room John has been bouncing between since chapters 4-5, the *har mo’ed*.

This settles part of the millennial debate, at least the premillennial portion thus forcing “the conclusion that the “thousand years” language in Revelation 20 is basically the present Church age. To deny this is to be forced to argue that there are two battles of Armageddon, an absurd and unbiblical conclusion given how the episode in Revelation 19 ends. The kingdom is thus now (the Church in its inaugurated form)... but also not yet. One of the “thousand years” references in Revelation 20 (v. 6) cannot speak of a pre-second coming context, and there are other reasons to look for an earthly messianic rule in real time.” Michael S. Heiser, *The Old Testament in Revelation: Notes from The Naked Bible Podcast*, 269–75; Meredith G Kline, “Har Magedon: The End of the Millennium,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39, no. 2 (June 1996): 207–22; Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation*, locs. 1456–1467.
When the fifth preview (20:7-10) appears, readers encounter a repeat with the second and ultimate defeat of the devil with a fourth reference to a final battle. Preview six (20:11-15) tells of the final judgement wherein “heaven and earth”, representing the present evil age, flee cleared from the scene by God’s discipline. The forces and places of death offer up their dead and books are opened proclaiming the names of those who have not lived according to cultural liturgies, the book of life, and those who lived a life of allegiance to the dragon empowered empires. Receiving the same destiny as the devil and his agents, death itself is thrown in the lake of fire.¹⁷⁵ The world is cleared of dragon empowered empires and all that mars God’s good and beautiful creation. The stage is set for the renewal of all things and the ultimate triumph of the One upon the throne and his Lamb.

Revelation 21:1-22:5 – A Renewed Heaven, Earth, and Jerusalem. The first six previews of God’s present and coming triumph come across the screen in a fast collage of images. Everything slows down for the seventh and final picture of God’s victory. Rome has not nor can it renew¹⁷⁶ the cosmos, only God can undo the decay caused by

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¹⁷⁵ “These powers, manifested in Rome's empire and resistant to God's purposes, are systematically destroyed and have no place in the new world created by God's life-giving purposes.” Carter, What Does Revelation Reveal?, 114–15.

¹⁷⁶ The onset of the new heavens and earth is contested. Is it “hitherto unknown” or is the old creation restored? How does it come about, through a new work or through a restoration project? Scholars are split. I am convinced, though not dogmatic, that God’s creation is ontologically good yet marred. I do not see how God would need to trash and restart the creation. Rather, I see the whole created order as being redeemed and restored never to be corrupted again. For scholars living in the ambiguity and detailing the nuances see Mounce, The Book of Revelation, 380; Resseguie, The Revelation of John, 251. For scholars with whom I agree discussing the transformation and renewal of the old creation into newness, see Bartholomew and Goheen, The Drama of Scripture; Koester, Revelation, 793–95; Nicholas Thomas Wright, Surprised by Hope, e-book (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers Inc., 2009), 151, 258; Smalley, The Revelation to John, 523–24; Oikoumenios, Commentary on the Apocalypse, 183; Carter, What Does Revelation Reveal?, 116. What all scholars I have read agree on: there is no rapture of saints into God’s space but the ultimate hope and victory of God is to merge the heaven and earth realities as he comes into our space and dwells with humanity.
human collusion with the dragon. The next key comes in God’s presence in and with his creation through the dwelling in the renewed and heavenly city of Jerusalem coming to earth. This beautiful woman, the bride of the Lamb, stands in double contrast to the prostitute of Babylon/Rome. This city is the everlasting dwelling of God with humanity that has lived according to the way of life of his liturgical Empire even while in the presence of cultural liturgies.

The next crucial moment is shown by the continual liturgical worship of those from every language, tribe, people, and nation adoring God and the Lamb. These worshipers bear the mark of allegiance to God on their foreheads showing they never received the mark of the beast through uncritical cultural participation. Opposed to the cities of Asia which were littered with temples and altars, this new heavenly city has no temple “for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.” This phrase denotes the abiding and permeating presence of the Living God on earth among his people.177

Lastly, comes the restoration of Eden. The renewed city of Jerusalem is recast as Eden brought forward. Here in this “Garden City” a river and tree of life are renewed for the healing of the nations. The so-called “eternal city” of Rome that brought supposed pax through its liturgies of violence, dominance, and exploitation has “passed away” and

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177 The temple in original Jerusalem was not primarily, at least in the narrative imagination of the Apoc., for sacrifice but for the Living Creator to dwell amid people. The building housed the glory of God on earth. Because of humanity missing the mark of “being human” through rebellion, the glory of God had to be contained by the building. Yet in the renewed Jerusalem humanity is fully restored in allegiance with the One on the throne, marked on the forehead, God’s uninhibited presence can be among the people. Fee, Revelation, 295–301; Resseguie, The Revelation of John, 256.
the renewed city of God filled with true worship and resounding with the shalom EOG has taken its place forever after.\textsuperscript{178}

**Revelation 22:6-21 – Triumphal Epilogue.** After the stunning preview of God’s final triumph, John relays Jesus’ words to his churches in Asia. The emphasis lies on the “trustworthy and true” nature of this prophecy because its origin in “the Lord, the God” (22:6). Jesus’ return is cast as imminent creating an urgency for Jesus-followers to distance themselves from RCR liturgies and cling to the true worship of the One upon the throne and his Lamb. This prophecy will divide those allegiant to Rome, and thus the beasts and dragon, from those allegiant to God’s Empire, and thus the One upon the throne and the Lamb (22:7-12). To those who offer true worship to God and not the dragon will receive a blessing from the “Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.” The Lamb, as said in chapter one, is the origin of this message and his return will be welcomed by the faithful whole people of God, both Israel and the church, called the Spirit and the bride (22:13-17). The book closes with the cry of God’s people oppressed by the dragon empowered empire, “Come Lord Jesus, come!” to complete God’s purposes and establish God’s Empire fully on earth as it is already in heaven (22:19-20).

**Excurses: Peter, Paul, and Violence.**

\textsuperscript{178} We must see Gen. 3, Ezek. 47, and Zec. 14 in the background of this section. We also see the fulfillment of the sermon to Philadelphia from 3:12 with the name of God placed upon them. The theme of “Garden City” is the title of a spiritual formation work bearing the same name. John Mark Comer, *Garden City: Work, Rest, and the Art of Being Human*, 1 [edition] (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2015); Fee, *Revelation*, 302–6; Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 399–400; Witherington, *Revelation*, 273; Ressegue, *The Revelation of John*, 256–58.
I have, admittedly, taken a hard stance alongside John against empire and civil religion. Revelation presents “a way” to negotiate empire, not “the way.” Revelation offers two, empire is of the satan, and it is under judgement, of the five predominated ways to negotiate empire presented in the NT. This does not present the whole witness of the apostolic and sub-apostolic era. I will comment briefly on two texts in, seeming, opposition to Revelation’s view giving a more robust NT picture.

*Romans 13:1-7.* This passage seems to instruct Jesus-followers to be “subject to the governing authorities.” This command engenders a great deal of debate. It does not seem to fit for, in the prior chapter Paul urges Jesus-followers to “not be conformed” to the imperial world. What’s Paul saying? A common interpretation declares that the state authorities are God’s servants (*diakonos* and *leitourgos* are both used) working God’s purposes out on earth. This requires Jesus-followers to respect and honor civic authority and “stand under” (*hypotasso*) them in obedience.

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179 Revelation is the only book length confrontation of empire as of the devil and under judgement. Sections of other New Testament books make the same claim. See Matt. 4:1-11; 24-25; Lk 4:1-13; 21; Mk 1:9-11; 5:1-20; 13; Jn 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 1 Cor. 2:6-8. The other three approaches to dealing with empire are a transformative approach (Luke 4:18-19, cf. Isa. 61:1-2; Rom. 12), the alternative communities’ approach (Acts 2:37-42; Rom. 16; 1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8-9; Jas. 2:1-7), and submission to authorities’ approach (Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Tim. 2:1-2; Tit. 3:1-2; 1 Pet. 2:12-17; 3:15-16). Carter, *The Roman Empire and the New Testament*, chap. 2.

180 At no point does this suggest that Paul is giving Rome permission to wield the sword internationally via military conquest. This passage is a favorite among Army chaplains as a defense of just war theory and it simply does not work. This passage deals with civil issues within the state not foreign or military policy on the international scene.

I am not convinced that what we see is what we get with this passage of Paul. Following Wright, McCaulley, and Carter, I see a “hidden transcript” in Rom. 13:1-7. Paul is using flattery in this passage discussing submission to human imperial authority. This flattery is driven by Paul’s reformed Jewish eschatology centered on the death and resurrection of the Jewish Messiah, Jesus.\(^{182}\) The demonic empowered empire crucified the “Lord of glory” (1 Cor. 2:8) and proclaims a rival *kyrios*, *soter*, and *huios tou theo* to Messiah Jesus.\(^{183}\) Paul, deeply inspired by his Jewish metanarrative, knows that God tore down Pharaoh and will triumph over Caesar.\(^{184}\) This flattery is putting limits on human government until the “Lord of lord’s” returns. This flattery helps Jesus-followers bide their time as good enough citizens, not anarchists or violent revolutionaries, until the true “Son of God” arrives and brings his Empire and *shalom*.


\(^{182}\) Paul is, as Wright says, cutting Rome and Caesar down to size. They are held accountable and under the thumb of God, contrary to the dominate narrative of Rome’s *euongellion*. As I have pointed out, Caesar drew his right to rule from Apollo or Jupiter. Here Paul is striping those deities of that power and giving it to God. Wright, *Christian Origins and the Question of God. Vol. 4*, 1305–19.

\(^{183}\) The internal evidence of Paul’s Christocentric revolutionary bent, solely within Romans, is apparent. In 1:18-32 he describes God’s wrath against the Gentile world. In 8:18-25 Paul emphasizes the ending of this present evil age and the onset of God’s new era; he picks this narrative up in 13:11-12. Romans 10:9 clearly counters the Roman *sacramenta* of “*Kyrios Kaisar*” with “*Kyrios Iesous*.” In 12:2 he discusses not being conformed to the imperial world. In 12:14-21 he claims, contrary to 13:3, that God rewards good behavior not the state. Lastly, Paul attributes punishment of evil to God in 12:17-21 where in 13:4 that belongs to the state. The difficulty lies in the nuance. I am convinced that Paul is a nonviolent Jesus-following revolutionary with a reformed and properly Messianic eschatology, neither over or understated. Carter, *The Roman Empire and the New Testament*, 133–36.

\(^{184}\) Paul’s presentation of the Egypt and Pharaoh episode in Rom. 9 proves a powerful narrative. “God, according to the apostle, is glorified through his judgment of wicked kings. . . . Paul outlines rulers’ responsibilities as God’s servants without directly addressing the problem of evil rulers. I contend that in absence of that explanation of Romans 13:1-7, we are free to use Paul’s reference to Egypt and the wider biblical account to fill in the gap.” This passage, says McCaulley, is a warning against Rome, and any human government, to watch out and fear God lest they be unjust. McCaulley, *Reading While Black*, 29-41.
1 Peter 2:11-17. On the surface Rom. 13 and 1 Peter 2 look nearly the same, however this is unlikely. In this passage Peter is profoundly, yet subtly, undermining the empire and its emperor. The titles he gives to the hearers starts this passage off as foreign to Rome’s culture. They do not belong to Rome; they belong to the EOG and thus are bound by the customs, values, and behaviors (yes, liturgies) of God. Contrary to the worship of the emperor and sub-human status assigned to everyone not Roman, Peter commands “subordination” to all “human creatures.” There is no respect for the emperor that is above the respect owed to every human. Peter builds a two-level hierarchy, God first, then everyone else no exceptions, including the emperor. Peter closes by calling the Jesus-followers in Asia minor to do the good work of God at all times and at

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186 *Paroikos*, in the east meant “resident alien” who has no privileges granted by a citizen. *Parepidēmos* refers to a suspect foreigner almost criminal hence the translation of “exile” a severe punishment. These terms link Peter’s hearers to Abraham and Israel’s nomad narrative as not belonging in the wider culture and YHWH establishing his Empire as a nation of priests. This points to the clash of empires discussed above in my Revelation commentary. These belong to the Empire of God, not Rome. They must resist the conduct of RCR even if it brings discrimination. This does not mean the Christian’s home is away in heaven. Far from it, Peter is recognizing the new home of the family of God when one is located in Messiah Jesus. Paul A. Himes, *1 Peter*, Lexham Research Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017), sec. 1 Pe 1:1–2:11 and Parepidēmos (“Resident Alien”) and Paroikos (“Stranger”); Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 173–78.

187 Notice the language in Peter about ownership. His hearers are “slaves of God” and “free people.” As followers of King Jesus, they are “free from” Rome and “slaves” only to God. In other words, like the Exodus story, God “frees” people “for” service, read liturgy, to him (Exod. 7:16; 8:1). This whole passage is subtly confronting the dominate narrative of Rome’s supremacy and ownership of everything. “There is no ‘being-free-from’ without a ‘being-free-for’. There is no dominion without serving God; in losing the one humankind necessarily loses the other.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works. Volume 3: Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1–3*, ed. Martin Rüter, Ilse Tödt, and John W. De Gruchy, trans. Douglas S. Bax, Paperback (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004), 66–67; Joel B. Green, *1 Peter*, The Two Horizons New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2007), 73–75.
all costs, even in the face of discrimination. If Roman culture happens to coincide with God’s good, then do it and receive praise. Yet if God’s good work collides with Rome’s, then disobey Rome and obey God.

In sum, these texts, Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2, share more in common with Revelation than initially meets the eye. All three place the God of Israel as supreme. Revelation and 1 Peter both explicitly command supreme allegiance to God while the Pauline corpus fills in the gaps in Romans 13 in that regard. All three subordinate the emperor and Roman liturgies to those of God and his Empire. In short, these texts are revolutionary and anti-imperial for if larger numbers of people lived by the narrative purposed it would naturally erode Rome. The great difference between these texts is genre. Arguably, if we were to strip the apocalyptic away from Revelation then we would essentially have a longer version of 1 Peter 2 and Rom. 13.

A note about violence. Central to these anti-imperial texts is the theme of nonviolence. Both Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2 have “submit” or “subordination” as central to their argument. This is obviously nonviolent. Revelation however, despite the grotesque monsters and mounting destruction, has as its controlling metaphor a slain and living

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188 In line with the theological-liturgical anthropology of this project, I see Peter warning against civic liturgies when he says, “to abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul” (2:11). See “As behavior is the visible expression of a group’s shared and mutually reinforcing thought patterns for making sense of the world, and as practices flow out of their shared deepest allegiances and dispositions, so Peter begins now to widen the angle of his lens to explore the way of life that displays the identity of his Christian audience. Of course, since practices also shape dispositions and the imagination by which life in the world is ordered . . . what Peter encourages here is also formative of identity.” Green, *1 Peter*, 66.

189 As my study above shows, this would have been electrifying in the emperor appeasing Asian cities of John’s day. It was here, in Asia, that the emperor cult began and the first temples to the emperor were erected. Peter is not talking about human institutions for he only mentions human persons, not impersonal offices like civic religion. Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 180–86; Paul A. Himes, *1 Peter*, sec. 1 Peter 2:13–17.
Lamb who conquers by his blood and word. The battle of the “mount of assembly” is never depicted and the symbolic nature of the disasters led us to believe they are images, not depictions of reality.\textsuperscript{190} The only real violence comes from the dragon empowered empire.

\textit{Implications for Today}

This study of Revelation through the lens of an anti-civic religious text has shown that uncritical participation in civic religious liturgies is dangerous. This approach to Revelation raises some interesting implications. First, Revelation creates a drastic tension between God’s Empire and human empires. The Apocalypse is clearly derogatory to Rome.

Where does this leave us with modern empires? Specifically, is the United States of America an empire? The calling card of any empire is \textit{domination}. Many empires, ancient and modern, survive better with a civil religion as they trend toward pluralism, and the civil religion binds the population despite other or lesser allegiances.\textsuperscript{191} Though a “melting pot” of peoples, the US does not directly own multiple nations.\textsuperscript{192} Yet the US

\textsuperscript{190}“In the eschatological destruction of evil in Revelation there is no place for real armed violence, but there is ample space of the imagery of armed violence.” Bauckham, \textit{The Climax of Prophecy}, 210–37.

\textsuperscript{191}Some empires, like Babylon, Egypt, Assyria, or Nazi Germany, attempted to homogenize their population in a draconian way. To be in the Egyptian empire one had to become as Egyptian as possible in economy, religion, and social interaction. Keep your heritage, social structures, and religion \textit{if} your final allegiance is to Rome and its Caesar. Herein lies one of the dangers of Christian Nationalism in America, it seeks a homogenization of peoples into a few thin categories. See Whitehead and Perry, \textit{Taking America Back for God}.

\textsuperscript{192}An argument could be made, one of which I lean toward, that America’s social, economic, and militaristic reach is completely empirical. Andrew Root would argue that the new, late modern, empire and emperor is the multi-national corporation. America does seem to hold the cards in many of the most
Military has approximately 750 military sites spread across eighty foreign countries and colonies. In perspective, that is three times as many foreign bases as the rest of the world’s nations combined.\textsuperscript{193} In Rome, the emperor received worship as part of the RCR, yet in America it is the state or its ideals, not the president, who receive the worship of the civil religion.\textsuperscript{194} America has a fully functioning and robust, however fluid, civil religion complete with cultural liturgies. Though not a one for one match, it seems a sound judgement to classify the United States of America as having an “imperial character” more in line with Rome than meets the eye.\textsuperscript{195}


\textsuperscript{194} The chilling “Apotheosis of George Washington” in the US Capitol rotunda argues against this. In the past century a growing argument for a “cult of the presidency” can be and has been convincingly made. Many indicators point to the building and sizable power centralized in the executive office. Recent presidential campaigns have carried a messianic and apocalyptic verve to them. The palpable emotion related to the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections can easily be described as simultaneously worship rally and demonization party. Building on Haidt’s work of Sanctity as one of the moral “tastebuds,” it becomes clearer about the cult-like behavior of both of America’s political parties. See “The Cult of the Presidency | Cato Institute,” May 12, 2008, https://www.cato.org/commentary/cult-presidency; Douthat, \textit{Bad Religion}, chap. 8; Haidt, \textit{The Righteous Mind}, 153–54; Philip Gorski, “Why Evangelicals Voted for Trump: A Critical Cultural Sociology,” \textit{American Journal of Cultural Sociology} 5, no. 3 (October 2017): 338–54.

\textsuperscript{195} “We should not, however, allow arguments about the precise nature of empire, or its embodiment in the American context, to keep us from hearing Revelation’s sharp critique of the status quo. It is more important for us to see Revelation as a critique of secular power wherever and however it expresses itself oppressively, and especially as a critique of such power that is deemed sacred and granted devotion and allegiance.” Gorman, \textit{Reading Revelation Responsibly}, 66–69; J. Nelson Kraybill, \textit{Apocalypse and Allegiance}, 15; Richey and Jones, \textit{American Civil Religion}, 84–87.
This leads to a further question, “What does Revelation tell us about relating to the American version of empire?” The simplest place to start is with a critical look concerning ACR’s cultural liturgies. If, as I have argued throughout, Revelation warns against uncritical cultural accommodation, then a Jesus-follower who “eats” the scroll known as the Apocalypse must start by turning a critical eye toward the liturgies of ACR. Revelation’s witness calls readers to turn a critical eye toward any civil religious liturgies. What are things like the pledge of allegiance or national anthem doing to us? How does this effect or arrange our loves and allegiances? The Revelation of Jesus would warn against the national sacramenta known as the “pledge of allegiance” as a daily creedal practice. Rather, a Jesus-follower whose imagination is enlivened by Revelation; the Apocalypse would likely encourage recitation of one of the church catholic’s great creeds. The Apocalypse gives readers a narrative imagination to see the desire forming efforts of the ACR’s liturgical calendar. Instead, a follower of the slain and living Lamb would see and interact with time through the rhythms of sabbath and the church universal’s annual rhythm of Advent through Ordinary time culminating in Easter.

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196 For the liturgical calendar of ACR see Richey and Jones, American Civil Religion, 81–87, 89–111.

197 Revelation is beautifully albeit frustratingly vague in its application. It calls followers to distance themselves from societal participation and cling to God’s liturgical Empire through worship and witness. Yet the details of how this plays out is void. Therefore, my focus in this application is strictly focused on the liturgical as my project is looking at “fighting” the liturgy of ACR with the liturgy of the historic church. Worship lies at the heart of Revelation and cultural liturgies are an aspect of cultural worship systems. What I am not referencing yet is incredibly powerful witness of the Apoc. concerns: economic policies, cultural consumption, a global approach to the human family over a national one, the exploitation of humans as property to keep the few rich and the rest oppressed, and ultimately the Apoc. is about loyalty. The ramifications are further reaching than I am discussing above. See Carter, What Does Revelation Reveal?, 119–32.
I started this project with a story about why I have entered this venture. I am an Army Chaplain working and living in the belly of the beast, the American military empire. How does this study, thus far, influence the way I live, move, and have my being in the world. The application I have detailed above, I already have implemented in my life out of uniform. While in uniform the nuances increase. First, I am a missionary from the EOG to the empire of the USA who offers invocations at the beginning of military ceremonies or prior to combat missions. My public prayers should shift away from national or militaristic prayers toward historically Christian prayers. Second, Revelation is saturated with liturgical worship and God’s Empire is a liturgical one. As a chaplain I should shift the worship services I host more toward historic Christian liturgical worship. If, as I have argued alongside James KA Smith, we humans are more formed by liturgy than knowledge, then a regular “dose” of thick liturgy could slowly shift the desires of soldiers away from ACR toward God’s Empire. Lastly, the foundation to all questions of engaging culture raised by Revelation pertain to uncritical participation. For a Jesus-follower to survive in the temple of Mars, the beating heart of ACR, a shift in imagination can and does make a significant impact. The social imaginary of the EOG creates a mythological world that can and does powerfully and critically question and counter the social imaginary of the Army liturgies. This is not an intellect shift; it is a desire or telos shift which requires a submersion in the narrative of God’s story and the visionary symbols of the Apocalypse. Learning to see the mythology of ACR and the Army critically over time
can be a means through which the Spirit bends the arc of one’s life away from the empires of the world and into the EOG.\textsuperscript{198}

\textsuperscript{198} “Like all transformative literature, however, Revelation does not just arise out of a world; it also creates one. Through the use of vibrant image and metaphor, the book creates a world that collides with reality as we know it and constructs a new way of living in light of this new reality.” Preston Clegg, “Recovering Revelation” (D. Min. Project, Baylor University, George W. Truett Theological Seminary, 2012), 9.
CHAPTER THREE

Method

Problem and Purpose

I embarked on this project because of the problem I saw in USA soldiers of lack of Christian formation. I believed the spiritual formation that comes from the institutional civil religion and the affective practices of patriotism have inoculated soldiers from a desire for the Empire of God (EOG), its King, and his life. When presented with the option to participate in Christian worship a good many soldiers refuse.\(^1\)

Many Army Chaplains approach Christian faith formation through the intellect and cerebral functions. This “knowledge dump” gives the ability to give correct answers to theoretical questions, yet it completely bypasses the heart, body, and imagination. I believe a ritual based, imaginative, and affective set of spiritual practices will counterform soldiers more into the likeness of Jesus.\(^2\)

This project explored the influence of American Civil Religion (ACR) in soldiers at USA Ranger School and its relation to Christian formation. The intervention studied

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the effects of historical Christian liturgical worship, devotion, and catechesis (education) on their ACR beliefs.

The purpose of this project was to spiritually counter-form Army Ranger students through historic Christian liturgical worship, catechesis, and personal practices centered on the Revelation of John.

Study Objectives

The major question guiding this project was: What affect will historic liturgical worship and corresponding catechesis have on the Civil Religious beliefs of US Army Soldiers? Secondary questions were:

1. What effect does Christian liturgical worship have on a soldier’s ACR beliefs?
2. How does a liturgy based Christian education (liturgical catechesis) relate to ACR beliefs in soldiers?
3. How does a Revelation focused spiritual formation curriculum affect a soldier’s patriotism?

Subject Selection and Recruitment

The subject population for this research is students enrolled in the USA Ranger School during the third and final phase called Florida (or swamp) phase. I drew volunteers from the student body who await the next class to arrive. The students who do not qualify for graduation get a second chance to retry the course. We nickname these students as ‘recycles’ as they will ‘recycle’ into the next class. During this break every spring they stay on Ranger camp and wait for the next class to start.

The number of soldiers I hoped to test my liturgical catechesis on was fifteen to
twenty. I could not control the sample size for two reasons. First, I did not know how many total students would “recycle” until after the course as it is based on their performance and their grades are not revealed until completion. Second, participation had to of been voluntary on the part of the recycles. The most “recycles” we have had in the previous two years was in the forties. The average age for a Ranger student is twenty-three with the range typically falling between eighteen and thirty-two. Occasionally some older than thirty-two attend the course. However, due to the physical rigor of the course, younger soldiers make up most of the population.

I, the principal investigator, recruited subjects by word of mouth. After the Ranger graduates left, I had all “recycles” attend a one-hour information brief where I explained my research and my study project. I had consent forms available (attached in the appendices). I sent the students back to their barracks with the consent forms to read and contemplate. Whoever decided to participate in the study returned the next day for the first liturgical worship service. Soldiers knew this project was and remained their free choice. Written into the consent form was their individual desire to participate without coercion. This brief and consent process took place in the chapel located on the Ranger training camp.

I assigned an alpha-numeric coded number (six digits) to which I only had the key matching the number to their name, no other information. They received the pre-test survey on April 25th, 2023 (attached in the appendices) and placed their coded number at the top. If during the test a subject decided to withdraw, they could do so as described on the consent form. Once analysis was complete, I destroyed the key for the coded numerical identifier.
Research Design and Methods

The project utilized a standard pretest/posttest procedure to measure intervention effectiveness. The pretest established the baseline of current formation among soldiers at Florida phase. Following the pre-test, the group underwent the liturgical catechesis outlined above.

Following the intervention, the participants received a posttest on May 26th, 2023, to measure the impact of the liturgical catechesis. Upon completion of the liturgical catechesis all soldiers retook the survey. I also collected copies of the journals for evaluation. These journals allowed for open-ended reflective comments throughout the process of the intervention. I made copies of these journals leaving the original with the soldiers. Once analysis of the journals was complete, I destroyed journal copies along with their surveys.

There was no incomplete disclosure, deception, placebo, or sham procedure involved in this test. During my data collection, I had only the coded number for the subjects so I could not identify demographics or characteristics of subjects. This removed bias. I only used the key to ensure that the identified soldier was using the correct coded number on all forms. For my pre- and post-test surveys I used standardized questions drawing from both published sources and specifically designed for this project.

I measured patriotism using the Kosterman and Feshbach Patriotism Scale used by Li and Brewer and Crittendon.3 These scales consist of five total questions for the

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3 Kosterman and Feshbach, “Toward a Measure of Patriotic and Nationalistic Attitudes”; Li and Brewer, “What Does It Mean to Be an American?”; Crittendon, “Differentiating Patriotism and Nationalism.”
following subjects: patriotism, nationalism, and xenophobia. I did not use the xenophobia scale. “I am proud to be an American” was one of the patriotism questions and “It is really NOT important that the U.S. be number one in whatever it does” was one of the nationalism questions. Ascertaining the patriotism of a soldier measured, in part, their ACR beliefs while measuring their nationalism further specified and more accurately located them in the constellation of ACR.⁴

To delineate specific civil religious beliefs, I assembled four questions aimed at civil religion in America. These questions are distilled from the academic research done on civil religion in America. These questions are as follows:

1. The American Flag has sacred meaning.
2. Major national holidays (like Memorial Day, Independence Day, Thanksgiving Day) should be revered.
3. God has uniquely blessed America with democracy and freedom.
4. History proves that God has a special plan for America.

I used four questions I developed specifically relating to the role of the Army soldier in ACR as the GI Messiah.⁵ The GI Messiah questions were:

1. By serving, suffering, and sacrificing in the Army, soldiers are doing God’s work.
2. The soldier earns salvation through their service, suffering, and sacrifice.
3. Soldiers are America’s saviors.
4. Soldiers are a more special type of American citizen.

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⁵ Ebel, G.I. Messiahs.
For the pre- and post-surveys, subjects responded to eighteen statements using a sliding scale from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.”

Study Activities

Becoming a soldier involves thousands of iterations of embodying a certain set of liturgies that counter-form one from a civilian into a soldier. Soldiers spend countless hours standing, marching, facing, and running in human rectangles called ‘drill and ceremony’. This embodied liturgy exists to bend human bodies into a communal, order following machine. These marching ‘formations’ create the foundation of moving as a ‘unit’ in combat. Something as simple as living according to the hours of the day marked by bugle calls deeply shape one into and toward a telos. These and other daily routines seem insignificant, yet they carry profound spiritual and character formative implications.

I took volunteers through eight embodied liturgical worship services. Each meeting we worshiped first, approximately an hour service, followed by a thirty-minute educational reflection on a certain aspect of the liturgy. This reflection was interactive and sought to bring awareness to what we did toward God and what God did to us through the liturgy. For example, after a certain worship service we brought awareness to the history and significance of the Apostle’s Creed and discuss what reciting a creed does to a human being. This was laid in contrast to the Ranger’s Creed said daily by soldiers in USA Ranger school.

The worship liturgy included soldiers embodying the classic motions of Christian worship. This involved kneeling, standing, and the sign of the cross at appropriate parts.
I led volunteers for reading the Psalm, OT, and Revelation lessons. As the clergyman, I read the Gospel lesson as is customary in liturgical services. We partook of the Eucharist during each service using small wafers and juice. This part of the curriculum was aimed at embodying the liturgy at a subconscious and visceral level. This was the education of the heart and gut, not of the mind.

Lastly, the biblical content of these services came from Revelation. Each service had a call to worship from the Psalms, an OT and Gospel lesson that corresponds, thematically, with the NT lesson which from Revelation. I created this simple and short lectionary that will tell the meta-narrative of scripture throughout each service and the whole series of services. Revelation was also worked through from beginning to end, not exhaustively but thematically. My sermons were exclusively from Revelation.

For this intervention to counter-form soldiers into the image of Jesus and citizens aimed at the telos of his Empire, I needed more than just three hours of liturgical catechesis weekly. I offered the soldiers a format for individual scripture reading and prayer to continue the formation started during the liturgy. This resembled the historic Judeo-Christian practice of the “hours.” Marked times of morning and evening prayer accompanied by scripture reading and reflectional journaling about the whole experience made up the aspects of the personal liturgies. These “hours” carried aspects of the liturgy for personal use like creeds, Lord’s Prayer, and confession. A daily reading guide exhaustively covering the breadth of Revelation was offered as the daily scripture readings with a matching Psalm. These reflective journal responses were collected for analysis.

The conditions in which this intervention took place is on Camp James Rudder (Florida phase of Ranger school). I used the outdoor chapel for the liturgical catechesis.
It can seat approximately one-hundred-thirty-five people. It has a wood floor, A-frame roof, a small steeple with a working bell, a small, raised platform with a large wooden cross as the backdrop, and no walls. It is nestled in the edge of the forest wood line, so it is surrounded on three sides by natural beauty of pines, oaks, and brush.

I was in a modified USA combat uniform. I removed my jacket, so I was wearing only boots, pants, and my olive-green t-shirt. I had the soldiers match my uniform. My intent with these conditions was to remove as much Army symbolism from the environment as I could. I also wanted to remove as much rank, title, and position as possible as I outrank and have positional authority over the students. The space we inhabit is just as formative as the actions we do, words we say, and the thoughts we think.  

Each of the eight liturgical worship services lasted one hour followed by a thirty-minute catechesis reflecting on a different aspect of the liturgy each session. All the liturgical worship and catechesis sessions occurred during daylight hours in the chapel. The morning and evening prayers took no longer than fifteen minutes to include reading of scripture. The journalling took no longer than five minutes each day. Everyone involved in the study participated in the same worship, catechesis, and personal devotion.

Analysis

I used a pen and paper pre- and post-test survey for the students as they did not

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have any electronic access at all. I then manually entered the survey responses into a spreadsheet to store, code, and analyze the data.

The sample size was limited by the environment. There have never been more than fifty “recycles” in the previous two years, therefore my potential population could only be below forty. It was a convenience sample as participants were volunteers. I am unable to speak authoritatively about the Army as a whole. At most, this research gives me a partial representation of Ranger School graduates. I am used a coded identification system so I could compare, one-to-one, the results by individual. As stated above, this was quantitative research.

Data Management and Privacy/Confidentiality

I collected data via pre- and post-test surveys and journal entry. I protected this data by keeping hard copies in my office which automatically locks upon exit. Only I had the door code for my office. My office was located on Camp Rudder. I kept the electronic files under a password protected file on my personal computer. All government computing devices cannot be kept confidential from the government systems. So, to protect the privacy of subjects, I used my personal computer. The data samples were kept until my date of graduation. Upon graduation I will destroy all data. No soldier is named or otherwise uniquely identified in my findings or any subsequent publication. Pseudonyms for each subject were used in chapter four of this project.

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7 Approximately 1,347 students graduate annually from Army Ranger school. My study will not even cover 10% of that population. Airborne Ranger Training Brigade, “ARTB Ranger Course Information” (Fort Benning, GA, 2019), chrome-extension://efaidnmbnpmpimgajapalasmdbo配/glfind-mkaj/https://www.benning.army.mil/infantry/artb/Student-Information/content/PDF/ARTB%20Ranger%20Course%20Information.pdf.
CHAPTER FOUR

Summary of Results

Introduction

This project explored the influence of American Civil Religion (ACR) in soldiers who are students at USA Ranger School and its relation to Christian formation. The intervention sought to study the effects of historical Christian liturgical worship, devotion, and catechesis on their ACR beliefs. This project sought to spiritually counter-form Army Ranger students through historic Christian liturgical worship, catechesis, and personal practices centered on the Revelation of John.

Soldiers participate in daily practices such as reciting Army creeds and marching in formation. These “liturgies” form them spiritually in the likeness of ACR. When presented with the option to participate in Christian worship many soldiers refuse.\(^1\) I believe Army liturgies meet their spiritual needs. I believe a ritual based, imaginative, and affective set of spiritual practices will counter-form soldiers more into the likeness of Jesus. This project seeks to fight ACR liturgy with Christian liturgy.\(^2\)

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\(^2\) Many Army Chaplains tend to approach Christian faith formation through the intellect and cerebral functions. This ‘knowledge dump’ creates the ability to give correct answers to theoretical questions, yet it completely bypasses the heart and body, which leaves the bulk of the soldier’s formation to the embodied liturgies of the Army. For the foundation upon which this idea stands see James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Empire: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*, Kindle edition, Volume 1 of Cultural Liturgies (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013); James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Empire: How Worship Works*, Cultural Liturgies, v. 2 (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2013); Frank C. Senn, *Embodied Liturgy: Lessons in Christian Ritual* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2016).
Study Objectives

Multiple questions drove the research process. The major question guiding this project was: *What effect will a liturgical catechesis have on the Civil Religious beliefs of US Army Ranger students?* Secondary questions were:

1. What effect does Christian liturgical worship have on a soldier’s ACR beliefs?
2. How does a liturgy based Christian education (liturgical catechesis) relate to ACR beliefs in soldiers?
3. How does a Revelation focused spiritual formation curriculum affect a soldier’s patriotism and nationalism?

Description of Sample Population

The subject population for this research is students enrolled in the USA Ranger School during the final phase called Florida phase. The students who do not qualify for graduation get a second chance to retry the course. Every spring they stay on Ranger camp, waiting six-weeks for the next class to start. This year the maximum population available was thirty-eight students from which to draw the sample population.

The intervention opened with an information session describing the task, purpose, and procedures of the intervention attended by thirty-seven students.³ Thirty students took the pre-survey on April 25th, 2023, and twenty-three volunteered for the full

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³ See Appendix A for the ethical reviews and Appendix B for the informed consent form and see chapter three for a full description of how the intervention sessions flowed.
participation in the intervention. By the end of the intervention, May 26th, 2023, twelve subjects completed the full project.

The average age of the soldiers was twenty-three. Seven subjects were commissioned officers, one was a non-commissioned officer (NCOs), and four were junior enlisted. Ten of the twelve subjects carried the military operational specialty (MOS) of infantry of which four were enlisted and six were officers. One had the MOS of medic and the other field artillery, enlisted and officer respectively. Ethnically, nine were of European descent, two were Hispanic American, and one African American. No subjects grew up in the western region of the country and all were native born citizens. Ten were males and two were females.

I also surveyed their religious behaviors and attitudes. When asked about the religious family they most identify with, half claimed “non-denominational.” Over half

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4 Full participation included the following aspects: pre-survey, eight liturgical worship services followed by liturgy focused catechesis, personal morning and evening prayers with daily Psalter and Revelation readings, daily journalling, and post-intervention survey. Each participant was assigned a five or six-digit alpha-numeric identifier code they retained throughout the intervention.

5 The oldest being twenty-seven and the youngest being twenty at the time of the test. The analogy most helpful to understanding the general division of labor of the three different classifications of rank is medical professionals. The officers would fill the role of medical doctors or physician assistants. The NCOs and nurses would share similar roles while the technicians and junior enlisted correspond. Officers carry the full responsibility for their respective units, at echelon, while owning most of the planning with a future orientation. The NCOs lead the daily operations, execute the plans of the officers, and provide for the welfare of junior soldiers. Junior soldiers follow directions of the NCOs and officers providing the direct labor for the plans and operations. Infantry are traditionally foot soldiers who, in large scale land combat, fix their opponent’s position while the mechanized and artillery units destroy the adversary. Infantry tend to accumulate the highest percentage of casualties as they carry the least weaponry and protection. Of the ten infantrymen, one was a mortarman, who can only be enlisted. All the officers were first lieutenants. One of the officers was a female with the rest being males. Three of the infantrymen were other than European ethnicity while the remaining seven were of European descent. Field artillery fire large cannons that send projectiles dozens of miles. All participants were raised in either the north-east (three from PA and one from NJ), mid-west (one each from WI and MI), or the south (three from TX, two from FL, and one from WV). One female was an infantry officer and the other was the field artillery officer. The medic was a male and the other nine males were infantrymen with five infantry male officers and four enlisted. I assigned a pseudonym to each subject. All names used in this document are pseudonymous.
claimed to attend worship services weekly when not in Ranger School. Only one claimed to be “not religious” while half claimed, “very religious.” All claimed some level of spirituality, with half claiming, “moderately spiritual.”

Two questions assessed the subject’s prayer habits. The first assessed frequency and the second assessed duration of prayers. All subjects claimed to pray with the average response being “once daily.” Nine subjects claimed to pray “a minute or two” when they pray, with two claiming to only pray for “a few seconds” and one claimed to pray for “several minutes.”

Research Findings

Subjects would mark an “X” on the nine-centimeter line that most honestly represented their opinion (from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”) on the 18 survey items. I then measured the mark on the line to numerically quantify their responses to the tens place past the decimal. The minimum score could be zero and the maximum nine. Higher values indicate more agreement for the statement.

The first five questions assessed their patriotism and the second five measured

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6 One each claimed United Methodist and Christian Churches while two claimed each “no religion / none” and Roman Catholic. Two claimed “never”, one claimed “less than once a year”, and two claimed “once a month.” Four claimed “very spiritual” while two claimed “slightly spiritual.”

7 Two claimed to only pray “less than once per month”, one marked “several times per month”, two marked each “several times per week” and “once daily”. Five claimed to pray “several times per day (other than meals).” Of the two who claimed to pray for “a few seconds” one also marked that they prayed “several times per day (other than meals)” while the other said to pray “several times per week.” The former identified as United Methodist and the later as non-denominational. The subject who professed to pray “several minutes” when he prayed also identified to pray “several times per day (other than meals)” and identified as Roman Catholic. The rest of the subjects claimed to pray for “a minute or two” and their frequencies were spread across the responses.
their nationalism. The next four generally corresponded to the primary tenants of ACR. The last four were specifically draw from work placing the American soldier as the messianic figure of ACR. I averaged their scores across the corresponding questions in each category with four-and-a-half as the divide between more and less agreement.

**Preliminary Findings**

The following findings came from the pre-test survey. Subjects showed high levels of patriotism, average for the group was 7.4 out of nine, signally a lived ACR faith. The initial nationalism average came in at 4.54 out of nine. The initial average of ACR faith score was 6.22 out of nine, closer to patriotism than nationalism which holds true with my research wherein patriotism functions as the experiential expression of ACR

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8 As I detailed in chapter two of this project, patriotism forms the piety of ACR. Patriotism is the lived faith of ACR beliefs. It comprises of the dispositions, behaviors, and attitudes of ACR. I tested ACR separately. These questions were stock from established patriotism and nationalism scales. Kosterman and Feshbach, “Toward a Measure of Patriotic and Nationalistic Attitudes”; Crittendon, “Differentiating Patriotism and Nationalism.”

9 See the major arguments and themes of Ebel, G.I. Messiahs.

10 The highest, or most “patriotic”, score was 8.88 from Ishmael, a twenty-seven-year-old, Roman Catholic, white infantry officer from FL who attends mass weekly, prays several times a week for a minute or two a time. There were four other subjects who scored above eight. The lowest average was 4.76 from Zeke, a twenty-four-year-old Hispanic infantryman at the rank of specialist who declared “no religion”, no church attendance, or religious inclination though slightly spiritual. He prays less than once monthly for a minute or two.

11 The highest agreement with nationalism was 6.98 from Stefan. He was a twenty-three-year-old infantryman at the rank of specialist, the fourth rank of nine for an enlisted soldier. He declared no religion, never to attend religious services, and yet “slightly religious” while “moderately spiritual.” He also scored a 6.86 on the patriotism scale in keeping with findings that patriotism and nationalism tend to have an inverse relationship. The lowest nationalism score was 2.98 from Simon, a white twenty-seven-year-old medic at the rank of staff sergeant, the sixth rank of nine enlisted. He declared himself as non-denominational who attended his place of worship once a month and claimed a moderate level of religiosity and spirituality. He prays once per day for a minute or two each time.
belief.\textsuperscript{12} The pre-survey results for GI Messianism, average for the group, was 5.15 out of nine.\textsuperscript{13}

These initial findings place the subjects as top third on the patriotism and ACR scales. Their nationalism was the lowest of the four dispositions, keeping in line with prior studies showing that patriotism and nationalism have an inverse relationship. These initial findings would point to a positive that my research espoused, namely that patriotism and ACR are linked. ACR provides liturgical forms and doctrinal beliefs while patriotism is the lived faith of ACR.

One subject, Ashton, scored third highest in patriotism and nationalism while scoring highest in the group in ACR and GI Messiah. Ashton strongly agrees that the American flag has sacred meaning, that God has uniquely blessed America, and that the historical record has proven God’s special plan for America. Regarding GI Messiah Ashton strongly agreed that soldier’s service, suffering, and sacrificing \textit{is} God’s work and that soldiers are a more special type of the American citizen.\textsuperscript{14} Five other subjects join him in high ACR and GI Messiah agreement. One subject, who had the lowest ACR score, had a corresponding low GI Messiah, the second lowest in the category. This

\textsuperscript{12} The highest ACR score came in at 8.29 from Ashton, a twenty-four-year-old, white, male, non-denominational, infantry officer from West Virginia who attends worship once monthly and considers himself as very religious and spiritual. He claims to pray “several times a week” for “a few seconds” at a time. The lowest ACR belief was 2.72 from Zeke who also had the lowest patriotism score.

\textsuperscript{13} The lowest GI Messiah score was 2.21 Cynthia, a twenty-three-year-old, Anglo-American female artillery officer from Wisconsin who worships in the United Methodist tradition once weekly. She considers herself as very religious and moderately spiritual and prays “several times per day (other than meals)” for “a few seconds” at a time. The highest GI Messiah came from Ashton and was 7.59.

\textsuperscript{14} He maxed out ACR questions one, three, and four and scoring an 8.6 on ACR question two. ACR question two claimed reverence for major American holidays in which he scored 8.6 of nine. For GI Messiah question one and four he scored 8.7 and 7.9 out of nine respectively. For the salvation and savior responses he gave 6.9 and 6.2 out of nine respectively.
preliminary finding, of both high and low corresponding agreements, points to Ebel’s re-
search as correct, namely that the GI Messiah lies near the heart of ACR faith.

Findings During the Project

Findings during this portion of the project were qualitative and conversation
based, drawn from field notes during the liturgical catechesis discussions.\textsuperscript{15}

With over half of the subjects claiming non-denominational affiliation, I pur-
posefully choose a “higher” liturgy that was as non-denominationally tied as possible.\textsuperscript{16} The
subjects were not thrilled by the liturgy to begin the project. One soldier said during dis-
cussion, “Parts of it feel ingenuine, like I am just going through the motions. Other parts
feel very significant. I hope it will become more genuine and natural.” Other subjects
echoed the ingenuine feelings of the liturgy even saying that liturgy felt like “going
through the motions.” Not all comments were negative: “I don’t know about all the stand
up, sit down, and kneel stuff. You know, I would just rather not. I just do it because we
are all doing it together. It is nice to do it as a group.” This generally negative view of
liturgy set a baseline for the catechesis.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{15} For the details of the structure of this intervention see chapter three of this project. For the ano-
nymity of the subjects the following comments were not directly linked, by my identifier code, to specific
Ranger students. I recorded their discussions in the order that they occurred during the catechetical class. For
the schedule of the catechesis and the comments made by subjects over the process of the discussions
see Appendix G of this dissertation.

\textsuperscript{16} See Appendix D for the order of worship and liturgy that was used throughout all eight services.

\textsuperscript{17} As the project progressed subjects noticed the different effects of the liturgy and the liturgical
process, how some aspects were solely focused on the embodiment while others blended a cognitive and
intuitive focus. Concerning the sermon within the liturgy one soldier commented, “The sermon mostly af-
ficts my brain or mind. It makes me think and builds my knowledge of the Bible or Christianity. The lit-
urgy seems to engage my body with all the standing, kneeling, and motions.” Later in the catechesis, when
discussing the Eucharist, one soldier commented along the same lines above: “In the liturgy communion is
The following six catechesis sessions broke down individual parts of the liturgy for examination. As the catechesis ran its course, subjects became more understanding of the liturgy and their knowledge caught up with their embodied worship. They came around to liturgy simply through “going through the motions.” One soldier even said, “I feel myself being drawn to service. Not because I mentally want to be there, sometimes it even feels like a chore. But my body wants to go experience the worship service.” This was resonated by multiple of the subjects around certain points of the liturgy.

Concerning the confession of sin, subjects agreed on the uncomfortableness of the kneeling and reciting, however they also admitted to an embodiment of forgiveness.\(^{18}\)

I have started, after I say the confession of sin in my daily prayers, to add in a moment of silence and count and name my sins through the day. I sin a lot! It is really making me think now throughout the day that I want that list to be shorter next time I pray! So, it’s helping me watch my behavior and be aware of how I fail God’s standard.

Subjects felt and began to know how this embodied and repeated practice was changing them, forming them toward Jesus.\(^{19}\)

Subjects easily grasped how a creed, regardless of its source or aim, shapes the desires and beliefs of the reciter into the likeness of whatever the creed represents.

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\(^{18}\) One soldier commented, “I notice, I may be thinking too far into this, that we kneel when we are asking for something like forgiveness for sins.” At this point this subject had completed two weeks of personal devotion, kneeling to confess sins twice daily, and participated in two services where kneeling for confession of sin happened corporately. Only after sixteen experiences of this embodied liturgy did he come to this conclusion.

\(^{19}\) One student commented about the corporate nature of confession. “I agree it feels uncomfortable and vulnerable however when we do it together it makes it better. It’s like, you know, I’m not alone with sin.” This was resonated by several other subjects pointing to a corporate formation alongside and in continuity with the personal formation.
Soldiers, as noted in chapter two of this project, have numerous Army creeds they recite. Students also saw a unifying or binding aspect to creeds. One commented. “Creeds unify. They give a group of people something to rally around. If we are all working to live a creed, then we come together instead of breaking apart. It unites despite differences.” Creeds function this way in all forms, as Newbigin says, a credo lies at the base or heart of a society that binds and propels a people together toward a telos. Subjects also noticed the unifying aspects of liturgy concerning the Eucharist or communion. One said, “Look at the name, it is meant to bring us into communion with Jesus. It connects us to him somehow. I think it is meant to connect us to each other too like communion is a community event.” Liturgy, like creeds and communion, propel us together toward a desired “good life.”

This propulsion provided by the liturgical creates movement. Both regarding the creeds and prayer, subjects commented on how the aspects of liturgy compel us into action.

It’s like only you know your beliefs and nobody else understands them until you do something publicly with them, right? Like my wife doesn’t know I love her until I put my love into action. It’s like the creeds tell us what Christian faith looks like, now it’s up to us to act it out. . . . When I pray, I find I have work to do. Through prayer I see and remember things that I need to work on, and God asks me to work. When I pray God invites me to participate with him in work.

Soldiers even called attention to how the liturgy itself is the work of the people as was defined in chapter one. When the sermon portion of the liturgy was discussed one student appropriately noticed that “We spend almost twice as long doing everything else as the sermon and we all take part in everything else. Only the pastor is working during the sermon . . .” This infers, correctly, that liturgy is an active work of the people toward something.
When asked, “what has liturgy taught us?” over half the subjects agreed with the following statement:

The first couple days of morning and evening prayer were great but then it got old, and I struggled to keep up. It’s like there was a honeymoon period of about ten days then it was over. I felt much more drawn to the corporate worship services. . . . I like doing the liturgy together as opposed to alone.

This was not universally applicable as some subjects were:

equally drawn to both the individual and public liturgies. They fed off each other and reinforced each other. They set a structure for me, and I really started to look forward to the routine. I knew what I was going to do each morning and night and I knew what I was going to do when I came here to worship with y’all. That was reassuring.  

Regardless of the majority preferring the corporate liturgy over the personal, the personal and public liturgical practices formed them into different types of people. One student commented:

Though I agree that the private prayers and readings started off strong then slacked off in interest, I did find that I really wanted to pray every morning and night. I don’t like repetition very much so saying the same confession, creed, and prayers over and over bothered me. But after about ten days of saying the morning and evening prayers you gave us, though I didn’t want to keep saying those it was like I “had” to pray, like my body desired to pray twice a day. I felt the same way about coming to worships services. This way of worshiping seems awkward to me but I was drawn to worship. I did this program to grow closer to Jesus and I have.

This formation resonated with many subjects in the catechesis.

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20 Though sticking to his sense that this way of prayer and worship was foreign to him, one student did comment on a more universal unity provided by liturgical worship. He noted: “I have never worshiped in this style before I don’t know if I will keep worshipping like this. However, I really understand why people worship this way, I do see the beauty in its form. It makes sense to me, and I feel like I am better able to connect with other Christians who worship different from me now because of this program.” I can only suspect the “sense” this liturgy made was an embodied and intuitive “sense” first that only later bubbled up into his strategic thinking domain. Regardless, this subject recognized the beauty of the liturgical form and that drew him closer to other families of Christians.
Post-intervention results showed changes in agreement in every category of patriotism, nationalism, ACR, and GI Messiah. Table 4.1 shows the results for patriotism. Agreement increased on every patriotism item. Patriotism item two had the greatest increase in agreement of 0.94.

Table 4.1 Changes in Patriotism for Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Pre-Test Average</th>
<th>Post-Test Average</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1. I am proud to be an American</td>
<td>7.93</td>
<td>8.49</td>
<td>+0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2. I am emotionally attached to America and emotionally affected by its actions.</td>
<td>6.97</td>
<td>7.91</td>
<td>+0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3. Although at times I may not agree with the government, my commitment to the U.S. always remains strong.</td>
<td>7.03</td>
<td>7.45</td>
<td>+0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4. The fact I am an American is an important part of my identity.</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>7.73</td>
<td>+0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5. In general, I have very little respect for the American people.</td>
<td>7.64</td>
<td>7.83</td>
<td>+0.19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The greatest increase in change of patriotism came from Alice. When asked what she learned most she replied, “I simply learned about how to pray and communicate with God, as well as more about religion and the Bible in general. I was inspired and intrigued to understand the concept/practice more, and I thoroughly enjoyed it. It made me more self-aware and appreciative of what I do have.” As one’s understanding of religion increases so does one’s ACR and patriotism.21

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21 Her greatest increase came in the patriotism question three saying she more strongly agreed that her commitment to the U.S. remains strong despite periodic disagreement with the government. She maxed out the responses for her pride as an American and American as important to her identity. She never missed a morning or evening prayer nor a liturgical catechesis. She attends worship services less than once annually outside Ranger school, considers herself slightly religious and spiritual, and prays several times per month for a minute or two at a time. She is a twenty-three-year-old female non-denominational infantry officer. She increased by 1.82 on the patriotism scale. She was also the second highest increase in nationalism as well with a 2.12-point increase. Her ACR increase was nearly the same proportion as her patriotism increase at 1.7, thus strengthening the link between ACR and patriotism. Alice was one of only three subjects who increase agreement in all four categories. Overall, the average increase in ACR was the highest with the increase in patriotism being the second highest. The two are mutually linked.
Nationalism items one through four increased in agreement while item five decreased. The greatest increase came in item two by a large margin of 2.09 while item five decreased by 0.94. The results are displayed in table 4.2 below.

Table 4.2 Changes in Nationalism for Participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Pre-Test Average</th>
<th>Post-Test Average</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N1. In view of America's moral and material superiority, it is only right that we should have the biggest say in deciding United Nations policy.</td>
<td>4.37</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>+0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N2. The first duty of every young American is to honor the national American history and heritage.</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>5.28</td>
<td>+2.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N3. Other countries should try to make their government as much like ours as possible.</td>
<td>4.59</td>
<td>5.01</td>
<td>+0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N4. Foreign nations have done some very fine things but it takes America to do things in a big way.</td>
<td>4.43</td>
<td>4.87</td>
<td>+0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N5. It is really NOT important that the U.S. be number one in whatever it does.</td>
<td>6.12</td>
<td>5.18</td>
<td>-0.94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Simon registered the greatest increase in agreement with nationalism. Simon participated in the daily prayers between fifty and seventy-five percent consistency while never missing a service. He learned that liturgical services “connect [him] me to others that do it more frequently. I learned that there are many ways to worship outside of my contemporary views.”

Christian liturgical worship effected the soldier’s ACR beliefs through nearly a standard deviation increase in agreement. This answers the first of my secondary questions above. Also, my theory linking patriotism as the faith of ACR was solidified. Eight of twelve subjects reported a mean 1.03 increase in agreement with ACR after eight liturgical worship services. It seems that the founding father’s understanding that practicing an institutional religion makes one a better citizen through increasing civil religious and patriotic dispositions.22

22 This view was held and distributed by George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, and James Madison. Concerning Washington directly “he called religion and morality the indispensable supports of
Table 4.3 Changes in American Civil Religious Belief in Participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Pre-Test Average</th>
<th>Post-Test Average</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACR1. The American Flag has sacred meaning</td>
<td>7.24</td>
<td>8.04</td>
<td>+0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACR2. Major national holidays (like Memorial Day, Independence Day, Thanksgiving Day) should be revered.</td>
<td>7.04</td>
<td>7.54</td>
<td>+0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACR3. God has uniquely blessed America with democracy and freedom.</td>
<td>6.58</td>
<td>6.98</td>
<td>+0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACR4. History proves that God has a special plan for America.</td>
<td>5.70</td>
<td>6.46</td>
<td>+0.76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Simon registered the highest increase in agreement with the ACR scale. He increased most regarding the reverence paid to major American holidays. Liturgical catechesis, for Simon, increased his unity across denominational lines which coincides with the original purpose of civil religion, to bind people together beyond differences.  

It seems that Ebel’s thesis about the connection between ACR and the GI Messiah proved true in the pre-survey, those dispositions are linked. Focus upon Revelation seemed to displace the mythology of the GI Messiah with the Messiah of the Creator, Jesus the slain and living Lamb. This category was the only one to have an overall average decrease in agreement of -0.3. This category was completely split with two items showing nearly similar increases and two showing nearly similar decreases. G.I. Messiah item one saw the most increase with +1.15 and G.I. Messiah saw the most decrease with -1.02.

Table 4.4 Changes in GI Messiah in Participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Pre-Test Average</th>
<th>Post-Test Average</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GIM1. By serving, suffering, and sacrificing in the Army, soldiers are doing God’s work.</td>
<td>5.55</td>
<td>6.70</td>
<td>+1.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GIM2. The soldier earns salvation through their service, suffering, and sacrifice.</td>
<td>5.35</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>-1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GIM3. Soldiers are America’s saviors.</td>
<td>4.84</td>
<td>4.49</td>
<td>-0.35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

political prosperity and argued that religion was always necessary for morality.” See Marty, *Pilgrims in Their Own Land*, 155–58, 162–65.

23 Simon, discussed in footnote 19, showed the third greatest decrease in GI Messiah at a -1.84 change. His greatest increase in agreement came from the idea that other countries should make their government as similar to America’s as possible. His overall increased change in patriotism was 1.42, nationalism was 2.38, and ACR was 2.73.
GIM4. Soldiers are a more special type of American citizen.

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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>+0.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The greatest increase in agreement with GI Messianism came from Julian. He maxed out the agreement that American soldier’s service, suffering, and sacrifice are both equal to God’s work and earns them salvation while they also function as America’s saviors. Like Simon, Julian saw the unifying aspect of liturgical worship saying: “Liturgy has its own special purpose in church and worship. Corporate liturgy allows us to come closer together in the liturgical process. By the end of the services, I understood [what] liturgy's impact is on a believer of Christ.”

The most unique findings came from Stefan who initially scored the highest in nationalism. His total average change across all four categories was -2.14 and he decreased in agreement in every category. Stefan, through this project, “learned that God is above all and that participating in rituals beside his worship must be done with caution.” Prior to the liturgical catechesis, daily office, and journaling Stefan ranked among the top scores in all categories, ranking above or near the sample mean. He was participating in

24 He is a twenty-three-year-old, white, infantry lieutenant from Florida who worships weekly at a Christian Churches congregation which displays the national colors in the sanctuary. He identifies as very religious and spiritual while praying several times daily (other than meals) for a minute or two each time. When the changes of all four categories were averaged together, Julian had the highest overall increase in agreement across all aspects. Across all eighteen statements, his agreement increases by over two points, more than .6 than anyone else. He had the third greatest increase in both patriotism and nationalism while having the second greatest increase in ACR. Julian prayed the daily office more than seventy-five but less than one hundred percent of the time, while attending six or seven worship services.

25 Recall, Stefan claimed no religious family or involvement with worship services. He declared himself as slightly religious and moderate spirituality (footnote 19 above). He had the greatest negative change in all categories except GI Messiah in which he was second. His most drastic categorical change came in nationalism. He went from highest in the pre-test to third lowest in the post-test. His decrease in patriotism was -2.16, nationalism was -2.68, ACR was -1.74, and GI Messiah was -1.97. His overall decrease was quadruple the mean total average change of the group. This puts Stefan over one standard deviation of change from the rest of the sample. Only one other subject had an overall decrease across all categories, Ashton whose data I analyzed above.
the ACR liturgies, and they seemed to have formed him strongly in that narrative. His consistent participation in historic Christian liturgy, corporate and personal, seemed to significantly move his desires and counter-form him toward God and his Empire.26

Conclusion

The primary question guiding the project was: What effect will a liturgical catechesis have on the Civil Religious beliefs of US Army Soldiers? I will address two of the secondary questions as a precursor to answering the main question.

Regarding the question, “How does a liturgy based Christian education (liturgical catechesis) relate to ACR beliefs in soldiers,” the liturgical catechesis moved the subjects to a greater understanding of liturgy and therefore greater unity across denominational lines. Seeing as ACR serves as the religio of the state binding citizens together across and despite institutional religious beliefs, the data points to a liturgical catechesis holding the same function. It seems this unity of worship also lent to the increase in ACR beliefs and patriotic faith. For example, George commented, “I learned a greater understanding of what it truly means to worship, finding a greater love for God, yourself, and your neighbor.” Alice said that “the group discussions after the services were most helpful. I was able to gain other perspectives and get some questions answered. It also broke down the different parts of the liturgy and their significance . . .” Lastly, Zeke, one of the two

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26 In the pre-survey he claimed to pray less than once a month for a minute or two at a time. He declared no religious preference and a low level of religiosity. Yet his impact statement of this program declared that the God of Revelation was “over-all” and that he needs to cautiously participate in cultural rituals. It seems the historic Christian liturgies won the fight with ACR liturgies for this soldier.
who claimed no religious preference and no attendance in worship, found the liturgical catechesis as a helpful “personal exploration of Christianity.”

Regarding the question, “How does a Revelation focused spiritual formation curriculum affect a soldier’s patriotism and nationalism?” As mentioned above, patriotism and ACR are linked as the agreement increased between those dispositions. Yet, through the intervention, their link with the GI Messiah seems to have broken. Seeing as Revelation and the Psalms, the content of the sermons and daily office readings, are heavily messianic it would seem correct to say that liturgical worship and daily office with readings and sermons from Revelation replace the messiahs of this world with the Messiah of God, Jesus.27

Lastly, what effect did this project have on the civil religious beliefs of USA Ranger students? This project seems to have aimed the hearts of the subjects away from the central figure of ACR, the GI Messiah, and more toward the Christian God and his Empire. This project also seems to produce agreement with ACR and patriotic dispositions at a greater rate than nationalistic beliefs. Research and recent history have shown that religious nationalism is not only bad for the country, but bad for religious faith.28

Since patriotism and ACR have been linked together in this project and patriotism and nationalism have an inverse relationship, it follows from this research that liturgical

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27 For an argument claiming the central message of the Psalter as being the worldwide reign of YHWH and his Messiah see James Luther Mays, *The Lord Reigns: A Theological Handbook to the Psalms*, 1st ed (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994). For the centrality of Jesus, the slain and living Lamb, as the Messiah of God in Revelation see chapter two of this project.

catechesis positively affects those relationships. Though not decreasing agreement with nationalism, as patriotism and ACR grew the agreement with nationalism slowed. Christian liturgical catechesis can create unity across denominations, the goal of ACR and the overtly opposite aim of nationalism, in an openly Christian manner.
CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion and Examination

This project intends to explore the influence of American Civil Religion (ACR) in soldiers who are students at USA Ranger School and its relation to Christian formation. The intervention seeks to study the effects of historical Christian liturgical worship, devotion, and catechesis on their ACR beliefs. This project seeks to spiritually counter-form Army Ranger students through historic Christian liturgical worship, catechesis, and personal practices centered on the Revelation of John.

Soldiers participate in daily practices such as reciting Army creeds and marching in formation. These “liturgies” form them spiritually in the likeness of ACR. I believe Army liturgies meet their spiritual needs. A ritual based, imaginative, and affective set of spiritual practices has shown to counter-form soldiers more into the likeness of Jesus through a battle of liturgies.

Study Objectives

Multiple questions drove the research process. The major question guiding this project is: What effect will a liturgical catechesis have on the Civil Religious beliefs of US Army Ranger students? Secondary questions are:

1. What effect does Christian liturgical worship have on a soldier’s ACR beliefs?
2. How does a liturgy based Christian education (liturgical catechesis) relate to ACR beliefs in soldiers?
3. How does a Revelation focused spiritual formation curriculum affect a soldier’s patriotism and nationalism?
Key Findings

This project revealed three key findings pertaining to how Christian liturgical catechesis effects civil religious beliefs of USA Ranger students. First, this project points toward the idea that institutional religious adherence increases general religious and patriotic dispositions. Patriotism as the lived faith of ACR was linked through this study. Patriotism is its own breed of religion, and it seems that participating in liturgical worship and learning about the liturgy carries over into other religious dispositions.

The second key finding came by way of increased unity across denominational lines. *Religio* since ancient times was a means to bind people together. The Romans instituted a civil religion to keep a pluralistic empire unified despite differences. ACR exists for the same reasons, to bind a population with vast differences together. This project showed that a liturgical worship model combined with catechesis created the same effect. The difference between a the *religio* of the civic structures and Christian liturgical catechesis comes in the source, namely, its Christian-ness. Rousseau believed Christianity was above all evil, intolerant, and divisive. This project proved the opposite, Christians of multiple denominations and even people of no religious preference grew in unity through the process of embodied liturgy and education.

Thirdly, Ebel claims the GI Messiah lies at the heart of ACR and this project confirmed his thesis; as ACR, patriotism, and GI Messianism were all linked in the pre-survey. This project then centered subjects focus on John’s Apocalypse who has a different messiah at its heart, the slain and living Lamb. This project displaced the GI Messiah complex with the Lamb Messiah of God. Effectively, the link between patriotism, ACR,
and the GI Messiah was broken through a liturgical worship and daily office with Revelation as its scriptural content.

In sum, the effect that a Christian liturgical catechesis, centered on Revelation, had on the civil religious beliefs of USA Ranger students was a positive shift in patriotism and ACR faith while producing a negative shift in GI Messiah beliefs. Also, the nationalism of subjects, though it grew, did not keep pace with the growth of patriotism and ACR. This finding is significant because of the unity developed across denominational lines. ACR and patriotism seek to be the ultimate allegiance while leaving room for secondary differences of opinion thus binding the population together, while nationalism seeks to divide, conquer, and subject. For the Christian, putting allegiance to Jesus as a secondary allegiance to the civil religious system is anathema, yet unity remains paramount to Christian faith. It seems that a Christian liturgical catechesis creates the same unity yet from a different source, the Empire of God (EOG) focused on the true Messiah, the Lamb.

**Implications**

Several implications arise from this project. First, the GI Messiah beliefs are no longer only theoretical. I have shown that Ebel’s work on the “G.I. Messiah” is held by the subjects of my study. This provides unique and challenging difficulties for the church at large and Christian chaplains in the Army to be aware of and confront. Revelation and the rest of scripture attests to only one Messiah, and he does not share allegiance with
lesser and would-be messiahs.¹

Second, Christian liturgical worship has shown to confront the GI Messiah complex and reverse its effects. Through the course of eight worship services, thirty days of morning and evening prayer, and reading the entirety of Revelation with accompanying Psalms, a measured reduction in GI Messiah beliefs occurred. Now that the GI Messiah complex was drawn into the open, this project also showed a way to reduce that complex. This implication gives Christian pastors and chaplains a way to, as mentioned above, address the GI Messiah.

The last implication concerns cross-denominational unity. The liturgical catechesis achieved unity across denominational lines. I do not believe this is a result of the liturgy itself but a result of the ensuing catechesis. Students who maintained a level of disdain for the liturgical way of worship acknowledged how much they grew to appreciate the liturgy and even more so why others worship in this way. Consensus even came in several subjects feeling more comfortable going to liturgical worship services in the future. Simply put, learning the “why” of liturgical worship removed barriers “to” participating in that form of worship. If Christian pastors and chaplains are searching for a way to build cross-denominational unity, liturgical catechesis offers an answer.

**Limitations**

Several limitations constrained this project. First, the population limited the

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¹ I, obviously, do not have anything remotely approaching population level data. However, for the scope of this project, the GI Messiah beliefs can no longer only exist in theoretical works like Jonathan H. Ebel, “Of the Lost and the Fallen: Ritual and the Religious Power of the American Soldier,” *The Journal of Religion* 92, no. 2 (April 2012): 224–50; Jonathan H. Ebel, *G.I. Messiahs: Soldiering, War, and American Civil Religion* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2015). This theory has moved, for the first time that I am aware, out of the academy and has been measured in human subjects.
scope of this project. Several variables, discussed in chapter three, put heavy constraints on the sample size. Most notably was the volunteer nature of religious involvement in the Army. This small sample size prevented this project from being able to speak for all Ranger students everywhere. How could the results have been more accurate had I run a control group with a non-liturgical worship service?

Another limitation came from the imposed schedule of the subjects as Ranger students. I only had five full weeks in the whole calendar year to execute this project. James KA Smith points out how the longer one embodies liturgy the greater liturgies effect. Obviously, a longitude study covering years of liturgical practice would show the greatest effect, however the limitation of this exact and tight window showed itself. What would the results have been with longer exposure to liturgical worship?

The final limitation to discuss comes in the atmosphere of Ranger school itself. Firstly, these subjects came from the population of those who failed to meet graduation requirements and thus had to retake the Florida phase. This added nearly six weeks away from home. They were not “happy” with themselves, the Army, and possibly God. How this emotional state affected their initial pre-survey results, I do not know. I would suspect, through conversations with hundreds of these types of students over the past three years, that their patriotism, nationalism, ACR, and GI Messiah beliefs were low. This may account for the rise in every category except GI Messiah.

Second to the atmosphere, as the students await the beginning of the next Ranger class they receive classes in the tactics, techniques, and leadership dispositions thus increasing their competence and confidence as soldiers and leaders. In other words, they go through more liturgies of ACR in the military monastery known as Ranger school.
They had a very compelling reason to embody these liturgies of civil religion and war: they wanted to master these tasks so they could graduate and receive the coveted “Ranger Tab.” This ongoing competition between the Christian and ACR liturgies must have created tension and thus a limitation.

The last atmospheric limitation was the physical location. I could not remove the Army combat uniform from myself or the subjects. Also, they lived full time on the Army camp. Where we worship, the space itself, functions as a liturgy. Reading Revelation, praying, and worshiping in an Army bunk bed, in an Army barracks, on an Army camp, and in an Army chapel could only limit the results and scope of this project. Smith captures this well, “In short, just the space of worship would tell a story that actually organizes time—an indication that here dwells a people with a unique sense of temporality, who inhabit a time that is out of joint with the regular, mundane ticking of commercial time or the standard shape of the academic year.”2 How would the effects of this project be different had they been in a different environment or atmosphere?

**Future Research**

Plethora avenues of future research building on this project have emerged. First, directly regarding the atmospheric limitations delineated above, a more “invasive” environmental shift would be worth studying. How would this project’s effects change if these soldiers were taken on an intensive offsite retreat in civilian clothes? Or a shift in aim, how would this project have effect on veterans who no longer serve in the military?

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2 Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 156. For a discussion of the effect of the worship space or atmosphere on liturgy and formation see Senn, *Embodied Liturgy*, chaps. 7, 9, and 12.
This project sets studies with veterans up nicely for future researchers.

Second, this project creates a need for further study on military service member’s nationalism beliefs and dispositions. I hypothesize that a sizable percentage of soldiers hold to average or above average religious nationalistic beliefs. Further research could look to answer the question, “how does a religious nationalism effect the service of Army soldiers?” It leads from the work of Perry, Whitehead, and Gorski that if Christian nationalism is detrimental for the church and country then nationalism is damaging for the military. What kind of unethical, discriminatory, and illegal behavior by soldiers arises from nationalistic beliefs? Worthwhile time would be spent working to establish Army wide nationalism scales and then working to reduce those dispositions in the ranks.

Lastly, interesting research could come from studying the patriotism and ACR beliefs of soldiers before they join the Army and attend the liturgical crucible known as basic training. One could then measure the growth of patriotism and ACR, and possibly nationalism, in directly relation to induction into the monastic and messianic life of the soldier. This line of research could also measure what role the chaplaincy and Army chapel services played in the creation of the GI Messiah. This would pinpoint ways of ministering to soldiers for both Christian chaplains and pastors.

Conclusion

To conclude, this project provides Christian pastors and chaplains a way to increase beliefs in Jesus as Messiah and bring unity across denominational lines that is explicitly Christian and not ACR driven. As a Christian clergyman my desire is to see people love, know, and grow as Jesus-followers. This project, in unique and surprising
ways, did exactly that. I have not solved, nor have I claimed to solve, every problem that brought me to this project. I have been led, by the Spirit and the seminary, into a whole new way of seeing the world and the culture in which I live and how to have a missionary encounter with my world. This project opens fresh doors to bring people into the EOG.
APPENDIX A

Ethical Approvals

Baylor University

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD — PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS IN RESEARCH

NOTICE OF DETERMINATION OF NON-HUMAN SUBJECT RESEARCH

Principal Investigator: Darius Barnes
Study Title: Fighting Liturgy with Liturgy: Studying the effect of Christian Liturgical Catechesis on the Civil Religious Formation of Army Ranger Students
IRB Reference #: 2027987
Date of Determination: March 17, 2023

The above referenced research project has been determined to not meet the definition of human subject research under the purview of the IRB according to federal regulations at 45 CFR 46.102(e) & (l). Specifically, this project does not contribute to generalizable knowledge.

The following documents were reviewed:

- IRB Application, submitted on 03/09/2023
- Protocol, dated 03/09/2023

This determination is based on the protocol and/or materials submitted. If the research is modified, you must contact this office to determine whether your modified research meets the definition of human subject research.

If you have any questions, please contact the office at (254) 710-3708 or IRB@baylor.edu

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Deborah L. Holland, JD, MPH, CHRC, CHPC
Assistant Vice Provost for Research, Research Compliance
MEMORANDUM FOR LTC Richard Jones, Camp James Rudder, Eglin AFB, FL  20 March 2023

SUBJECT: Research Access Permission

Name of Researcher: CH (CPT) Darius M Barnes
IRB Protocol Number: 2027687

1. References:
   b. Department of Defense (DoD) Instruction 3216.02, Protection of Human Subjects and Adherence to Ethical Standards in DoD-Conducted and -Supported Research
   c. Army Regulation 70-25, Protection of Human Subjects in Research
   d. Federal Regulation 45 CFR 46.102(e) & (I)

2. Approval. I hereby approve the request for support described below.

3. Scope. I give permission for 6th Ranger Training Battalion and Camp James Rudder to provide support to the above referenced research via access to the following installation assets and/or personnel: the Camp James Rudder Keanelly Chapel while on duty time with Ranger Students or Camp James Rudder during the “Best Ranger Competition” cycle break between Ranger Courses 5-23 and 6-23. Use of printers to create religious education materials and religious regalia owned by 6th Ranger Training Battalion’s Unit Ministry Team is authorized. This research does not involve human subjects according to the federal regulation cited in (d.) above.

4. Conditions of approval for research involving human subjects: If this activity is research involving human subjects, this approval is provided on the condition of, and with the understanding that, the researcher’s institution will:
   a. Provide to my command any human research protection program-related support necessary to implement and oversee the above referenced activity.
   b. Obtain and comply with the terms of its Federal Assurance for the Protection of Human Research Subjects for this DoD supported research involving human subjects (if applicable).
   c. Inform me via my point of contact below regarding any relevant unanticipated problem involving risk to subjects or others, or serious or continuing noncompliance.
   d. Obtain publication clearance review from my command before publishing or otherwise releasing findings from this research to members of the public (e.g., via abstracts).

5. Affirmation. By endorsing this request, I affirm I have determined that participation in the above-referenced activity will not impact execution of the 6th Ranger Training Battalion and Camp
James Rudder’s mission. While not mission critical, this effort will be worth the time/cost of Army support and/or assistance. The results of the research may provide information to future leaders of Camp Rudder and the Army the ability to provide Religious Support more accurately in accordance with individual’s sincerely held faith and the first amendment of the US Constitution. I acknowledge that my office assumes responsibility for ensuring the portion of the activity supported by my area of responsibility meets all applicable regulatory requirements.

6. POC. The action officer is CH (CPT) Darius M Barnes, 5th RTB CH, Darius.m.barnes.mil@army.mil, and 480-706-7005.

RICHARD JONES
LTC, AN
COMMANDING

Attachment: Institutional Review Board Approval
Letter for Above Referenced Study
MEMORANDUM FOR Mr. Darius Barnes, Student at Baylor University's Truett Seminary, 901 Valparaiso Blvd., Niceville, FL, 32578, (Darius_Barnes1@baylor.edu)


1. Review Outcome.

The Army Human Research Protections Office (AHRPO) Assistance Review of the above referenced protocol is complete, and AHRPO accepts the Baylor University's Institutional Review Board's (IRB) determination/approval of the protocol as not human subjects research (HSR).

The AHRPO assistance review is required to ensure that Department of Defense (DoD) assisted HSR is compliant with DoD requirements in DoD Instruction (DoDI) 3216.02 and the AHRPO policy for the provision of assistance titled, "Department of the Army Review Requirements for Research Assistance to Non-DoD Institutions". Assistance is defined as non-financial resources that are provided by the DoD to non-DoD institutions for research, including, but not limited to facilities, equipment, access to information about DoD-affiliated personnel for recruitment, access to DoD-affiliated personnel, data, or specimens. Funds that are provided by the DoD through a contract or similar arrangement subject to the Defense Federal Acquisition Regulation Supplement (DFARS); grants, cooperative agreements, technology investment agreements; or other non-procurement awards are not considered assistance. Assistance is a subset of support.

The DoD is providing assistance for the above referenced activity by providing facilities and providing access to DoD-affiliated personnel for recruitment.

2. Requirements.

Substantive Changes to the Protocol: The AHRPO must review and accept the IRB's determination when substantive modifications are made to this research protocol and any modifications that could potentially increase risk to subjects, before the changes are

implemented to ensure compliance with the DoDI 3216.02. Substantive modifications include a, change or addition of an institution, elimination or alteration of the consent process, change to the study population that has regulatory implications (e.g., adding children, adding active duty population) or a change that could increase risks to subjects.

Furthermore, if after project initiation, the project changes such as that it is no longer in the scope of the AHRPO assistance policy, the project must receive additional DoD Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) review before the expenditure of funds and/or the initiation of revised activities. Such activities that would require a different type of review include:

- Addition of any activities that will be supported by the DoD through funds provided to non-DoD institutions through a contract, grant, or similar agreement
- Addition of DoD-affiliated personnel serving as investigators in such a way that engages the DoD institution in HSR.
- Addition of study procedures involving DoD-affiliated personnel as subject when those study procedure are determined to involve greater than minimal risk to subjects, and/or test articles subject to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations 21 CFR Parts 312 and 812.
- Addition of any activities that require a Component Level Administrative Review (CLAR) in accordance with DoDI 3216.02, §3.6.a(1)(a)-(f).
- Addition of prisoners as subjects.

Access to Records. Records maintained by non-DoD institutions IAW the non-DoD institutions’ record retention policies as specified by 45 CFR 46/32 CFR 219 that are directly related to the DA assistance must be accessible for inspection and copying by AHRPO.

Notification. The investigator should immediately notify the AHRPO of the occurrence of any of the following:

- When the IRB used to review and approve the research changes to a different IRB;
  - Suspension or termination of this research study by the IRB, the institution, the sponsor, or any regulatory agency;
  - Substantiated unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others related to this research study; and
  - Substantiated serious or continuing noncompliance related to this research study.

3. Other Considerations.

If your activity includes an information collection (IC) (i.e., surveys including focus groups, questionnaires, etc.) IAW AR 25-98, DoDI 1100.13, and DoDI 8910.10, review of the activity by the U.S. Army Records Management and Declassification Agency (RMDA), Records Management Division (RMD), Information Collections Branch, may be required. This is a separate review from AHRPO’s review. For more information, contact the Army Information Management Control Office (IMCO), Mr. Kurt Hedberg (kurt.e.hedberg.civ@army.mil).


Do not construe this AHRPO memorandum as IRB approval, DoD Institutional approval, or other DoD support agreement. This review confirms only that the above reference project is deemed by AHRPO to be compliant with the requirements identified in the AHRPO assistance policy and DoDI 3216.02.

5. Point of Contact.

The AHRPO Point of Contact for any questions regarding this memorandum is Ms. Sarah P. Rule, at 703-681-5778 or sarah.p.rule.civ@health.mil.

RICE.1039223887
SARAH P. RULE, MPH, CCRP
Deputy Director
Army Human Research Protections Office
APPENDIX B
Informed Consent

Baylor University
Truett Theological Seminary
Consent Form for Research

PROTOCOL TITLE: Fighting Liturgy with Liturgy

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Dairus M Barnes

SUPPORTED BY: Baylor University’s Truett Seminary

Purpose of the research: The purpose of this study is to study the relationship between historic Christian Liturgical worship and education and the patriotism of USA Ranger students. I am asking you to take part in this study because you are a student at USA Ranger school during a class break between two cycles of the course.

Study activities: If you choose to be in the study, you will:
- Take a pre- and post-survey identifying initial and concluding levels of patriotism and Christian faith.
- Participate in this study for the next four (4) weeks.
- Attend eight (8) liturgical worship serves each followed by religious education studying the significance of Christian worship.
- Keep a daily rhythm of morning and evening prayers accompanied by selected Psalms and sections of Revelation for reading. These prayers and readings will take less than fifteen minutes each session. The prayers will be provided by the researcher and broadly follow the structure of the Anglican Book of Common Prayer, 2019.
- Each daily reading will have accompanied questions for reflective journaling. This journaling practice will occur at the conclusion of each day as an individual practice. The researcher will copy these journals for study and data allowing you to keep the original.

Risks and Benefits:
Questionnaire/Survey Risks: You may be uncomfortable with some of the questions and topics we will ask about. You do not have to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable.

Sensitive Topics: This research study involves religious, patriotism, and faith testing. The questions being asked may be sensitive and personal in nature. It is possible that answering some questions may cause some stress.

Reflection Questions and Journaling: Questions and readings are specifically selected to interact with your loyalty to God and your nation. These questions and readings aim to increase your loyalty, devotion, and love of God. This may affect your love of your nation (patriotism). Please feel free to openly discuss this tension in your journaling.
There are no monetary or material benefits to you from taking part in this research. The potential exists for spiritual growth and a deepened appreciation of God and historic Christian worship.

**Confidentiality:**
A risk of taking part in this study is the possibility of a loss of confidentiality. Loss of confidentiality includes having your personal information shared with someone who is not on the study team and was not supposed to see or know about your information. The researcher plans to protect your confidentiality.

I will keep the records of this study confidential by only collecting broad and general demographics data (age, ethnicity, rank). Each survey will have a code to which only the researcher will have the key. This code will allow your pre- and post-test survey’s to be compared for individual assessment of changes. I will make every effort to keep your records confidential. However, there are times when federal or state law requires the disclosure of your records.

Authorized staff of Baylor University may review the study records for purposes such as quality control or safety.

**Questions or concerns about this research study**
You can call me with any concerns or questions about the research. My telephone number is listed below:

Dairus Barnes  
480-709-7005  
[Dairus_barnes1@baylor.edu](mailto:Dairus_barnes1@baylor.edu)  
Fridays 0930-1700.

The academic/faculty supervisor for this project is listed below:

Dr. David Wilhite  
254-710-6789  
[David_Wilhite@baylor.edu](mailto:David_Wilhite@baylor.edu)

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or wish to obtain information, ask questions, or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher, you may contact the Baylor University IRB through the Office of the Vice Provost for Research at 254-710-3708 or [irb@baylor.edu](mailto:irb@baylor.edu).

Taking part in this study is your choice. You are free not to take part or to stop at any time for any reason. No matter what you decide, there will be no penalty or loss of benefit to which you are entitled. If you decide to withdraw from this study, the information that you have already provided will be kept confidential. Information already collected about you cannot be deleted.

By continuing with the research and completing the study activities, you are providing consent. Thank you for your support and participation. Grace and Peace to you!
APPENDIX C

Surveys

Pre-Survey

Identifier Code ____________

**Demographic Information**
This information is for data collection purposes only. Your personal identity will remain confidential and anonymous. The setting of Ranger School ensures that a barrier exists between your demographic information and anyone in the public by removing age, rank, and ethnicity from your ID code. Only the researcher (CH Dairus Barnes) will have the key to the ID code list at the top of the page. Once this data is collected, organized, and recorded it will be destroyed. The ID code will only be used to compare pre-test with post-test to individually measure results of the study.

AGE ____________

MILITARY GRADE / RANK (if not the Army write out) ___________________________
[Ex. O3 / CPT or captain]

MILITARY OPERATIONAL SPECIALTY (MOS; if not the Army write out) ______________
[Ex. 56A: Chaplain]

ETHNIC IDENTIFICATION ________________________________ [Ex. Anglo-American]

IN WHAT STATE DID YOU GROW UP (birth to 18 years old, if multiple states pick longest residence)? ___________________________ [Ex. Nevada or NV]

BIOLOGICAL SEX (circle one): M / F

**Pre-Test Survey Instructions**
Below you will find twenty statements. Under each statement you will find a line with “Strongly Disagree” at one end and “Strongly Agree” at the other end. Place an “X” on the line that most honestly represents your attitude toward the statement. See the example below:

1. Tom Brady is the best American football quarterback of all time.

   Strongly Disagree          Strongly Agree
   ____________________________
   | X |

   P1. I am proud to be an American.

   Strongly Disagree          Strongly Agree
   ____________________________

   P2. I am emotionally attached to America and emotionally affected by its actions.

   Strongly Disagree          Strongly Agree
   ____________________________

   P3. Although at times I may not agree with the government, my commitment to the U.S. always remains strong.

   Strongly Disagree          Strongly Agree
   ____________________________

   ___
P4. The fact I am an American is an important part of my identity.

Strongly Disagree  Strongly Agree

P5. In general, I have very little respect for the American people.

Strongly Disagree  Strongly Agree

N1. In view of America's moral and material superiority, it is only right that we should have the biggest say in deciding United Nations policy.

Strongly Disagree  Strongly Agree

N2. The first duty of every young American is to honor the national American history and heritage.

Strongly Disagree  Strongly Agree

N3. Other countries should try to make their government as much like ours as possible.

Strongly Disagree  Strongly Agree

N4. Foreign nations have done some very fine things but it takes America to do things in a big way.

Strongly Disagree  Strongly Agree

N5. It is really NOT important that the U.S. be number one in whatever it does.

Strongly Disagree  Strongly Agree

ACR1. The American Flag has sacred meaning.

Strongly Disagree  Strongly Agree

ACR2. Major national holidays (like Memorial Day, Independence Day, Thanksgiving Day) should be revered.

Strongly Disagree  Strongly Agree
ACR3. God has uniquely blessed America with democracy and freedom.

*Strongly Disagree*                                           *Strongly Agree*

ACR4. History proves that God has a special plan for America.

*Strongly Disagree*                                           *Strongly Agree*

GIM1. By serving, suffering, and sacrificing in the Army, soldiers are doing God’s work.

*Strongly Disagree*                                           *Strongly Agree*

GIM2. The soldier earns salvation through their service, suffering, and sacrifice.

*Strongly Disagree*                                           *Strongly Agree*

GIM3. Soldiers are America’s saviors.

*Strongly Disagree*                                           *Strongly Agree*

GIM4. Soldiers are a more special type of American citizen.

*Strongly Disagree*                                           *Strongly Agree*

------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

**Religious Behaviors and Attitudes**

1. With what religious family, if any, do you most closely identify? *(Read the whole list before marking a box. Please mark only one box.)*

- Anabaptist/ Mennonite
- Asian Folk Religion
- Assemblies of God
- Baha’i
- Baptist Bible Church
- Buddhist
- Catholic/Roman Catholic
- Christian Churches (Church of Christ, Disciples of Christ, Independent Christian Churches)
- Christian Science
- Church of God
- Church of the Nazarene
- Episcopal/Anglican
- Hindu
- Holiness
- Jehovah’s Witnesses
- Jewish
- Latter-day Saints
- Lutheran
- Methodist (United, African, Global)
- Muslim
- Orthodox (Eastern, Russian, Greek)
- Pentecostal
- Presbyterian
- Quaker/Friends
- Reformed Church in America/Dutch Reformed
- Seventh Day Adventist
- Sikh
Identifier Code ____________

☐ Unitarian Universalist          ☐ Other (please specify)          ☐ Don’t know.
☐ Non-denominational Christian
☐ No religion

2. How often do you attend religious services at a place of worship? (Outside of Ranger School, please mark only one box.)
   ☐ Never
   ☐ Less than once a year
   ☐ Once or twice a year
   ☐ Several times a year
   ☐ Once a month
   ☐ 2-3 times a month
   ☐ About once a week
   ☐ Several times a week

3. Does your place of worship display an American flag in the main worship space?
   ☐ Yes
   ☐ No

4. How religious do you consider yourself to be? (Please mark only one box.)
   ☐ Not religious
   ☐ Slightly religious
   ☐ Moderately religious
   ☐ Very religious
   ☐ I don’t know.

5. How spiritual do you consider yourself to be? (Please mark only one box.)
   ☐ Not spiritual
   ☐ Slightly spiritual
   ☐ Moderately spiritual
   ☐ Very spiritual
   ☐ I don’t know.

6. I typically pray in private… (Please mark only one box.)
   ☐ I never pray. (If marked skip the next question, your survey is complete.)
   ☐ Less than once per month
   ☐ Several times per month
   ☐ Several times per week
   ☐ Once Daily
   ☐ Several times per day (other than meals)
   ☐ Only at meals (grace)

7. My private prayers typically last… (Please mark only one box.)
   ☐ A few seconds
   ☐ A minute or two
   ☐ Several minutes
   ☐ A half an hour
   ☐ An hour or more
Post-Survey

Identifier Code __________

Post-Test Survey Instructions

Below you will find twenty statements. Under each statement you will find a line with “Strongly Disagree” at one end and “Strong Agree” at the other end. Place an “X” on the line that most honestly represents your attitude toward the statement. See the example below:

1. I love the Lord of the Rings book trilogy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This portion is intentionally left blank
P1. I am proud to be an American.

Strongly Disagree  Strongly Agree

P2. I am emotionally attached to America and emotionally affected by its actions.

Strongly Disagree  Strongly Agree

P3. Although at times I may not agree with the government, my commitment to the U.S. always remains strong.

Strongly Disagree  Strongly Agree

P4. The fact I am an American is an important part of my identity.

Strongly Disagree  Strongly Agree

P5. In general, I have very little respect for the American people.

Strongly Disagree  Strongly Agree

N1. In view of America’s moral and material superiority, it is only right that we should have the biggest say in deciding United Nations policy.

Strongly Disagree  Strongly Agree

N2. The first duty of every young American is to honor the national American history and heritage.

Strongly Disagree  Strongly Agree

N3. Other countries should try to make their government as much like ours as possible.

Strongly Disagree  Strongly Agree

N4. Foreign nations have done some very fine things, but it takes America to do things in a big way.

Strongly Disagree  Strongly Agree

N5. It is really NOT important that the U.S. be number one in whatever it does.

Strongly Disagree  Strongly Agree
ACR1. The American Flag has sacred meaning.

**Strongly Disagree**  **Strongly Agree**

ACR2. Major national holidays (like Memorial Day, Independence Day, Thanksgiving Day) should be revered.

**Strongly Disagree**  **Strongly Agree**

ACR3. God has uniquely blessed America with democracy and freedom.

**Strongly Disagree**  **Strongly Agree**

ACR4. History proves that God has a special plan for America.

**Strongly Disagree**  **Strongly Agree**

GIM1. By serving, suffering, and sacrificing in the Army, soldiers are doing God’s work.

**Strongly Disagree**  **Strongly Agree**

GIM2. The soldier earns salvation through their service, suffering, and sacrifice.

**Strongly Disagree**  **Strongly Agree**

GIM3. Soldiers are America’s saviors.

**Strongly Disagree**  **Strongly Agree**

GIM4. Soldiers are a more special type of American citizen.

**Strongly Disagree**  **Strongly Agree**

Impact of Program

How involved were you with the individual program (morning and evening prayer)? (check one)

- Did not participate ______
- Completed between 50-75% ______
- Never missed ______
- Completed more than 75% but less than 100% ______
- Completed less than 50% ______

Post-Test
Identifier Code ___________

How many liturgical worship services did you attend during the program? *(check one)*

None ______  1-2 services ______

3-5 services ______  6-7 services ______

Never missed *(all 8)* a service ______

In your own words, what did you learn from participating in this program?

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

What was most helpful about this program?

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

What was least helpful?

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________
APPENDIX D

Order of Worship: The Liturgy

FIGHTING LITURGY WITH LITURGY
An Order for Public Worship

PRELUDE
Prelude is listening to music, quiet fellowship, and reflection.

WORDS OF GATHERING
P: This is the day that the Lord has made.
C: Let us rejoice and be glad in it. (Psalm 118:24)

ORDER FOR CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS
The sign of the cross may be made by all in remembrance of their Regular whenever the & appear. Please stand.
P: In the name of the Father, and of the & Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
C: Amen
P: Make us to know your ways, O Lord, and teach us your paths.
Lead us in your truth and teach us, for you are the God of our salvation, for whom we wait.
C: Amen
P: If we say we have fellowship with God while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not live according to the truth; but if we walk in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin. (1 John 1:7)

SEARCH FOR REFLECTION AND SELF-EXAMINATION. Prayer Time
P: Have mercy on us, O God, according to your steadfast love.
C: According to your abundant mercy, blot out our transgressions. Wash us thoroughly from our iniquity and cleanse us from our sins. Create in us a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within us. Cast us not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from us. Restore to us the joy of your salvation, and uphold us with a willing spirit. Amen
(Prison 54:2-10:12)
The worship leader addresses the congregation. Leader speaks:
P: Let it be known: that through Jesus Christ, the forgiveness of sins
is proclaimed to you. (Acts 10:47)
C: Amen
P: He commanded us to preach and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name. (Acts 10:43-48)
C: Amen

OPENING HYMN
APOSTOLIC GREETING
P: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.
C: To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (Revelation 1:4-5)

VERSES OF PRAISE
The worship leader and congregation join in a dialogue of Scripture verses, based on the theme of the Gospel. Leader speaks:
P: Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased.
C: (Luke 2:14)
P: Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever. (Revelation 7:12)
C: (Revelation 7:12)
P: Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!
C: (John 1:29)
P: “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!” (Revelation 5:12)
P: Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy.
C: (Revelation 15:3-4)

ABOUT THE LITURGY
The historic Christian order of service and the traditional liturgy for worship are based upon the words of Scripture, from both Old and New Testaments. Various traditional elements of the service, like the New Creation and Agony Narratives are taken directly from Scripture, while others like the Olivet and Saxon are made up of many Bible passages brought together.

This setting of the service for Holy Communion attempts to make the connection to Scripture to worship even more explicit. The focus of the liturgical form finds the book of Revelation at its center. Therefore, every worship service will have a reading from Revelation, and much of the liturgy comes from the liturgy and songs found in The Revelation. Also, the hymns or songs of praise sung during the liturgy are inspired by the words and songs of The Revelation.

Many Western branches of the Christian faith, Roman Catholic and Presbyterian share a similar form and style of their liturgy. This liturgy follows the same general order as the great liturgies of the Western church cathedrals. For a comparison see the table of comparisons found in Frank O. Sema, Christian Liturgies: Canonical and Evangelical (Manhattan: Fortress, 1997), 444-47.

The spoken dialog and prayers in this setting are taken directly from the English language versions, with its appropriate contexts intact throughout. These verses were chosen to convey the sense and meaning that are in the traditional liturgy, embellishing the biblical texts for our worship. The “Praise of the Day” will come from The Anglican Book of Common Prayer, 2019. The Prcelis of the Church will come from the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod’s Book of Worship, 1978.

Since this is a spoken liturgy, reducing musical accompaniment only for congregational hymns, it is well suited for places where professionally trained accompanists or vocal soloists are not available to lead a musical setting of the liturgy. You can find the hymns for the hymns and praise songs on a separate worship chart.
The words in red text are not set in print, service, they provide instructions to help the flow and embodiment of the worship service. Please adhere to these instructions. The worship leader says the lines marked with “P” and the congregation says the lines marked with “C”.

140
Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever. (Revelation 11:15)

P: Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power.
C: for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created. (Revelation 4:11)

Salutation and Prayer of the Day
P: The Lord be with you. (2 Thessalonians 3:16)
C: And also with you.

The worship leader offers the Prayer of the Day.
C: Amen.

Please Be Seated.

The Old Testament Reading

The Psalm

The Revelation Reading

Gospel Introduction

Please Stand
P: Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.
C: And we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God. (John 6:68)

The Gospel Reading

The Sermon Seated

Hymn of the Day Seated

P: Lord, in your mercy,
C: Hear our prayer.

The Peace
P: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
C: And also with you.

Preface to Holy Communion
P: The Lord be with you. (2 Thessalonians 3:16)
C: All the saints greet you. (2 Corinthians 13:13)
P: Lift up your hearts. (Romans 5:4)
C: To you, O Lord, we lift up our soul. (Psalm 121:1)
P: Let us thank the Lord. (Psalm 121:2)
C: We must always give thanks to God, as it is right. (2 Thessalonians 1:1)

Sanctus
P: Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!
C: Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created. (Revelation 4:11)

Words of Institution

P: In the night in which he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks; broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying: Take and eat; this is my body, given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.
C: Again, after supper he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying: This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sins. Do this in remembrance of me.

The Nicene Creed
All stand.
P: Let us confess our faith in the words of the Nicene Creed:
C: We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things, visible and invisible.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made. For we believe that for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. We believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Prayers of the Church
The worship leader and congregation call upon God in prayer. Please kneel.
P: Lord God of our salvation; we cry out day and night before you.
C: Let our prayer come before you; incline your ear to our cry. (Psalm 86:1-2)

P: Let us pray...
More special supplications, intercessions, and prayer may be made following each one with the below response:

The Lamb of God
P: Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. (1 John 1:29)
C: Have mercy on us.
P: Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. (1 John 1:29)
C: Have mercy on us.
P: Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. (1 John 1:29)
C: Guide our feet into the way of peace.

The Distribution of the Sacrament
During the distribution, one or more hymns may be sung. The worship leader and assistants administer the Sacrament.

Blessing and Response
P: Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! (Revelation 15:3)
C: For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed. (Revelation 15:4)
P: Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for his judgments are true and just.
C: Hallelujah! (Revelation 19:1-3)
P: Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, small and great.
C. Hallelujah!
P. Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns.
C1. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the
marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself
ready. (Revelation 19:6-7)

CLOSING HYMN

Benediction and Dismissal

P. The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make his face to shine
upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance
upon you and give you peace. (Numbers 6:24-26)
C. Amen.
P. The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come.” And let the one who hears
say, “Come.” (Revelation 22:17)
C. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! (Revelation 22:20)
P. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. (Revelation 22:21)
C. Thanks be to God. Amen. (1 Corinthians 15:57)

Works Cited

This liturgy was modified from a liturgical setting for
worship (found below). The original setting contained the
Apostle’s Creed. I have replaced this with the Nicene Creed
for corporate worship. The soldiers will say the Apostle’s Creed
twice daily in their individual liturgies so this Nicene is used here.
I have also replaced as much of the original scriptural portions of
the liturgy with as many of the songs found in the text of The
Revelation as possible. Also, the first reading has changed to the
“Old Testament Reading” and the second reading has changed to the
“Revelation Reading”. See below for the copyrights for both
the English Standard Version and the original liturgy setting.

SOLA SCRIPTURA SETTING

A Spoken Liturgy for Holy Communion
Arrangement © 2011 - Sola Publishing

Sola Publishing
P.O. Box 521
Maple Lake, MN 55355

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† In a few cases, the singular “I” has been changed to the plural “we” for
use in corporate worship with the prominent music conclusion.

‡ The phrase “and the Sea” (Latin: maris) is not in the original Greek text.
See the resolution of the College of Bishops concerning the phrasing from the Anglican
Church of North America to Documentary Fundamentals of the Book of Common
Prayer, 2013, page 768.
Daily Office and Lectionary

APPENDIX E

The Liturgy with Liturgies: Daily Prayer Hours

IN THE MORNING

O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth your praise.

Psalm 51:17

Confession of Sin

Almighty and most merciful Father, we have sinned and strayed from your ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the desires and dictates of our own hearts. We have offended against your holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done, and apart from your grace, there is no health in us. O Lord, have mercy upon us. Spare all those who confess their faults. Restore all those who are penitent, according to your promises declared to all people in Christ Jesus our Lord. And grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake, that we may now live a godly, righteous, and sober life, to the glory of your holy Name. Amen.

Great is your faithfulness, O God, and your love endures forever. Amen.

A reading from the Psalms, while making the sign of the cross:

Psalm 143:8-11

Psalm 32

A reading from Revelation for the Day

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.

He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended into hell; on the third day he rose again;

He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Prayer of the day

O God, you have given us grace at this time with joy and peace in believing through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Romans 15:13

IN THE EVENING

Let my prayer be set forth in your sight as sacrifice and let the lifting up of my hands be an evening sacrifice.

Psalm 141:2

Confession of Sin

Almighty and most merciful Father, we have sinned and strayed from your ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the desires and dictates of our own hearts. We have offended against your holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done; and apart from your grace, there is no health in us. O Lord, have mercy upon us. Spare all those who confess their faults. Restore all those who are penitent, according to your promises declared to all people in Christ Jesus our Lord. And grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake, that we may now live a godly, righteous, and sober life, to the glory of your holy Name. Amen.

THE PRAYERS

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

THE PRAYERS

Lord, have mercy.

Chant, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

The Prayer of the Church

For the Church

O God, who has made us perfectly for your glory, make us perfectly one in you; that the world may know that you have sent your Son Jesus Christ and have made him for the salvation of the whole world. Amen.
Introduction

Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; in his excellent greatness he does wondrous things. He rules over the sea and all the creatures that live in it. He made the world, and all that is in it, both the earth and those who live on it. He gave us a place in the world to live, but we must not forget that we are responsible for our actions. The Lord bless us and keep us in his love.

READING THE PSALM OF THE DAY

Upon the completion of the Lord's Prayer, say:

"Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen." A period of silence may follow.

READING FROM REVELATION FOR THE DAY

A period of silence may follow.

THE APOSTLE'S CREED

Standing up:

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.
He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell.
On the third day he rose again.
He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

THE PRAYERS

LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Daily Psalm and Revelation Readings:

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CONCLUDING SENTENCE

The almighty and merciful Lord, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, bless us and keep us, this night and evermore. Amen.

Footnote:

APPENDIX F
Authorship and Date

As alluded to above, Revelation was not written because Rome persecuted Christians. Revelation, as Gorman says, was written as a “prophetic critique” of “imperial idolatry” which he defines as civil religion or the systematic worship of civil power.\footnote{1}{Bauckham evens says that “Revelation [is] the most powerful piece of political resistance literature from the period of the early Empire.” Gorman, Reading Revelation Responsibly, 12, 54–72; Bauckham, The Theology of the Book of Revelation, 38.}

Understanding the Apocalypse’s origin story helps better locate its critique of civil religion.


I disagree with this claim. I understand Lazarus of Bethany as the author of the fourth gospel.\footnote{3}{I am convinced by Ben Witherington III of the Lazarus connection. There exist multiple linguistic and thematic commonalities between the Fourth Gospel and Revelation. Many of these are not convincing when one examines the details. For example, the only references to Jesus as a “lamb” in the New Testament occur in these two works. However, upon investigation the author of Revelation always uses \\textit{arnion} for lamb while the Gospel only uses \\textit{amnos}. Enough of these linguistic nuances compound pointing to a person other than the author of the Gospel or the Epistles bearing “John’s” name as the author of Revelation. Ben Witherington, “What’s in a Name?: Rethinking the Historical Figure of the Beloved Disciple in the Fourth Gospel,” in John, Jesus, and History, Volume 2, ed. Paul N. Anderson, Felix Just, and Tom Thatcher, Aspects of Historicity in the Fourth Gospel (Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 203–12; Ben Witherington, Revelation, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 2–3. My friend and pastor Jeremy Smith brought this compelling work to my attention.}

I construct the narrative pieces thusly: John the Seer was a
Jesus-following, ethnic Jew in the prophetic tradition living in Jerusalem until the Jewish war with Rome broke out in 66 AD. He knew of Lazarus and his eyewitness, oral, and written tradition of Jesus, possibly being discipled by him and a generation younger. John the Seer fled the destruction, in accordance with his Lord’s warning (Matt. 24:15-28 and Luke 21:20-24), eventually making his way to Asia establishing himself in the area during the subapostolic era. It was here in Asia he redacted and compiled the Fourth Gospel, prior to his stay on Patmos, keeping Lazarus’ pre-70 AD material largely intact.

He then was given the apocalyptic vision from and about Jesus and spent the late years of the first century compiling and circulating the Revelation of Jesus. This story proves important as it could describe the fervor with which John writes contra Rome and RCR.

The material we know as the Apocalypse was received and written during the reign of Domitian (A.D. 81-96), most likely late in that reign. The “Nero myth” in

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4 Koester notes, “the most plausible view is that John was the real name of the author and he was a Jewish Christian prophet active in Asia Minor.” Koester, Revelation, 66. See also Gorman, Reading Revelation Responsibly, 46.


Revelation 13 and 17 of pseudo-resurrection, almost certainly did not circulate until later in the century. The spiritual decline of Ephesus, Paul and Timothy’s Asiatic center of ministry, needed time to decay and the heretical sects discussed in Revelation 2-3 needed time to develop. The impending persecution that John discusses could only have expression in Domitian’s reign. Lastly, Revelation 3:17 tells of a rich and materially self-sufficient church in Laodicea which would take time to recover after the devastating earthquake there in A.D. 60-61.

The early date places the writing under Nero’s reign (A.D. 54-68). Arguments for the early date come from the list of emperors/heads of the beast in 17:10-11 which is highly symbolic. Most plausibly, John measures out the Jerusalem temple in 11:1-2 as if it still stands. Based on the loose evidence for the early date, I hold to late in Domitian’s reign for the writing of the Apocalypse.

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7 Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, 66.19.3.


10 A.D. 68-69 saw four different emperors in rapid succession, finishing with Vespasian (A.D. 69-79). Counting the “year of the four emperors” muddles this argument beyond valid use.

11 If my narrative of John the Seer’s life is correct, then John would have experienced the devastation of Roman conquest. It most likely would have broken his heart and he would have been searching for answers from God. This Revelation from Jesus would have retroactively given John “eyes to see” what he has experienced.
APPENDIX G

Service Schedule, Attendance, and Field Notes from Catechesis

**Introduction Session:** 25 April 2023

37 in attendance

18 signed up for full participation.

**Worship Service 1: Why Liturgy? 27 April 2023**

23 in attendance

*Field notes from catechesis:*

Discussion topic was centered on the questions “Why worship in liturgical forms? What is liturgy?” To open the catechesis, I defined liturgy as I have in my dissertation: ‘routine practices of ultimate allegiance meant to form the practitioner into a certain kind of person who desires the kingdom implicit in the practices.’ I made explicit some Army liturgies such as the Ranger Creed, saluting the flag, and physical fitness. I led a short discussion telling my story about chaplain ministry in Syria and the only soldiers who regularly came to worship services were ones from historically liturgical traditions. I described, as detailed in chapter one and three of my dissertation, how I hypothesized that the liturgies of the Army satisfied the liturgical needs of soldiers from non-liturgical traditions. This led them to deny the opportunities to participate in Christian worship when presented. In short, their patriotism engendered through Civil Religious liturgies of the Army have satisfied their religious desires. While, on the other hand, the soldiers raised in a liturgical faith tradition, it seemed their bodies desired and drew them to worship services. I could not, not attend. I described to them how I wanted to study the relationships between historic Christian liturgical worship and the Civil Religious faith (patriotism) of soldiers. I then asked for some of their thoughts and experiences of the liturgical worship service we just participated in. I leveled with them acknowledging that, as an ordained Pentecostal pastor, I have not grown up with liturgical forms of worship. I acknowledged the initial awkwardness of some of it, yet I was drawn to figuring out how to better provide Christian services and formation for soldiers. Here were some of the responses:
Ranger A: “I don’t know about all the stand up, sit down, and kneel stuff. You know, I would just rather not. I just do it because we are all doing it together. It is nice to do it as a group.”

Ranger B: “Parts of it feel ingenuine, like I am just going through the motions. Other parts feel very significant. I hope it will become more genuine and natural.”

Ranger C: “It keeps me engaged. Not fun so much, but there is something required of me to do so I found myself paying more attention.”

Ranger D: “I like the routine, its something to look forward to and anticipate. I know that we are going to do the same stuff every time, I can look ahead and be ready for what comes next.”

Worship Service 2: Why Confession of Sin? 2 May 2023

25 in attendance

Field notes from catechesis:

Discussion topic centered on the opening part of the liturgy: the confession of sin. The questions that focused our catechesis were “Why do we confess our sins? What does God do to us through our confession of sin?” Some discussion responses were as follows:

Ranger A: “When I am confessing my sin each morning and night and in service, I find myself reflecting on my day. It requires me to take inventory of my day according to what I have done and said.”

Ranger B: “It puts me in a position of vulnerability, kneeling and admitting fault and all. Its like a surrender to God. That’s uncomfortable.”

To this comment I led a discussion of how vulnerability is a key ingredient to being a healthy human and having healthy life-giving relationships. Then I talked about being vulnerable is only good if you are surrendered to a good and healthy person. Vulnerability and surrender before a cruel or immature or unhealthy persons are dangerous and foolish. Then I made the connection that God is the best, mature, and healthy person therefore vulnerability and surrender before him is the most healing and life-giving. Conversation then continued.

Ranger C: “I agree it feels uncomfortable and vulnerable however when we do it together it makes it better. Its like, you know, I’m not alone with sin.”

Ranger D: “I have started, after I say the confession of sin in my daily prayers, to add in a moment of silence and count and name my sins through the day. I sin a lot! It is really making me think now throughout the day that I want that list to be shorter next time I pray! So, it’s helping me watch my behavior and be aware of how I fail God’s standard.”

Ranger E: “Receiving forgiveness is healing. It helps me feel better and I know it makes relationships healthier.”

Ranger F: “I notice. I may be thinking too far into this, that we kneel when we are asking for something like forgiveness for sins.”
**Worship Service 3: Why song and scripture? 10 May 2023**

20 in attendance

Field notes from catechesis:

The discussion topic for this catechesis centered upon the role of song and scripture in liturgical worship.

The focusing questions were “why do we sing and read scripture? What does God do to us through our singing and reading?” Thoughts and discussion from the Ranger students included the following:

Ranger A: “Singing is fun. You know when a song comes on the radio you know or like you sing and move with it.”

Ranger B: “Songs help me engage in the service in a different way. I get to participate, and it keeps me interested in the service.”

Ranger C: “Scripture provides some lessons. We read a lot of the Bible each service. It seems like the scriptures speak more to the mind, more thoughtful or thought provoking.”

Ranger D: “The songs are beautiful and artful. The scripture seems to be more thoughtful so it’s like we have both art and science, song and scripture, in the service. They help each other, you know? Its like the words of the scriptures we are reading are in the songs, so the songs help solidify or confirm what we are reading.”

Ranger E: “The songs seem to set conditions for what comes next in the liturgy while also strengthening what we just did before the song in the liturgy. After we confess our sins, we sing a song which leads us to the reading of the Bible. Then after the sermon we sing so that helps close the scripture portion and sets us up for communion. Then we close with a song. Its like songs transition us and help us celebrate.”

Ranger F: “Songs seem to bypass our brains and touch us without our mind’s engagement. It’s weird but, you know, it’s like our hearts or bodies are the focus of singing and music not our brains. Scripture seems to do both, speak to my brain and body, but songs and music are lower than my brain.”

Ranger G: “If everything belongs to God any way then we are obligated to give and sing praise. It doesn’t seem like we have much choice but to sing and praise the one who created it all and holds it all together. We owe our worship to him if Revelation is true.”

**Worship Service 4: Why the creeds? 12 May 2023**

13 in attendance

Field notes from catechesis:

The discussion centered on the use of the creeds in liturgy and our lives. The Army, as was discussed, has many creeds. Specifically in Ranger School, our immediate context, the Ranger Creed is said by the whole student body, in unison, followed by six strict chin-ups prior to every meal. The questions that focused our conversation were as follows: “What are creeds? Why do we say them? What do they do to us?” This discussion was the most engaged thus far. Here are some comments from the discussion:
Ranger A: “Creeds unify. They give a group of people something to rally around. If we are all working to live a creed, then we come together instead of breaking apart. It unites despite differences.”

Ranger B: “A creed is a set of morals for living life. Its like a series of values that give you a guide to live a certain kind of life you know.”

Ranger C: “Creeds are a confession of faith, it states what a group believes. Its like a framework for belief.”

Ranger D: “Creeds set a standard for action, you know, they are like a measuring stick. When you see someone wearing a Ranger Tab you then can judge if they are a “Ranger” by how closely to live to the standard talked about in the Ranger creed. Creeds help us measure behavior.”

Ranger E: “Creeds, especially the Ranger Creed, promote action. Even the Nicene Creed says “. . . look for the resurrection of the dead.” That’s action, creeds direct our actions tell us what to do.”

This comment prompted further conversation on the necessity for the unification of so-called “belief” (private and internal convictions) and “action” (public and external behavior). I talked about how the Nicene Creed would naturally produce a different set of behaviors, actions, and dispositions because of the language used. If one believes “in one God, the Father, the maker of heaven and earth, of everything visible and invisible” then a certain range of deeds and words should eventually flow from that confession of faith.

I then taught a short history lesson on the Nicene Council, Constantine, the Arian controversy, and the establishment of the creed for use in the church through the Great Schism of 1054 over the filoque. Discussion continued.

Ranger F: “The history really helps deepen the genuineness of saying the creed. I didn’t know it was that old and significant in history. Wow. These words have been said by a lot of people!”

Ranger G: “It’s like only you know your beliefs and nobody else understands them until you do something publicly with them, right? Like my wife doesn’t know I love her until I put my love into action. It’s like the creeds tell us what Christian faith looks like now its up to us to act it out.”

**Worship Service 5: Why do we pray? 16 May 2023**

11 in attendance

*Field notes from catechesis:*

Today’s discussion centered on prayer. The focusing questions for the catechesis were: “What is prayer? What is going on when we pray? What do we assume when we pray? How does God use prayer to change us? I did not have to talk much for this conversation to get going. I opened by pointing to where we pray throughout the liturgy and commented on the universality of prayer in broad variety of Christian churches regardless of their liturgical status. I then turned the conversation over to the Ranger students for discussion. Here is what they said:
Ranger A: “Prayer is talking to God its how we speak to him. God has many ways of communicating with us, we most speak to him with our words. Prayer is talking to God.”

Ranger B: “Prayer is radical if you think about it. To an outside, nonbelieving person, prayer doesn’t make much sense. It’s a radical act for us to pray like when I pray at meals people ask me why I do that. It makes sense to me since God is over all things to give thanks or ask for someone to be restored to health. In this way prayer is connected to witness for when people see us do the radical act of prayer they notice and ask questions.”

I interjected and asked to dwell on the “radical act of prayer” for a moment. What is radical about prayer?

Ranger C: “Prayer could be radical for an outsider because it doesn’t make sense. Like for someone who doesn’t believe there is a God prayer would be like talking on a phone without anyone on the other end of the line.”

Ranger D: “I think prayer is normal, like giving thanks and asking for things. It is strange and helpful for me to think like an unbeliever and see prayer as radical.”

Ranger E: “I think we assume that God will respond to our prayers. Not only is it radical enough for us to think there is a God to pray to, but it is also unique to believe he will respond. If we didn’t think we would receive a response, why would we keep praying? God doesn’t always respond with what I want but eventually, he does respond to prayers.”

Ranger F: “From the perspective of an outsider to Christianity I see it being radical that we assume someone is listening. Prayer assumes that God is listening. Like in Revelation 8 where there is silence in heaven. God listens to our prayers.”

Ranger G: “Praying to God increases my dependency on God. He can do all things and has all the power. I cannot do all things and I need help. Through prayer God teaches me dependency on him.”

Ranger H: “When I pray, I find I have work to do. Through prayer I see and remember things that I need to work on, and God asks me to work. When I pray God invites me to participate with him in work.”

Worship Service 6: Why do we preach? 18 May 2023

15 in attendance

Field notes from catechesis:

Discussion centered on preaching. Our focusing questions were “Why do Christians preach? What does the sermon do for us? How does God affect us through the sermon or preaching act?

Ranger A: “The sermon helps me to understand the Bible. So much of it is confusing and hard to understand. A good preacher helps me know the Bible better than when the service started.”

Ranger B: “I agree, preaching helps me understand. But it also helps me to apply the Bible in my life. Understanding it is part of the help, but good sermons help me live what I now understand.”

Ranger C: “The sermon can tell you a lot about what the church holds valuable like its virtues and what kind of character they want to form in their congregation. The preacher will show what is important to that church if you listen to their sermon.”

Ranger D: “Sermons, singing, praying, and reading the Bible seem to be what all Christian churches share in common. A lot of their liturgies are different but those four seem to be the bare minimum.”
Ranger E: “Most churches I have attended have had older preachers, like in their sixties. I think that is important because God uses their life experience to change me and help me be more wise. I think wisdom is where the Bible meets real life. God changes be through developing wisdom through the life experience of the pastor.”

Ranger F: “God uses sermons to answer prayers. I have been praying about things before in my life and a preacher will say something and it was like God was telling me that was the answer, I needed to hear to the prayer I had been praying about.”

I then asked them to do some analysis on the sermon’s location in the liturgy and its time allocation. My sermons throughout have averaged in the low to mid twenty-minute range (the shortest was eighteen-minutes and the longest was thirty-minutes). The whole liturgy has averaged between sixty and seventy minutes. I asked them what the time allots and placement within the liturgy mean. I also asked what human faculties sermons mainly engaged versus what faculties the rest of the liturgy primarily engages. Discussion followed.

Ranger G: “It’s in the center so I think the sermon is the most important thing in the service. It draws everything together before it and after it.”

Ranger H: “The sermon mostly affects my brain or mind. It makes me think and builds my knowledge of the Bible or Christianity. The liturgy seems to engage my body with all the standing, kneeling, and motions.”

Ranger I: “I don’t feel comfortable with calling the sermon the most important part of the service. We spend almost twice as long doing everything else as the sermon and we all take part in everything else. Only the pastor is working during the sermon so if the preacher is bad or messes up the sermon gets ruined. I don’t think it can be the most important thing or should be. It can be great even the best part if the sermon is good but not the most important thing we do in worship.”

Worship Service 7: Why communion? 23 May 2023

15 in attendance

Field notes from catechesis:

Discussion centered on communion with the focusing questions of “what are we doing in communion? What is God doing to us through communion? Why communion?” I opened the discussion with an acknowledgement of sacramental theology. Simply put, a sacrament is the vessel in and through which the treasures of God are transported to us and us to him. The incarnation of Jesus is the ultimate sacrament.

Some would call the sacraments a vehicle of grace. The point was seeing sacraments as more than a symbol without drifting into the pseudo-magic of the Roman Catholic sacramental theology. The spiritual working in and through the material. Sacrament is how faith is embodied. Discussion followed as such:

Ranger A: “We take communion because Jesus told us to do it. Jesus didn’t give too many explicit commands, but this is one. That’s important.”
Ranger B: “Isn’t communion just a symbol like a sign reminding us of what Jesus did for us?”

Ranger C: “The Catholics think that when the priest says the words the bread and wine become the real DNA blood of Jesus don’t they? I don’t understand how that works.”

Ranger D: “In the liturgy communion is the most important thing, right? It comes last and takes a decent amount of time. It seems real important.”

Ranger E: “Look at the name, its meant to bring us into communion with Jesus. It connects us to him somehow. I think it is meant to connect us to each other too like communion is a community event.”

Worship Service 8: What has liturgy taught us? 25 May 2023
10 in attendance

Field notes from catechesis:

Discussion today focused on the project impact. The focusing questions were: “what did you learn? How was it praying and reading every morning and evening? What did this form of heavy liturgy do to you?”

Discussion ensued:

Ranger A: “The first couple days of morning and evening prayer were great but then it got old and I struggled to keep up. Its like there was a honeymoon period of about ten days then it was over. I felt much more drawn to the corporate worship services. I really like learning from the sermons and I enjoy worshiping in song. I like doing the liturgy together as opposed to alone.”

This was shared by over half of the subjects in attendance, that the personal liturgy started out strong and invigorating and then tapered off. More than half agreed that they were more drawn to the public worship over the personal liturgy. Most echoed the same reasons from Ranger A.

Ranger B: “Though I agree that the private prayers and readings started off strong then slacked off in interest, I did find that I really wanted to pray every morning and night. I don’t like repetition very much so saying the same confession, creed, and prayers over and over bothered me. But after about ten days of saying the morning and evening prayers you gave us, though I didn’t want to keep saying those it was like I “had” to pray, like my body desired to pray twice a day. I felt the same way about coming to worship services. This way of worshipping seems awkward to me but I was drawn to worship. I did this program to grow closer to Jesus and I have.”

Ranger C: “I have never worshiped in this style before I don’t know if I will keep worshiping like this. However, I really understand why people worship this way, I do see the beauty in its form. It makes sense to me, and I feel like I am better able to connect with other Christians who worship different from me now because of this program.”

Ranger D: “I feel like I was equally drawn to both the individual and public liturgies. They fed off each other and reinforced each other. They set a structure for me and I really started to look forward to the routine. I knew what I was going to do each morning and night and I knew what I was going to do when I came here to worship with y’all. That was reassuring.”

Ranger E: “I don’t know if this fits, but I have worshiped in a lot of different settings from very high church Catholic to very low church non-denominational. I have loved and experienced God in both settings. I have also seen wickedness in both settings where the personality of the leader takes center stage and steals focus from God. It seems like a liturgy would prevent some of the personality issues from developing where
the pastor or priest becomes the focus and center. Anyone can do the liturgy if they can read so it seems like liturgy would better keep the focus on God. Though I think anyone, or style of worship can glorify God, not just the liturgical."

I closed summing up how this project was studying the effects of historic Christian liturgical worship (personal and public) affects the civil religious faith and formation of Ranger Students. I recapped how liturgical the USA is and how liturgies are routine practices that form us into certain types of people. Liturgies are character and desire forming practices and we are formed into soldiers through embodied liturgies. That embodiment can lead us astray from the worship of God so I want to test how Christian liturgy would affect their civil religious formation. I wanted this project to draw them closer to Jesus and they agreed. I then explained the post-survey and they completed their survey and handed in their journals.


Fehrenbach, T. R. *This Kind of War*. Open Road Media, 2014.


