

Monday Evening Bible Reading Group: Revelation Chapter 13: Some Notes

Chapter 13 probably wins the prize for weirdness. We have a menagerie of weird (highly improbable) beasts; we have dying and not dying; we have funny horns; we have the famous magic number; and we have John winking at us and saying “Think about it, and you’ll know what I mean (or rather who I mean)— sorry I can’t be more explicit!” On the day when the media are going back to the Ukraine murder that wasn’t a murder, we have an interesting current example of dark things happening and inability to tell it as it is.



We still use animal parallels to make a point. I recall in Parliament “The Hon Gentleman’s comments are like being savaged by a dead sheep.” Then there was: “The Hon Gentleman has the look of a recently bereaved bloodhound”.

One commentator says that Chapter 13 contains the essence of the whole Book. Satan (the dragon) delegates to the Beast from the sea (the Roman Empire). The terminology is borrowed from Daniel, whose four beasts (four successive Empires) are combined into one. The Seven represents the seven

Emperors from Augustine onwards – those Emperors who claimed to be divine. The extra Three, to make up Ten, includes the three short-term rulers who filled the chaos after the death of Nero. The Blasphemous Names say it as it was, with Nero's coinage declaring he was Saviour of the World. For pagans, one more god was no great problem. For Christians and Jews, there was only One God.

The Second Beast is the civil powers of the magistrates and priests, through which Rome enforced Emperor worship. The mysterious horn that died and came back to life is Nero, who was widely thought to have faked his suicide. (The Nero redevivus story.) Nero had a ghastly father and mother, but was himself so unremittingly and nauseatingly evil that he gave psychopaths a bad name, and shocked the mother who had schemed and murdered to get him to be Emperor. He had his mother killed, and well as sundry of his male and female lovers. He set fire to Rome so he could rebuild it, and put the blame on the Christians – who were persecuted with enormous cruelty. The Senate eventually declared Nero an enemy of Rome. 666 probably represents Nero, via rather complicated formulae of Hebrew into Greek and numbers into letters. (You really wouldn't want to be too rude to Nero in anything you wrote, in case he really came back.

The brand marks: Jews had their phylacteries on forehead and wrist. Slaves had brand marks. Some soldiers had their general's name branded on them. The Book of Life: rulers of the time kept a register of their subjects, so why not God? C.f. tattoos today. (JW's oppose tattoos, because they suggest ownership by/loyalty to someone other than God.) You got a certificate when you did your formal Emperor worship. Making worship objects seem alive: conscious of Jewish views on idols being nothings, pagan priests had various dodges for making idols seem to open their eyes and their mouths.

Issues: There are many; but here are a few. 1) Would we have refused to offer incense to the Emperor. 2) Do we have any idols that get in the way? 3) Paul saw Rome as the protector of faith; John saw it as the enemy of faith. Why the change? 4) John was hugely concerned about the unholy alliance between State and religion. How do you read Christian history in the light of this judgement. How do you feel about an Established Church? Have we paid too high a price for official recognition? (Constantine didn't make Christianity the official religion so that it could criticise the State, but so that it could support the State. Our Wartime Government here didn't like bishops criticising allied bombing raids. Christians who wouldn't fight in the 14-18 War, on conscientious grounds were labelled cowards and traitors. The Orthodox Church tended to back the Tsars, and tends now to side with Putin. In China, some churches are officially recognised; others have had to go underground.)

France[[edit](#)]



The French version of separation of church and state, called [laïcité](#), is a product of French history and philosophy. It was formalized in a [1905 law](#) providing for the separation of church and state, that is, the separation of religion from political power.

This model of a secularist state protects the religious institutions from state interference, but with public religious expression to some extent frowned upon. This aims to protect the public power from the influences of religious institutions, especially in public office. Religious views which contain no idea of public responsibility, or which consider religious opinion irrelevant to politics, are not impinged upon by this type of secularization of public discourse.