

## Features of the Two Religions From Wes Howard-Brook “Come Out My People”

Feature	<i>Religio of Creation</i>	<i>Religio of Empire</i>
Source of divine power	One God, the creator of heaven and earth	Many gods and goddesses
God’s Home	Beyond and within creation and among people	In a temple near the palace in the royal city
Places of sacred encounter	All of the Earth	Urban temple, mediated by priestly elite
Basic social structure	egalitarian kinship	hierarchical patronage
Basic economics	gift, barter, collaboration amid abundance	money, debt, competition amid scarcity, capital
Political ideology	God alone reigns	Human king reigns as presence of supreme god
Religious obligations	Love and praise of God and neighbor	Rituals expressing loyalty to “patron” human or divine
Relationship with ‘strangers’	Hospitality, love	Suspicion, scapegoat, violence
Relationship with Land	Belongs to God; people are tenant	Belongs to king and those who can afford to buy it
Relationship with ‘enemies’	Love them	Destroy the them

One religion is based on violence, coercion, suspicion, and fear.

The other religion proclaims that Jesus, who was killed, is alive and that victory cannot be guaranteed but only discovered and experienced through courage, patient resistance, sacrificial love and nonviolence: these are the contrasting remedies to what the empire offers (see chart below for comparison).

Revelation unmasks these two patterns of human society at work in the world. This is one of the powerful things about the book of Revelation. It unveils empire.<sup>4</sup>

The first pattern is what I am calling the “religion of empire” because it is a whole system of making meaning and creating systems of oppression. This is akin to what the Apostle Paul calls “the powers and principalities.” The religion of empire is signified by the Beast, a powerful, destructive force that seeks to destroy all that resists it. The religion of empire seeks to subject all it deems threatening. It breeds suspicion of the other, and scapegoats those who get in its way.

The second pattern marks a deeply alternative path for humanity. The religion of creation or the lamb that was slain, is about direct encounter with God, building a sharing economy in which everyone has enough (rooted in texts like Ex. 16, Jesus’ feeding of the 5,000, The Lord’s Prayer and prayer for enough bread for today, and the notion of Jubilee and debt forgiveness), it is rooted in a narrative where pain and suffering and those who are marginalized are incorporated into the center of community, and seeks to build the “Multitude” or the beloved community as we often refer to it today.

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<sup>4</sup> Wes Howard-Brook’s commentary on Revelation titled, *Unveiling Empire: Reading Revelation Then and Now* (2005).

In the chart below is revealed the value system of each “religion.”

<b>Stranger / Enemy Relationships</b>	Violence of the empire meant to control those who oppose its regime and ideologies	The church is to be shaped by the image of the lamb, a powerful symbol of nonviolence
<b>Economics</b>	Benefit some at the expense of the many.  Mark of the Beast  Constant remarks about the rich, pitfalls of wealth, and deep critique of economic system in Chapter 18	The economics of the lamb call for the abundance of gift for all creation, care for the poor, a complete refusal to participate of imperial economics (the mark) which is symbolized in chapter 18 by slavery of both cattle as well as human bodies.
<b>Worship / Liturgy</b>	For every scene of heavenly worship we find a competing worship from the empire. We know that Rome had many temples and its own religious system in place. The religion of empire even has it’s own competing liturgy and symbols of worship to form its subjects into its own likeness.	The lamb has his own Liturgy, which is symbolized by the suffering prophetic servant of the lamb at its center worship. This worship is slow and intentional, couched in between silence, taking on lengthy periods of hymns that lift up and center the victims of empire and those who “will shed no more tears.”
<b>Creation of a Social order</b>	Builds a society with a center and margins, with a hierarchy and patriarchalism built in. (scapegoating mechanism - sameness / multitude - difference)	Builds a community that refuses scapegoating, is rooted in unity around difference), builds the what the book of Revelation calls “the multitude.”

### **Then I saw...a Lamb**

Fear, desire for control and violence are some of the main qualities that tend to show themselves when our lives feel like they are spinning out of control.

When we first learned about our oldest daughter’s allergies I felt all three of these responses. I was afraid because I didn’t know what it meant for our family. What changes would we have to make? What kinds of things would Lily miss out on as a kid? How might this affect her emotionally, psychologically, spiritually? What if she was accidentally given peanuts when she was out of view or away from home: could we lose our child to something like a peanut allergy?