

Leading with a commitment for truth: An ideological texture analysis of John's letter addressed to the church at Pergamum[©] (Revelation 2:12-17)

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The Value of Identifying Different Drivers and Uncertainties

Identifying the different drivers within the Scriptural context allows the reader to broadly expose trends and other changes that will shape future conditions. Through an ideological texture study of scripture we are able to understand the social, technological, economic, environmental, and often political factors (STEPP) that either will drive or block change which directs us to take a long look back and an anticipatory look forward (Hines and Bishop, 2006). Organizations, if not challenged, tend to believe the future is going to be very much like the past.

A useful forecast of the future challenges existing assumptions about the future, moves the organization to consider the “what ifs”, and ultimately motivates the organization to plan and act differently. There are many who will profess to have the truth, or some unique insight into what truth exists, and will call for allegiance. But we as believers, must be on guard and keep our faith in Christ and in His Word. We, like the church at Pergamum, must be committed to the truth.

In Revelation John wrote seven letters to the churches whereby the third letter was written to Pergamum (Revelation 2:12-17) It was a city in tribulation centered upon idolatry, false teaching, and the persecution of Christians.

John recorded the words (or warnings) of Jesus to this church as He exposed the religious and political conditions in the city and the spiritual condition of the church. He provided an evaluation on how the church was doing in light of the conditions of the times. And it is in these writings we are able to learn several truths that are preeminent for the ages. We must be faithful in spite of persecution, avoid false teachings and instruction, do not compromise one's faith nor integrity, when believers stumble there is hope, and there are rewards for those who persevere.

Introduction

Pergamum was the capitol city of Asia until the close of the first century. The name Pergamum literally means “marriage” or “elevation.” As the church became married to governmental authority and elevated to a place of public acceptance, it declined in spiritual blessing and power. It became a city given over to the worship of many Greek idols and the local Roman leadership found it difficult to cope with the multitude of religious differences thus demanding the cooperation of all group. Two of the most prominent religious systems of the city were the worship of Bacchus (the god of revelry) and the worship of Asclepius (the god of healing). Twice in verse 13 John refers to the city as the place where “Satan’s throne is” or “where Satan dwelled.” Satan knew from his attack on the church of Smyrna that persecution only caused the church to flourish and continue in a perpetual state of revival.

The influence of paganism on the Church increased over the years incrementally step by step. The Church began to shroud itself in “mystery” and “ritualism” that had a strong resemblance to Babylonian mysticism. From A.D. 312 on, the Church became more and less Christian in its practices. But yet the saints were faithful in spite of their persecution. Through the centuries, many have been killed because of their witness. Yet most of the time, these martyrs are unheralded on earth and, without a doubt, they are highly celebrated in heaven. When people face persecution now, they must be faithful to God.

Not all persecution results in the death of the saints. Believers suffer from all sorts of different persecutions, from ridicule to physical pain. Jesus told His disciples that they would suffer persecution. Some believe they are serving God when they persecute believers.

The Ideological texture of Revelation 2:12-17

¹² “*And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: ‘The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword.*”

¹³ “*‘I know where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is. Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith^[a] even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. ¹⁴ But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality. ¹⁵ So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. ¹⁶ Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth. ¹⁷ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.’*”

Defining Ideological Background

Robins (2000) states, “The primary subject of ideological analysis and interpretation is people. Texts are the secondary subject of ideological analysis, simply the object of people’s writing and reading. The issue is the social, cultural, and individual location and the perspective of the

writers and readers. A special characteristic of ideological analysis is its focus on the relation of individual people to groups” (p. 95).

In light of this definition, it is important to recognize the belief system existing in the church in Pergamum and its relationship toward the future expectation of the church and how John relates this to believers. A special emphasis of ideological texture is its focus on relationships between individuals and a specific group of people. It is John, the communicator, who defines the political and religious climate of the church at Pergamum and the season of idolatry, false teaching, and the persecution of Christians with an eye toward the future.

John’s Ideological Insight as Expressed Through Jesus’ Relationship with the Church at Pergamum

By reading the book of Revelation we are able to gain a fresh perspective on Jesus’ message to churches for all times. We see His warning and correction for the church, and His hope and encouragement for the future. John, the communicator, reflects his love and devotion to his Lord and warns the church of pending events and challenges for those who place their dependence upon Jesus and culminating in judgment, restoration and peace.

To the church at Pergamum, Jesus has the sharp, doubled edged sword. He is the passion of authority and power and when He wields authority, it is a blessing for those who follow and condemnation for those who do not. He says, “I know where you live, where Satan has his throne, and you remain true to My name.” It was a challenge to not worship Caesar, and Jesus encourages them, in spite of their suffering, to remain true to him.

The great majority of the people attending worship believe in the “church”. They believe in religion. They believe in being faithful and setting an example for those who are lost. But they have yet to believe in the church as the bearer of a radically new orientation to change the world, as a revolutionary power that will penetrate the masses in order to achieve an ultimate goal. They do not see themselves as a special people who have a secular task to fulfill the ultimate great commission.

The ‘bench warmers’ are considered “friendly enemies” of the overall mission of the church. They are dangerous in the sense that their ignorance of the meaning of the church weakens everything the church stands for around the world. And even when this ‘ignorance’ of not seeing the mission of the church, they will not tolerate a church that gives up spiritual things to mix it up in the business climate of the world. They will not break through the walls of their socioeconomic ‘comfort zones’ to contact and enter into dialogue with the unconventional or alienated people of the community. Someone must explain and prepare the church at Pergamum for what lays ahead and that is the engagement of worship in a hostile environment. John was that communicator to shift fundamentally that which would have an impact on church-as-usual.

The Influence of Revelation 2:12-17

Fundamental shifts are those external forces that have the potential of shaking the core assumptions of an organization. These forces are referred to as megatrends, discontinuities,

tsunamis, or change drivers of change depending on the practitioner (Hines and Bishop, 2006). In this situation the practitioner is Jesus.

John was very perceptive and recognized the evolution of a long term trend pattern being forewarned by Jesus. He recognized “You can’t do just one thing” (Kaufman, 1980) meaning that anything one intends to do has consequences, and they are often far beyond the initial intentions. By the same token, “Nothing changes by itself.” In a world of accelerating change, many, if not most, things change at the same time. It is important to note here that in urban communities, which are rapidly becoming the normal context of America, the influence of the church in many important venues may decide whether the public good or selfish interests will prevail. The church will have the opportunity to be in places where policy is being discussed. This alone warrants the involvement of committed Christians for the deployment of reason in the structures of the community. Yet let them be forewarned as faith needs foresight to give new birth to new opportunities for living and society.

There are three dimensions we must consider for when it comes to foresight. Looking backward trusts God for what He has done. This is referred to as hindsight. Looking upward looks to God for what he will provide for us each day. This is insight. Foresight trusts God for what he will yet accomplish through us in the coming days, weeks, months, and years in the church, our families, our churches, and communities.

Those Who Overcome Will Be Fully Rewarded

Jesus said (verse 17), “*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him will I give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.*” The reward is threefold.

First, while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, God supplied manna as their food. Looking back, God commanded Moses to put manna in a jar and keep it in the sanctuary (Exodu 16:32-34, Hebrews 9:4). This manna became known as the hidden manna. The hidden manna of the Old Testament is a type of Christ who is hidden manna of the New Testament.

Second, those who overcome will receive a white stone. John views the white stone as representing acquittal. In John’s day a white pebble was used in judicial matters as a vote of “not guilty”. Jesus challenged the compromisers to repent. When they repent, they will be acquitted.

Third, Christ promises the overcomer “*a new name written on a stone which no one knows but he who receives it*”. This new name may be Christ’s hidden name or a new name for the believer. Either way, the believer is fully identified with Christ.

The churches across Asia faced difficult times and were often persecuted. Yet while the saints were often confronted with false teachings, Christ exhorted them to avoid these teachings and prepare for the future. Those who succumbed to the idolatry and false teachings must repent. The church had a mission and believers must realize they can lead the way in social reform with foresight and determination.

References:

Hines, A., Bishop, P. (2006). *Thinking about the future: guidelines for strategic foresight*. Washington, D.C.: Social Technologies.

Kauffman, D. (1980). *Systems I: an introduction to systems thinking*. Minneapolis, MN: Futures Systems.

Robbins, V.K. (1996). *Exploring the texture of texts: A guide to socio-rhetorical interpretation*. Harrisburg: Trinity Press.

The situation with the dominance of the scientific approach to all aspects of life becomes even more paradoxical when one realises that human beings do not become more happy and free from the aspects of material existence. By making nature an object of manipulation scientific consciousness forgets humanitarian duties in respect to nature: nature must be "respected" simply because we live in it and that there is the light of that all-embracing reason (Logos) which we, human beings, carry in ourselves as little logoi. The objects of nature are inseparable from their creator, so that the oblivion of this fact leads to the loss of love of them in the same sense as the loss of love for other people. This interest leads to investigations of how language is structured to achieve socio-cultural meanings. SFL therefore focuses on the analysis of texts, considering relationship to the social context in which they occur. Fairclough's (2003) approach to CDA is also unique in that he deals with the Foucauldian notion of discourse with a strong focus on linguistic analysis of textual materials and he has developed linguistic means of analyzing textual forms and structures. This type of study is valuable as it bridges the gap between the structural form of language and the external social world it tries to represent. Letter of Commitment " indicates the signatory's intent to commit resources to the funded project as specified in the letter, should the proposal be funded. May also give the partner's rationale for supporting the project and point to strengths of the organization that could be of value in implementing or sustaining the project. • Keep letters short and to the point. • Be specific about the nature of the collaboration or commitment. • Usually indicate concrete actions the signer is committed to provide during the project. Proposers requesting letters should provide the administrator with a copy of the proposal Abstract and, for NSF proposals, the Facilities, Equipment, and Other Resources section.