

DOMITIAN APOTHEOSIS DISCUSSION: A HISTORICIST JOHANNINE RESPONSE THROUGH THE INTRODUCTORY SALUTATIONS OF THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF REVELATION

Domiciano Apoteose Discussão: A resposta de João historicista Através das saudações introdutórias das sete igrejas do Apocalipse

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ABSTRACT

The apotheosis of the Roman emperor after his death is another context in which personal Roman eschatology intersected with imperial cults. The ritual and concept of apotheosis were more important in the capital than in the provinces because divinization of living emperors was common outside Italy. The living divus allegation by Domitian meanwhile he was emperor is a central part in this article's discussion. In opposition to the Roman emperor apotheosis as a growing state religious profile against Christianity and God's kingdom beliefs, John reacts opposing the man worship through the introductory salutations to the seven churches expressed in Chapters 2 and 3 in the book of Revelation. In these seven introductory salutations, the Seer of Patmos brings up an important reacting response confronting the Emperor's cult and divining manipulating process that not only comprises the initial bonding characteristic of church and state, but also serves as an illustration of the time of the end and its political-religious realm.

KEYWORDS: Apotheosis. Historicism. Preterism. Domitian.

RESUMO

A apoteose do imperador romano após sua morte é outro contexto em que a escatologia pessoal Romana cruzou com cultos imperiais. O ritual e o conceito de apoteose eram mais importantes na capital do que nas províncias porque a divinização dos imperadores que vivem era comum fora da Itália durante o primeiro século da era cristã. O conceito divus alegado por Domiciano, enquanto ele foi imperador é uma parte central da discussão deste artigo. Em oposição à apoteose do imperador rom

ano como um perfil religioso e político em seu poder crescente contra o cristianismo e suas crenças do reino de Deus, João reage e se opõe ao culto de Domiciano através das saudações iniciais para as sete igrejas expressas nos capítulos 2 e 3 no livro de Apocalipse. Nestas sete saudações iniciais, o Vidente de Patmos traz uma importante resposta confrontando o culto do imperador e o processo de manipulação que não só compreende a característica de ligação inicial entre Igreja e Estado, mas também serve como uma ilustração do tempo do fim e seu domínio político-religioso.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Apoteose. Historicismo. Preterismo. Domiciano

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ROMAN ESCHATOLOGICAL AND APOTHEOSIS PRESENCE IN MILITARY AND GOVERNMENT

During the Republic period (TAAGEPERA, 1979, p. 115-138), Romans occasionally extended apotheosis to certain chosen dignitaries. The term apotheosis, applied to such individuals, can be defined as a divine and immortality gift conceded to some distinguished Roman citizens. This vocable was also enhanced in its significance by its recorded depiction in stones or pottery representations of the dead one, including masks. The death mask (imagine) of general Scipio Africanus, for instance who was Hannibal's defeater, was kept in the temple of Jupiter as a symbol of heaven dwelling place for this Roman leader (TAYLOR, 1975, p. 55). That same mask was visible in the atria at the house of the immediate family. This mask placement was a symbolic description of a ghostly funeral familiar presence of the respective dead one. Quintus Ennius, the Father of Roman poetry, mentioned that in Scipio Africanus' epitaph was engraved that he ascended to heaven (TAYLOR, 1975, p. 55).

The presence of apotheosis can also be observed in Julius Caesar's death. Because of the discourse of Marc Anthony and the populace outcry, the Senate was forced to promote Julius Caesar as *divus* of the Roman State in 42 B.C.E. This action was superstitiously believed by the appearance of a comet named Julian star, adjudicated to Julius Caesar's soul (FISTWICK, 1991, p. 65-73).

During the Roman Empire period, apotheosis concept can also be seen in the Arch of Titus. It is possible to watch there an engraved apotheotical motif way up high in the inner center of the Arch where Titus is shown clothed in toga (not in military array) and been taken to heaven by an imperialis eagle. Inside the structure of such Arch, there is a spiral stair that leads to a chamber in the middle of the attic. Some scholars consider this place as being Titus tomb (KEINER, 2009).

APOTHEOSIS, AUGUS AND SEBASTOS IN THE PROVINCES

Geographically speaking, the occurrence of Roman apotheosis was also seen in the extreme northwestern part of the Empire. According to Pliny the Elder (4.111), the northwestern Celtic region in Spain was the first Western area that was granted permission to rend cult to Augustus in 19 B.C.E. As an emphasis of the superstitious influence of the emperors is appropriate to consider here the meaning of the word "August."

The rite to the gods was called *augus* (CONNOR, 1976, p. 2-29). The word was known as an equivalent for "authority" connected with abstract

and unseen and, also with all that increases and flourished upon earth. The temples were also called by the same term. Octavius was adscript with the addition of Augustus. This attributive term was originated in the Latin “auguries” which were connected in a certain manner with the “aurispices” in their pretended “supernatural effort” in bringing a superstitious awareness response from the gods to the Empire when these men examined the liver of certified animals that were sacrificed for that purpose (JONES, 1891, p. 82-83). Other word, by which the emperor was known mainly in Asia Minor was *σεβαστός* or venerable. This noun comes from *σέβας* -awe, reverence. The Latin translation for *σεβαστός* was “Augustus” (LIDDELL et al, 1935).

The imperial cult in the form of apotheosis was a good gluing omen formula to promote good luck for the existence of the Roman Empire, protecting it against any eschatological catastrophe. Therefore the emperor was called the “father of the people” because he was the “connection” that bestowed a supposed political and religious blessing affair upon the Empire (Tacitus 1.4). Friesen (2006, p. 129- 130) points that the discourse of imperial cults after an emperor death was committed to prevent the imagination from imaging the end of the world. The emperor’s *kaly tuchv* - good luck -, promoted a bonding magic confidence in the life of superstitious Romans. For many of the Roman citizens, emperors were the fulcrum in keeping the fortune and well being of the Empire. This way of thinking by Romans was a constant feature in the evolving imperial religious institution. The commitment to the longevity of Roman imperialism expressed in a damaged text of the imperial hymnody from 41 CE had the intention of preventing disorder and chaos in Rome and the empire. The hymnody begins:

“[on behalf of the etern]al continuation of Tiber[rius Claudius Caesa]r Sebastos Germanic [us and of] his [who]le house.” Forty years later, an Ephesian inscription echoed the same sentiments: “On behalf of the health of our Lord Emperor Titus Caesar and [on behalf of] the permanence of the rule of the Romans, the damaged wall surrounding the temple was repaired” (FRIESEN, 2006, p. 129-130).

There is also a text from a small marble altar that confirms the previously damaged hymnody’s veracity. It was found in Phrygia, and it says:

“Euphrastos, slave of Caesar [prays] for the eternal continuation and victory of emperor Nerva Trajan Caesar Sebastos Germanicus Dacicus. Year 188 (= 104. C.E) in the ninth month.” (FRIESEN 2006, p. 129-30).

It is appropriate to remind that Asia Minor promoted the cult to Roman Emperors. The Altar of Augustus in Miletus, the sanctuary of Aesclepius in Pergamum, the Antonine altar in Ephesus, the upper square in Ephesus, the temple of Rome and Augusta in Mylasa and the temple of Artemis in Sardis give evidence of the imperial cult presence in Asia Minor (PRICE,

2002, p.138-167). There are more than 159 altars and temples dedicated to the Roman emperors distributed from Bithynia to Syria including an insulate Mediterranean map, where Price describes the royal portico at the island of Thera or Santorini (PRICE, 2002, xviii-xxv). This is why the introductory salutation to the seven churches in the book of Revelation, responds against this cult of human genius in the person of the roman emperors. As a contrast, John is solemnly describing the Divine-human attributes of Jesus: eternity, almighty power, these two combined with love for his creatures. These Christ's divine attributes unmask, vividly, part of the mystery of iniquity. This cosmic conflict was continued by Satan on earth (Gen 3:4-5; Is 14:12-14; 2 Thes 2:2-4) including in it the divine allegation of the Caesars as being gods as *κύριος*.

These false allegations on Caesars apotheosis are totally eclipsed by the marvelous "Mystery of Piety" in the person of Jesus (1 Tim 3:15). The cult to the Roman emperor "evolved" gradually until it became accepted within the eternal city of the Empire. This soften process was also possible as legions conquered new Eastern lands, and they brought to Rome their gods and new religious ideas including the constant influx of cult to emperors. The next segment for this article's will analyze briefly the Domitian living *divus* approach.

THE DOMITIAN LIVING DIVUS AND DEUS APPROACH

There are two questions scholars are intrigued about Domitian and his imperial policy: Firstly, if he really enforced a general and wide persecution on Christians during his reign and secondly, his allegation in being a living divine being or *divus*. There are some Preterist writers that estimate there was not a real crisis in the book of Revelation in the time of John, between Christian commitment and the social order. They consider It was mostly a John's personal perspective on the Roman society. They say the real issue was a personal crisis between John and a real woman named Jezebel by the writer (CARTER, 2009, p.32-47; DUFF, 2001, p. 13/74; THOMPSON, 1990, p.175). It is known that shortly after Domitian began his reign, he restored the cult of ruling emperor's genius. There is a reference from an Alexandrian Jew about Domitian worship. On this particular, Jones says this evidence is dated more than a century after Domitian's death and is referred to Domitian worship with the words: "all men worship and gladly obey" (JONES, 1993, p.1-3). Domitian had concern for Greek culture. In Athens his cult was associated with that of Zeus *ἐλευθέριος* – the act of freedom- given by this god (JONES, 1993, p. 1-3).

Notwithstanding, Domitian was considered traditionalist, he is also described as being severe and repressive. Probably, this is why he was viewed as

a second Nero, because of his interest in Hellenism and the East authoritative concept on kingship power (BIRLEY, 2005, p. 269). On the Domitian's living *divus* allegations, there is additional external evidence on this subject from Latin writers, including the Patrology (Dio.67.3.4-7; Eutropius 7.23; Orosius 7.10). (Tacitus 1,2; Pliny iv,12, 23; Irenaeus: 30.3; Victorinus Pettvius 10:11; Epiphanius ii.12, 223; Eusebius III. 18). It is also observed that according to Dio Cassius (68.1), Some of these Latin writers mention that Nerva abolished the Domitian persecution against Christians (DAMIAN, 1998, p. 369).

The post-mortis decision on Domitian by the Senate in removing and destroying from buildings any written evidence from this emperor about their divine claims (GRAINGER, 2003, p. 32-33, 49), could have been one of the possibilities that fueled doubt among some scholars in finding or not Domitian extensive archaeological data as a living *divus* and, at the same time, if he ever really persecuted the Christian faith. This Senate's action certainly produced a hindrance gap in the finding of more relevance evidence on this issue. However, one interesting archeological data source, outside of Italy, that could indicate to a some extent the Senate decision and likewise, the Domitian living *divus* position was found in 1930 by Austrian archeologist Joseph Keil in the excavation of one temple's ruins in Ephesus where the Domitian's name has been removed. This archaeological discovery gives a certain validity point to our discussion. In this site, the name of Domitian has been chiseled out in various inscriptions of the temple in question and the name of Vespasian has been engraved instead. On this respect, it is being commented the following:

“In the last 125 years of research and excavations at Ephesus, 13 inscriptions dedicated to the provincial temple in Ephesus have been discovered. These rectangular marble blocks were placed by various cities of Asia Minor in recognition of Ephesus being the *neokoros* (“guardian” or “caretaker”) of this temple. In these inscriptions the name Domitian is chiseled out, and in some cases *Theos Vespasian* is in its place. Removal of Domitian's name came from the Roman Senate's edict to erase any mention of Domitian” (FRIESEN, 1993, p. 29-37 in GORDON, 1910).

There is also numismatic evidence showing a similarity between Domitian and Jupiter. The Roman emperor is depicted with the stars on his hands. In other coins, he is shown as having thunderbolts as spears on his hands (FRIESEN, 1993, p. 29-37 in GORDON, 1910).

Commenting on the imperial cult at Thessaloniki, Harrison (2002, p. 71-96) refers to the presence of “an aggressive imperial eschatology and the widespread circulation of Augustan apotheosis traditions competed with early Christian proclamation of the risen and returning heavenly Κύριος.” The same Harrison (2002, p. 72-96) says the apostles responded by “injecting”

heavily loaded Roman political terms into his presentation of Christ ... and overturned the absolutist claims of the imperial cult.” Life after death in the Roman Emperor was also something intertwining in Roman artwork. The imagery of the emperor ascending to heaven in the chariot of the Sun was also well known in Asia; it affirmed a special geography of the afterlife for deserving emperors (CANNADINE and PRICE, 1993, p. 56-104). The early Christian response against creature’s worship in Revelation is the next portion to discuss.

EMPEROR’S KURIAN ATTRIBUTIVE DEVELOPMENT

Notwithstanding the references from Latin writers such as Suetonius (Dom 13.) and Martial (Epig. 9.56.3) concerning the use of *dominus et deus* expressions by Domitian, specialists such as Kittel (1965, p. 1058) says the use of the word *dominus* at the beginning of the imperial period had another role. During the first century CE of the Roman Empire, Rome rejected the use of the term in the same way as the oriental-style monarchy was utilized. However, with the passing of time, *κύριος*, slowly but surely, established itself in Roman society. However, there is no passage in which *κύριος*, when used to describe a Roman emperor, establishes such usage during the first and second centuries. Kittel emphasizes, there is no passage in which *κύριος* when used to talk about a Roman emperor, is sufficient in itself to describe the emperor as a god (KITTEL, 1965, p. 1056).

In the Johannine literature, the statement of Thomas in John 20:28: Ὁ Κύριός μου καὶ ὁ θεός μου is the equivalent in the LXX of the Hebrew יהוה (Orr and Nuelsen 1974a: 1267-1268; 1974b: 1583-1584). The same word is transliterated as “Jehová” in the Reina Valera Spanish Version and “Yahveh” in the Jerusalem Bible Version. By this kurian confession, Thomas related Jesus as the same Jehovah of the Old Testament. These words of Thomas evidently later became a faith confession using *Κύριος Ἰησοῦς* (1 Cor 12:3). *θεός* appears in the Septuagint as a translation from the Hebrew אֱלֹהִים *Elohim* (ORR and NUELSEN, 1974a, p. 1264-1270), which is used mostly for God the Father (Rm 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3), but in the Thomas Kurian faith declaration, these words are used in the same way as in John 1:1 *θεός ἦν ὁ λόγος* (NICHOL & COTTRELL, 1990a, p. 1043).

In relation to the usage of *κύριος* in the Roman religious system during the Western Empire, the imperial priest, for example, is practically never called *ιερεὺς τοῦ κυρίου*. *Κύριος* is not found on the private domestic altars of Hadrian, for instance, in Miletus, which apparently once stood in every citizen’s house in Miletus. On coins, the term is rare and apparently not used before the second century CE. The difficulty lies elsewhere. If the emperor

is not κύριος as a god, he can be god as κύριος having political dominion not only as *καίσαρι* showing dominion upon ἑλλάδος - Greeks - (lit. Helade), and *Ευρώπας* -Europe- but also called as *Ζεὺς σωτῆρ* -savior-. These terms are described in one epigram dedicated to Augustus (KITTEL, 1965, p. 1056).

CHRISTIAN OPPOSITION TO ROMAN STATE

With this previous reference It is not surprising Christian martyrs showed their opposition to the absolute claim of the Roman state, with its implication of deity, is also found in the form of distinction between *dominus noster imperatur* and *dominus meus, rex regum e imperatur omnium gentium*. The use of *rex* and *imperator* along with *dominus* shows that the point at issue was not the mere title, but the religious claim of the state that Christians were forced to resist in demonstration of their loyalty to God and the state (KITTEL 1965, p.1058).

The book of Revelation shows the divine allegiance between the supreme risen God Κύριος and His dominion, which Christians thought Rome state religion was not part of (Rv 1:10; 16: 5; 17:14; 19:16). Instead, In Roman thought, neglect and rejection of the gods and the emperor of Rome promoted by Christians was atheism. Schüssler (1985:132-36) adds that the imperialist setting gave the book of Revelation its urgency. At the same time, it is possible that John's rhetorical response in Revelation occurred because he had to confront groups of individuals in the synagogues and churches of Asia Minor that had a positive and favorable opinion about Roman power (SCHÜSSLER, 1985, p. 132-36).

Hermeneutically, the posture in considering Domitian as a living *deus* or not is heavily influenced by the chosen school in which the Apocalypse is interpreted. Typically, the book of Revelation is studied under different writing date theories: Nero, Papias, Cerinthus, Babylonian Primieval and Domitian, among others. This article follows the Domitian Theory criteria and therefore views Domitian as claiming those titles.

According to Fears (1981, p. 233-245), Domitian's ideal seemed to have been a return to Augustan standards in money and religious matters. He was influenced by two factors: The Flavians needed to bolster the new dynasty with supernatural support and, his personal sincere belief in the traditional religion. Vespasian and Titus had stressed the family's connection with the more reputable Julio- Claudians and thus, indirectly, with Venus. In Flavian propaganda, Jupiter regularly appeared on Vespasian coinage; he was associated with the benefits of the new regimen provided – victory, peace, and food. This triple combination was an indispensable ingredient in the preservation of the Empire and the emperors. Price (in CANNADIEN and

PRICE, 1993, p. 79-95) and Jones (1993, p. 11-112) deal with the idea that educated Romans, as expressed by Aelius Aristides in his Cyzicus Speech (in BEHR, 1968, p. 93-101, 287), were aware of the clear difference between old pagan gods (*deus*) and deified emperors (*divi*). No one ever prayed to a *divus*. Domitian and Trajan are portrayed on some of their coins with a thunderbolt. This wording technicality usage is what produces certain tension among scholars on a living *divus* claim on Domitian.

THE JOHANNINE RESPONSE AGAINST DOMITIAN DEUS CLAIM

The book of Revelation describes the Great Controversy between good and evil. This spiritual war between Christ and Satan was originated in heaven and transferred to Earth. The Plan of Salvation destroyed the devil's master plan to domain and control the Universe. Because of Christ's victory against evil, the message of the Apocalypse assures us that Christ's kingdom will not be in danger never more (1:5,6; 19:11-16, 17-21; 20:7-10; 21:1-8, 9-21, 22-27; 22: 1- 5). When the apostle John penned the promises made to each of the seven churches, he is reminding his hearers and readers that, no matter how powerful the kingdom of evil can be, finally the power of the beast will come to an end. With the statement: τῷ νικῶντι – “to him who overcomes” present in each of the seven churches as a closing admonishing and promise, John is not only addressing his prophetic letter content to the original church audiences located in Asia Minor where the apotheosis cult had a great deal of followers, but he also wrote this encoded truths to the faithful ones through time history.

The statement “to him who overcomes” can be grammatically identify as a continuous present. This tense also indicates the constant intervention of Christ in the world saving and preserving his followers from evil. He is the divine Κύριος that died and resurrected to preserve God's kingdom for eternity. In this same Johannine admonishing message -to him who overcomes- woven in Revelation 2 and 3, the verb's construction for νικῶ in the original is parsed as participle, present, active and dative (2:7,11,12,27; 3:5,12,21). It is not only an active presence movement but also a dative one, an offer of grace to anyone who accepts it. The churches in Asia Minor combined those promises in their daily life as a continuous present for them. Applying these promises as a devotional and homileticl sense, these churches admonitions also become ours through our daily relationship with our Savior as we fight against devil, sin, world, and ourselves.

Doukan (2002, p. 27, 48 citing PRIEDEAUX, 1867, p. 19, 45) referring to an attested third century Bible Commentary, declares that is necessary to review that the term “seven churches” must not to be taken in Apocalypse as

a very strict and literal level. It is clear that, these seven churches were chosen to represent the church as a whole. The churches in Asia were far more numerous than seven (Col 1:2; 4:13) but these particular churches in cities did comprised very well when it comes to utilize them within the historicist pattern of a continuum period in history.

As Prophetic Historicists, Seventh Day Adventists view the Apocalypse as a gathering process where the Roman Pontiff inherited in certain way, the political religious power of the Roman Emperors, especially during the 1,260 days period (ECKHARDT, 2011, p. 1; VON HARNACK, 2006, p. 269, TILLICH, 1968, p. 2; FLICK, 2009, p. 150). This sensitive argument pointing to the Roman Emperor and Roman Pontiff religious political inheritance, helps to understand why John was determined to disclose a symbolic relationship identify the sea beast and the harlot that would be decoded through its history development as a political and religious power or church and state combination (13:1-18; 17:1-18).

The Johannine mind understands the seven churches being originally localized in Asia Minor, an important and boiling world region where the Roman emperor's apotheosis cult was commonly practiced. The fact that Christ walks in the middle of the candlesticks in Chapter 1 could indicate that He is the Light source for the churches throughout any difficult age, and that He is the Light of salvation and wisdom that will decode, through his prophetic message, the assurance of His presence and help against evil forces across Church's history. The concept of the candlestick from Revelation Chapter 1 as representing the assurance of Christ's presence and care to His churches through the Holy Spirit is enhanced when we consider this caring act of Christ as a geographic map illustration, in how the seven churches in Asia Minor are situated between one to another. If you pay close attention to a map of that Asia Minor region where the seven churches were settled, the impression can be accepted as being lamps of a seven-branched lampstand (STEFANOVIC, 2009, p. 80).

The final conclusion on this work proposes is, that each Church introductory salutation to the seven churches can be suggested as a vivid respond against the Roman *divus* or apotheosis approach inclusive on Domitian kingdom.

THE SALUTATIONS OF THE SEVEN CHURCHES IDENTIFIES THE REAL DEUS AND LORD

The physical description of Jesus in Revelation 1:16 depicts Him as having seven stars in his right hand. In the salutation message to the church of Ephesus, Jesus is viewed as walking among the seven golden lampstands

and having seven stars in his right hand (2:1). In the salutation to Sardis, the mention of the seven stars in the right hand of Christ is once again attested (3:1).

Numismatic gives evidence of Domitian appearing in coins as having six stars and with the head of Apollo, god of truth and light (JAMSEN, 1994, p. 648; MORRIS, 2010, p. 53-55). This Domitian adherence to Greek cosmogony is also supported by previous astrological superstition by Romans who believed the throne of Caesar was near the North Pole star, Leo and Cancer (PLINY 2.178 in MALINA, 1995, p. 90).

This is a very significant aspect if we include that Asia Minor and specially Ephesus, proposed the cult to the emperor in 29 BCE. The fact Christ is having the seven stars on His right hand indicates his care over his churches and the announcing of his gospel message to the οἰκουμένη. This term discloses more than the Graeco Roman inhabited world ruled by the Caesars. It is also an indication of the humanity that throughout history, and especially at the end of the time will be reached with the Gospel of Christ. The care of Christ upon his church through His teachings and love testifies that He is the true source of Light (Eph 1:17-23). As a lampstand in sharing the Light of Christ, the church is defined in its mission to humankind in the following words:

“The church is God’s appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world. From the beginning it has been God’s plan that through His church shall be reflected to the world His fullness and His sufficiency. The members of the church, those whom He has called out of darkness into His marvelous light, are to show forth His glory. The church is the repository of the riches of the grace of Christ; and through the church will eventually be made manifest, even to “the principalities and powers in heavenly places,” the final and full display of the love of God, Ephesians 3:10.” (WHITE, 2005, p. 9).

This divine care from Jesus is fulfilled in the suffering of the seven churches during their historical period. The original audience to which John also wrote the message of Revelation, testified of Christ’s suffering through the suffering of their followers. For that audience, the Johannine Apocalypse came into existence as a continuum Historicist response to the iron fist of the Roman Empire under Nero, Domitian, Diocletian, Decius and other demonic powers through history. The certainty of hope on Christ eternal kingdom is anticipated by the trial, suffering, sorrow and near despair has been normally the cause and growth for this kind of apocalyptic reading (NASH, 2004, p. 5). In the period of the early Christian church and all believers through history, the book of Revelation portrays the assuring promise that evil will

be destroyed forever. Domitian dominion was just a kingdom that only lasted fifteen years. The depiction of the New Jerusalem in the book of Revelation is also a message against the Flavian family and their political massive building agenda of temples and other constructions full of egocentrism and idolatry exalting the power and glamour of Roman state.

The original Christian audience to whom also John wrote his prophecy had to decide between Christ and Caesar. When those Christians heard about the Capital of the Lamb, they understood Rome was only a grotesque devilish city that finally would come to an end. In his defiant attempt in declaring himself a living deus, Domitian employed his architectural agenda to claim his “divine nonsense.” Three buildings in his Palatine Hill Palace including the Basilica and the Triclinium, contained a semicircle area or app with a dome adorned by mosaics to promote the impression of a heaven court seat. Domitian sat under those domes to receive dignitaries and people from his kingdom or to eat with them. Through this architecture technique designed by the architect Riberus, the last son of Vespasian and the end of the Flavian imperial family, stayed surrounded by massive statues of Apollo, Hercules and other gods, proposing himself as a living god. Under his man made “heavenly court dome” Domitian sold the idea that he was another Romulus in the Palatine Hill (KLEINER, 2009).

Domitian constructed his royal palace on the Palatine Hill where centuries before, Romulus built his hut on the tufa rock where holes were excavated for the fundament poles on a rectangular plan and shaped corners with the walls made of wattle and dubs in April 753 BCE (KLEINER, 2012). On the other hand, the kingdom of Christ was established in eternity, that is, aeons before the foundation of Rome and even earth’s creation, with the most powerful fundaments of all: Love and Justice. Those heavenly pillars were confirmed through the life and teachings of Christ and his ultimate proof of love and Justice: the wooden Cross of Calvary.

Continuing with the introductory salutation to the seven churches in the book of Revelation, the assurance salutation to Smyrna (2:8) deals with the eternity of God in human flesh. Roman emperors were political gods by the Senate. Christ instead is eternal and also became a servant in the flesh. This is the antithesis of Roman apotheosis. The Bible defines this precious incarnational mystery as being part of the Mystery of Piety (1 Tim 3:16). Domitian instead, ordered to build a good amount of statues of his own person that reflected the physical perfection of the gods. These images had to be of certain weight and only gold and silver were allowed for their fabrication. Suetonius (2007, p. 312) cites Domitian as having weak eyes and hammer head feet: a notorious physical discrepancy that differed with the massive and perfect statues of Hercules and Apollo and other gods situated in the Palatine Palace.

In the salutation to Pergamos (21:12) Christ is He who has the sharp two-edged sword. The vocable here is ῥομφαίαν, which is mostly used as an equivalent way as μάχαιρα. The word ῥομφαίαν is the same weapon description for Jesus found in 1:16; 19:11-15,21. In Revelation, this weapon has also a technical sense. Christ cares over His church through his word and He will intervene some day judging and destroying world affairs. As a pejorative contrast, during his absolutist and tyrannical period, the Domitian sword, through the Roman legions, shed rivers of blood that temporarily secured his throne and fame in the war campaigns against Dacians, Hermans, East, Africa, Chatti, Britain and specially the one on Danube frontier, which secured him the term *Imperatur* (JONES, 1993, p. 138-144, 139, 131- 135, 150-153, 195-283). But his conquering campaigns are now in the oblivion. The human war trophies from all of those military campaigns who marched in chains in Rome are sleeping in the dust of death altogether with the legions that conquered their lands. The sword of Caesar did not prevailed against Christ's word (Ps. 103:15; Is 40:6; 41:10; Heb 1:10-12; 4:12). On this respect, the salutation promise to the church of Thyatira in 2:18 shows a glorious, vibrant and eternal Jesus. The marble art ruins resembling Domitian glory are now in museums, reminding us the futility in self-exaltation to be a god.

In the introductory salutation to Thyatira (2:18) John beholds the Son of God as having a glorious physical appearance that is intended to explain, through the Bible, His wisdom, judgment and the beauty of the teachings that He lived by. The prophet utilizes the terms ὡς, “like” and ὁμοιος, “similar” in the effort to compare a heavenly vision with earthly elements. The eyes of the living Christ indicate the purity and wisdom in his judgment and the wholeness by which He can read the human mind (Num 10:31; Deut 11:12; Esd 9:8; Job 7:8; Ps 32:8; 33:18; 34:15; Prov 8:22; Mk 8:18; Eph 1:16; Rev 3:18). His feet also are a symbol of honesty and truth of the Gospel by which Jesus built his church in this world (Ps 119:59; Is 52:7; Nah 1:15; Rom 10:15; Eph 6:15).

The term applied to “burnished brass” only here in 2:18 and in 1:15 is χαλκολιβάνω This is a complex word in its function and meaning. They compress four different metal alloy possibilities and usage technicalities. It is possible these various applications in defining χαλκολιβάνω could give a glimpse of the provenance diversity of metal workers in Asia Minor especially Ephesus (PLUMPTREE in VINCENT, 2009, p. 428) This brief word discussion also could imply how John was related to the language metallurgy terminology of Asia Minor as well. However all the possibilities and functionalities about χαλκολιβάνω coincide in the fact that the final product in this regard was melted in a furnace and then polished which vividly describe the ministry of Christ and the mission history of the Christian church.

Eyesight and feet sometimes are figuratively applied to degraded and immoral humanity including thinking and behavior (Prov 1:16; 5:5; 6: 13,18; 2 Rom 3:15; Cor 4:4; Eph 6:6; Col 3:22; 2 P 2:14). Roman emperors, no matter their pretensions of apotheosis including Domitian, carried with them the physical limitations of any human being. The amount of delatores or false informers in his court reflects not only his vain and superfluous “godly” limitation in judgment but also his impossibility in knowing others mind. Domitian kingdom was a reign full of slandering, lying and revenge (RUTLEDGE, 201, p. 11-135).

It is possible that one of these delatores influenced on Domitian to summon John to banishment. Domitian god like behavior was also compensated by the confidence in astrology, especially with the ravens that were identify with prophecies from Apollo (MOLNAR, 1995, p. 6-12). This astrological concept is also supported by the fact that ravens were messengers from Apollo and Diana (in MATTINGLY, 1977, p. 172). Even thou the only coin mentioned in Revelation is the denarius in the sixth seal (6:5,6), the monetary exchange was a vital part in the preservation and well being of the empire (FRANZ, 2000, p. 9-11).

The raven, symbol of prophetic messages from Apollo appears in some Domitian coins as it is shown in the following example:



(in Gordon Franz 2008).

In the salutation to Sardis (3:1), Christ is identified as having the seven spirits of God. This numerical completeness and plenitude resumes the work of the Spirit (Jn 16:8-11; 16:13; 2 Cor 3:1-3; Heb 10:15-17; Rom 8:26,27; 1 Cor 12:1-13). He is the bridge between Christ and the world. Altogether with Jesus, He deserves the title *Pontiff Maximus*. In the case of Domitian, as Roman emperor, he was the high priest of the Sacred College in Rome. He was in charged of the expiatory ceremonies to stop calamities in the Empire, lead the consecration of temples, to promote the worship of dead

ancestors, the regulation of public morality and the administration of law and the testamentary succession (BRITANNICA in Microsoft, 2006). However, his moral and religion omens couldn't avoid the murdering plots and death against him. On the other hand, Christ is our High Priest living forever interceding for us (Heb 7:25).

In the salutation message to Philadelphia and Laodicea (3:2; 3:14) Christ identifies Himself as the Holy and True. His life is transparent and pure. He taught what he lived and he lived what He taught. There were no double standards for Him (Ex 20:1-17; Jn 8:44-47). The life of Domitian instead, was full of rivalry and slandering produce by a host of prosecutors and informants (Rutledge 2002:134-136). This Philadelphian salutation reminds the lineage of Jesus (Rev 1:18; Isa 22:22; Jer 30:9; Ezek 34:22; 37:24; Ps 122:5). Domitian was only an *eivkwn* just a human body image of a “god” with anthropomorphic desires, the last of the three emperors from the Flavian dynasty. Domitian could not stop either in contributing to the inevitable decline and fall of the Roman Empire. In an opposite Historicist Homiletic Parallelism “the shut door and the open door” from the salutation to Philadelphia explains how Christ is able, despite the most adverse circumstances, in guiding and leading his small band of believers even through the hard experience of the Great Disappointment in 1844.

In Revelation 3:14, John describes Jesus as the beginning of God's creation. The term here is ἀρχή -beginning. This particular word is in the active sense, the one who begins the action of creating by the same Jesus (Jn 1:3; Heb 1:2). The Roman Emperor apotheosis teaching could indicate the desperate human effort when it is necessary to keep a whole kingdom together. It also indicates the growing process of the mystery of iniquity (2 Th 2:1-5) that at the end of the time will be promoted in the futile attempt to save the world from going to its prophetic doom.

The Domitian living *divus* claiming also illustrate in some way the deceptive delusion through which Satan is going to unite humanity on these last days. The already in action Anti-Christ agenda is looking to glue this world global village in which we live. The figurative *divus* apotheosis appearance of the Roman Pontiff will be a gluing formula for the οἰκουμένη, full of calamities and longing for an age of peace and restoration (WHITE, 1992, p. 11-17). However, the walking of Jesus among the lampstands with the seven stars in His right hand reminds us that He still cares. This is one of the most beautiful bible truths: the Divine Presence of Jesus has never been withdrawn from the earth. One of the last promises from Jesus before He ascended Heaven was: “Lo, I'm with you always. Even unto the end of the world (HASKELL, 2007, p. 39). Glory be to real Emperor, Christ Jesus.... Worthy is the Lamb. He is empty tomb testifies He is the real Κύριος and living Deus.

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