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REVIEW OF C. WESS DANIELS,
*RESISTING EMPIRE: THE BOOK OF
REVELATION* (BARCLAY PRESS, 2019)

MARK CONDO

If you're a student, teacher, or leader in your faith community and take the discipline of biblical studies and hermeneutics seriously, Wess Daniels' commentary, *Resisting Empire: The Book of Revelation*, is a must-read. Knowing how to responsibly answer earnest questions about apocalyptic New Testament literature can be a daunting task, particularly when it comes to the Revelation of John of Patmos. Questions such as, "What is the book of Revelation actually about?" or, "What relevance does Revelation have for today?" need to be handled in an informed manner and not merely dismissed. However, knowing where to begin can itself be discouraging, as there are varieties of interpretations and approaches to this capstone section of the Christian Bible. It is unfortunate how this work historically has been marinated in misunderstanding and used to perpetuate spiritual misguidance, most widely within dispensational Christianity. It is clear that if the book of Revelation is to be taught responsibly, having a contextualized, informed, and balanced approach is of paramount importance.

In contrast to speculative treatments of Revelation, this resource is brief, clear, refreshing, and helpful in ways well beyond its size (132 total pages). Within the nine short yet substantive chapters, *Resisting Empire* conveys to its readers a clear and informed perspective. Daniels' approach helps the reader to recover the original literary intent of Revelation and brings a sense of balance to this letter's original message. To aid this perspective, Daniels introduces refreshing lenses of interpretation. *Resisting Empire* clarifies the apocalyptic function of Revelation by helping readers recognize what the original author was trying to convey in the visions recorded in this sacred text.

Daniels offers readers four themes that function as anchor points for interpreting Revelation's fantasy-like visions. In the first theme, "Enemies and the Scapegoat Mechanism," the reader is

helped to understanding how systemically destructive social structures, referred to as “Empire,” maintain power by the socially ousting methods of “scapegoating.” The recipients of such designs oftentimes are groups both within and without the margins of the Empire’s systems. Essentially, as long as there are enemies to be named and singled out, this social mechanism is able to thrive.

A second theme is “Imperial Economics.” Revelation has much to say about how economic power is mishandled, and how it often is used in ways to keep the powerless in their place. Knowing how economics are used to bolster Empire’s subjugating systems is a crucial insight for understanding what the book reveals about worldly systems.

The third theme has to do with Empire’s liturgy and religion, and how these are presented as a parody of God’s own work in the world. It’s a widely accepted fact that the ancient Hellenistic culture of Rome was largely a religious system. This relationship leveraged a symbiotic interdependence involving social dynamics, coupled with Roman and local religious cult practices and culture. Daniels’ theme gives the reader guidance on how one should encounter and interpret what he refers to as “The Two Liturgies: of Empire and Lamb.” Herein lies a poignant interplay composed of the religious components of the Roman Empire and that of the oft-suffering, yet beloved, Community of Christ.

The fourth and final theme is about the community of the Lamb of God, or, “The Multitude, an Alternative Social Order.” This gathering of peoples from all over the earth coheres in their sharing in the sufferings of Christ. Daniels writes about who these people are that are included in this particular multitude: “those who were lynched, those who were oppressed and victimized, [are] at the center with the lamb. This centering of the victims and marginalized is something that is too often missed within Western, white, middle-class Christianity today” (30). The text offers a view through a clear-paned window of exactly who comprises this authentic community of God, and how it is such an assembly that Empire seeks to neutralize and ultimately eradicate.

Within this, *Resisting Empire* approaches the paradigm of human history and systems with proverbial “broad strokes of a

painter's brush," thus providing a macro view of the essential truths of Revelation's visions. This approach keeps the reader focused, rather than distracted by details within the signature apocalyptic style of the book. Daniels maintains a steady, objective voice of fair handedness and insight throughout his analysis, providing reminders of the set themes as well as drawing insights from various other authors and sources that speak new life and inspiration into the biblical text. Here is a clarion call for communities of faith to take up the Cross of a living resistance toward the powers that be: "principalities and authorities" hidden-in-plain-sight in our own time and culture.

Another helpful and practical feature of this commentary is its intentional summons to action from its readers. Conclusions to the book's chapters include thoughtful queries to consider and inspirational quotes to help propel its readers towards creative responsiveness in faithfulness to the Spirit. As indicated in the very title, this book is about practical, truthful, non-violent *resistance* against the powers of domination and violence. It poses a much-needed prod for lethargic communities to not just foster an intellectual assent to Revelation's messages, but it calls us to actively resist the dominating powers exposed by Scripture.

This is not a mere "how-to" guide to Revelation, but rather, *Resisting Empire* functions like an amplifier. It takes the chords which John's visions strike and increases them so as to bring its readers to a heightened level of awareness about what's happening around them. The contextual truth about Revelation, though, is not time-bound. The visions not only reveal what was happening in John's world some 2000 years ago, but they also illuminate what is happening today in our settings as well.

For far too long have Christian traditions been seduced by the ways of Empire, at times neglecting the sacrificially loving ways of Christ Jesus, the true Lord and King of the earth. If there is a book in our Bibles that unsettles the Christian conscience, it is the Revelation of John: if there is a hermeneutic companion that challenges communities of faith to take seriously the relevant message of Revelation, such a guide is *Resisting Empire*.