

In another tract, *Hunting the Whore of Babylon*, we looked at nine arguments given by fundamentalist Dave Hunt for his claim that the Catholic Church is the Whore of Babylon from Revelation 17–18. His arguments are typical of those used by fundamentalist anti-Catholics and are easily proven wrong. (See that tract for details).

But we can go beyond a mere critique of the shallow anti-Catholic arguments like Hunt's. There is irrefutable evidence in Revelation 17–18 (the chapters Fundamentalists love to quote *against* the Catholic Church) that proves that it is impossible for the Catholic Church to be the Whore.

A VISION IN THE WILDERNESS

When John introduces the Whore in Revelation 17, he tells us: "Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, 'Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who is seated upon many waters, with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and with the wine of whose fornication the dwellers on earth have become drunk.' And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns. The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and bedecked with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her fornication; and on her forehead was written a name of mystery: 'Babylon the great, mother of harlots and of earth's abominations.' And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. When I saw her I marveled greatly" (Rev. 17:1–6).

This passage tells us several things about the Whore: (1) She is an international power, since she "sits on many waters," representing different peoples (17:15), and she has committed fornication with "the kings of the earth," and she has inflamed "the dwellers on earth" with her fornication. (2) She is connected with the seven-headed Beast from Revelation 13:1–10. That Beast was a major pagan

empire, since its symbolism combined animal elements from four other major pagan empires (compare Rev. 13:1–2 with Dan. 7:1–8). (3) The Woman is connected with royalty, since she is dressed in the royal color purple. (4) The Woman is rich, for she is "bedecked with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup." (5) She has committed some kind of fornication, which in Scripture is often a symbol of false religion—lack of fidelity to the God who created heaven and earth. (6) She is symbolically known as Babylon. (7) She is a central cause of "abominations" in the land, abominations being a reference to practices, especially religious practices, that are offensive to God. And (8) she persecutes Christians "the saints and . . . martyrs of Jesus."

While the rest of her description could refer to a number of things, the symbolic designation "Babylon" narrows it down to two: pagan Rome and apostate Jerusalem. It is well known that the early Church Fathers referred to pagan Rome as "Babylon"; however, there are also indications in Revelation that the Whore might be apostate Jerusalem. Historically, a number of commentators, both Protestant and Catholic, have adopted this interpretation.

THE SEVEN HEADS

Continuing in Revelation, the angel begins to explain to John the woman's symbolism: "This calls for a mind with wisdom: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; they are also seven kings, five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he comes he must remain only a little while" (Rev. 17:9–10).

Fundamentalists argue that these seven mountains must be the seven hills of ancient Rome. However the Greek word here, *horos*, is usually translated "mountain" in Scripture. Mountains are often symbols of kingdoms in Scripture (cf. Ps. 68:15; Dan. 2:35; Obad. 8–21; Amos 4:1, 6:1), which might be why the seven heads also symbolize seven kings. The mountains could stand for a series of seven kings, five of whom have already fallen.

This passage gives us a key rule of Bible interpre-

tation which is often denied by Fundamentalists: A symbol does not have to refer to one and only one thing. Here Scripture itself tells us that the heads refer *both* to seven mountains *and* seven kings, meaning the symbol has multiple fulfillments. Thus there is not a one-to-one correspondence in the Bible between symbols and their referents.

Also, the mountains could be a reference to pagan Rome, yet the Whore could still be a reference to apostate Jerusalem. In this case, her sitting on the Beast would not indicate a geographical location but an alliance between the two powers. The Whore (Jerusalem) would be allied with the Beast (Rome) in persecuting "the saints and . . . martyrs of Jesus." (Note that the Whore also sits on many waters, which we are told are many peoples, [cf. 17:15]. The context makes it clear that here her "sitting" on something does not refer to a geographical location.)

This passage gives us one reason why the Catholic Church cannot be the Whore. We are told that the heads "are also seven kings, five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come." If five of these kings had fallen in John's day and one of them was still in existence, then the Whore must have existed in John's day. Yet Christian Rome and Vatican City did not. However, pagan Rome *did* have a line of emperors, and the majority of commentators see this as the line of kings to which 17:10 refers. Five of these emperors are referred to as having already fallen, one as still reigning in John's time, and another yet to come. Since Jerusalem had no such line of kings in the first century, this gives us evidence that the Beast (though not the Whore) is Rome.

THE TEN HORNS

The angel also interprets for John the meaning of the Beast's ten horns: "And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received royal power, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast. These are of one mind and give over their power and authority to the beast; they will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will

conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful" (17:12–14).

This shows us that the Beast is allied with ten lower rulers and with their own territories. Some Fundamentalists bent on making this apply to modern times and the Catholic Church have argued that the horns refer to the European Community (EC) and a revived Roman empire with the Catholic Church at its head. The problem is that there are *ten* kings, but there are now many *more than ten* nations in the EC.

However, what we are told about the horns does fit one of the other candidates we have for the Whore—apostate Jerusalem. The angel tells John: "And the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the harlot; they will make her desolate and naked, and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire, for God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by being of one mind and giving over their royal power to the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled" (17:16–17).

If the Whore is Jerusalem and the Beast is Rome (with the ten horns as vassal states), then the prophecy makes perfect sense. The alliance between the two in persecuting Christians broke down in A.D. 66–70, when Rome and its allied forces conquered Israel and then destroyed, sacked, and burned Jerusalem, just as Jesus prophesied (Luke 21:5–24).

THE WHORE'S AUTHORITY

Finally the angel tells John: "And the woman that you saw is the great city which has dominion over the kings of the earth" (17:18). This again points to pagan Rome or apostate Jerusalem. In the case of the former, the dominion would be political; in the case of the latter, it could be a number of things. It could be spiritual dominion in that Jerusalem held the religion of the true God. It could be a reference to the manipulation by certain Jews and Jewish leaders of gentiles into persecuting Christians.

It could even be political, since Jerusalem was the center of political power in Canaan and, under

the authority of the Romans, it ruled a considerable amount of territory and less powerful peoples. On this thesis “the kings of the earth” would be “the kings of the *land*” (the Greek phrase can be translated either way). Such local rulers of the land of Canaan would naturally resent Jerusalem and wish to cooperate with the Romans in its destruction—just as history records they did. Local non-Jewish peoples were used by the Romans in the capture of Jerusalem.

THE HUB OF WORLD COMMERCE

Continuing in chapter 18, John sees the destruction of the Whore, and a number of facts are revealed which also show that she cannot be the Catholic Church. For one, she is depicted as a major center of international trade and commerce. When it is destroyed in chapter 18, we read that “the merchants of the earth [or land] weep and mourn for her, since no one buys their cargo any more” (18:11) and “all shipmasters and seafaring men, sailors and all whose trade is on the sea . . . wept and mourned, crying out, ‘Alas, alas, for the great city, where all who had ships at sea grew rich by her wealth!’” (18:17–19).

Pagan Rome was indeed the hub of world commerce in its day, supported by its maritime trading empire around the Mediterranean, but Christian Rome is *not* the hub of world commerce. After the Reformation, the economic center of power was located in Germany, Holland, England, and more recently, in the United States and Japan.

PERSECUTING APOSTLES AND PROPHETS

When the Whore falls we read, “Rejoice over her, O heaven! Rejoice, saints and apostles and prophets! God has judged her for the way she treated you’ . . . In her was found the blood of prophets and of the saints, and of all who have been killed on the earth” (18:20, 24). This shows that the Whore persecuted not just Christians, but apostles and prophets. Apostles existed only in the first century, since one of the requirements for being an apostle was seeing the

risen Christ (1 Cor. 9:1). Prophets existed as a group only in the Old Testament and in the first century (Acts 11:27–28, 13:1, 15:32, 21:10).

Since the Whore persecuted apostles and prophets, the Whore must have existed in the first century. This totally demolishes the claim that Christian Rome or Vatican City is the Whore. Rome was not a Christian city at that time, and Vatican City did not even exist, so neither of them could be the Whore. Furthermore, Fundamentalists continually (though wrongly) claim that Catholicism itself did not exist in the first century, meaning that *based on their very own argument* Catholicism could not be the Whore!

Fundamentalists are fond of conjecturing that in the last days there will be a “revived Roman empire,” such as the one that persecuted Christians in the first century. Yet they never draw the inference that this empire would be headed by a revived *pagan* Rome, with the bishop of Rome leading the Christian underground, just as he did in the first century.

Still, Revelation 18:20 and 18:24 prove that the Whore had to be a creature of the first century, which, in the Fundamentalist view, the Catholic Church was not. Thus, on their own view, their identification of the Catholic Church with the Whore is completely impossible! Only ancient, pagan Rome or apostate Jerusalem could possibly be the Whore.

IF NOT THE WHORE, THE BRIDE

The fact that the Catholic Church is singled out by Fundamentalists as the Whore reveals that they intuit the fact it has an important role in God’s plan. No other church gets accused of being the Whore—only the Catholic Church. And it is understandable why: The Catholic Church is the largest Christian body, larger than all other Christian bodies put together, suggesting a prominent place in God’s plan. Fundamentalists assume, without objectively looking at the evidence, that the Catholic Church cannot be the Bride of Christ, so it must be the Whore of Babylon.

Yet the evidence for its true role is plain. The First Vatican Council taught that “the Church itself . . . because of its marvelous propagation, its exceptional

holiness, and inexhaustible fruitfulness in all good works; because of its Catholic unity and invincible stability, is a very great and perpetual motive of credibility and an incontestable witness of its own divine mission” (*On the Catholic Faith* 3).

So why is the Bride maligned as the Whore? Jesus himself answered the question: “If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household” (Matt. 10:25). “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world . . . the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you” (John 15:18–20).

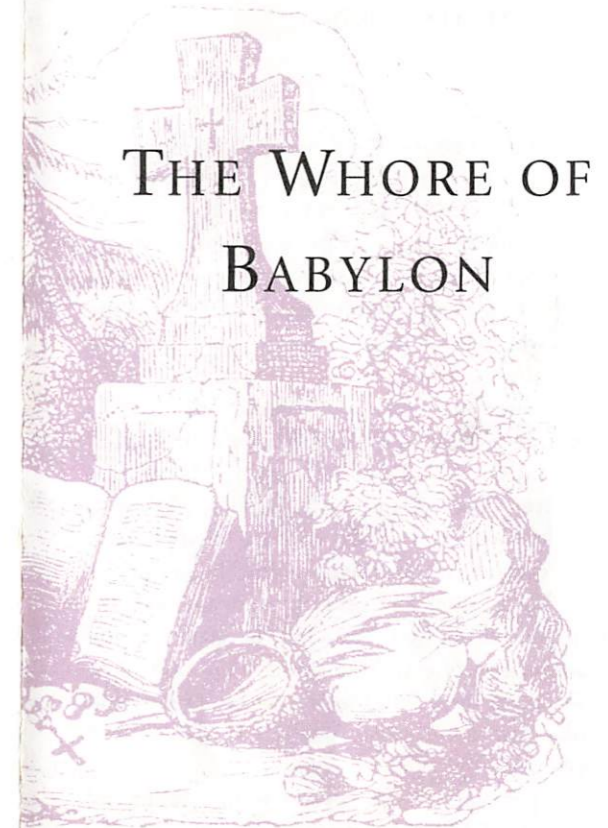
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Bernadette Carr, STL, 10 August 2004

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+Robert H. Brom, Bishop of San Diego, 10 August 2004

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Last Things



THE WHORE OF BABYLON