

The euro and the Roman Empire

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IN REVELATION 17 we see a vision of a beast representing a power which will oppose Christ when he returns: "So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns" (v. 3). The seven heads represent "seven mountains" (v. 9) and the woman "is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth" (v. 18). This is unmistakably the city of Rome. The "kings of the earth" are European countries who come under the banner of Rome, and "These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast" (v. 13).

The beast in Revelation 17 is similar to the beast that represents the medieval phase of the Roman Empire in Revelation 13. We should therefore be looking for signs of the European nations uniting in a way reminiscent of the Roman Empire. The introduction of the euro has provided such a sign.

On 1 January euro coins and notes came into circulation in twelve European countries. Within two months the national currencies of these countries will cease to be legal tender. Around 300 million people will share the same currency. This is a sign of unity amongst the European nations. However, the significance of this event runs deeper than simple unity. It has a precedent, that of the Roman Empire. The *Economist* commented as follows:

"Onlookers, groping to capture the significance of the event, note that no currency has circulated so widely in Europe since the Roman empire. It is a provocative comparison, for it raises the biggest political question about the venture. Will the euro . . . inexorably lead to a pan-European political union? Or is it just a convenient currency and nothing more?"¹

The introduction of the euro is thus leading commentators to compare present-day Europe with the Roman Empire. Moreover, a single currency is not necessarily seen as an end in itself. The article speculates whether or not it will lead to "a pan-European political union". Certainly this would seem to fit with what we would expect from Revelation 17.

In Revelation 17 the beast is shown to be a revival of a specific phase of the earlier Roman Empire: "And there are seven kings: five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space. And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition" (vv. 10,11). The "kings" refer to different types of government which existed in the Roman Empire throughout the centuries.

The type of government that ruled at the time of John ("and one is") can be identified as the imperial form of government. This came to an end with the invasion of the Goths, but was revived afterwards, not least in the guise of the Holy Roman Emperor Charlemagne, who was crowned by the pope in A.D. 800.

Revelation 17 shows that at the time of the end we can expect echoes of the Roman Empire, including the Holy Roman Empire, which developed afterwards.² Interestingly, in the same article quoted above the authors comment that, together with Napoleon, "a single currency for Europe was dreamed of by Charlemagne". So, in this respect, the euro has led to a Europe whose likeness to the Roman Empire is greater than the Holy Roman Empire!

Isaiah wrote: "We grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if we had no eyes: we stumble at noon day as in the night; we are in desolate places as dead men" (59:10). As we saw above, people are "groping to capture the significance" of the euro. But the "sure word of prophecy", which is "a light that shineth in a dark place" (2 Pet. 1:19), means that we are not groping like blind men to see the significance of the euro. It is a sure sign that the return of Christ is near.

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1. "Europe's big idea", *Economist*, 5-11 Jan. 2002, p. 11.
 2. For more detailed discussion of the Holy Roman Empire and the latter days see the series "The Holy Roman Empire and the European Community" by Brother Richard Mellowes, *The Testimony*, Oct.-Dec. 1993 and Jan. 1994.