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The State They Were in: Luke's View of the Roman Empire¹

Steve Walton

Scholars have long debated Luke's view of the Roman empire – and for good reasons. Luke's Jesus is silent in the face of his accusers before the Roman procurator Pontius Pilate, but in similar situations Luke's Paul speaks up for himself and claims his rights as a Roman citizen. Luke alone records that Jesus had a Zealot among his disciples, but he portrays the early Christians as non-violent and compliant in the face of a sometimes-hostile state. Luke presents the Jewish authorities as responsible for the death of Jesus, but also implicates the Roman empire in Jesus' demise by characterising Pilate as weak and ineffectual. Further, this is no mere academic debate, for similar tensions can be seen in Christian responses throughout history to nation-states whose attitudes vary from outright hostility through undermining by absorption to modern western pluralism.

Within the New Testament there is a range of views of the state, from Paul's apparently positive and 'submissive' view (Rom. 13:1–7) through 1 Peter's concern to witness by being ready to suffer for doing right (3:13–17; cf. 2:13–17; 4:12–15) to the seer's vision of the same Roman state as the beast that rises from the sea to oppose the

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people of God (Rev. 13). Presumably these varying approaches reflect the various situations of the writers and their readers. So where does Luke fit on this spectrum? In this chapter I shall briefly outline major views in scholarship before discussing key passages and themes in Luke-Acts, and critiquing the main views in the light of this examination. Finally, I shall propose a series of theses summarising Luke's view of how Christians should see the Roman state.

Previous Views

Five key views can be found in scholarship of the last two hundred years. The first is by far the dominant view until recent times; the last thirty years have seen a growth in alternative perspectives, reflecting the decline in the dominance of historical-critical scholarship and the growth of other methods of reading the New Testament. The proposals are that (1) Luke-Acts is a political apology on behalf of the church addressed to Roman officials; (2) Luke-Acts is an apology on behalf of the Roman state addressed to the church;² (3) Luke-Acts is providing legitimation for the church's identity; (4) Acts is equipping the church to live with the Roman empire; and (5) Luke-Acts is not interested in politics at all.

Political apology for the church to Rome

This approach has the claim to age, for it can be traced back to the work of Heumann in the eighteenth century.³ In recent times it finds classic statements in the work of Easton, Cadbury, Conzelmann and Bruce.⁴ While particular emphases differ – often considerably – these

² Klaus Wengst, *Pax Romana and the Peace of Jesus Christ*, 89–105, seeks to combine these first two views by arguing that Luke's intended readership includes Christians, sympathisers and non-Christians. His basis for this claim is that the dedications of Luke and Acts imply that Theophilus is to see that the books are published (101), but this demonstrates little about the intended readership of the volumes.

³ C.A. Heumann, 'Dissertatio de Theophilo, cui Lucas historiam sacram inscripsit', 483–505, cited by W.W. Gasque, *A History of the Criticism of the Acts of the Apostles*, 21–2; Philip F. Esler, *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts*, 205.

scholars agree that Luke is offering an apologetic designed to persuade Roman officials that Christianity is politically harmless. Many also believe that Luke is seeking to show that Christianity should be regarded as a subspecies of Judaism, in order that Christians may receive the same freedom to practise their faith that the Roman empire afforded to Jews.⁵ This latter point is usually expressed by claiming that Luke wishes Christianity to be seen as a *religio licita* (a 'legally-recognised' religion).⁶

For Conzelmann (and some – but not all – others), coming to terms with the empire is part of the reality of dealing with the delay of the parousia; Luke needs to help his church adjust to issues that could in earlier times be glossed over (and hence, e.g., Paul in Rom. 13:1ff. takes a positive view of the empire, for he wrote in a period of 'imminent expectation'). Thus Luke's use of 'apology' language (particularly ἀπολογέομαι and ἀπολογία⁷) indicates the purpose of his account.

⁴ Burton Scott Easton, *Early Christianity*, 42–57; Henry J. Cadbury, *The Making of Luke-Acts*, 308–15; Hans Conzelmann, *The Theology of St Luke*, 137–49; F.F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, 8–13; also Harry W. Tajra, *The Trial of St Paul*, 199; Robert F. O'Toole, SJ, 'Luke's Position on Politics and Society in Luke-Acts', 1–17, citing 4–8.

⁵ Easton, *Early Christianity*, 46, observes that Luke uses αἵρεσις for the church (Acts 24:5; 28:22) as well as for the Pharisaic and Sadducean Jewish parties (Acts 5:17; 15:5; 26:5).

⁶ E.g. *ibid.* 43. This phrase appears to be used in ancient literature only by Tertullian, *Apology* 21.1. Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, xlvii, distances himself from this specific view, observing correctly that Luke does not argue on the basis of Roman law; cf. in agreement, Henry J. Cadbury, 'Some Foibles of New Testament Scholarship', 213–16, 215 – failing to admit that he himself defends the idea that Luke is arguing that Christianity should be legally recognised in his earlier work (Cadbury, *Making*, 308–15)! This is not to deny that Judaism had a particular place in the empire (see Josephus, *Antiquities* 14.186–285 = 14.10.1–11.4; 16.160–74 = 16.6.1–8, and the valuable discussion in Tajra, *Trial of St Paul*, 14–21), but simply to assert that there was not a general Roman legal category of *religio licita* into which Christianity might fit.

⁷ The verb is found in Acts 19:33; 24:10; 25:8; 26:1, 2, 24 (cf. Luke 12:11; 21:14); the noun, in Acts 22:1; 25:16. These are Lukanisms not found in the other Gospels, and only occurring eight times in the rest of the New Testament.

This apology is accomplished by two main strategies. First, Luke shows that whenever Roman officials consider the case of Christians (in particular, Paul) or Jesus, they are found innocent of political wrongdoing. Second, Luke portrays the attitudes of these Roman officials towards the Christians as positive.

Thus in Acts examples include that the first Gentile convert is the centurion Cornelius (10:1–11:18); Sergius Paulus, the governor of Cyprus, believes (13:12); the Philippian praetors apologise to Paul and Silas when they realise they have acted wrongly (16:39); the Thessalonian politarchs simply put the missionaries' host Jason on bail, rather than acting against Paul, Silas and Timothy (17:9); in Corinth the proconsul Gallio rejects the accusations against Paul as internal Jewish debates (18:14–16); the Ephesian Asiarchs seek to protect Paul, and the town clerk rejects the uproar over Paul's ministry (19:31, 35–41); Claudius Lysias rescues Paul and writes that he is innocent (21:31–2, 37–40; 23:29); Felix pays no attention to Tertullus's indictment of Paul as an insurrectionist (24:5–6, 22) and treats Paul well (24:23–7); Festus tells Agrippa that Paul is innocent of political charges (25:25) and Agrippa agrees (26:32); and on arrival in Rome Paul is allowed to live in his own rented place and to preach freely (28:30–1).

Further, in Luke's Gospel Jesus is declared innocent by Pilate three times (23:4, 13–14, 22), by the Roman client-king Herod (23:15), and by the centurion at the foot of the cross (23:47).⁸ By contrast, Luke emphasises the responsibility of the Jewish leaders for the death of Jesus (Luke 23:1–2, 5, 10, 18, 21, 23, 25, 35; Acts 2:23; 3:14; 4:11; 7:52; 10:39; 13:27–8),⁹ and presents the Jews as the cause of civil disturbance when Paul visits towns and cities (Acts 13:50; 14:5, 19; 17:5–7, 13; 18:12–13; 21:27–9; 22:22–3) and

⁸ Each of these Gospel passages is either without parallel in, or shows a different wording from, the other synoptic evangelists.

⁹ Again, many of the Gospel passages represent Lukan *Sondergut*. Jack T. Sanders, *The Jews in Luke-Acts*, presents the evidence fully, although note the effective critique of his conclusions by Jon A. Weatherly, *Jewish Responsibility for the Death of Jesus in Luke-Acts*, and Jon A. Weatherly, 'The Jews in Luke-Acts', 107–17, arguing cogently that Luke presents the responsibility for the death of Jesus as lying with the Jews of Jerusalem rather than all Jews everywhere; thus Sanders misrepresents Luke as anti-Semitic.

as the ones who pursue the (false) accusations against him (Acts 23:12–15; 24:1–6; 25:1–3, 7).

Apology for Rome to the church

A second proposal is that Luke is writing to persuade his Christian readers of his own positive view of the Roman empire in the light of Christians who are either suspicious of it (Walaskay) or courting (semi-deliberate) martyrdom (Maddox¹⁰). A common feature of scholars espousing this view is their rejection of the claim that Luke is writing for a non-Christian audience and the repeated quotation of Barrett's famous verdict concerning the 'political apology' view: 'No Roman official would ever have filtered out so much of what to him would be theological and ecclesiastical rubbish in order to reach so tiny a grain of relevant apology. So far as Acts was an apology, it was an apology addressed to the Church ...'¹¹

Walaskay argues cogently that there are features of Luke's presentation of the empire that do not fit the 'political apology' view so well and fit this view better.¹² In particular he identifies elements in Luke-Acts that would be disturbing or unhelpful in persuading a Roman official of the harmlessness of Christianity: Jesus has a Zealot among his disciples (Luke 6:15, contrast Mark 3:18; Acts 1:13); Jesus commands his followers to buy swords (Luke 22:35–8); the emphasis on Jesus as Lord and king throughout Luke-Acts would sit uncomfortably with the use of these titles for Caesar; and the silence of the ending of Acts would not impress a Roman official reading the book, for such a reader would not have been shown that Paul was innocent.

Walaskay also responds to the claim that there are features of Luke-Acts' presentation of the empire that portray imperial power as capricious, harsh or corrupt (see below, pp. 19–20, 23–5). Walaskay's response to these elements is to claim that Luke constantly presents the various Roman magistrates as under pressure

¹⁰ Robert Maddox, *The Purpose of Luke-Acts*, 96–7, noting particularly the evidence of 1 Pet. 2:13–17 as suggesting that this tendency developed quite early in the life of the church.

¹¹ C.K. Barrett, *Luke the Historian in Recent Study*, 63.

¹² Paul W. Walaskay, *And So We Came to Rome*, esp. 15–37.

from jealous Jews, and to suggest that Luke is showing the durability of the imperial legal system.¹³

Walaskay observes that Luke does not present the kind of anti-Roman polemic found in *4 Esdras*, the *Sibylline Oracles* (bk. 8) and *Revelation*; rather Luke glosses over negative aspects of the empire and presents imperial power positively. Thus Jesus' birth is placed in the context of the empire (Luke 2:1–5), showing that God's plan of salvation is being worked out in conjunction with the empire's history: the *pax Augusta* would be completed by the *pax Christi*. John's preaching reflects Augustan ideals of fair taxes and just military rule (Luke 3:10–14). Luke often presents centurions and other Roman officials positively.¹⁴ He has edited Mark's story of the question concerning tribute to Caesar (Mark 12:13–17; Luke 20:20–6) to heighten the treachery of the Jewish leaders (note v. 20); Luke's purpose in including this story is to answer Christians who were unsure about paying tribute to Caesar – the question would have seemed a non-question to a Roman official, for it was obvious that such tribute should be paid! Luke has edited Mark 10:42–5 and inserted it into the Last Supper narrative (Luke 22:24–7) in order to portray the empire more favourably (see further below, pp. 19–20).

Walaskay follows this with a point-by-point discussion of the trials of Jesus and Paul.¹⁵ He claims that Luke presents Pilate as dealing fairly with Jesus and maintaining his innocence, whereas the sinful Jewish leaders pervert justice in order to do away with Jesus. Paul defends himself by appeal to the resurrection of Jesus, and thereby shows Christians of Luke's day both that their predecessors were innocent before the state and that Paul had no political quarrel with Rome.

Robbins's view is close to those of Walaskay and Maddox, although more nuanced, for he argues that Luke-Acts is commending a symbiotic relationship between the empire and Christianity.¹⁶ He believes that Luke-Acts is intended to support Christians building strategic alliances with local leaders in the

¹³ Ibid. 23–5.

¹⁴ Luke 7:2; 23:47; Acts 10:1ff.; 22:25–6; 23:17, 23; 27:1ff.; 28:16.

¹⁵ Walaskay, *And So We Came*, 39–63.

¹⁶ Vernon K. Robbins, 'Luke-Acts', 202–21.

Roman empire (and thus is written for a Christian audience). Robbins identifies a number of ways in which the church works in similar manner to the empire: different levels of workers operate, negotiation happens with insiders and outsiders, both develop a presence everywhere, and both extend citizenship to new groups. The eastern empire is the 'workplace' of Christianity: it is where power 'takes place', particularly in synagogues and homes. Jesus' followers are in an analogous position to those in the Roman military system, for they have no choice but to do God's work. God ensures that his will is communicated and executed by using angels, the Lord Jesus and the Spirit at key moments, to work through and with obedient Christian leaders.

Legitimation

Esler rejects both apologetic views and proposes that Luke is writing for a Christian audience and offering them legitimation for their beliefs and lifestyle, which includes assurance that faith in Christ is not incompatible with allegiance to Rome.¹⁷ He is rightly critical of the *religio licita* theory, on the ground that we know nothing of such a category in the first century AD, as well as rejecting Walaskay's view, since Luke's portrayal of the relationship of Rome and Christianity is mixed, including situations in which Roman officials treat Jesus and Paul unfairly or badly.

Esler draws attention to the presentation of Christianity as an ancestral religion in order to help legitimate his readers' beliefs by appealing to the (Roman) cultural value of antiquity – the supposed 'new' religion was in fact ancient. Thus Luke omits 'new' from his Markan source (Mark 1:27; Luke 4:36), he adds 'the old is best' (Luke 5:39; contrast Mark 2:22), and he regards the Athenians' love of new things as scornful (Acts 17:19, 21). Further, Luke repeatedly links Christianity with Israelite ancestors (Acts 3:13; 5:30; 15:10; 22:14; 26:6; 28:25).

Esler proposes that within Luke's community there were a number of Roman soldiers or administrators who needed

¹⁷ Esler, *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts*, 201–19; so also Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 810–11; Helen K. Bond, *Pontius Pilate in History and Interpretation*, 161–2.

reassurance that Christian faith and serving the empire could coexist satisfactorily. He claims that Luke diverges from his sources to highlight such Romans among the first believers, including the centurions (Luke 7:1–10; 23:47; Acts 10:1ff.¹⁸), Sergius Paulus (Acts 13:6–12), and Titius Justus (Acts 18:7). Further, Luke adds ethical advice to soldiers and tax-collectors in his account of John's preaching (Luke 3:12–14), and gives prominence to Paul claiming his rights as a Roman citizen (Acts 16:37–40; 22:25–9).

However, this is hardly 'quite a body of evidence';¹⁹ it simply involves the doubtful procedure of 'mirror-reading'²⁰ Luke-Acts for its audience. Of course the contents and presentation of a book will tell us *something* about the intended audience; Mark's explanation of Jewish washing customs (Mark 7:3–4) suggests that he does not expect his readers to know about them. However, to argue that the presence of these features implies a significant presence of Romans in Luke's church assumes both that Luke is

¹⁸ Esler, *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts*, 95–6, argues that the account of Cornelius's conversion is unhistorical on the grounds that (1) for Peter subsequently to do the about-face described in Gal. 2:11–14 is incredible; (2) we should not expect Peter to be the 'apostle to the circumcised' and Paul the 'apostle to the uncircumcised' if it had been Peter who began the Gentile mission; (3) we should expect that the Council (Acts 15) would simply refer back to this event as *decisive* if it were historical. However: (1) Peter is presented as changing his behaviour in different company (particularly when under pressure) in the Gospels, including in Luke (esp. 22:54–62); (2) the titles in Galatians are concerned with the *focus* of the two apostles' ministry – one could equally argue (equally erroneously, that is) that Paul should be known as 'apostle to the circumcised', on the basis that he constantly goes to synagogues in Acts; (3) the use of ἡσυχασαν (11:18) need not imply acceptance, as in Luke 14:4; Acts 21:14 (the only other use of the verb in Acts) it may well imply continuing reservations, such reservations only being resolved at the Council (James D.G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 152). In any case the question in 11:1–18 is about the acceptance of Peter eating with this group of Gentiles, and does not raise the question of whether circumcision was required for Gentile converts, which is the central question in 15:1ff.

¹⁹ Esler, *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts*, 210.

²⁰ For the phrase, see John M.G. Barclay, 'Mirror-reading a Polemical Letter', 73–93.

writing for a particular, identifiable, small community (a claim Bauckham has rightly challenged²¹) and that each feature in Luke-Acts corresponds to a need or grouping within Luke's church – an assumption that needs only to be stated in order to see that it is unlikely to be correct. In any case, as we have seen, the presentation of Roman officials is rather more mixed than Esler's brief presentation allows, and Luke-Acts presents Jesus, rather than Caesar, as Lord and king.

Equipping

Cassidy offers a further level of nuancing of Luke's presentation of the empire, which seeks to take greater account of the 'mixed message' that appears to come through in Luke-Acts.²² Like Esler he rejects 'apologetic' explanations of Luke's presentation of the empire, arguing that Acts does not present Christians as politically harmless or law-abiding, for there are a large number of public controversies concerning Christianity, particularly featuring Paul. When he arrives in a city his preaching frequently leads to public disorder, causing him to have to leave. Cassidy argues that Luke does not show that the problems were due to Jewish troublemakers, for the problems only arose when Paul came into a city. Further, Paul is not finally exonerated by Roman justice; for example, in the case of Gallio Paul simply benefits from bias against the Jews.

Indeed, Cassidy notes, Paul's attitude to his Roman citizenship and his co-operation with Roman officials are highly qualified in Acts. Although Paul is generally co-operative, he is hardly an unquestioningly loyal Roman citizen: he identifies himself as a citizen of Tarsus (Acts 21:39); he mentions his citizenship only in private to officials who fail to treat him properly; and Paul's references to Jesus as 'Lord' show that he does not see Caesar as exercising ultimate sovereignty (cf. Acts 17:7). In places Paul is far

²¹ Richard Bauckham (ed.), *The Gospels for All Christians*; see Esler's review and Bauckham's rejoinder: Philip F. Esler, 'Community and Gospel in Early Christianity', 235–48; Richard Bauckham, 'Response to Philip Esler', 249–53.

²² Richard J. Cassidy, *Society and Politics in the Acts of the Apostles*, esp. 145–70; cf. Richard J. Cassidy, *Jesus, Politics, and Society*.

from accommodating to his judges: he speaks with Felix of 'justice, self-control, and the coming judgement' (Acts 24:25), and rebukes Festus (Acts 25:10). Luke portrays Paul as not expecting to receive justice from Festus; that is why he reacts angrily and appeals to Caesar (Acts 25:10–11), and tells the Roman Jews that he was *compelled* (ἡναγκάσθη) to appeal to Caesar (Acts 28:19).

Cassidy asserts that Luke does not in fact portray the Roman empire particularly favourably, for Paul was in prison for four years without an effective verdict, principally because of corrupt judges (Acts 24:26, 27; 25:9). Christians are pictured as those who are critical of human authority, for they have a higher allegiance (Acts 4:19–20; 5:29).

Thus Cassidy proposes a threefold theory of Luke's purposes, which he calls the 'allegiance-conduct-witness' theory: he wrote to share and express his own faith in Jesus, to provide his fellow Christians with guidance how to live under Roman rule, and to give guidance and perspective for Christians when on trial before political authorities. The first is relatively uncontroversial; the second and third, Cassidy believes, show why Luke presents the trials of Jesus and Paul as he does. Luke is demonstrating that faithful witness is required in such situations, but different outcomes might come from trials – severe punishment and even death were real possibilities.

In particular, Cassidy cites Luke's editing of Mark 13:9–13 in Luke 21:12–19 as showing that Jesus is here giving significantly fuller guidance to disciples:²³ he speaks of disciples experiencing betrayal by family and even death (21:16); he gives more definite advice on how to act when on trial (21:14–15); 21:12 shows greater emphasis on secular persecution, for he places 'kings' first, adds 'prisons' and omits Mark's 'councils'; the addition of 'before all this' (21:12) shows that the instructions are for a time before the cataclysmic upheavals to come.

Cassidy also argues that his view fits the ending of Acts better than others, for it shows the book climaxing with Paul ready to testify before Caesar. Luke thereby encourages his readers to be faithful in their own testimony to Jesus in 'ordinary' life.

²³ Cassidy, *Society and Politics in Acts*, 165 (with n. 18).

Thus, Cassidy asserts, five concerns animated Luke in writing.²⁴ Luke wished (1) to inform his readers both about Jesus' trials before Roman officials and his predictions that his disciples would have similar experiences; (2) to equip his readers to handle such trials rightly by presenting Jesus' instructions on what to do; (3) to make his audience aware that some leading disciples had, in fact, suffered such trials; (4) to warn his readers of the different possible trial outcomes, which might include death or imprisonment; (5) to encourage his readers to show the same faithfulness of testimony when under trial as Jesus and the leading disciples.

Not interested in politics

Finally, Jervell and Franklin argue that Luke is simply uninterested in the politics of the Roman empire.²⁵ Franklin sees Luke's focus as being on the triumph of God in Paul's arrival in Rome; Roman officials are merely agents used by God to achieve his purposes. Luke is not favourable towards the empire, for he presents Pilate unfavourably (Luke 23:13–25; 23:1), he includes sayings that predict the destruction of the temple by Rome (Luke 23:28–31), he shows the empire acting badly towards Christians (Acts 16:39; 17:6–10; 18:12–17), and he shows the Roman authorities as uncomprehending of Christian preaching (Acts 24:26–7). The state is not hostile to Christianity, but is fickle. On the other hand, Christianity is not guilty of deliberate subversion, but poses a threat to the peace of the empire: Lysias sees Paul as a disturber of the peace (Acts 23:30).

Jervell's presentation is fuller than Franklin's. He argues that in the latter chapters of Acts we are seeing *Jewish* charges against Paul (21:21, 28; 23:29; 24:5; 25:8, 19; 28:17) rather than political charges initiated by the Roman authorities. Paul is being charged concerning his alleged teaching against Israel, the law and the temple. Charges of sedition come from the Jews (17:6–7; 24:5), whereas the Romans simply charge Paul with civil disturbance (16:20; 21:38; 25:8; cf. the charges against Jesus, Luke 23:2). Thus Luke's readers are Christian

²⁴ Ibid. 160.

²⁵ Jacob Jervell, *The Theology of the Acts of the Apostles*, 15–16, 86–8, 100–106, 134; Eric Franklin, *Christ the Lord*, 134–9.

Jews under pressure from their non-Christian compatriots. Jervell goes against the trend of scholarship in proposing that Luke is himself Jewish and wishes to show that Christian Jews are highly influential in the life of the early church.

Jervell observes that both Jews (Acts 2:23; 3:14–15; 4:10; 7:52; 10:39; 13:27–8) and Romans (Acts 4:27; 2:23; cf. 13:28) are responsible for the death of Jesus in Luke–Acts. Further, Luke's unflattering presentation of the Romans hardly allows Walaskay's approach. Thus Luke is showing his readers that the empire is no threat to the church: the empire cannot obstruct the progress of the gospel to the ends of the earth, even if it acts in concert with the Jewish authorities.²⁶ The church does not react politically towards the authorities: its only response is proclamation (Acts 4:20, 28–9; 5:29–32). Similarly, relations with the empire are through presenting the name of Jesus (Acts 9:15; 13:7; 24:14ff.; 26:1–32; Luke 12:11–12; 21:14–15); for now, Christianity is politically harmless, but when the kingdom of God appears the political powers will stand helpless (Luke 21:20–31).

In sum, in this view Luke has no 'theology of the state': he simply recognises its existence as a political reality, but he is clear that God is greater. Defiance of the empire only happens when it attempts to hinder the proclamation of the gospel.

Key Evidence

This survey of scholarship drives us back to the texts to see how far they support these views. I shall review the Romans' ways of administering their empire, focusing particularly on cities, the key contexts in Acts for Christian mission, and then reconsider seven features of Luke–Acts: the placing of Christianity in the context of the Roman empire; the location of Jesus within a Jewish framework; the trial of Jesus; the presentation of Roman officials and Roman justice; troubles caused by Paul; Jesus as Lord, king and saviour; and the ending of Acts. In each case I shall identify key passages and issues, and evaluate the relevance and strength of the evidence.

²⁶ Cf. Douglas R. Edwards, 'Surviving the Web of Roman Power', 179–201.

The administration of the Roman empire

This is a vast topic, and I shall of necessity concentrate on a small number of key points.²⁷ It is common in New Testament scholarship to assume that contacts between the Christians and the city authorities within the Roman empire can be taken as evidence of Christian relations with the empire. However, the Romans employed a system of delegated government, which meant that significant facets of city life were under the control of local people.

In New Testament times the empire was divided into provinces, some under direct imperial authority, others under senatorial control. In charge of each province was a governor, normally of senatorial rank, supported by a (usually very small) staff under his immediate control. Only in frontier or troublesome provinces, such as Judaea, were significant numbers of Roman troops present, in order to preserve Roman control and political stability. A key member of the governor's staff was the procurator, whose duties could include the collection of taxes, as well as looking after the emperor's interests.²⁸

Within a province there would be a number of communities with 'city' (πόλις) status, and the nature of this status could vary considerably from one community to another.²⁹ Among its inhabitants, some were citizens of the city, and a smaller group (often much

²⁷ For (considerably) fuller accounts, see the following, to which my brief account is indebted: Joyce Reynolds, 'Cities', 15–51; Fergus Millar, *The Roman Empire and its Neighbours*, ch. 5; David W.J. Gill, 'The Roman Empire as a Context for the New Testament', 389–406; David W.J. Gill and Conrad H. Gempf (eds.), *The Book of Acts in its Graeco-Roman Setting*; Andrew Lintott, *Imperium Romanum*, esp. chs. 3–4, 8; A.H.M. Jones, *The Greek City from Alexander to Justinian*, esp. chs. iv, viii, xi; Anthony D. Macro, 'The Cities of Asia Minor under the Roman Imperium', 658–97. Valuable collections of source material in English translation are found in W.K. Lacey and B.W.J.G. Wilson, *Res Publica*, and Jo-Ann Shelton, *As the Romans Did*, esp. sections x, xii.

²⁸ Judaea and Egypt were exceptions to this structure in New Testament times, not having their own governor, but rather a procurator or prefect of equestrian rank: Emil Schürer, Geza Vermes and Fergus Millar, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, I:358.

²⁹ See Reynolds, 'Cities', 23, for a helpful taxonomy.

smaller) were Roman citizens. Philippi, Corinth and Pisidian Antioch were Roman colonies, all of whose citizens were Roman citizens – many were former soldiers granted citizenship on their retirement from the army.³⁰ Athens, by contrast, retained the feel of a Greek city with the Areopagus as its ruling council.³¹ In this case, the Romans had taken an established Greek city and permitted its own civic structures to continue, but now overseen by the governor of the province of Achaia and his staff. As long as the city ran smoothly and peacefully, and Roman taxes were paid promptly, the governor would not be likely to interfere.

Typically a πόλις in the eastern empire would consist of an urban centre that controlled a surrounding territory, usually containing villages under the centre's jurisdiction – thus to think of a modern 'city' does not give quite the right picture. When the emperor granted the status of πόλις to an existing place he would allow the people to appoint (or, in the case of an established city, to continue to appoint) a council (βουλή) which could pass local laws, and to elect their own magistrates annually,³² who dispensed justice in many matters and had their own subordinate officials.³³ Cities usually had a citizen assembly (ἐκκλησία), but under the Romans it was increasingly subject to the council, which tended to consist of members of the wealthy social élite.³⁴ Indeed, magistrates were frequently appointed from the council members, and were required to contribute financially to the city's affairs on appointment,³⁵ further limiting those who could be candidates for office.

³⁰ David W.J. Gill, 'Macedonia', 411–13.

³¹ David W.J. Gill, 'Achaia', 441–3, 447.

³² Luke gets the designation and jurisdiction of these officials right in place after place; see Colin J. Hemer and Conrad H. Gempf (ed.), *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History*, 115 (on 16:22), 119 (on 17:34), 121 (on 19:31), 122 (on 19:35), 123 (on 19:38), 153 with n. 152 (on 28:7).

³³ Cicero, *Epistulae ad Atticum* 6.1.15 (written c. 50 BC), says that he allowed Greeks to try cases between provincials under their own laws. Methods of election varied considerably across the empire: Reynolds, 'Cities', 26–7.

³⁴ Millar, *Roman Empire and its Neighbours*, 87.

³⁵ Reynolds, 'Cities', 36.

The powers of these local magistrates, councils and assemblies were circumscribed by those of the governor. Hence the Ephesian town clerk warns the citizens that the city is in danger of being charged with rioting (Acts 19:40), which could lead to the governor disbanding the citizen-assembly, punishing city officials or taking away privileges already granted to the city.³⁶

More specifically, cases that could result in death or exile were reserved for the governor's judgement, as well as cases involving Roman citizens,³⁷ and some cases involving commercial questions or public order.³⁸ The governor would travel annually to various cities within his province to try such cases, and others that the local magistrates could not resolve.³⁹ In Achaia Luke records Gallio hearing the Jews' case against Paul in Corinth, the governor's seat (Acts 18:12–17).⁴⁰ In Judaea this comports well with John's assertion that the Jews were not allowed to 'put anyone to death' (John 18:31).⁴¹

It is within this setting that the Acts accounts of encounter between the Christians and the 'powers that be' should be seen. This limits the number of *direct* contacts between the Christians – and Paul in particular – and the Roman empire, as we shall see.

³⁶ Paul R. Trebilco, 'Asia', 344–5 (where examples are given).

³⁷ Macro, 'Cities of Asia Minor', 671. Hence the Philippian magistrates are taken aback when they realise they have beaten Roman citizens, thus acting in a case over which they have no jurisdiction (Acts 16:37–9).

³⁸ Bruce W. Winter, *Seek the Welfare of the City*, 107–8.

³⁹ See G.P. Burton, 'Proconsuls, Assizes and the Administration of Justice under the Empire', 92–106, for a careful description of the system of travelling assizes.

⁴⁰ Most governors had at least one legal advisor among their personal staff (cf. Acts 25:12), whereas Gallio, a noted jurist, gives his own judgement without consulting advisors.

⁴¹ Supported by Josephus, *War* 2.117 = 2.8.1. See discussion (and further references) in George R. Beasley-Murray, *John* 308–10; D.A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, 590–2.

Christianity placed in the context of the Roman empire⁴²

Luke alone among the canonical evangelists sets the coming of Jesus and the growth of the church in the context of the Roman empire. He identifies Augustus as emperor and Quirinius as governor of Syria when Jesus is born (Luke 2:1–2).⁴³ He offers a sixfold dating by Roman rulers for John beginning to preach (Luke 3:1–2). Throughout Luke–Acts readers who are aware of the ancient world are conscious that Paul, for example, is able to travel freely because of the benefits of Roman roads, harbours, ships and, above all, the *pax Romana*.⁴⁴ In Acts, particularly in the second half, Luke relates developments in the Christian community to the empire, referring to Roman officials from time to time and the interaction between the missionaries and these people.

However, this evidence is slight, for Luke never explicitly mentions the benefits of the *pax Romana* or the Roman road system.⁴⁵ If, as some urge,⁴⁶ this is a significant sign of Luke's positive view of the empire, he has not gone out of his way to draw attention to it. Paul's direct contacts with Roman officials are limited to Gallio in Corinth (18:12–17), the tribune in Jerusalem (21–2), Felix (23:31–24:26), Festus (24:27–26:32) and Julius the centurion (27:1, 11, 31, 43). The emperors themselves never appear in the narrative, but are always peripheral (e.g. Luke 2:1–2; 3:1–2; Acts 5:37; 11:28; 18:2).⁴⁷ Nero is not mentioned by name, although in places it must be him to whom a character refers (Acts 25:11–12, 21, 25–6).

⁴² See Bond, *Pontius Pilate*, 140–1.

⁴³ The dating here is notoriously difficult; see discussion in John Nolland, *Luke 1–9:20*, 99–102 (particularly thorough); Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Luke I–IX*, 400; Christopher F. Evans, *Saint Luke*, 193–5; I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 99–104; Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, 547–56.

⁴⁴ See Michael B. Thompson, 'The Holy Internet', 49–70; Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, 14–16.

⁴⁵ On the latter, see David French, 'Acts and the Roman Roads of Asia Minor', 49–58.

⁴⁶ Walaskay, *And So We Came*, 25–7; Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 415–16.

⁴⁷ Robbins, 'Luke–Acts', 205–7.

Jesus acts within a Jewish 'religious' framework

For Conzelmann it is important that Luke places Jesus within a Jewish 'religious' framework,⁴⁸ for this proves that Luke is attempting to show Christianity as politically neutral and harmless. Luke, Conzelmann believes, is coming to terms with the delay of the parousia, and therefore is handling a situation where the church must come to a 'settlement' with the empire. Several lines of evidence are important to Conzelmann's case.

In Luke, John's preaching to the soldiers and tax-collectors (3:10ff.) includes the implicit instruction to be loyal to the state. John's arrest is for non-political reasons (3:19). Jesus' career is presented as non-political in the Nazareth scene (4:18ff.). When Herod seeks to 'see' Jesus it is because of his miracles, not for any political reason (9:7ff.; cf. 23:8). Jesus' death will be that of a prophet, not a political subversive (13:31ff.). At the entry to Jerusalem Jesus is acclaimed as 'king' in a non-political sense, for the goal of his journey is the temple (19:38). When the question of the political supremacy of Rome is raised explicitly, Jesus encourages submission to the emperor (20:20–6). Although the accusations against Jesus are framed politically (23:2), Luke makes it clear that the Jewish authorities are lying (20:20ff. shows that they themselves are disingenuous in their question; 23:18ff. shows that they are in fact in solidarity with political insurgents).

However, Conzelmann operates with a division of 'religion' and 'politics' untenable for the first century AD. To speak of Jesus in kingly terms was inevitably to speak politically, for that was the kind of king known in that world.⁴⁹ Further, to speak of Jesus as 'son of God' was to invoke a messianic, that is, a royal title (cf. Ps 2:7) with political overtones. To argue that Luke's insertion of 'king' into the triumphal entry is non-political is naïve in a world where Caesar was known as 'king'. For Jesus to read Isaiah 61:1ff. in the synagogue at Nazareth (4:16ff.) cannot be construed as apolitical, for it echoes jubilee legislation that presupposes Israel once again has control of

⁴⁸ Conzelmann, *Theology of St Luke*, 137–49.

⁴⁹ On this paragraph, see N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 2:97–8, 296–7, 310–11, 481–6; Marcus J. Borg, *Conflict, Holiness and Politics in the Teachings of Jesus*.

her own land.⁵⁰ For John to speak against Herod's marriage was to speak against the king's fitness to rule in a world where divine law concerning marriage was taken seriously.⁵¹

The question of tribute to Caesar (Luke 20:20–6) requires a little more discussion.⁵² In a time and place where revolution was in the air Jesus' answer to the question whether tribute should be paid to Caesar would have been awaited with bated breath. If he said that tribute should be paid to Caesar, he would identify himself with the collaborators; if not, he would mark himself as a revolutionary and a danger to Rome. Jesus' brilliant answer, 'Give to Caesar that which is Caesar's, and to God that which is God's' (v. 25) avoids both horns of the dilemma. This answer echoes Mattathias's dying words, 'Pay back the Gentiles in full and obey the commands of the law' (ἀνταπόδοτε ἀνταπόδομα τοῖς ἔθνεσιν καὶ προσέχετε εἰς πρόσταγμα τοῦ νόμου, 1 Macc. 2:68). The first clause of Mattathias's words is unquestionably a revolutionary charter. Thus, facing someone holding a Roman coin with a blasphemous inscription,⁵³ Jesus' response was implicitly revolutionary, for it implied that Caesar should get what he deserved. Yet it was not explicitly so, for Jesus had not forbidden paying the census tax, and thereby avoided being arrested before he was ready. The second clause of Jesus' answer (in agreement with the second clause of

⁵⁰ Cf. Wright, *Jesus*, 294–5; Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 212–3; Nolland, *Luke 1–9:20*, 197; Sharon H. Ringe, *Jesus, Liberation, and the Biblical Jubilee*, 36–45; contra Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 1:67–8.

⁵¹ Cf. Wright, *Jesus*, 160–2; Harold W. Hoehner, *Herod Antipas*, 142–4.

⁵² What follows is based on Wright, *Jesus*, 502–7; cf. John Nolland, *Luke 18:35–24:53*, 955–61. For other views, see F.F. Bruce, 'Render to Caesar', 249–63, esp. 257–62; Marshall, *Luke*, 733–7; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Luke X–XXIV*, 1284–98; J. Duncan M. Derrett, 'Luke's Perspective on Tribute to Caesar', 38–48, esp. 41–3.

⁵³ H. StJ. Hart, 'The Coin of "Render unto Caesar ..." (A Note on Some Aspects of Mark 12:13–17; Matt. 22:15–22; Luke 20:20–26)', 241–8, shows that the inscription would probably be TI(BERIVS) CAESAR DIVI AVGVSTI F(ILIVS) AVGVSTVS: PONTIFEX MAXIMVS (= 'Tiberius Caesar, son of the divine Augustus, Augustus: high priest') – thus making blasphemous claims alongside the offensive presence of Caesar's εἰκών (image).

Mattathias's words) echoes Israel's call to worship the one true God (e.g. Ps. 96:7–10; Deut. 6:4–5) and to avoid idolatry. Thus, faced with this blasphemous Roman coin, Jesus implicitly states that possession of it involves compromise with paganism – and therefore gives a clarion call to faithfulness to Yahweh by calling his hearers to follow Jesus' way of the kingdom. Jesus' two-edged answer could be accused of many things, but that it was 'political', in both Jewish and Roman contexts, is hard to deny.

The trial of Jesus

It is clearly crucial to understanding Luke's view of the empire to consider the empire's treatment of Jesus. Pilate as Roman governor three times declares Jesus innocent of any crime (Luke 23:4, 14, 22) and invokes the client-king Herod as having come to the same conclusion (Luke 23:15). Herod himself has failed to gain any answer from Jesus after having earlier sought to see him and, reportedly, plotted to kill him (Luke 23:8–11; cf. 9:7–9; 13:31–2). The centurion at the foot of the cross likewise declares Jesus to be innocent (Luke 23:47; contrast Mark 15:33; Matt. 27:54). So who is responsible for the death of Jesus from Luke's perspective?

A key passage for understanding Luke's view is Acts 4:27–30, which asserts that opposition to Jesus is the factor uniting Pilate, Herod, the Gentiles and the 'peoples of Israel'.⁵⁴ To assert, as some do,⁵⁵ that the Jewish people alone are held responsible for the death of Jesus is to overstate the case. Luke's presentation is more nuanced, for he locates responsibility on the Jewish side with the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem and, to a lesser degree, the people of Jerusalem.⁵⁶ This is clear, not least, since it is only in Jerusalem itself that the apostles speak of 'you' as responsible for killing Jesus (Acts 2:36; 3:13, 14, 17; 4:10; 5:30; 7:52; cf. 5:28). Further, on the one occasion outside Jerusalem where Paul speaks of responsibility for the death of Jesus, he attributes it to the Jerusalem residents and especially their leaders (Acts 13:26–7).

⁵⁴ Jervell, *Theology of Acts*, 100–101.

⁵⁵ Especially Sanders, *Jews in Luke-Acts*.

⁵⁶ Weatherly, *Jewish Responsibility*, esp. ch. 2.

It is also clear from Luke's characterisation of Pilate that the Roman system is by no means guiltless in this regard.⁵⁷ Luke 18:31–4 asserts that Jesus will be handed over to the Gentiles (v. 32). Pilate is named in speeches in Acts concerning the death of Jesus (Acts 3:13; 4:27; 13:28). In the Lukan passion narrative, while Pilate pronounces Jesus innocent three times, he nevertheless gives him over to be executed (Luke 23:25). This portrays Pilate as all the more culpable, not least because the verb παραδίδωμι (give over) is used on at least twenty occasions by Luke as indicating 'giving over' in persecution, arrest, betrayal or execution, especially in the passion narrative, where it is the only sense in which this verb is used.⁵⁸

Certainly Luke regards the purposes of God as being achieved through the death of Jesus (not least in Acts 4:28), but this does not exonerate either the Jewish or Roman authorities. Both share the blame, just as both Jews and Gentiles may benefit from the fruits of the death of Jesus, as Acts makes clear by the response among both to the preaching of the gospel.

The presentation of Roman officials and Roman justice

This is a significant group of evidence on our question, for there are several occasions when the empire's officials, soldiers or justice system impinge on Luke-Acts, especially Acts. We may divide the passages into those that present positive and negative views of the empire.

As far as positive aspects go, six features of Luke's *Dopplewerk* come to mind. First, John the baptiser's preaching to tax-collectors and soldiers (Luke 3:1–10) avoids telling them to withdraw from their occupations, but rather instructs them on how to conduct their vocations in a manner consistent with being baptised by John. Given that these people are in both cases likely to be Jewish⁵⁹ (for

⁵⁷ See Bond, *Pontius Pilate*, 150–60.

⁵⁸ Luke 9:44; 12:58; 18:32; 20:20; 21:12, 16; 22:4, 6, 21, 22, 48; 23:25; 24:7, 20; Acts 3:13; 8:3; 12:4; 21:11; 22:4; 27:1; see Weatherly, *Jewish Responsibility*, 96 (the list of references is an expanded version of his). The verb is used thirty times in total in Luke-Acts.

⁵⁹ With Marshall, *Luke*, 143; Nolland, *Luke 1–9:20*, 150; Fitzmyer, *Luke I–IX*, 470; Evans, *Saint Luke*, 241; contra Walaskay, *And So We Came*, 31 (with 81, n. 82); Green, *Luke*, 180.

John's was a Jewish renewal movement), these instructions are at least supportive of the empire, since they are compatible with Augustan ideals for these groups.⁶⁰

Second, Walaskay regards Luke 22:24–7 as an edited version of Mark 10:42–5, and in particular proposes that the replacement of the compound verbs κατακυριεύω and κατεξουσιάζω (Mark 10:42; they imply domineering rule) by the simple forms κυριεύω and ἐξουσιάζω (Luke 22:25; they do not carry 'domineering' overtones) suggests that Luke is 'toning down' Mark's wording to sound less anti-empire. However, it is unlikely that the Lukan passage is a true parallel to the Markan,⁶¹ for the verbal agreement is poor: of sixty-seven words in Luke 22:24–7, only sixteen occur in the same form in Mark – including four definite articles, four conjunctions, three third-person plural nouns, and the phrases οὐχ οὕτως and ἐν ὑμῖν. No verbal forms are common to the two passages, and the only noun they share is ἔθνων. Further, Luke rarely relocates material from its Markan sequence, but rather uses the material in the same order. Jeremias points to only two small deviations before the passion narrative (Luke 6:17–19; 8:19–21) and concludes that deviations imply that Luke is not using Mark.⁶² In sum, it is unlikely that we should draw any conclusions from this proposed parallel, since it is not a real parallel. We may add that, from the perspective of Luke's first readers, such subtleties would be likely to be invisible, for they probably did not have access to Mark's Gospel (nor, indeed, a Gospels Synopsis!).⁶³

⁶⁰ Walaskay, *And So We Came*, 29–32.

⁶¹ For this paragraph (including fuller detail on differences between Mark and Luke), see Steve Walton, *Leadership and Lifestyle*, 110–15, and Peter K. Nelson, *Leadership and Discipleship*, 124–31, in agreement with Marion L. Soards, *The Passion according to Luke*, 30–1; Sydney H.T. Page, 'The Authenticity of the Ransom Logion (Mark 10:45b)', 148–54; Joel B. Green, *The Death of Jesus*, 44–6; Vincent Taylor, *The Passion Narrative of St Luke*, 61–4; Nolland, *Luke 18:35–24:53*, 1062–3.

⁶² Joachim Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, 98.

⁶³ Cf. C.K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, II:1: 'We cannot suppose that Luke wrote his gospel with the notion that it should be published in one of four parallel columns in a Synopsis.'

Third, the lack of any reporting of Roman persecution of the early Christian community in Jerusalem suggests that the Jesus movement was not seen as a political threat, for the Romans could and did round up and execute the followers of would-be revolutionaries.⁶⁴

Fourth, Luke presents Roman officials and (especially) centurions positively, drawing attention to their godliness or justice. The centurion of Capernaum (Luke 7:1–10; cf. Matthew 8:5–13) is presented more fulsomely by Luke than by Matthew, for Luke includes a speech telling Jesus of the man's piety (7:4–5). The portrait of Cornelius (Acts 10:1–11:18) echoes this centurion's godliness, for Cornelius is 'devout and God-fearing', he gives to the needy, prays (10:2) and is commended by the angel (10:4). When Peter hears about Cornelius, these qualities are underlined (10:22). In addition, some Roman officials – such as the proconsul in Cyprus, Sergius Paulus (Acts 13:7, 12) – believe.⁶⁵

Fifth, Paul is portrayed as submitting to the legal process, and generally being helpful to Roman officials. He does not resist arrest; he answers the charges against him and speaks respectfully to the courts (e.g. Acts 24:10; 26:2–3); he assists and advises Julius the centurion during the voyage to Rome (27:21–6, 30–2, 33–6). However, Paul is no doormat, for on key occasions he expects justice and exercises his privileges as a Roman citizen (22:25–9; 25:11⁶⁶). Similarly, he speaks frankly with Felix about judgement to come (24:25).

Sixth, Paul is regularly found innocent and/or treated well by Roman officials irrespective of their acceptance of the Christian faith. In Corinth the proconsul Gallio finds that he has no case to answer (Acts 18:14–15). Claudius Lysias, the commander of the Jerusalem garrison, saves Paul from the mob (21:31–4), permits him

⁶⁴ E.g. Josephus, *War* 2.261–3 = 2.13.5 (the Egyptian false prophet); *Antiquities* 20.102 = 2.5.2 (the sons of Judas the Galilean); *War* 2.118 = 2.8.1; *Antiquities* 18.4–10 = 18.1.1 (Judas the Galilean); *Antiquities* 20.97–8 = 20.5.1 and Acts 5:36–7 (Theudas).

⁶⁵ The tax-collector Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1–10) and the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:27–34) are not Roman officials, but local officials, even though Zacchaeus would have been seen as a Roman collaborator by the Jewish people at large.

⁶⁶ Cf. Paul's response to the local magistrates in the Roman colony of Philippi (Acts 16:35–9).

to speak to the crowd (21:37–40a), complies with Paul's request to exercise the privileges of his Roman citizenship (22:24–9), protects Paul from the Sanhedrin (23:10), and finally sends Paul to Caesarea, away from the plot to kill him, accompanied by a letter expressing the view that Paul has no charge to answer (23:16–30). Felix appears to regard Paul as innocent and only keeps him in prison from expediency (24:23, 27). Festus judges that Paul is innocent of crime (25:25), a verdict confirmed by the client-king Herod Agrippa II (26:32). Julius treats Paul well by allowing him to visit his friends in Sidon (27:3) and by protecting him when the soldiers plan to kill all the prisoners during the shipwreck (27:42–3). Publius, the first man of Malta,⁶⁷ welcomes Paul and his companions and treats them well (28:7).

We may also observe that the charges against Paul are almost always presented as an internal Jewish argument in which Roman officials do not wish to become involved (Acts 18:13–15; 23:27–9; 25:19; cf. 26:2–3).⁶⁸ The magistrates are only concerned to keep public order, and do not wish to become involved in 'theology'.

Such are the positive aspects of Christianity in relation to the Roman empire. Two striking negative aspects of the portrait of the Jesus movement in relation to the empire should also be noted.

First, Luke underlines the fact that Jerusalem will fall to the Romans, and highlights this more than Mark or Matthew (Luke 21; Mark 13; Matthew 24), particularly Luke 21:20 (which makes it clear that Jerusalem is being spoken about) and 21:24 (which speaks of Jerusalem being trampled by the Gentiles).

Second, Luke presents Roman officialdom 'warts and all', and does not hesitate to tell of failings and corruption.⁶⁹ Pilate is represented as weak and swayed by the Jewish leaders into acting

⁶⁷ Publius may be either a Roman official or a local official whose jurisdiction was recognised by the Romans, after the manner of city magistrates; see discussion in Barrett, *Acts*, II:1224–5; Witherington, *Acts*, 779.

⁶⁸ Jervell, *Theology of Acts*, 87–8, astutely observes that the charges against Paul are as a false teacher of Israel (Acts 21:21, 28; 25:8; 24:5–6; 23:29; cf. 25:19). In the Roman colony of Philippi (Acts 16:20–1) the issue is ironically to do with Paul's Jewishness.

⁶⁹ Ibid. 103–4; Witherington, *Acts*, 811; Brian M. Rapske, *The Book of Acts and Paul in Roman Custody*, 431; Franklin, *Christ the Lord*, 136–9; Bond, *Pontius Pilate*, 142–3.

unjustly, knowing Jesus to be innocent (Luke 23:3, 14, 22, 24).⁷⁰ The verb ἐπικρίνω (v. 24) is used elsewhere in judicial contexts,⁷¹ which suggests that Pilate is here giving a formal judgement in his own person, and thus his conduct is not excused by Luke. This adds to the description of Pilate's act of killing the Galileans (Luke 13:1), which Luke alone reports. We may grant that the focus of Luke 13:1ff. is not on Pilate's conduct, but on God's judgement on those who reject his messengers,⁷² but nevertheless Luke does report this unflattering action (which appears not untypical of the historical Pilate⁷³).

Similarly, when Paul travels, Roman officials fail to offer him protection or justice in cities under direct Roman law (as opposed to Hellenistic cities), whether in Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:50–1),⁷⁴ Lystra (14:19), Philippi (16:20–4, 35–9).⁷⁵ The primary concern of the officials is to get the problem (Paul) to go away, rather than with the truth of the matter or the requirements of justice. Similarly, a careful reading suggests that the Roman proconsul Gallio disregards the accusations against Paul, not because they are untrue, but because of his apparent disdain for Paul's accusers: his address ὦ Ἰουδαῖοι (18:14), in combination with the feeling of exasperation conveyed in the rest of his ruling (18:14–15) and the fact that Gallio 'drove' (ἀπήλασεν, 18:16) the accusers from before the judgement seat, all suggest bias by Gallio against Paul's accusers.⁷⁶ If the 'all' who assault Sosthenes (18:17) are (Gentile) bystanders, this suggests anti-Semitic feeling, more widely than Gallio's views, was present in Corinth.⁷⁷

⁷⁰ 'In the governor's court, injustice has triumphed over justice' (Bond, *Pontius Pilate*, 159).

⁷¹ E.g. Plato, *Laws* 6.768a; Aristophanes, *Wasps* 1434; Josephus *War* 6.416 = 6.9.1; *Antiquities* 14.192 = 14.10.2; cf. Bond, *Pontius Pilate*, 156.

⁷² Walaskay, *And So We Came*, 24.

⁷³ N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 173–4.

⁷⁴ See G.H.R. Horsley, *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity*, vol. 3:30, proposing that the 'leading men' (Acts 13:50) are Roman magistrates.

⁷⁵ Both Lystra and Philippi were Roman colonies, where one might expect some protection for Roman citizens, as happens eventually in Philippi.

⁷⁶ Cassidy, *Society and Politics in Acts*, 92.

⁷⁷ So Bruce, *Book of Acts*, 353–4; Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 536–7; Luke T. Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 329; Witherington,

When it comes to Paul's trials in Jerusalem and Caesarea, although Paul is protected by Roman officials from the attempts of the Jewish authorities to do away with him, the tribune Claudius Lysias transfers Paul to Caesarea despite believing him to be innocent of crime (Acts 23:27), Felix hopes for a bribe and keeps Paul in custody to please the Jews (24:26–7), and Festus is (understandably, as a new governor) more concerned with pleasing the Jews than giving Paul justice (25:9, 25). Ultimately, Paul appeals to Caesar because he does not expect to receive justice from Festus (25:11) – and with good reason! The result of the actions (or non-actions) of Felix and Festus is that Paul unnecessarily spends four years imprisoned. If, as some emphasise,⁷⁸ Roman officials recognise Paul's innocence, his continuing imprisonment suggests that Roman justice is corrupt – hardly a persuasive argument if Luke is seeking to persuade the church to trust the state, or if Luke hopes to convince Roman officials that they have nothing to fear from the church.

Luke offers a mixed (and, therefore, probably realistic) portrait of the Roman officials who encounter Jesus and Paul.⁷⁹ Such a portrait would offer to Christians in various situations in the ancient world models of handling relationships with the authorities.⁸⁰

Trouble caused by Paul

On several key occasions Paul is presented as the source of trouble in the cities he visits. In places this is the result of Jewish agitators persuading the populace to attack Paul, such as Antioch (Acts 13:50), Iconium (14:2, 4–5), Lystra (14:19), Thessalonica (17:5–8), Beroea (17:13), Corinth (18:12–13), and Jerusalem (21:27–30). But on other

⁷⁷ (continued) Acts 554–5; contra Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 630–1. Barrett, *Acts*, II:875–6, adopts a mediating position in which Jews and Greeks combined to attack Sosthenes.

⁷⁸ E.g. Wengst, *Pax Romana*, 98–9.

⁷⁹ Rapske, *Paul in Roman Custody*, 190–1.

⁸⁰ Ibid. 190, helpfully suggests that Paul's appeal to his Roman citizenship at times would demonstrate that Christian faith did not forbid use of this privilege in order to receive better treatment, while the wider example of Paul would also suggest that the use of such privileges should never be a way of avoiding suffering for the sake of the gospel.

occasions it is Gentiles opposed to Jewish practices (Philippi, 16:20–1) or Gentile traders who are being harmed economically by Paul's ministry (Ephesus, 19:23–8). Neither group of events would persuade Roman officials reading Acts that Christians were politically harmless or neutral and that all the trouble was the work of Jewish agitators – Paul is simply a cause of trouble wherever he goes, and the charges of civil disturbance brought against him (16:20; 21:38; 25:8) would reinforce this view. For Christian readers these stories would highlight the vulnerability of proclaiming the gospel in the face of hostile opponents, whether Jewish, Hellenistic or Roman.

Jesus as Lord, king and saviour

Luke stresses that Jesus is 'Lord', for he uses this title for Jesus very frequently,⁸¹ especially after the resurrection (but also – and programmatically – in the birth narratives, Luke 2:11), to the extent that we may see this as Luke's standard way of describing Jesus' present position. Luke never mentions Caesar's claim to be lord,⁸² but to use *κύριος* so prominently for Jesus could not but remind readers living in the empire of this claim and would suggest that Luke was making a counter-claim for Jesus over against Caesar (as indeed he was).

Similarly, Jesus is referred to as 'king' by Luke more frequently than the other evangelists,⁸³ not least in the birth narratives in

⁸¹ *Κύριος* is the most frequent title for Jesus in Acts, found some sixty times: see James D.G. Dunn, 'ΚΥΡΙΟΣ in Acts', 241–53; D.L. Jones, 'The Title ΚΥΡΙΟΣ in Acts', 85–101; Steve Walton, 'Where Does the Beginning of Acts End?', 460.

⁸² See Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, 353–5; Tajra, *Trial of St Paul*, 36, the latter observing that *κύριος* was used in poetry of the emperor as early as Augustan times.

⁸³ *Βασιλεύς* and *βασιλεύω* are used seven times of Jesus by Luke (cf. Matthew six times; Mark six times – in both cases mainly in the passion narrative): Luke 1:32–3; 19:38 (here Walaskay, *And So We Came*, 17, correctly argues that Conzelmann, *Theology of St Luke*, 139, is mistaken in arguing that Luke's introduction of *βασιλεύς* into Mark's story preserves a non-political view of kingship); 22:29–30; 23:2, 37–8; Acts 17:7. Brent Kinman, *Jesus' Entry into Jerusalem in the Context of Lukan Theology and the Politics of His Day*, esp. 91–103, demonstrates that Luke heightens the sense

reference to him 'reigning' (Luke 1:33) and the insertion of 'king' into the acclamation at the 'triumphal entry' (Luke 19:38). The charge against Jesus, which he does not deny, is that he claims to be a king (Luke 23:2; cf. 23:37–8). Behind the claim that the Christians proclaim 'another king' (Acts 17:7) surely stands Caesar's claim to be king.

Luke also uses the language of 'salvation' more frequently than the other evangelists,⁸⁴ to the extent that it can be claimed as the main theme of Luke-Acts,⁸⁵ and specifically calls Jesus *σωτήρ* (Luke 2:11; Acts 5:31; 13:23). Again, this echoes language used of Caesar.⁸⁶

The use of these three groups of words so prominently for Jesus suggests that Luke presents the early Christians as subversively using Caesar's titles for Jesus. When we add to this the strong statements in the face of the Jewish authorities that obeying God is more important than obeying mere human beings (Acts 4:19; 5:29), the reading of Jesus' 'render to Caesar' saying proposed above, and Luke's view that the kingdoms of the world are in the hands of the

⁸³ (*continued*) of Jesus' kingship in his account of the entry into Jerusalem. Walaskay, *And So We Came*, 22, notes that Luke 1:52; 4:18–19; 12:49, 51; Acts 5:29, 42; 21:38; 28:31 imply an anti-Caesar stance. In conversation, Dr Gerald Borchert proposed to me that John makes the *theme* of the kingship of Jesus prominent, particularly from John 12 onwards, even though John does not use the *language* of kingship as frequently as Luke; Dr Borchert will argue this in his forthcoming second volume on John (NAC).

⁸⁴ Twenty-five times in Luke; twenty-two times in Acts (Matthew fifteen times; Mark sixteen times, John eight times). Luke programmatically signals this theme in his birth narrative by using the word group six times (1:47, 69, 71, 77; 2:11, 30), as well as summarising the Christian message using *τοῦτο τὸ σωτήριον τοῦ θεοῦ* at the end of Acts (28:28), thus forming an *inclusio*.

⁸⁵ I. Howard Marshall, *Luke: Historian*, esp. 94–102.

⁸⁶ E.g. Julius Caesar is described as 'the god made manifest ... and common saviour of human life' (SIG³ §760; trans. from Deissmann, *Light*, 344); Augustus is one 'providence ... [sent] us and those after us a saviour who put an end to war and established all things' (IGRR III §719; trans. from Naphtali Lewis and Meyer Reinhold (eds.), *Roman Civilization*, 2:64, and 'saviour of the entire world' (OGIS II §458; my trans.); and Claudius is 'saviour of the world' (IGRR IV §12; Oakes's trans.) and 'god who is saviour and benefactor' (IGRR IV §584; Oakes's trans.). See further Peter Oakes, *Philippians*, ch. 5 (Dr Oakes kindly allowed me to see a draft that outlines these references).

devil (Luke 4:5–6⁸⁷), we have a picture of a movement that, to a Roman loyalist, could not but be seen as subversive and anti-emperor.

The ending of Acts

Acts ends with Paul living in his own rented accommodation able to preach the gospel unhindered (ἀκωλύτως,⁸⁸ 28:31), and without his hearing before Caesar having taken place. The question why Luke ends at this point has long been debated, but we shall consider only its contribution to our understanding of Luke's view of the Roman empire.

Cassidy argues that this ending provides completeness: Paul's faithful testimony before Caesar is complete 'in principle'.⁸⁹ As Acts closes, Paul is close to appearing before the emperor's tribunal in Rome and we know from assurances given by God that he will appear there (23:11; 27:23–4). Further, throughout Paul has spoken faithfully for Jesus, so we may be confident that he will do so before Caesar. Luke goes on to present a scene in Rome where Paul speaks in precisely that manner (28:17–20, 23, 25–8).

All this is true enough, but hardly answers our question about Luke's view of the empire. As far as the fate of Paul is concerned, the ending of Acts is unresolved.⁹⁰ If Luke had reported Paul's execution⁹¹ this would have told against any presentation of the empire as acting justly (although we have seen reasons to doubt this as a uniform picture throughout Luke-Acts). If Paul had been acquitted, then the story would have been complete from the perspective of Paul's political innocence being demonstrated – and thus the political harmlessness of Christianity would be clear.

⁸⁷ Jervell, *Theology of Acts*, 106; Evans, *Saint Luke*, 259; Green, *Luke*, 194.

⁸⁸ A legal term: MM, 20; BDAG, 40; Tajra, *Trial of St Paul*, 192–3; Barrett, *Acts*, II:1253.

⁸⁹ Cassidy, *Society and Politics in Acts*, 167–70.

⁹⁰ Franklin, *Christ the Lord*, 134–6.

⁹¹ Reported by Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica* 2.25, and hinted at in 1 Clem. 5.1–6.1. For discussion see F.F. Bruce, *Paul*, 441–55; E.P. Sanders, *Paul*, 16–17; Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *OP, Paul*, 368–81.

Some⁹² suggest that the hints of martyrdom during the book (Acts 20:25, 29, 37–8;⁹³ 21:11–14; 28:17–20) show that Luke and his readers already knew that Paul had been executed in Rome, and so that part of the story did not need telling. Indeed, had Luke told it, it would have distracted from the point he wished to make.⁹⁴ On this view, Luke's concern is not with whether Paul is acquitted or condemned, but simply with his being in Rome at all – but it would hardly encourage a positive view of the empire.

It is not easy to decide the date at which Luke wrote. If it was before the trial of Paul, then Paul's fate was unresolved at that point, which would explain why Luke did not report the result.⁹⁵ If Luke wrote after the death of Paul (whether or not Paul was initially released before being imprisoned again before his execution), he must have had good reason for not including this event. Perhaps the explanation, whatever Luke's date of writing, is in his demonstration that Paul was able to preach about Jesus freely for two years in the heart of the empire (28:30–1). If Paul could do this, then he – and, by extension, the Christian community – was regarded by the empire as innocent of crime.⁹⁶ Acts 28:31 closes with the portrait of the word of God unhindered, triumphant over human attempts to imprison its messengers, and that would speak powerfully to Luke's Christian readers in their attempts to be faithful to God in their day.⁹⁷

Evaluation of Theories

In considering the theories outlined at the beginning of this chapter, our chief concerns must be how far each manages to get

⁹² E.g. R.P.C. Hanson, *The Acts*, 31, 203–4; Haenchen, *Acts*, 731–2.

⁹³ For discussion of the Acts 20 verses, which leave Paul's fate open, rather than certainly speaking of his death, see Walton, *Leadership and Lifestyle*, 78–80.

⁹⁴ Although Acts 7:54–60; 12:1–2 show that Luke does not shy away from reporting the death of faithful believers.

⁹⁵ Although 28:30 implies that *something* happened to bring the two-year period to an end (Witherington, *Acts*, 807).

⁹⁶ Bruce, *Book of Acts*, 511; Haenchen, *Acts*, 726; Rapske, *Paul in Roman Custody*, 191.

⁹⁷ Cf. Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 797, and numerous others.

the variety of data from Luke-Acts into view, and how much explanatory power the theory has for Luke's intentions in writing.

Luke's readership has been widely debated, and is beyond the scope of this chapter. I simply re-emphasise that we should be cautious in mirror-reading Luke-Acts for its audience, particularly in seeking to find a section of Luke's readership for every individual emphasis of the two volumes (see above, pp. 8–9). Luke may have had reasons other than his audience's needs for recording an event – such as that it happened and was important for the church as part of its historical foundation.

To turn, then, to the different proposals, we must declare the claim that Luke is not interested in politics as barren. There is too much politically sensitive material for this view to be tenable when Luke-Acts is read in its first-century settings, both Jewish and Graeco-Roman. Nevertheless, Jervell identifies a crucial point, which is that Luke's *central* concern is not political; rather, Luke focuses on what God is doing, and other topics arise in relation to God's actions.⁹⁸ We shall return to this below.

We must regard the 'political apology' view as inadequate, for it omits too much important data, as I have repeatedly indicated. The greatest difficulty of this view is that, if one of Luke's primary purposes was to persuade Roman officials of the harmlessness of Christianity, he has been far too subtle to succeed and has included far too much extraneous material. More than that, his presentation of Roman officials is far from flattering, particularly his portrayal of Pilate's involvement in the death of Jesus. The fact that Paul is regularly a cause of civil unrest in cities he visits would not commend Christianity to Roman officials charged with maintaining the *pax Romana* – indeed, Acts ends without any verdict on Paul's case. Nor would the presence of a Zealot among Jesus' disciples add to these officials' sense of security. Moreover, the

⁹⁸ It is noticeable that θεός is the commonest verbal subject in Acts (sixty-three times in the singular); note esp. Acts 11:17–18; 14:27; 15:4, 7–8, 12, 14; 16:10; 21:19. The Lukan themes of fulfilment and God's plan are both suggestive for this point also; see David Peterson, 'The Motif of Fulfilment and the Purpose of Luke-Acts', 83–104; John T. Squires, *The Plan of God in Luke-Acts*; John T. Squires, 'The Plan of God in the Acts of the Apostles', 19–39.

claims that Jesus was 'another king' (Acts 17:7), 'lord' and 'saviour' made repeatedly in Luke-Acts would clash with Caesar's claims to these titles.

A subsidiary part of this view is often that Luke is presenting Christianity as a subspecies of Judaism; in view of the distance Luke at times places between Jews who believe the gospel and those who oppose it, we may nuance this point to say that it is likely that Luke is presenting Christianity as the true Judaism. In common with Paul, Matthew and John (at least), Luke sees no future for a Judaism that rejects its Messiah, Jesus.

The 'ecclesial apology' view, which sees Luke-Acts as commending collaboration with the empire as the way forward, fails to account for material critical of the empire. Luke-Acts contains much that would damage the estimation of the empire in Christian eyes, including Pilate's share in the death of Jesus and the continuing detention of Paul for four years, even though he was successively adjudged to be innocent by the Roman officials Claudius Lysias, Felix and Festus. Further, we lack evidence that there were Christians acting provocatively towards the empire or awaiting its apocalyptic collapse, apart from the doubtful inferences drawn from Luke-Acts by Maddox and Walaskay.⁹⁹

Esler's 'legitimation' view is more nuanced and, at significant points close to the truth. Luke is writing to offer assurance to his readers in their faith (Luke 1:3–4¹⁰⁰). Whether that readership includes those outside, or on the fringe of the church is debatable, but that it includes those inside the church is surely clear. However, we may doubt the likelihood of Esler's scenario, that Luke's congregation included a significant group of Romans for whom Luke is seeking to legitimate Christian faith, in particular to demonstrate to them the compatibility of Christian faith with allegiance to the empire. First (See above, pp. 8–9), Esler's mirror-reading of Luke-Acts is at best speculative. Second, the presence of

⁹⁹ Esler, *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts*, 209. Esler observes this blind spot in Walaskay and Maddox, but apparently does not realise that he argues in the same manner in claiming that the presence of Roman officials presented positively in Luke-Acts implies that Luke's church contained such people.

¹⁰⁰ See Loveday Alexander, *The Preface to Luke's Gospel*, esp. 136–42.

significant materials that stress the *incompatibility* of Christian faith with the 'metanarrative' claims of Caesar to supremacy suggests that Luke's view is not as straightforward as this: Luke's Jesus is Lord, king and saviour – all imperial titles – and his followers 'must obey'¹⁰¹ God rather than any human authority' (Acts 5:29; cf. 4:19–20).

Cassidy's 'allegiance-conduct-witness' proposal represents a further level of nuancing and manages to fit more of the data in. His proposal that Luke writes to affirm and support his readers in their Christian faith by sharing his own faith agrees substantially with Esler's view and is likely to be correct, providing we understand it in the sense of assuring his readers of the *truth* of that which he writes (Luke 1:3–4), rather than simply sharing his own story (as we might say).

Given that Luke has such a concern for mission and witness – for God's action to spread the gospel is one of the major themes of Acts beginning, programmatically, in 1:8¹⁰² – it is likely that he writes in part to encourage the church of his day to preserve or recover a readiness to witness faithfully and to take risks in mission at God's prompting. It is also likely that Luke realises that some of this testimony will be given under adversity, not least because he records Jesus as predicting this and the earliest Christians as fulfilling it (e.g. Luke 12:4–12; Acts 20:19, 23–5, 28–31¹⁰³). Cassidy is also correct in observing the high proportion of Luke's narrative given over to Paul's testimony before Roman officials.

Nevertheless, Cassidy finds it hard to handle the preponderance of passages where Roman officials are presented kindly, even warmly, as fair, efficient and helpful to Paul. As we have seen, Luke chooses to present these people positively in significant cases, which suggests that he is not only seeking to help Christians facing pressure from the authorities, but also those dealing with friendlier versions of the 'powers that be'. The ending of Acts, which presents Paul preaching

¹⁰¹ Πειθαρχεῖν, a word that can connote political obedience; e.g. Aristotle, *Politics* 1262b3; Herodotus, *Histories* 5.91.1 (LSJ, 1353).

¹⁰² Haenchen, *Acts*, 144, rightly observes, 'As Acts presents it, the Christian Church is a *missionary* Church' (*italics* his). Note the summaries at Acts 2:47; 5:42; 6:7; 9:31, 42; 12:24; 16:5; 18:11; 19:10, 20; 28:30–1, each identifying the growth of the church (or the word) as the focus of what God is doing.

¹⁰³ See discussion in Walton, *Leadership and Lifestyle*, 87–9, 122–4.

'unhindered' (20:31) in Rome, suggests a more positive view of the empire's treatment of Christians than Cassidy leads us to expect. While Luke is by no means uncritically pro-Roman, he certainly does not portray the empire in similar vein to Revelation, as the beast rising from the sea to oppose the people of God (Rev. 13). Rather, he sees the empire as a system through which God can and does work.¹⁰⁴

This leads to a key criticism of Cassidy, which is that he seems to subsume all of Luke-Acts under the heading of political and social issues.¹⁰⁵ Against this, we need to assert that Luke's primary concern is with what *God* is doing by the Spirit and through the Christian community.¹⁰⁶ Luke-Acts is focused on the progress of the word of God around the Mediterranean basin and, in this context, Luke is concerned with who God is (and thus Christology and pneumatology are central to his theology) and how to respond to God as he has now revealed himself in the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus, the Messiah. How, then, might we summarise Luke's view of the empire in this context?

Proposal

We may summarise the view of Luke's presentation of the Roman empire by a series of affirmations.

First, Luke writes purposively when he writes about the Roman empire, and not merely descriptively. He tells his stories of Christians, and particularly Paul, relating to the empire to help his readers see what shape Christian discipleship in relation to the empire might take in their day. The prologue to the Gospel suggests this strongly (Luke 1:3–4).

Second, Luke offers a variety of perspectives on Christian relations with the empire. When the empire is friendly and acting justly, Christians can expect the state to allow them freedom to bear

¹⁰⁴ Cf. John M.G. Barclay, review of Richard J. Cassidy, *Society and Politics in the Acts of the Apostles*, 577.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Robert F. O'Toole, SJ, review of Richard J. Cassidy, *Society and Politics in the Acts of the Apostles*, 427.

¹⁰⁶ See n. 98. I shall argue this *in extenso* in a commentary on Acts now in progress.

witness to Jesus and to speak 'unhindered'. For this situation, models include the eighteen-month period in Corinth either side of the hearing before Gallio (18:1–18a), the two years or more in Ephesus of (relatively) peaceful ministry (19:1–22) and the visit to Malta (28:1–10) – to say nothing of the closing scene in Rome (28:30–1). Luke's presentation of the innocence of Paul and Jesus of the charges against them would encourage Christians to live at peace with the authorities as far as it lay with them to do so. When the empire behaves thus towards Christians, Robbins's view that the relationship of church and Caesar is symbiotic has much to commend it, as does his claim that in such situations Christians work by negotiation with the Roman authorities.

But Luke does not have a romantic, idealised view of the empire. He is well aware that Christians can be harassed, persecuted and arrested for their witness to Jesus, both officially and unofficially. In such situations the examples of Jesus, Peter and John, Stephen, James the brother of Jesus, and Paul offer pictures of faithfully maintaining the 'good confession' (cf. 1 Tim. 6:12–14), in some cases leading to deliverance, and in others to punishment or even death.¹⁰⁷ The repeated emphasis on the innocence of the Christians and of Jesus shows that Luke's readers should not fight with the enemy's weapons, whether violence or falsehood, but rather that they should offer testimony to Jesus in similar manner to Peter and John, Stephen or Paul, relying on Jesus' promise that the Spirit will show them how to speak (Luke 12:11–12). With Paul, they should maintain their innocence (Acts 25:8) and with Peter and John they should 'obey God rather than human beings' (Acts 4:19; 5:29; my trans.).

Third, Luke underlines the supremacy of Jesus over Caesar. Luke's prominent use of 'lord', 'king' (esp. Acts 17:7) and 'saviour' of Jesus is highly suggestive in this regard, for it highlights that Jesus, not Caesar, truly reigns. Thus – and supremely – the unjust execution of Jesus, in which both Jewish and Roman authorities were complicit, was overcome and reversed by God in the resurrection.¹⁰⁸ Luke also draws attention to God's

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Bond, *Pontius Pilate*, 147.

¹⁰⁸ Note the use of passive voice forms of ἐγείρω with God as subject and Jesus as direct object in evangelistic speeches; e.g. Acts 3:15; 4:10; 5:30; 13:30.

reassurances to Paul that he will stand before the emperor (Acts 23:11; 27:23–4) – both occasions coming when Paul's circumstances would lead Luke's readers to think the opposite might be the case. The evident climax of the book at Paul's arrival in Rome underlines how God has kept his word. Throughout Luke-Acts God works his purposes out, whether or not he receives human co-operation, and those purposes are not ultimately frustrated; hence (for example) he rescues Paul and Silas from prison in Philippi (Acts 16:25ff.) and enables Stephen to be faithful to death (Acts 7). The greatness of God's power is an encouragement to Luke's readers to keep trusting God, for he is at work and his purposes will come to fruition in spite of human opposition.

In sum, Luke offers his readers a strategy of critical distance from the empire. He thus falls at *both* ends of the spectrum between Romans 13 and Revelation 13 that I sketched. Where co-operation and mutual respect are possible, Christians should do nothing to harm those; where the empire or its representatives turn against the church, the Christian stance is to be twofold: to call the state back to its former ways and to bear faithful witness to Jesus. The church is to live in the knowledge that, just as its Lord suffered injustice from the empire and was vindicated, so the church of the Lord will be able to withstand by the same 'good confession'.

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