

## **Luke-Acts: A Mixed Population Seeks a Home in the Roman Empire**

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The thesis underlying this paper is that Luke-Acts is a narrative map grounded in an ideology that supported Christians who were building alliances with local leaders throughout the eastern Roman empire. In language that merges social and historical geography, a discipline Robert David Sack calls “human geography,” Luke and Acts present a strategy of territoriality.<sup>1</sup> If we apply insights from the work of Sack and others to Luke-Acts, we see that this two-volume narrative presupposes that the eastern Roman empire is an appropriate work place for the emissaries of God who are carrying out the project inaugurated by Jesus of Nazareth. The image in the two-volume narrative of the officials who hold the highest positions in the Roman empire ranges from matter-of-fact to positive. At one end of the spectrum, the narrator describes decrees and edicts of emperors without negative or positive comment, simply accepting them as the framework in which certain events occur. At the other end, Paul, a Pharisee with Roman citizenship who converts to Christianity, successfully claims the right to appear before the emperor as a means to avoid legal judgments in the East. This means that Christianity functions in the domain of the Roman empire, and this empire is good because it works symbiotically with Christianity. Roman law, correctly applied, grants Christians the right to pursue the project started by Jesus, and the goals of Christianity, rightly understood, work congruently with the goals of the Roman empire.

From the point of view of the proposal in this paper, previous

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<sup>1</sup> The language of “territoriality” comes from Robert David Sack, *Human Territoriality: Its theory and history*, Cambridge Studies in Historical Geography 7 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). I am grateful to my colleague Thomas S. Burns for guiding me to this and other books as I was pursuing the thesis in this paper.

approaches have not dealt satisfactorily with the aggressive strategy of the action and speech in Luke and Acts. Beginning with the work of C. A. Heumann in 1721, interpreters regularly have viewed Luke-Acts as a defense of Christianity, an *apologia pro ecclesia*, for Roman officials who consider it a threat to the empire.<sup>1</sup> In 1983, Paul Walasky proposed that this approach should be “turned upside down”: Luke-Acts is a narrative designed to persuade members of the church that “the positive benefits of the empire far outweigh the occasional intrusiveness of an errant emperor.” In other words, the author presents “an *apologia pro imperio* to his church.”<sup>2</sup> Philip Esler, weighing the two alternatives, argues that both sides are better served by viewing the two-volume work as a text of legitimation for Christianity.<sup>3</sup>

These approaches have not addressed the overt strategy of territoriality contained in the two volumes. The approach to Luke-Acts as an *apologia pro ecclesia* mistakes the two-volume work as a defensive narrative in an environment filled with legal and political obstacles rather than as an aggressive narrative in an environment perceived to be teeming with opportunities. Viewing Luke-Acts as an *apologia pro imperio* suggests that the subject matter concerns the Roman empire rather than Christianity. Viewing Luke-Acts as a narrative of legitimation for Christianity is better, but this approach still does not give adequate attention to the aggressive strategies in the portrayal of Roman, Jewish and Christian leaders in the narrative. Viewing the two volumes as a narrative map of territoriality for the development of Christian alliances throughout the eastern Roman empire provides a better hermeneutical tool than viewing it as an *apologia pro ecclesia*, an *apologia pro imperio*, or a narrative of legitimation.

## 1. The Implied Author’s Mimetic Desire toward Rome

The thesis of this paper builds on the beginning point of René Girard’s theory about human culture--namely that mimetic desire is at work

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<sup>1</sup> Paul W. Walaskay, *‘And so we came to Rome’: The Political Perspective of St Luke* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983): ix-14.

<sup>2</sup> Walaskay, *‘And so we came to Rome’*, p. 64. The statement about turning the interpretation “upside down” is a pun on Acts 17:6.

<sup>3</sup> Philip Francis Esler, *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts: The Social and Political Motivations of Lucan Theology*. SNTS Monograph 57 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987): 16-21, 93-130.

wherever humans engage in joint activities with one another, form groups with boundaries, and establish rituals and traditions involving speech and action. Mimetic desire functions where there is a subject, an object, and a rival. The proposal is that humans desire certain objects and not others in a particular social context, because one or more other persons in the setting desire those same objects. In other words, a subject knows what to desire by seeing what a rival desires. This means that:

*the subject desires the object because the rival desires it.* In desiring an object the rival alerts the subject to the desirability of the object. The rival, then, serves as a model for the subject, not only in regard to such secondary matters as style and opinions but also, and more essentially, in regard to desires.<sup>1</sup>

One of the primary focuses of attention in the narrative is on power.<sup>2</sup> The power in the environment, according to the narrative, resides in the military and legal structure of the Roman empire. Thus, the narrative treats the upper levels of this power structure with special deference. The narrator evokes Theophilus, a Roman official whom he addresses as “most excellent,”<sup>3</sup> as a model in the opening verses of Luke and Acts. Very soon, in addition, the narrator refers to Roman emperors who reign over events in Syro-Palestine (Luke 2:1; 3:1). By the end of the narrative, Paul, as a result of an appeal to Caesar

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<sup>1</sup> René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977; French original, 1972): 145. The proposal in this paper is that human territoriality rather than sacrifice is the major framework in which mimetic desire functions in Luke and Acts. This is based on my view that it is not necessary for Girard’s insight about mimetic desire to focus on sacrifice, as Girard himself appears to think, in order for it to be instructive for analysis of texts.

<sup>2</sup> Another is on wealth: see Halvor Moxnes, *The Economy of the Kingdom: Social Conflict and Economic Relations in Luke’s Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988). The implications of the focus on power for the possession and use of wealth must be left for another paper; but see Richard L. Rohrbaugh, “The Pre-Industrial City in Luke-Acts: Urban Social Relations” and Halvor Moxnes, “Patron-Client Relations and the New Community in Luke-Acts” in Jerome H. Neyrey (ed.), *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991): 125-49, 241-68.

<sup>3</sup> *κράτιστε*: Luke 1:3. The apostle Paul and Claudius Lysias use the same title of honor to address governors under Roman appointment in Acts 23:26; 24:3; 26:25.

(Acts 28:31), is in Rome preaching and teaching openly and unhindered. This means that the implied author, whose mimetic desire is focused on Rome's successful establishment of power from Rome to Jerusalem, yokes Christianity to Rome's success by inverting the process, that is, by showing the expansion of Christianity from Jerusalem to Rome.

The aggressiveness of the two-volume narrative appears in criticisms the narrator feels free to make of members of local families or groups, even if they have been invested with power by Rome. These criticisms may concern a misuse of power based on wealth. In the Gospel of Luke, Pharisees are a major object of attack for their love of money.<sup>1</sup> In Acts, however, the narrator casts a negative light only on Pharisees who want to maintain exclusive religious practices after becoming members of the believing Christian community.<sup>2</sup> Pharisees who remain leaders of the Jews, in contrast, speak out courageously in attempts to be fair with Christian leaders.<sup>3</sup> People invested with power by Rome come under attack as the narrator criticizes Herod Agrippa I as an evildoer and implicates Felix as a fraudulent governor.<sup>4</sup> Thus, within the framework in which the implied author inverts the Roman success story by displaying Christianity walking and sailing its way from Jerusalem to Rome, the desire of the implied author for power emerges in the aggressiveness the narrative displays with local leaders who have power, whether or not that power has been invested by the Roman military and legal system.

## **2. The Power Structure of the Roman Empire and of Christianity**

For Luke-Acts the highest power in the Roman empire is the emperor, and the place of his power is Rome. No emperor appears in a scene in Luke or Acts; at every stage the emperor remains out of sight, wielding his power and protection at a distance. The first reference to an emperor is in Luke 2:1, where the narrator places the birth

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<sup>1</sup> Moxnes, *The Economy of the Kingdom*: 139-53.

<sup>2</sup> Acts 15:5. See David B. Gowler, *Host, Guest, Enemy and Friend: Portraits of Pharisees in Luke and Acts* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1991): 5-6, 281-82, 300-302, 309, 313.

<sup>3</sup> Acts 5:34-39; 23:9.

<sup>4</sup> Herod Agrippa I: Acts 12:22-23. Felix: Acts 24:26-27.

of Jesus in the environment of Roman history. From the narrator's point of view, the will of the emperor Caesar Augustus to have a census taken in Syro-Palestine caused Jesus, whose hometown was Nazareth in Galilee, to be born in Bethlehem, the city of king David.<sup>1</sup> According to Acts 5:37, Judas the Galilean resisted the census and attracted a following, but, as Gamaliel puts it, "he perished and all who followed him were scattered." In other words, "unnamed powers" destroyed him, and his followers disappeared. The reader is not told exactly who caused Judas' destruction, but a general scenario can be inferred from the reference to Quirinius, the governor of Syria. The emperor's power extends from Rome to Syria, Galilee, and Judea in such a manner that the emperor never need be present to assure that his will be obeyed.

One chapter later (Luke 3:1-2), the narrator exhibits the finely-tuned administrative presence of Roman power throughout the eastern region of the Mediterranean where Christianity began. During the fifteenth year (28-29 C.E.) of the reign of the emperor Tiberius Caesar,<sup>2</sup> Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod Antipas was tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip was tetrarch of Ituraea and Trachonitis, Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene, and Annas and his son-in-law Caiaphas held the high-priesthood in Jerusalem.<sup>3</sup> The power of the distant emperor extends throughout the region in a detailed jurisdictional manner, with men with Roman names in charge of Judea and Abilene, with members of the Herodian family who have had a close alliance with Rome since 40 B.C.E. in charge of Galilee, Ituraea

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<sup>1</sup> A special feature of the reference to Augustus Caesar in Luke 2:1 is the use of a transliteration of the Latin term *augustus*, rather than a translation of the term into Greek as *sebastos*: Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX* (New York: Doubleday, 1981): 399. In contrast, the translated form *sebastos* stands on the lips of the prefect Porcius Festus when he addresses King Herod Agrippa II in Acts 25:21, 25, and after this the narrator uses the term in reference to the Augustan Cohort, to which the centurion Julius belongs (Acts 27:1). Luke 2:1 is the narrator's initial reference to an emperor as he addresses his narratee Theophilus. In other words, at the beginning of the account the narrator adopts a social location in the presence of a Roman official Theophilus, and as the narrator proceeds he places the events in the framework of the jurisdictional power of the Roman emperor over Syro-Palestine.

<sup>2</sup> Tiberius reigned 14 C.E.-37 C.E.

<sup>3</sup> For details about the rulers and the regions, see Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX*: 455-58.

and Trachonitis; and with Annas, who was appointed highpriest by the Roman governor P. Sulpicius Quirinius in 6 C.E., and his son-in-law Caiaphas in control of the high-priesthood in Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup> Thus, as the emperor Augustus Caesar reigned at a distance over the birth of Jesus, so Tiberius Caesar reigned at a distance over the activity of John.

In Acts Claudius (41-54 C.E.) is referred to as the emperor during the great famine over the inhabited world (Acts 11:28) and as the emperor whose edict expelled Priscilla and Aquila from Rome (Acts 18:2). Neither positive nor negative statements by the narrator accompany the presentation of this information. Gaius Caligula (37-41 C.E.) is never mentioned by name, nor is Nero (54-68 C.E.), since as the narrative progresses toward its conclusion the emperor is referred to simply as Caesar or Sebastos.<sup>2</sup> There is no portrayal of a trial of Paul before the emperor; in fact only Paul and his work receive attention once the centurion Julius successfully escorts him to Rome. The power which brought Paul to Rome is the God of Israel. Thus a major issue is the relation of the power of the emperor to the power of the God of Israel.

From the perspective of Luke and Acts, the power structure of Christianity works symbiotically with the power structure of Rome. The manner in which these power structures work together is exhibited by two stories about centurions that are strategically located at Luke 7:1-10 and Acts 10. In order to understand these stories, we need to know that a centurion, who is in charge of 100 soldiers in the Roman army, receives a mustering-out pay after serving his duty that is sufficient for him to be a member of the order of decurions.<sup>3</sup> The status of decurion entitled a person to be a member of the council in a city in the eastern Roman empire. In Rome itself, office-bearers were drawn almost entirely from two orders, the senatorial and the equestrian. To qualify for senatorial rank, it was necessary to hold "property worth 250,000 times the day's wage of a labourer," with somewhat less than half that amount for equestrian rank.<sup>4</sup> Decurions

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<sup>1</sup> Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX*, p. 458.

<sup>2</sup> *Καίσαρ*: Acts 17:7; 25:8, 10, 11, 12, 21; 26:32; 27:24; 28:19. *Σεβαστός*: Acts 25:21, 25; 27:1.

<sup>3</sup> Esler, *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts*: 184.

<sup>4</sup> Ramsey MacMullen, *Roman Social Relations, 50 BC to AD 284* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974): 89.

were expected to possess about one-tenth of the amount required for a senator.<sup>1</sup> In the eastern region of the empire, decurions rather than senators or equestrians were the council members, and magistrates were almost always elected from the decurions.<sup>2</sup> Thus the decurions were the local aristocracy in the eastern empire, and a centurion was either already a decurion or well on his way to becoming one.

In Luke 7:1-10 a centurion sends people to Jesus to ask him to come and heal his slave. From the information above, we know that the request comes from a person who has recognizable status in the power structure of the eastern Roman empire. From Luke's perspective, people in Capernaum know that Jesus can heal because of his previous activity there (Luke 4:23, 31-41). When the centurion sends people to Jesus, he is replicating the process by which the emperor transmits his will throughout the region. Just as the emperor remains out of sight at a distance, so the centurion remains out of sight. First the centurion sends "elders of the Jews" to Jesus requesting that he come and heal his slave. Neither the Jews nor Jesus hesitate: the Jews come to Jesus and Jesus goes with them. In other words, both the Jews and Jesus readily submit to the will of the Roman centurion. In the process, the Jews indicate to Jesus that the centurion is worthy to receive a benefit, since he loves the Jewish nation and he built the Jews their synagogue in Capernaum. After sending elders of the Jews to Jesus, the centurion sends "friends." They address Jesus as "κύριε," and they tell Jesus that the centurion does not consider himself worthy to have Jesus come under his roof and he would not be so presumptuous as to come to Jesus directly. Then the message of the centurion contains a command: "Say the word, and let my servant be healed," and the command is succeeded by a rationale:

"For (a) I am a man set under authority,

(b) with soldiers under me:

(1) I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes;

(2) and to another, 'Come,' and he comes;

(3) and to my slave, 'Do this,' and he does it."

When Jesus hears this, he marvels and says that not even in Israel has

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<sup>1</sup> MacMullen, *Roman Social Relations*, p. 90; J. Gag , *Les classes sociales dans l'empire romain* (Paris: Payot, 1964): 163.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Garnsey, *Social Status and Legal Privilege in the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970): 251-56.

he found such faith. When the people who had been sent return to the house, they find the slave well.

With this story, the narrator presents an interchange that his narratee Theophilus can understand at once. The manner in which power is channeled from the emperor to the people in Syro-Palestine provides the framework in which the centurion communicates with Jesus. But, the narratee is led to understand, God's power can be transmitted in a similar manner. The transmission of commands and power from Jesus through a centurion's friends and Jewish elders replicates the centurion's transmission of power to get certain results. Here then, in the territory over which the Roman emperor reigns, a Roman official has needs which the founder of the Christian movement meets. In social terms, the centurion, who is a broker between the emperor and the Jewish people, successfully negotiates with Jesus, who is a broker between God and people who live in the inhabited world over which the emperor reigns (Luke 2:1).<sup>1</sup> At this point in the story, then, a broker within the jurisdictional power structure of the Roman empire becomes the recipient of a broker within the power structure of the God of Israel. Given the dynamics of reciprocity in first century Mediterranean society, the centurion will now stand in obligation to Jesus much as the Jews stood in obligation to the centurion at the beginning of the episode.<sup>2</sup> In this story, then, God's power begins to flow through Jesus from Syro-Palestine to Rome. From a narrative point of view, God's power reaches Rome only through a sequence of events events that present situations virtually as complex as those which brought the power of the emperor from Rome to Syro-Palestine.

With the healing of the slave of the Roman Centurion in Luke 7 the centurion initiates the action and his action provides the social and political framework for the power of God to flow into the domain of Roman leaders and through Roman leaders to Rome itself. According to the narrator's view, the centurion acts in a manner that reveals his acceptance of the power structures with which Jesus is involved. From the centurion's point of view, and therefore from the narrator's point of view, the structures of power in the Roman empire work

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<sup>1</sup> Bruce J. Malina, "Patron and Client: The Analogy Behind the Synoptic Theology," *Foundations & Facets Forum* 4,1 (1988): 2-32.

<sup>2</sup> Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981): 80-82.

symbiotically with the structures of power in Christianity.

While the story of the healing of the centurion's slave sets the stage for a symbiotic relation between the activity of Jesus and the Roman power structure, the story about Cornelius in Acts 10 exhibits more fully the nature of the symbiotic relation of power structures in the Roman empire and Christianity. In Acts 10:3-4 the God of Israel sends an angel to Cornelius, a devout centurion of the Italian Cohort, telling him that his prayers and alms have ascended as a memorial to God and that he should send men to Peter to bring him to Cornelius. In this instance, then, the God of Israel takes the initiative by sending commands to a centurion, who in turn sends soldiers with the commands to Peter. The next day, the heavens open before Peter, a great sheet descends, and a voice from heaven dialogues with Peter about killing and eating all kinds of animals, birds, and reptiles (10:9-16). During the time of Peter's perplexity over the meaning of the vision, the emissaries of Cornelius come to get him. The language of the men is reminiscent of the language of the elders of the Jews in Luke 7:4-5 as they refer to Cornelius as "an upright and God-fearing man, well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation" (Acts 10:22). When Peter goes to Cornelius' house, Cornelius falls down at Peter's feet and worships him, but Peter lifts him up, telling him that he too is a man (Acts 10:25-26). In other words, Peter's location in the Christian power structure is similar to the centurion's location in the Roman power structure. For this reason, they can communicate face-to-face without obeisance or other extraordinary formalities.<sup>1</sup> After they exchange information, Peter preaches to Cornelius and his household, the holy spirit falls on all of them, and Peter commands that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ (10:28-48). In this instance, then, God initiates the action, and he initiates it both with the centurion and with Peter. According to the narrator's view, both the centurion and Peter respond in a manner that reveals their acceptance of the power structures with which they are involved. In the final analysis, then, God is the one who oversees the symbiotic relationship of the structures of power in the Roman empire and in Christianity.

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<sup>1</sup> See Vernon K. Robbins, "The Social Location of the Implied Author of Luke-Acts," in Neyrey (ed.), *The Social World of Luke-Acts*, pp. 305-32, for explication of Paul's relation to Jewish and Roman leaders in Acts.

### 3. The Eastern Roman Empire as the Work Place of Christianity

People who have power exercise that power in particular places. Thus we need to turn to a discussion of the places, that is, the geographical spaces, where power “takes place” in Luke and Acts.<sup>1</sup> Robert Sack’s study, referred to earlier, investigates human territoriality in various kinds of spaces, and this focus will help us in our analysis. For Sack, territoriality in humans is:

a spatial strategy to affect, influence, or control resources and people, by controlling area; and, as a strategy, territoriality can be turned on and off....Territoriality in humans is socially and geographically rooted. Its use depends on who is influencing and controlling whom and on the geographical contexts of place, space, and time.<sup>2</sup>

Humans can use territoriality for various reasons, and with humans it presumes a form of control over an area or space that humans conceptualize and communicate. Therefore, territoriality can be constituted by all kinds of variations and flexibility. The work place is an excellent example. During work hours, workers are limited to certain kinds of spaces. A modern secretary is supposed to be at a work station at a particular time of day and remain in its vicinity until the day ends. It may be appropriate to be in certain hallways and rooms, especially at certain times during that day, but other hallways and rooms will be off limits. At a certain time of day, for example lunch time, this secretary is free to go at will to a lunch room, a physical exercise center, a library, or various other places, so long as it is possible to be back at the work station at the appropriate time.

At the end of the work day, the work space may invert into a space that is off limits to the worker. If the secretary returns and spends time in that space “without a well-communicated reason,” the time in that space may be considered to be in violation of territorial presuppositions surrounding that work place. Custodians, however, are free to enter the building, and they have almost unlimited access to every space in the building without formalities like knocking, receiving an invitation or command, or buzzing a telephone buzzer. Thus, territoriality is created by humans in highly complex ways for reasons that they conceptualize and communicate, and the work place exhibits the flexibility and complexity of it especially well.<sup>3</sup>

As indicated above, the thesis of this paper is that Luke-Acts presents the eastern Roman empire as a fully appropriate work place for Christianity. The presentation is territorial, because other people also are at work in the area. With this approach, we also become aware of another aspect of Luke-Acts. The narrative approaches Christianity

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<sup>1</sup> For the use of this language with religious narrative, see Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

<sup>2</sup> Sack, *Human Territoriality*: 1-2.

<sup>3</sup> Sack, *Human Territoriality*: 169-215.

from the perspective of work: God's work and people's work. This is undoubtedly one of the reasons why some interpreters find it difficult to compare Acts with erotic novels that appear to be designed for entertainment. Since there are many aspects in common among Acts and erotic novels,<sup>1</sup> perhaps the difference in tone is primarily the result of the perception of Christian activity as a kind of work.

In order to approach this appropriately, we need some insight into the perception of work in Mediterranean antiquity. Without going into detail, two aspects of work in antiquity are important for this paper. First, people in modern life often identify work with some specialized activity they perform during specific hours of certain days in a week, month, and year. Also, a person in the modern world often distinguishes sharply between "religious" work and "secular" work. Anyone who lives or has lived in a traditional rural setting, or perhaps an ethnic environment, may know how kinds of work flow into one another. In the not-too-distant past, it was common for farmers in the USA to do everything from keeping their own accounts to repairing their cars, tractors, and machinery, as well as butchering livestock and vaccinating their own pigs and cattle. Thus, work was embedded in a person's life in such a manner that a wide range of work activities could flow into one another during any part of any day or night. In fact, often what we call recreation was very close to work as a person used a horse or a tractor to pull a sled or rode a horse to drive the cattle from the pasture to the barn for milking. Also, religious work was often embedded in one's regular work. Thus, helping a neighbor with work when he was sick could be a religious and secular activity at the same time. Thus, work in antiquity, as well as in traditional settings even now, may be a "way of life" that covers a wide range of activities and intermingles what we would call religious and secular work.

It was the case, however, that people distinguished in antiquity between simply "working with one's hands" (or with "one's body," as the Greeks put it) and working as an independent artisan (*βάνανσοος* or *τεχνίτης*), since the artisan is further removed from his employer and subject only to a limited servitude. In fact, by the exercise of his skill and wise use of slaves or laborers, an independent artisan may

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Pervo, *Profit with Delight: The Literary Genre of the Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987); compare the article by Douglas Edwards in this volume.

even gain enough property to enter the wealthy class.<sup>1</sup> The proposal in this paper is that Luke and Acts present Christian activity as a kind of work embedded in a way of life in the eastern Roman empire. Jesus inaugurates the program which God gives to him, and various kinds of people carry out the work at various levels. By the time the reader gets to the last half of Acts, Christian activity occurs at the level of the independent artisan or above.

The proposal that Luke-Acts views Christian activity as a kind of work in the eastern Roman empire is supported, first of all, by Loveday Alexander's exceptional study of the preface to Luke. Her investigation shows that the author has penned the preface to Luke with technical or professional prose characteristic of manuals for artisans.<sup>2</sup> As we pursue this insight throughout Luke and Acts, we discover that the leaders within early Christianity function at the level of independent artisans or above, and, as a result, there is close association with people of artisan status throughout the eastern Mediterranean. The territorial nature of the work becomes clear as local artisans complain about the effect of the work of Christians in their locale.

Second, one of the effects of Luke-Acts is to change the center of the holy work of a devout person from work in the temple to a kind of cottage industry that operates in the domain of synagogues and households. God begins this transformation by sending an angel to Zechariah, a priest, while he is at work in the temple (Luke 1:5-23). The end result of this visit is the birth of John the Baptist, who functions outside the Temple among all kinds of people. When asked for specific advice, John functions like an overseer of distribution of clothing and food, of fair collection of taxes, and of restrained action by soldiers (Luke 3:10-14). In other words, the Baptist's holy work is like a public officer who directs the use and exchange of goods, money, and power among the people. By God's command, then, a priest's son has taken God's holy work out of the temple into the region around the Jordan where he works as God's officer among the people.

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<sup>1</sup> G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World from the Archaic Age to the Arab Conquests* (London: Duckworth, 1981): 181-85.

<sup>2</sup> L. C. A. Alexander, "Luke's Preface in the Context of Greek Preface-Writing" *Novum Testamentum* 28 (1986): 48-74.

As Jesus begins his work, he goes to a synagogue on the sabbath. In the synagogue he announces the program of work God has given to him: (a) preaching good news to the poor; (b) releasing captives; (c) recovering of sight to the blind; (d) setting at liberty those who are oppressed; and (e) proclaiming the acceptable year of the Lord (Luke 4:18-19). This program of work is significantly different from the type of work people regularly perform in the temple, and the response of people shows that it also is not the kind of work people regularly performed in the synagogue.<sup>1</sup> The basic model for this kind of work for God comes from the traveling prophets, Elijah and Elisha, who did things like help a poor widow and cleanse a leper (Luke 4:25-27). Jesus' announcement of the work causes great furor in the synagogue and leads to an attempt to kill him (Luke 4:29-30). Therefore, Jesus goes away from the synagogue in Nazareth to the synagogue in Capernaum, and there on the sabbath he begins his work (Luke 4:31-37). After teaching with authority and casting an unclean spirit out of a man in the synagogue, Jesus goes to Simon's house, and there he heals Simon's mother-in-law of a fever (Luke 4:38-39)). Then people who are sick with various diseases are brought to Jesus at the house, and Jesus heals them (Luke 4:40-41). When Jesus leaves the house the next day and goes to a lonely place, people come to him there, then he continues on to synagogues throughout Judea (Luke 4:42-44). Jesus' activity, then, defines the central workplaces of Christianity to be in synagogues and houses.

The sequence of events at the beginning of Luke establishes the work places for Christ's followers throughout Luke and Acts. The beginning of Acts replicates the movement from the Jerusalem temple to synagogues and houses. The work begins in synagogues, but when rejection becomes too great there, the work is taken into houses and people come to the houses to get the services of Christ's followers. Even when Christ's followers go outside a house or synagogue, however, they encounter people with whom they carry on the work. According to God's will and plan, then, synagogues are the appropriate work places for Christ's

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<sup>1</sup> For the social significance of transference of God's work from the temple to the household, see John H. Elliott, "Temple versus Household in Luke-Acts: A Contrast in Social Institutions," in Neyrey (ed.), *The Social World of Luke-Acts*, pp. 211-40.

followers to begin their work in a region, especially on a sabbath. In addition to synagogues are houses, where the followers receive hospitality and offer their services.<sup>1</sup> This house will become a place where visitors come for their services. But even when Christ's followers go outside the house, they see people to whom they offer their services, and many people will come to them for this purpose when they hear they are in the vicinity.

The work pattern for Christ and his followers is a strategy of territoriality that begins through God's empowering of leaders in the Jerusalem temple and continues in synagogues, houses and public areas from Galilee and Judea to Rome. Christ's followers, in the narrator's view, have no choice but to do this work, just as people in the Roman military and legal system have no choice but to do their work. Commands come down from the top which they obey.

#### **4. Levels of Workers in the Workplaces**

Just as God and the emperor create tasks for people by their commands, so Jesus, Christian leaders, and people in the Roman military and legal system work through people who are their subordinates. To fulfill the tasks that have been given him by God, Jesus enlists a group of twelve and sends them out (Luke 6:12-16; 9:1-6) and then appoints seventy<sup>2</sup> to go out as "laborers into the harvest" (Luke 10:1-12). We should not miss the image of the laborers in the field. Luke 4-10 allows the images of the work of an itinerant prophet, the work of an overseer or landowner, and the work of a centurion to flow into one another. In fact, the narrator perceives the work roles of each to have much of the same status in Mediterranean society. The prophet, the overseer, and the centurion are set under authority, but in turn they have people under their authority.

When we come to Acts, Peter and John continue the basic work program of preaching and healing that Jesus introduced in Luke 4. But this work broadens in the context of the dramatic experiences of

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<sup>1</sup> For the basic pattern, see the sequence in Philippi: (a) on the sabbath day ... to ... a place of prayer (Acts 16:13); (b) when she [Lydia] was baptized with her household ... "... come to my house and stay" (Acts 16:15).

<sup>2</sup> For the textual variation in the number, see J.A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV* (New York: Doubleday, 1985): 845-46.

Peter and Paul. In Acts 9 Saul, who carries letters from the high priest to synagogues that give him the right to bring Christians bound to Jerusalem (Acts 9:1-2, 14), is made into a “chosen vessel” (*skeuos ekloges*) to carry Jesus’ name before Gentiles, kings, and sons of Israel (Acts 9:15). Dramatically, then, a kind of work associated with the priesthood at Jerusalem is changed into work for which the metaphor is the distribution of a certain kind of goods (the name of Jesus) carried in a vessel (like oil or some other product). The places in which this work is to be carried out will be wherever there are Gentiles, kings, and sons of Israel. The initial power of Paul, then, comes from the Jerusalem Temple, but this power, which remains in the control of the highpriest, is subverted by Jesus who appears from heaven to Paul.

In Acts 10, the chapter concerning the centurion Cornelius discussed above, Peter’s experience with the sheet that comes down from heaven and the conversion of Cornelius’ household transforms the work of the devout from concern with clean and unclean food that keeps a person away from Gentile households to one which goes into that household and makes it a Christian space. Peter is lodging in the house of Simon the tanner at Joppa when Cornelius sends for him (Acts 10:32). Thus, Christian work occurs in spaces where independent artisans lodge, and when Peter goes to Cornelius’ house the work is undertaken in places where military personnel above the regular soldier dwell.

In Acts 13 when Paul and Barnabas go to Cyprus, they are summoned by the proconsul Sergius Paulus who becomes a believer in the Christian way of life (13:7-12). With this event, then, Cyprus becomes a certified work place for Christians with a member of the senatorial order sanctioning the place of work.<sup>1</sup>

When the reader comes to Acts 16, the narrative begins to exhibit Christianity as an activity that challenges the monneymaking activities of various people and refers to the means by which Paul makes money. In Acts 16:19, Paul destroys the moneymaking of owners of a slavegirl by casting out the spirit of divination within her. In Acts 18:2-3, Aquila and Priscilla reside with Paul because they all share the same tentmaking trade. In Acts 19:19 people who practice magic arts burn books valued at 50,000 pieces of silver. And finally, in Acts 19:23-41, the narrator presents a lengthy scene

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<sup>1</sup> As proconsul Sergius Paulus must have been a member of the senatorial order.

in Ephesus where the silversmiths bitterly complain that Christianity is ruining their business. This series of events reveals that, from the narrator's perspective, the activity of Christian leaders is an occupation that occurs in an arena that affects other people's work. When Christians work in the environments to which they have been sent, regularly there are objections similar to the objections of local populations to people doing the work of Roman government.<sup>1</sup> These dynamics are a natural part of introducing new, important activities into new areas, and they often require negotiation between people whose work may be dislocated by someone else's work. But the genius of the Roman empire is to be able to rule over these kinds of problems.<sup>2</sup>

When Paul is asked to defend his activities in the succeeding chapters, he emphasizes that he has no choice. He was engaged in very different activities before "the God of our fathers" appointed him to his new work (Acts 22:14-15). He explains that he went to Jerusalem to bring his nation alms and offerings, which was part of his work (Acts 24:17). And Paul stresses that he was not disobedient to his heavenly vision (Acts 26:19). Just as responsible people in the Roman military and legal system obey the commands that come to them, so Paul is a responsible Christian who obeys the commands that come to him. The narrator supports Paul's claims by presenting a scene where Jesus stands before Paul giving him instructions (Acts 23:11), and Paul explains the necessity that has been laid upon him, with the implication that they understand such necessities (Acts 26:16-18).

Christians, then, have nothing against the law of Jews, against the temple, or against Caesar (Acts 25:8). They simply do the work they are commanded to do. Christians function much like people who receive commands from officials in positions of higher authority in the Roman military and legal system. Christians, like people who are part of the Roman system, are set under authority and often have people under them who help with the work.

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<sup>1</sup> Ramsey MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order: Treason, Unrest, and Alienation in the Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966): esp. 163-241.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power. I. A History of Power from the Beginning to A.D. 1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986): 262-98.

## 5. Building Alliances among a Mixed Population

In order for a strategy of territoriality to be successful, it must employ tactics that produce good results over a period of time. The practitioners of the Roman empire, by all accounts, had such tactics at their disposal. One of the tactics was to negotiate with people both inside and outside the boundaries of the empire rather than to concentrate on “boundary defense.”<sup>1</sup> When the Parthians under the rule of the Arsacids defeated the Roman army in a battle, the Roman response was to negotiate with the Parthians about rule over Armenia: Rome invested an Arsacid as king over Armenia, keeping Armenia under Roman jurisdiction and Parthia in conversation with Rome.<sup>2</sup>

Another tactic, which was a corollary of the absence of “border defense,” was to deploy legionary and auxiliary forces locally wherever they were needed. This tactic created a psychological image of “presence everywhere.” People often did not resist the will of the Roman empire because they had a fear that they simply could not escape the power of Rome.<sup>3</sup>

Another tactic was the granting of citizenship to entire cities who had done something beneficial for the Roman empire. Citizenship brought privileges to the members of this city like grain rations during a famine and protection of various kinds when needed.<sup>4</sup>

The proposal in this paper is that Luke-Acts portrays Christians using tactics similar to those that brought success to Rome. First, instead of focusing on boundary defense, Christians continually negotiate with outsiders and insiders to pursue their goals. Whenever Peter or Paul are brought before Jewish or Roman authorities, they explain what they are doing and try to get an agreement that they should be allowed to do it. But more than this, commands of God and the Lord Jesus require that they negotiate with people outside the boundaries. Peter has no choice but to go to Cornelius’ house and work out his relationship with Gentiles in their own house (Acts 10).

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<sup>1</sup> Edward N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire: From the first Century A.D. to the Third* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976): 19.

<sup>2</sup> Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire*, p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire*, pp., 33-35, 13-18.

<sup>4</sup> J. P. V. D. Balsdon, *Romans and Aliens* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979): 82-96.

Then, after this happens he has to negotiate with people inside the boundaries. Going up to Jerusalem, Peter tells how he was required by the Spirit to accept Cornelius and his household (Acts 11:1-18). Paul, in turn, uses a tactic something like Rome did with Parthia when he is taken before the Jewish council in Acts 23. When Paul violates Jewish law by reviling the high priest after the high priest commanded people to strike him on the mouth (Acts 23:1-5), he diverts attention from his guilt by asserting that he did not know he was the high priest, by showing his knowledge of the Torah commandment about speaking evil against a ruler of the people, and by changing the subject to resurrection of the dead. With these tactics, Paul negotiates with Pharisees in such a manner that they turn against Sadducees and take a position that they find no guilt in Paul. The key to this strategy, when it is compared to Roman strategies of negotiation, lies in Paul's offering Pharisees a way to exercise power over Sadducees. In other words, much as Rome helps Parthians establish dominance over Armenia, so Paul helps Pharisees establish dominance over Sadducees. The side benefits of the negotiations, of course, go respectively to Rome and to Paul.

Another tactic was the use of legion and auxiliary forces wherever they were needed to create the image of "presence everywhere." This approach begins in Luke when Jesus sends out not only the twelve (Luke 9:1-6), who continue to serve comparably to legionary forces until the story is turned completely over to Paul, but to seventy who go to "every town and place" to which Jesus himself is about to travel (Luke 10:1-11). Then in Acts 8:5-25 the Hellenist deacon Philip goes to Samaria, and two members of the twelve, Peter and John, go out and certify what Philip has done. Then, wherever Peter and Paul go, they win auxiliaries who maintain a local presence for Christianity as the Christian legionary forces go on their way to another city or region.

Another tactic concerns the granting of citizenship. According to Acts Christians, like Romans, grant full citizenship to people who show their allegiance to Christian belief. They do not maintain the strictures of the Greeks, who require an identity associated with activity in the gymnasium, or the strictures of the Jews, who require circumcision for males and exclusionary eating practices. People of any kind--Ethiopian, Parthian, Greek, Roman, slavewoman--can become full members of the believing community.<sup>1</sup> In other words, the

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<sup>1</sup> See a discussion of the mixed population in the Christian community in Robbins, "The Social Location of the Implied Author of Luke-Acts," in Neyrey (ed.), *The Social World of Luke-Acts*, pp. 315-18.

Christian tactics of territoriality appear to be driven by Roman ideology for running the empire, rather than by Greek or Jewish ideology that focuses much more on defending boundaries, establishing physical dominance, and maintaining strict rules for citizenship rather than opening citizenship to people who show some form of allegiance.

Finally, the narrator grounds the tactics of Christianity in the basic interests of God that are similar to the interests of the Roman empire. Both are interested in salvation and peace. The terms savior (*σωτήρ*) and salvation (*σωτηρία*) never occur in Mark or Matthew, but they are very significant in Luke and Acts.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, peace (*εἰρήνη*) is a major concept throughout both volumes.<sup>2</sup> The importance of these terms is indicated by the Priene inscription, which reads in part:

Providence that orders all our lives has in her display of concern and generosity in our behalf adorned our lives with the highest good: Augustus, whom she has filled with arete for the benefit of humanity, and has in her beneficence granted us and those who will come after us [a Savior] who has made war to cease and who shall put everything [in peaceful] order; and whereas Caesar, [when he was manifest], transcended the expectations of [all who had anticipated the good news], not only by surpassing the benefits conferred by his predecessors but by leaving no expectation of surpassing him to those who would come after him, with the result that the birthday of our God signalled the beginning of Good News for the world because of him,....<sup>3</sup>

The major interests of Augustus, which are salvation and peace, are the major interests of God, according to Luke and Acts. One passage in Luke and two in Acts will make this final point:

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;  
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,  
to give knowledge of *salvation* to his people in the forgiveness of their sins,  
through the tender mercy of our God,  
when the day shall dawn upon us from on high  
to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,  
to guide our feet into the way of *peace*. (Luke 1:76-79)

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<sup>1</sup> *Σωτήρ*: Luke 1:47; 2:11; Acts 5:31; 13:23. *Σωτηρία*: Luke 1:69, 71, 77; 19:9; Acts 4:12; 7:25; 13:26, 47; 16:17; 27:34.

<sup>2</sup> Luke 1:79; 2:14, 29; 7:50; 8:48; 10:5, 6; 11:21; 12:51; 14:32; 19:38, 42; 24:36. Acts 7:26; 9:31; 10:36; 12:20; 15:33; 16:36; 24:2.

<sup>3</sup> Frederick W. Danker, *Benefactor: Epigraphic Study of a Graeco-Roman and New Testament Semantic Field* (St Louis: Clayton Publishing House, 1982): 217.

So the church throughout all Judea and Samaria had *peace* and was built up; and walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit it multiplied. (Acts 9:31)

Let it be known to you then that this *salvation* of God has been sent to the nations; they will listen. (Acts 28:28)

God has given commands for people to work throughout the eastern Roman empire to bring salvation and peace. Followers of Christ carried the work first into the regions surrounding Judea, bringing peace wherever the church was built up. They have continued to work, often under difficult circumstances, until this salvation has reached Rome, the very center of proclamation of peace to the world.

### **Conclusion**

The proposal in this paper has come full circle. The suggestion is that Luke-Acts is a narrative map of territoriality for the eastern Roman empire. The narrative map presupposes a compatible, symbiotic relation between Christianity and Rome. The key to the strategy is the perception of synagogues, houses, and public places in the eastern empire as work places God has selected for Christians to work programmatically from Jerusalem to Rome. The people with tasks in these work places function at different levels. Beginning with Jesus, those whom God appoints function at the level of independent artisans or above. These people receive commands from God, and these people regularly give commands to people who work under them. As Christians do their work, they use tactics analogous to Roman leaders as they focus on negotiation rather than defense of boundaries, as they use legion and auxiliary forces to create an image of presence everywhere, and as they grant full citizenship to those who show allegiance to them. Mimetic desire within the implied author of Luke-Acts, therefore, focuses on power in the Roman empire. Just as the emperor guarantees that the Roman empire works programmatically toward its goals, so God makes sure that his will is communicated again and again through angels who transmit special messages, through the Lord Jesus who appears at crucial moments, through the Spirit who comes upon people as a sign of God's presence and approval, and through faithful Christian leaders who obediently persist in the tasks they are commanded by God to do.